



Why a 'Success List' Is Better Than a To-Do List

For your best productivity, prioritize what's really important.

Sam Milam November 19, 2017

As you write [your to-do list](#) for the day, does it feel like a vine, growing and pushing your attention from one mundane task to the next? There is essential work on that list, but you're focused only on checking off items, regardless of which is most important. How do you choose [what to focus on](#) when you are caving beneath the mammoth pressure of obligations? What if someone told you to burn that to-do list, and then handed you a blank slate and asked you to write out a short "success list"? Could you do it? What would you write?

A success list focuses on a small number of tasks—the vital few—essential to achieving your long-term goals. These tasks are *the most important things* that you can do right now to grow exponentially. You aren't looking for balance here. A balanced life means you never push yourself to extremes, and success lies in those extremes. In *The ONE Thing: The Surprisingly Simple Truth Behind Extraordinary Results*, Gary Keller writes, "The question of balance is really a question of priority. When you change your language from balancing to prioritizing, you see your choices more clearly and open the door to changing your destiny."

A to-do list encourages multitasking, even when research overwhelmingly finds that multitasking is ineffective. On the other side of the coin is your success list, which promotes focused time. You create focused time by [eliminating distractions](#) and interruptions—social media, redundant meetings, emails, phone calls—which take up 28 percent of the average workday, and dedicating set hours to the most important work each day. The morning is ideal for doing your crucial work because your willpower hasn't been drained by tedious tasks. With focused time you can achieve meaningful work in fewer hours. You don't need overtime; you need efficiency.

Set three [specific goals](#) that you can do right now that will result in measurable progress toward your dreams. Be bold in your actions and never fear failure. Success is built upon failure. Devote time to your vital few. When you devote your full attention without distraction, every day, you [achieve more in less time](#). That also means you need to schedule time off. Plan vacations and activities that recharge you. Focusing on the vital few allows you to take time off because you are spending more concentrated hours lifting yourself to new heights. It takes courage to discard several half-executed dreams for a tunnel-vision focus on your big dream. Ready?