

**ZEN TO DONE: THE
ULTIMATE
PRODUCTIVITY
SYSTEM
BY LEO BABAUTA**

Zen to Done is Leo Babauta's response to two of the best and most popular productivity systems; David Allen's Getting Things Done and Stephen Covey's 7 Habits of Successful People.

WHY ZEN TO DONE?

Zen To Done(ZTD) focuses on the habit changes necessary for Allen's Getting Things Done (GTD), in a more practical way, and it focuses on doing, on simplifying, and on adding a simple structure.

Reasons that ZTD is simpler and easier to implement: 1. ZTD focuses on one habit at a time. It's overwhelming and it's too hard to focus on your habit changes if you do too many at a time. 2. ZTD focuses more on doing — and how to actually complete your tasks. 3. ZTD focuses on simplifying. Take as much stuff off your plate as possible, so you can focus on doing what's important, and doing it well. 4. ZTD focuses in on your big goals and ensures that you keep addressing these and working towards your ultimate goals.

TEN HABITS

Zen To Done is a set of 10 habits that will help you get organized, simplify your life, get things under control, and actually get things done. If you adopt ZTD, you are under no obligation to do all 10 habits ... you should pick the ones that will work for your individual style, and focus on mastering those.

1. Collect Habit

Carry a small notebook and write down any tasks, ideas, etc. that pop into your head. Get it out of your head and onto paper, so you don't forget it.

2. Process Habit

Make quick decisions on things in your inbox, do not put them off.

3. Plan Habit

Each day, create a list of 1- 3 most important tasks (MITs). Do your MITs early in the day.

4. Do Habit

Do one task at a time, without distractions. Select one of your MITs and focus on it to the exclusion of all else. No distractions.

5. Simple Trusted System Habit

keep simple lists, check daily. Keep your lists as simple as possible.

Either use a simple notebook or index cards for your lists, or use the simplest list program possible.

6. Organize Habit

Put things where they belong, right away, instead of piling them up to sort later. This keeps your desk and inbox clear so you can focus on your work.

7. Review Habit

Review your system & goals weekly.

8. Simplify Habit

reduce your goals & tasks to essentials. Remove everything but the essential projects and tasks, so you can focus on them.

9. Routine Habit

Set and keep routines. Set morning routines and evening routines that work for you, and keep them.

10. Find Your Passion Habit

seek work for which you're passionate. Make your life's work something you're passionate about, not something you dread doing, and your task list will almost seem like a list of rewards.

MINIMAL ZTD

For some people, 10 habits is too much. In that case, adopt only the following 4:

1. Collect - carry a small notebook and jot down ideas etc.
2. Process - make quick decisions in your inboxes.
3. Plan - set MITs daily and weekly.
4. Do - focus on 1 task at a time and do it without distraction.

FORMING THE 10 HABITS

An essential part of ZTD is the forming of the 10 Habits, one at a time. One of the main problems people have with other productivity system, probably without knowing it, is that they are a series of habit changes that people attempt to undertake all at once.

Doing one habit at a time will take some patience, but at the same time it's not as overwhelming and it's much easier to adopt this way. If you are already good at some of these habits, and if you are good at changing your habits, it's possible to do more than one at a time. No more than 2-3 at a time, though, because the more you do, the less your chances of success.

Start simple, and gradually add the other habits as you see fit. Now, which habits should you adopt first? The order that they're listed in, is ideal, but not essential.

The habit change mentality

The methods best to help make these changes successful:

1. Commitment. Commit yourself to your habit change, even make it public.
2. Practice. Commit yourself to do your new habit every single day for 30 days. Practice makes perfect.
3. Motivation. Find as many ways to motivate yourself as possible.
4. Tracking. It's best if you log your progress on your habit every day. T
5. Support. Join an online group, or do your habit change with a partner.
6. 1. Rewards. Reward yourself often.
7. Focus. Find ways to bring your focus back to your habit regularly.
8. 1. Positive thinking. If you tell yourself that you can do this, that you will do it, then you will.

COLLECT HABIT

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I recommend analogue (paper) over digital for this habit, but if your PDA or smartphone works for you, go for it. The key with this capture habit is to write things down right away, before you forget, and to empty out your notebook as soon as you get home or to work. Don't procrastinate with these two steps, or they will pile up and you will be less likely to do them. Also, carry it around, everywhere.

This simple habit of collecting all the information that comes into your life into a tiny notebook (and in a few other inboxes) will greatly improve your organization and eventually your productivity. You will stop forgetting things, stop losing information, and always know where things are, all the time.

PROCESS HABIT

Process to empty. Letting stuff pile up is procrastinating on making decisions. If you process your inboxes, making quick decisions and putting things where they belong, things don't pile up. Process your inboxes at least once a day, and more frequently if needed.

Minimise how many inboxes you have, then master them. Do not allow them to overflow.

Process from the top down, don't ever skip over one. Make the following decisions;

- Delete it? - Delegate it? - Deal with it immediately - reply or take action? -

Defer it for later? - File it - you only need it for reference? - DO NOT LEAVE

IT IN YOUR INBOX

PLAN HABIT

Each week, list the Big Rocks that you want to accomplish, and schedule them first. Each day, create a list of 1-3 Most Important Tasks (MITs -- basically your Big Rocks for the day) and be sure to accomplish them. Do your MITs early in the day to get them out of the way and to ensure that they get done.

Big Rocks. At the beginning of each week, sit down and look at your to-do list. What do you want to accomplish this week? These are your “Big Rocks”. The term comes from Stephen Covey’s “7 Habits of Highly Effective People”. It means that Each morning, decide what your Most Important Tasks are for that day. These may be the same as your Big Rocks for the day. Choose about 3 MITs for the day — this could include a Big Rock and a couple other important tasks. Block out time for them early in the day if possible — if you put them later in the day, other things pop up that will get in the way.

DO HABIT

ZTD focuses on doing your tasks one at a time, to the exclusion of all else. Don’t multi-task, and don’t let yourself get interrupted.

1. Choose a Big Rock. First, select a task and decide to work on it either until it’s done, or for a set amount of time.
2. Get zoned. Before you get started, eliminate all distractions. Shut off email, cell phone, etc.
3. Timed burst. Set a timer if you like.
4. Interruptions. If you get interrupted, write down any request or incoming tasks/info on your notepad. Don’t try to multi-task.
5. If you feel the urge to check your email or switch to another task, stop yourself. Get back to the task at hand.
6. The inevitable. There are times when an interruption is urgent. In that case, try to make a note of where you are with the task at hand. Then, when you come back to that task, you can see where you left off.
7. Relax. Take deep breaths, stretch, and take breaks now and then. Enjoy life. Go outside, and appreciate nature. Keep yourself sane.

8. Ahhhh. When you're done, congratulate yourself! Reward yourself with a short burst of email or blogs.

SIMPLE TRUSTED SYSTEM HABIT

Many people get too caught up in fiddling with the tools, with creating complicated systems, changing tools and systems every week or two, instead of actually getting things done. But ZTD asks you to use the simplest tools possible, and then forget about them. ZTD is about the doing, not the tools. Here are my recommendations — the simplest, most effective GTD tools:

- Simple GTD: it doesn't have a lot of features, but that's its appeal.
- Moleskine or any small notebook
- Hipster PDA: Basically, it's a stack of index cards attached with a clip.
- Tadalist: simply a list program.
- Todoist: Another simple, slick to-do list manager,
- Calendar: I suggest Google Calendar, 30 Boxes, Outlook or a paper calendar.
- Reference system: For paper filing, use manila folders, file alphabetically. For digital files, you could use a simple folder system similar to the paper one.

ORGANIZE HABIT

Your life can be completely organized with one single rule: put everything in its home. Here's how to do it:

- Have a system. Put all incoming papers in your inbox (at work and home). Process that inbox regularly.
- Find a home: If you're about to put something down on your countertop, think about this: is that where it belongs? Where is it's home? If it doesn't already have a home, find one. Car keys? Have one place where you put the keys, all the time.

- Simple filing system: Always have blank labels and folders on hand. Never have a Miscellaneous file. You might as well call it the Procrastination file.
- Put it away immediately. Don't wait until later. Do it now!
- Make it a habit. concentrating your energy on putting things away immediately until it becomes automatic.
- Pay attention to transitions. The time between when you're doing one thing and when you're doing the next thing is a transition. This is the time when you should put stuff away where it belongs and clean up your mess.
- Keep flat surfaces clear.
- Label. These are the organizer's best friend. Label everything.
- Evaluate. Every now and then, it's good to review your organization of everything.

REVIEW HABIT

Here's how to do a powerful weekly review in five simple steps:

1. Review your single long-term goal, and short-term goal. Once you've done this, every week's Weekly Review should be just a review of the progress you've made on that single goal, and a refocusing on that goal.
2. Review your notes. Many of the tasks in your notes will be already done, but it's important to look back over them so you can find unfinished tasks, phone numbers to enter into your contacts, etc.
3. Review your calendar. Look over your upcoming week's calendar to see if there's any tasks that need to be done.
4. Review your lists. Cross off completed items. Also review your follow-up list, your someday/maybe list, and your project list, if you keep them.
5. Set your short-term goal this week and plan your Big Rocks.

Remember: just focus on one goal at a time, making it much more likely that you'll achieve it. Print it out and post it up if necessary. Send yourself email reminders. Tell everyone about it. Put it on your blog. However you do it, maintain that laser focus, and it will happen.

SIMPLIFY HABIT

Simplify your list of to-dos down to the barest of essentials, and you can eliminate the need for complex planning systems.

- Eliminate, eliminate. Sometimes a task gets old and isn't necessary anymore. Cross those out. Sometimes a task can be delegated. Do that, and cross it out.
- Know what's essential. Know what your main goal is. Any smaller tasks are essential if they help you accomplish those goals, and not essential if they're not related.
- Simplify your commitments. You need to learn to say no, and value your time. Only have commitments in your life that really give you joy and value.
- Simplify your information stream. Eliminating RSS feeds. Cut back on the number of emails I respond to. Simplify the inputs into your life, and you can simplify the outputs.
- Review weekly. Take a few minutes each week to eliminate, and eliminate some more.

- Big Rocks. During your weekly review, figure out the most important tasks that you'd like to accomplish over the next week. Make those the most important tasks each day, and do them first.
- Biggest value. Focus on those big tasks, that will make a name for you, that will generate long-term income, that will give you lasting satisfaction and happiness. Those are your Big Rocks. Eliminate the rest.
- Three MITs. Write down your three Most Important Tasks on a sheet of paper, That's it. Check off those tasks when you finish them.
- Batch small tasks. During the course of the day, other stuff will come up. You don't need to do them right now, most likely. Just write them down for later. Set a time (probably 30 minutes or so) to batch process these tasks sometime later in the day (perhaps 4 p.m.).

ROUTINES HABIT

Take control of your life. Set some routines and learn to follow them. Here are some tips for doing that:

- Work tasks. Make a list of all the things you want or need to accomplish in your work life. This could be big things like the Weekly Review, or

setting your MITs at the beginning of each day, processing your email inbox to empty etc.

- Personal tasks. Do the same thing with your personal life. This could include things like exercise, yoga, reading etc.
- Batch process. For example, if you have grocery shopping, going to the bank, going to the post office and going to the pet store on your list, put them together as “errands” and do them on one day.
- Daily list. My suggestion is to have a morning routine (maybe one morning routine at home and another when you first get into work) and an end-of-the-day routine (again, for the end of your work day and for right before you go to bed). Leave the middle of the day (the biggest portion of the day) open for completing your MITs and other things that come up.
- Weekly list. This could be things like your Weekly Review, laundry, house cleaning, exercise. Schedule these things throughout your week, trying not to pile too much on each day.
- Trying it out. Now that you’ve set your daily and weekly routines, give it a go. Try to stick with them for at least a week. At the end of the week, review how it went. If there are things that just didn’t work, make adjustments.
- Sticking with it. This is the trick — it’s easy to set routines, but harder to stick with them. But once you find a good set of routines that work for you, if you can stick with them for 30 days, it will become a habit.

FIND YOUR PASSION HABIT

Give it a thought: if you really want to do something, you’ll work like hell to get it done. You’ll work extra hard, you’ll put in even more hours, and you’re less likely to procrastinate. It’s for work that you don’t really care about that you procrastinate.

- Is there something you already love doing? Do you have a hobby, or something you loved doing as a child, but never considered it as a possibility? Research the possibilities of making money from it.
- What do you spend hours reading about? There may be a few possibilities here for you ... and all of them are possible career paths. Don’t close your mind to these topics. Look into them.

- Brainstorm. Get out a sheet of paper, and start writing down ideas. Anything that comes to mind, write it down.
- Ask around, and surf for possibilities. Ask other people for ideas.
- Give it a try first. It's best to actually test your new idea before jumping into it as a career.
- Never quit trying.