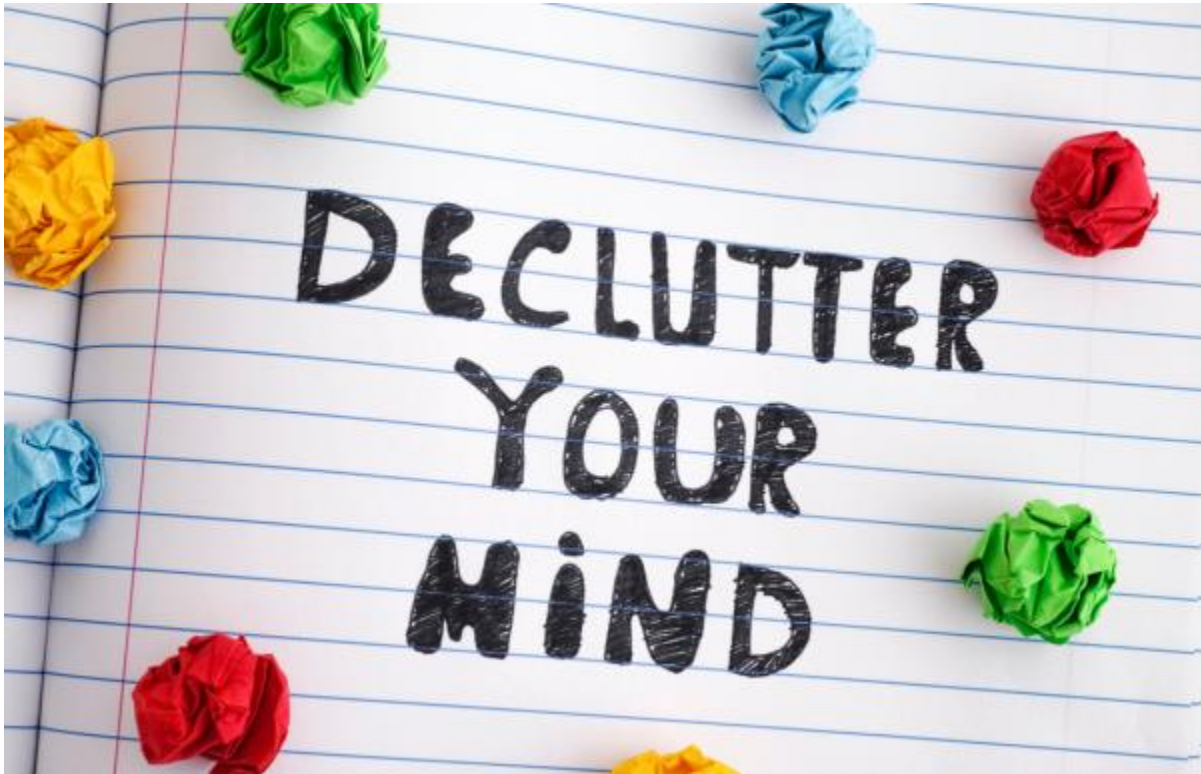


Episode #156: Clear Your Mental Cache by Decluttering Your Mind



Full Episode Transcript

**With Your Host
Dr. Janel Anderson**

Episode 156: Clear Your Mental Cache By Decluttering Your Mind

Hello and welcome to another Hello and welcome to another episode of the working conversations podcast where we talk all things leadership, business communication and trends in organizational life. I'm your host, Dr. Janel Anderson.

Imagine that your mind is like a computer, running multiple tabs storing random bits of information, and occasionally getting bogged down by all that digital clutter, while in this case, mental clutter. Now, you probably know that you need to clear the cache on your computer from time to time to keep it running efficiently. Well, the same goes for your brain. You need to clear the metaphorical cache in your brain from time to time to keep things running smoothly. It's like hitting the mental reset button decluttering your thoughts and giving your mind some much needed breathing room just as a tidy desktop can make finding your files and office supplies a breeze a clear mind can boost your productivity and focus. And I've got some tips and strategies for you today to do just that.

So this all started a couple of days ago. Well, actually a couple of weeks ago if we really want to go back to the source. I use an app on my phone called Libby it connects me to my local public library where I can Download Audiobooks and other digital materials, digital books and read books and so on and do it from either the Libby app itself which is where I listen to audiobooks or if it's a book that's not an audio book, but print material that's digital, I can send that to my Kindle app. And I can either read it on my Kindle app on any device or I can read it on my Kindle Paperwhite device which I love, by the way, or if I don't want to read it in Kindle. I could read it in the native Libby app that allows me to read books there. Now things started glitching several weeks ago, the first thing that started happening was that my books, my audio books were skipping, and so sometimes entire chapters or half a sentence. It would be weird, sometimes little chunks, sometimes big chunks.

And I got so frustrated with one of the suspenseful novels that I was listening to while I was walking the dog you know, usually after dark through the path in the woods and like somebody in my book is about to get killed or something like this crazy, suspenseful fun piece of fiction that I'm reading and right in the most just deliciously juicy part. It skipped and it skipped like three chapters ahead. I was so frustrated. I went on the Libby app after I got home from that walk I found the digital version of the book that I could read and read it in the digital app, the Libby app the three chapters that were missing because I it was so important to me to read those chapters and find out what happened before I went any further in this suspenseful mystery novel.

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So that's how it first started happening then. I mean, I kind of at first thought it was maybe my internet connection or whatever. But then something even stranger started to happen. And this started to happen last week. So when I download a book I can choose again to read it in the native Libby app, or I can send a Kindle. And when I clicked Send to Kindle, the little thing spun for a little bit.

So I know it's thinking it's working on it. And then usually what happens is the Kindle app opens and sometimes asked me to log in sometimes knows who I am, and then everything syncs up in the background. And now that book is in all of my Kindle apps on my phone, on my computer on my tablet, and in my paperweight. But what started happening is, it was you know, they I would say connect to kindle or send this book to Kindle and it would spin a little bit and then it would spin a little bit longer and a little bit longer. And then the strangest thing happened. The ticket Max ticket master app on my phone opened. I kid you not. It kept taking me to Ticketmaster and I would like I closed it out multiple times. I shut down my phone rebooted my phone I tried all the things. But Ticketmaster kept opening, and I didn't want to see ice spice or Playboy cardi or any of the shows that it was trying to sell me was taking me to Ticketmaster it just made no sense.

Then the final straw just happened yesterday. Audio books wouldn't open at all and I'm in the middle of this 20 hour long audio book that's due in like six days and I don't even have time to be listening to it but I listened to it while I walked the dog or while I am driving the car and I could not get the audio player to open. It just kept spinning and spinning and spinning. Sometimes it would say updating your app experience and then it would spin and spin and spin and then it would just shut down. Rebooting my phone did not do the trick. The only thing that did the trick is to clear the cache for that app. It wasn't even on my whole phone. It was just the cache for that app. And literally, all my problems went away. Well, not all of my problems, but all of my problems with the Libby app went away after I cleared the cache of the app.

So it got me thinking about my mind and clearing the cache on my mind. You see, I've got a lot of open loops in my brain at any given time. And open loops is a phrase that David Allen, the author of the book, Getting Things Done uses to describe all these things that are going on in our mind at any given time. That can be distracting because we're constantly trying to either remember to do them. Remember not to forget them.

Try to think of the next step in doing them if it's part of a larger project. So I am running around with dozens and dozens of like open browser tabs in my brain all the time. When is my son's next baseball practice is in the calendar. Am I available to drive him then? When is my daughter's next basketball game that she's going to be cheering at for on

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her cheerleading squad? Do I have tickets? Will the tickets sell out? Did I order their school pictures? Really? I mean, I should have done that last fall. Did I order their school pictures? How about a yearbook because I keep getting emails about that? But I'm not sure if I've done it yet. Is there some food that needs to be defrosted for dinner tonight? Is there gas in the car? Have I made a parking reservation at the airport for my trip next week? Have I do I have enough book inventory for an upcoming speaking engagement that just decided to gift every attendee at the conference with a book and do a book signing? When will I get the proof facts, the proofs back for my photographer? Is there anything on my Costco list because I'm really like feeling like stopping at Costco tomorrow on my way home from a client site. And on and on. It goes that is what is kind of happening in my brain all the time.

So I mentioned getting things done by David Allen, one of my favorite books. I read this book, like I don't know 20 or 25 years ago when it first came out. It's been around a while. He David Allen is a productivity and time management expert and this book really does help with the open loops. I used it again many many years ago. I got reacquainted with the book not that long ago was, let's see. About four months ago, I was in a bookstore, buying a book that I was sending to somebody for their birthday was buying one of my favorite books to send it to somebody for their birthday. And while I was there I had just a few extra minutes until I started perusing through the business books, which is what I often do when I'm in a bookstore, and I came across the new and updated version of getting things done and I thought oh, it's been such a long time since I acquainted myself with this work and really implemented the work and as you know from listening to just a relatively short list, I mean truly short list of things that are going through my brain at any given time.

I thought it is time to do the Getting Things Done work again or GTD as the real aficionados call it for getting things done. So the first part of getting things done is to capture all of those things that David Allen calls, open loops, all these things that are running through your mind at any given time. It could be tasks that you need to do it could be ideas for projects that you want to start or maybe things in your home that you want to change commitments that you've made to yourself commitments that you've made to work or to your civic organizations or clubs or anything, but getting them out of your head and into some sort of trusted system. And he is a big fan of the inbox the physical inbox.

Now, he also in his updated version says you can use a digital app or you can use a variety of other tools. It does not have to be Paper Inbox. But there is some real advantage to sitting down with a big stack of paper and on each sheet of paper writing down one idea or one commitment or one open loop and putting that aside. He is a

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staunch advocate of one idea or project per page. You can't make a list of 10 things each thing goes on its own list. Now he also says if things take two minutes or less to do just do them. But for anything that takes more than two minutes and has multiple steps. Write it down, get those open loops out of your head.

So I bought this book in December. It sat on my shelf through the holidays. And then in early January, I had a little bit of discretionary time you know that whitespace on your calendar. So I was reading the book in the evenings and on the weekends. And then during the day I was as as my time permitted was making single pages of what he calls projects. A project is anything that has more than one step. So ever since I've been doing that it's been really helping. In fact, it's kind of clearing the cache for my brain. Now in if you were interested in following David Allen's system, I'll give you kind of a high level of what it looks like and by all means I'm a big fan. So go go read the book if you want to do the work yourself, but it does take some time to get all those loops out of your head.

And then of course once you've captured everything you need to determine what is the next appropriate action to take on them. So once you made that list and that page for every different thing that's that's on your mind, you go back and you identify what's the next important action I have to take, for example, I have a speaking engagement coming up in Detroit in about three weeks time three or four weeks time and I need to buy a plane ticket I have not purchased my plane ticket yet. And that is my next action on that particular project. It will be about another week or two before I start customizing my slides for that but I do need to get myself a plane ticket. And while I'm at it, I might as well booked myself a parking spot at the airport so that I don't have that as an open loop within the days or weeks before I leave and once you've captured everything and gotten that next action listed, then you can figure out is this something that you can delegate to somebody else? Is it something that needs to be done right now? Can I defer it to later or what would be the consequences and I love this question what would be the consequences of not doing it? So if I just didn't do it? What would happen? Well, if I didn't book my flight to Detroit, I wouldn't show up to the speaking engagement because I'm not going to drive to Detroit.

So you definitely have to go through some clarifying processes once you make that each piece of paper its own project. Then you need to organize anything else that you can think of about those projects. And I like to sometimes I'll use little post it notes as I'm making the list of all the things that go with the project because then I can be moving those post it notes around on that physical piece of paper. And that really is something I mean I like to be as digital as I can with things. But with the open loops there is really something about having them on sheets of paper in an inbox on my desk. I was the

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most reluctant person ever to want to actually create that because it felt like more clutter. I have a strange relationship with paper as it is and I'm always trying to get paper off my desk, not have more paper on my desk, but I got these really cool inbox trays. And I have two of them. They are clear acrylic and the bottom lifts up and you can put pictures in it. It's a multiple layer bottom. And so when inbox tray is completely empty, it's like a vision board. I have some really cool pictures sandwiched in between these two pieces of acrylic of places that I want to go.

One of them has places that I want to go sort of you know, future focused, and then the other one has pictures of me and my kids and so it's fun to get to the bottom of the inbox, even if it's just to go through what's in the inbox and prioritize and figure out what's my next action on any given project. So it really is kind of fun to have them in that physical sense because it's tangible. I can pick it up I can flip through them. I can easily see. Am I forgetting about a project? Is there something that needs to have a higher level of prioritization? Because the due date is coming up soon, or because I've decided this is important to me and I want to be working on it more actively. So having that system of all the steps and then specifically called out what is that next action? Sometimes the next action is to like, you know, again, book a flight. Well, for me booking a flight is maybe a 15 minute job. But if I'm booking parking, there is far fewer there are far fewer choices to make in terms of parking. And so I go on to the parking website and I can book my flight, my parking, provided my flight is already booked because I need to put in the time I'm leaving the airline I'm on the flight number and I need to put in a few logistics into the parking app.

So that if something were to happen with a parking with a slight delay or something like that, I would still have a parking space. So those tasks are shorter but when I have them all organized, and I have let's just say a few discretionary minutes because a meeting ended early. I can just go look what's an what's the next task on one of these projects. That might just take like five minutes. I can book the parking in five minutes. Absolutely. So it's great in terms of using your discretionary time, especially when it comes in just like little tiny pockets of five minutes. Here. 10 minutes there. I can look through my list of projects and find something that I can do to move the needle forward on something that I'm working on.

Now, David Allen recommends regularly going through that list and looking to see what are all of your next actions and is everything complete. So doing a bit of reflection around each of the projects that you're working on? And then you know taking action planning in your calendar when you're going to take action on some of those items that are not two to five minute projects that you can get done in little pockets of time here and there. But really planning your time and prioritizing your time around the things that

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matter the most so that you can get those things done.

So overall, this book, Getting Things Done provides a very practical framework for managing tasks and projects in a systematic way. And certainly allows you a greater sense of productivity, it reduces overwhelm and ultimately it gives you a sense of greater control and fulfillment in your life. And that's the piece that for me. It's the control piece that is so helpful. It is getting the things out of my head and having a certain element of control over them because I know they're not going to get lost. Now granted a stack of papers on my desk is not particularly portable. Although I would say right now my stack of papers that's on my desk in that pile is less than 25 sheets.

So if I really really wanted to take it on the road with me, if I was going to be gone for a period of time, let's say two or three speaking engagements back to back, then I might actually stick it in a manila folder. I might put a good solid clamp or paperclip on it so that those pages don't go spilling in the airport or on a plane or something like that. And and take it with me. So it is somewhat portable. It's not as portable, let's say as an app on your phone. But really, for me that most important concept is that sense of control that I have.

When I capture those open loops, it clears the cache in my brain and it gives me the certain sense of freedom. It gives me a sense of an ability to focus because I know that nothing is going to fall through the cracks because I've got the the the project that is baseball and so all the things I can think about my son's baseball team, and upcoming practices and tryouts and everything, go on that piece of paper. And then of course they go in my calendar as well when there are times when somebody needs to be moved from location A to location B.

But then there's also the things like do we have this supplies and that supplies and do the cleats from last year still fit and all of those things. So I record those all on that page, which is the baseball project or likewise for any other whether it's a kid activity or something I'm engaged in, even outside of work, keeping those lists of all the related things that go along with that project is so helpful, because then I am not driving around. Whether I'm physically driving or I'm just moving through my life with so many open tabs in my brain, juggling things, trying to figure out if I'm going to forget them trying not to forget them.

So I encourage you to capture your open loops get them out of your brain it is like clearing the cache for my brain. Now as for me in terms of implementing the whole Getting Things Done process, it is a big project to capture all of those open loops and then put some systems in place so that you are regularly revisiting those. I'm doing it a

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little bit loosey goosey I'm pretty sure that if I actually hired David Allen, to come into my office and do this with me, he would be far more rigorous with me than I am being with myself. But at a minimum I am capturing all of those open loops. So I sat down in January I was sort of reading the book in fits and spurts in the evenings or on the weekends as my time permitted. And then I sat down with a big stack of blank paper and I wrote down next act you know project name next action as many next actions as I could think of and then I use the highlighter to note the very specific next action like booking that plane ticket to Detroit, which I actually really need to do as soon as I finish recording this podcast, but it is immeasurable in terms of giving me my mental bandwidth back so I strongly encourage you to do it. Whether you're taking it on in a rigorous format, like David Allen's getting things done, or if you are going to simply open an app on your phone and dump out all of the things that are swirling around in your brain right now that you are concerned that you might forget or that you need to put into your calendar or that you need to figure out what is the next action or like me book that next plane ticket to Detroit.

Alright, my friend, I hope you get a chance to clear the cache in your brain. And also just as a friendly, technical tip and reminder if you have any apps that are not operating as they should be on your phone, try clearing the cache, even just on the app, you don't have to dump all the data off your phone, just go app by app and clear the cache if something's not working.

Remember the future of work is not only about technology, it's about the values we uphold the communities we build and the sustainable growth that we all strive for. We need to keep exploring, keep innovating and keep envisioning the remarkable possibilities that lie ahead.

As always, my friends stay curious, stay informed and stay ahead of the curve. Tune in next week for another insightful exploration of the trends shaping our professional world and our lives in general.

If you enjoy this content and you're watching it on YouTube, make sure you hit the subscribe button and knock that little bell so that you get notified every time there's a new episode out. I've also got some YouTube shorts over there. So there's some other things that you can take in. And if you listen on a podcast player you're going to want to head over to YouTube and subscribe so that you don't miss a thing because there's some fun stuff happening over there. Wherever you're listening or watching and please leave me a review because it does help other listeners just like you find me and they play it all makes me feel good. You know that until next time, my friends be well.