

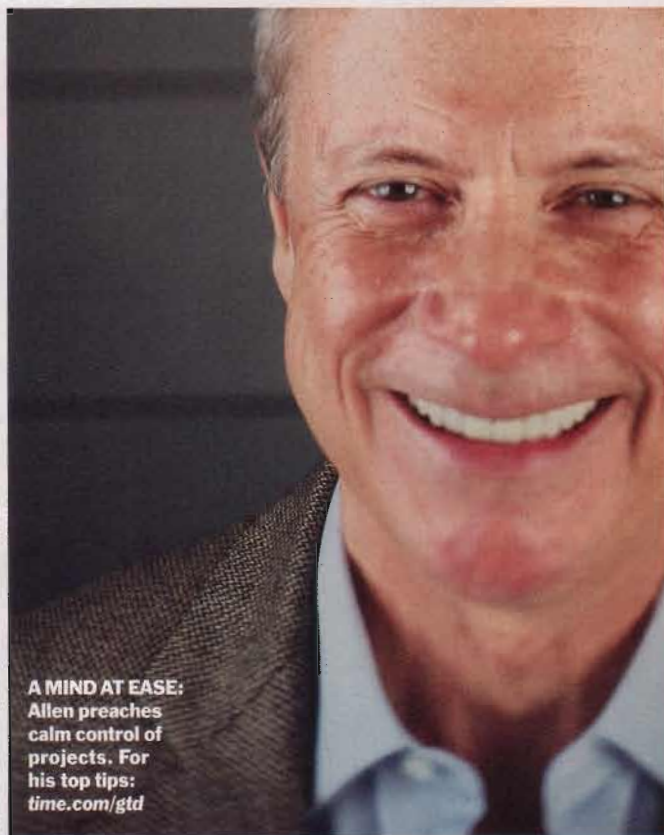
By JEREMY CAPLAN

EVERY DECADE HAS ITS defining self-help business book. In the 1940s it was *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, in the 1990s *The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*. These days we're worried about something much simpler: *Getting Things Done*.

That's the title of productivity guru David Allen's pithy 2001 treatise on working efficiently, which continues to resonate in this decade's overworked, overwhelmed, overteched workplace. Allen hasn't just sold 500,000 copies of his book. He has preached his message of focus, discipline and creativity everywhere from Sony and Novartis to the World Bank and the U.S. Air Force. He counsels swamped chief executives on coping with information overload. He ministers to some clients with an intensive, two-day, \$6,000 private session in which he and his team organize their lives from top to bottom. And he has won the devotion of acolytes who document on their blogs how his Getting Things Done (GTD) program has changed their lives.

Allen admits that much of his basic recipe is common sense. Free your mind, and productivity will follow. Break down projects and goals into discrete, definable actions, and you won't be bothered by all those loose threads pulling at your attention. First make decisions about what needs to get done, and then fashion a plan for doing it. If you've cataloged everything you have to do and all your long-term goals, Allen says, you're less likely to wake up at 3 a.m. worrying about whether you've forgotten something: "Most people haven't realized how out of control their head is when they get 300 e-mails a day and each of them has potential meaning."

**“Most people haven't realized how out of control their head is when they get 300 e-mails a day.” —David Allen**



**A MIND AT EASE:** Allen preaches calm control of projects. For his top tips: [time.com/gtd](http://time.com/gtd)

MORGAN B. AZIMI FOR TIME

## The Oracle of Organization

Productivity guru David Allen shows the overworked how to free their minds

When e-mails, phone calls and to-do lists are truly under control, Allen says, the real change begins. You will finally be able to use your mind to dream up great ideas and enjoy your life rather than just occupy it with all the things you've got to do. Allen himself, despite running a \$5.5 million consulting practice, traveling 200 days a year and juggling a business that's growing 40% every year, finds time to joyride in his Mini Cooper and

sculpt bonsai plants. Oh, and he has earned his black belt in karate.

Few companies have embraced Allen's philosophy as thoroughly as General Mills, the Minnesota-based maker of Cheerios and Lucky Charms. Allen began at the company with a couple of private coaching sessions for top executives, who raved about his guidance. Allen and his staff now hold six to eight two-day training

sessions a year. The company has already put more than 2,000 employees through GTD training and plans to expand it company-wide. "Fads come and go," says General Mills exec Kevin Wilde, "but this continues to work."

The most fevered followers of Allen's organizational methodology gather online. Websites like [gtdindex.marvelz.com](http://gtdindex.marvelz.com) parse Allen's every utterance. The *43Folders* blog ran an eight-part podcast interview with him. GTD enthusiasts like Frank Meeuwse, on [whats-thenextaction.com](http://whats-thenextaction.com), gather best practice techniques for implementing the book's ideas. More than 60 software tools have been built specifically to supplement Allen's system.

That ardor has led some devotees to bring GTD home. They use their electronic label-makers (a must-have GTD tool) to make sense of linen closets, and they encourage their kids to break homework assignments into action steps. The clamor for new applications of GTD has grown so loud that Allen is at work on a third book, due in 2008. He says it will further explore GTD's principles and extend his theory to novel domains, including the home.

Allen's new direction may be a sign of the next wave in corporate consulting. While today's management experts often look for ways to trim organizations into the leanest machines possible, Wharton marketing professor Sigal Barsade says consultants will increasingly be "balance experts." Corporations that have survived waves of layoffs need advice on finding calm and new outlets for creativity. "They're looking at how far you can slow down to actually increase efficiency," Barsade says. Allen has put that at the top of his to-do list. ■

