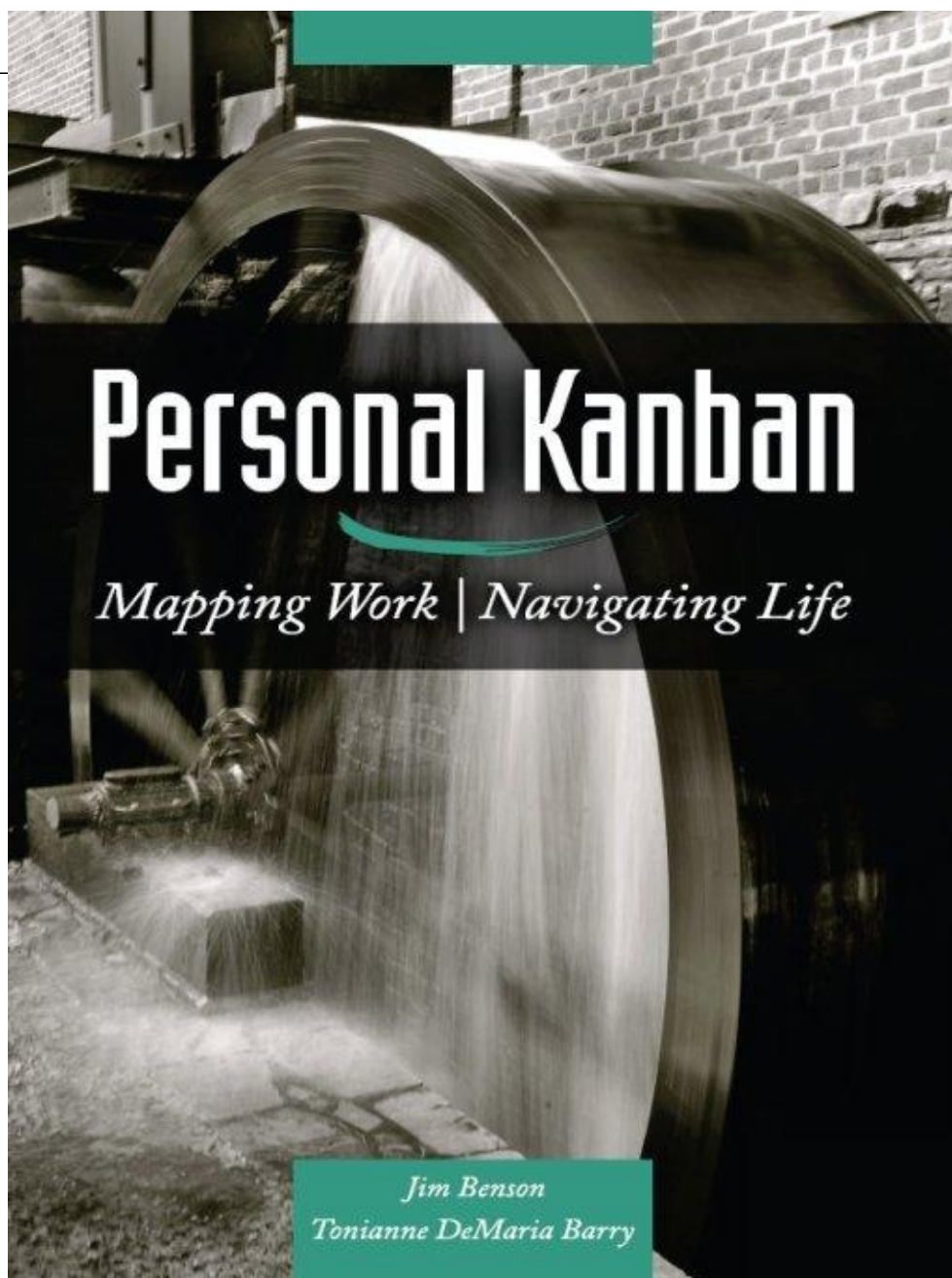


A black and white photograph of a watermill with a large wooden wheel and a stone basin. The water is in motion, creating a blurred effect. A teal rectangular block is at the top center, and a teal curved line is below the title.

Personal Kanban

Mapping Work | Navigating Life

Jim Benson
Tonianne DeMaria Barry



ACCLAIM FOR PERSONAL KANBAN

We're all constrained to just 1,440 minutes a day, so balancing work, family, and social responsibilities can be a challenge. The simple innovation of visualizing your work and limiting multitasking, explained in this engaging book, has me addicted and is paying off big time. It just feels more natural than other approaches and gives me a tool that I can use to manage my work and calendar instead of the other way around.

~ Michael A. Dalton
Author of *Simplifying Innovation*

Personal productivity systems usually fail in practice because of complexity—they don't reflect the collaborative nature of real work. Personal Kanban provides the simplest structure that could possibly work and lets you achieve a state of flow.

~ Ross Mayfield

As an executive tasked with managing and creating innovation, my mind never gets to stop work
5pm. In my experience professionally and at home, the methods described in *Personal Kanban* have
greatly increased my productivity and personal satisfaction. I'd highly recommend this book
anyone who feels the need to make their lives more manageable and their use of time more effective.

~ Jabe Bloo

CTO of The Library Corporation

Personal Kanban shows you just how revolutionary the technique is. It's a must read for students
senior citizens who want to do fantastic work. *Personal Kanban* is simplistic and will become second
nature; not only does it change with you and your life, it will change your life.

~ Patty Beidlema

Educator, Non-profit Organizer, Caregiver, Mom

Trying to get more effective? Why use Rube Goldberg systems of tabulated notebooks and special
purpose inserts? Instead, consider a system that flows like a stream and focuses your attention, both
on the task at hand and on making your process more effective. That's what *Personal Kanban* is, and
may just fit your thinking and doing style.

~ Jerry Michals

guide, Relationship Economy eXpedition

An important new addition to the transliteracy toolbox. And I'm enjoying the iPhone app!

~ Sue Thom

Director of the Institute for Creative Technology

De Montfort University

Personal Kanban

Mapping Work | Navigating Life

*Modus Cooperandi Press
A Division of Modus Cooperandi, Inc.
1900 Nickerson Ave W, Suite 116-BB
Seattle, WA 98119*

Copyright 2011, Modus Cooperandi, Inc.

*Designed by Wayworks
Manufactured in the USA*

*ISBN 1453802266
EAN-13 9781453802267*

PERSONAL KANBAN

Mapping Work | Navigating Life

by Jim Benson and Tonianne DeMaria Barry

© 2011 Modus Cooperandi Press

Cover Photo: © 2009 Tonianne DeMaria Barry

Taken At: Aldie Mill, Aldie, VA

E-book ISBN: 978-0-578-07985-1

Cover Design: Wayworks

Back cover cartoon by Jim Benson using ToonDoo: <http://toondoo.com>

Image on page 5, "Kanban Team at Work" used with permission by Kenji Hiranabe

Base image on page 49, "Trafficjam" used with permission by Lynac -

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/lynac/321100379/>

DEDICATION

Life is long. Life is short. We never do anything alone. Decades after they left this earth, the following people continue to inspire us. Their words and example at once fill our hearts and leave a void. It is their memory we gratefully and lovingly dedicate this work.

For Jim:

Corey Sean Smith Who was the first person to truly help me realize my creative side. Who taught me that creative, intellectual, and spiritual expression were one and the same. Who was always more interested in doing than worrying. Who has never left my side.

Nellie Gray Hill Benson Who was around very briefly in my life, but has always been a model of what success really looks like. Driven, unassuming, uncompromising, flexible. You play the hand you are dealt.

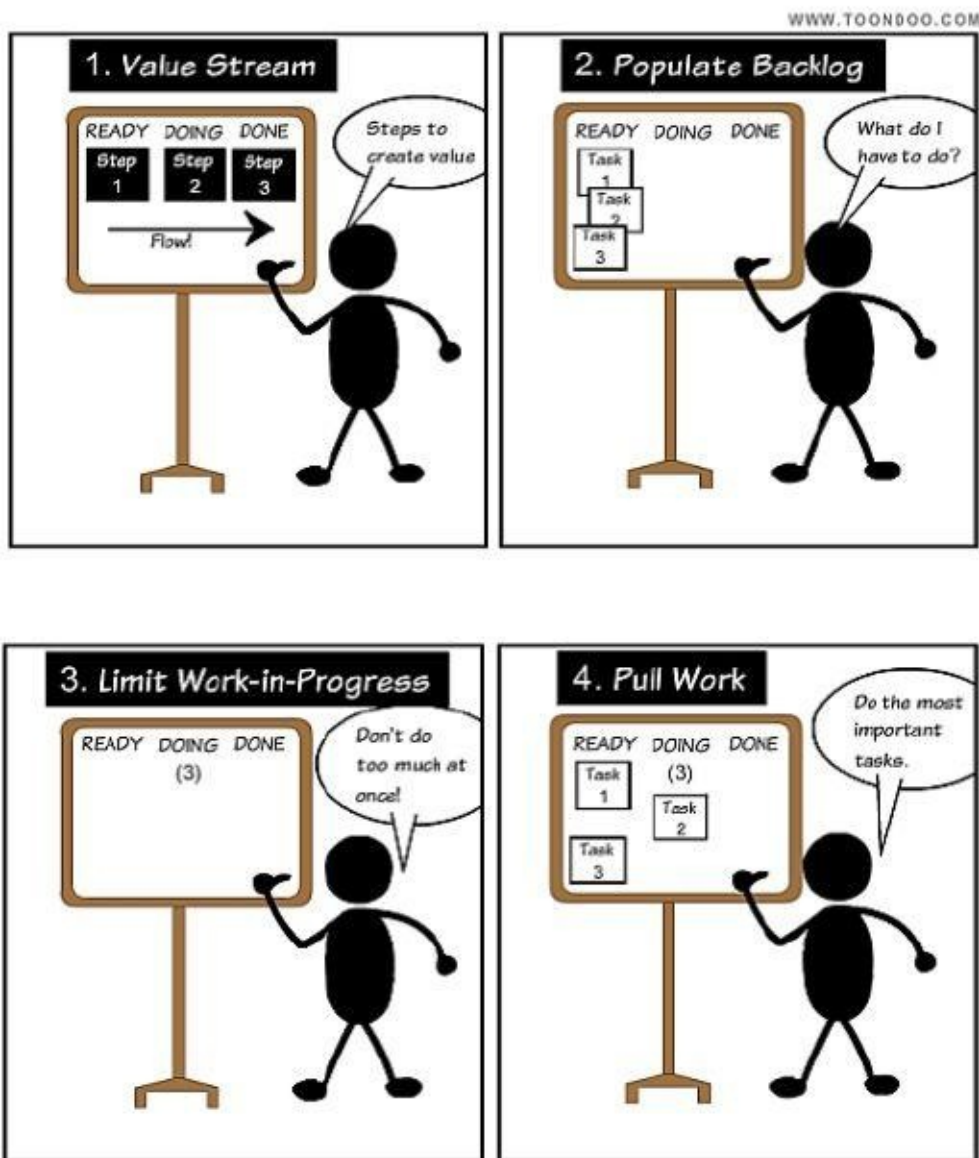
For Tonianne:

Robert G. DeFelice Whose passion for the arts was rivaled only by his unbridled generosity and the enormity of his heart. My very own Uncle Drosselmeyer, he showed me from an early age you are never too old for fairy tales, magic truly exists, and angels most certainly walk among us.

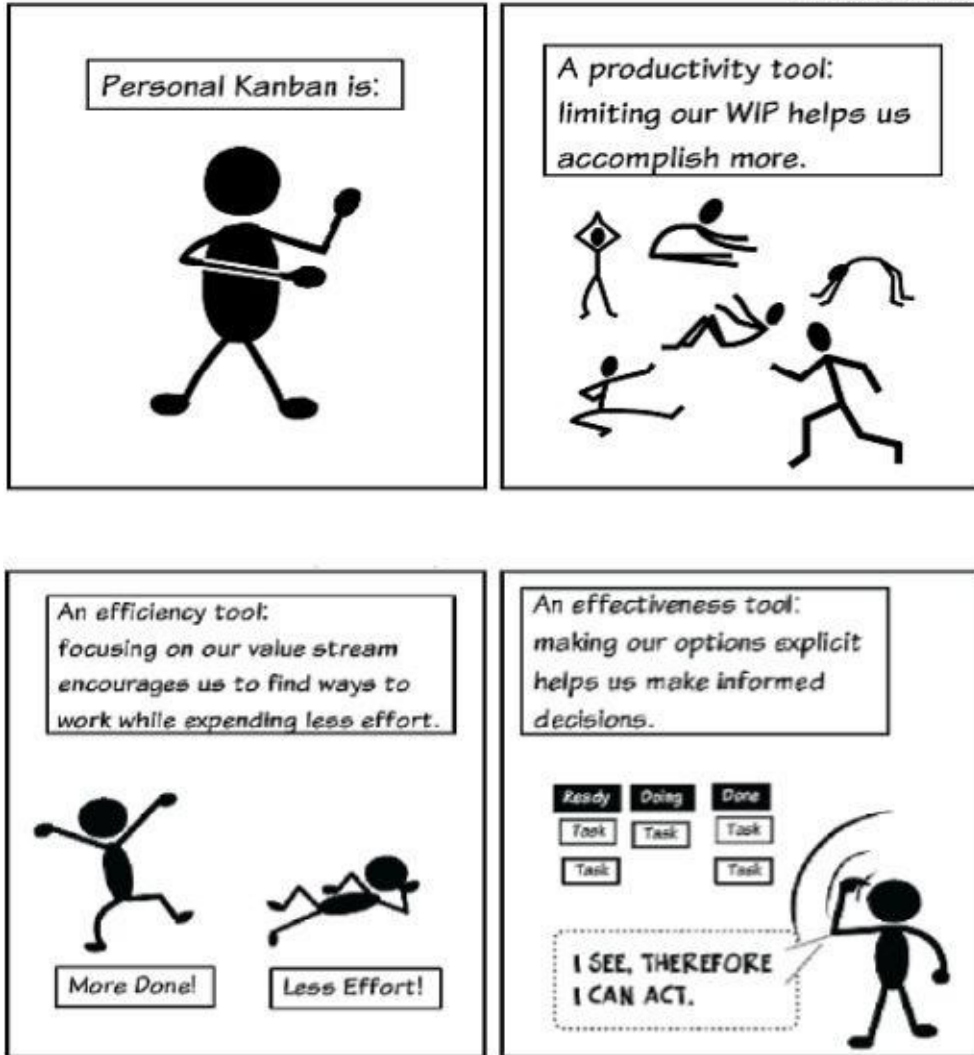
Anthony A. DeMaria Whose passing was an incomprehensible loss, but whose faith in me is eternal. He was and remains my greatest teacher, and his words continue to inspire me. His fierce loyalty

insatiable thirst for knowledge, distinctly Neapolitan sense of humor, and appreciation for *la bella vita* are but a fraction of his bountiful legacy. It was a privilege to call him Daddy, and is a profound honor to be his namesake.

PERSONAL KANBAN IN FOUR FRAMES



Kan-ban is a Japanese word for "sign board."



Personal Kanban provides context for our work, allowing us to go beyond mere productivity and experience greater efficiency and real effectiveness.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[TITLE PAGE](#)

[COPYRIGHT PAGE](#)

[FOREWORD](#)

[The Agony of Crisis Management](#)

[INTRODUCTION](#)

[Personal Kanban: 100% New Age Free](#)

CHAPTER 1

The Basics of Personal Kanban

[Towards a More Personal Kanban](#)
[Rules for a System That Abhors Rules](#)
[Why Visualize Your Work: Navigate Safely](#)
[Why Limit Your WIP](#)
[Why Call it Personal Kanban](#)
[How to Use This Book](#)
[PKFlow Tips](#)

CHAPTER 2

Building Your First Personal Kanban

[Step One: Get Your Stuff Ready](#)
[Step Two: Establish Your Value Stream](#)
[Step Three: Establish Your Backlog](#)
[Step Four: Establish Your WIP Limit](#)
[Step Five: Begin to Pull](#)
[Step Six: Reflect](#)
[Personal Kanban Power Boosters](#)
[What it All Means](#)
[PKFlow Tips](#)

CHAPTER 3

My Time Management is in League with the Freeway

[Flow Like Traffic](#)
[Setting WIP Limits](#)
[Living the Days of Our Lives](#)
[Clarity Calms Carl](#)
[To-do Lists: Spawns of the Devil](#)
[PKFlow Tips](#)

CHAPTER 4

Nature Flows

[Flow: Work's Natural Movement](#)
[Cadence: Work's Beat](#)
[Slack: Avoiding Too Many Notes](#)
[Pull, Flow, Cadence, and Slack in Action](#)
[Busboy Wisdom: The Nature of Pull](#)
[PKFlow Tips](#)

CHAPTER 5

Components of a Quality Life

Metacognition: A Cure for the Common Wisdom

Productivity, Efficiency, and Effectiveness

Defining a Good Investment

Reality Check

PKFlow Tips

CHAPTER 6

Finding Our Priorities

Structure, Clarity, and Our Ability to Prioritize

Smaller, Faster, Better:

Controlling Task Size and Limiting WIP

Prioritization in Theory and Practice

Urgency & Importance

Live Your Own Life

Expert: Metrics in Personal Kanban

PKFlow Tips

CHAPTER 7

Strive for Improvement

Clarity Conquers All

Course Corrections:

The Reality of Reprioritization

The Bedrock of Introspection

Retrospectives

Solving Problems at Their Source

PKFlow Tips

ENDGAME

Endgame

APPENDIX A

Personal Kanban Design Patterns

Jessica's Story: Future in Progress and

Multiple Value Streams

Sequestering Approach:

Dealing with Repetitive Tasks

[Emergency Response Approach:](#)

[Taming Unexpected Workloads](#)

[Time Capsule Approach](#)

[Balanced Throughput Approach](#)

[APPENDIX B](#)

[Personal Kanban and Social Media](#)

[Facebook](#)

[Twitter](#)

[Blogging](#)

[FOREWORD](#)

[THE AGONY OF CRISIS MANAGEMENT](#)

As an avid reader of business literature and a recovering human capital practitioner, most recently Deputy, Human Resources at the Central Intelligence Agency, (retired), I've found *Personal Kanban* and *Mapping Work | Navigating Life* both insightful and timely. As we all cope in our own way with managing our work schedules and balancing our personal lives, others' expectations of us and our expectations of ourselves, we all suffer from work and information overload. While attempting to keep pace with the myriad knowledge flows, three dimensional conversations and constantly changing priorities among competing workflows, it is imperative that each of us forms new ways with which to adjudicate work; interact with our professional and personal colleagues—and our calendars—with due consideration for balancing what I like to call our “crap to fun” ratio.

Let's face it: technology precedes anthropology. The knowledge explosion, advent of social tools, new enterprise architectures, and complicated multifaceted workflows coupled with the exponential expansion of available knowledge and information is having a profound impact on how and when we do our work. This new knowledge environment is also impacting how we function both physically and mentally. The seemingly constant pressure to make hundreds and even thousands of decisions per day, some large and some small, and then act on those decisions is innately stress-inducing. Some have postulated that even our physiological brain development is being altered by virtue of how much time and focus we expend online, via mobile devices and constant access to information on demand.

Amidst this chaos and increasing pressure to function at a high level in a digital world where every keystroke is persistent and every thought expressed digitally impacts both our productivity and our personal brands, we are all personally challenged to keep our promises to others and ourselves, to balance work and family, the physical and the spiritual—while all around us our environments a

evolving with increasing speed. Here, the gift to us all is resurrecting the tried and true concept of *kanban*, a “just in time” means of visualizing future, current, and past workflows that worked so well for the likes of Toyota (before their current challenges) and others—and then applying this framework personally as Personal Kanban.

Years ago while serving in a particularly demanding overseas position, I cut out an ad for an organizational software product (I don’t even recall which one) that read: “Escape the agony of crisis management.” I posted this on the whiteboard in my office, which I used both to communicate with my staff and, unwittingly, to categorize future work and work in progress against goals and objectives. In its day that whiteboard served as an analog social network—as various employees came in to post updates and share information. It wasn’t until reading this book that I realized how much better my personal productivity and health could be if I were to use that same approach in my personal and professional life. This work makes this methodology so clear and applicable to our personal lives, I now once again am using a whiteboard at my consulting practice using Personal Kanban as my roadmap.

The approach is both simple and elegant; clear and commonsensical. Without pretense or irrational demands, Personal Kanban offers several options for achieving better balance and peace of mind as we set about our daily tasks. From visualizing your workflow, understanding that your capacity is not the same as your throughput, to taking time to note your completed tasks (something at which I am very lacking, preferring instead to pummel myself immediately with the next task), I have learned multiple lessons from this book. It belongs on the bookshelves, Kindles and iPads of every student of health, personal and professional productivity. It is the kind of work that deserves to be bookmarked, highlighted and referred to often as we all tackle our dynamic workloads, while constantly prioritizing and reprioritizing the next steps in our shared but personal journeys. Hopefully, you will find it equally useful, amidst all of today’s distractions and high expectations, in escaping the agony of crisis management and balancing your own crap to fun ratios.

Tom McCluskey
Deputy, Human Resources (Retired)
Central Intelligence Agency
November 2010

Personal Kanban



Mapping Work | Navigating Life

INTRODUCTION

PERSONAL KANBAN: 100% NEW AGE FREE

I hesitated writing anything in this book that would smack of dime-store self-improvement or seem unnecessarily huggy and harmonically convergent. I wanted this to be a fun read—a practical one, be sure—but certainly not one that promises the holy grail of time management. You'll find here no unwarranted claims of travel on the astral plane, or spiritual salvation through tracking your work. I am no self-help sufi or productivity pontiff. I simply want people to make conscious, informed decisions about the actions they take.

Professional life. Personal life. Social life. They are often treated as separate entities, but our lives and insights cannot be segregated. ~~Work / life balance is a false dichotomy; compartmentalization is not sustainable.~~ It forces life's professional, personal, and social elements to vie for attention, bringing with them seemingly competing expectations and goals. When we compartmentalize our lives, the elements become pathological, pushing us from one task to the next in an effort to satisfy their own jealous needs.

A leisurely weekend spent with loved ones, a perfectly manicured lawn, a winning business plan, an impromptu night on the town. Family time, work time, what we create, what we enjoy—it's all living. It's what makes you who you are, me who I am. Ideally we would find a balance between our daily routine, the obligations we feel compelled to satisfy (but don't excite us) and activities that rejuvenate us and feed our souls. This can prove challenging, because money is both a necessity and a major distraction.

For most of us, at least half our waking hours are spent at our place of employment. We measure work by measuring time: billable hours, punches of the clock, overtime. We assess our time at work by its monetary value: the hourly rate, the project bid, time-and-a-half. We approach and validate our work with an economic mindset: we work because we're paid. When we lack the tools to expand our relationship to work—our participation in it, our control of it—we become careless about what it is that we actually do. An economic view of our work becomes our *only* view of our work. When time becomes a function of income rather than personal or professional value, we become psychologically and emotionally detached from our actions.

If our goal is to live and work with meaning and purpose, this is not the approach we want to take.

As a supervisor and as an employee, I observed the impact of exchanging hours for dollars when time sheets were due. *What the heck did I do on Wednesday?* became a familiar lament. People were working so hard to complete work, they forgot what they had actually accomplished. There was no time to revel in accomplishments or even notice they had occurred.

We're all guilty of this, squandering our precious time merely trying to get by. We sequester joy for our evenings and weekends, scheduling time when we allow ourselves to live, rather than living all the time.

Fulfillment should not be considered an indulgence.

The following scenario is not uncommon: we go to work, we have little visibility into our co-workers' actions while at the same time, we offer them little transparency into our own. We are told to do work but seldom understand why. We crave and deserve *context*. Without context, being told what to do is a communication failure. We cannot make informed decisions or create a quality product without first understanding *why* we are doing what we are doing. Lack of context creates waste, resulting in long work days, poor planning, and the inability to keep commitments outside the office.

Hoping to avoid these common mistakes, I turned to the world of productivity and time management. I soon discovered that while the tools had useful applications, implementation was often cumbersome and convoluted; the tools became chores. They took my time, energy, and focus. Some robbed me of

my self-control. Even worse, most of these tools were solo flights, offering little opportunity for collaboration. ~~Those sorts of tools didn't work for me. Tools should give you control and not take anything.~~

I wanted to track and communicate my progress beyond the walls of my cubicle. I wanted to know where and when I could help my colleagues. I wanted collaboration and effectiveness for me and my team. I wanted a map of my work depicting not only the tasks at the office, but everything that mattered to me. Rather than being pushed by life, I wanted to pull life along with me.

I wanted Personal Kanban.

Personal Kanban is a simple, elegant mechanism that produces dramatic results. It helps us manage ourselves, but also lets us share our work, our goals, and our epiphanies with others. It's a visual launchpad to personal effectiveness, spontaneous collaboration, and an integrated life. It's low maintenance, but high yield. No crystals, no aromatherapy—just you, your work, and better planning.

CHAPTER 1

THE BASICS OF PERSONAL KANBAN

Resident of the 21st Century, consider:

Your boss wants you to finish that report.

Your accountant wants you to file your taxes.

Your friends want you to show up for tee time.

Your garden wants you to prune the hydrangea.

Your daughter wants you to attend her recital.

Your father wants you to call your mother. *It's been two weeks, you know.*

Your bathroom wants you to re-caulk the tub.

Your spouse wants you to just be present.

Confronted with endless obligations, you are overwhelmed. Faced with an onslaught of demands, you can't remember if you ate breakfast, much less deploy the mental reserves you need to survive the next two hours.

Is this as good as it gets?

Right now, all those things on your plate are just concepts. They are hard to prioritize, hard to analyze. You need a way to actually *see* the tasks you're expected to perform so you can do the right work at the right time, and bring some clarity to the chaos. Personal Kanban is a visual representation of work.

that makes the conceptual tangible. It shows what needs to be done, what is complete, what is being delayed, and what is going on at this precise moment.

There's a martial arts concept known as *Shu Ha Ri*, a cycle of learning where first you learn the basics, then you question them, and finally you find your own path. It's not uncommon for someone coming to a book like this to want to be told what to do and how to do it, without ever understanding *why*. They want quick steps to easy living. Life is not like that. It is variable. It changes whether we plan for it or not. Our systems need to be flexible to adapt to this variation. So, in this book we describe not only the mechanics of Personal Kanban, but also the principles behind it. We want you to understand the *why* and not just *how to*. Afterwards, you can discover how Personal Kanban practices fit into your life.



TOWARDS A MORE PERSONAL KANBAN

It's been well over a decade since I first began exploring ways to visualize workload to better manage myself and my teams. From 2000 to 2008, I co-owned a software development company called Gray Hill Solutions with my partner William Rowden. Gray Hill created collaborative software for the government, usually in the area of Intelligent Transportation Systems. It was there that I first experimented with several visualization tools, including to-do lists, mind maps, and concept maps. To some extent, they all helped our teams see their work, but they weren't without their shortcomings. They would clutter quickly, fail to convey urgency, and become confusing when ad hoc team members collaborated on a particular item.



Of all the tools we explored at Gray Hill, floor-to-ceiling whiteboards covered in to-do lists proved to be the least effective. Rather than motivate us, we found them patronizing and demoralizing, revealing little more than the volume of work we faced. Thinking the medium might be at fault, we turned to databases, backlog management tools, even Microsoft Outlook to try to get lists to work for us, but the

results were always the same: lists offered our work zero context, allowed for no reorganization, reprioritization, and obscured vital priorities beneath piles of marginally useful work.

What we needed was a system that was dynamic, one that would help us prioritize and show us what we were currently working on. We then experimented with managing several large, concurrent projects using a shared mindmap. Using this visual control during our daily 15 minute stand-up, we were able to manage a shared backlog, pull tasks from that backlog, and limit our work-in-progress. ¹



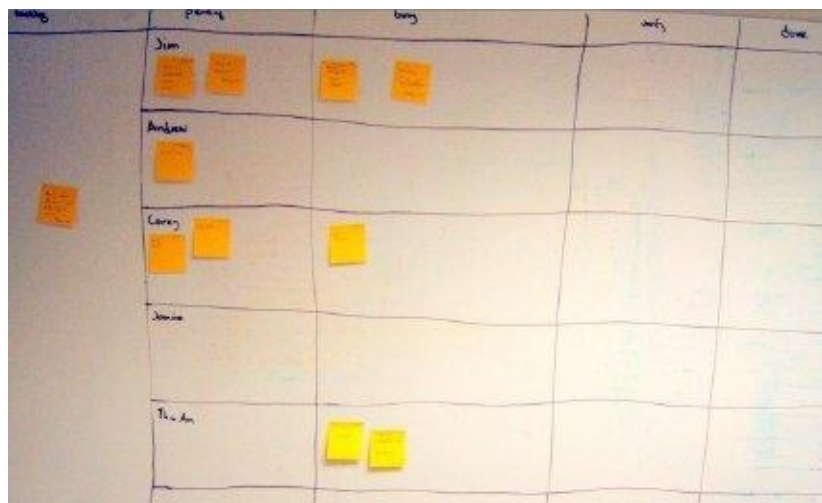
The mind map made Gray Hill staff positively giddy. It was the first time our geographical dispersed group had a constant and fairly comprehensive idea of what was going on. But while the mind map was a significant improvement over the to-do list, it was still lacking. It didn't help complete tasks or distinguish between work shared by multiple people. Its greatest limitation was that the information conveyed was not obvious. Text-based and small, with 8 point type on tiny branches it offered us little ability to get a status-at-a-glance. As a project management tool it was useful, but wasn't the information radiator we were seeking.

Fast forward to 2008. Corey Ladas, David Anderson, and I started Modus Cooperandi—a company built around collaborative management. At this point we'd all been using kanban-based management systems for software development: David and Corey at both Microsoft and Corbis, I at Gray Hill. With kanban, we visualized the current work of our development crew on sticky notes as they traveled through a value stream—a graphic depiction of the steps in the software development process. The system was both simple and effective.



Kanban for software development worked great for managing software creation, better than anything we'd used before. Its focus on team work increased productivity and effectiveness brilliantly. But we were overlooking a vital element—the individual team member. We still needed to understand how processes impacted our personal work.

It was at Modus that Corey and I put our heads together and created a *personal* kanban to visualize and manage our team's personal work. Our board was specifically designed to be an information radiator we wanted it to show the flow of our work (even from a distance), limit our work-in-progress, and capture all tasks, not just those directly related to software production.



We paid close attention to the board's nuances. During our weekly retrospectives we discussed what was working, and what wasn't going as expected. We experimented with various formats, exploring ways in which this new tool worked best for the individual, and where it performed best for the team.

One thing was certain: in front of our board, we experienced our most intense focus, enthusiasm, and camaraderie. For the first time we could visualize our work—we could see its relationships and contexts—and we could interact with it. Beyond simply validating our productivity, our board fostered discussions that were expansive, enthusiastic, and revelatory. It stretched us far beyond our daily goals, taking us into exciting new realms of possibility.

We were operating under some basic assumptions taken from Lean manufacturing models.³ We were visualizing work, limiting our work-in-progress, pushing decisionmaking to the last responsible moment, and continuously striving to improve. We learned that understanding our work is the key to controlling it.

In a manufacturing setting, organizational kanban visualizes how value is created, usually in the service of reducing waste and creating standard work. Adhering to this rule proved difficult in an office dominated by knowledge work. Knowledge work fights vigorously against standardization.⁴

It would take one more transition and several epiphanies to get beyond these issues.

In the middle of 2009, Corey went on a year-long sabbatical. Around the same time, I was offered a long-term opportunity in Washington D.C. Since David had left Modus to start his own company in late 2008, it made sense to close the office that after ten years and two businesses was packed with files, furniture, and work products.

Suddenly I was forced to deal with land management and insurance companies, telephone and internet service, selling office furniture, and finding temporary housing in D.C. The window to deal with the logistics was just a few short weeks and there were still client demands to be met. My personal life didn't take a break, either. I was moving across the country, and still had responsibilities to the two properties I owned in Washington State.

Even with the help of some very good friends, I found myself with more commitments than I could handle. The demands of multiple companies, clients, projects, and homes threatened to destroy my sanity. The overlapping nature of my work life, home life, and social life became clear. My need to quickly complete a disparate, overwhelming backlog produced a series of epiphanies:

- » Personal projects materialize out of nowhere.
- » Personal projects are often short-lived.
- » Personal projects can have their own unique visualizations.
- » Personal work is often unpredictable.
- » Personal work is difficult to manage.
 - » The only way out is “through.” Often, you can't delegate, procrastinate, or ignore personal work.
- » Context dictates the way we prioritize our personal work.
- » Prioritization for personal work happens at the moment of doing.
- » Other people's expectations of you do not disappear simply because you are overworked.
- » Personal and professional life are not distinct and should not be artificially separated.
- » Risk for individuals is inherently different from risk for a company.

CRAPBAN

OBJECT	ASSEMBLING		PROCESSING	COMPLETED	NOTES
	ING	ED			
3 ENTERPRISE CLAIM	X	X	X	MM	PERMITS DETERMINED w/ 1st
5 CANCEL WATER	X	X	X	MM	THINK HOME EVAL GOT IT
2 HEALTH INS	X	X	X	MM	NEED QUOTATIONS FOR NEW POLICY
4 ESTES PAYMENT	X				
1 JUNE BILLS	X	X	X	MM	
10 CANCEL INTERNET					
8 STORAGE UNIT					
7 CRAIG'S LIST	X				
11 MONITOR					
9 P.O. BOX					
12 NEW BUSINESS	X				
15 E FAY	X	X	X	MM	
14 DETAIL					

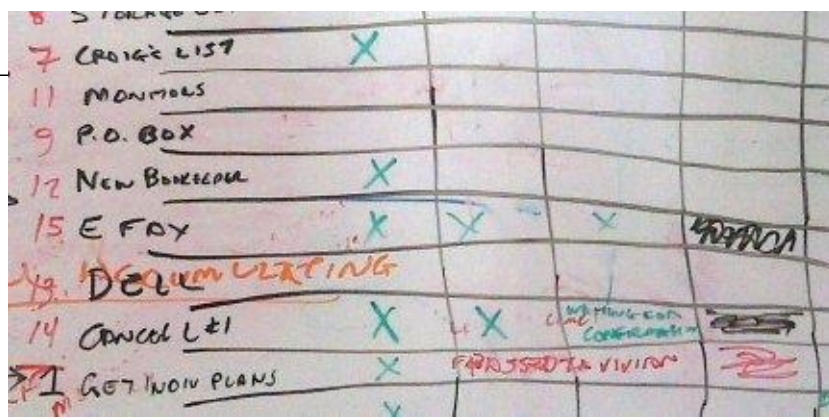
I came to the realization that—like this photo—personal work is *messy*. “Organizational” kanban used to seek predictability in work through visualization and refinement. While personal work can be calmed and tamed, it resists standardization. Therefore, “Personal” Kanban needed to be flexible enough to relate to an extremely variable or even chaotic workload.

I needed insight into how my work was being carried out, and how best to calm the stress. So I built that kanban—affectionately known as “Crapban.” It was designed to deal with my laundry list of epiphanies, most important of which was that it needed to elegantly manage a highly variable workload and react to a dynamic work-in-process limit.

And it worked!

In a short span of time I burned through a substantial amount of work. When I was done, I knew exactly what I had accomplished, how long it took, what obstacles held me up and why. I was elated. My Personal Kanban showed me exactly what I’d done—*quite the opposite of not knowing what to put on your timesheet!*

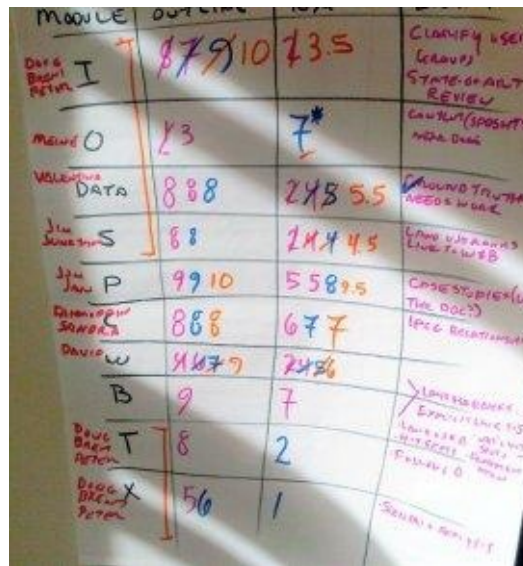
Note: If you look closely at the left side of the Crapban grid, you’ll notice I gave all those tasks initial prioritizations. Looking at what was accomplished, you can see that my initial prioritizations were quickly overcome by events. Premature prioritization was ultimately a waste of my time. Prioritization for personal work is highly contextual. Case in point, “Cancel L&I” was initially scheduled as task #14, but L&I called unexpectedly one morning and most of what I needed to accomplish with them was easily handled during that call. The context changed and so the priorities changed.



Soon after I arrived in D.C., Tonianne DeMaria Barry and I continued to use, test, and blog about Personal Kanban. The approaches we wrote about were variations we used to get beyond my frenetic office closing and cross-country move, and begin doing business with our new clients.

It wasn't long before we began hearing from people around the globe who read the blog and tried Personal Kanban. Some were using it to organize their households, some to track student progress in their classrooms, some to manage a family member's treatment for a life-threatening illness.

Opportunities to use Personal Kanban professionally soon followed. Our engagement with the World Bank reinforced the flexibility of the Personal Kanban model. Planning to use it with a global team of scientists and researchers, we quickly discovered the Personal Kanban featured in most of our blog posts didn't fit with their unique needs. They needed to track more than simply work. Their content demanded that they track real-time issues, individual progress, and team progress every 20 minutes. We immediately created a new Personal Kanban visualization to display these elements and manage their particular workflow.



Personal Kanban has to be endlessly flexible. It needs to be a system that abhors rules. It's an enigma. A process that hates process.

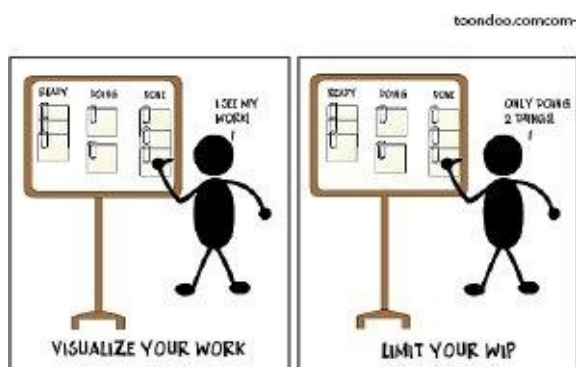
How is this even possible?



[RULES FOR A SYSTEM THAT ABHORS RULES](#)

All too often companies respond to business needs by shopping for “proven” solutions, repeatable processes to achieve a desired outcome. They call these “best practices,” which for many translates into *Don't tell me why something worked, tell me how they did it*. Rote, universal solutions exhibit little respect for the individuality of a problem, and epitomize lazy management. Their adoption often spawns professional organizations which certify legions of consultants selling one-size-fits-all processes. The end result is that good initial ideas become codified and ineffective industry dogma.

Imagine if I told you I had a simple, ten-minute technique—or worse yet, a twelve month program—guaranteed to fix any broken marriage simply because it was built on marital best practices. How skeptical would you be? My guess (and my hope) is that your response would range between highly skeptical to downright disgusted. Instinctively, we understand that every relationship has its hardships and its happiness. On a personal level, we intuitively recognize that life is fraught with variation.



We appreciate and accept this variation when it comes to interpersonal relationships. So why not accept it in all aspects of life, including business?

Our lives are not static, and neither is our work. Personal Kanban evolves as our context changes, encouraging us to innovate and invent in response to the variation we encounter daily.

Our goal with Personal Kanban is to say *No* to those who presume to have our work all figured out. To say *No* to imposed processes that limit our ability to create false hopes of enforcing predictability.

The Two Rules of Personal Kanban

Rule 1: Visualize Your Work.

It is challenging to understand what we can't see. We tend to focus on the obvious elements of our work (deadlines, individuals involved, the amount of effort needed) when the real context includes larger, unexpected, and more nebulous elements (passage of time, changes in the market, political impacts). Visualizing work gives us power over it. When we see work in its various contexts, re

trade-offs become explicit. We now have a physical record of all those demands on our time. The larger view of our work and our context allows us to make better decisions. We can heartily embrace one task, while politely declining another.

Rule 2: Limit Your Work-in-Progress (WIP).

We cannot do more than we are capable of doing. This should seem obvious, but it's not. Our capacity for work is limited by a host of factors including the amount of time we have, the predictability of the task at hand, our level of experience with the task type, our energy level, and the amount of work we currently have in progress. Limiting WIP allows us the time to focus, work quickly, react calmly to change, and do a thoughtful job.

With Personal Kanban, principles take precedence over process. Process should change with context. Whether you choose to use a whiteboard or the back of a napkin, the underlying principles of visualizing your work and limiting your WIP remain constant, giving you the minimum structure to remain in control.

Think of Personal Kanban as a dynamic, interactive map that surveys your personal landscape for what excites, worries, or amuses you. It reveals what lies ahead (your goals, your upcoming tasks), where you are currently (what you are doing now), and where you've been (what you did, how you got here).

Like most maps, Personal Kanban depicts a wealth of information. It shows you:

- » What you want.
- » What you do.
- » How you do it.
- » Who you do it with.
- » What you complete.
- » What you leave unfinished.
- » How quickly you do things.
- » What causes your bottlenecks.
- » When and why you procrastinate.
- » When and why certain activities make you anxious.
- » What you can promise.
- » What you can say *No* to.

Mapping our work allows us to navigate our life. It makes obvious not only the course we need to take to reach our destination, but also the terrain—revealing the amenities at our disposal and the roadblocks along the way. It plots our work's context (the people, the places, the conditions, the effort, the trade-offs), helping us to envision our real options. We begin to understand how we've made decisions in the past, and how we can make even better ones in the future. When we see the landscape of our work, we identify better courses of action because we have clarity.



WHY VISUALIZE YOUR WORK: NAVIGATE SAFELY

You get into your car to visit to your Grandma Tess. You adjust the seat and the mirrors, start the engine, and back out of the driveway. Navigating the streets of your hometown is deeply ingrained. You know where your grandmother's house is, you know the shortest route and the safest way to get there. Despite the fact that you've been making this trip for twenty years, you continue to rely on your vision of the road and the instruments in your car. You check your speed in the school zone. You make sure you have enough gas for the return trip home.

Your speedometer and gas gauge are "information radiators," passive yet indispensable objects that broadcast vital conditions such as the current state of your vehicle and the progress you've made thus far. Information radiators help us operate our vehicle safely and navigate our course effectively.

We don't dare drive without watching the road or checking our gauges, but oddly enough we manage our work blindly all the time. We don't visualize our tasks or rely on information radiators to alert us when our work might veer off track or require intervention. At best, we use deadlines to track our progress, even though deadlines are imposed, inflexible, and often don't respect our current context. Based on assumptions about the future, deadlines fail to take into account actual, real-time information.

We know our car gets approximately 400 miles per tankful. We know we last filled up around 250 miles ago. We know that city driving consumes more fuel than highway driving, and that missing an oil change can lower fuel efficiency. While we might be able to infer the level of our tank by our mileage, we would never buy a car without a fuel gauge. Without seeing the real-time impacts of our fuel consumption, it is likely we will run out of gas.

As automotive technology has become more advanced, we have more information radiators than ever before. As a society, we are becoming more demanding of our machinery. We expect real-time information from our cars, our phones, and even our kitchen appliances. We should demand no less from our work.

Personal Kanban is an information radiator for your work. With it, you understand the impacts and context of your work in real-time. This is where linear to-do lists fall short. Static and devoid of context, they remind us to do a certain number of tasks, but don't show us valuable real-time information necessary for effective decision making. It would be like covering your fuel gauge with a note telling you to *Buy gas when you need it*. The message is there, but the information is not. Personal Kanban gives us context, and shows us how that context impacts our ability to make decisions.



Cookie and the Cocoa Puffs

Growing up, I had a dog named Cookie. That's us over there. I'm reasonably sure this photograph was taken just a few weeks shy of this story, around 1978 or so.



Cookie didn't have the most discriminating taste, she ate everything. My family has countless stories and tales of leaving Cookie alone with objects three or four times her size. We would come back to find not a trace of them, impossibly ingested by the unfazed poodle.

One night my brother Dave and I were watching *Logan's Run* on television, eating Cocoa Puffs from the box. Just two kids home alone having "dinner." Cookie, not surprisingly, wanted her share.

Who were we to deny her this most basic need?

When Cookie wanted something she would let you know. Her eyes would widen, she'd run around in circles, she'd make crazy noises. On that particular night, Cookie wouldn't rest and may have exploded without her critical fixx of Cocoa Puffs.

So I threw her one. And she caught it.

Then I tossed another one way up in the air. She tracked it, and swallowed it whole.

The third I threw directly at her, as hard as possible. *C'mon, it's a Cocoa Puff! You can't get a lot of velocity out of a Cocoa Puff!* She caught that one, too.

I followed up with two, then three. Cookie caught them all.

Finally, I grabbed a handful of Cocoa Puffs, and hurled them at her. Cookie panicked, her mouth hung open, her eyes tried to find to right ones to go for, her head waggled maddeningly and in the end...

...she caught nothing.

I can still see Cocoa Puffs bouncing off her nose and forehead. My brother and I thought this was hilarious.

Over and over we went through the progression. We tried four, five, six Cocoa Puffs. At four through

- [read online The Rough Guide to Ecuador book](#)
- [read online Lonely Planet Chile & Easter Island \(8th Edition\)](#)
- [read Brill's Companion to Callimachus](#)
- [read Schatten Ä¼ber Ferrol \(Perry Rhodan Neo, Band 13; Expedition Wega, Band 5\)](#)

- <http://cambridgebrass.com/?freebooks/CookFight--2-Cooks--12-Challenges--125-Recipes--an-Epic-Battle-for-Kitchen-Dominance.pdf>
- <http://chelseaprintandpublishing.com/?freebooks/Kale--The-Complete-Guide-to-the-World-s-Most-Powerful-Superfood.pdf>
- <http://growingsomeroots.com/ebooks/Brill-s-Companion-to-Callimachus.pdf>
- <http://schroff.de/books/Why-the-World-Does-Not-Exist.pdf>