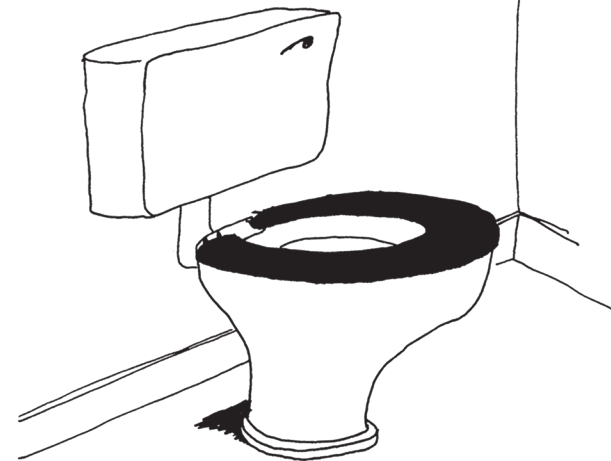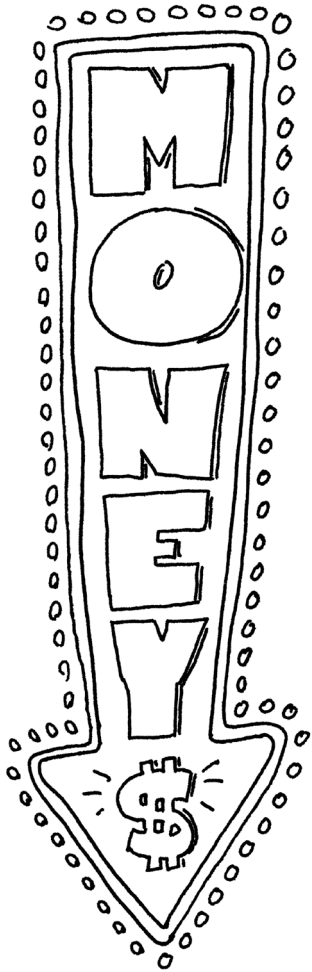# Why Creative People Need Time Management

A good artist has less time than ideas.

— Martin Kippenberger

'IDEA' DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

**A business that makes
nothing but money
is a poor business.**
— Henry Ford

Don't follow the money

People regularly allow themselves to be led by money. Often, money is their excuse not to do what they really want to do. But money is a means, not an end in itself. If you truly want to do what you love, money can never be an excuse not to do it. Neither is it always a good reason to do something. I have often worked on projects with the thought "I can earn some good money with this". Virtually all of these projects have perished, because there was no soul in them — the primary goal was making money. Follow your heart, not the money.

How to Know What You Want (What You Really Really Want)

The Taxi Experiment teaches us that if you have no idea where you want to go, you will end up someplace you are not even sure you want to be. Admittedly, knowing where you want to go — approximately — is not easy. You have to dare to be honest with yourself to know what you truly want.

**Don't limit yourself. Many people limit
themselves to what they think they can do. You
can go as far as your mind lets you. What you
believe, remember, you can achieve.**
— Mary Kay Ash

Ask yourself this question: "What is something I would be raring to do any day?" Keep your answer in mind while doing the following exercise.

→ Make a list of things you would really like to do.
→ Review the list and be honest. What activities have you added with the thought: "That could also earn me money"? Strike those options and replace them with activities that you hadn't yet dared to write down, due to that little voice inside your head telling you "I couldn't possibly". Don't listen to this voice; add what you want to the list. Including the things that, at first glance, may have nothing to do with work. Simply write down the things that you get excited about.
→ Take your list and pick the 3 things you would like to do most.

There's a chance that your list has surprised you. It probably contains things you might not initially offer up when being asked about your goals. No problem. Let it sink in for a bit.
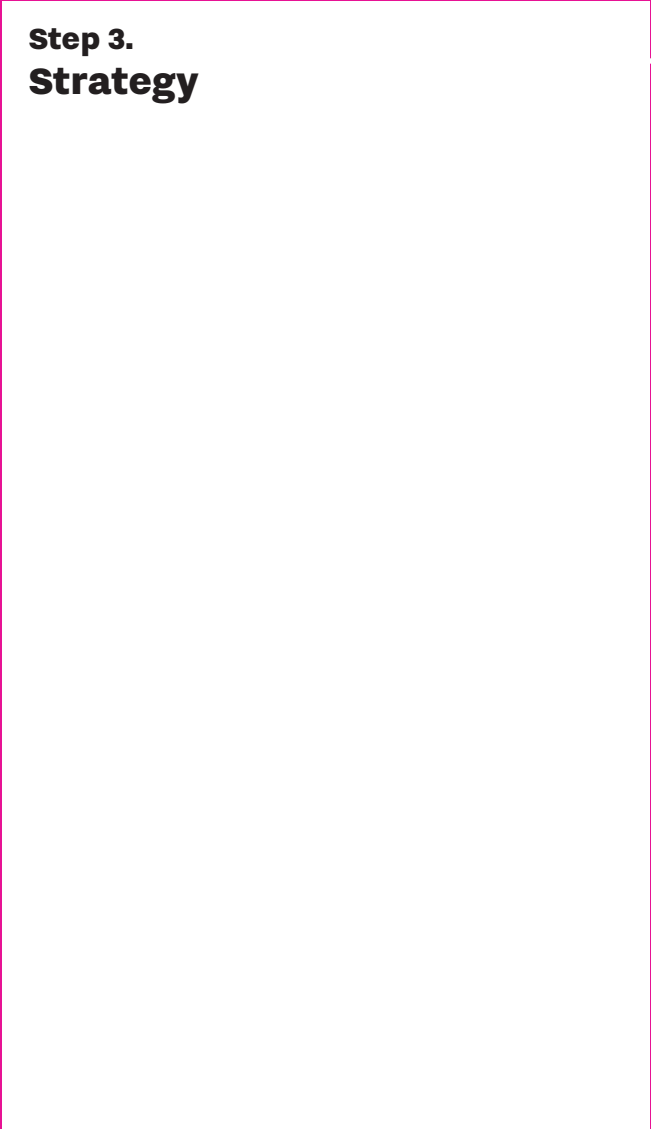
Make a Life Plan in Three Steps

Step 2.
Where I currently stand

Step 3.
Strategy

Step 1.
Goals

Time is the raw material of creation. Wipe away the magic and myth of creating and all that remains is work: the work of becoming expert through study and practice, the work of finding solutions to problems and problems with those solutions, the work of trial and error, the work of thinking and perfecting, the work of creating.

— Kevin Ashton

[How to Fly a Horse]

Note to the reader: This chapter will mainly be of interest to free-lancers or independent workers. However, whenever a 'client' is mentioned, you can also read 'boss' or 'manager'. Students could in some cases replace 'client' with 'teacher'.

Daily Routine

**Get on a daily routine…
Working is a process not a product.**
— Nicoletta Baumeister

The Dutch writer-journalist Hans den Hartog Jager wrote a beautiful book on artists' working methods. He interviewed fourteen of the most important contemporary artists based in the Netherlands, among whom Constant, Armando, Marlene Dumas, and Robert Zandvliet. There were great differences in their methods, but the major thing they had in common was that they each had a routine: a fixed way of working.

The mind of a creative is a chaotic fusion of ideas and thoughts. The only way to convert that chaos into work is to ensure that you organize your daily life. President Obama wears a blue or grey suit every day; Mark Zückerberg is always dressed in a hoodie. They both claim to have so many choices to make on any given day, that they don't also want to choose their clothes. In short: save time on trivial matters to make time for those that actually need your focus.

I like routine. It enables me to improvise.
— James Nares

Creativity is being boring (most of the time)

At the end of a meeting for a new project my client asked me: "And how will you get started on the project? Will you go lie down on the couch to think about it?" "No," I replied, "I'm going to get to work." He expected me to find my inspiration by relax-ing on a couch. Perhaps fuelled by liquor and a snort. I had to disappoint him: it's not all that bohemian or romantic.

Office Hack #4: Singletasking

With the rise of the Internet and mobile phones, the expectation is — more than ever — that we can carry out various actions at the same time. And of course we can. The only question is: how well?

In this text, tweet, twerk world that you've grown up in, remember that just because you're doing a lot more, doesn't mean you're getting a lot more done.

— Denzel Washington

The myth of multitasking

Whoever does two or more things at the same time, needs to divide their attention. Chewing gum while you walk is not so complicated. Having a phone conversation while you walk will ask for more concentration and will make you less aware of where you're going. But it is still possible to do both at the same time. As soon as you carry out two or more activities that both require conscious thought, things start to go wrong. Try writing an email while making a phone call.
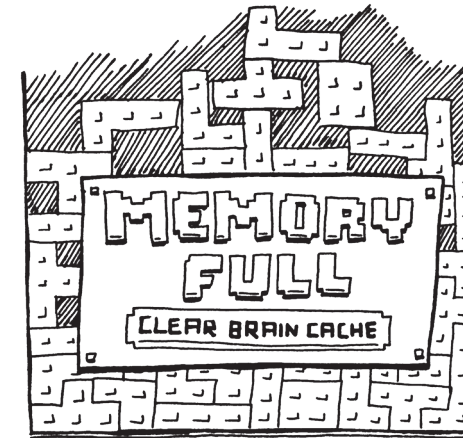
Your memory is full

Your brains are simply not built to multitask. You cannot do two things at the same time with an equal intensity of attention. Really doing things at the same time is not possible anyway. When multitasking, your brain constantly switches between the various tasks. And every time you switch, your brain starts from scratch. The information entering your mind becomes highly fragmented. This causes you to only make half-baked connections in your brain and reduces the chance that the information will eventually end up in your long-term memory to a minimum. So, if you are reading this while calling, you will remember very little about your call, this paragraph, or even both later on.

Missing out

Do you need more reasons not to multitask? If you're always on the phone while walking around the city, you miss out on lots of other input from the world around you. A colleague who makes music once told me: "When I'm travelling, I listen to the sounds around me. I can never put on that 'music' at home." So by not multitasking, you not only create space in your head; you might also be inspired to fill that space with new thoughts and creative ideas.

Automate everything (that can be automated)
The computer doesn't necessarily make me a better designer.
A computer is still nothing more than a digital pencil. But as
soon as you know what you want, the computer is a great tool
to help you finalize your designs. You can also have computer
programmes perform actions that would take hours if you had
to do them manually.

You can't do better design with a computer, but you can speed up your work enormously.

— Wim Crouwel

For instance, Photoshop has functionality with which you can
automate a certain act. You only have to carry out the tech-
nique once yourself, and then it continues automatically. Very
useful if you need to edit 10 photos in the same way.
    Another everyday example: smart folders in your email
programme that immediately sort your email in terms of rele-
vance.

If you know your way around coding a bit, you can even write
your own tools for letting the computer do things automati-
cally. If you don't: there is an app, website, or programme for
almost anything you wish to automate. A good example is the
online tool If This Then That (IFTTT.com). This website allows
you to create simple recipes for connecting all your social me-
dia channels to each other.

```
fill(None)
stroke(0)
strokeWidth(2)
for i in range(10):
    y = 100 + 50 * i
    line((100, y), (600, y))
```

Not everything is for today

Some clients call to ask for something they actually needed yesterday: "Can you drop whatever you're doing and get started now?" You do it, send it and hear nothing back.
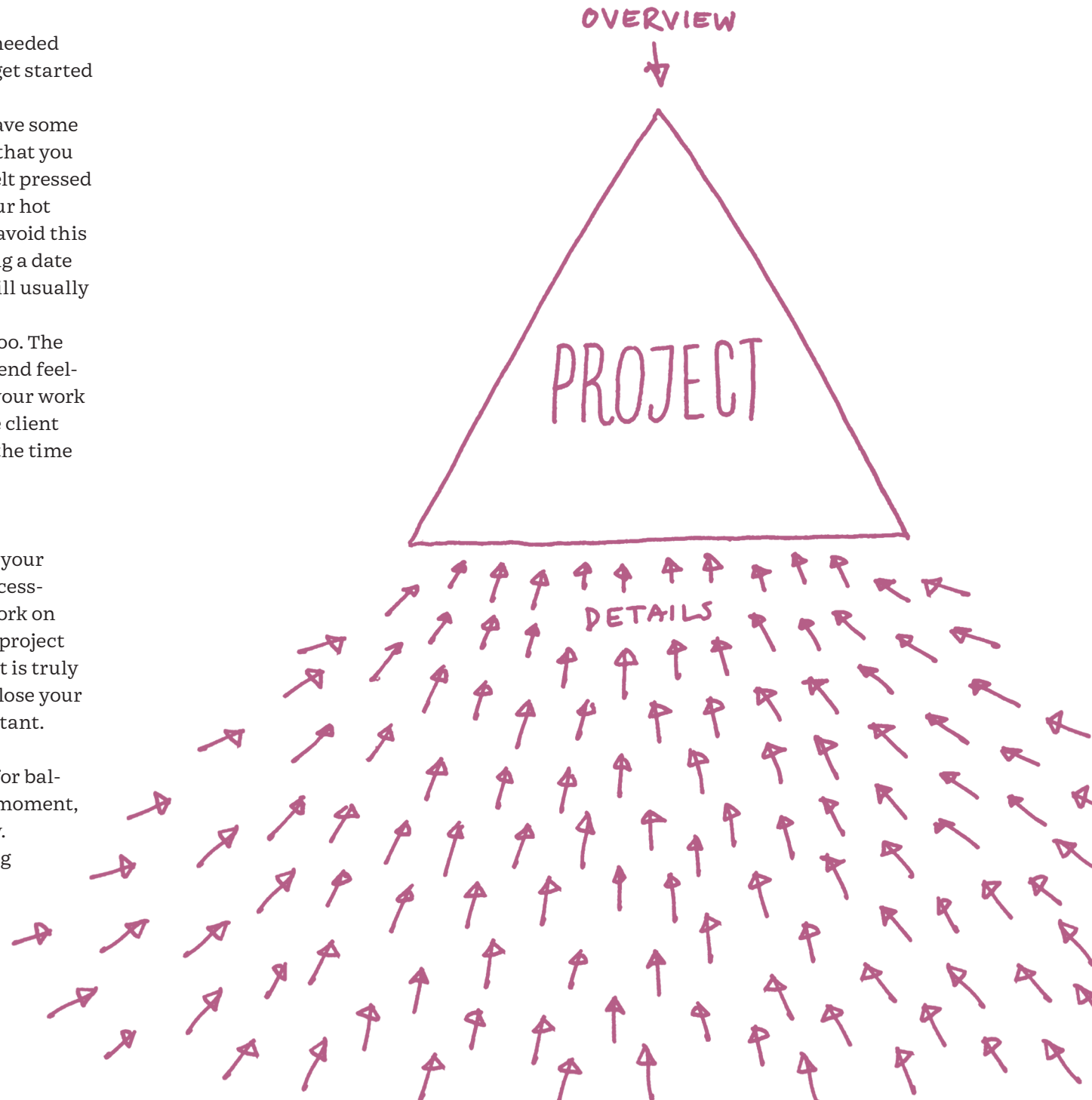
Three months later the phone rings again… "We have some adjustments to the proposal you made." That means that you actually had three months to make something you felt pressed to finish as quick as you could. You even cancelled your hot date to be able to work on this… for nothing. You can avoid this by taking the lead when you get such a call and setting a date by which you can deliver. You'll find that the client will usually conform to your deadline.

A request for delivery on Friday afternoon is odd too. The client will only ask for that in order to start the weekend feeling reassured. Do you really think your client needs your work Saturday afternoon while watching football? Ask the client whether they really need it for the weekend. Most of the time Monday morning is early enough.
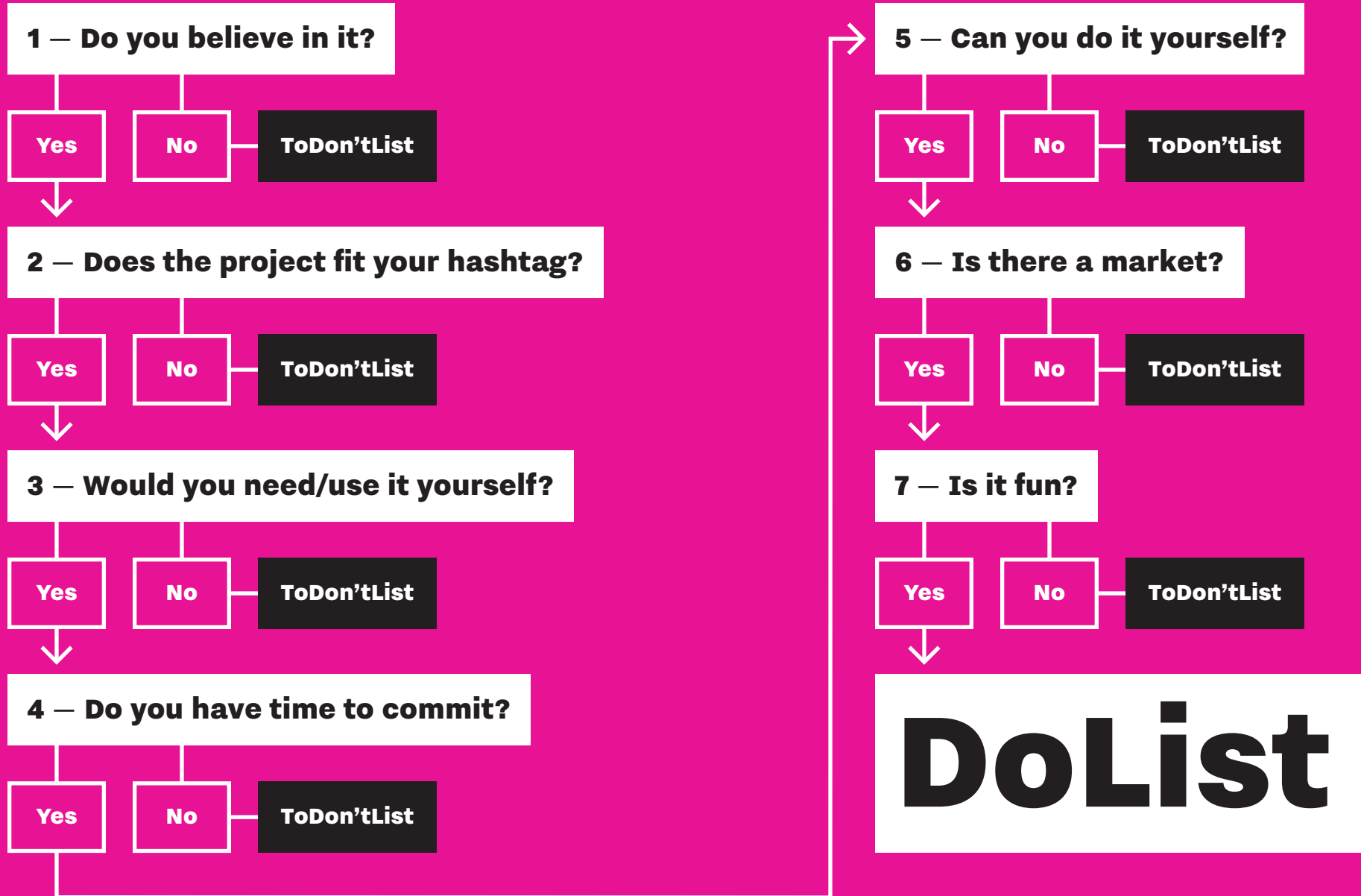
Keep a top-down overview

If you are more relaxed and flexible, you will see that your clients will respond accordingly. During creative process-es things continually change. Especially when you work on something with multiple people. Keep looking at the project on a higher level. That makes it easier to identify what is truly important. If you are too focused on details, you will lose your overview and then every little thing will seem important.

Take your work seriously, but not too seriously. Look for bal-ance. If you just cannot seem to manage that for the moment, then it is what it is. Let it go. Tomorrow is another day. Whatever you do, always make sure you enjoy working on your projects.

OVERVIEW

PROJECT

DETAILS

To-Do or To-Don't Checklist

1 — Do you believe in it?

Yes
No — ToDon'tList

2 — Does the project fit your hashtag?

Yes
No — ToDon'tList

3 — Would you need/use it yourself?

Yes
No — ToDon'tList

4 — Do you have time to commit?

Yes
No — ToDon'tList

5 — Can you do it yourself?

Yes
No — ToDon'tList

6 — Is there a market?

Yes
No — ToDon'tList

7 — Is it fun?

Yes
No — ToDon'tList

DoList

Nothing is more dangerous than an idea when it is the only one you have.

— Emile Chartier

**"I can't sketch"** — **"Oh, yes, you can!"**

Do you have a sheet of paper (notebook, A4, back of a letter, napkin, beer mat, the very table you are sitting at, if necessary)? Do you have something to draw with (pen, pencil, lipstick, anything that rubs off colour)? Can you hold it? If necessary with your mouth or feet?

Yes? Three times 'yes'? Then you can sketch. Anyone (even the occasional animal) is able to hold a pencil and draw a line onto a piece of paper. Admittedly, it is easier for some than for others. But we can all manage to jot something down on paper.

Let go of the idea that your sketch should look like those impressive sketches artists make in Moleskine books. A beautiful sketchbook can have a suffocating effect. It instantly puts pressure on you: the sketches you make in the book have to be as perfect as the book itself. And that is absolutely not necessary. All your sketches have to do is roughly reflect the ideas you have in your head. So you don't have to buy an artsy pen or a beautiful sketchbook. Just get a large sheet of paper and a pencil or a thick marker and draw.

Size matters

The thicker the marker, the better. If you use a 0.01 fineliner, you will quickly find yourself making fiddly drawings. They won't be of any use at this point. A thick marker will not allow you to get sidetracked with details that are not yet relevant at this stage. Work big; there is enough time to refine later on.
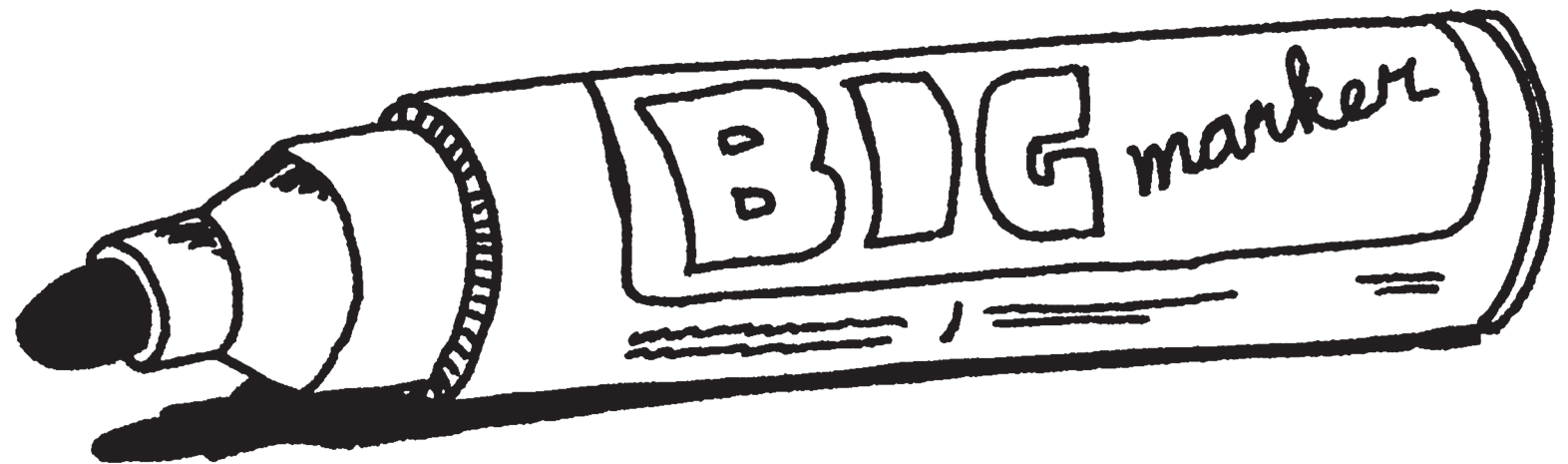
The ToDon'tList App

As mentioned before (page 23), a programmer friend and I made a ToDon'tList app, an app that helps you make choices and keep track of your goals. We created it according to the ToDon'tList method before we even called it a method.

Making of

The ToDon'tList became a household term in the studio when I ran a social media company with a friend. It was something we'd often say: "Good idea, but we'll just park it on the To-Don'tList for now." The very idea to make a ToDon'tList app also spent some time on the ToDon'tList.

That is, until I met Frank, with whom I collaborated on an entirely different app at the time. Frank was excited and said that if I could keep the app as simple as possible, he would be willing to programme it — a great example of collaboration between two people from different disciplines, but with the same passion for a project.

In order to keep the app simple, we came up with the following restrictions:

→ No more than one list

One list prevents people from creating heaps of lists again, which they will eventually stop managing, because it costs them too much time. Users can personally choose at what level they wish to use the list. Frank uses the app for programming. I use it to organize my ideas for new projects.

→ No extra sub-features

The app is just a list. You can't add any tags to your items, you can't share anything, and you can't post to social media. The app has one button: for adding something to your ToDon'tList. From there you decide whether you move this new item to your DoList.