



Complexity Builds -- How to Rule Your Technology, So It Doesn't Rule You

By Jeff Davidson, March 17, 2013



Sometimes, the smallest item out of place, or the tiniest issue left unchecked, can result in a chain reaction that hampers your ability to proceed with the task at hand.

One afternoon, the small knob on my dashboard that controls the direction of air flow in my car fell off while I was driving. At the end of my trip, I searched for the item, but it was nowhere to be found. I searched two other times with a flashlight, and it was all to no avail. Fortunately, the position of the knob when it fell off was set for air to be circulated high and low. In other words, when I put on the car heater, warm air currents were directed at my head and at my feet.

Weeks passed and winter came, but the temperature fell below freezing on only a few days when I got in my car. One morning, while driving to Charlotte, North Carolina, the temperature at 5 a.m. was about 25 degrees.

As I warmed up my car, I realized I could not direct the flow of air to the front or back windshield. *Okay*, I thought, *once the car warms up, the internal heat of the engine and the heater in the passenger compartment should be enough to keep my windows defrosted.* Not so.

Twenty minutes into the trip, I was constantly wiping the inside of the windshield as a manual form of de-fogging. That worked well enough, but it was cumbersome, and for safety reasons I had to move at a crawl. Mercifully, about 40 minutes into the trip the outside temperature must have risen to above 32 degrees, because the windows began to de-fog on their own. Another 15 minutes later, to my back, daylight was emerging. Soon the sun came up and I had full visibility in all directions.

Handling a variety of small issues in anticipation of tackling a larger challenge does not represent procrastination, as I discuss in my book, *The 60 Second Self-Starter*. When you prepare your immediate environment to support your efforts, once you get started on a larger challenge, you are able to proceed more productively. From that standpoint, those opening, mini-tasks serve a useful purpose. Likewise, undertaking an activity in advance of a known event, an identified challenge, or something that merits your earnest attention is worthwhile and will contribute to your effectiveness. I call this procedure "managing the beforehand."

Managing the beforehand is a method for reducing complexity in your personal and professional life. The concept behind managing the beforehand is that anything you can do in advance that will free you to be at your best, to focus, to concentrate, or to make great strides at the task or project at hand, is worth undertaking.

Out with Interruptions

Interruptions have been on the rise since the introduction of powerful personal technology and have become a major work-related dilemma. The modern era of such technologies began in 1981 with the introduction of the IBM PC and the Apple Computer. Now, add other developments in information generation and communication capabilities, right up to the present day with our smartphones and other mobile devices, and what do you get? You have the prescription for a populace who, without effective self-management, will be interrupted endlessly and will face increasing complexity in all manner of tasks, even tasks that previously wouldn't have been deemed complex at all.

Like finding that small car heater knob, we each need to take the time to ensure that the small things are in place that will enable us to be more effective at the projects and tasks confronting us. Similarly, we need to manage the beforehand in all respects, including taking control of our technology.

The axiom of our era is that if you don't rule your technology, it will rule you. You need to decide when to be available in person, by phone, by text message, and by instant-message, and when to not be available. If your job calls for you to be on alert for the entire work shift, that's one thing, but if you have concluded arbitrarily that you need to be "on" for hours and hours at a stretch when no one is making you do this, it's time to reexamine your relationship to your job, your responsibilities, and your technology.