

How to Get Things Done (An idea that sold for \$25K in 1930s!)



People often set their goals but are then unable to focus on getting them done. In life, there are many things that can create obstacles, but there are also ways to overcome them. Let me tell you a simple idea that helped an employee and his company become very rich.

Many years ago, when Bethlehem Steel was a small up-and-coming factory, a young management consultant named Ivy Lee visited Charles Schwab, a manager at the steel plant. (Schwab later became the first man in history to earn a salary of \$1 million a year. Obviously Andrew Carnegie, founder of the company, liked Schwab's ability to get things done.) Lee said that he could help Schwab find better ways to do the things that were necessary to make the company a success. Schwab told him that they already knew how to make steel and knew what needed to be done—but, he added, they were not getting those things done.

“Show me how to do the things we ought to be doing,” Schwab challenged, “and we'll pay you whatever you want.” Lee said that he could do that in 20 minutes. He even offered to let Schwab use the system and then pay Lee whatever the steel company executive thought it was worth, if anything. Schwab was impressed with Lee's confidence and told him to proceed.

Lee handed Schwab a piece of paper and said,

“**Write down the things you have to do tomorrow.**” Schwab did as instructed.

“**Now number these items in order of importance,**” Lee continued. Schwab did that.

Then Lee gave Schwab his instructions.

“**First thing tomorrow morning, start working on #1 and stay with it until it is completed.** Next take #2, and don't go any further until that is completed. Then proceed to #3, and so on. If you can't complete everything on the schedule, don't worry; at least you will have taken care of the most important things before getting distracted by the items of lesser consequence.”

Lee said that if Schwab completed every item on the list before the day was done, he should make a new list and start on that; or, if any items were left at the end of the day, they could be considered for the next day's list. “The secret,” Lee continued, “is to do this daily, evaluate the relative importance of the things you have to get done, establish your priorities, record your plan of action, and stick to it. Test it for as long as you like and then send me a check for whatever you think it is worth.”

In a few weeks, Charles Schwab sent Ivy Lee a check for \$25,000. This was big money in the 1930s! Schwab reportedly told his associates that this was the **single most valuable idea** he had ever received.