



# 20 TIPS

**TO ELIMINATE  
OVERWHELM  
FROM YOUR LIFE**

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# HERE ARE 20 OF MY FAVORITE WAYS TO ELIMINATE OVERWHELM:

1.



## Get it all out of your head.

In David Allen's great book, *Getting things Done: The Art of Stress Free Productivity*, he makes the great point that our brains are made for making decisions, not remembering every task and event in our calendars. Make a list and get it all your tasks out of your head. This helps clear out the clutter so you can think more clearly.

2.



## Redefine your job in terms of things you can control.

Overwhelm can come from worrying about things we can't control. My father-in-law sells insurance and is in the top 3% of Blue Cross Blue Shield's closers in the state of Michigan. When you ask him what his job is though, he doesn't say he sells insurance, he says his job is to get in touch with 5 people a day who could possibly buy insurance from him. He knows sales is simply a numbers game and once he's reached out to five people he feels good about the days work. He knows he can't control who does and doesn't buy from him, all he can control is the number of people he reaches out to. It saves him a lot of emotional energy and self-worth. He's one of the happiest, stress-free people I know. So do what you can, and let the rest go.

3.



## Break it down.

When you're faced with a big project, write down the next three small things you could do. Taking a massive undertaking and breaking it down into small, actionable steps is a proven way to stay out of overwhelm AND continue to make progress on your goals. If you break it down and it still feels too hard, break it down some more until you have a list of manageable action steps. Try it, it works.

4.



## Count down from 5 and take action.

You have a list of things to do. A big list. A list that makes list makers cower in fear. So what do you do? Pick one task — just one. Count down in your head, "5, 4, 3, 2, 1..." and do that task. Once that's done, choose another task. And so on, and so on. Taking action trumps planning.

5.



### **Focus on the present.**

Another tool in your arsenal of tools is to take a few deep breaths, get really quiet, and focus only on the moment at hand. Tell yourself that everything right now is ok. I do this all the time. When I'm worried about something, I look around me and notice all the things that are okay, and focus just on that. It's simple and extremely effective.

6.



### **Practice gratitude.**

Gratitude is a valuable skill that can be learned through practice. Sort of like being in the present, so make a list of all the things you're grateful for, and the smaller the better. Maybe it's as simple as the fact that the sun is shining today. Get in the habit of practicing gratitude every day.

7.



### **Practice meditation.**

Meditation is a fantastic way to get centered and calm. Even if you have just a few minutes, meditation can help. If you're just getting started, try using an app like Headspace or Calm to guide you.

8.



### **Think of the worst-case scenario.**

When I'm especially stressed out with worry, I've often asked myself, "What's the worst that can happen?" Most of the time, even the very worst thing that could happen isn't the end of the world. Even though it might be truly awful, I could recover. That helps to put things in perspective.

9.



### **Take a break and get outdoors.**

Fresh air will do wonders for your mood. If you're somewhere where there's even a tiny square of grass or trees, connecting with nature will help center you.

10.



### **Establish boundaries — and enforce them.**

Often we're overwhelmed because we've taken on too much — and that's often because we don't have good boundaries. A mentor of mine once told me that saying no is the act of trading popularity for respect. So get comfortable saying no. If we're constantly saying yes to everyone, we eventually say no to ourselves.

11.



### **Simplify — your space, your files, your life.**

"When in doubt, throw it out." If something no longer serves you, get rid of it. If you're not sure, pack it away until you ARE sure. It's perfectly ok to acknowledge that something once served you but has now outlived its usefulness. Honor that and let it go.

12.



### **Prioritize.**

You can't do everything for everyone. You just can't. Make your list, choose your top 3 most important things, and put the rest on hold.

13.



### **Plan for speed bumps and LEAVE SPACE.**

I used to be late all the time. I was always rushing, and I hated it. Then I realized it was because I was trying to squeeze in as much as I could into every single minute. So if I had to be somewhere in 10 minutes, I'd swing by the bank or stop to get gas first. Inevitably, it always took me longer than I planned, and because I filled every single minute, I was always rushing. Then, if I got behind a driver who wasn't driving quite as fast as I would have liked, I got annoyed and very impatient. Once I learned to give myself some buffer time, I realized how nice it is to arrive early and not have to rush. Along those lines, sometimes things don't go as planned — so have a backup plan just in case.

14.



### **Delegate.**

Just because you CAN, doesn't mean you SHOULD. I can do a lot of things that aren't the best use of my time, so I delegate them to members of my team. It's not always easy to do, but it's important. Find someone with the skill set you need, and learn to hand stuff off to them.

15.



### **Let go of perfectionism — give yourself permission to be imperfect.**

“Done is better than perfect” is a great mantra for perfectionists. A woman I used to date was a teacher, and she would spend weeks writing progress reports. She was often behind because she was so extremely detailed. Though she submitted a superior product, it was really stressful for her. The key is to identify a standard that you can live with yet won’t keep you from delivering on time.

16.



### **Don’t try to get it all done now.**

Your list is long. You feel like it all needs to be done TODAY, so you freeze and turn to Facebook instead. Go back to what we learned above about breaking things down and prioritizing. Not everything needs to get done right this minute, or even today, or even this week — even though you might feel like it does.

17.



### **Keep track of your progress and celebrate it.**

We tend to focus so much on what we need to do and what is in our way, that we neglect the things we checked off that list, and the things that went well. I love checklists that allow me to see what’s been completed — so paper works well, so do digital list tools that don’t delete the completed tasks (Workflowy is a good example of one that gives you the option to show or hide completed tasks). Looking back at how far you’ve come and celebrating that progress is a great way to keep your spirits up when you’re feeling down.

18.



### **Clear the decks at the end of the day.**

At the end of the day, clean up your desk. It might be tempting to just get up and walk away, but if your desk is a mess that’s how you’re going to feel in the morning. Do you really want to start your day with another mess? Make note of where you left off, identify what you’re going to start with in the morning, then put everything away.

19.



### **Choose your three MITs every day.**

My best tool for staying focused is the MIT (Most Important Task). Each day, identify no more than three MITs for the day. These are the things that absolutely have to get done. Focus on them, and once those are done you can feel like you made real progress.

# 20.



**Remember improvement is a crockpot,  
not a microwave.**

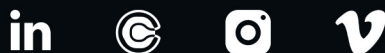
**Working on making your life less overwhelming is fantastic!**

Just remember it doesn't all happen at once. We often overestimate what we can accomplish in a day and underestimate what we can accomplish in 5 minutes a day for a year. So just pick one or two items off this list and try them out this week. Then next week try adding one or two more. If you change just a half a percent each day, in 200 days you'll be a completely different person!



## LET'S CONNECT

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