



# Taking the **Lead** Overwhelmed?

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## Seven Steps Toward Regaining Control

**R**egardless of how seasoned we may be, every once in a while we become overwhelmed with what's on our plates. Getting back to the basics and applying these seven steps will help you regain control over your daily and long-term goals:

### 1. "Mind to Paper" or "Mind to PDA"

If you don't already have a place at your fingertips—one place where you can dump your to-dos—you need one. If you're not comfortable with a daily list, then set your system up with dated weekly lists. Stop long enough to establish your to-dos, by reviewing incoming information for one thing: Does it generate an expectation of action on your part, and when? Once you've established that, write it down on a day or week that makes sense. If consistent list making is new and challenging to you—practice documenting all of the to-dos that cross your mind or desk.

For more comprehensive projects, open a paper or computer file where you can develop a master list focused on that project. At the very least, begin entering ideas or actions as you think of them. Once your master list becomes more comprehensive, use it as a project plan by identifying target dates and opportunities to delegate. Want to kick-start a project you've been putting off? Ask one of your direct reports to come up with a first draft project plan from his or her perspective and use it as a springboard for your own strategic thinking.

### 2. Take the Time to Plan

As you schedule future meetings, project tasks, or as you delegate, ask yourself this question: When is the **FIRST** time I need to think about this? The answer to this

question is the date (or week) in your planner where you place your first prompter. You allot time to think about new creative strategies. Once you've planned ahead, relax. You can trust your system to prompt you.

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### 3. Prioritize Realistically

When you're overwhelmed with what's on your list, ask yourself: Which of these items absolutely **MUST** be done today? Highlight them and let go of the rest of the items on your list. This offers an immediate focus. It will consistently remind you what must be accomplished before your head hits the pillow tonight.

### 4. Code or Track Your Progress and Let It Drive You

The goal is for you to use your to-do list as a driver and barometer. As you address tasks, use a code in a column at the front of the list offering an easy status snapshot

(establish a code for completed; moved forward; working on it; delegated it, etc.).

### 5. Close or Sweep Your Weekly List

At the end of the day or week (depending on your system), review your list for open items—those that are not completed or moved forward. Close or sweep the list by moving your open to-dos onto your upcoming daily or weekly list and start anew. The clean slate offers a fresh and efficient mental start.

### 6. Delegate Consistently and Effectively

The answers to these questions may help you identify areas needing attention:

- a) Are you updated on your direct reports' volume of activity enough to know how much more they can handle?
- b) When delegating, are you activating accountability through non-arguable outcomes and specific target dates?
- c) Have you continued to transition to a new level of delegation as your position and team matures?

### 7. Strive for Balance

If you're struggling with striking a balance between the energy you give your job and that which you devote to yourself or loved ones, trying to change your entire focus in the short term may be a huge undertaking. Instead commit to one small, doable action a day. For example, plan to turn off your cell phone and spend time with a loved one for just one hour tonight. Better yet, interrupt your daily work ritual and call someone you care about.

Take it a day at a time. Today's the only day we have to work with anyway. **BSM**

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