

# 15 Ways To Be A Better Ringmaster Of Your Circus

From Jones Loflin

*Helping With The Struggle Of Too Much To Do*

## Identify The Pain

Most people only go looking for help with time management when there is a problem. But what specifically IS the problem (or problems) you are experiencing? Just making better use of how you manage your time during the workday rarely addresses the deeper issues. Ask yourself these questions and don't settle for anything else than your most honest answers:

- ◆ In your struggle to get it ALL done, what is NOT getting done? Is that a problem worthy of you changing work habits and life routines?
- ◆ If you could do one thing for yourself each week that you are not currently doing, what would that be? Again, is that an opportunity worth making some significant changes to how you carry out our day?
- ◆ What are you at risk of losing? Is keeping it worth making some painful choices?

If the answers to the second half of each of these questions is "Yes," then you are more likely to actually adopt some of the following strategies.

## Change Your Daily Routine

John Maxwell says it best: *You will never change your life until you change something you do daily. The secret of your success is found in your daily routine.* What do you need to change about your daily routine? Do you need to take a few minutes to plan your day instead of just responding to the first crisis, phone call or e mail? Where, in your day, do you notice things getting the most out of control? What needs to change about your daily routine to be better prepared for those events or situations? Is there a poor habit you have developed that needs to change?

## Work More From Your Calendar Than A Task List

There are several benefits to this approach. They include:

- Making sure the highest priority tasks have a place in your day
- Forces you to quantify how long something might take and find a place for it in your schedule
- Helps block out potential interruptions and holds you more accountable

## **Develop Periods of Focused Intensity**

Create times where you are fully engaged on a task for a specific period of time. Allow no distractions. Use a countdown timer to maintain a sense of urgency to complete the task-or at least move it forward as much as possible. The [Pomodoro Technique](#) is an excellent tool to develop this habit.

## **Single Task When Possible**

Peter Drucker is quoted as saying, *One hour of uninterrupted time is worth 10 times the amount of 4 15 minute segments.* Multi-tasking dilutes our ability to get something done WELL.

When you want to single task, tell your staff/family/friends etc. that you're unavailable during certain hours of the day and to hold their questions until you're available unless it's an emergency-or waiting to act has major consequences (define what those are!). Let your calls go to voicemail and turn off email notifications. The goal is to accomplish one thing WELL-not just attempt to get five things done.

Read more about [multitasking](#) and [single tasking](#) on Jones' website.

## **Get It Off Your Mind**

David Allen, author of *Getting Things Done*, writes, *If it's on your mind, your mind isn't clear. It must be captured in a trusted system outside your mind-and you have to come back to it as needed. The reason something is "on your mind" is that you want it to be different than it currently is.*

Notice that the key is to get the thought somewhere that you can reflect on it later-when you are ready to take action on it-or at least plan how to accomplish it. If you refuse to get it off your mind, it's because you don't have a trusted place to put it.

Maximize your use of technology. I use an audio recording app on my smartphone that I can click one button, record my thoughts and then click another button to immediately send the information to me via email. Use tools like Google Keep or Evernote to capture your thoughts. The goal is to keep your mind clear for the task that is in front of you.

## Make Quick Decisions About Best Using A Short Period Of Time

Frequently find yourself with blocks of 5-10 minutes of time? Don't let it slip away. Take a few seconds and ask yourself the following questions to best determine how to use it.

- ◆ How much time do I have? (Time not moving or having to engage in another activity)
- ◆ What are my priorities today?
- ◆ What is my level of mental (and/or physical) energy right now?

Based on my answers and where I am physically at, what should I do with this time?

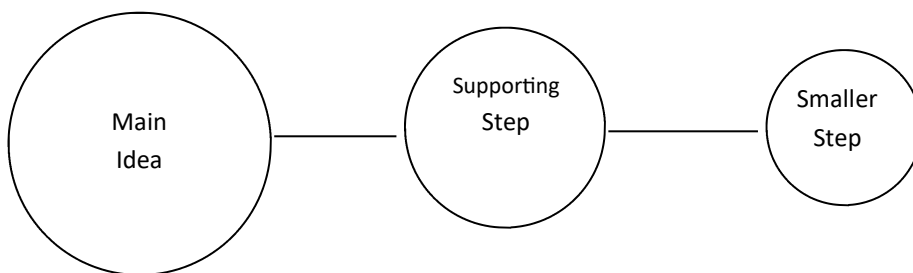
## Use The 321zero Technique To Handle Email

- ◆ Check your email 3 times per day
- ◆ Spend 21 minutes on your email each time
- ◆ Get your inbox to zero

Now I know that the numbers don't work for some people. The key is to have a plan that includes how many times per day you check email, how long will you spend on it, and what's your goal in working on your email.

## Use Mind Mapping

Too often we try and work through new ideas in our head instead of creating a visual picture that our mind can easily follow. Google "mind mapping" and you will get lots of models to use. The one that is easiest for me to follow when fleshing out a new idea or project looks like this:



Let's take a main idea of "Clean out the garage." A supporting step would be to "get boxes" or "determine time/date." A smaller supporting step to "get boxes" might be to "Call Joe about boxes" or "stop by grocery store." You can add as many supporting steps as needed and still keep your thoughts organized.

## Be Clear About “Done”

Whether professional or personal, it’s important to be as specific as possible about what constitutes a completed task. Some things need to be done well while other things just need to be done. For the ones that need to be done well, begin looking at times you can single task to achieve a better outcome. My daughter gave me a quote I frequently use: “Done is better than perfect.”

## Minimize Procrastination

Start by recognizing that the pain of inaction will be greater than the discomfort of action. Then dig deeper to determine why you aren’t taking action more quickly. Seth Godin, (Best-selling author and marketing guru) gave four thoughts in a blog about “what is getting in the way” that really help me determine why I’m procrastinating. They are:

*\*You don’t know what to do*

*\*You don’t know how to do it*

*\*You don’t have the authority or the resources to do it*

*\*You’re afraid*

Once I determine the reason, I can more specifically address it. From there I develop a doable action to move the project forward. If it’s a big project or I need additional information, I’ll tell someone who will hold me accountable.

Learn more of Jones’ thoughts about [procrastination](#)

## Survive the E Mail Tsunami

Email overload is, for many people, about like the weather. They talk about it, but they don’t do anything about it. Some proven ways to better handle your email include:

- ◆ Develop a system for managing incoming email instead of just dumping them into a general inbox. Create folders like “Action Needed” or “A/B/C Priority.” Set rules that send emails from certain individuals into your “A” priority folder so that you can quickly see and retrieve them.
- ◆ Put your request in the subject line-not in the 3rd paragraph.
- ◆ Train your recipients about how you are going to manage your email. If they know, then they can plan accordingly how to best work with you.
- ◆ I have a 50 word rule about email. If it’s going to take me (or the sender) more than 50 words to make the request, I pick up the phone.

## Stop With the “Victim Mentality”

Be more proactive about communicating your current workload to others when they want to add more tasks to your schedule. If the person is a boss or supervisor, ask them for help in determining priorities (hint-it’s what they get paid for). Lastly, ask for resources to complete the new task. That includes people, time, space and financial resources.

## Insulate Your Schedule

For any task of at least an hour, add 10-20% to the expected amount of time for completion. You wouldn’t drive to work without allowing time for traffic jams, construction or a stop along the way. Why should it be any different with other major tasks?

## Passionately plan for all 3 areas of your life

Most of us do a good job at planning for work tasks. But when it comes to relationships and taking care of ourselves, we fall miserably short. You need the physical, emotional and mental energy that is gained from your other areas to be more effective at work.

You can learn more about Jones’ 3 ring planning philosophy in his book, [Juggling Elephants](#).

## Looking for more? Check out these resources:

[Jones Zone](#) (Over 200 “how to” videos related to time management, change, and leadership).

[Downloads Page](#) at [jonesloflin.com](http://jonesloflin.com) or [Jones’ Blog](#)

Or how about some [professional coaching](#) around time management?

Jones Loflin is an internationally-recognized author and speaker. His messages focus on change, motivation, time management and work/life balance. He is the author of four books, including *Always Growing*, *Juggling Elephants*, *Getting the Blue Ribbon*, and *Getting to It*. His humor, energy, and audience engagement make an **impact** on every member of your group, not just an impression.

Learn more about what Jones can do for your organization:

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