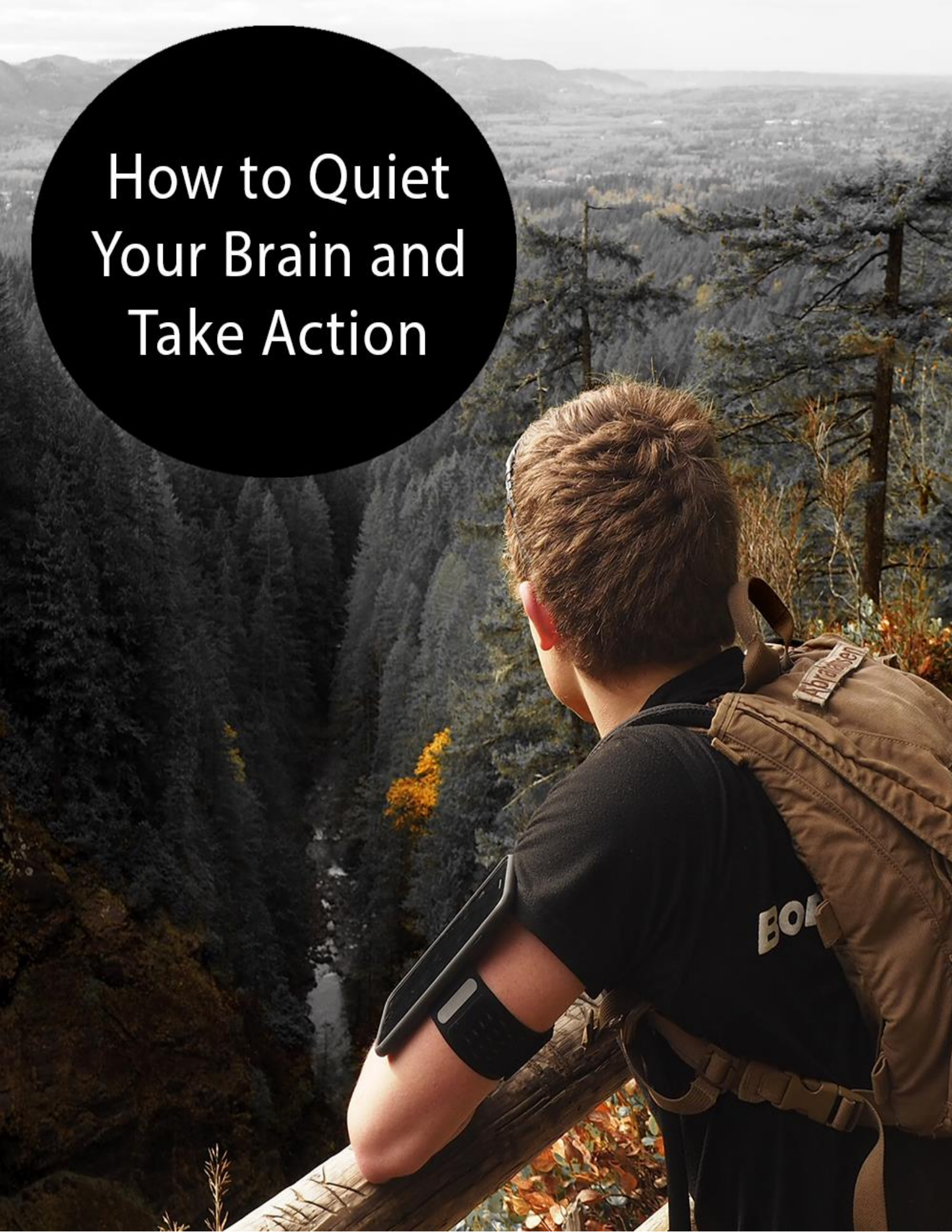


# How to Quiet Your Brain and Take Action



# Introduction

The human brain is hard wired to overthink and nothing feeds it better than anxious or negative thoughts. Anxious thoughts can be overwhelming, and so can negative thoughts. Both can also lead to overthinking which in turn result in anxiousness and poor decision-making. Together these two make up for a perfect formula for a racing mind.

What that means for a lot of people is that they often over-evaluate and exaggerate the real situations, events, possible scenarios and even goals but never actually do anything about them. Pending decisions are often a cause for worry with the imminent fear of making the wrong decision and having to live with it for the rest of their lives.

And while thinking is nice, not doing anything about your thoughts actually means not making any progress. In fact, being an overthinker can actually result in becoming someone who stands still in life, because deconstructing things won't let you move forward. It may also be the one thing most responsible for stopping you from taking action.

This is the trap that a busy mind can easily get entangled in. A mind that tends to overthink can make it very difficult for people to balance thought and action.

They get trapped in their thoughts and find it very hard to act. If you think that you are an overthinker, you will also know that it is very easy for you to get caught in a loop where you recreate an event repeatedly or try to analyze an idea from every possible angle. After hours of thinking and getting no sleep, you often get nowhere and are unable to move the process along.

Plus, when you overthink, your judgement gets cloudy and your stress levels elevate.

## **What Do You Overthink About?**

Not all overthinking is the same. This may sound strange so let's look at it a bit more closely. One type of overthinking means obsessing over a single thing or event over and over again. It could be something in your present that you can't seem to let go of such as *why your head hurts so bad? Could it be a symptom of*



*something more serious? Perhaps even something deadly? Is that why you can't seem to sleep well at night? And so on.*

Another way to overthink is to regret a decision or action you may have taken. This one takes you back to your past and keeps you rooted there. An example may be *choosing a career choice that didn't work out as planned*. Instead of trying to change their circumstances, overthinkers tend to get stuck in the “what if” phase ruminating over the past. This neither helps change the past nor improve their current status.



Then there is the scenario where you keep deliberating about a possible future and how things may pan out. Thinking about how bad the economy is may lead you to *ponder endlessly on how your investments are going to be worthless, how you may lose your job or how you may never be able to send your kids to college.*

In any of these scenarios, overthinking the situation means that you can't think about anything else and it starts to affect your life in a negative way.

## **The Problem With Overthinking**

Since overthinking seems to mostly revolve around negative or problematic issues, these can take hold of your mind and exert their power over it. It is very typical for most people to obsess over previous mistakes, present day stresses and future troubles and not do anything to improve their situation.

Here are some common problems associated with thinking about every trivial thing in life:

## **Overthinking creates problems which are not there**

Overthinking about every little problem only magnifies it manifold. Also, thinking about the same thing time and again makes it larger and scarier than it actually is. *Ever spent time ruminating why your boss didn't comment on your presentation in a recent meeting? Was it because your presentation was bad? Did it make you look incompetent in front of your colleagues? Are you going to be fired for making a sub-par presentation?* You get the idea.

The same can also happen when you overanalyze a good thing. Even in scenarios where you keep thinking about something over and over again can diminish its importance and make it appear insignificant.

Things like choosing what to wear for a job interview or deciding where to go on vacation are not difficult decisions, but being an

overthinker can make these seem like life or death decisions. Ironically, all that thinking won't help you make a better choice.

## **Overthinking keeps you from living in the present**

When your mind is constantly worrying, thinking and analyzing, you miss out on a real chunk of the present. Overthinking stops you from living in the moment and lets you dwell in the past or a possible future in your mind.

When you are not in the present, your brain shifts into something called the default mode which is when the decision making part of your brain does not work well. Research also points to the fact that when in default mode, the brain expresses lower levels of activity when you are involved in a task and higher levels when you are not engaged.

This means that it works harder when you overthink which is not a good thing, since allowing the brain to be in a state of constant anxiety can lead to other behaviors like anger and depression which are all toxic to mental health.

## **Overthinking disturbs sleep**

If you are an overthinker, then you already know you can't sleep since your mind won't turn off. Even at night, you are unable to rest the mind or turn off the numerous channels in the brain. The mulling continues and the brain becomes more exhausted than ever.

And even if you do manage to get some shut eye, overthinking will impair the quality of your sleep. You will be less likely to sleep well after you have been thinking about the same thing over and over again.

## **Overthinking impacts mental and emotional health**

At some point overthinking becomes the mental habit of giving birth to ideas and thoughts that are not real. It is a nifty trick that plays tricks on your mind. If anything, it tricks you into believing that you are on your way to solve your problem. It offers protection



against threats like failure, embarrassment and rejection by limiting your actions to the minimum.

As a chronic overthinker, you operate under the mechanism that thinking everything out will let you control every situation and find the perfect solution to every problem.

Instead, quite the contrary happens as overthinking can have negative effects for both mental and physical health. Unsurprisingly, the same can also lead to emotional distress.

## **How To Stop Overthinking**

Prone to overthinking and overanalyzing, people waste a lot of time inside their own brains when they should actually be minimizing such thoughts and making them as productive as possible so they don't get in the way.



The overthinking keeps most people rooted in uncertainty, fear and doubt keeping them stuck. Whether you have been putting off getting a house for a few years or because you can't find the perfect one, or because you struggle to be productive as every choice you make takes up too much of your time, overthinking will drag you down.

However, you don't have to be an overthinker for ever. Before you can take any kind of action, you need to stop yourself from overthinking.

There are a few different ways to go about this problem. And while these tips may not entirely quiet the mind, they will stop you from overthinking for a while. They can help slow down the mind and help you focus on the moment.

## **Recognize the problem**

The initial step to quieting a frenzied mind is acknowledging that there is a problem. So to cope with overthinking you need to be aware of when it's happening. A good way to start is to take a look at how overthinking is actually affecting your daily life.

*For example you may be concerned about why your colleague hurrying down the hall didn't make eye contact with you. If the thought bothers you and you let it go thinking you'll ask that person if everything is alright the next time you see them, you're okay. But if you start obsessing about why they were avoiding you, could it possibly be something that others know about and you don't, and the thought sticks with you, distracting you from your work obligations, then you are in trouble.*

In most cases, overthinking is brought on by the most basic of emotions, fear. With all your attention focused on the adverse

things that *may* happen, it is not difficult to become helpless. So when you sense yourself spiraling in that particular direction, stop. If you have to think, then think about everything that may go right, keeping the positive thoughts up front and present.

## **Put things in a larger perspective**

It is not at all hard to succumb to the lure of overthinking small events in life. And when you do so, just ask yourself if the thing you are thinking about so hard, will it even matter in another four weeks let alone four months or even four years? If you widen your perspective using this one simple question, you may well find that it is very easy to snap out of thinking too much and let go of the situation.

Changing the time frame may be helpful in shutting down overthinking.

## **Find a distraction**

Sometimes when you can't take immediate action, you can try to entertain your mind instead. You can look for a hobby, an activity or some other task that occupies your mind. Whenever you find a

distraction, you stop overthinking and ultimately the wandering thoughts begin to disappear.

An example would be to go out for a run or jog. Exercise is a great way to clear the mind of obsessive or spiralling thoughts. Exercise gets your endorphins and blood circulating with activities which trigger you to move and put you in a positive mindset.

Some people turn to meditation for the same effect while others listen to music or practice personal rituals. The important thing here is to involve the mind in activities which are totally unrelated to your worrying thoughts.

## **Making a decision**

Not all decisions will affect you for life, so treat them as per their importance. If you find that making a decision takes forever, then set out a game plan first. For instance, if you don't set a time frame for when you need to finalize a decision, then you will likely keep turning the thoughts in your head and be stuck with them for a rather long time.

Instead you need to improve your decision making skills and get into action by establishing deadlines in daily life. For smaller

everyday things like whether to wash the dishes right away or after watching your favorite show, give yourself less than a minute to decide and move on.

For somewhat bigger decisions, give yourself till the end of the work week and decide how to go about it.

## **Single tasking**

Single tasking helps you keep your focus intact and finish what is most important first. This eliminates the need to overthink things through while also pacing your day, giving you enough time to rest as well as recharge.

If you are not used to it, you may think that single tasking will slow you down. However, what it does do is set you up with a relaxed mindset with improved focus that allows you to concentrate with clarity and make better decisions. This also prevents you from avoiding ending up stressed and prevents overthinking.

Single minded work also prevails because it allows you to reach the real depth of what you do, appreciate the action you took and enjoy it as well.



## **Minimize daily input**

The amount of input you receive, whether at work, school, home, or through your social media clutters your mind. The greater the input the more you have to respond and the harder it becomes to keep things simple.

It is important to realize that you can't and shouldn't have to be part of everything. So stop trying to think everything through to deliver the perfect result. There is no way you can be in control of everything so step outside your comfort zone and take some action despite the risk of making a mistake.

Of course, this is not all possible in one go, so do it in small steps if you like.

## **Let go of perfection**

Which brings us to the next point. Everyone aiming for perfection needs to become more realistic. Being ambitious is great but looking for perfection in everything is not only unrealistic and impractical, it can also be highly debilitating.

While everyone does overthink situations occasionally, those who are overthinkers are bombarded with a torrent of thoughts every day, all the time. Incessant overthinkers rehash every conversation they have and second guess each decision they make in search of perfection.

But the problem with this is that thinking overly about an issue often engages much more than words. In fact, overthinkers create different images in their minds and the overthinking stops these people from getting anything done.

## **How To Take Action**

Creating a plan is the first step towards taking action and that often means pushing towards the thing that you would normally avoid. It is a step moving towards what is uncomfortable or what scares you.

What makes taking action so difficult for people who overthink is that fact that action typically goes against their impulse. What is easier is to simply mull over a plan for the umpteenth time and

deceive yourself into “playing it safe” (which basically means *not doing* anything until you think you know what to do).

However, your potential to predict the future is quite slim. And it really is hard to see the possibility of success if all you have experienced is failure. Yet it is only after a number of failures that most people get a chance at success.

This fear fixates overthinkers into inaction. It convinces them into believing that inaction does not hurt. However, while you may play it safe temporarily, it is important to realize that inaction may not hurt you now, but it will hurt you for the rest of your life.

And the longer you choose inaction over action, the harder it becomes to act.

Here are some ways to cut the cord and step into taking action:

## **Just do it**

Nike got it right when they chose “Just Do It” as their slogan. This step will help you snap out of overthinking making you do what needs to be done right away. By now you know that you can’t really just sit around and think your way out of something.

But just doing it sounds a lot easier than going through with it, especially if you are an overthinker. This step also involves cutting ties with your thoughts and emotions. (Not all ties, but just the irrational ones holding you back). This means disregarding what your thoughts are babbling about and how your emotions are trying to hold you back. It is perhaps the best reminder to focus on the present and forget about everything else.

This however, does not mean that thoughts and emotions are useless. However, sometimes, and you often know when, they do hold you back. If you can disassociate with these temporarily, it becomes easier to act regardless of what others have to say.

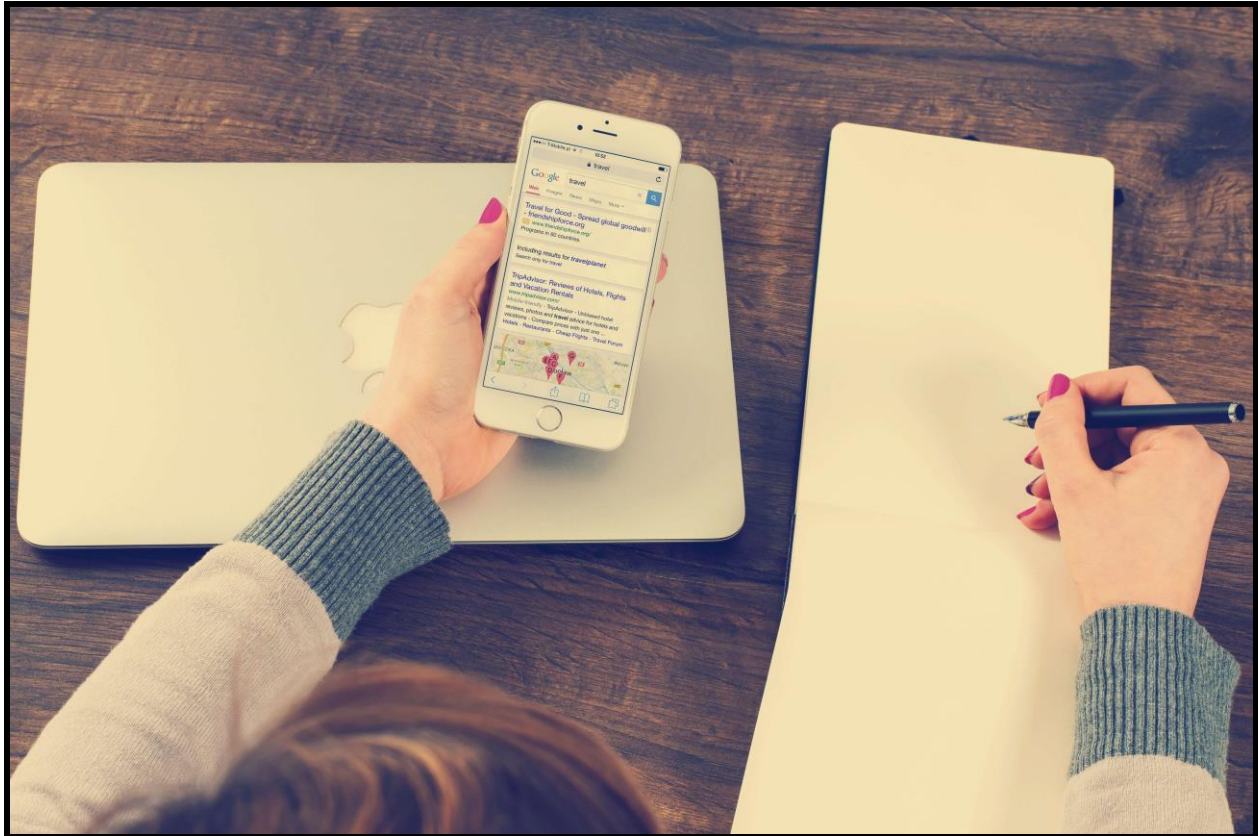
This step can be particularly helpful if you are trying to establish a new habit, or quit an old one. Take the example of quitting smoking. By identifying less with your thoughts and emotions, you will improve faster and stick to your habit until it sticks to you.

Just doing it is also useful when you don't feel like doing something. For instance, your new habit may be to exercise everyday but today you may not feel like working out. In this scenario, you can find a lot of excuses not to work out and slack off, but doing it without any regard for these excuses may surprisingly make you feel better.

Exercise is known for boosting mood so once you start, you may find out that you flip around mentally, and what felt like a drag before actually helped make you feel better and turned the rest of your day around.

## **Become result oriented**

All actions work towards getting results. If you make this your motto, you may find that it becomes a lot easier to get the job done. Becoming result oriented is also a very effective mindset for productivity and one that scoffs procrastination.



When you take action to get to a result, everything else becomes insignificant. Only the result remains relevant and this mindset automatically puts all your focus into the action that you take.

There are also a few advantages to becoming result oriented as you work toward your target. First, there is the drive to action. And then there is flexibility.

For instance, if one action does not work as planned, then you improvise and get things done another way. Since the result is all



that matters, you will change how you do things to get there. This promotes flexibility.

Here is an example of result oriented action: *You have to do the dishes, but it is not the most exciting of chores. However, if you are result oriented, then you will look at the scenario as something like this- you want to have an organized and clean kitchen and you need to get the dishes done to achieve that. You will do so quickly without giving it too much thought since that will get you the result you wish for.*

## **Hold yourself accountable**

This is a good check to monitor your actions versus inaction. When you hold yourself accountable to yourself, you establish your own principles and standards of behavior. This is the first step.

But it is easy to cheat your way out of your own accountability, especially if no one else knows what you are up to. You may be tempted to rationalize your inaction to yourself and take a cheat day or two off. So another way to ascertain action is to tell others about your plans.

By being accountable to others, it becomes harder to not do something as promised. If a bunch of people know what you are going to do, you would not want to disappoint them by inaction or will have to face up to them the next time you see them. This tip can work well for some people but may not be for everyone. It may put some at risk for taking action only to avoid judgement and create pressure within themselves.

But if you feel that you can create accountability for yourself to your standards, it may be more helpful when taking action than the one you receive from being accountable to others. You may need to feel your way through both options to see what works best for you.

## **Lighten up**

This may seem a little out of sorts, but it is important not to take everything so seriously. And people who overthink tend to do exactly that.

Taking things too seriously is perhaps one of the most effective ways to discourage yourself from being proactive. After all, there could be *serious consequences* and *repercussions* of the action you take, tells the mind of an overthinker to the person.

This possibility makes taking action feel too large, too difficult and too intimidating all at the same time. Having too serious a mindset is a one-way street headed to creating big problems and negative feelings from pretty much nothing.

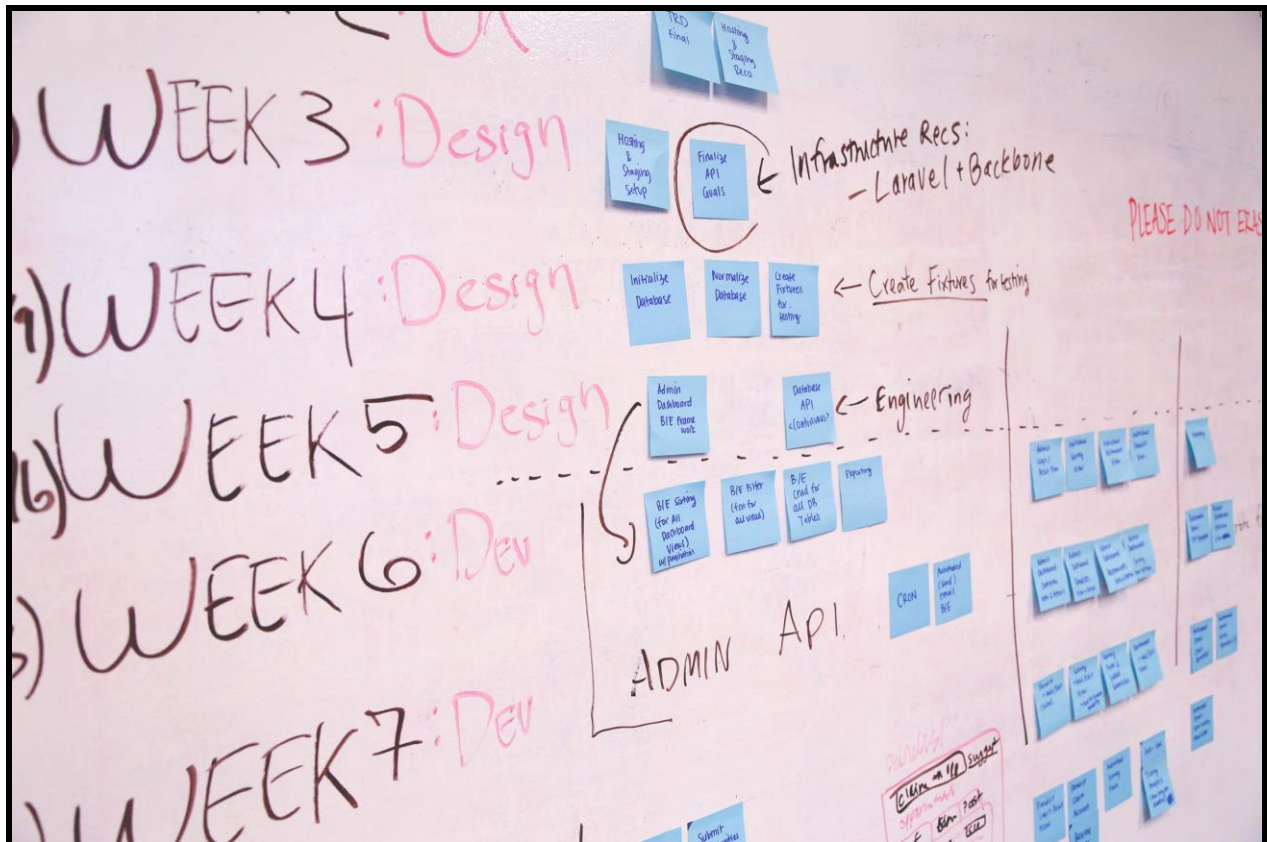
But if you relax a little and ease off, you will realize that the issues and negative emotions wandering inside your mind are simply the mind's own creations and nothing more. Without such a negative state of mind your projects will also appear lighter and seem less cumbersome to get started on.

Too often overthinkers fail to discriminate between what is of importance and what isn't, since they think about everything. On the other hand, lightening up will also help you distinguish the important stuff from the unimportant leaving you more time and energy for what really matters in life.

## **Prepare a to-do list**

If you pair the previous step up with preparing a to-do list, taking action can become even easier. When you have a to-do list on hand,

it becomes a visual reminder of what needs to be done and where to take the action. Visual reminders are also a great tool to limit the wanderings of a rambling mind.



Plus, the list also acts as a filter to separate the important things from the unimportant. You (or your busy mind) need not worry about things that are not on the list.

When creating your list, do keep in mind to make it precise and limited. This is important as it is easy to become overly passionate when penning down what needs to be done. Or, you may end up

making a long list that eventually starts to fill you up with dread, makes you feel weary and sets in the temptation to procrastinate.

Instead it is better to have a short list of just three to four items max, and everything else can go on a different list. A shorter list will be less frightening and make it simpler to take action and get the work done.

## **Get rid of the “what if”**

The “what if” dilemma can really do a number on your mind. It can lead you to devote days, weeks, months, and in some cases even years just contemplating about what might happen should you take action.

A better suggestion instead is to redirect the focus from “what if” to “how”. Rather than let your mind meander over “what if”, think about the course of action you will follow to do something, solve a problem, or get to a goal. How you plan on achieving all of these things and what you must do to get there is a better and more relevant way to engage the mind.

Focusing on “how” to take action not only puts your thinking skills to better use but also helps establish a positive outlook. It replaces resolve with irresolution which in turn makes it quicker to take action in the absence of overthinking possible scenarios.

## **Conclusion**

To sum up, quieting an on-the-go mind requires active participation on your part. You can only do so when you stop being a constant worrywart and put some kind of action into motion.

While some anxiety and worry are normal, overthinking everything takes it beyond the bounds of normalcy if it starts to affect routine life. Still, breaking the habit with a few simple changes can help to free your mind and become proactive to take action rather than be fixated in the negative.



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