Beware

The Profzi Scheme

Don't Get Scammed!

How Profzi Schemes work:

Faculty convinces young scholars to work in their field.

In order to survive, each scholar must recruit new scholars to follow in their footsteps.

When funding runs out, the scheme collapses.
Personal Productivity

11 March 2009

Research Methods for Empirical Computer Science
CMPSCI 691DD
10,000 hours

- Five years of 40-hour weeks of doing research exclusively
- Not...
  - Learning the technical literature
  - Building a professional network
  - Email, Web surfing, etc.
- ...and getting
  - High rate of feedback and coaching
  - Practice at those things you’re not good at
- Thoughtful practice is the thing that makes the difference
But so many things get in the way. How do I find the time?

Some alternatives...
Do it all
Do it now
Cultivate disregard
Cultivate disregard
Getting mental space to do good research

• All these methods have serious problems...

• **Doing it all** is impossible because the space of possible actions is too vast

• **Doing it now** means that the most urgent things get done, not the most important

• **Disregard** is necessary, but at high levels...
  • Few can (or want to) consistently and widely practice it
  • It damages relations with friends, family and colleagues
  • Some things you disregard eventually bite back

• Is there any other way to keep your mind clear so you can do high-quality research?
Keeping your mind clear

• This is a central issue for researchers

• Address it actively:
  • *Identify* potential solutions by reading, talking to colleagues, mentors, etc.
  • *Try out* the solutions and see how they work for you
  • *Keep up this process* at a low level all the time

• I’ll tell you about some approaches that have worked well for me, but there are many approaches and each person needs to find the combination of things that works for them.

See also: www.thinktrylearn.com
Starting with the text:

**Getting Things Done — Key ideas**

- **Get everything off your brain** — Use your brain for task generation, selection, and action, not storage.
- **Work from zero** — Empty all your “in-baskets” daily.
- **No leaks** — Make your system “leakproof” so you trust it to store your thinking and thus can disregard higher-level decisions for a while.
- **Projects** — Identify the projects you have committed to and their “successful outcome.”
- **Next actions, not “to dos”** — Identify the next physical action for each and every project.
- **Weekly review** — Review your projects and next actions at least weekly.
Getting Things Done — Key themes

• The goal is not to do more things, it’s about...
• Making good choices about what things to do
  • Clearly identifying projects when they enter your life
  • Deciding which projects you are committed to doing
  • Periodically reviewing these decisions
• Doing those things regularly and efficiently
  • Knowing the next action on every project you’re committed to doing
  • Stating those actions so they are immediately doable
  • Knowing which actions you can do at any time
Getting Things Done — Key themes

• Effective action requires advance thought, but only a relatively small amount of thought.

• Effective thought requires focus, and it is very difficult to focus simultaneously across multiple levels of detail, so you should...
  
  • *Limit the range of levels* you have to consider simultaneously.
  
  • Ensure that you *think about each level regularly*.
  
  • *Store the results* of that thinking in ways that are efficient to access and understand.
Practical tips

• **Ubiquitous capture** — *Always* have some method with you for capturing ideas, actions, projects, and notes; emphasize *simple* and *fast*

• **Limit your inboxes** — Limit the number of ways projects and actions can enter your life

• **Efficient filing** — Physical and virtual filing systems should be simple, robust, and efficient, so you *use them*

• **Weekly review** — A weekly review of projects and actions is a vital practice
Software

- Software for managing projects and actions has grown dramatically in past two years.
- What to look for:
  - Fast and simple entry from anywhere
  - View actions by project and context
  - Include links to notes, email, webpages, etc.
  - Optionally associate dates with actions
- Remember —
  It’s not about the software.
  It’s about living a fulfilling life.
  The software is a means, not an end.
GTD tips for CS researchers

• **Projects** — Many projects are self-initiated. They won’t just “arrive in your inbox.” That requires more attention and planning.

• **Contexts** — We tend to have very few contexts. We’re always at a phone and computer. Consider contexts about energy or time, not resources.

• **Email** — Because we’re very comfortable with email, we tend to use email as a list of projects and actions. It’s not, it’s an inbox of stuff to process into projects and actions.

• **Software** — We’re likely to focus too much on software. Consider low-tech options first.
Pitfalls

• This is not about...
  • **Organization**
    Better organization alone won’t make better choices
  • **Technology**
    No “perfect system” will make choices for you.
  • **One-time effort**
    This is will be an ongoing effort throughout your life
  • **Your system**
    The system should disappear, so that you can spend your time living your life!

• This is about...
  • An ongoing effort...
  • To understand what helps you...
  • To make better choices...
  • And get mental space for leading a creative and fulfilling life.