

Scientific research proves it: less stress, more productivity and time saved through Getting Things Done[®] ('GTD') training

We know GTD works. We see the positive feedback from GTD users and in our training we see how participants use the practical aspects of GTD and experience the flow of GTD in adopting the five steps that are the basis of GTD. And all of us at meereffect are GTD users and have experienced what GTD brings. Still we felt the need to have more scientific data on the impact of GTD. More specific: of the impact of the meereffect GTD Fundamentals training. Time to get researchers involved.

more effect - less stress



Research design

To find out what the measurable effects of the meereffect-GTD training are we reached out to the faculty of Work and Organizational Psychology at Tilburg University in the Netherlands. After a few meetings Ari Sadik was selected to do his master thesis on the impact of the GTD training.

Assured of scientific guidance for the research the work started in January 2016. A large group of participants received a questionnaire before the start of the training and the same questionnaire four weeks after the training. A control group also got the questionnaire and a follow up questionnaire after four weeks. That would help us to see not just what the results of the participants group are but to compare those results with the results of a group that did not take the GTD training.

The participants group all attended the one day GTD Fundamentals training. A number of the participants also took part in an implementation session to help them set up their GTD system. None of the participants attended the two day training or followed up the training with coaching sessions. That makes the investment of participants one work day.

Summary of the results

- ⦿ Experience a statistically significant reduction of stress
- ⦿ Experience a statistically significant increase in productivity, job control and save time. On average participants estimate the time saved is 66 hours per year.

The control group did not experience any of these or other results after four weeks.





1 Reduction of work stress

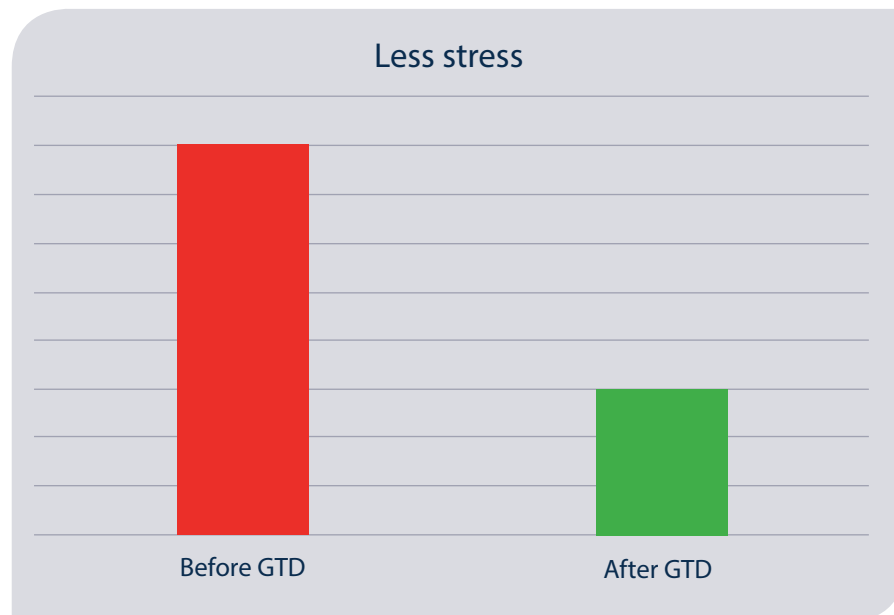
A lot of so-called knowledge workers experience stress during their work: lots of emails, a full inbox, too many tasks to do, multiple projects that demand simultaneous attention and rarely be able to limit the time spent to regular working hours. By continuously doing urgent tasks and the associated pressure it becomes increasingly difficult to prioritize or to work on projects that are not due soon. These projects remain unattended and progress in the not urgent area of work comes to a standstill.

Participants were asked before and after the training to what degree they experience stress, whether they worry about work or worry that they will not be able to finish their work on time. After the training participants scored significantly lower on all of these questions.

In the GTD training we pay attention to the way you deal with all the commitments you have, how you manage all of the issues that come at you and we start to establish reflection habits. In doing so we provide a number of concrete behaviors that helps reduce stress levels. The results of the research proves that participants experience this reduction.

Illustration 1

Results show that participants experience a significant reduction of stress levels after the GTD training





2 Job control increases

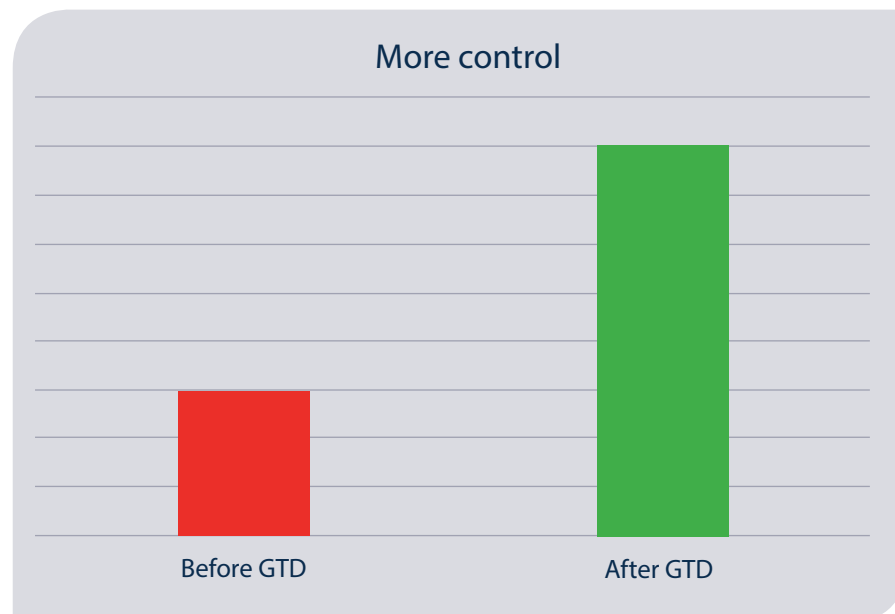
Knowledge workers on average experience a lot of autonomy in their job. They often decide themselves how they plan their work hours, what tasks and projects to work on and what the desired outcomes of those tasks and projects are. This freedom in itself is positive but also have its drawbacks. How do you know what to act on if you can choose so many tasks to do? And when is a project really finished and the desired result the right result? If there are too many open ends knowledge workers can feel a lack of job control. And a lack of control can lead to negative feelings.

Participants were asked before and after the training whether they have sufficient job control, whether they experience their work as structured enough and whether they know what to do to arrive at the desired outcomes of their work. Participants that took the GTD training experienced a significant increase in job control after the training.

In the training we discuss ways to get more control on your workflow and get perspective on all of your commitments, like with all the best practices within the five steps that make up the control-axis of GTD. One of the best practices is to define the desired outcome and next action of any project you undertake. Another aspect of gaining more job control is building reflection habits. All of these skills lead to more control and helps knowledge workers to tackle the downsides of the autonomy that their work has.

Illustration 2

The results show a significant increase in job control





3 Work productivity increases

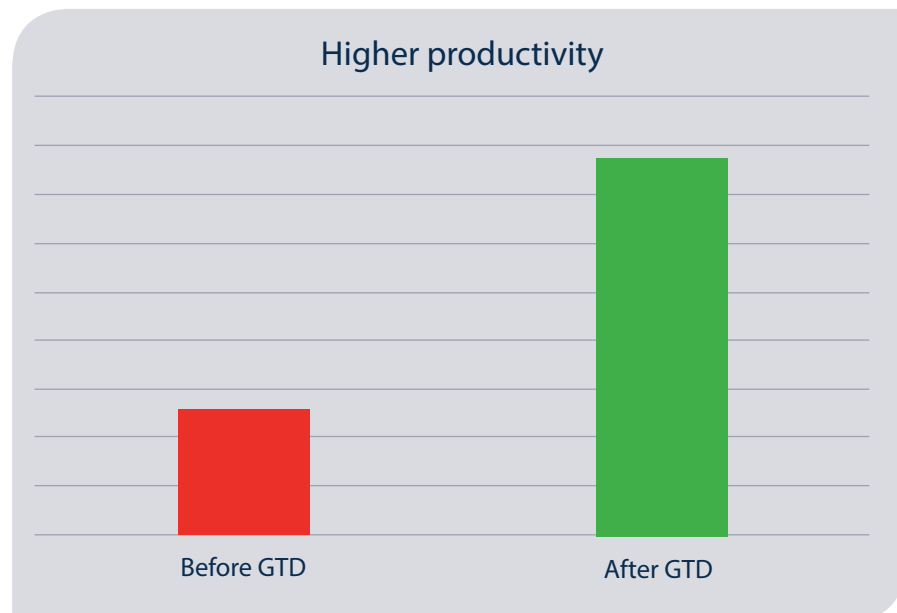
Every professional wants to be productive. It is very satisfying to look back on a work day and see what you have finished and what projects have made progress through actions you took. Regularly that feeling is hard to achieve seeing that there is always more work than you can finish and you continuously have to choose which task to do next. Also the average work day has all kinds of interruptions - email for instance - which interfere with your initial planning for that day. Being busy is no guarantee that you are working on the right tasks or projects. In short, to feel productive requires more than just go and do work.

Participants were asked before and after the training whether they felt they had finished enough tasks, made enough progress on their core tasks and whether their planning and time management skills were sufficient for their work. The participants of the training reported a significant increase in productivity after the training compared to the control group.

In the training we discuss what feeling productive is and how to feel productive more often. Realizing what makes you feel productive and what you need to get in that specific zone helps. Being aware and knowing what impacts the productive feeling makes it something you can work on. Also moments of reflection add considerable value to knowing what it takes to ensure that next week you will work a bit more efficient, quicker and more elegant. Also accepting that interruptions are part of everyone's work and have their place in a work day helps to accept them and manage them more relaxed.

Illustration 3

The results show a significant increase in work productivity





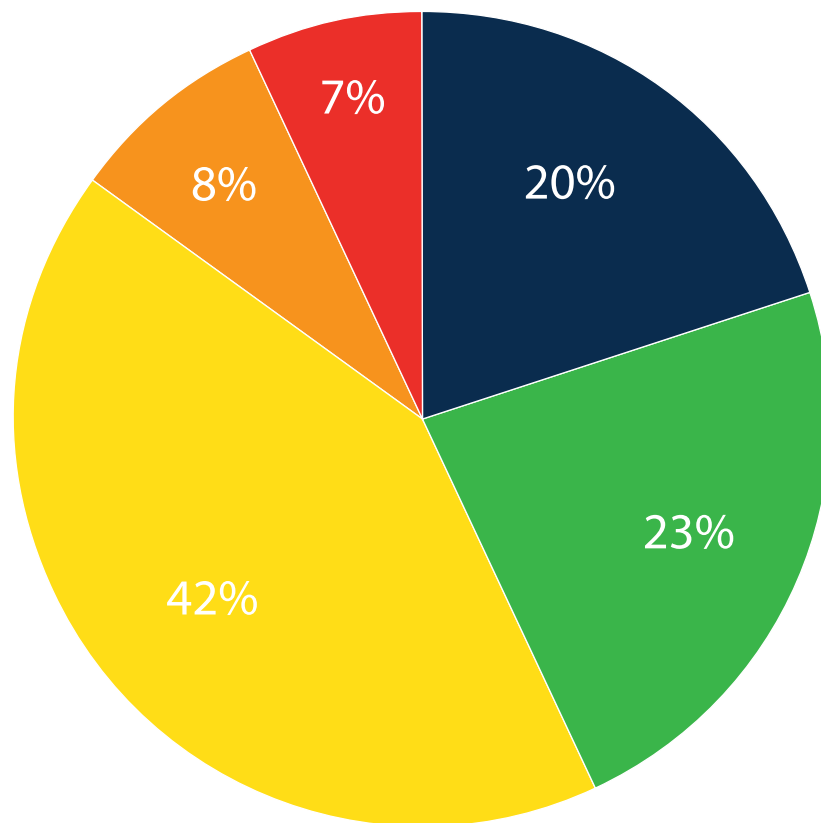
4 GTD saves time

The first and foremost goal of GTD is to give participants more perspective and control on all their commitments. This helps you to do your best work and add value. But undoubtedly the five steps that make up GTD also do save time.

80% of the participants reported that the best practices from the training helped them save time. The time saved totalled to 66 hours per year (based on 45 weeks a year).

In the training we discuss ways to structure work, be more aware of what helps build a productive day, deal with interruptions and process email efficiently. This helps to be more efficient and thus save time in addition to achieving better results from the time spent. The participants did not take an email management training. From other case studies we know that those sessions save a reported two hours a week. The combination of the Fundamentals training and an email management training can help achieve even better results.

Illustration 4
Reported time saved
after the GTD training



Conclusion

Investing in a day of GTD Fundamentals training results in:

- ⦿ less stress,
- ⦿ increased job control and
- ⦿ increased productivity.

GTD leads to a higher quality of work. Also, on average GTD saves 66 hours a year. Even if these 66 hours would be the only benefit from the GTD training, the return on investment of the GTD training is enormous.

Further reading

Explanation of the GTD research by Ari Sadik: <http://mref.nl/measuringgtd>