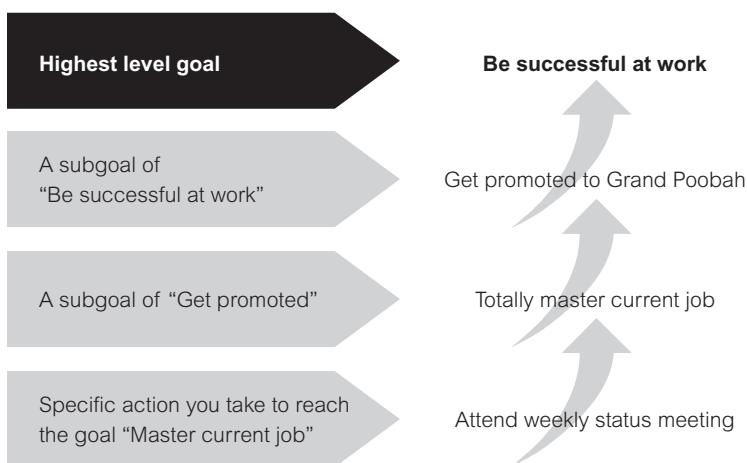## YOU NEED TO IDENTIFY YOUR GOALS

The first step in living on purpose is to get really good at identifying goals. Big goals, little goals, medium-sized goals. Everything you do at any moment has a bunch of goals attached. You see, goals don't hang out alone; they travel in packs. Really big goals—like "be successful"—are made up of subgoals. Those are made up of smaller subgoals, and so on. Finally at the bottom are specific, concrete actions. But all these subgoals offer enticing diversions where we can conveniently get off course, giving us the chance to waste time and energy. If a subgoal wanders off course, so do we, and we never get what we want. If your highest-level work goal was to be successful at work, the following table will show you how your goals might break down.

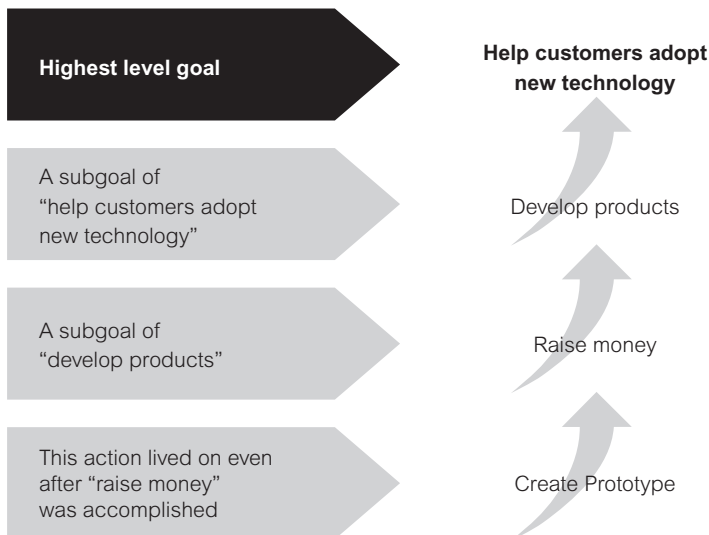|	
Highest level goal	**Be successful at work**
A subgoal of "Be successful at work"	Get promoted to Grand Poobah
A subgoal of "Get promoted"	Totally master current job
Specific action you take to reach the goal "Master current job"	Attend weekly status meeting

Yes, you can see that your subgoals of getting promoted and mastering your current job, and yes, even your action of attending weekly status meetings all relate to your highest-level work goal—being successful.

Michael's love of clean teenage bedrooms isn't one of his highest-level goals, it's a subgoal of some larger goal. My guess: Michael's high-level goal is to be a good parent. He believes he has to do that by teaching his son to be a responsible adult (which is a subgoal). And *his* parents brainwashed him into thinking that being a responsible adult means having a clean bedroom, which led to his action of yelling at Skyler to clean the bedroom.

Someone else with the same high-level goal of being a good parent might have different subgoals and use different actions as a result. Their subgoal might be to spend quality time with their kid and their action might be talking to their kid about school at dinner. Or perhaps they would play baseball together, or go out for manicures together, or play baseball *and* go out for manicures together. Heck, if it were me, I think teaching your kid to be a responsible adult means letting a kid keep their room however they want it, and letting *them* deal with the consequences

when the pizza grows legs. Whatever your subgoals and actions, they'd better match your big goal. Otherwise while trying to be a good parent, you risk pulling a Michael. You'll spend your quality together-time yelling at your child and making them hate you.

This mismatch between goals and actions is hardly limited to parenting. One company I worked with had an overall goal of making it easy for an entire industry to adopt a new technology. A subgoal was raising funds from the board of directors, which included some prominent financiers. Their fund-raising subgoal's action was developing a prototype product to show the board. The investors would be so dazzled that they would write a big fat check. The prototype took on a life of its own, however. Even after money was raised, it lived on as an entirely separate project. It kept sucking up time and resources without contributing one bit to the original goal of building a product customers would buy. Here's how their goals broke down:

Highest level goal	**Help customers adopt new technology**
A subgoal of "help customers adopt new technology"	Develop products
A subgoal of "develop products"	Raise money
This action lived on even after "raise money" was accomplished	Create Prototype

HOW TO IDENTIFY YOUR TOP GOALS

You may know what your own personal top-level goal is, but at work, the top goals come from the organization. It's usually called a vision or mission. The subgoals are strategic initiatives, and below that are projects or goals. Different companies have different names for them. All that's important is that they point you in the direction of meeting the topmost goals. If you were working for a financial software company, your goals might break down like this:

How?		BUSINESS	ORGANIZATION LEVEL	Why?
	Vision	Become the world's foremost supplier of financial software.	Executives, VPs	
	Strategic initiative	Develop software to help people manage their checkbooks.	Directors	
	Project	Create Mac version of software.	Project managers	
	Actions	Write 1,000 lines of code.	Programmers	

If your actions don't match your projects, or your project doesn't fit the strategy, you can work your butt off and it won't help the company one bit. In fact, when earnings dip next, executives will scramble to "return to their core business." They will notice your project isn't adding value and lay you off, with genuine tears of dismay. At bonus time, they'll tearfully collect a bonus of 190 percent of their already-inflated base salary for having the strength to oversee such unpleasant and regretful layoffs. It will never cross their mind that it was their job to keep the organization aligned in the first place.*

If you're in a management position you can align your organization using the same tools we just used with Michael. Ask the people who actually do the work, "Why are you doing this?" Then ask their managers, and their managers, and their managers. You will end up with a neat map of what everyone *thinks* they should be doing.

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* Yes, some companies have no mission, or they have a stated mission that is the opposite of how they act. Fixing *that* is going to take more than I can fit in a footnote, so for now, pretend your company has a mission.

Then do a sanity check. Make sure that if you ask "How?" to the biggest goals, the answer is at least vaguely related to the organization's subgoals. In most places, you'll find a mismatch—or several—somewhere along the way. A top goal may be "to provide excellent medical care for patients," and one of the intermediary goals may be "cut costs by 15 percent," which is being carried out by skimping on care quality, an action that clearly doesn't fit in with the top goal. If you find the conflict, but can't make it right yourself, your best bet is probably to work toward both the top and intermediary goals, knowing they can come into conflict. When you must choose between them, the choice is yours. The idealist in me says to do what's right for the patients. My realist says to do what's right for the patient, within the cost-cutting constraints. My cynic says to hunker down and cut costs, since the chances of anyone you know personally being killed by your inferior medical care are small enough that you can afford to ignore the moral implications of your actions and retreat into the justification that you would lose your job if you disregarded cost-cutting. And your job, presumably, is more important than someone else's life.

Remember our employees who created a prototype that became a completely separate development effort for their board of directors? If they had stopped to identify their goal in hour ten of the prototype, they would have realized that there were better uses of their time. For example, building a real product that would help their customers adopt the new technology in their industry.

Identify Your Life Vision

Ask yourself, "What would be a fulfilling life?" Be inspiring! Think about your role in the larger world. For example, "To raise my kids to have opportunity, happiness, and success." Or "To end poverty." Or "To be the kind of person people look up to."

While writing this chapter, a Get-It-Done Guy listener wrote in saying, "I have lost track of that 50,000-foot level, and may have given up on some dreams prematurely or unnecessarily." I know that you, gentle reader, are still deeply in touch with your dreams, so the next few sections will be pure review. Humor me. Identifying your goals and dreams is central to creating a work-less-do-more lifestyle.

Whole books have been written about how to discover or craft your life mission. This isn't one of them. Let's try a few quick hits. If these don't get you going, check out one of the excellent books on GetItDoneGuyBook.com.

We all had dreams as children. Some of them made us wet our beds and wake up screaming in terror. Those dreams, you can leave in childhood. But too many of us also left our inspiring dreams in childhood. We left them in favor of "being sensible." Our dreams don't go away, though. They become a nagging

presence, whispering "sell out" every time we meet someone who *is* living what we gave up. Now's your chance to bring that dream back and use it to find a passionate overarching life direction. Start by reconnecting to your dream, as I did. This will help you know where you're going, so you can begin making all your work lead straight to the dream.

As a child living in a traveling New Age commune, I put on magic shows at KOA campgrounds in return for free lodging. I loved performing! And my parents saw how to combine my love of performing with our need for lodging. They had brilliant legal minds, you see; child labor laws don't apply if you don't pay the child. Call it "chores" and they even praise it for giving kids responsibility.

Regardless, I *loved* performing! I really loved it! But then a few years later, I moved into my own apartment and discovered responsibility for real. I was a convert. I put away childish things like magic, went off to get a degree in computer science and then an MBA. By the time I got a good, upstanding job in business, I was so sensible that it *hurt*. And it really *did* hurt.

Deep down, I still wanted to perform. It wasn't even that deep down. At business school, other kids brought slide decks to management communications class. I brought a five-foot satin cloak and used a fake French accent to give my presentation. You'd think I'd have gotten a clue. Nope. I blotted it from my memory. "I must be practical," I told myself. "Performing is too much fun. It will distract me from the serious business of living."

I continued this foolish logic for eighteen years, feeling more and more like I was living the wrong life. It was only after starting my podcast and realizing it gave me such joy that I began to reawaken to my media and performing aspirations.

My dream: to be able to reach and connect with millions of people. Fortunately, it was kind of easy to uncover; the satin cloak was a minor giveaway. Yours may not be so close to the surface.

If you aren't lucky enough to have a suppressed dream tortur-ing you throughout your day, it's time to ask your intuition or, as I call it, your Little Voice. Remember, without knowing what you want out of life, you can't construct a Life Map to help you get there. And without knowing your purpose, you won't know what to work less and do more *of*.

Your Little Voice is your source of inner wisdom. It sounds hokey, and maybe it is, but even an engineer-and-business geek like me has inner wisdom. You must, too. Our Little Voice knows what we're about, and when we're making our best decisions. The velvet Elvis poster you bought, thinking it would look great in your living room? Your Little Voice knew the truth, if only you'd lis-tened. It's hard to listen, though; it's Little. Most of the time, it's drowned out by your Big Voice. Let's listen to the Little one.

Grab a piece of paper, a pen, and a calming beverage. As you sip, quiet your mind. Breathe slowly. Imagine a white cow . . . in a snowstorm. . . . Ask your Little Voice, "What do I care about so much I want it to be the direction of my life? What is my highest purpose?" Then listen. Don't expect anything profound. If it feels as if you're trying to force your Little Voice to talk, *stop it!* Just sit still and listen. Eventually it will say something, hopefully in a language you speak. Write down what it says. *You don't have to believe it.* You don't have to approve of it. Just write it down. Then put it away and take a break.

Go do something that satisfies your Big Voice: Play a violent video game, knit an anatomically correct image of Michelangelo's *David*, or call your neighbor and exchange utterly untrue, das-tardly rumors about your local city councilman. After your break, bring out your sheet. Reread it. What did your Little Voice say that was worth listening to? You're separating yourself from the Little Voice by time and by writing. You're getting its words on paper, so they're not trapped inside your head, and you're giving yourself a chance to enter a new frame of mind before you read them.

Perhaps your Little Voice said something like, "Your purpose is to build a family and home for everyone you love," or "Your purpose is to help save the world by inventing clean fusion" or "Your purpose is to collect a matchbook cover from every dive bar between here and Poughkeepsie." Use that as your dream for now. If it's not quite right, you'll feel it and change it as you build your map.

If you're really stuck, grab a piece of paper and a pencil. Imagine you're talking to the Deity of Your Choice, and he, she, it, or they ask, "Did you live the life I gave you to its fullest?" If you answer no, imagine he, she, it, or they asks the follow-up question: "What would have been a better life for you?" Grab your paper and write down *twenty* answers to the question. Yes, twenty. The first five will be easy. Then they'll get harder. You'll have to dig for the last several. But where are you digging? Through your subconscious mind, of course. Chances are that a couple of the items on your list will strike a chord.

Once you have your list, close your eyes and put your finger down at random. Open your eyes. Congratulations—whatever is under your finger is your life purpose.

Oh, you don't like it, you say? Well, then, cross it off the list. Close your eyes and try again. Keep going until you've found your dream.

Sometimes you'll choose a dream that has some higher-level goals attached, so let's make sure you're really finding your top life purpose. Start with your dream and ask Why. If you still don't have a dream, use "I want to be rich, famous, and have perfect skin." Now ask Why, then take the answer and ask Why again. Keep asking until you get to something so big it's Your All-Encompassing Life Goal. When Michael asked Why, he found he wanted to be a great parent. One more Why and he simply said, "Because that's who I want to be in this phase of my life." When you get an answer like that, you know you're there.

If you're scared to commit, remember *you can change this as often as you wish!* It's your life, after all. Change is normal. When you were eight, you thought living in a giant chocolate-chip cookie house would be the coolest thing *ever*. As you grow up, you learn that chocolate chips melt in the summer and make lousy furniture. Now you want to live in a condo in a full-service building with a doorman who will fetch you chocolate-chip cookies on demand. You are allowed to update your dreams whenever you wish.
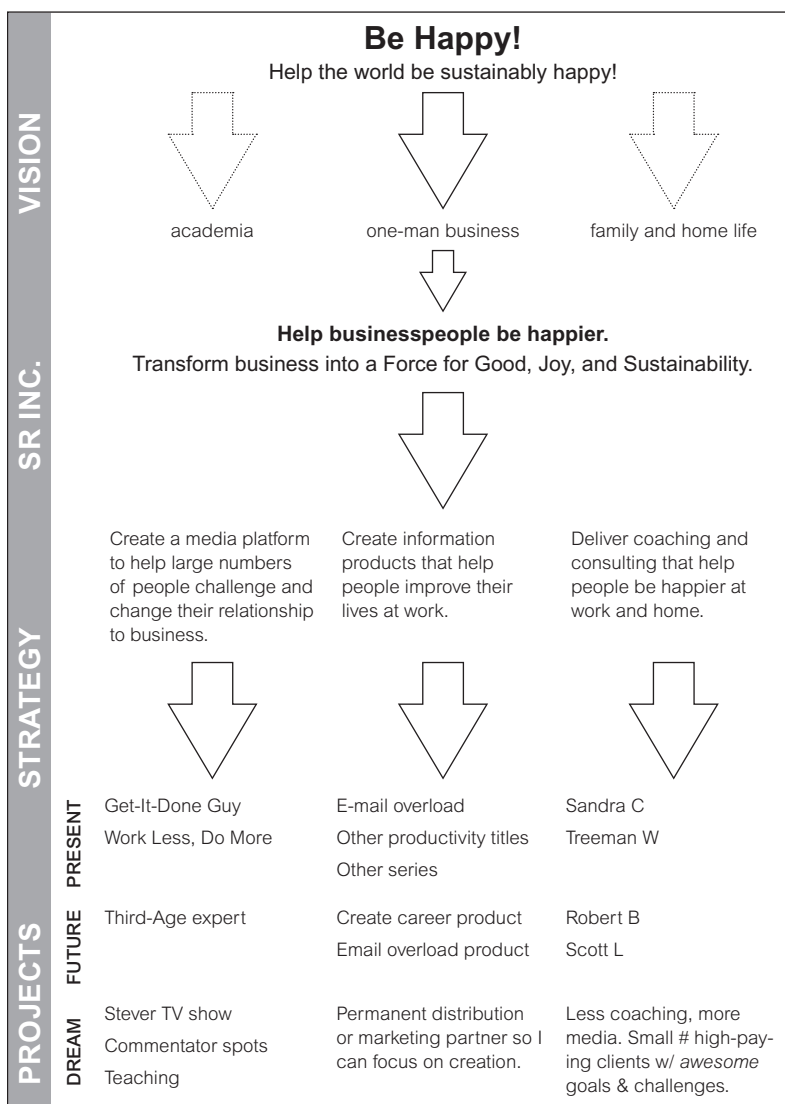
(Keep this in mind when you're planning your career. Twenty-year career plans can be dangerous. By the time you're thirty-five, following a plan created by a fifteen-year-old—however well-intentioned—may not be your wisest choice.)

Instead of calling this your Life Goal, we'll call this your Life Vision or Life Mission or Life Purpose. It means the same thing but sounds much more impressive, and will garner secret admiration and envy from listeners when you share it at cocktail parties.

Beneath your Life Purpose, write your career purpose. If you're self-employed, this is the vision/mission of your company. If you're employed by someone else, this is the vision you have for why you're in that job or profession. Since what you do at work is presumably all intended to help the company succeed, its vision becomes your vision while you work there.
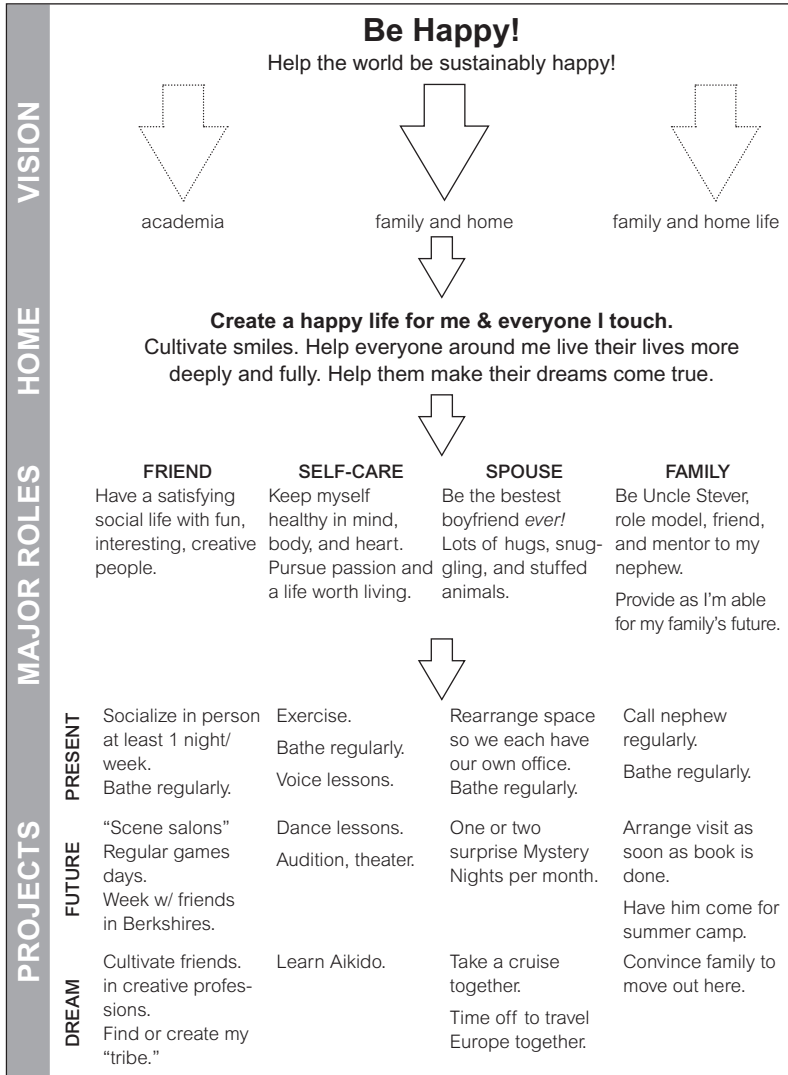
Below the company vision are the major goals you're working on to fulfill the vision. You find them by asking, "How can I achieve the vision, given my current resources and environment?" Underneath each major goal, ask, "What projects fall under this goal?" I divide my projects into current projects, future projects in the pipeline, and dreams the Tooth Fairy will grant as wishes (apparently she prefers children, whose teeth fall out naturally. She was quite unmoved by the teeth I left under my pillow. She didn't like the pliers' marks).

Here's my Work Life Map.

Be Happy!
Help the world be sustainably happy!

| | academia | one-man business | family and home life |

Help businesspeople be happier.
Transform business into a Force for Good, Joy, and Sustainability.

| Create a media platform to help large numbers of people challenge and change their relationship to business. | Create information products that help people improve their lives at work. | Deliver coaching and consulting that help people be happier at work and home. |

PRESENT	Get-It-Done Guy Work Less, Do More	E-mail overload Other productivity titles Other series	Sandra C Treeman W
FUTURE	Third-Age expert	Create career product Email overload product	Robert B Scott L
DREAM	Stever TV show Commentator spots Teaching	Permanent distribution or marketing partner so I can focus on creation.	Less coaching, more media. Small # high-paying clients w/ *awesome* goals & challenges.

Row labels (left margin, top to bottom): VISION · SR INC. · STRATEGY · PROJECTS

Even if you believe you don't have separate work and home lives, you have concerns in life other than pure work concerns. Create a second map, but don't put a business mission in the second line. Instead, put whatever guiding principle you may have about who you want to be in your home life.

Now ask, "For each major area of my life (family, work, social, religious), what could bring me closer to my vision that would be fun, motivating, and stimulating to accomplish?" These are your next tier. Under that, list all your projects and activities. Here's my Home Life Map.

Be Happy!
Help the world be sustainably happy!

VISION	academia	family and home	family and home life

Create a happy life for me & everyone I touch.
Cultivate smiles. Help everyone around me live their lives more deeply and fully. Help them make their dreams come true.

	FRIEND	SELF-CARE	SPOUSE	FAMILY
MAJOR ROLES	Have a satisfying social life with fun, interesting, creative people.	Keep myself healthy in mind, body, and heart. Pursue passion and a life worth living.	Be the bestest boyfriend *ever!* Lots of hugs, snuggling, and stuffed animals.	Be Uncle Stever, role model, friend, and mentor to my nephew. Provide as I'm able for my family's future.

		FRIEND	SELF-CARE	SPOUSE	FAMILY
PROJECTS	PRESENT	Socialize in person at least 1 night/week. Bathe regularly.	Exercise. Bathe regularly. Voice lessons.	Rearrange space so we each have our own office. Bathe regularly.	Call nephew regularly. Bathe regularly.
	FUTURE	"Scene salons" Regular games days. Week w/ friends in Berkshires.	Dance lessons. Audition, theater.	One or two surprise Mystery Nights per month.	Arrange visit as soon as book is done. Have him come for summer camp.
	DREAM	Cultivate friends. in creative professions. Find or create my "tribe."	Learn Aikido.	Take a cruise together. Time off to travel Europe together.	Convince family to move out here.

When You Have a Really Big Organizing Job

If you have a really big organizing job, and don't have time to finish it, you need a new organizing strategy so that you don't end up with half-sorted, piles-waiting-to-go-elsewhere neatness mixed with glorious preorganized chaos. Instead, use focus and completely separate the sorting task from the moving task. Tackle the sorting plan first.

You don't know what you'll find, so you can't plan for this . . .

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* I'm making this sound more Disney than it is. This is a principle from behavioral decision theory called "anchoring to the current state of affairs." I'm just making it more fun to read about.

whatever it is . . . completely in advance, but you *can* decide for general categories. Then when you find something, the decision is made. You just grab it and go.

Let's say you need to organize your room but have a very important appointment in forty-five minutes and your room is no match for forty-five minutes. You see socks. They peek out of your briefcase. They flirt with you from the floor, bureau, and lampshade. Socks. Not even pairs of socks, just socks. "Socks" looks like a good category. You can decide up front that socks go into a big pile in the middle of the room. After you've completed the whole job of organizing the room, you can pair, wash, and put away the socks. You've decided the sorting plan in advance, so when you find a sock you know where it goes—the pile. And you know what to do with the pile when you're done.

Plus, there's change everywhere. Decide in advance to use a plastic box as its home. Change goes right into the Tupperware. Later, you'll visit the giant Change Sorting Machine at the grocery store. You'll give them $2,000 worth of pennies, in return for $1,800 worth of cash. A bargain, at any price.

Maybe you're besieged by receipts. Only two kinds matter: tax-deductible ones or receipts you can expense, and receipts for returning products. Prepare two envelopes ahead of time, "tax-deductible receipts" and "might-want-to-return." Any receipt you find goes straight into the envelope where it belongs. Any that don't fit, you'll plan to send to the landfill.

These are my categories. Your categories may differ. Maybe you have vintage handbag collections, and must decide whether the rhinestone encrusted Sushi lunchbox is part of your collection, or just an unfortunate consequence of a three-martini lunch. Deciding in advance will streamline your organizing so if you need to call it quits only thirty minutes into a two-hour organizing spree, you'll know where everything goes so you can easily restart and complete the task when you have the time. You save

time by making decisions only once, instead of with each item. Plus once the decisions are made, you can fit in the actual doing as time allows—which lets you fit it into blocks of time here and there that would otherwise go wasted.

Before you start actually organizing, wander through the room with your trusty pad of paper. Instead of noting specific items, jot down *categories* of things that can all be dealt with the same way. If you see something that doesn't fall into a category on your sheet, think for a few minutes and identify the category it belongs to. You'll end up with a list like this:

OFFICE CLEANING	
Categories	**Sample items**
Files	Saved receipt folder, folder with vendor contract.
Meeting notes	About two dozen different sheets of paper throughout the office. Notes about a grant to apply for.
Memos to read	Strategic planning summary, Ghoul Authoritarian Initiative alert, revisions to the budget.
Articles I've read	*How to Get Rich Without Using a Single File Folder* **(hated it).**
Articles to read	Saras Sarasvathy articles on entrepreneurship. Len Schlesinger articles on running a service firm.

APARTMENT CLEANING	
Categories	**Sample items**
Game controllers	Bundle of cords with occasional buttons, joystick, Wii controllers, guitar controller, drum controller, golf club, tennis racket.
Comic books	The pile of *Green Lantern* issues by the door. My *X-Men* Phoenix series, a stack of miscellaneous Anime, my complete *Elfquest* collection, a Doonesbury compilation, and my complete collection of Barefootz.
Dirty clothes	Those socks. Yes, those. And that … er, T-shirt. I think— well, whatever that furry thing with armholes is.
Books I've read	They're everywhere: *The Halo Factor, Succubus in the City* (**love** Nina Harper), *Outliers,* and *Using Your Brain—For a Change.*
Tasty food	Package of Twinkies by the bedside. Marshmallow peeps from Easter (they never go bad, do they?), raw pasta for snacking purposes.

Before you touch a single thing, decide what you'll do with each category. Write it down so you don't cheat and make exceptions for things that don't deserve exceptions.

CATEGORY	WHAT I'LL DO WITH THEM
Files	Stack in "to file" pile. File today between 4 p.m. and 5 p.m.
Meeting notes	Using papier-mâché, form them into a likeness of the meeting facilitator, stick pins in each, then burn them.
Memos to read	Throw away any over six months old. Read the rest between 1 p.m. and 4 p.m. next Wednesday.
Tasty food	Wrinkle my nose and sniff. If it smells bad, throw it away. Otherwise, put it in "for kitchen" pile and then put all "for kitchen" items away today at 5 p.m. If any of the food wrinkles its nose back, throw it out no matter how it smells.

Then kick yourself into action and do it. I use paper organizing for e-mail, paper mail, sorting out books, dismantling piles that have outlived their usefulness (yes, I know which pile a given item is in, but that doesn't mean I know everything in a given pile), straightening up a car, storing camping equipment, and matching up jobs and how they fit my many Zombie warriors. The simple trick of deferring the hard decisions to paper gives you the focus to organize in a snap. The organizing is easier, and all that time you used to spend trying to find stuff can now be spent doing something more deeply meaningful, like joining a wine-tasting club, or a scotch-tasting club, or a scotch-tape-testing club.

HOW TO QUICKLY ORGANIZE A MESS
IN THE MIDST OF A PROJECT

As much as my ego doesn't want to admit it, there will come a time where you won't have followed my stellar advice on organizing and so you will find yourself trying to complete several urgent projects while sitting in the middle of a monumental mess created from the paperwork, books, folders, e-mail, snail mail, phone messages, and other items related to each project. Because said project needs to be completed tomorrow, you simply don't have time to take my advice and do a thorough organizing job. But you can't possibly get any work done when everything is so disorganized. The secret organizing weapon is simple: Filter.

Going through item by item and deciding what to do with it would take forever, and would burn up most of your mental energy. Fortunately, there's a better way to grab just what you need. It relies on your brain's little-known but very powerful superpower, filtering. You can filter things much more easily than you can triage and categorize. Filtering keeps your brain focused in one place even when you're bombarded with chaos. It's easy to use filtering to save the day!

Pile everything incoming in one big pile. Think of your first project, scan the pile, and pull out everything related to that project. For example, set your mental gears to the Feed Yelena's Pet Boa While She's on Vacation project. In moments, you can spot everything related to that project—a phone message from the vet, an e-mail reminding you of the feeding schedule, and a live white mouse to feed to the snake. (The mouse is easy to spot. Its box has a picture of a young girl holding the mouse gently, with the caption "Somebody loves me" on the side. How sweet!) Leave everything else in a pile and just filter out what you need when you need it.

ORGANIZE YOUR BRAIN

You've taken another step toward a future of working less by organizing your office and house. Now they're nice, neat, and organized and you won't waste time looking for the right pen—you'll know exactly where it is, since you've categorized them by color, tip size, ink type, and barrel width (am I projecting, here?). But you don't get off that easily. These things won't stay organized unless you organize your brain to keep them that way. The biggest organizing task happens where no one else can see it: in your brain. You think your workspace was chaotic? Just be thankful we humans can't see how disorganized our own thinking is. It makes a messy office look pristine by comparison.

I, sadly, was playing with my super X-ray specs attempting to solve all twenty-four sides of a Rubik's HyperCube at once when I glanced in the mirror. Several hundred hours of therapy later and I realize that my brain isn't suitable for keeping track of much of anything.

Someday when I can afford an entourage, I'll have a perky assistant named Okra who will keep track of everything for me. Until then, I use crutches to manage the complexities of twentieth-century life. My favorite crutch is engineer's graph paper.* It's a general-purpose tool that can help you manage *anything*! I've seen it used to track projects, to monitor the progress of different teams during a scavenger hunt, to organize a three-day, two-hundred-character interactive theater event, to keep

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* And the Pilot G2-05 mechanical pencil, the Pentel Shaker pencil, and the Pilot G-02 0.38 blue retractable gel ink pen. And before you say anything, I am *not* obsessive about my stationery supplies! Obsessive would be if I knew the model numbers by heart, instead of simply keeping all of them in my pocket at all times so I can just grab one and write the model number down right from the barrel.

track of a year's worth of programs at a yoga institute, and to make sure that *all* of the octuplets are getting fed and changed properly.

Use Graph Paper to Stay Organized

Want to know exactly how graph paper can transform your life and make you more organized? Let me explain how I use it. I'm the point person for four student projects. I have to keep track of four projects comprised of 22 students, 3 faculty members, and 4 sponsors, who only have to deal with 16 or 17 administrators around 3 different topics? What could be easier?

Herding cats. That could be easier. I'm easily confused. I could keep track of Mommy and Daddy when I was young because one of them had a beard. I wasn't always sure which, but at least I could tell them apart.

My project started out easy. I wrote up the project description for one group and sent it to them. Then I began the project description for group two, but the faculty member for group three called to chat. So we outlined group three's project, while I accidentally sent the group two description to the administrator for group one.

Then I had to get back to project two—or was it one—to help them schedule their next meeting with the administrators. Er, which administrators? I think the administrator I was just talking to was from project two. Or one. Or three. Or . . . argh!

What made this so hard to deal with is that the projects were similar. They all had students, faculty advisers, sponsors, and administrators. Plus, I had to do the same things for each project: Create a project overview, prep the administrators who would be talking with the students, and check in with the faculty sponsor to set up a schedule.

Because the projects were so similar, I got confused about what I'd done on which projects. Salvation came in the form of my trusty engineering graph paper. That's graph paper with a wide column one, and the rest of the columns narrow.

On each row, I wrote the names of the student team. To protect the innocent, let's call them Cougar, Buffalo, and Snort.

I labeled each column with the steps the team had to go through: project overview written, admins prepped, faculty check-in complete. There were lots of other steps, but you get the idea.

As each step got completed for each team, I would just check it off in the grid at the intersection of the team name and the step. When Snort's faculty adviser interrupted the phone call with Cougar where we were planning the project overview, I was able to check off the Snort/Faculty-Check-in-Complete box, so I wouldn't forget and recheck-in later. Then when I finished with Team Cougar's overview, I could check that off. With a single glance, I now know which teams still need to do which phases.

Sometimes you need to track information on a project-by-project basis. In that case, I merge a few columns together and write the information right on the tracking sheet. Since each team has a different weekly check-in time, I create a column called "Check-in Time" and just write in each team's check-in time on their line.

My grids often go onto the cool engineering graph paper I mentioned before. But if you're so glued to your computer that you use sunscreen to prevent your pasty white skin from getting burned by the monitor's glare, you can do this easily in a spreadsheet or word-processing document. Just do me a favor, please, and don't waste too much time resizing your columns. Your computer is a tool, not your silicon master.

The grid technique isn't just limited to projects. You can use

it anytime you have the same set of steps you'll be doing with many different people.

If you're on a campaign to get the people in your office to approve of you and reinforce your feelings of worth as a human being, you might as well be organized about it. Your rows would be the names of each coworker. The columns would be the steps in your relationship-building plan: Meet with each one, uncover mutual interests, recommend a thoughtful book, learn their middle name, swap stories of your traumatic childhood, and then have a nice conference with them and an HR representative, where the three of you discuss boundary issues.

SAMPLE PROJECT TRACKING GRID				
	write overview	faculty check-in	team colors chosen	war cry selected	check-in time
Cougar	✘		✘		Monday, 3 p.m.
Buffalo	✘		✘		Wednesday, 8 a.m.
Snort		✘		✘	Saturday, 2 a.m.

Sample Grid to Track Renting an Apartment

A group of tenants could use this grid to keep track of what they need to apply for an apartment. Checked boxes in the first column apply to the entire group, while other checked boxes apply to individuals.

MULTI-ROOMMATE CHECKLIST							
	Alan	Blake	Sasha	Eric	Alicia	Steve	Date
Application submitted	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Co-signer application submitted	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Lease signing							
Lease signed	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Co-signer signed lease	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Lead law initialed	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
1st month's rent sent	✓						
Signed lease scanned into computer	✓						
Security deposit-related							
W9 filled out and submitted for security deposit	✓						
Security deposit sent	✓						
Security deposit account # received	✓	Account #					
On-site issues							
All furniture arranged to be delivered	✓						
All roommates have their set of keys		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mailbox labeled with our names	✓						
Parking passes obtained		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Use Forms to Organize Your Information

Sometimes you need to organize more information than a mere checked box can handle. Information needs a home, too. Your

brain can only hold five to nine chunks of information at once, so your brain is *not* a good place to store lots of detailed stuff. When you're collecting information about something with many moving parts, create forms you can use to organize the information.

A good form has a space for all the information you'll need to fulfill the form's purpose. It acts as a checklist—any blank areas are a reminder that there's information you still have to obtain—and it's a record of the information you've managed to dig up. It's also a learning tool. As you use a form, if you discover it's missing critical information, you add fill-in areas to the form and next time, your form does the work of remembering what you need.

The best forms are the ones you design yourself, since they meet your needs perfectly. When traveling to do public speaking, for example, I would often visit a city for just a few hours. The first time, I gleefully hopped on the plane and arrived in Hoboken . . . only to realize I had no idea whether my host was picking me up at the airport, whether I was supposed to rent a car, or even whether I was supposed to go to a prespeech dinner or simply show up right before the speech.

The keys to creating a good form:

- Create space for all the information you think you'll need.
- Leave some blank space for free-form notes for notes you hadn't anticipated. Later, you can add spaces on the form for information you add.
- Label each space so you know what goes there. (I know this sounds obvious. Humor me. I used to jot down phone numbers with my travel arrangements with no label. Is it my host? The rental car company? The hotel? Having labeled spaces for each of those saved the day!)

My assistant and I gradually designed a form that let me put everything I needed on one page:

Traveling to destination	Airline, flight#, departure date & time	Arrival time, terminal
	(transfer flight if applicable)	Arrival time (if applicable)
If being met, who will meet me?	Person, emergency contact phone#	
If driving myself	Rental car company, reservation#, phone#	
Immediate destination upon arrival?		
Hotel	Address, phone#, reservation#, type of room	Check-out date & time
Pre-speech event (e.g. consulting or facilitation engagement, mixer, etc.)	Date/time	Location
Speech	Date/time	Location
	Contact person on day of speech, phone#	
Return home	Airline, flight#, departure date & time	Arrival time, terminal
	(transfer flight if applicable)	Arrival time (if applicable)

Forms make the most sense when organizing information you'll use over and over. You'll create forms to keep track of individual Zombies in your World Domination Army, because you want to track the same information about each of your many thousand Zombie soldiers. For one-time events, such as

cornering the world fashion market, you may find it useful to create a form or two, but there's no need to be so structured about it. Once you have a stranglehold on the fashion industry, you won't need to stage a second takeover. Just declare anyone who opposes you as hopelessly out of style, and you win. If you'd like to borrow my tie-dyed T-shirts for your campaign, just ask.

Use File Folders to Track Physical Objects Through Their Lives

Your forms can help you sort information, but what about the physical stuff that comes with all those to-dos? We discussed file folders earlier as holders for stuff we want to archive and retrieve later. In-work paperwork doesn't belong in reference files, however, since it's just passing through. You can use file folders in a different way to organize ongoing-process paperwork. By process paperwork, I mean the paperwork that keeps stuff moving. Like the tenants above, who are juggling a dozen types of paperwork, you need a way to keep them all straight. Many jobs involve managing lots of paperwork. Pretend you're a high school teacher who gets 125 papers in one day—twenty-five papers from five different classes. File folders are a fine tool for taming process paperwork, too. Just watch.

You do stuff to all those papers. Maybe you read them, grade them, write comments, or feed them to your dog (it's about time *teachers* should be able to use the excuse, "My dog ate your paper"). When you want a paper, you'll be asking one of a few questions: "Where are the ungraded papers to grade?" "Where are the finished papers to hand back?" and "Where are the papers I need to review again?"

These questions form a road map for the process each paper goes through. You collect it, then you grade it, then you hand it

back. Some papers may need to be reviewed again, so you rereview them before handing them back.

Here's the solution: Grab three file folders. Label them *Grade, Hand back,* and *Review.* When you collect papers, put them all in the "Grade" folder. After grading a paper, put it in the *Hand back* folder or, if you find you need to review it later, in the *Review* folder.

Now at any moment, you know exactly what's going on with each paper, since it's always in a folder that tells you what to do with it. When you're in the mood to work, just grab the *Grade* or *Review* folder and get to work.

Once those folders are empty, your *Hand back* folder will be full and ready to hand back to the students. Since you have three classes whose papers you grade, you might want three sets of folders, one for each class.

You can track your clients and prospects using folders, too. Set up five folders: *Prospects, Dropped Prospects, Negotiation, Active Clients,* and *Ex-Clients.* When someone calls or gives you their card, put their contact info and why they're calling in the *Prospect* folder. Use a full sheet of paper and staple their business card to it. When you start discussing terms, move it to the *Negotiation* folder. If they bail, toss 'em into *Dropped Prospects* and check back occasionally in case their needs change. Otherwise, they go into *Active Clients.* You can scan that folder to get your client list. When your engagement is over, their paper goes into *Ex-Clients.* In an ideal world, you send your ex-clients a tasteful holiday card and a bouquet of flowers on their birthday. Dream on.

You can use this system to track *any* process. For example, in organizing our all-important Zombie world domination project, every Zombie recruit has to go through several steps. First, the Zombie has to be identified, then sprinkled with Zombie reanimation powder. Once reanimated, the Zombie needs to be out-

fitted with a mind-control ray, issued a uniform, and sent out to do your bidding.

Each of those steps is a file folder. The first folder, *Recruits Identified*, has an information sheet on every zombie. The second folder is *Recruits Reanimated*. Once a recruit has been sprinkled with powder, their information sheet gets moved from the *Identified* to the *Reanimated* folder. The *Reanimated* folder now has a sheet for all the Zombies who need mind-control rays and uniforms. Once those are issued, you move the information sheet into a folder labeled *Active Zombie Army*. And of course, you have a final folder, "Reclaim for spare parts," so when an active Zombie soldier finally dissolves into goo on the battlefield, you can take appropriate salvage action.

(Who knew building a Zombie army would be so complicated? Or that using folders correctly could make it so easy?)

When my process is complicated, I use the folders to remember the details. On the inside of the folder, I write a reminder of the next steps for papers in that folder. So inside the *Reanimated* folder, I, er, I mean, *someone*, would write: Issue ray gun and move to *Active Zombie Army* folder.

Next time you have a complicated process, make it easy by breaking it down into steps and creating a file folder for each step. And if you're a teacher with troublesome students, just toss their papers into the folder labeled *Feed to Dog* and at long last, you'll be able to use that excuse, yourself.

Steps in a process	Once step is done, transfer to folder	What to do with items in that folder (tape to inside of folder)
Identify Zombies.	Identified	Sprinkle with reanimation powder.
Reanimate Zombies.	Reanimated	Requisition uniforms, mind control rays, etc.
Zombie outfitted with gear.	Active Zombie army	Zombie takes over world on my behalf, while I sip fruit-flavored beverages on secluded island.
Zombie melts into goo.	Reclaim for spare parts.	Send out salvage team.

ORGANIZE YOUR DAYS

Not only is assembling a Zombie army a huge process, but your body, itself, goes through a daily process. Once it's a finely tuned instrument, you can get the most done the fastest by organizing your work around what comes easily, *when* it comes easily. So now let's talk about how to organize your days to help you get the most done in the shortest amount of time.

We have natural rhythms. Some times of day, it is easier to do intense thought work. Sometimes, you're more sociable and outgoing. Still other times, you're not good for much except napping.

We all know about "morning people" and "night people." I am a night person; I have a promising career as a rock musician, someday. We night people *have* to work late. That's when the world gets quiet so we can think. There are also morning people. *Shudder.* One boss was *gasp* a morning person. He held staff meetings Monday at eight a.m. The morning people

were there, chipper, smiling, and as energetic as ever. We hate them.

The rest of us were wasted. We could barely open our eyes. He thought we'd contribute. What a joker! He couldn't have done a better job of making sure he caught us at our physical, emotional, and mental bottom. It was work just to keep our eyes open, and we were getting nothing done. Although, we did dream. We dreamed about meeting him in a dark alley, at night, when *we're* awake, and *he's* asleep.

We have an emotional cycle, a physical cycle, and a mental cycle. All three need recharging. Pace your work to recharge all three and you'll get more rest and more done than trying to push straight through.

We drain our physical cycles with stress, and we recharge with sleep and exercise. We need to get enough sleep, and it has to be quality sleep. We also need exercise. And no, typing doesn't count. So next time you go to the convenience store to buy candy, walk instead of drive. It's a start.

Our emotional cycles recharge with positive emotion: feelings of gratitude and connection to life meaning. We spend our day lurching from emotion to emotion, reacting to the world around us. Take time out. Reconnect your life meaning. Feel grateful. If nothing else, imagine butterflies. Butterflies always make me smile.

Mental recharge happens in downtime: sleep and daydreams. That's why the best ideas happen in the shower. No, it's not those toxic shower mold fumes after all. It's because your brain is built to think when you're doing something else.

Look at your daily schedule. Rate your appointments and to-do items as physical, emotional, or mental. Notice if each uses or restores energy. Use a − if the activity uses energy, a 0 if it's neutral, or a + if it gives you energy. For example, supervising teenagers might be a mental rest but a physical and emotional drain.

Now look at the time of day. Is each activity scheduled when it best fits your rhythm?

Revise your schedule so you match what you do with the best time to do it. Maybe shifting your phone calls from afternoon to morning works better. Or working out at three p.m. makes more sense, since it's when you need to replenish mentally and emotionally. Customize your schedule around your rhythms to keep your energy smooth and flowing all day long. That way, you'll be at your peak for each kind of task. You'll get it done faster and you'll do a much better job.

APPOINTMENT	Physical	Emotional	Mental	Time
Writing book	0	0	—	10 a.m.–1 p.m.
Working out	+	0	+ (if I listen to music)	3 p.m.
Meeting with boss	—	—	0	11 a.m.
Hug my Sweetie	+	+	— (we talk a lot)	6 p.m.

When you're organized, you simply eliminate all the work involved with finding and arranging stuff. You know where everything is and where it goes, whether it's your office you're dealing with, or your current projects, your body's daily ups and downs, or the paperwork for your Zombie army recruits. You can organize using graph paper, grids, and by using paper to capture the organizing that would take too long to do physically. All the time you used to spend hunting through drawers or little scraps of paper are gone. Now that you're organized, you're working less; all you're doing is work that actually moves you toward your goals. In the next few chapters, we'll explore how to do more by optimizing, enlisting others, and using leverage so you'll be working even smarter.

USE THE 80/20 RULE TO STOP WASTING TIME

Just doing today's work isn't enough. That will keep you working and doing, but working *less* means picking and choosing the work that's most important to your goals. Bernice is in charge of putting together our annual management meeting. With her keen eye for design and her charming way with people—charm that only improves when she uses mouthwash regularly—she's a natural at event planning. Unfortunately, she really *loves* flower arranging, and she isn't so keen on arranging all those complicated plane flights for the speakers. Flower arranging is, indeed, part of the work that needs to be done. But getting speakers is more important. Don't be a Bernice! Put your efforts behind what's most important using the 80/20 rule.

To illustrate why the 80/20 rule is important let's take a look at the success of the Home Shopping Network. It's not the average customer like me that keeps that business profitable. I just buy a faux diamond-studded hairpiece once every couple of years. Their profit comes from the tiny group that buys *hundreds* of items every week. If they want to sell product, the network should stop thinking about me and my hairpiece (hard to do, I know) and spend their time figuring out how to sell another doggie comforter to dear Bernice, who already has seventeen of them, in a wide variety of colors.

That principle has a name. It's called the 80/20 rule or the

Pareto principle. It means that most of what happens comes from a small number of causes. A few customers account for most of your profit. Your top employees produce as much as most of the rest put together. And most likely, your meaning and happiness in life comes from a tiny part of how you spend your time.

This is good news! It means when you look over your Life Map (or even just your current work goals), most of your progress will come from just a few actions. If you can identify those most-important actions, simply do more of those and less of the busy-work and you'll be home free. For you math geeks out there, think about it this way: let's say 20 percent of your activities give you 80 percent of your results. If you double the amount of time you spend on those Most Excellent activities and stop doing anything else, you'll only be working 40 percent of your time and getting 160 percent of the results you used to get. *That* is working less and doing more! Identifying your own Trusty 20 Percent depends on your job.

You can figure out your most important 20 percent by logging how you spend your time, analyzing all your activities, drawing graphs, and doing lots of stuff that would impress your ninth-grade teacher. Give it a rest. I'm willing to bet with five minutes' thought, you could list your key activities. Fill in this table:

What current tasks are your most important use of time?	What do you not do *now*, that would produce great results if you did?	What do you do now that *seems* to be work, but doesn't get spectacular results?
Finishing pending proposals, such as the proposal for client X.	Regularly called client X to find out what her current needs are.	Spend a half hour each day replying to nonessential email.
Preparing the marketing plan for the product launch.	Reach out to members of the PR committee so they're on my side when I pull the cute weather balloon stunt.	Copyediting the one paragraph blurb on the box.

Now, do more of columns one and two, and less of column three. Yes, it *is* that easy to stop wasting time!

DON'T WASTE TIME ON PERFECTIONISM

Being a brainiac, myself, I have even managed to find ways to waste time when I'm doing nothing but my Trusty 20. My crowning time waster is perfectionism. They say the perfect is the enemy of the good. My boss once said, "You spend most of your time getting your work quality from 80 percent to 98 percent, when everyone would be happy with 70 percent." I understand what he meant, but I just can't help it. I'm weak; I love perfection. I attended a Zombie march. Two hundred people dressed as Zombies, shambling along the city streets, boarding buses, grunting at the windows of restaurants, and generally doing what Zombies do.

I wanted a *perfect* costume! That meant makeup. And tailored rotten clothes. Maybe even raiding a graveyard, to find clothes taken from a real corpse. It turns out that raiding graveyards is illegal (who knew?), so I found myself stymied, not to mention running out of time.

Then I remembered "good enough." This is a Zombie march, for goodness' sake. "Good enough" was a few spoiled vegetables, torn jeans, tomato sauce, and green slime. For green slime, I settled on green face masque, to moisturize my skin, even as I pretended it was rotting off. (Talk about killing two birds with one stone, but moisturizing one of the birds.)

It became fun to fantasize about how low I could push "good enough." Would it be okay to attend as a two-day-old Zombie who hadn't started decomposing yet? Maybe I could just buy a rubber mask of a politician. People would instantly assume I was some sort of evil being from Heck.

Perfectionism affects more than just Zombie marches. I've seen people spend an entire weekend formatting a presentation to get the perfect fonts, with perfect animated sparkles at the perfect junctures. C'mon, does anyone really care? "It has to be perfect for the board of directors." Get real. The board of directors cares about the substance. They know how to add sparkles, they *don't* know the details of how the division is doing. Perfectionism is sucking up time, causing you to work more, and the only person benefitting is the owner of the company that wrote the presentation software. And he already has enough, don't you think?

Your presentations and reports don't need perfect formatting. Your product design doesn't need to be perfect, only better than the competition. Your spreadsheet doesn't need to have ten thousand cells calculating every possible interpretation of your data, only the interpretations that make a difference to how you'll move forward.

By now you agree you can lower your expectations from perfect to good enough. But who gets to define "good enough"?

If you're producing a product or service, good enough is defined by your customers. That's what market research is all about.

And if you want to do a good enough job to be promoted, it's your boss who can tell you what's good enough. It's true that your boss may define good enough differently from how the company defines it. I, however, shall diplomatically avoid a frank discussion of corporate politics and instead suggest that your All-Knowing, Benevolent Boss will happily help you understand how to do a good enough job.

Only never let your boss know you want to settle for good enough. Instead say, "What are the critical pieces that absolutely must get done; the things that we would never abandon even if our schedule slipped?" It's a simple question about priorities. Your boss will be thrilled to answer (unless she has never considered the question, in which case she'll feel threatened and fire you to resolve her uncomfortable feelings). It will also let you know what constitutes good enough, so you can relax once you've achieved those "good enough" requirements.

Now that you've dealt with finding what's good enough on the job, it's time to ramp down the extraperfectionism that's causing you more work with no benefit. Start finding where you strive for perfection. Do you format your documents obsessively? Do you go overboard on your community service? Do you try to be the perfect boss? Do you bow and scrape and say yes even when you mean no, in an attempt to be the perfect employee? List everywhere you're striving for perfectionism. For each, ask what would constitute "good enough"? Then, consider doing that. Use a table like the following one to help.

WHERE I'M A PERFECTIONIST	WHAT WOULD BE "GOOD ENOUGH"
Needing the perfect writing implement.	1 pen, 1 pencil.
Keep my computer backed up, totally updated, with multiple off-site backups.	Internet backup. Only do updates once a year.
Needing the podcast audio to be perfect before I send it to the sound engineer.	Send it immediately to the sound engineer. We pay *him* to make it perfect.

MAKE FASTER DECISIONS WITH ABSOLUTE LISTS

Now that you're working less by settling for good enough, let's take it down another notch and make it supereasy to know if something's good enough. Allow me to introduce Absolute Lists.* They come in two varieties: yes and no. An Absolute Yes list lays out the qualities that make an automatic yes for a decision. It tells you quickly what's good enough.

For example, I need a new car. I decide in advance if it costs less than $15,000, comes with a 100,000-mile warranty, gets over 35 miles per gallon, and is painted with a bigger-than-life picture of Elvis, I will buy it, no questions asked. (You may wish to ask why somebody would paint Elvis on their car, but I feel no such compulsion.)

This is my Absolute Yes list. If something matches everything on the list, it's an automatic yes. I take action and keep moving. Maybe there are things I would say yes to that don't match the list, but the list gives me a guaranteed cutoff. Anything matching

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* I was first exposed to the ideas through Coach University and also through the work of author Cheryl Richardson.

instantly lets me proceed.* This makes life pretty easy. I don't have to spend a lot of time on things that fall in the gray area. If it's not an Absolute Yes, then it is a no.

You can use Absolute Yes lists to help you quickly recognize when to take a potential business deal seriously. You can create lists to help you screen job candidates, choose vendors, identify target customers, and choose the partners, companies, or bosses you want to work with. For example, if you're passionate about space travel and want the chance to be an astronaut someday, your Absolute Yes list for a job might include, "Provides the chance to travel to the moon." If you're passionate about space travel *and* housecleaning, you might include ". . . chance to travel to the moon and tidy things up once I'm there."

Once upon a time, if you had received a dozen job offers, you might agonize among them. You'd draw charts, evaluate pros and cons, and make the decision an agony of overwork. With your Absolute Yes list, you quickly scan through and realize that four of the jobs all involve space travel and housecleaning. Since all of them are an Absolute Yes, you can simply roll a four-sided die to make your final choice. A once-multiweek decision gets made in mere minutes.

We mostly try many options before we decide. Since we say no more times than we say yes, an Absolute No list can also help. The Absolute No list covers things that will instantly disqualify an option.

It's a very different creature from an Absolute Yes list. Sometimes you may not know exactly what you want in a job, but you *do* know that you despise fluorescent lights. An Absolute Yes list of "has flattering, incandescent lighting" won't do the job. Your office

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* The academic scholar of decision theory will recognize this as "satisficing," a decision-making procedure named by psychologist Herbert Simon. Now that you've satisfied your desire for a citation, go finish reading the tip.

might have a single incandescent bulb in the customer waiting area, and then evil, soul-destroying fluorescent light everywhere else. But "no fluorescent lights" is an Absolute No. If a job also meets an Absolute No, thank them for the chance to apply and run as fast as you can, screaming, in the opposite direction.

You can use your Absolute Yes and Absolute No lists together. For example, when your friends (or family, or scout troup, or poly-amorous family unit) decide to catch a movie, you can easily end up spending all night debating what to see. Cut down the work by creating Absolute lists for the group to winnow down the choices quickly. Just fill out everyone's Absolute Nos. For your Absolute Yes list, include only criteria you *all* agree on. Instead of two hours of debate, just pull out your Absolute lists and elimi-nate any movies that trigger an Absolute No. If any movies trig-ger an Absolute Yes, go for it. Otherwise, you'll still have to discuss, but you've already eliminated all the noncontenders in mere moments.

TOPIC: MOVIES THE GROUP WANTS TO SEE	
Absolute Yes These are *group* absolute yeses.	**Absolute No** One person's absolute no is a veto.
Anything written by David Mamet	Gory horror (any villain wearing a ski mask, long fingernails, or who has stringy hair)
Star Wars franchise	Starring Madonna
Star Trek franchise	Starring anyone whose last name is the name of a hotel chain
Starring Meryl Streep, Matt Damon, or Pee Wee Herman	Anything with subtitles

Your Absolute lists will come in handy when making all kinds of tough decisions you face in your work life, including:

- Deciding whether or not to take on a new project.
- Evaluating whether or not to hire a prospective new team member.
- Deciding whether or not to stay late in the office to work on a project.
- Which interruptions get an immediate response (my vote is: none but life-or-death)?
- Whether you should spend money on a morale-building event.
- Whether you should spend money on a business-building event.

Here are how you might use Absolute lists around a business-building event:

TOPIC: BUSINESS-BUILDING EVENTS, SHOULD WE ENGAGE?	
Absolute Yes	**Absolute No**
It will provide guaranteed exposure to at least 1,000 people at a maximum cost of $15/person.	If it involves any explicit or implied political endorsement.
Trade shows for industries with cumulative sales of over $2 billion.	Anything that requires more than 10 people present (we don't yet have the staff to have that many people gone at once).
In past years, this event has led directly to sales or to valuable distribution partnerships.	Events held wherever we're on the "do not allow on premises" list (e.g. the Ballagio, after the unfortunate penguin incident).