

ORGANIZE YOUR LIFE, WORK & MIND
WORK CLEAN



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BY DAN CHARNAS. SUMMARIZED BY NAT ELIASON

Only one profession has developed a comprehensive philosophy on *how to work*: the culinary arts, and that philosophy is *mise-en-place*, a French phrase which means “to put in place.” In the kitchen, it means to gather and arrange the ingredients and tools needed for cooking, but it’s also a tradition of focus and discipline, a method of working and being. A way of life.

There is a difference between working hard and working *clean*.

Part of developing good MEP is having a plan of how everything will happen, and a map of where everything should be.

You should know where all of your tools are blindfolded. And remember when you stir something, you cool it, and it takes longer to cook.

A big part of our overwhelm with work occurs because we’ve never been taught how to manage that work.

“The urgent are not important, and the important are never urgent” – Eisenhower

Chefs commit to a life of preparation, where you always have to think ahead. Cooking can’t happen without prep coming first.

A commitment to process doesn’t mean following tedious procedures, it’s about becoming a high-functioning human being and being happier for it. Good process must not only make the work better but make you better. Excellence arises from refining good process—how can I do this better, or easier, or with less waste? It’s a job, like preparation, that never ends.

Ingredient 1: Planning is Prime

Why not wake up a half hour earlier? Isn’t creating your day better than fighting it? Why not prepare as much as you can the night before so you’re not running around like a maniac the next morning?

Making a list of things to do isn't enough, you also have to square it with the clock. How long will all of these things take? How much can I actually get done given my time resources? What order will I do them in?

We need to work clean with time, which means:

1. Determining our daily actions
2. Ordering those actions in sequence

For your most important, recurring tasks, log out how long they take so you can make accurate predictions of how long they'll take in the future. Such as writing an article or preparing an email report.

Figure out your Meeze Point, the optimal number of actions you can put in your daily list before you begin to overload yourself.

1. Select 3 actions to complete for this day.
2. Plan those actions on your calendar
3. If you truly commit those tasks when and as quickly as you planned, you can up to 4 tasks tomorrow
4. Keep increasing until you start to fail at completing your tasks. That's your meeze point.

Arrive everywhere 15 minutes early so you never feel rushed or stressed.

Recipe for success: Commit to being honest with time. Plan daily.

Ingredient 2: Arranging Spaces, Perfecting Movements

You don't need much space if you're smart about how you use it. Cultivate the use of both sides of your body, both sides of the space, both sides of a motion. Create checklists so you have recurring recipes for your processes.

1. Select a task that you do often
2. Break it down into 10 steps or fewer
3. Determine if you need a Read-Do (read then do it) or a Do-Confirm (do the items then use the checklist after to confirm)
4. Test your checklist by using it 3 times
5. Update the checklist each time you use it, as necessary

Recipe for success: Commit to setting your station and reducing impediments to your movements and activities. Remove friction.

Ingredient 3: Cleaning as You Go

You cook the way you look: the cleaner your station, the faster you work. Practice “coming to zero”: every hour, take a minute to straighten your physical and digital workspace, no matter what you’re currently doing. Try “knolling”:

1. Scan your environment for anything not in use
2. Put away everything not in use
3. Group all “like” objects
4. Align or square all objects to either the surface they’re on, or the studio itself

Recipe for success: Commit to maintaining your system. Always be cleaning.

Ingredient 4: Making First Moves

The first moments cost more than the later ones. When a task in the present unlocks a cascade of work that other people do on our behalf, the worth of process time increases and becomes harder to measure.

There are two kinds of work. The first is hands on, immersive, and creative, like writing or designing.

This is solo, creative work that is usually your most important work. But there is also hands off, process work that enables other people to do work. This seems less important, since it’s more managerial, but since it enables other people to do their work it’s worth doing first.

Begin each day with 30 minutes of scheduled process time, starting, unlocking, and unblocking the work of others

Recipe for your success: Commit to using time to your benefit. Start now.

Ingredient 5: Finishing Actions

Do similar jobs at the same time to minimize the switching costs between actions. Avoid orphaned tasks: tasks that haven't been tied up in the neatest way possible to enable easy continuation later.

If you can't finish a task, tie it up for later. Collect all the materials and keep them in one place till you resume. Jot down any thoughts you have that are at the top of your mind that you want to remember. Schedule your session to resume the work. Communicate your progress to a partner or stakeholders to assess what remains to be done and whether help is available.

Record all of your breaks during an immersive work section to see where you lose the most time, and to be more strategic about how and when you take breaks.

Recipe for success: Commit to delivering. When a task is nearly done, finish it. Always be unblocking.

Ingredient 6: Slowing Down to Speed Up

"Sometimes, it's the panic about work that's in your way, not the work itself."

When you hear yourself overtalking or interrupting someone, simply talk slower. It'll have a calming effect on you and force the other person to pay attention.

Instead of stopping when you feel distracted, just move very slowly.

In times of stress or panic, clean your work station so your visual field is clear. Think about what you need to do next. Batch your tasks together. Close apps. Get to zero. Now resume slowly.

Recipe for success: Commit to working smoothly and steadily. Use physical order to restore mental order. Don't rush.

Ingredient 7: Open Eyes and Ears

Recipe for success: Commit to balancing external and internal awareness. Stay alert.

Ingredient 8: Call and Callback

Being polite can get in the way of getting work done, you need to communicate efficiently. Communication should be clear, concise, and respectful.

Direct those around you by asking the right types of questions: What's the consensus here? What's the takeaway? What's the next step? Who needs help? How can I help?

Recipe for success: Commit to confirming and expecting confirmation of essential communication. Call back.

Ingredient 9: Inspect and Correct

For a day, keep a tally of all the errors you make, big or small. For each of the errors, write the consequence. At the end of the day, write down one thing for each that you could have done to avoid the problem.

Recipe for success: Commit to coaching yourself, to being coached, and to coaching others. Evaluate yourself.

Ingredient 10: Total Utilization

Conserve space to conserve motion to conserve time. Log where you lose time and resources to see how you might make better use of those resources and time periods. How can you plan better to avoid waste?

Create routines for when you have downtime, for when you're distracted, for when you know you're passing through a particular place.

Recipe for success: Commit to valuing space, time, energy, resources, and people. Waste nothing.

The Commitments of Working Clean

- 1: Commit to preparation with a 30-minute daily planning session.
- 2: Commit to a process which makes you better.
- 3: Commit to being present in whatever you do.

A Day of Working Clean

Evening: Preparation with the Daily Meeze

Step 1: Cleaning your station

1. Empty and log physical inputs (notes, papers, bag, desktop, notebook, etc.)
2. Clear and log digital inputs (email, messages, note taking software, social media)
3. Set the table: straighten everything out and clean it up

Step 2: Sharpen your tools

1. Adjust your calendar based on what didn't get done today, move the relevant things to later in the week
2. Adjust your to-do list so you have an accurate view of what needs to get done

Step 3: Plan your day

1. Make a list of the actions and routines already scheduled for tomorrow and what else you want to do tomorrow
2. Identify the immersive vs. process tasks
3. Ballpark how much time you'll have available
4. Schedule everything on your calendar

Step 4: Gather your resources

1. Collect anything you need for tomorrow, load up your bag, lay out your clothes, etc.

Morning: Process

1. Greet the day by waking up early
2. Do a morning check-in in case anything has come up that means you need to adjust your plan
3. Start with 30 minutes of process time to free other people up.

Afternoon: Presence

1. React to surprises as they show up, adjusting your schedule and task lists
2. Tie up anything you can't finish so it's easy to pick up later

Then start again the next evening!

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