

# San Diego BizMart

San Diego Business Directory & City Guide - San Diego Internet Advertising & Promotion

## Managing Your To-Do List, Long-Term versus Short-Term

by [Jeff Davidson, MBA, CMC](#)



**To be in control of your life**, you must identify your priorities along with some goals. If you've identified your priorities and some well-chosen goals in support of them, it's likely that you face an age-old dilemma about staying on top of everything you need or want to get done.

People are always asking me about to-do lists. Do they need to maintain them? How can they go about fixing them? I don't know anyone in the work-a-day world who doesn't use some kind of list as a tool for getting things done. I'm neither for nor opposed to any type of system you use to stay efficient.

### The Super Long Strategy

The primary dilemma you face is balancing short-term versus long-term tasks and activities. I maintain a 12 to 14 page to-do list! I have hundreds of things on my to-do list arranged by major life priorities. How do I keep from going crazy? Most of what's on the list are medium to long-range activities.

The first page of my list represents only the short-term activities. The first items on the list represent things I've chosen to do now or this week. I continually draw from the 14-page list, and move items to the top as it becomes desirable, or necessary, to tackle them.

I maintain a dynamic to-do list in the sense that it contains everything on this earth I want to get done, but I only need to look at one page, and it's always on top. Although I am forever updating the list and running a new printout of it, its advantages outweigh this task. I wouldn't think of doing it any other way.

All the anxiety about the things you want to get done diminishes once you put everything down on paper. My list is long, and it will stay long. I don't worry about all the things on the list, because I know I can only get so much done in one day or one week. I know that I'll periodically review the entire list, and continually move items from page 8 up to the front. My anxiety stays at a rather low level.

### Not Everything Everyday

Many days, I don't look at pages 2 through 14. Virtually all word-processing programs contain word search capabilities. If I'm working on something during the day and it appears that there will be a break-through in my ability to tackle something buried on page 9, I put my word search on, and I quickly come to the item. There is no need to pour extensively through the hundreds of items listed.

Maintaining such a long to-do list helps me to become more proficient in managing long-term or repeated tasks. If something represents a long-term project, I can continually draw from it those portions that can be handled in the short-term and move them up to the front page. Likewise, if something is a repeat or cyclical project, something that I need to do every month or every year, I can move the portion I choose to get done in the short-term up to the front page.

Consider using the super long to-do strategy. At the least, you'll have identified everything you face, and have it all on one gigantic roster. At the most, you may have a tool that will support you for years to come.

## Short-circuiting the To-do List

On occasion, you may wish to short-circuit the to-do list and get stuff done without entering it on your list. Here's how it works. Most people who encounter information they believe worth retaining make a note or add it to a list. The information stays there for days, weeks, or months. Since whatever information you encounter usually involves calling or writing to someone else, rather than adding to your to-do list:

- \* Pick up a pocket dictator and immediately dictate a letter or memo to whomever you need to be in touch with; take action on what it is you've come across.
- \* Type on computer the fax, e-mail, or internet message for immediate transmission.

I was talking to someone who said they enjoyed the Readers' Digest section by Peter Rich. In this section, he reviews vocabulary words from books he's read. Years ago, I would have made a note about this and done something about it sometime in the next 6 months. Instead, I grabbed my pocket dictator and dictated a letter to Mr. Rich on the spot indicating which vocabulary words I thought his readers might enjoy. Once my transcriber types the letter, I send it. Hence, the item never goes onto a to-do list.

## Paper and Pencil Still Work

A simple system to stay on top of your goals, that works surprisingly well, is to go to your nearest office supply store and buy one of those washable wall charts or an oversized set of monthly calendars in cardboard stock or paper. You can mount your calendars on the wall and use magic markers, flares, post-it pads, gold stars, and red seals, so that you are able to visually mark down what you want to or have to accomplish.

This isn't news to you if you work in an office where the use of a number of people, vehicles, or goods need to be scheduled for optimum efficiency. On a personal basis, such calendar plotting works well, if for no other reason than you're the boss of the calendar. You get to move things around-in a one-second maneuver.

Consider this: Honoring your priorities is an efficient way to run your life. The price of being successful, however, of being affluent, of traveling about, or of meeting the demands of a busy schedule is losing things.

Be kind to yourself when this happens.

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