

# **OVERCOMING OVERWHELM - 5 SIMPLE STEPS**

**an eReport**

**By**

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# Overcoming Overwhelm - 5 Simple Steps

Whether you have a chronic health condition or you're generally healthy; I'm sure that at some point in time, you've felt the heavy, dark, immobilizing feeling of overwhelm. We all get that feeling from time to time. I'm sure you'll agree that once you find yourself overcome by overwhelm, it is very difficult to maintain perspective on the issues that cluster to become a dark cloud overhead.

Overwhelm can be the result of one situation or the combination of many. However, it can generally be classified into one of the two types of chaos below:

- **Physical chaos** is usually the result of limited time, energy or organizational skills necessary to maintain an orderly environment
- **Mental chaos** results from having so many things on your mind that require attention that you are unable to focus on any one task long enough to make progress.

It's worth noting at this point that physical and mental chaos or overwhelm often come hand in hand. One frequently even perpetuates the other.

## Objective

The objective of this eReport is to give you 5 simple steps for addressing *physical* overwhelm and *mental* overwhelm. Each step will provide you with a simple "how to" that if followed will inevitably take you from "being stuck" to "moving forward".

If after you've read this eReport, you have a question or a comment that you would like to make on this process, please feel free to call or [e-mail me](#). I would welcome your feedback and any opportunity to assist you in the process of overcoming your person overwhelm.

## Definition

We've all been there... The "to do" list is longer than the hours in the day, the days in the week or the weeks in the year. Where to begin? Arhh!!! – How do *you* define "Overwhelm"?!!

One of the most common and detrimental forms of stress is overwhelm. Many people who have trouble with overwhelm on a regular basis, ultimately live in chronic stress. That constant state of overwhelm can have a profoundly negative impact on your health, as well as, your quality of life. The good news is, there *is* hope. Let me offer you a simple, 5 Step Process for overcoming overwhelm. By applying these steps to the current situation that is causing you to feel overwhelmed, you will begin to find that your stress levels are reduced and the chaos will be tamed.

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## **Step 1: STOP & Step Back**

Stop whatever you're currently doing to "pick at" the situation. You know that you are just scratching the surface and making yourself more frustrated in the process. So stop NOW!

As long as you're feeling overwhelmed by trying to sort through too much on your mind, or making no headway at all with living in a physical environment that feels like chaos, you're never going to make any significant progress. You need to step back and direct your attention elsewhere.

Go out for lunch, get some exercise, take a nap, watch a TV show, or do whatever it takes to distance yourself from your frustration for a period of time. The length of time need not be long, just long enough to clear your head and bring some fresh energy to the situation. Let it go, step back and take a break from the physical chaos or from the futile effort of tossing the mental overwhelm around in your head.

Taking the time to stop and step away from the situation, is like taking a breath of fresh air after having had difficulty breathing for a period of time. If fatigue, depression, anxiety or any other chronic illness has been an issue for you, then this step can be a very welcome relief. It's important to honour our physical as well as our mental health needs. Giving ourselves permission to "forget about it" for a while is precisely what we need to empower us to be able to move forward again.

## **Step 2: Empty & Purge**

Now that you're ready to tackle the next step, it's time to do some dumping. That's right - you have to create an empty space in order to move forward from this point.

***Physical Overwhelm*** - If we're talking about a kitchen drawer that needs organizing, that means you have to empty the contents of the drawer onto the kitchen table. No, really! If it's the closet that needs help, take everything out and put it on the bed, no where else, just the bed. I promise, just this action alone will feel great and you'll be compelled to move forward from here!

***Mental Overwhelm*** - If we're talking about a state of overwhelm in your head, then you need to empty your head of whatever's on your mind. To tackle this step, you need to get a package of index or recipe cards, or cut some letter sized paper into 4 pieces each. Plan to have 20 - 30 pieces of paper or index cards. Then, on the individual cards or pieces of paper, write down all of the "Need to Dos", "Need to Remembers", "Things to Plan" and "Errands to Run" that are bouncing around in your head and dragging you down. Continue filling these out until you can't think of one more thing to write down, no matter how small or distant it might be. WOW! Doesn't that feel great to get all that stuff out of your head? Now you are ready to move on.

### Step 3: Sort & Pile

Now that you've got either a pile of clutter on the table or the bed, or a pile of cards or pieces of paper in front of you, it's time to start sorting through it all. The key to staying clear-headed at this point is to focus on one thing at a time, and no more.

***Physical Overwhelm*** - If we're talking about the kitchen table, begin by setting up boxes, bins or bowls on the kitchen counter. You'll use each one to collect items of a similar nature.

For example:

- Kitchen items
- Bathroom items
- Bedroom items
- Garbage

DO NOT begin putting things away until the sorting is completely done and the table is clear. Same goes for the closet; make piles on the bedroom floor as you remove items one at a time from the bed.

The piles might be:

- Return to closet
- Put in storage
- Toss
- Give away
- Repair

***Mental Overwhelm*** - Now that all of the chaos in your head is written down on the cards or pages, it's time to sort. The process of sorting begins by defining categories for grouping "like with like".

Some example categories may include:

- Less than 15 minutes
- Less than an hour
- More than an hour
- Inside the house
- Outside the house
- In town
- Out of town
- Urgent
- This week
- This month
- For me
- For spouse
- For kids

Do you see how I've grouped the categories into (a) time needed, (b) logistics, (c) urgency, and (d) delegation? Your categories may differ from these examples; they may relate to different items in your house, individuals in your family or identify means of accomplishment i.e. telephone work, domestic tasks, work-related projects or errands to run. It doesn't matter as long as you're clear about the criteria for your categories. Now, sort, sort, sort, until you have no more cards or papers in front of you.

## Step 4: Prioritize & Schedule

Now that the overwhelming pile or list has been sorted into small piles or individual tasks, you'll probably notice that your energy has changed. The concept of cleaning out the drawer or the closet, or tackling anything at all that was amidst the chaos in your head is not quite so overwhelming. That's because you've broken the big picture down into snap-shot sized pieces. Next, let's put some order to the snap-shots.

***Physical Overwhelm*** - Now that all of the items are sorted, it's a great deal easier to judge what to tackle first. Using the example of the kitchen drawer, at this point, you likely have boxes, bowls or baskets all over the kitchen counter.

Prioritizing, at this point, is as easy as arranging the baskets (or whatever) in the order of their importance, their destination's proximity to the kitchen or the ease of moving them to their appropriate final resting place.

***Mental Overwhelm*** - Now that you've got all your tasks sorted and categorized, you're ready to prioritize. Obviously, some things will be more urgent than others; some will require delegation to other people, and some will need to be postponed until some other task is completed or situation is resolved. This step may even require some further categorizing. Now that you have got everything in piles, go through each item with these three criteria in mind:

1. Urgent
2. Non-urgent
3. Long-range

Some piles can remain a group because the tasks would be more effectively completed together. Other piles may get split up according to their priority. When you have finished this step, you will have a really clear idea of what needs to get done and when.

## Step 5: Take Action & GROW

Once you have gotten to this step your sense of overwhelm will be GREATLY reduced. You may even be looking forward to jumping into action and feeling good about it. If you are, then go for it! If not, take a break to re-energize yourself.

***Physical Overwhelm*** – The piles, or bowls or baskets are calling you now. It's likely you're feeling *compelled* to finish the job at this point because putting things where they belong is a natural extension of what you've already accomplished. In the end, you will have a number of bowls and baskets to put away and a good reason to put your feet up and relax. So, whatever belongs in the bedroom, bring that bowl of items to the bedroom for distribution. Is there a bowl of stuff that belongs in the garbage? Do it! Whoo Hoo! When you're done, you'll have a tidy drawer or closet. The items that didn't belong, will now be in their proper place, in the garbage or in a box to be donated. How great does that feel?!!!

***Mental Overwhelm*** – Obviously, the first tasks to take action on are those that are most urgent. Among those, start with the ones that will take the least amount of time. Doing the little things first will help break the inertia of in-action and propel you with new energy into the things that will take longer. Next, assign and record deadlines to the non-urgent and long range items on a calendar or in a date book. It's most effective if you use a scheduling tool that you look at every day. I personally use an electronic task manager so that I can move the tasks if I need to. Using post-it notes in a datebook would work also. Another option is to post the cards or pages on a wall or a bulletin

board to give you a visual sense of your priorities. Each time you accomplish one, take that card down and celebrate the success. There, didn't that feel great?!

The completion of Step 5 is *not* when everything is completed, but rather when everything has been looked at, prioritized and scheduled. When you're done, your sense of overwhelm will be history!

Those things that nag us the most are the ones that once accomplished, have the most potential for making us feeling great about ourselves.

So, what corner of chaos in your life will you tackle today?

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**



Trish Robichaud is a Disability Awareness Coach living with major depression and multiple sclerosis. Her passion is helping people to maximize their quality of life in spite of a chronic health condition or a disability. Through the process of coaching, she takes her clients from a state of overwhelm to a comfortably paced lifestyle.

Trish facilitates monthly TeleConnections events at no charge to participants as well as publishes a free monthly electronic newsletter.

She is also available to facilitate workshops on "Living Well with Chronic Illness", "Disability Awareness" or for motivational speaking engagements. Trish is truly genuine and always "says it like it is". Her style is highly interactive and her participants always leave with a deeper sense of self-awareness. Trish's idea of a successful session is one where the participants learn through "feeling" the content, not just understanding it.

Trained in supportive counseling, self-advocacy, social action and life skills, Trish has been providing coaching, counseling and advocacy support to people with multiple sclerosis and other chronic illness for over a decade. Minimizing her own MS symptoms through profound lifestyle changes, self-awareness, proper treatment and conflict and stress management, she has lived a very joyful and rewarding life despite her 20-year battle with depression. Trish coaches people facing life, health and vocational transitions. To learn more about Trish and Changing Paces, visit her on the web at [www.ChangingPaces.com](http://www.ChangingPaces.com).