

# The Secret to Reducing Distractions and Getting Things Done

By David Brewster

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## THE SECRET TO REDUCING DISTRACTIONS AND GETTING THINGS DONE

Have you ever worked hard all day only to look back with wonder at how little you achieved? Or set up a fool-proof new system only to find no one – not even yourself - sticks to it? Or had a great idea that never saw the light of day? There is a simple yet powerful idea which can help you overcome all of these problems.

I call this concept the 'trigger'. Triggers initiate nearly everything we do during a typical work day. Anything that causes you to pause, stop what you are doing and move onto something else is a trigger.

Triggers come in a whole range of forms. The phone ringing, an interruption by a colleague, mail arriving on your desk, a computerised alarm – these can all be triggers. A sudden thought or idea can also be a trigger.

Our routines and habits act as powerful triggers. If you are in the habit of having a coffee at 10 o'clock every morning, that habit is a trigger: it pulls you away from what you were doing.

Some triggers set us on the path towards getting something done while others keep sending us off on a detour. We might say triggers can act for 'good' as well as 'evil'.

On the 'good' side, triggers are the essential link between your documents – diaries, to-do lists, written procedures, etc. – and action. For example, items on your to-do list won't get done unless you have some sort of trigger which causes you to refer to the list on a regular basis.

Triggers are critical to getting less regular tasks done. In Australia, most small businesses used to do their accounts only annually because there was no trigger to do otherwise. Then the government introduced a 'trigger' called the Business Activity Statement which forces us to do our accounts at least quarterly. (Whether this is more 'good' than 'evil' is debatable!)

You can use triggers – diary entries, for example – to prompt things like a regular review of your plans, or a review of your price lists or sales statistics.

On the 'evil' side, a whole host of triggers constantly conspire to remove our focus. In fact an effective way of tackling procrastination is to identify and remove the triggers that distract you. For example, turn off the prompt that pops up to tell you that "you have new email".

Try focusing on your triggers for a day. Every time you 'change course' during the day, consider what it was that caused you to do so. Write these things down. Conversely, when you think about that job which you never seem to get around to, think about developing a trigger to make it happen.

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