



BRIEF

To-Dos

By [Mark Abbott](#)

Introduction

When viewed from 30,000 feet, To-Dos are a task list of things that need to get done to help us win the week.

When turning a [Vision](#) into reality, it's helpful to break steps down into small, easily digestible bites. We start by breaking down our [Compelling and Audacious Goals](#) into 3-year Goals, then 1-Year Goals, then 90-Day Goals (which we call [Rocks](#)), then Milestones that turn into [To-Dos](#).



Context

Educator and author Stephen Covey encouraged us to imagine an empty jar as a metaphor for our time. Covey then asked us to think about what we want and the activities needed to achieve it. These activities form the groundwork for creating goals (Covey called them Rocks, and so do we). We then break down Rocks into smaller pieces (Covey called them pebbles, but we call them Milestones). Those Rocks and pebbles get dropped into our metaphorical jar first.

To-Dos are sand, and our day-to-day work (aka our Roles and Responsibilities) is water. The sand and water go into the jar next — they naturally fill the space around the Rocks and pebbles already in our jar. That's why it's so important to first drop in our Rocks and pebbles.

When assigned, To-Dos have a built-in shelf life of seven days, but we don't set that in stone (pun intended). It's not uncommon to push out due dates because, hey, life happens. The danger comes when pushing the date becomes a habit, which is why our [L](#)

[on-1 tool](#) includes a section documenting the rate at which we complete our To-Dos on time.

If To-Dos are becoming burdensome to complete within a week, discuss potential roadblocks during the Issues section of the [Weekly Team Meeting](#).

Core Disciplines of Great To-Dos

- 1. A To-Do is an agreement. [Agreements are almost always between two people. Don't](#)** accept a To-Do without thinking through the level of importance and the associated work. Great teams honor their agreements.
- 2. Enable the feature in Ninety that automatically converts Milestones into To-Dos a week before they're due.** This keeps us on track with our Rocks and increases progress visibility across the team. Our data shows that the probability of a Rock getting done each quarter improves by at least 10% when it has three or more Milestones.
- 3. A stack of overdue To-Dos should be a red flag that something is off.** It's likely not a surface-level problem that the To-Dos can address. Create an Issue to initiate an open conversation about what's going on. [High-trust companies](#) excel at these conversations.
- 4. Make a habit of checking To-Dos every day (typically via My 90).** Doing so helps prevent To-Dos from falling through the cracks and helps frame the day.
- 5. More than one person can be assigned the same To-Do, but strive to give them different aspects of the task.** Cut down on confusion by making it clear who is accountable for what. If more than one person owns it, nobody owns it.
- 6. Talk about the percentage of To-Dos not done on time during Quarterly Discussions.** Great companies have [high-trust cultures](#), and a core component of trust is honoring our commitments. If a company is running below 80% done on time each week, a conversation is needed.

Hopefully Helpful Hints

Not every To-Do involves a task that applies to the entire team, especially for people who like to task out their personal life to-dos alongside work ones. Ninety includes a toggle that allows users to mark a To-Do as "private," removing it from the reporting the rest of the team sees. Using this feature results in not getting called out (at least by the folks at work) for failing to "Take out the trash."

We like to sort To-Dos by due date to clarify prioritization. Ninety will flag a To-Do the day before it's due, and a red exclamation point will appear by those that have gone overdue. This delineation carries over to the Weekly Team Meetings, making it easy to sort, identify, and discuss the To-Dos that need some prodding to get checked off on time.

Takeaway

To-Dos are agreements. They are the bread and butter of work. Most people already use some form of a to-do list, but rarely do they leverage this tool at its highest level. One of the benefits of the Ninety platform is that To-Dos are seamlessly integrated into almost every tool, enabling us to easily track progress toward completing our Rocks and goals. When properly applied, To-Dos transform getting stuff done into [Getting Smart Stuff Done](#).

What's next? Visit the [90u Library](#) or [try Ninety today](#).

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