

## Brand You: The “To-Don’t” List

I have a very good friend who’s an extraordinary engineer. He’s also an annoying person, and he’s an annoying person because he just goes and goes and goes, and every minute he comes up with seven new ideas. And what’s really, *really* annoying is they’re all good ideas. You can’t dismiss them out of hand.

He was in a position where he was going from an idea-generating job into a job where he was executing a roll-out of an idea, all the way across the country, using millions of dollars of Gates money. Now, I happened to be in a meeting with the chairman of his advisory board, who also knew of my friend Dennis’s habits to have a thousand ideas a minute, and this guy said—and I just love the language—he said, “Dennis, what you need is a ‘To-Don’t’ list.” And it really just smacked me right between the eyes.

My mother is southern, she told me to be polite, and therefore I say “Yes” to everything. I have made more mistakes in my life by saying “Yes” to too many things than probably any other thing that I’ve done.

And I *love* this idea of a “To-Don’t” list. You get up in the morning, every one of you who is watching this—you’re busier than the dickens—you can generate a priority list with 26 incredibly important, no-baloney things in the space of about 15 minutes, type it up on the computer, print it out, and what have you.

The secret is to take the list—even though all 26 items are important—take the list of 26 and dump 21, and maybe then dump another two or three. If you are in a job, and if you get one big thing done in a year, you’ve had a hell of a good year. If you’re in the job for five years, and you get two big things done, you’ve had a hell of a five years.

So, focus formally, regularly, probably daily on “To-Don’ts.” It is critically important for personal and organizational success.