



Help! The most common leadership struggles and what to do about them.

Help... my 'to do' list is overwhelming!

If you have far too much to do and too little time, how can we make better lists to help us get the things that need to be done, done?

The answer can be found in 'To do, ta-dah, to be, to know' lists

You may, like me, have a 'to do' list obsession. I have tried every way you could possibly imagine when it comes to 'to do' lists. I have pre-printed pads, post it note versions, wall charts, digital versions and now an electronic notebook version which syncs with my phone which means I am never away from my 'to do' list. I could sit and make 'to do' lists all day long but the problem is, sometimes I think I am making the wrong kinds of lists. Following this hunch, I delved into this issue to see if I could find some wisdom from the world of business, psychology and high performance which would steer my thinking. It turns out I did find something, and we may need more than one list!

A list of lists!

Your system may be working for you perfectly, but why not try a different approach and see if it helps you get perspective and feel more in control.

1. **To do lists** – This is where we write all the jobs down. The problem is that not all the jobs are equally important. On that list will be things you *could* do and things you absolutely *should* do. We know what we do though: often we do the thing that we can get off the list first. If the Pareto Principle is true, then the minority of inputs will lead to the majority of the results. 20% creates 80% of the impact. So, what should we do?
 - Focus on being productive, not busy.
 - Identify the few things on the list that will make the biggest difference.
 - Resist the temptation of 'checking off' and getting the instant dopamine hit, play the longer, better, bigger game.
 - Re-frame your 'to do' list into a 'success list' – what will change if you do that thing? Focus on the success not the thing. Doing X may be quick but it won't have the impact of Y.
 - Eat the frog first or put the big stones in – whatever metaphor you may want to use, the principle is the same, do the big thing first and make time for it.
 - Diary time to do the big, impactful thing you have identified. They will not happen unless you do.
2. **Ta-da** – celebrate what we have done! Gretchen Rubin, author of *The Happiness Project*, said that on top of a 'to do' list we should write a 'ta-da' list of all accomplishments we have achieved, the people



we helped, the tasks we completed, the way we took care of ourselves and the things we are proud of. This end of week ritual can really help us reflect and re-set for the next week.

- What have you done this week that could go on your 'ta'da' list?
3. **To be** – sometimes we are so busy doing we forget to **be**. This list is when we write down who we want to BE. For example, I want to be someone who makes time for people or who has time to listen. I want to be someone who can make time to get into deep work and allow my thinking to come out. IF this is true, then what should I DO? I should book in time with a friend or create space in my diary to write (like I am right now!). What we want to BE is followed by what we have to DO to make it true. Many of us get that the wrong way round, we do in the hope we will be. Habits and tasks follow our identity.
4. **To know** – what is it I want to find out or explore? What do I want to know? What do I want to find out? What is evading capture in my brain that I need to chase down? Just writing down what you want to explore or find out can help sharpen your thoughts. Then, of course, you know you want to know it (to know list), you know you want to be the type of leader who finds it out (to be list), you then make the time to get it done (to do list). Then, when you have done it, you write it on the 'ta-da' list, feel great and are convinced this is something worth repeating again. You are now operating in the 20% which will make all the difference.

By all means get list-tastic, but let's make sure we are making the right type of lists. Getting stuff done is a great feeling, getting the stuff done that will make the biggest impact is an even greater one. Invest in the right type of lists. As we do that, we will feel more in control and less overwhelmed.