

Hoarding brain space will not increase your productivity



Do you ever crave the need to empty your brain, sweep your mind clean, and purge all those messy thoughts into a brain dump?

To state the obvious, we've all super busy. So busy at times, we think our brain is going to explode. There's new information to be processed, thoughts and feelings bleeding through, long and short term memories to manage, spontaneous messages and reminders popping up, and a subconscious filled with who knows what. That's a lot of brain space to be hoarding.

You most likely think of your brain as a massive computer processor and database. The best estimate is that your system is composed of 100 billion neurons and 150 trillion network connections between neurons. Or, imagine it as having all the stars of the milky way between your ears.

Even a great computer system slows down when storage is reaching capacity. Excess or infrequently used information is moved to sub, sub-files, which is why retrieval starts to buffer. Your brain does the same when sensations of thoughts or words do not immediately come to mind.

The Brain Dump

It's especially a very frustrating experience when you've been on-a-roll and everything comes to a halt. Lucky for you there's a solution. It's called a **brain dump**.

A brain dump relieves the brain of information vying for attention. [Click To Tweet](#)

A brain dump is a technique of transferring information from one system to another. Specifically, it relieves the brain of information vying for attention and intruding on the ability to focus and concentrate. The idea is to take the information hoarded in the brain and move it into a paper or electronic storage format.

The term brain dump was popularized by productivity consultant David Allen. Allen writes in *Getting Things Done – The Art of Stress-Free Productivity* that productivity is not a time management issue. It's about having "appropriate engagement" without the distractions of what's on your mind hoarding your brain space. Or, as he calls it, your "psychic bandwidth."

The brain dump is for freeing your mind up to be productive – creative thinking, innovation, problem-solving, and being "optimally available" to shift focus where and when needed.

Allen recommends taking the time to sit down and write all the things that are currently on your mind. In no particular order, just let the thoughts spill out onto paper. They can be reviewed and dealt with at a later time.

Writing things down may seem like a waste of time, with so many other electronic options available. So, it's a personal choice as to which method works the best for you.

According to Allen, the point is to get competing thoughts for your attention out of your head and into an alternative storage system in order to free up brain space for thinking.

Mind Sweep an Alternative to a Brain Dump

Productivity coach, Laura Hutchinson, offers a variation which she calls a "mind sweep (video is posted below).

Rather than trying to write down what's on your mind at one time, Hutchinson suggests carrying a planner to record what comes to mind as it occurs. It may be items for a to-do-list, random and unrelated thoughts, insane thoughts, or anything of consequence. The practicality here is that great thoughts, ideas, and reminders don't slip away from memory. And, it's also a way to be mindful of what's happening in the "now."

As you can imagine, writing it down may not always be convenient or safe. A quick sticky note may suffice, or a voice recording or text message may do until it can be captured in full later. However, it does require being more proactive as thoughts occur rather than saving them for a specific time to brain dump.

While the brain dump or the mind sweep may be opening up more brain space, there still remains the issue of what to you do with all this documented information.

You're probably wondering if this isn't unproductive by itself. You now have to spend time reviewing, sorting, categorizing and prioritizing these thoughts into a meaningful list. Yes, there is a time element here, but it's a trade off against what you can now productively focus on, accomplished and finished.

And, of course, those who are already using either the brain dump or the mind sweep techniques have freed up their brain space and figured out a system of how to make this happen more productively.

More about this in our next post. In the meantime take 10 minutes and write down everything on your mind. See how much brain hoarding you can release.

Resources:

<http://gettingthingsdone.com/>

<https://engineering.mit.edu/ask/what-are-thoughts-made>

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