

# DO ONE THING

*a short guide*

\*

*Eleven things to do.*

*One that matters.*

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## W H Y O N E , N O T M A N Y

*Most lists never get done. This diary is one line.*

Most planners become buckets. Fifty tasks that never get done, most of which shouldn't have been there in the first place — ideas wearing the costume of work, things that should have been delegated, noise pretending to be progress.

The fix isn't a better tool. The fix is to stop trying to manage the bucket and to pick one line instead — the line that, finished today, would make today count.

This isn't doing less for its own sake. It's being deliberate. Spending the day on what moves the needle, not on the comfort of a long, busy list.

A finished page with one real thing on it beats an untouched page of eleven. The diary is what's left after giving up on the bucket.

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*Most days don't need a to-do list.  
They need a decision.*

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# T H E R H Y T H M

*Three pages. Three timescales. One decision.*

## 01. THE MONTH.

At the start of each month, write three or four most important tasks on the monthly page — the things that, by month's end, would make the month count. The codes M1 to M4 are pre-printed. These are the month's intentions.

## 02. THE WEEK.

At the start of each week, decide which intentions you're working on. Pull them down to the weekly page — write the code in the empty bracket, [M1], followed by the specific weekly version of the goal. Add any week-only commitments as [W1], [W2]. Commit your protected hours: the blocks of time you'll defend.

## 03. THE DAY.

Each morning, or the night before, decide the one thing. Write the code (often the same M-code that's been with you for two weeks) and the specific task. Below it, the secondary tasks that support it, plus a few additional things that need to happen.

## 04. THE CLOSE.

At the end of the day, two questions. Did the one thing ship? Yes or no. What's tomorrow's one thing? Write it on the next page. Close the diary.

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*The decision is the system.*

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# CHOOSING THE ONE THING

*The decision is the practice.*

The hardest part of the system isn't doing the work. It's choosing it. Most people skip the decision and let the day start with whatever's loudest. The diary forces the decision to happen first.

*Three filters help, in order.*

## 01. ORIGIN.

Check the monthly page first. Of your four most important tasks for the month, which one is closest to needing the next piece of work? The funnel does most of the choosing for you — the [M] codes carry the decision down.

## 02. CONSEQUENCE OVER URGENCY.

Inside that goal, ask: of the things you could do for it today, which one, if shipped, would make the day count? Not what's most urgent. What's most consequential. Replying to email is urgent. Shipping the draft is consequential.

## 03. DOABLE IN A DAY.

The one thing has to be something you can finish in a working day. "Write the book" is a project. "First draft of chapter three" is a day's work. If a line can't be closed by tonight, break it down until it can.

If nothing on the monthly page fits today's work, pull from a week-only goal — [W1], [W2]. If you find yourself picking the same kind of thing every day — admin, meetings, inbox — that's a signal. Not a problem with the discipline; a signal that something about your role or week needs attention. The diary tells you that too.

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*The hardest part isn't doing the work.  
It's choosing it.*

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## W H E N T H E P L A N C H A N G E S

*The plan changes. The discipline doesn't.*

Two things will happen, often. Work you put on the monthly page won't ship that week. And work you didn't plan will appear and ask for a slot. The system handles both honestly.

#### 01. WHAT SLIDES.

A monthly goal you allocated to this week but didn't pull down isn't a failure. It's information. Either it wasn't actually critical, or you misjudged the time, or something genuinely more important took its place. Don't tick it. Don't pretend it shipped. Move it on the monthly page to a later week.

#### 02. WHAT KEEPS SLIDING.

If the same M-code slides week after week, that's a signal. By the third slip, ask: am I actually going to do this? Or has it become the diary's version of an open browser tab — kept open, never read? Cut it. The page is the only honest record.

#### 03. WHAT GETS ADDED.

New work will appear mid-month. The boss asks for a thing. A customer escalates. The funnel doesn't reject these — but it asks for honesty about where they fit. If it's week-only, give it a W-code on the weekly page: [W1], [W2]. If it's bigger, go back to the monthly page and add it as M11, M12, or wherever it fits. If your four critical slots are full and this new thing is genuinely more important, replace one — don't expand. Critical is critical.

#### 04. WHAT STAYS OFF THE PAGE.

If something doesn't fit this month at all but might matter later, the diary isn't where it goes. Put it in a notes app, a paper backlog, anywhere else. The diary holds what you've decided to spend this month, this week, this day on. Not the inventory of everything that exists.

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*Move what slid. Code what's new.  
Let the rest stay off the page.*

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## W H Y I T W O R K S

*Three forces. One discipline.*

**CONSTRAINT CREATES FOCUS.**

Asked to pick the one task that matters most, you ruthlessly down-rank everything else. Eleven items collapse into one. That clarity carries through the day.

**WRITING CREATES COMMITMENT.**

Putting a sentence on paper — physical paper, in ink — is a quieter, harder promise than a calendar entry or a Notion doc. Paper is harder to edit and impossible to ignore.

**THE FUNNEL SHRINKS THE DECISION.**

When the daily line is the next link in a monthly chain, the morning question stops being "what should I do today?" and becomes "what's the next piece of the thing I already decided to build?" Smaller question. Faster answer.

The hardest cognitive work of the day — naming what matters — is behind you by nine. The rest is showing up.

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*The hardest part is over before it began.*

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## W H Y I T M A T T E R S

*The line is small. The year isn't.*

The discipline isn't about today. It's about the year you're slowly building, one decision at a time.

By Friday, a week of one lines tells you, without flattery, whether you've been on the right things. Feelings lie. The page remembers.

A month of weeks becomes a body of work. Twelve months becomes the only honest record of the year.

Most people, by December, can't tell you what mattered in March. The diary tells you. One line per day — a specific record of what you decided to spend your life on.

This is the quiet payoff. Not productivity for its own sake. A year that, when you flip back through it, looks like a year you actually meant to live.

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*Twelve months from now,  
the page is the only honest record.*

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# T H E   W E E K L Y   R E V I E W

*Look back. Name the cost. Decide what walks forward.*

The weekly review is the only page in the diary that asks you to look backwards. Five minutes at the end of the week — Sunday evening, or whenever your week ends — to read the week as a record, not a memory. Three questions, no scores.

## 01. THE LINE THAT MATTERED.

Of the most important tasks of the day you wrote this week, name the one you're most glad you wrote. The question rewards the decision, not the outcome. A launch that slipped but was the right line is a good week. A launch that shipped but was the wrong line is a week to learn from. Over time, the rolled-up answers are a portrait of your judgement.

## 02. THE COST OF FOCUS.

What did choosing one thing to focus on cost you this week? Name what got delegated, deferred, declined, or quietly dropped. Focus is never free, and most planners pretend it is. Making the cost visible is what makes the discipline real. The list is short, written in your own words, and over the year it becomes the most accurate record of what you stopped trying to do.

## 03. THE LINES THAT WALK FORWARD.

Which [M] codes carry into next week? Which, if any, get retired? This is the bridge to next week's planning page. Goals are mortal — they don't all survive every week. The question asks you to decide which travel, which finish, and which fall away. By Monday morning, the next weekly page is half-written.

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*Three questions a week. A year of self-knowledge.*

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## HOW THE FUNNEL WORKS

*October 2026. Watch [M1] travel from a decision to a launch.*

The next six pages trace one goal through October — first a four-week overview, then the monthly, weekly, daily, and daily planner pages it travelled through, and finally a weekly review at the end of the launch week.

The example follows a senior product manager through October — a product launch, a hiring decision, a junior team member to mentor, a security audit to sign off, a board review on the horizon.

Watch the [M] codes. The same one travels from the monthly page to a Tuesday morning. Then it keeps travelling — Monday, Wednesday, the next Monday — until the goal is done.

By the time Tuesday 9:00 a.m. happens, the hardest decision was made on the first of the month. The rest is execution.

*Read top to bottom.*

# A C R O S S T H E M O N T H

*M1 was the day's one thing on nine of the month's mornings.*

Below: one critical monthly goal — **[M1] Launch dashboard v3** — traced from a decision made on the first of October to the nine days it claimed as the morning's one thing. Red wherever M1 lands. Grey for the work that happened alongside it.



**Nine mornings answered to [M1].**  
**October launched.**

*The decision was made on October 1. M1 launched on October 27 — twenty-six days later.*

MONTH STARTING 0 1 / 1 0 / 2 6

## M O N T H L Y P L A N N I N G

MOST IMPORTANT TASKS THIS MONTH		ALLOCATED WEEKS	ACHIEVED
[M1]	* <i>Launch dashboard v3</i>	W1 W2 W3 W4 W5	<input type="checkbox"/>
[M2]	* <i>Hire senior designer for the team</i>	W1 W2 W3 W4 W5	<input type="checkbox"/>
[M3]	* <i>Q4 board review prep + presentation</i>	W1 W2 W3 W4 W5	<input type="checkbox"/>
[M4]	* <i>Complete security audit sign-off</i>	W1 W2 W3 W4 W5	<input type="checkbox"/>
SECONDARY TASKS			
[M5]	• <i>Draft Q1 OKRs for the team</i>	W1 W2 W3 W4 W5	<input type="checkbox"/>
[M6]	• <i>Mentor Sarah through her first PRD</i>	W1 W2 W3 W4 W5	<input type="checkbox"/>
[M7]	• <i>Customer interviews — 5 sessions</i>	W1 W2 W3 W4 W5	<input type="checkbox"/>
[M8]	• <i>Renewal call with Acme (top-tier account)</i>	W1 W2 W3 W4 W5	<input type="checkbox"/>
[M9]	• <i>Q4 roadmap workshop with eng leads</i>	W1 W2 W3 W4 W5	<input type="checkbox"/>
ADDITIONAL TASKS			
[M10]	• <i>Submit Q3 expenses + travel claims</i>	W1 W2 W3 W4 W5	<input type="checkbox"/>
[M11]	• <i>Approve team Q3 bonuses with HR</i>	W1 W2 W3 W4 W5	<input type="checkbox"/>
[M12]	• <i>Plan Q1 team offsite</i>	W1 W2 W3 W4 W5	<input type="checkbox"/>
[M13]	• <i>Annual health check</i>	W1 W2 W3 W4 W5	<input type="checkbox"/>
[M14]	• .....	W1 W2 W3 W4 W5	<input type="checkbox"/>

Worked example: the M-codes carry through. Find [M1] on the next four pages — same code at every level.

## WEEKLY PLANNING

### MOST IMPORTANT TASKS THIS WEEK

### ALLOCATED DAYS ACHIEVED

[M1] * <i>Finalise v3 launch comms plan</i>	(M) (T) W T F S S	<input type="checkbox"/>
[M4] * <i>Lead security audit kick-off w/ vendor</i>	M (T) W T F S S	<input type="checkbox"/>
[M6] * <i>Brief Sarah on the PRD structure</i>	M T (W) T F S S	<input type="checkbox"/>

### SECONDARY TASKS

[M10] • <i>Submit Q3 expenses by EOW</i>	M T W T (F) S S	<input type="checkbox"/>
[W1] • <i>Review designer portfolio shortlist</i>	M T W (T) F S S	<input type="checkbox"/>
[W2] • <i>1:1 with VP Product on hiring strategy</i>	M (T) W T F S S	<input type="checkbox"/>
[W3] • <i>Bi-weekly check-in with engineering leads</i>	M T W (T) F S S	<input type="checkbox"/>
[ ] • .....	M T W T F S S	<input type="checkbox"/>

### ADDITIONAL TASKS

[W4] • <i>Reply to beta-user product feedback</i>	M T W T (F) S S	<input type="checkbox"/>
[W5] • <i>Calendar audit for Q4</i>	M T W T (F) S S	<input type="checkbox"/>
[ ] • .....	M T W T F S S	<input type="checkbox"/>
[ ] • .....	M T W T F S S	<input type="checkbox"/>
[ ] • .....	M T W T F S S	<input type="checkbox"/>

## PROTECTED HOURS

WHEN WILL YOU DEFEND DEEP WORK FOR THIS WEEK'S MOST IMPORTANT TASKS?

*Mon 9–11, Tue 9–11, Thu 9–11, Fri 14–16.*

[M1] sits at the top of the week. Protected hours commit when the work happens. The decision was made at the month level — the rest is execution.

## DAILY GOAL SETTING

### MOST IMPORTANT TASK OF THE DAY

### TIME REQUIRED

[M1] \* *Finalise v3 launch comms — sync with marketing* 2h

### SECONDARY TASKS OF IMPORTANCE

[M4] • *Security audit vendor kick-off call* 1h

[W2] • *1:1 with VP Product* 45m

### ADDITIONAL TASKS

[ ] • *Approve freelance designer's invoice* 5m

[ ] • *Reply to head of sales re: customer demo* 10m

[ ] • .....

## HABITS & REGULAR ACTIVITIES

• *Morning walk*

• *No Slack before 9*

• *Read 30 min*

## NOTES & IDEAS

*Comms plan needs eng sign-off on the new feature messaging before sending.*

*Asked Jordan to review by EOD Wed.*

.....  
 .....

## DAILY REVIEW

DID I DO THE ONE THING TODAY?  Y / N

### TOMORROW'S ONE THING

[M1] *Pre-launch QA review with engineering*

*[M1] carried from month to week to day. The line that mattered today was decided on the 1st of the month.*

DATE 06 / 10 / 26

M T W T F S S

# DAILY PLANNER

TODAY'S ONE THING

[M1] *Finalise v3 launch comms — sync with marketing*

TIME [M] SCHEDULE

06:00		
06:30		<i>Morning walk</i>
07:00		<i>Read 30 min</i>
07:30		<i>Breakfast</i>
08:00		<i>Inbox triage — no Slack yet</i>
08:30	[M1]	<i>Prep comms doc</i>
09:00	[M1]	<i>Sync w/ marketing</i>
09:30	[M1]	<i>Sync continues</i>
10:00	[M1]	<i>Apply revisions from sync</i>
10:30		<i>Slack catch-up + invoice approval</i>
11:00		<i>Reply head of sales — customer demo</i>
11:30	[M4]	<i>Prep audit kick-off</i>
12:00	[M4]	<i>Audit vendor call</i>
12:30	[M4]	<i>Audit call continues</i>
13:00		<i>Lunch + walk</i>
13:30		<i>Lunch</i>
14:00	[M1]	<i>Deep work — finalise comms</i>
14:30	[M1]	<i>Deep work continues</i>
15:00	[M1]	<i>Deep work continues</i>
15:30	[M1]	<i>Deep work continues</i>
16:00	[W2]	<i>1:1 w/ VP Product</i>
16:30	[W2]	<i>1:1 continues</i>
17:00	[M1]	<i>Send comms to mktg for sign-off</i>
17:30		<i>Wrap + tomorrow's line</i>
18:00		<i>Dinner</i>
18:30		
19:00		
19:30		<i>Family time</i>
20:00		
20:30		
21:00		
21:30		
22:00		

NOTES

*The afternoon deep block was the one that mattered. Two hours uninterrupted on M1 is what got the comms over the line. Sent to mktg by 5pm.*

*Nine M1 blocks across the day. The hours defended the line.*

WEEK ENDING 01 / 11 / 26

## W E E K L Y R E V I E W

## 01 THE LINE THAT MATTERED

*Of the most important tasks of the day this week, which one are you most glad you wrote?*

*Tuesday's [M1] LAUNCH (27 Oct). I chose ship over polish — the docs were imperfect but customers had it by 2pm and feedback came in within hours. Picking 'ship' was the right call.*

## 02 THE COST OF FOCUS

*What did choosing one thing to focus on cost you this week? What got delegated, deferred, declined, or quietly dropped?*

*Delegated: [M5] Q1 OKR draft to Priya — she shipped a better version than I would have.*

*Deferred: [M12] Q1 offsite plan by two weeks. Declined: speaking at the eng all-hands.*

*Quietly dropped: [M7] customer interviews — planned five for the month, got to one.*

## 03 THE LINES THAT WALK FORWARD

*Which [M] codes carry into next week? Which, if any, get retired?*

*Retire: [M1] (launched + post-mortem done). Retire: [M3] (board meeting Wed went well).*

*Retire: [M4] (audit signed off in W2 — already done). Continue: [M2] (designer Day 1 Mon).*

*New monthly page Monday — fresh [M1] becomes 'Post-launch metrics + first iteration'.*

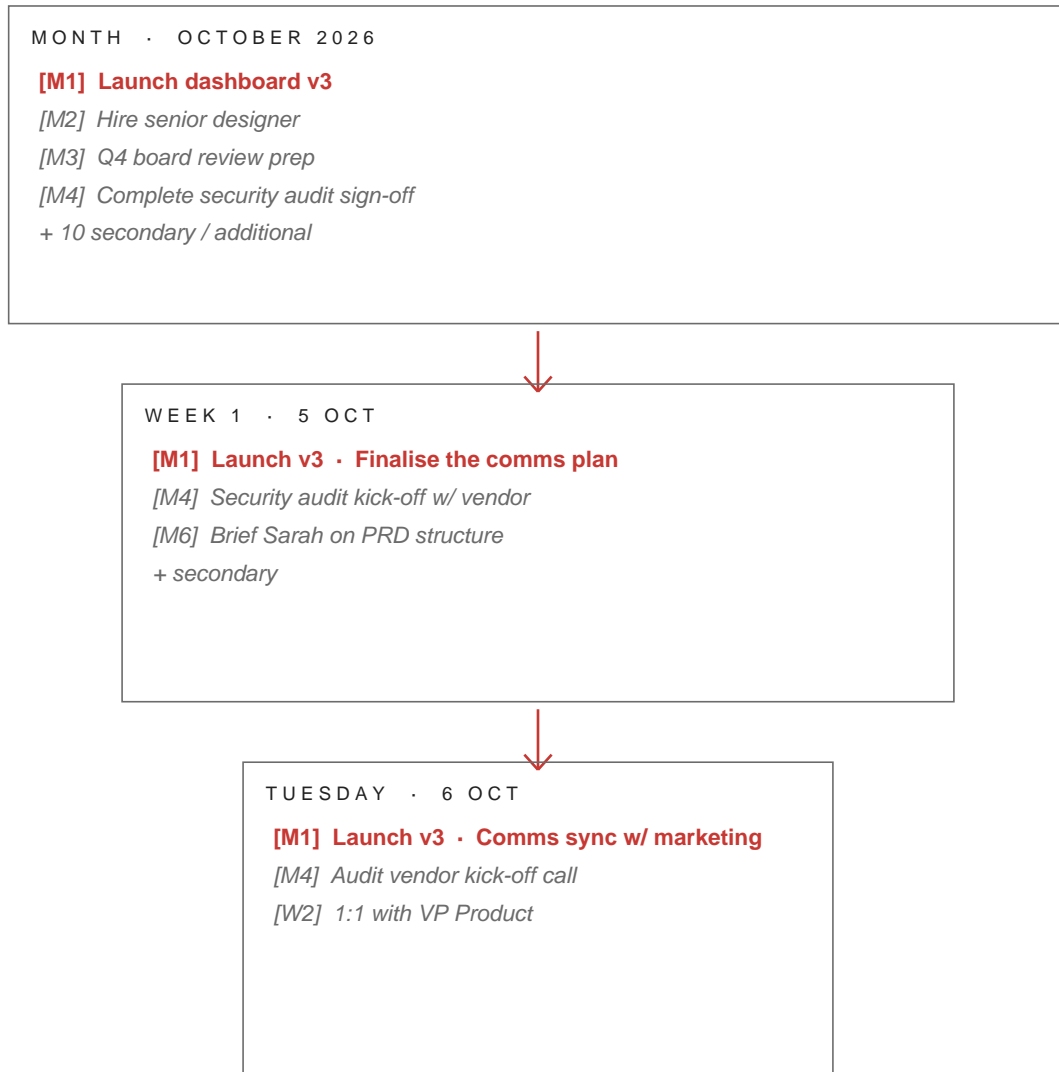
*Week 4 of October — the launch week. Five minutes on Sunday; the next month begins half-decided.*

## THE FUNNEL

*One month. One direction. One line that counts each morning.*

One day in the life of [M1]. Across the Month showed the goal's full arc over four weeks.

This page is the same idea, compressed to a single morning — Tuesday, 6 October.  
The decision was made five days earlier. By 09:00 Tuesday, it lands as the day's most important task.



***[M1] is decided once.  
It travels.***

*By Tuesday at nine, the hardest decision was made on the first of the month.*

## T O M O R R O W

*Print the page. Write the line.*

Four page types live in this file: the monthly, the weekly, the daily, and the weekly review. The monthly runs once per month; the weekly once per week; the daily as many times as you'll use it; the weekly review once at the end of the week. A fifth page — the daily planner — is optional, for the hours when you want to time-block. A4 — print at default settings.

Start with the monthly. Three or four most important tasks — what would make this month count. The codes [M1] through [M14] are already there. On Sunday night, pull what matters into the weekly. Each morning, decide the day's one line. End the week with the review — three questions, five minutes.

The diary lives on the desk, not in a drawer. Open by default. A pen close by. If the page is hard to reach, it stops being the system that decides the day.

You'll miss days. Don't backfill — that turns the page into theatre. Don't apologise — the page is a record, not a judge. Write tomorrow's line and continue.

There are no streaks. No badges. No charts of how well you've performed this month. The reward is a year that, when you look back through it, looks like a year you actually meant to live. The line is the practice.

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*Print the page. Write the line.*

*The rest will follow.*

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