

"Forget the hard drive, it's my brain that's full."

Storyboarding

A Mickey Mouse solution to idea management -- by Gary Forster

I define creative problem solving as having the right idea in the right place at the right time. Too often, the place we keep ideas is in our head, or on lists. Both places are prone to loss.

When Walt Disney started making cartoons, he used a technique called "storyboarding" that remains today, 60 years later, the key tool for animators, cinematographers, and ad agency artists.

It worked like this: each crazy prank that Goofy and Mickey would get into would be sketched on a card. Mickey drops piano on foot. Piano rolls down stairwell. Goofy flattened by piano. Maybe 50 or 100 main thoughts for a simple cartoon. They'd be pinned to a wall and then moved around, arranged and rearranged until the story was in the proper order. Some ideas would be pulled and used instead on another project; obvious holes in the story would need to be filled by other ideas. Then the work would be delegated, and final artwork done to connect all the ideas. Walt used the same technique to design DisneyWorld.

Do you use a "to do" list to organize yourself? Storyboarding is better. Get a bulletin board for your office wall. (The bigger the better. In fact I like buying 4'x8' sheets of "Home-a-sote" and covering them with nifty fabric). Make three title cards: "To Do" is where you push-pin all of your tasks, each on it's own 3x5 card. It's the biggest section of the board.

"Doing" is the next title, and it replaces your daily to-do list. By coming into your office, anyone should be able to see what

your priorities are for the day. At the end of the day there's no transferring jobs to tomorrow's list, (or forgetting to transfer it!) It stays on the board staring at you until it's completed. Phone numbers and notes might get added to it, magazine articles might be taped to it. But it stays there on the board until it you move it to...



The "Done" category! My favorite, and a very important spot. The "Done" zone is an automatic pat on the back, much longer lasting than the pleasure you got from crossing out a job on your old "to do" list. And everyone else in your office can see how much work you're getting accomplished.

As great as all that is in organizing your work, there's more! The storyboard allows you to prioritize each category. Your "to do" cards get moved around until the most important are at the top and the least important are at the bottom. Your supervisor can come into your office at any time and see what priority you've placed on her pet projects. She can lobby you to move it higher on your list! Good information to have if you want to keep your job.

The storyboard actually grows information. Ideas in "to do" and "doing" are out where all other staff members can survey them. They can add "Postit" notes to ones they have ideas or resources on, and that helps *you*. Likewise if they all have their own "do-doing-done" boards, you can see what they're up to and pass fresh ideas on to them.



How do you make sure you don't forget important jobs? Date the top of the card as to when it should go into "doing", and have your secretary file it in a "tickler" file that gets reviewed monthly, when the cards are sent back to you. And all of those "done" cards with the notes and phone numbers and such? A lot of those are jobs you'll do again next year at the same time. Just send those cards back into the tickler file to magically appear in your mailbox at the proper time! Think of the time saved in not writing things over and over again, and all the extra brain space you'll have left over because you don't have to *remember* and *worry* about all that stuff!

Prioritizing is an art in itself.

Remember this: you earn your salary by doing the jobs that really *need* to get done because they have the greatest impact on the organization. Be sure those important jobs get starred or circled and kept on the top of each column of cards. Season your "doing" with jobs that are fun or easy to do, but don't let them fill your day. Use

them as rewards for getting the big jobs done first.

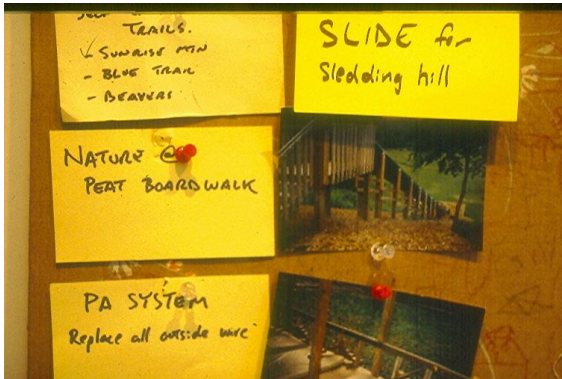
But wait! The system gets even better. Wherever you go, carry 3x5 cards with you. When you're sitting in traffic and have an idea, put it on a card. Whether you're in a staff meeting, at a conference, or reading a magazine on the toilet at home: write the ideas directly onto cards, and post the cards on your board. Better yet, post the cards on the boards of the people you delegate the jobs to! No remembering; no memos to write; they're already done!

Our office has boards in every room. One is our annual promotion schedule, with the twelve months listed across the top, and the newsletters, camp shows, brochures or other deadlines on cards under the appropriate month. New ideas get added to an "ideas" column so they don't get lost. Another board is for our "Wow!" program, where the staff is constantly coming up with new ideas on providing "wow!" experiences for our guests. Every idea goes on the board, and we watch them move higher or lower, get adopted or scrapped, grow and improve, and finally "done!"



Our maintenance department has two boards. One acts as their daily "to do" list, so any of us can see where our projects are in the priority ranking of "to do." The "done" list eventually goes into their own tickler file. The other board is a longer

term planning tool that lets us list those projects we want to do this year, those that will have to wait for next year, and so on. It prioritizes jobs not only by *when* they should get done, but *how* we're going to pay for it. No more hard feelings because the OE department doesn't understand why their bog boardwalk isn't built yet: they've been in on the whole process of deciding we needed to spend our time and cash on new bunks first. They know their job *is* on the list, *where* it is compared to everything else, and *why*. This planning board isn't screwed to the wall like all the others. It's portable so we can take it to board meetings and property committee meetings.



I've used storyboarding at board and committee meetings to generate and prioritize ideas. Once I had a group come up with all the topics and ideas they thought their organization should be dealing with. We posted them all on the wall under broad categories, and duplicates were combined. There were over two hundred cards. Then I gave each member ten red sticky dots. They had to spend their dots by sticking them to the ideas they thought were most important. If one idea was really important to them, they could put two or even three dots on it, but they had only ten total dots to spend. The resulting cards with dots became their agenda, pre-prioritized, for the year ahead.

Obviously there's a lot of synergy that develops from having everyone in your office on the same program. But don't let that keep you from getting started. Even if you're the only one that does it, the improved quality of your decisions and the efficient use of your scarce time on your most important projects might just make *you* the most valuable employee.

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