

**COURSE TITLE:** TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR DIGITAL LIFE

**WA CLOCK HRS:** 50

**NO. OF CREDITS:** 5 QUARTER CREDITS  
[semester equivalent = 3.33 credits]

**OREGON PDUs:** 50

**PENNSYLVANIA ACT 48:** 50

**INSTRUCTOR:** Michael Boll  
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#### **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

**This course meets OSPI's STEM requirements.**

Are you as overwhelmed with the sheer volume of digital communication as I am? It has become a never-ending stream of inputs that is difficult to get a grip on!

This course takes aim at the tremendous level of input that comes across our devices and helps you develop systems and strategies to process it all. Along the way, you will learn about the Getting Things Done Methodology, how technology companies are competing for our limited attention, and much more.

Time to organize all that input so you can clear your brain and do your best work.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES:** Upon completion of this course, participants will have:

LEARNING OUTCOMES: Upon completion of this course, participants will enjoy:

- The Getting Things Done methodology
- Getting to Inbox Zero
- Digital storage systems
- Task management
- A workflow system that actually helps
- Technology and competition for your attention

#### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

Completion of all specified assignments is required for issuance of hours or credit. The Heritage Institute does not award partial credit.

The use of artificial intelligence is not permitted. Assignment responses found to be generated by AI will not be accepted.

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#### **HOURS EARNED:**

Completing the basic assignments (Section A. Information Acquisition) for this course automatically earns participants their choice of CEUs (Continuing Education Units), Washington State Clock Hours, Oregon PDUs, or Pennsylvania ACT 48 Hours. The Heritage Institute offers CEUs and is an approved provider of Washington State Clock Hours, Oregon PDUs, and Pennsylvania ACT 48 Hours.

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#### **UNIVERSITY QUARTER CREDIT INFORMATION**

##### **REQUIREMENTS FOR UNIVERSITY QUARTER CREDIT**

Continuing Education Quarter credits are awarded by Antioch University Seattle (AUS). AUS requires 75% or better for credit at the 400 level and 85% or better to issue credit at the 500 level. These criteria refer both to the amount and quality of work submitted.

1. Completion of Information Acquisition assignments 30%
  2. Completion of Learning Application assignments 40%
  3. Completion of Integration Paper assignment 30%
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### **CREDIT/NO CREDIT (No Letter Grades or Numeric Equivalents on Transcripts)**

Antioch University Seattle (AUS) Continuing Education Quarter credit is offered on a Credit/No Credit basis; neither letter grades nor numeric equivalents are on a transcript. 400 level credit is equal to a "C" or better, 500 level credit is equal to a "B" or better. This information is on the back of the transcript.

AUS Continuing Education quarter credits may or may not be accepted into degree programs. Prior to registering, determine with your district personnel, department head, or state education office the acceptability of these credits for your purpose.

### **ADDITIONAL COURSE INFORMATION**

#### **REQUIRED TEXT**

Choose one of the following

- Getting Things Done: A Time Saving Summary of David Allen's Book on Productivity.
- The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business. By Charles Duhigg.

None. All reading is online.

#### **MATERIALS FEE**

None.

### **ASSIGNMENTS REQUIRED FOR HOURS OR UNIVERSITY QUARTER CREDIT**

#### **A. INFORMATION ACQUISITION**

Assignments done in a course forum will show responses from all educators who have or are taking the course independently. Feel free to read and respond to others' comments.

Group participants can only view and respond to their group members in the Forum.

#### **Assignment #1: Get It Out of Your Head!**

##### **Explanation**

Phew, there is a lot of information and input that flows our way. A bunch of it comes via email, but social media, our friends, students, family, and just "life" are big contributors too. What can we do to help us get a grip on it all and bring more balance to our lives?

[David Allen](#) the designer of the [Getting Things Done](#) methodology helps us understand the overwhelming nature of the inputs we receive today and how to sort and capture it in a way that lets us have the space we need to get things done. In sum, we need to "Clear our heads."

The video in our first lesson covers a variety of things and the following really struck me:

- Today, the whole world seems able to pile into your psyche (inbox)
- Everything wants to demand your attention NOW!
- We react with additional stress and demand more time
- We need space to think. This allows you to be creative and get things done
- We must move the input out of our head and into a system

## Assignment

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/CHxhjDPKfbY>

1. [Watch this TEDx Video](#) (22 mins), “The Art of Stress-Free Productivity” by David Allen
2. Write a 250-word reflection
  1. A few suggested discussion topics
    1. What ideas or thoughts spoke to you from the talk?
    2. How does the amount of input that piles up in your life impact you?
    3. Did you disagree with anything?
    4. Any other comments, thoughts, or ideas?

## Additional Resources

- [Interview](#) with David Allen by Leo Laporte
- [David Allen's Podcast Feed](#)
- The [Getting Things Done website](#)
- [Interview with Tiago Forte](#) author of Building a Second Brain to Organize Your Digital Life

## Assignment #2: Applying the Getting Things Done Methodology To Your Email Inbox

### Explanation

Now that we know we need to get all this input out of our head, let's apply the benefits of the Getting Things Done Method (GTD) to our email inbox!

Merlin Mann designed the Inbox Zero technique back in 2004 and it was inspired by the GTD methodology. While a lot has changed since then, the fundamentals stay the same. For example, even though I first designed this course back in 2011, I still use the same Inbox Zero method to preserve my email sanity. Well... most of the time. ;-)

Taking control of your inbox is the first step in controlling your digital lifestyle. When we treat email as something to process, we are able to use an assembly line process and push our inbox to zero.

My short video explanation helps explain how the assembly process works.

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/cTPnIUSqYSE>

## Assignment

1. Watch [my video](#) about the assembly line process for handling email
2. Take some time to look at your inbox and create folders and systems to handle all the incoming emails
3. Just for fun, raise your right hand and repeat after me: “Email is something to process not something to read” And... “My email box is a terrible to-do list!”
4. Write a reflection (250 words or more) about your email system
  1. You may want to include some or all of the following:
    1. A screenshot of some of the new folders you have created
    2. Explain how you normally handle emails and how you plan to do so now
    3. Explain what further steps you need to take to make it to Inbox Zero

## Frustration Alert

Getting your email to zero is very difficult. It requires decisions about every piece of input. It is particularly difficult in the beginning

because you are new to the Inbox Zero process and don't yet have a clear, defined process set up. Don't worry, it does get better and easier. However, getting to zero is a continuous battle sometimes. It reminds me of how we should always eat well and exercise more. We know it is good for us, but we don't always do it

As we progress through the course, you will have the chance to learn and pick some tools that are helpful to you. Remember, your goal with email is to delete it, delegate it, action it, or do it.

### **Additional resources**

- [Merlin Mann's Google Tech Talk \(YouTube\)](#): Merlin gives a talk at Google in 2007 all about email and how to deal with it. While this talk is older, the video and the audio is so so, the discussion is totally relevant today.

## **Assignment #3: Digital Storage Systems**

### **Explanation**

The only way we can clear our brain of todos or other things we feel we need to remember is to find a reliable dumping ground to hold all that information. Something we see as trustworthy enough to hold all our information.

At first, it seemed that a digital storage system was the only answer. While this is still mostly true, there are some other options out there. However, most of them work best as a task manager. Something we cover in the next lesson.

This lesson asks you to review a few digital storage systems and pick one that fits your style. Evernote is the one I picked many years ago before there were many choices. I still like it and use it today. All the others are great too.

### **Assignment**

1. Watch the short, overview videos below that cover four different digital storage systems. Three are from tech giants and one is from Evernote.
2. Pick one (or two if you like) and, if needed, create an account.
3. Add some digital information such as a photo, voice note, text, etc.
4. Write a reflection about digital storage systems and the one that sparks your interest.
  1. Suggested discussion topics:
    1. How can you see yourself using a digital storage system?
    2. Which one is your current favorite? Why?
    3. Is this type of system something you could see yourself continuing to use in the future? Why or why not? Remember, it takes a change of habit!
    4. Should students be taught about these types of systems?

### **Video Resources**

- [Evernote](#)
- [Google Keep](#)
- [Microsoft OneNote](#)
- [Apple Notes](#)

## **Assignment #4: Task Managers AKA, To-do Lists**

### **Explanation**

To-do lists have been around since the dawn of man. Recently, and I am probably making this up, archeologists discovered drawings in caves that appear to be a list of to-dos by early man. It had a series of sketches: hunt, cook, eat, and declare that it is NOT your turn to clean up.

Anyway.... To-do lists often involve(d) a list of some sort that is written on a piece of paper. We get this odd satisfaction from checking off the list and feeling like we made a meaningful contribution to the world. Writing things down is great for the brain!

While most task manager systems are digital, it is still possible to use a notebook of some sort or one of the tablet options (see below) that have cropped up. My wife loves her Remarkable tablet and uses it every day for work.

### Assignment

1. Create a list of at least five things you need to get done. Maybe you already have that list ready to go.
2. Review the task manager apps below in the resource section.
3. Pick one or more programs and transfer your written list to them.
4. Play with it, try it out; experiment.
5. Write a reflection about the task management system(s) you explored. You may want to include:
  1. Which is your current favorite and why?
  2. How do you plan to use a task manager in the future?
  3. If new, how easy or difficult will it be to switch to a task manager?

### Task Manager Resources

- [Trello](#)
- [Todoist](#)
- [Things](#) (iOS and macOS only)
  - Things App versus Todoist [video review](#)
- [Asana](#) (Better for teams)
- [Remarkable](#) tablet
  - [Video from Remarkable](#) (Commercial)
- [RocketBook](#) (Much cheaper)
  - [Video](#)

[Check out this AirTable](#) of resources for different apps that might help you in your journey. This resource applies to many areas including notes, pdf readers, project management, task management and more.

### Assignment #5: Bringing It All Together With A Workflow System

#### Explanation

Wow, look how far you have come! Great work. You are well on the way to becoming a productivity superstar. People will be rushing to you on a daily basis asking you how you became so efficient happy and successful.

It is now time to look at and articulate our workflow system.

[https://www.youtube.com/embed/gQXzEPB\\_zNI](https://www.youtube.com/embed/gQXzEPB_zNI)

1. [Watch my reminder video](#) where I address other inputs.
2. Using mind mapping software such as [Canva](#) design your workflow system for your email inbox. (A picture of a hand-drawn version is always welcome too.)
  1. What calendar system do you have in place now?
  2. Digital storage system?
  3. Task management/ToDo list?
- 3.

Write a reflection explaining how you see yourself using this system on a daily basis.

1. Share your mindmap or image of your workflow system
2. How will it improve your interactions with all of life's input?
3. Can you apply it to other inputs in your life such as when talking to someone and coming up with a shared idea?
4. Any other thoughts you might have

## Resources

- [Canva For Mind Mapping](#)
- Artificial Intelligence: Ask ChatGPT or another AI site to help brainstorm ideas for your workflow. See my course on [this here](#). Click on the "Syllabus" button to see all resources for free.
- [Deep nerd dive on how Tiago Forte handles his inputs](#)
- My favorite mobile app for sending super quick emails (reminders) to my email
  - [MeMail for iOS](#)
  - [MeMail for Android](#)

[Check out this AirTable](#) of resources for different apps that might help you in your journey. This resource applies to many areas including notes, pdf readers, project management, task management and more.

## Assignment #6: Fine Tune Your Personal Devices To Meet Your Needs

### Explanation

Today's world allows us to have ubiquitous access to our email, digital storage, to-do lists, project management, and workflow systems. This extends from our computers to our personal devices. "The Cloud" wirelessly syncs all our data to our devices (phone, tablet, watch, etc.) and we usually don't even have to set it up to make this happen.

But do we really want all the reminders and the buzzing and beeps that come with all that? Probably not, or maybe yes to some. Regardless of the need to be reminded, it is always handy to know you have access to your workflow system at any time.

### Assignment

1. Make a list of all the information accounts or apps that you use to help run and organize your life. You may have added a few as part of this course.
  1. For example, I have the following
    1. Asana for task management with various teams
    2. Trello for my personal tasks
    3. Google Calendar
    4. Slack for communicating with various work teams
    5. Apple Messenger
    6. Facebook Messenger
    7. Email
    8. Evernote
    9. Google Drive
  2. Ensure the productivity apps from your list are on your mobile devices. We will deal with the reminders later.
  3. Decide what apps deserve your attention with reminders such as a buzz or other alerts. I allow the following apps to give me reminders
    - 1.

Google Calendar

2. Email from certain accounts
3. Messages from messenger
4. Write a reflection about your decisions around your workflow system and mobile devices.
  1. What apps have you included?
  2. Which ones are worthy of reminding you?
  3. How do you receive those reminders?
  4. How well is it, or will it be, working for you in your daily life?

[Check out this AirTable](#) of resources for different apps that might help you in your journey. This resource applies to many areas including notes, pdf readers, project management, task management and more.

## **Assignment #7: Technology Addiction And Competition For Your Attention**

### **Explanation**

Now that you have a system, let's look at how the digital world seems to be conspiring against your success by distracting you.

To make matters worse, tech companies understand the biggest challenge for them is to compete and win your attention. There is far more content out there than we can possibly handle, so they work hard to win.

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/bNJ-vfJPXF8>

1. Watch [my short video](#) on technology and the competition for your attention.
2. Watch [this TED Talk](#) by Tristan Harris How Better Tech Could Protect Us from Distraction."
  1. Note I have more Tristan Harris videos below as well.
3. Write a reflection about the impact of technology and your attention.
  1. Is technology addictive in your life?
  2. How does it compete for your attention?
  3. What ways have you found to help tame the technology so you can stay focused?
  4. Any other thoughts or comments?

### **Resources**

- [Another Tristan Harris TED Talk](#)
- [Tristan Harris With Comedian Bill Maher](#)
- [Tristan Harris On The PBS NewsHour](#)
- [Tristan Harris, And Others On 60 Minutes](#)

## **Assignment #8: STEM Career Choices**

### **Overview**

The future of work, as you know, is shifting. Even education which is often one of the last structures to change embraced remote learning for certain courses or entire programs. These are designed to meet the needs of students who prefer to school from home and/or enjoy the chance to take a specific course their school is unable to offer.

Some sort of STEM-related skills is becoming nearly mandatory for access to a middle class or above lifestyle.

### **Assignment**

Take a read of the two articles below. One discusses the future of work and how it is (no surprise) embracing remote workforces. The other lists the top 30 STEM careers of the future. This list, of course, will end up changing over time but for now, it is a starting point.

After reading the articles, pick one or more of the 30 careers and in 250 words or more, speculate how the five changes of the future (fluid gigs, decentralized workforces, motivation to work, lifelong learning, artificial intelligence) will impact the career you choose. For example, if I choose the career of web developer, what would my career look like based on the five future changes in how we work?

### Resources

- [The Future Of Work: 5 Important Ways Jobs Will Change In The 4th Industrial Revolution](#)
- [The 30 Best STEM Jobs](#)

## ADDITIONAL ASSIGNMENTS REQUIRED FOR UNIVERSITY QUARTER CREDIT

### B. LEARNING APPLICATION

In this section, you will apply your learning to your professional situation. This course assumes that most participants are classroom teachers who have access to students. If you do not have a classroom available to you, please contact the instructor for course modifications. Assignments done in a course forum will show responses from all educators who have or are taking the course independently. ?Feel free to read and respond to others' comments. Group participants can only view and respond to their group members in the Forum.

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### Assignment #9: Research Assignment

Complete **ONE** of the following options

Option A

Create a 30-minute or longer presentation to be given at a professional development workshop. It should relate to the themes discussed in this course.

OR

Option B

Research a specific topic of your choosing with instructor permission.

### Assignment #10: Book Reflection

#### Explanation

The two books for this course are wonderful and very different.

- [David Allen's](#) book talks about his "Getting Things Done" methodology. David's ideas were a huge influence on the development of this course. His book had a profound influence on me many years ago.
- [Charles Duhigg's](#) book discusses habits, how they work, and how we can change them. It is one of my favorite all-time books.

Personally, I think both books are worth reading. However, only one book is required for the course and for this particular lesson.

#### Assignment

1. Open up your THI online response box and post a 500-word (or more) reflection on [one of the two books](#).
2. Choose as many of the following suggested writing topics below as needed:
  1. Provide a general summary of the book.
  2. What portions of the book stood out for you? Why?
  - 3.



What portions of the book did you disagree with? Why?

4. What aspects of the book will you adopt?
5. What do you wish the book included but did not?
6. Would you recommend this book to a friend? If so, what type of friend?

### **Frustration Alert**

Both of these books help explain how to set up systems or change habits to improve our daily lives. If you find yourself agreeing with all or most of what you read, you might find yourself frustrated that you are not doing it all. I deal with that every day as I try to change habits and use the GTD system from David Allen. I often fail, try again, succeed a little, and repeat.

### **Assignment #11: (500 Level ONLY)**

Complete **ONE** of the following

#### **Option A**

Take a very deep dive into the “Getting Things Done” philosophy from David Allen.

Check out these resources:

- [GTD Times](#)
- [TEDx Talk](#)
- [GTD Podcasts](#)
- [Facebook Page](#)

(or find some of your own) and write a 750-word paper where you discuss the “Getting Things Done” ideas and how they work/benefit others.

Suggested ideas to include:

- An [elevator pitch](#) that neatly explains GTD to new people.
- The strongest aspects of GTD. How you see most people (maybe even you) using GTD.
- The barriers or resistance to using the GDT methodology
- Using the GTD method with students. Is it possible? A good idea? What are the upsides and downsides of asking young people to do this?
- The future of GTD-type points of view. Will it be replaced by something? What might be more effective? How might it change?

### **C. INTEGRATION PAPER**

Assignment #12: (Required for 400 and 500 Level)

#### **SELF REFLECTION & INTEGRATION PAPER**

**(Please do not write this paper until you've completed all of your other assignments)**

Write a 400-500 word Integration Paper answering these 5 questions:

1. What did you learn vs. what you expected to learn from this course?
  2. What aspects of the course were most helpful and why?
  3. What further knowledge and skills in this general area do you feel you need?
  4. How, when and where will you use what you have learned?
  5. How and with what other school or community members might you share what you learned?
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## INSTRUCTOR COMMENTS ON YOUR WORK:

Instructors will comment on each assignment. If you do not hear from the instructor within a few days of posting your assignment, please get in touch with them immediately.

## QUALIFICATIONS FOR TEACHING THIS COURSE:

Michael Boll is an Apple Distinguished Educator and former Technology Coach at international schools in China and Thailand.

Now based in the United States, Michael is an enthusiastic instructional designer and presenter. He works to make his courses and presentations information-packed, slightly provocative, and fun.

Michael has an adult son with profound autism and is keenly interested in the special needs community and its population of diverse learners.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR DIGITAL LIFE

**Allen, David.** *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-free Productivity*. New York: Viking, 2001. Print.

In today's world, yesterday's methods just don't work. In *Getting Things Done*, veteran coach and management consultant David Allen shares the breakthrough methods for stress-free performance that he has introduced to tens of thousands of people across the country. Allen's premise is simple: our productivity is directly proportional to our ability to relax. Only when our minds are clear and our thoughts are organized can we achieve effective productivity and unleash our creative potential. I

In *Getting Things Done* Allen shows how to:

- Apply the "do it, delegate it, defer it, drop it" rule to get your in-box to empty
- Reassess goals and stay focused in changing situations
- Plan projects as well as get them unstuck
- Overcome feelings of confusion, anxiety, and being overwhelmed
- Feel fine about what you're not doing

**Duhigg, Charles.** *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business*. New York: Random House, 2012. Print.

"In *The Power of Habit*, award-winning New York Times business reporter Charles Duhigg takes us to the thrilling edge of scientific discoveries that explain why habits exist and how they can be changed. With penetrating intelligence and an ability to distill vast amounts of information into engrossing narratives, Duhigg brings to life a whole new understanding of human nature and its potential for transformation."

**Duhigg, Charles.** *Smarter Faster Better: The Secrets of Being Productive in Life and Business*. New York: Random House, 2015. Print.

"At the core of *Smarter Faster Better* are eight key productivity concepts—from motivation and goal setting to focus and decision making—that explain why some people and companies get so much done. Drawing on the latest findings in neuroscience, psychology, and behavioral economics—as well as the experiences of CEOs, educational reformers, four-star generals, FBI agents, airplane pilots, and Broadway songwriters—this painstakingly researched book explains that the most productive people, companies, and organizations don't merely act differently.

They view the world, and their choices, in profoundly different ways.

A young woman drops out of a PhD program and starts playing poker. By training herself to envision contradictory futures, she learns to anticipate her opponents' missteps—and becomes one of the most successful players in the world.

A group of data scientists at Google embark on a four-year study of how the best teams function, and find that how a group interacts is more important than who is in the group—a principle, it turns out, that also helps explain why *Saturday Night Live* became a hit.

A Marine Corps general, faced with low morale among recruits, reimagines boot camp—and discovers that instilling a "bias toward action" can turn even the most directionless teenagers into self-motivating achievers.

The filmmakers behind Disney's *Frozen* are nearly out of time and on the brink of catastrophe—until they shake up their team in just the right way, spurring a creative breakthrough that leads to one of the highest-grossing movies of all time."