

The psychology of the to-do list

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BBC:

If your daily schedule and email inbox are anything like mine, you're often left a state of paralysis by the sheer bulk of outstanding tasks weighing on your mind. In this respect, David Allen's book *Getting Things Done* is a phenomenon. An international best-seller and a personal productivity system known merely as GTD, it's been hailed as being a "new cult for the info age".

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So what's the psychology that backs this up? Roy Baumeister and EJ Masicampo at Florida State University were interested in an old phenomenon called the Zeigarnik Effect, which is what psychologists call our mind's tendency to get fixated on unfinished tasks and forget those we've completed. You can see the effect in action in a restaurant or bar – you can easily remember a drinks order, but then instantly forget it as soon as you've put the drinks down. I've mentioned this effect before when it comes to explaining the psychology behind Tetris.

Read the whole story: [BBC](#)

See [Roy F. Baumeister](#) at the 25th APS Annual Convention: [APS Award Address](#) and [Theme Program](#)