

'What kills most start-ups is the failure to execute a plan'

Productivity consultant David Allen on how entrepreneurs must get their act together and stay focussed

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Entrepreneurs wear many hats to keep track of different things. Therefore, it becomes that much more critical for them to be able to keep their heads clear and be focused on the most important tasks rather than be distracted by the latest and loudest things going on in their heads, says David Allen, productivity consultant and author of the self-help international bestseller *Getting Things Done* (GTD). In an interaction with *BusinessLine*, Allen who is visiting India, explained how GTD could help entrepreneurs get their act together. Excerpts:

What should entrepreneurs do to survive and thrive in the ever changing, fast paced start-up world?

There are basically three things that venture capitalists look for in start-ups – do they have intellectual property rights, enough capital, and whether they can execute it. What kills most start-ups is the failure to execute a plan.

In such a situation, GTD in its very nature is hugely important to entrepreneurs. The first thing an entrepreneur must do is to grab a big sheet of paper and write down everything that's on his mind. Next, he must go through all those things listed on the sheet of paper and decide what is the next course of action on everything to get resolution and closure. Then, set up a system which will hold reminders of all those actions that need to be taken. These steps called Capture, Clarify and Organize are the first three steps of GTD, which apply to everyone from 8-year-old school children to CEOs of companies.

Retention is becoming a huge problem for organisations as employees burn out much faster due to stress, today. How can organisations address this issue?

When you are stressed out and overwhelmed, its important to get whatever is in your

head, out of it. To be in an optimally productive state at work, you have to have a clear head. Distractions create a huge lack of productivity and sub-optimal cognitive processing for people out there. You can be more productive, more strategic, more creative, more present, if you can stop that noise inside your head which allows you to focus on what's most important. Employees must know what it is they are trying to do and what is the next step. There are a lot of people out there who don't have that focus. If you know what you are doing, it's a great time to be alive. If you don't know what you are doing, you are toast! I would agree that the stress factor is going up but, its simply because of the speed of change and the fact that people don't have the skills or the abilities to keep up with that change or are not demonstrating the behaviours and best practices

about how to stay clear headed, focused and in the present. Organisations must support best practices that keep things clear for its employees. It's the lack of clarity that creates stress. Employees must know what exactly their job is, what exactly they should be doing right now and what the organisation is expecting of them.

How does one keep oneself happy and content at work and at home?

Most people don't realise they are stressed out until they clear out what's in their heads. Its not just clearing up but it is about opening up to be able to recognise more of who you really are... If you had clear space in your head with nothing pulling on you right now, how would you use it? A lot of people get more creative,

more innovative, more strategic and so on.

The main reason to have a clear head, is that you are ready to take on a surprise, and not over react or under react to it. For instance, if you have 2000 unprocessed e-mails hanging in your psyche, every interruption feels like a pain in the butt. But, if your backlog is zero, there are no interruptions, there are just opportunities to influence your world. GTD is a rather sophisticated self development process which is for anyone but not everyone. Its really simple, anybody who has a busy life and wants to get more on top of their life, its highly valuable for them. My mission is to let people know that 'here is the game,' whether they implement it or not is up to them.

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Productivity consultant and author

