

THE **Organized** Executive

Keeping it together in a chaotic world

Tackling your to-do list when unforeseen events arise

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This is a guest article by Jeff Davidson

Each day when you compose your to-do list, and begin merrily proceeding down the list, do you take into account what is likely to occur in the course of a day? No matter how well we compose our to-do lists, and how productive we are in handling the products and tasks on the list, within the course of a day, invariably, unexpected obligations, interruptions and other developments arise that are going to throw us off.

What is your reaction when you are humming along and all of a sudden you get an assignment

from out of left field? Perhaps your boss has asked you to jump on something immediately. Or, a client calls. Or, something is returned to you that you thought was complete.

If you are like most professionals you will immediately become flustered. The intrusion on your time and your progress means that you are not going to quite accomplish all that you set out to before the end of the day. Is there a way to proceed and still feel good about all that you accomplish?

I believe there is, and it involves first making a mini, supplemental to-do list that accurately encapsulates the new task you need to handle. Why create this supplemental to-do list? It gives you focus and direction. It reduces anxiety and increases the probability you will remain buoyant at the time of its completion, and be able at the time of its completion to turn back to what you were doing.

If you don't compose such a list, and simply plow headlong into the unforeseen challenge that has come your way, you might not proceed effectively, and you might never get back to the to-do list you were working on.

Unforeseen tasks that arise represent more than intrusions on our time; they represent intrusions on our mental and emotional state of being. Some people are naturally good at handling unforeseen situations and often work as public servants, such as police officers and firefighters, or in health care, such as nurses and orderlies.

Most of us, however, are not so wired. Interruptions and intrusions on our workday take us off the path that we had so wanted to follow, and tend to be at least temporarily upsetting. Hereafter, when executing the items on your to-do list, proceed with the mindset that there will be an intrusion of some sort. You don't know when it is coming or how large the intrusion will be, but it will pull you off course.

The key question for you is: Can you develop the capacity to maintain balance and equanimity in the face of such disruptions? The good news is that you can, and it all starts with acknowledging that the situation is likely to happen, devising a supplemental checklist to handle the new task, and as deftly as possible, returning to what you were doing.

Jeff Davidson, “The Work-Life Balance Expert®,” has written 59 mainstream books, is an authority on time management, and is an electrifying professional speaker. He is the author of Breathing Space and Simpler Living. He believes that career professionals today in all industries have a responsibility to achieve their own sense of work-life balance, and he supports that quest through his website www.BreathingSpace.com.