

Make lists!

One day I'm going to make my fortune by writing a best-selling sequel to the 'Da Vinci Code'. I'm going to call it 'The Baldock Cipher'. Baldock is a little market town in the county of Hertfordshire in southern England and I think the Holy Grail is buried there. You see Baldock's original name is 'Baldac', the Old French form of Baghdad (yes, really. Would I kid readers of Connections? Don't tell the US Marines). This is because the medieval order of the Knights Templar founded it in the 12th century as their English HQ, naming it after their international HQ in Baghdad. So when it came to hiding the Holy Grail where better could the Knights bury it away than somewhere in Baldock?

Getting things done

This came to mind because I was looking at my 'To Do' list the other day and found 'Find Holy Grail, make million pounds, retire to the Seychelles' at number 438. But there may be a quicker way to make that money. An American, David Allen, has made a million US dollars by – you guessed – writing about lists. He calls it the 'Getting Things Done' system and charges US\$595 a seminar. Easy money you might think but there is some sense in the idea. One of the most difficult things about being an Open Poly student is all the stuff that competes for your time and attention alongside your studies – all the things to do with jobs, families and everything else. All this ongoing and uncompleted stuff creates distraction and stress just by being there. The best way to get rid of that stress is to get the stuff out of your head and onto a list.

Make your lists

So start by writing down everything you've got to do. Divide your list into whatever categories you like – mine has headings such as 'Work' ('finish assignment marking'), 'Home' ('fill hole in window frame'), 'Deadlines' ('1 September – car tax due'). Then I have subsidiary lists – 'Things to be done today' ('phone daughter – see how much money she wants') kept by my phone, and 'Things I've just thought of' ('make dentist's appointment') on a scrap of paper in my shirt pocket along with two pens, my reading glasses and a large amount of fluff. This sounds complicated but works for me – you can choose what suits you. If you like the Web you can use <http://www.tadalist.com/>.

Crossing things out

Now the useful bit. *You don't have to complete one thing on your list before moving onto another one.* When you've got a little time you just take some small actions on any of the things on the list that will move them forward. For example this article has been written over several weeks in 10-20 minute bursts interspersed with other part jobs. Now I can do the most enjoyable part of having a list which is to send the article off to your inestimable editor and scratch it off the list completely. Oh and yes, you guessed right – sometimes I put things on the list which I've actually already completed so I can scratch them off straightaway – well, we all have our little indulgences.

And if you're visiting the UK sometime and passing through Baldock late one night and see a shadowy figure at the crossroads with a spade, you'll know that number 438 on my list has finally made it to the top...

Ormond Simpson