25 September 2025 – George Knight, Training Consultant

# THE FOCUS FORMULA:

# HOW TO BOOST PRODUCTIVITY

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# With the end in mind…

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# Key takeaways

- Why to archive emails
- Making the right to-do lists
- Focusing on what is important

# Push the red button

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What is the biggest communication challenge you face?

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**100+**

Per day

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*“What is important is seldom urgent, and what is urgent is seldom important.”*

Dwight D. Eisenhower

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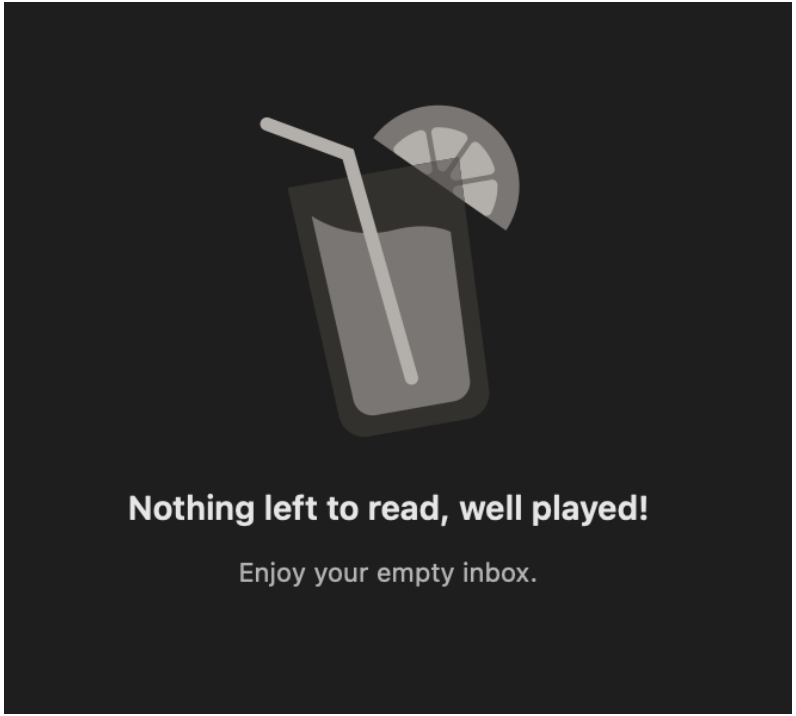
Our inboxes do not need to be a dumping ground.

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# So you have a messy inbox?

- Folders
- Flagging
- Rules

- Different between:
  - Outlook
  - Gmail
  - Apple



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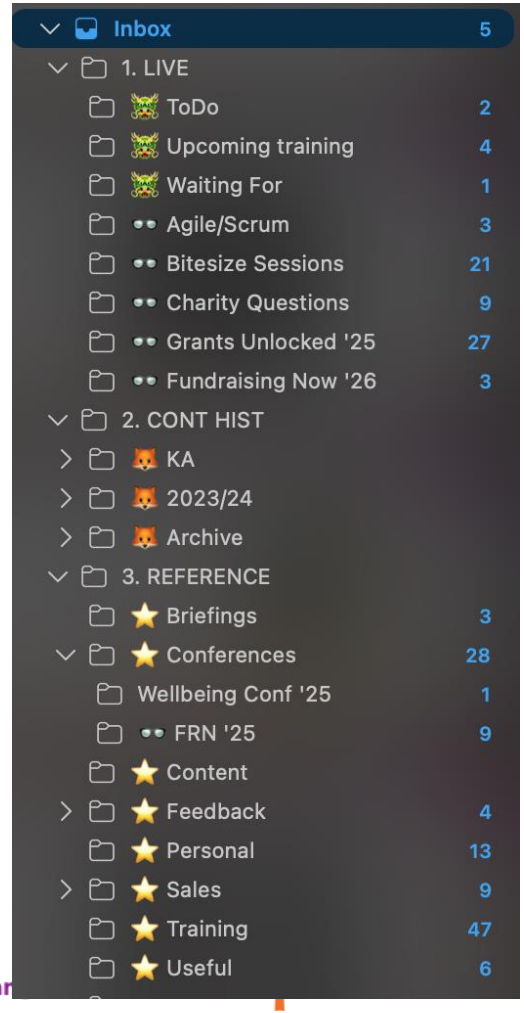


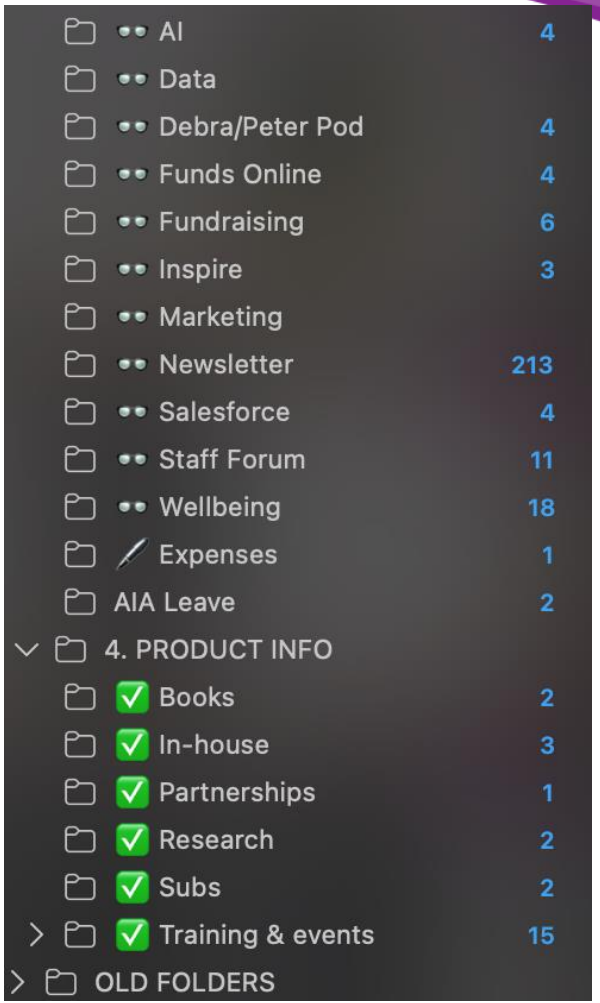


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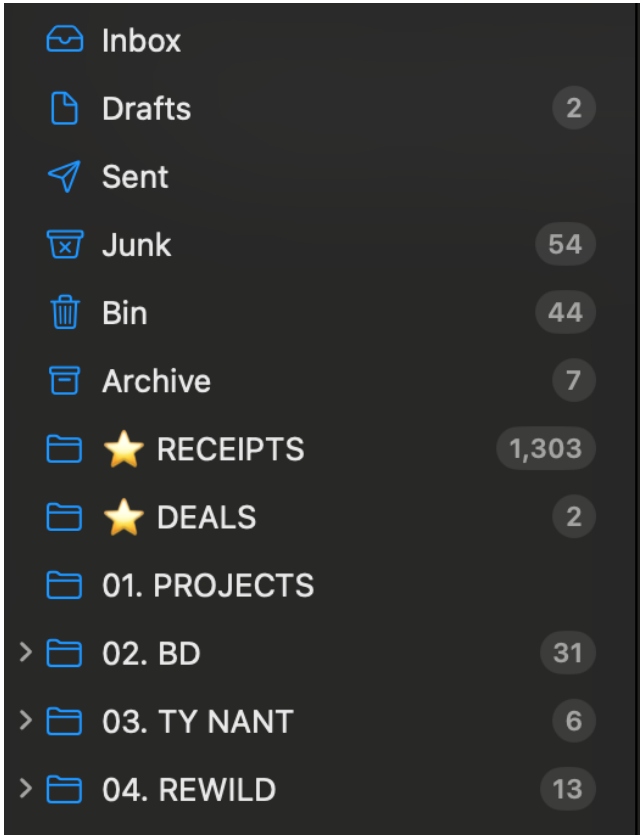


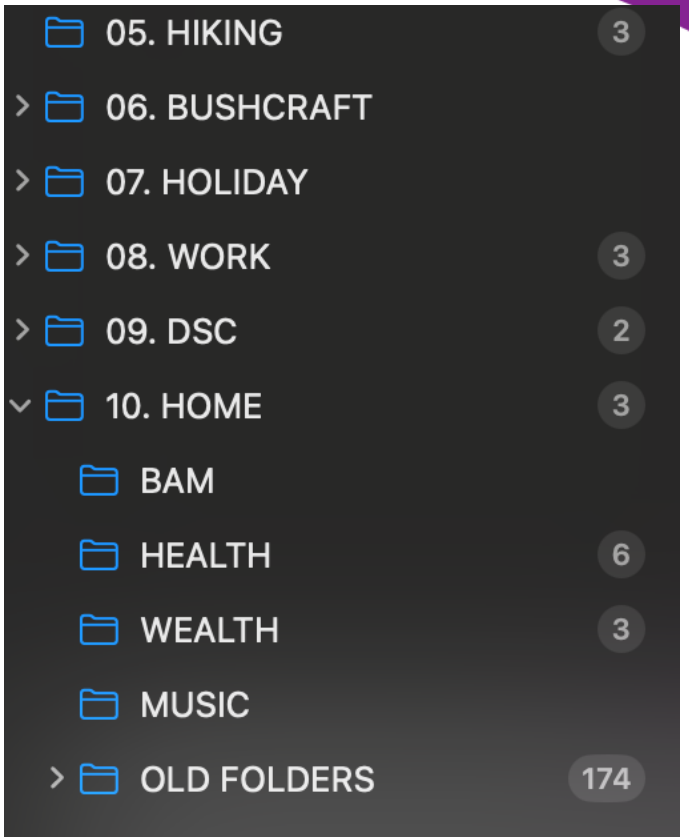


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**Use sub-folders** and **numbers** to allow for **easier categorising**

# TASK: Folders

- Open your inbox
  - Have a go at creating folders and storing emails in them



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# Steps to take

- Every email in our inbox needs one of the following:
  - Actioning
  - Storing for reference
  - Archiving/deleting

# TASK: Push the red button

- Open your inbox
  - Archive all messages that need no action or do not need to be stored for reference



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# Make it a calendar event

- I check email between
  - 09.30-10.00
  - 15.30-16.00
- You have more email, you schedule more time
- Honour your calendar

# Calendar tip

- I check my calendar the work-day before and set alarms for all my meetings
- Calendar is open to be viewed by all colleagues
- Always tackle my biggest objective before emails
- Open online calendar so you can close emails

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# If you have URGENT emails?

Set a calendar event first thing

# If you have IMPORTANT emails?

Set a calendar event for when practical


Set time for when suits you

# How many times should you ‘touch’ an email?

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# Organising the inbox

- Deal with anything that takes under two minutes
  - Just do it, please.
- Deal with urgent?
- Flag important or regular tasks

# Getting it right

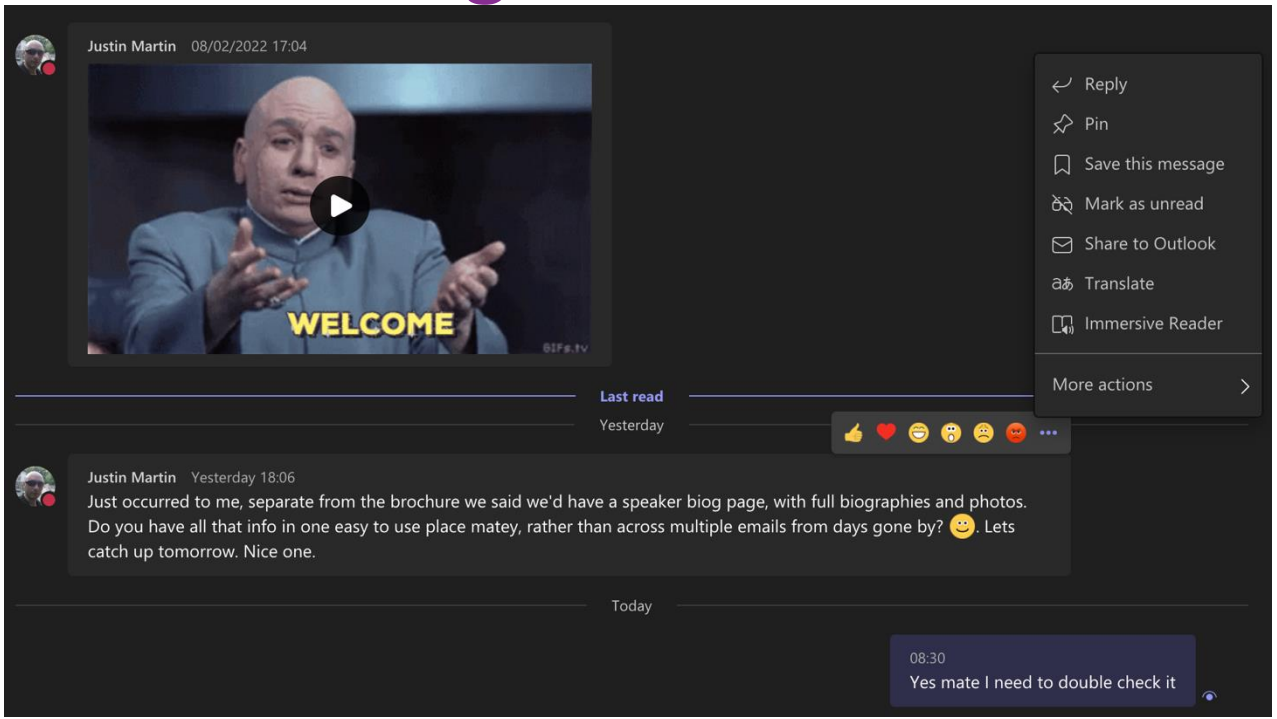
- Internally
  - I now only receive emails that are about something I will need to reference or action

- Externally
  - Still use like normal for most clients
  - Slowly moving clients to more natural channels
    - Texts / Phone calls

# Talk to your colleagues

- If you need me urgently call me
- If you want to mention something to me text or message me
- If you think I will need to keep a reference of that info email me

# Sending chat to emails

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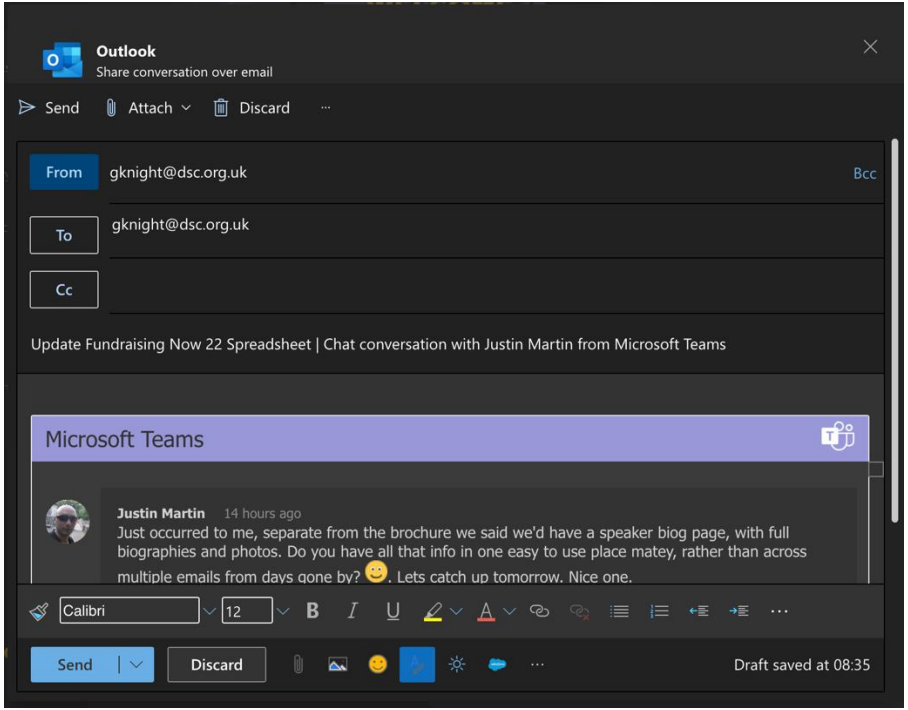
# Sending chat to emails

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# Turn off notifications

- Can you make that final brave step?
- Not just email
  - Social media
  - Shopping
  - Anything fighting for attention
- What notifications do you want?



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# Key tips

- New folders should take less than 1 minute to add an organise
- The power of *unsubscribe*
- Please try not to touch emails more than once or twice

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# Writing tasks

*“Your mind is for having ideas,*
*not holding them.”*

David Allen

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*“You can do anything, but not everything.”*

David Allen

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# Seven Ways to Organise

1. Next actions list
2. Reference material
3. Calendar actions
4. Projects list
5. Project support material
6. Waiting for list
7. Someday maybe

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# Common language

- Tasks
  - An individual task that makes up a milestone
- Milestones
  - Conclusion of a range of tasks
- Project
  - Conclusion of a range of milestones

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# Milestones

- *Finish* agenda
- *Sort* a new filing system
- *Buy* a water cooler

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# Milestones and tasks

- *Finish* agenda
  - *Draft* thoughts for the budget meeting agenda
- *Sort* a new filing system
  - *Talk* to Greg about the filing system we need
- *Buy* a water cooler
  - *Research* the internet for a new water cooler

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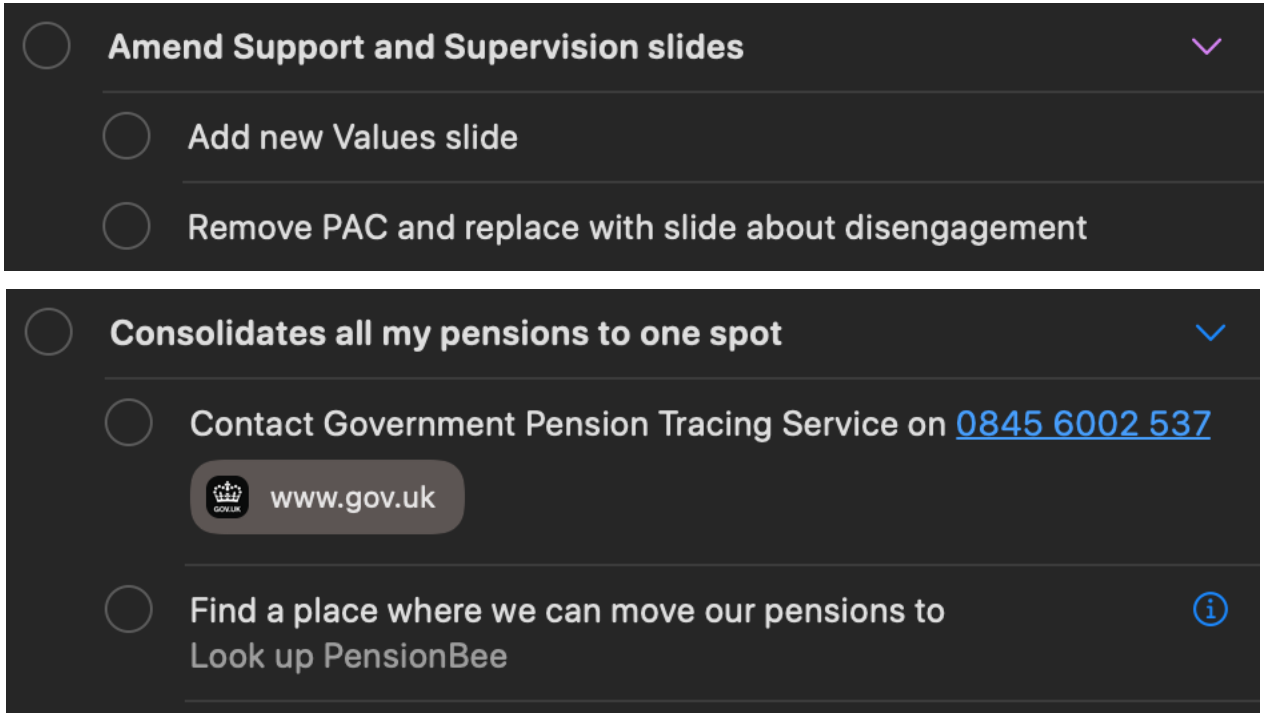
# Milestones and tasks in practice

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# Creating an ‘in-tray’

- Physical in-tray
- Digital in-tray
  - Apple Reminders
  - Microsoft Tasks
  - Trello
  - Other?








# Next actions lists

- For longer than two minute non-delegatable action
  - Email update to family
  - Order replacement screwdriver
- Can also go straight into our calendar

# Lists for specific types of action

- DSC desk
- On-site
- Train commute
- Food shopping
- Saturday morning
- Packing



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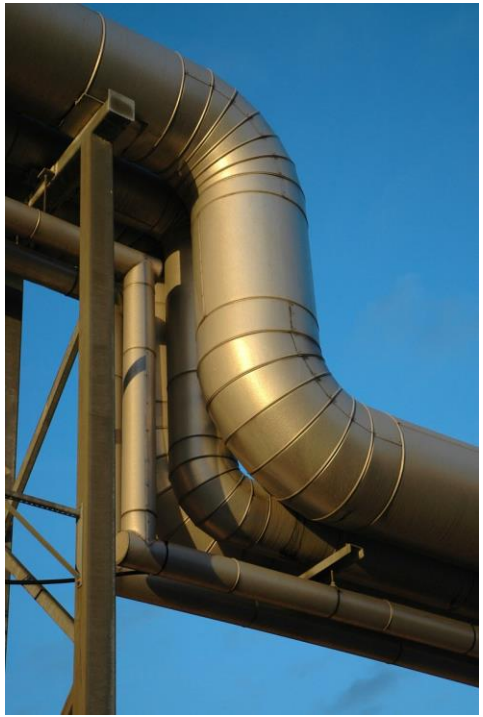
# Project lists

- Directly related to specific projects
  - Course creation
  - Sales
  - Fundraising

- Do you need some?



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# TASK: Make an in-tray

- Using either software or a notepad, write down:
  - A list of different in-trays
  - A list of all your current projects
  - These are your next action and project lists



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# Review project lists regularly

# Firm language

- Use clear verbs
  - *Design* a poster
  - *Support* the task group
  - *Secure* funding

- Concise verbs rich in meaning

# What to capture?

- Physical or digital tasks
  - Every open loop must be in the capture system
  - Have as few capturing buckets as possible
  - Check them regularly

# TASK: Write down open loops/tasks

- Pick one of your next action lists
- Using either software or a notepad, write down:
  - A list of all the respective open loops/tasks



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*“Everything should be made as simple as possible, but no simpler.”*

Albert Einstein

# Organising tasks coming in

- Is it actionable?
  - NO: trash/someday maybe/reference.
  - YES: Takes under two minutes? Do it now. If not, delegate/defer/plan.

# Calendar actions

- Plan time/day specific actions
- Mark out key future events
- Free up space in your next action and project lists

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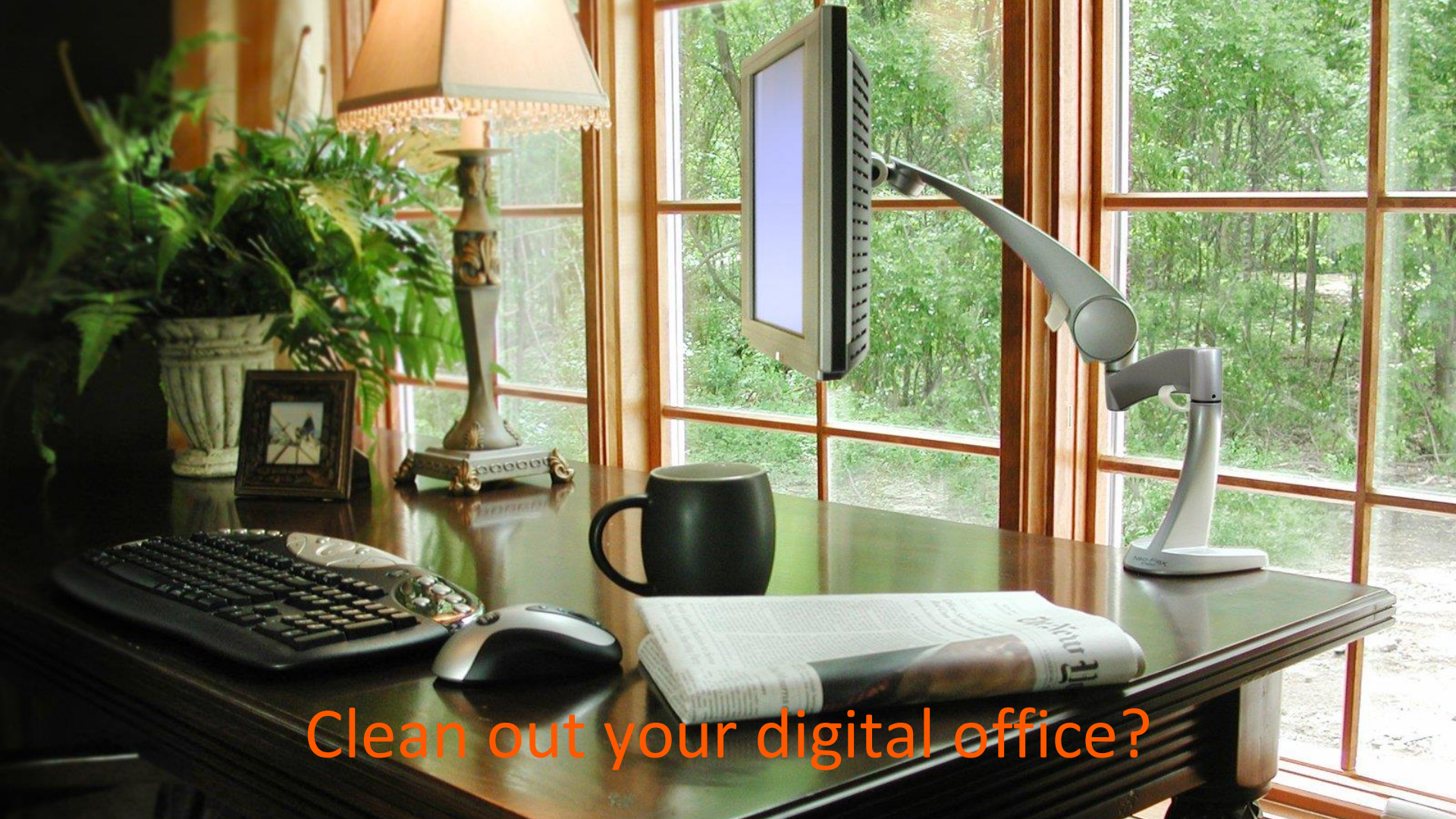
# Remember to ARCHIVE

If there is no action or nothing to reference later

Get rid of it!


Clean out your digital office?

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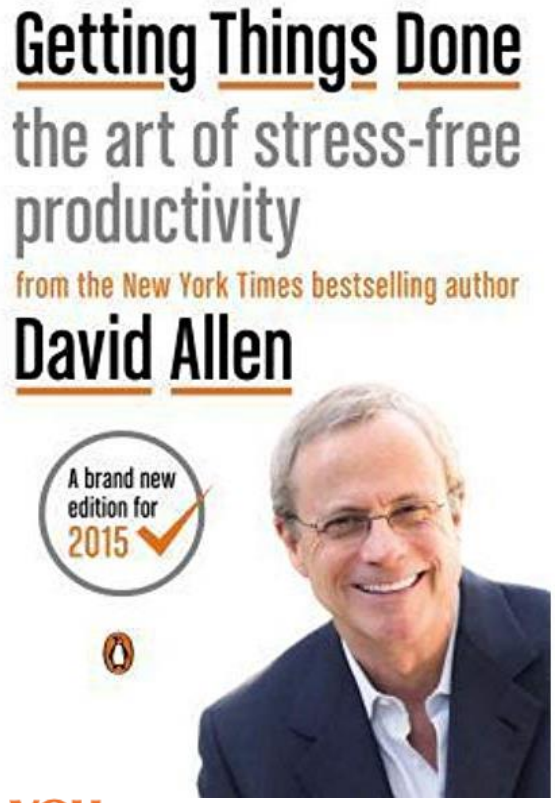


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# Key takeaways

- Why to archive emails
- Making the right to-do lists
- Focusing on what is important

START

STOP

CONTINUE

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START

STOP

CONTINUE

George Knight

gknight@dsc.org.uk

07809 874303

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