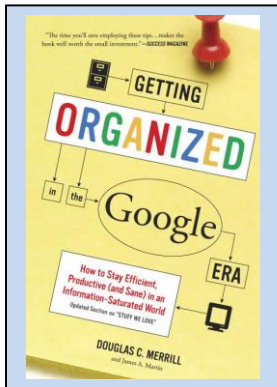


Getting Organized in the Google Era Douglas C. Merrill



Why read this book?

From former Google CIO Douglas Merrill comes the definitive book on getting – and staying – ORGANIZED in the digital age.

“Merrill offers a wealth of new tools, tips, and techniques for managing the avalanche of information that assaults us in today’s world.

An antidote to the outdated, one-size-fits-all approach to organization, this invaluable resource will help you become more efficient and productive than ever.” (Back cover)

Key Quotes

“Just remember, it’s rarely a good idea to keep doing something a certain way simply because it’s how you’ve always done it. In, fact...that’s typically a bad idea. If you truly want to be more efficient, challenge the ways you’ve been organizing the information in your world and open yourself to new ways of doing it.” (P. 129)

“Our biggest challenges stem from events we can’t control...the key is to spend time getting organized BEFORE a crisis strikes, which in turn helps you prepare for the unexpected when it comes. Think of your organizational skills as insurance against (these events).” (P. 204)

“Starting with specific goals in mind may seem very Organization 101. But you’d be surprised how many people don’t do it, or do it incorrectly. They’re too busy DOING to stop and think about what they’re doing or why they’re doing it.” (P. 56)

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*Braeuler Consulting works with organizations to leverage Strategic Thinking and Execution Planning and we encompass many of the principles in these books into our **Four Decisions™** methodology and development of company’s **One Page Strategic Plans**. Whatever system you decide to use, understand them fully, implement them slowly and completely and maintain the discipline and rhythm necessary to see concrete results. Employees tire of “Flavor of the Month” and thrive on organizational alignment, execution of plans and achievements that garner a sense of accomplishment.*

Getting Organized in the Google Era begins by letting us know that our difficulties in getting and staying organized are due in large part to the fact that our brain does have some limitations and our society has created barriers that are outdated and continue to plague us. We can, and should, look at the constraints that surround us, determine which are real and which imagined and then figure out a way around them.

This book can help you fine-tune your organizational skills and gives some great ideas on specific tools that can help. The bigger picture is not so much on the tools themselves as to how to use those or similar tools. As Merrill states, there is no one-size-fits-all solutions. Let's take a look at some of the ideas that may be of interest including his 21 principles of organization.

Part One – A Panoramic View of YOU

We will be exploring PRINCIPLES of organization not RULES of organization

Brain Does Well	Brain Does not do well
ID gender and age looking at photo of a nose	Memorizing bits of information
Recognize a song in a few notes	Accurately remembering events
Approximate where a Frisbee will land	Brain tends to combine memories



*Organize your life to
minimize brain strain*

Attention is a survival mechanism honed around each of our senses. Close your eyes and identify what is vying for your attention RIGHT NOW. Your brain registers a lot more than you are aware of. Have you ever been to a large noisy cocktail party and here your name – this is the Cocktail party effect (coined in 1953). All this information goes into short term memory and most disappears. We can only hold on to 5 to 9 things at a time.



*Get stuff out of your head as
quickly as possible.*

The critical component of organization – get the information OUT of our short term memory and into a searchable database we can easily access. That's what we do today with phone numbers. How many numbers do you really know?

Multitasking usually makes you less efficient. Multitasking works against us (except for rote tasks). Classic example is texting while driving! If you don't encode the information you lose it.



Use stories to remember

To move things from short term to long term memory requires encoding the information which is usually done through rehearsal (think of memorizing a phone number). Best is to wrap the rehearsal around a story



Just because something's always been done a certain way doesn't mean it should be.

Our brains are also lousy at making decisions. Given too many choices we opt for the most familiar and also start changing our mind when confronted with new choices or sometimes revisit a decision already made. (The real key to making decisions is to understand what your goals are and prioritize them.)

Our World is WRONG

Why are we working 9 to 5 – Industrial Revolution → Frederick Taylor created efficiencies and sameness → assembly lines required everyone to be there at the same time and labor movements created the 40 hour work week → adopted by many nonindustrial businesses, education (Summer vacations – remember Outliers?), etc. Now companies maintain that to be available to their customers and vendors, and often to simplify managing people you don't trust and out of habit.



Knowledge is not power. The sharing of knowledge is power.

Once upon a time KNOWLEDGE was POWER. Apprenticeships, education... and as knowledge became readily available and inexpensive it is hard to hold power for long, why cram it all in your head? Build a team, delegate, and find people smarter than you, share and share alike.

Owning up to our personal constraints



Organize around actual constraints, not assumed ones.

These can be physical constraints, behavioral constraints (procrastination, obsessive overachiever...), poor memory, etc., psychological or societal. Some are within our control and others are not.

Assumed constraints – constraints we assume are real yet are based around experience, history, what others have told us etc.

Actual constraints – Generally involves something you have absolutely no control over.

Be completely honest – but never judgmental – with yourself. When we are not honest with ourselves, we complicate our lives. Get feedback. Use a 360 performance review. Ask those you trust about your strengths and weaknesses; Learn about yourself with a behavioral assessment; assess your environment to identify roadblocks.

Know when to ignore your constraints. Weigh your constraints against your assets, consider the risk, and determine – what is the worst thing that can happen if you ignore it. Merrill says, "Whatever you decide, try not to let irrational fear take control. Fear is an emotional constraint that's often best ignored." (P. 54)

The importance of having goals

“A clearly defined goal and action plan to achieve it gives context and purpose to everything you do.” (P. 56)
*Know exactly where you’re going – and how you’ll get there – **before** you start the engine.*



*Be flexible about how you
achieve your goals.*

However, the WAY you achieve that goal is not carved in stone and you need to maintain flexibility. Be specific about the goal and go with the flow on how to achieve it. Decision making is enhanced if you visualize the possible results of your decision, you can list pros and cons and then prioritize them. Do you have a backup plan? Can you get help from others? Has this been done before? How?

Part Two – The New Organization – and How to Achieve It



*Don’t FILE
your
information;
Search for it.*

“Search is the foundation of the new organization” (P. 72) “The fundamental difference between physical and electronic filing is you don’t file your information; search for it.” (P. 77)

Starting on page 83 he reviews how to get the best search results using things like quotation marks, the tilde symbol (containing word), OR, - (to exclude words), etc. Information is readily available using search such as currency, measures, time, weather, flights, translations... In Windows 7 just launch the start menu and start typing...you’ll be amazed at what comes up.



*Only keep in your
head what truly
needs to be there.*

Your goals determine what you do with information. You will either determine that the information relates to your goals or not and if so you FILTER the information: available for future use (search) or encode through REPETITION so it is immediately available when needed.

Break big chunks into small ones.

Dedicate time each week to reviewing key information

- Copy/paste text of article you want to “file” into email and send message to yourself. P. 105. Add keywords and descriptors to facilitate future searches.
- Prioritize your material – use a system that works for you
- Every week, review and reread notes, reorder, and gain repetition to encode key information or ensure it is searchable for the future



*There's no such
thing as a
perfect system
of organization.*

Four key factors that prevent us from going paperless: Generational preferences, emotional attachments, engrained habits and lack of trust. (P. 110)
Make a list of all the different tools you use and how. Identify the breaking points and figure out a way to work around them. And let your goals be your guide. Use tools like Dropbox to store “paper”. Decide what should be in paper form, digital, or both. He reviews things like statements, legal docs, old technology, etc.



*Whenever
possible, use the
tools you
already know.*

Find Scaffolds to store, search, organize, and access the digital information you want or need to keep. (P. 133)

- Gmail has search, multiple colored labels, filters, cloud-based, conversation threads, stars, and large storage capacity. And you can keep your current email address by consolidating accounts.
- GCal – calendar, multiple reminders, sharing, multiple calendars, add notes, alerts, invitations
- Google Docs – collaboration, cloud access, meeting notes - shared
- Google Reader – NO LONGER AVAILABLE – you can use feedly or Curata Reader instead.

Add relevant keywords to your digital information so you can easily find it later.

Part Three– Overcoming Challenges, Big and Small

It is important to have context shifts periodically however the downside to these shifts is that “when you shift contexts, some information never makes it from short-term memory into long-term memory. It gets dropped as the new information floods in.” (P. 182)



*Take notes to help you
shift contexts later.*

- Add notes to calendar entries, contacts, to better orient yourself to shifts in context.
- Block your day to bundle similar contexts together
- Create some “do not disturb” times into your day
- Try to keep meetings to 30 minutes or less
- Block out some 15 minute times just for yourself – think time

Group tasks with similar contexts together

The author discusses “work-life balance” and makes the case that it is a mirage. He says, “A more realistic goal is to integrate your work with your life in a way that reduces your stress, rids you of resentments, boosts your productivity, and puts you more in sync with the joys and challenges of your life.” (P. 193)

- Create a family calendar – shared

- Adjust your life according to what your workday REALLY looks like
- Create to-dos of five minute tasks you can do in lots of places
- Make good use of travel time (books, magazines, reading) create to do's FOR LATER
- Deal with the fact that the unexpected WILL happen so get yourself organized to better deal with them when they do.

In the appendix of the book you will find ideas on other tools you might find useful – or not. His Love, Like, Dislike list.

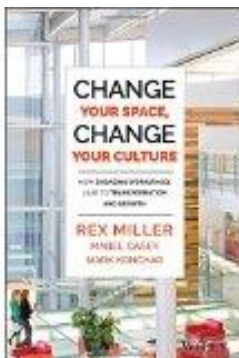
“Dude!” he said with a grin. “Just turn off your brain and ski!”

None of us can foresee all the bumps before we hit them. We can't move the trees, we can't change the gradation of a hill. We can only propel ourselves forward and trust that we'll make it to the bottom of the mountain unharmed, exhilarated, and, in every sense, alive.” (P. 219)

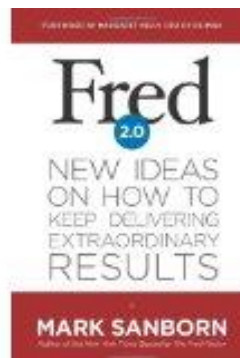
Actions to take from the book

- List the tools you currently use and tools you might use. Pick which ones you WILL use
- What are your real and perceived constraints and how will you manage to these? Which ones will you ignore?

Friday November 20th



Friday December 18th



Saturday Jan 16th
(Special MLK Event)

