

Your To-Do List: Unforeseen Events Will Happen by Jeff Davidson



Each day when you compose your [to-do list](#) and begin proceeding merrily down it, do you take into account what is likely to occur in the course of a day? Leading up to the height of the tax season, or months away from it, no matter how well we organize our lists and how productive we are in handling the products and tasks, invariably, unexpected obligations, [interruptions](#), and other developments arise that are going to throw us off.

How do you react when you are humming along, and all of a sudden, you get an assignment out of left field? Perhaps your boss has asked you to jump on something immediately. Maybe a client calls. Maybe something gets returned to you that you thought was complete.

Flustered No More

If you are like most professionals, you immediately will become flustered. The intrusion on your time and your progress means that you are not going to 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 miniature, 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, reduces anxiety, and increases the probability that you will remain buoyant at the time of its completion and be able to turn back to what you were doing before the task was assigned.

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

Anticipating the Unexpected

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 unexpected situations and often work as public servants, such as police officers and firefighters, or in health care, as nurses and orderlies.

Most of us, however, are not wired like this. [Interruptions and intrusions](#) on our workday take us off the path that we wanted to follow and tend to be at least momentarily upsetting. Hereafter, when executing the items on your to-do list, proceed with the mind-set that there will be an interruption of some sort. You do not know when it is coming or how large it 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.

© 2013 by Jeff Davidson

[Read](#) more articles by Jeff Davidson.

About the author:

Jeff Davidson is "The Work-Life Balance Expert®," is a preeminent time management authority, has written fifty-nine mainstream books, and is an electrifying professional speaker. He is the premier thought leader on work-life balance issues and has been widely quoted in the Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, Christian Science Monitor, New York Times, and USA Today. Cited by Sharing Ideas Magazine as a "consummate speaker," Jeff 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.