



## Getting Things done: The Trigger

### Three Month Vacation Podcast

Speaker 1: When I was little my uncle gave me a game. It was called Snoopy Tennis and it was a little console, a video game from Nintendo. All you had to do was play tennis. Lucy from Peanuts and Charlie Brown from Peanuts as well, they would hit the ball towards you and you as Snoopy had to return the service. Lots of people played those games. Millions of kids played those games across the globe, but mine was different, mine was unique. My console had a crack in it. It had fallen at some point in time, so I can see the ball heading towards me and I have to listen for it. It would go beep, beep, beep, and then I had to push down on the red button that would ensure that I hit the ball, got the service back over the net as it were.

What was interesting was that I wasn't looking for the visual anymore. I was listening to the sound and responding. That sound was a trigger. One of the biggest reasons why we can take as much time off as we do is because we have these triggers in place. Without the triggers it's very hard for us to get anything done. That is because as adults we have so many things to do and so many responsibilities that when we try to do something, when we try to finish a book or write an article or do anything at all, we struggle. We struggle because we don't have that trigger in place.

What is that trigger and how can we make it work for ourselves? Let's start with the things that I don't like very much. One of the things that really bug me is having to exercise. As I've mentioned before, I don't care much for exercise, and yet you'll notice that I'm reasonably fit. This is because I end up doing between 80,000 to 100,000 steps a week. You have to ask yourself how does someone who doesn't like exercise doing such a lot of walking. Well, I use a trigger. In fact, two triggers.

The first trigger is just the coffee. that is when I get up in the morning I am not headed for a walk, I am headed for a coffee. I'll wake up, I'll get my iPhone on, put on the audio, and then head towards the café. When I reach the café that's my reward. What's really happening here is that the walk is not something that appeals to me that much. However, the coffee does appeal to me. That sense of reward, that carrot and stick as it were, is what helps me. That's the trigger.



The second trigger that I have in place is I have a little pedometer called Fitbit. I have other friends who are also high achievers who do 70, 80, 100,000 steps a week. I want to compete against them so that becomes my second trigger. What I'm saying here is that I don't care much for walking. I would rather sit here and do a podcast and do some music and draw some cartoons, and do all kinds of stuff.

Yet no matter what the weather, whether it's rainy or windy or hot or cold, I end up going for a walk - and that is because of the trigger. Triggers work both ways. They work for good and evil.

What we are covering in today's episode are three things. The first is how to activate the trigger. The second is how it helps you build and sustain momentum. This is very important. The third thing is what happens when you go offtrack. How do you get back on track? Let's start off with the first one, which is how do you activate the trigger.

Now in a normal day what I have to do is I have to write articles, I have to draw some cartoons, I have to do a whole lot of things. While a trigger might seem like a reward, because I was talking about coffee earlier, well it's not necessarily a reward. It's just that beep beep headed towards you. How do you install that beep? One of the things that I found very useful for me and to get things done is to keep things open. Now I draw a daily diary in my Moleskin diary. I do a painting every single day, and I've been doing this since 2010.

How do I achieve this? It's a very busy day. It's quite easy to put it off. It takes a lot of time to do it. What I do is I don't keep the diary in my bag. I don't keep the paints in my bag. I don't keep the pencils in my bag. They're all ready on my desk and they're open. Just before I sit down for breakfast, every single day I will say "Well, let me just sit here for five minutes. Let me just do a little wash. Let me just paint a bit." I'm always trying to fool myself there.

The thing is that the diary is already open, the paints are already there, the water's already there. If I were to spend just a few minutes trying to find the paints or the diary or the pencils and the pens, that could distract me enough for me not to do that painting for the day. I've tried this. I've kept it in the bag, and just that little distraction, that tiny distraction can slow you down.



Slowing you down often leads to complete derailment. It's the same thing when I'm trying to do a podcast for instance. At the end of the day I don't have much energy but I do have energy to keep my Garage Band, which is my software, ready and open. When I show up here at 4 in the morning, and that's just me, it's already open. Before I check any email I'm looking at Garage Band staring at me in the face. The moment I see that I know you've got to do this podcast now, and then you can do the other stuff.

This concept of keeping things ready and open seems almost remarkably too simple and yet it is a trigger. It is a trigger that helps you get things done. This is what successful people have known for a very long time. I once read a book by Twyla Tharp, and she talks about getting into a taxi. Now Twyla is a very famous dancer and choreographer. She needs to practice. When you wake up in the morning you don't feel like practicing. What she does is just get dressed and gets into a taxi. Often she says "When I'm in the taxi that's when I realize I have to practice." The taxi becomes that little trigger. It's like that beep beep beep.

The mistake that we often make is we have our to-do list and we don't realize that the to-do list is not what gets things done. The to-do list is almost the end point. What gets things done is the trigger that leads us to that to-do list, the trigger that gets us on the bike, the trigger that gets us for the walk, the trigger that gets us to pick up that racket and hit the ball back to Lucy and Charlie Brown.

If you want to get things done you have to isolate that trigger. You have to figure out what is the thing that comes in between me and the task. What is that one thing that will start me off and get me to that task? Then you have to put the trigger in place.

To activate the trigger we have to have that isolation point. We have to figure out what is that one thing that comes in between that will help us to get to the trigger. It will be different for different things. We know email is a trigger. We know Facebook is a trigger. These are triggers that are designed to get our attention. That's why they flash on our phones. That's why they show up on our screens. Because once we have that trigger we are forced to go to the next step. If these distractions help us waste time in the day, well there is a good chance that you can use the trigger to your advantage as well. It works for good; it also works for evil. Harnessing it for our good is probably the better way to go, isn't it?

That brings us to the end of the first part, but the second part is what is really critical, and that is the factor of how the trigger builds momentum.



When psychologists look at how to improve your memory what they realized is that something that is not done takes up an enormous amount of energy. What they did was they took two groups of people and they gave them tasks. One group was supposed to finish their tasks and the other was not supposed to finish their task. At the end of the exercise they were supposed to write down the tasks that they had completed.

The groups of people who had completed the tasks didn't have such a good memory, as in they forgot some of the tasks that they had completed. But the groups who had not completed the tasks remembered stuff. What did they remember? They actually remembered the stuff that they had not completed. You see, in the exercise these people were given the tasks and then almost as they were completing the tasks, the tasks were taken away from them. That stuck in their head. Later on when they had to fill in the form they remembered the tasks that they had not completed.

What was happening was those incomplete tasks were taking up an inordinate amount of energy in the brain. They had to remember those tasks even though they were not trying to remember any of them. This is what happens to us all the time. For instance, I came back from the information products course that I had in Vancouver and I had to write a tiny little booklet about something. I can't even remember now. I've completed the task. It was a tiny bonus, and usually that would take me about a day, maybe two days if I was really slow.

But instead it took me a month. Everyday when I went for my walk that's all I could think of: I have to finish this bonus. I have to finish this bonus. I have to finish this bonus. What that was doing was killing my momentum. Because I couldn't complete or wouldn't complete that task it was draining all my energy for all the other tasks, so it was like a game of dominoes. It was one task not being done, that was dropping into the next and the next and the next. When we look at the reverse thing, which is when we have that trigger in place and we get the task done, then the next task moves along and the third moves along, the fourth moves along.

One of the reasons why I go for a walk in the morning is because I complete so many things. I get my exercise. I listen to the audio. I talk to my wife. We also learn a language and we drink coffee.



Before 8:00 in the morning a lot of stuff gets done, but then that leads to the second task and the third task and the fourth task. When people say "I'm not getting a lot of stuff done because I don't have enough time in the day," they probably are referring to not time but energy. Time is different from energy. The lack of completing one task leads to a depletion of energy, which then spills onto the second and the third and the fourth and the fifth.

You know it's energy because sometimes you have the time and you spend that time on Facebook, and you spend that time just lying there on the sofa saying "I'm so tired." That is a depletion of energy, not a factor of time. When you get stuff done, when you use triggers to get stuff done, your energy level is so much higher. You know this; I don't have to tell you this. Your energy level is just bouncing and you get more done.

This brings us to the end of the second part. The third part is just as important because often we go offtrack. Supposing you've gone on vacation for instance. The moment you get back you're offtrack, or say there's been some kind of problem or urgency and now you're offtrack. How do you get back on track? I wish there were a magic pill to tell you how to get back on track, but I've struggled with the same issues. I'll stop painting and then before I know it a week has passed or two weeks have passed and I haven't done a painting. I say I paint everyday. Yes I do but only if the book is open.

I have to go back to the same concept, which is what is that trigger. If the book is open then I'm going to get it done. If the program is open I'm going to write the book. That's just how it is. I wish there were a simpler way. I wish there were a magic button but there is no magic button. The magic button is to isolate the trigger. Whatever that trigger is, you have to isolate it.

This brings us to the end of this episode. In this episode what we covered was just the whole factor of activating that trigger. We activate that trigger by isolating it. We saw how the coffee motivates me, but it's not just a reward. It is any sort of trigger. Just keeping the book open makes a difference. Just keeping the program makes a difference. Just getting to the taxi makes a difference. You might get on a bus or in a car and when you get in that car you switch on, not the radio, but listen to some audio that helps you learn instead. That's your trigger. That trigger helps you get smarter. You go to your networking meeting, you go to your meeting, you go to your office. You know more, you feel better, that sets off the other triggers, the other tasks that get better and better everyday.



This is the key to getting things done. A lot of people think that getting things done has to do with the to-do list, but it doesn't. The to-do list is at the end of the rainbow. Now you saw what was happening there. I had the trigger. That was my trigger to go for a walk. That was my wife calling up and I'm off right now. Even though I might feel like finishing this podcast I'll have to come back to it and complete it, because that was my trigger.

Just before we I go I want you to know that I'm not always like this. I'm not always hyped up, ready to go. There are some days when I'm just lazy, and that's okay to be that way. Not because I'm saying so but because it's okay to just have down time. Just know that when you're working, work out the trigger that gets you to work more efficiently. That is probably the best thing you can do for yourself. That's the one thing that you can do for yourself: find that trigger.

Here we are at the end of this episode. If you're keen on learning more about planning, then I have a book there for you. It's called Chaos Planning. I find that most people plan without taking chaos into consideration. It details how we go about our three month vacation and how we plan stuff, and why is it so important to plan with chaos in mind. Now chaos is your best friend. It may not seem like that but if you make time for him then he does help you out a lot. Look for Chaos Planning.

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