



MASTERING WORKFLOW SERIES

METHODOLOGY GUIDES

David Allen Company

METHODOLOGY GUIDES

MASTERING WORKFLOW SERIES

Enclosed is a set of key principles and checklists for Getting Things Done® (GTD®). Honed over many years of hands-on work with thousands of people, these have proven highly effective in supporting maximum personal productivity. Though simple, they are not simplistic. Used appropriately, they serve as a foundation for implementing and maintaining the best practices for winning at the game of work and the business of life.

Wishing you all the best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Allen', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David Allen

METHODOLOGY GUIDES

MASTERING WORKFLOW SERIES

Five Steps

These are the keys to staying current, organized, and in control of your life and work. The five individual steps of the workflow process have their own principles, methods and tools. Each must be mastered and integrated to create a coherent and effective system. Use this to remind yourself of improvement opportunities for your productivity.

Incompletion Trigger List

A critical factor for graduating to a level of mastership is keeping your mind as clear as possible. Review this list regularly to uncover open loops lurking that need to be captured and clarified externally.

Workflow: Clarifying Diagram

These are the key initial elements of workflow management—how to clarify your input and get your inboxes to empty.

GTD Weekly Review®

The primary success factor for managing the practical aspects of your life is a consistent revisiting of the projects, actions, and checklists that represent anything you are responsible for and/or interested in. If you actually DO everything on this review just once, it will amaze you. If you do it every week for a month, you will transcend to a new level of productivity. When this is a habit, you will be free to live and work from a very different plateau of effectiveness.

Natural Planning Model®

This is the quickest and most effective way to get any project, topic, or situation off your mind and constructively moving forward. Based on how your mind naturally thinks anyway, it provides a highly practical procedure for managing the five levels of focus that migrate projects from the idea level into physical reality. Use it as a reminder about areas that need attention to increase clarity and get things going.

Project Planning Trigger List

This is merely a catalyst for project thinking, covering a wide range of potentially relevant topics. Use it to foster and capture details and perspectives that might add value.

Horizons of Focus®

The need to prioritize is a given—but how to prioritize, minute to minute, can be a challenge. This overview of the multiple horizons of work and life perspectives provides a practical map for managing the conversations that guide your intuitive judgements.

1 CAPTURE

COLLECT WHAT HAS YOUR ATTENTION

- Capture anything and everything that has your attention in leakproof external “buckets” (your in-trays, email, notepads, voicemail etc.)—get them out of your short-term memory. (Use the Incompletion Trigger Lists to keep yourself “downloaded.”)
- Have as few of these collectors as you can, and as many as you need.
- Empty them regularly, by processing and organizing (below).

2 CLARIFY

PROCESS WHAT IT MEANS

- Process the items you have collected (decide what each thing means, specifically).
- If it is not actionable—toss it, incubate it for possible later action, or file it as reference.
- If it is actionable—decide the very next physical action, which you do (if less than two minutes), delegate (and track on “Waiting For” list), or defer (put on a Next Actions list). If one action will not close the loop, then identify the commitment as a “project” and put it on a Projects list.

3 ORGANIZE

PUT IT WHERE IT BELONGS

- Group the results of processing your input into appropriately retrievable and reviewable categories. The four key action categories are:
 - Projects** (projects you have a commitment to finish)
 - Calendar** (actions that must occur on a specific day or time)
 - Next Actions** (actions to be done as soon as possible)
 - Waiting For** (projects and actions others are supposed to be doing, which you care about)
- Add sub-categories of these lists if it makes them easier to use (Calls, Errands, At Home, At Computer, etc.).
- Add lists of longer horizon goals and values that influence you.
- Add checklists that may be useful as needed (job description, event trigger lists, org charts, etc.).
- Maintain a general reference filing system for information and materials that have no action, but which need to be retrievable.
- Maintain an incubate system for triggers of possible actions at later dates (Someday/Maybe lists, calendar, tickler).
- Maintain support information files for projects as needed (can be kept in reference system or in pending area).

(continued)

(continued)

4 REFLECT

REVIEW FREQUENTLY

- Review calendar and Next Actions lists daily (or whenever you could possibly do any of them).
- Conduct a customized weekly review to get clear, get current, and get creative (see GTD Weekly Review®).
- Review the longer-horizon lists of goals, values, and visions as often as required to keep your project list complete and current.

5 ENGAGE

SIMPLY DO

- Make choices about your actions based upon what you can do (context), how much time you have, how much energy you have, and then your priorities.
- Stay flexible by maintaining an integrated life management system, always accessible for review, trusting your intuition in moment-to-moment decision-making.
- Choose to:
 1. Do work you have previously defined or
 2. Do work as it appears or
 3. Take time to define your work.

(You must sufficiently clarify and organize to trust your evaluation of the priority of the ad hoc.)

- Ensure the best intuitive choices by consistent regular focus on priorities. (“What is the value to me of doing X instead of doing Y?”) Revisit and recalibrate your commitments at appropriate intervals for the various horizons of life and work (see Horizons of Focus):

GROUND: Calendar/actions

HORIZON 1: Projects

HORIZON 2: Areas of focus and accountability

HORIZON 3: One- to two-year goals and objectives

HORIZON 4: Three- to five-year vision

HORIZON 5: Purpose and principles

WHAT HAS YOUR ATTENTION?

PROFESSIONAL

PROJECTS started, not completed

PROJECTS that need to be started

“**LOOK INTO**” projects

COMMITMENTS/PROMISES TO OTHERS

boss, partners, advisors, coaches, strategic partners, colleagues, subordinates, others in organization, other professionals, customers, other organizations

COMMUNICATIONS TO MAKE/GET

calls, emails, voicemails, faxes, letters, memos, texts, social media content

WRITING TO FINISH/SUBMIT

reports, evaluations, reviews, proposals, articles, marketing material, instructions, summaries, minutes, rewrites and edits, status reporting, conversation and communication tracking

READ/REVIEW

books, periodicals, articles, printouts, websites, blogs, RSS feeds, podcasts

FINANCIAL

cash, budget, balance sheet, profit & loss, forecasting, credit line, payables, receivables, petty cash, banks, investors, asset management

PLANNING/ORGANIZING

goals, targets, objectives, business plans, marketing plans, financial plans, upcoming events, presentations, meetings, conferences, travel, vacation, business trips

ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

org chart, restructuring, lines of authority, job descriptions, facilities, new systems, leadership, change initiatives, succession planning, culture

MARKETING/PROMOTION

campaigns, materials, public relations

ADMINISTRATION

legal issues, insurance, personnel, staffing, policies/procedures, training

STAFF

hiring, firing, reviews, communication, staff development, morale, feedback, compensation

SYSTEMS

mobile devices, phones, computers, software, databases, telecommunications, office equipment, printers, faxes, filing, storage, furniture, fixtures, decorations, supplies, business cards, stationery, personal/electronic organizers

SALES

customers, prospects, leads, sales process, training, relationship building, reporting, relationship tracking, customer service

MEETINGS

upcoming, need to be set or requested, need to be de-briefed

WAITING FOR

information, delegated projects/tasks, pieces of projects, replies to communications, responses to proposals, answers to questions, submitted items for response/reimbursement, tickets, external actions needed to happen to continue or complete projects...(decisions, changes, implementations, etc.), product orders

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

training, seminars, things to learn, things to find out, skills to develop or practice, books to read, research, formal education (licensing, degrees), career research, resume

WARDROBE

professional

INCOMPLETION TRIGGER LIST



WHAT HAS YOUR ATTENTION?

PERSONAL

PROJECTS started, not completed

PROJECTS that need to be started

PROJECTS – OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

service, community, volunteer, spiritual organization

COMMITMENTS/PROMISES TO OTHERS

spouse, children, parents, family, friends, professionals, returnable items

COMMUNICATIONS TO MAKE/GET

calls, emails, faxes, cards, letters, thank-you's, texts, social media content

UPCOMING EVENTS

birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, graduations, receptions, outings, holidays, vacation, travel, dinners, parties, cultural events, sporting events

ADMINISTRATION

home office supplies, equipment, phones, audio/video media, voicemail, computers, Internet, TV, appliances, entertainment, filing, storage, tools, data backup, mobile devices

LEISURE

books, music, videos, travel, places to visit, people to visit, Web browsing, photography, sports equipment, hobbies, cooking, recreation

FINANCIAL

bills, banks, investments, loans, taxes, budget, insurance, mortgage, accountants

PETS

health, training, supplies

LEGAL

wills, trusts, estate, legal affairs

WAITING FOR

product orders, repairs, reimbursements, loaned items, information, RSVPs

FAMILY

projects/activities with spouse, children, parents, relatives

HOME/HOUSEHOLD

real estate, repairs, construction, remodeling, landlords, heating and air conditioning, plumbing, electricity, roofs, landscaping, driveways, garages, walls, floors, ceilings, decor, furniture, utilities, appliances, lights and wiring, kitchen stuff, laundry, places to purge, cleaning, organizing, storage areas

HEALTH

doctors, dentist, optometrist, specialists, checkups, diet, food, exercise

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

classes, seminars, education, coaching, career, creative expressions

TRANSPORTATION

autos, bikes, motorcycles, maintenance, repair, commuting, reservations

CLOTHES

professional, casual, formal, sports, accessories, luggage, repairs, tailoring

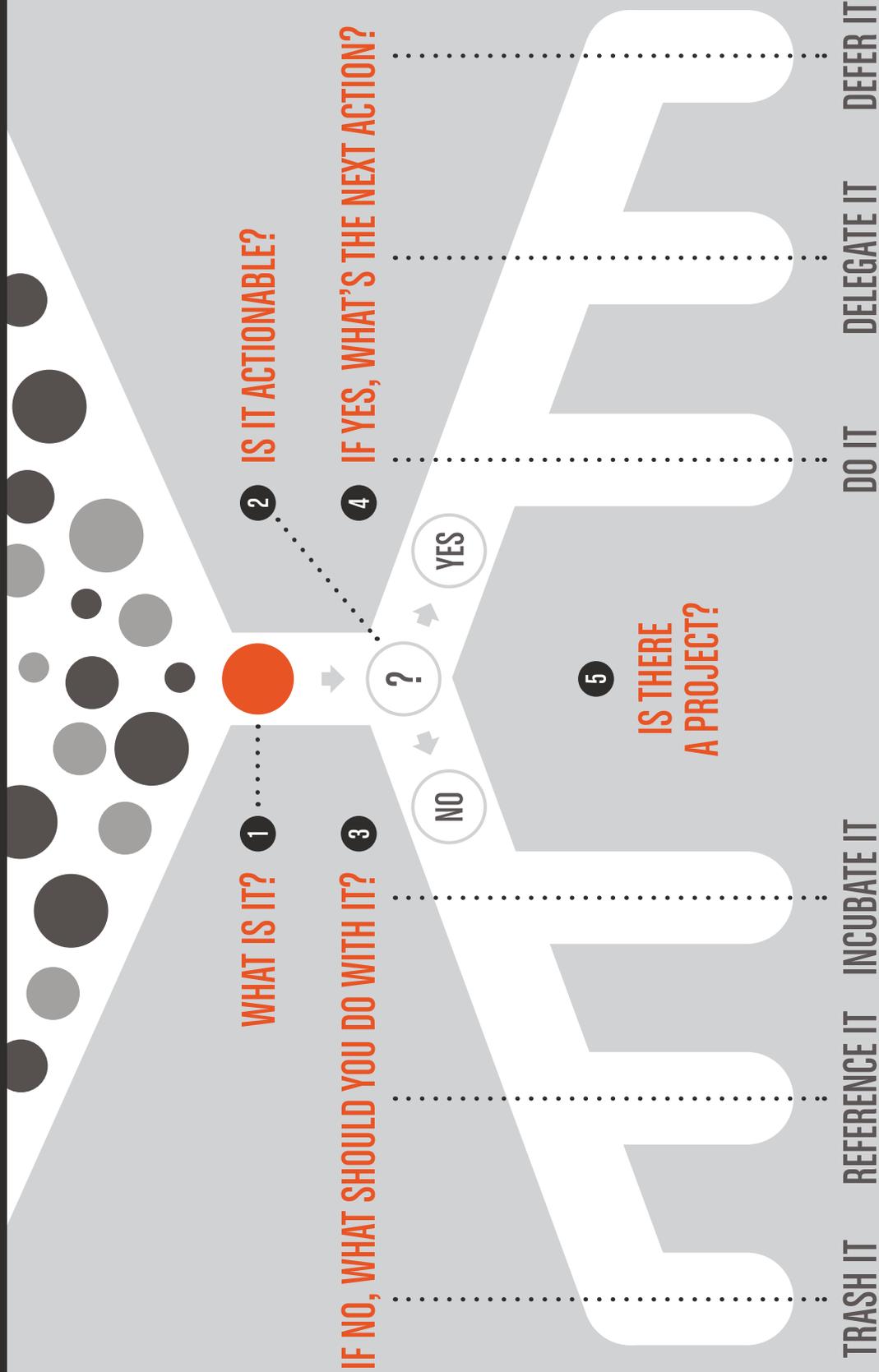
ERRANDS

shopping/stores, hardware, office supplies, gifts, groceries, pharmacy, bank, cleaners

COMMUNITY

neighborhood, neighbors, service work, schools, civic involvements

WORKFLOW: CLARIFYING



GET CLEAR

COLLECT LOOSE PAPERS AND MATERIALS

Gather all accumulated business cards, receipts, and miscellaneous paper-based materials into your in-tray.

GET “IN” TO ZERO

Process completely all outstanding paper materials, journal and meeting notes, voicemails, dictation, and emails.

EMPTY YOUR HEAD

Put in writing and process any uncaptured new projects, action items, waiting fors, someday/maybes, etc.

GET CURRENT

REVIEW NEXT ACTIONS LISTS

Mark off completed actions. Review for reminders of further action steps to record.

REVIEW PREVIOUS CALENDAR DATA

Review past calendar in detail for remaining action items, reference data, etc., and transfer into the active system.

REVIEW UPCOMING CALENDAR

Review upcoming calendar events—long and short term. Capture actions triggered.

REVIEW WAITING FOR LIST

Record appropriate actions for any needed follow-up. Check off received ones.

REVIEW PROJECT (AND LARGER OUTCOME) LISTS

Evaluate status of projects, goals, and outcomes, one by one, ensuring at least one current next action item on each. Browse through project plans, support material, and any other work-in-progress material to trigger new actions, completions, waiting fors, etc.

REVIEW ANY RELEVANT CHECKLISTS

Use as a trigger for any new actions.

GET CREATIVE

REVIEW SOMEDAY/MAYBE LIST

Review for any projects or actions which may now have become active, and transfer to the appropriate list. Delete items no longer of interest.

BE CREATIVE & COURAGEOUS

Any new, wonderful, hare-brained, creative, thought-provoking, risk-taking ideas to add into your system?

1. CLARIFY PURPOSE/GUIDING PRINCIPLES (THE “WHY”)

- Why is this being done? What would “on purpose” really mean?
- What are the key standards to hold in making decisions and acting on this project? What rules do we play by?
- The purpose and principles are the guiding criteria for making decisions on the project.

2. DEFINE MISSION / VISION / GOAL / DESIRED OUTCOME (THE “WHAT”)

- What would it be like if it were totally successful? How would I know?
- What would that success look or feel like for each of the parties with an interest?

3. BRAINSTORM (THE “HOW” PART A)

- What are all the things that occur to me about this? What is the current reality? What do I not know? What ought I consider? What haven't I considered? Etc. (See Project Planning Trigger List.)
- Be complete, open, non-judgmental, and resist critical analysis.
- View from all sides.

4. ORGANIZE (THE “HOW” PART B)

- Identify components (sub-projects), sequences, and/or priorities.
- What needs to happen to make the whole thing happen?
- Create outlines, bulleted lists, or organizing charts, as needed for review and control.

5. DECIDE NEXT ACTIONS

- Determine next actions on current independent components. (What should be done next, and who will do it?)
- If more planning is required, determine the next action to get that to happen.

Shift the level of focus on the project as follows if needed:

If your project needs more clarity, raise the horizon of your focus.

If your project needs more to be happening, lower the horizon of your focus.

How much planning is required?

If the project is off your mind, planning is sufficient.

If it's still on your mind, then more is needed.

PROJECT BRAINSTORM TRIGGER LIST



RESOURCES

Whose input do you need?
Whose input could you use?
Has anything like this been done before?
What mistakes can you learn from?
What successes can you learn from?
What resources do you have?
What resources might you need?

EXECUTIVE ISSUES

How does this relate to the strategic plan?
How does it relate to other priorities, directions, goals?
How will this affect your competitive position?

ADMINISTRATION

Who's accountable for this project's success?
Lines of communication
Methods of reporting
What structures do you need?
What planning is still likely to be required?
What re-grouping will you need? How often?
What people do you need?
Current staffing? Hiring?
Subcontractors, consultants?
How do you get involvement?
What skills are required?
Who needs to know how to do what?
What training do you need? How do you get it?
What other communication do you need?
Who needs to be informed as you go along?
What policies/procedures are affected?
What about morale? Fun?

FINANCE

What will this cost? How do you get it?
What might affect the cost?
Might you need additional funds?
What are the potential payoffs (ROI)?
Who authorizes?

OPERATIONS

What is the timing?
Hard deadlines?
What might affect timing?
Who's going to do the work?
How do you ensure complete delivery?

QUALITY

How will you monitor the progress?
How will you know if the project is on course?
What data do you need, when?
What reports, to whom, when?

POLITICS

Whose buy-in do you need? How can you get it?

STAKEHOLDERS-CONSIDERATIONS?

Board
Stockholders
Employees
Vendors
Customers
Community

LEGAL

Issues?
Regulations?

SPACE/FACILITIES/EQUIPMENT

What requires room? How do you get it?
What tools do you need? When?
Digital equipment

RESEARCH

What might you need to know?

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Is there value in others knowing about this? How do you do that?

RISKS

What could happen? Could you handle it?

CREATIVE THINKING...

Who would have concern about the success of this project?
What would they say, ask, or input, that you haven't yet?
What's the worst idea you can imagine about doing this project? (What is therefore the best idea which is its opposite?)
What is the most outrageous thing you can think of, about this project?
What would make this project particularly unique?
What haven't you asked yourself about this yet?

THE ALTITUDE MAP

“Work” is defined and managed from at least six different horizons, corresponding to different altitudes of perspective. These range from core intention; the understanding of the purpose and values of an undertaking, enterprise, or life, to the most mundane—the next physical actions required to move them forward. Clarity is enhanced and distraction reduced when the multiple horizons with which you are engaged have been assessed and the commitments emerging from each one have been appropriately identified, captured, and implemented. Alignment of the various horizons produces maximum productivity.

Priorities are determined from the top down—i.e. your purpose and values will drive your vision of the purpose being fulfilled, which will create goals and objectives, which will frame areas of focus and accountability. All of those will generate projects which will require actions to get them done. Each horizon is equally important to clarify, however, to get things done, and the content of your thinking and commitments will be different at each horizon. A key driver for your life may be to assist others in achieving their dreams (purpose), which you will express by becoming a world-class athlete and spokesperson (vision), for which you will achieve a starting line-up position on a national team (goal). To do all this you need to maintain a rigorous training program (area of focus). You realize you want to get a new personal trainer (project), for which you need to call your college coach (next action) to get his recommendation.

An altitude map can be used to identify which conversation, at what horizon, with yourself and others, might have the most value, at any point in time. It could be at any horizon or include a combination of them. You may know the long-term goal but have yet to identify the projects needed. You may know the vision but not the actions and who's doing them. Etcetera. Keeping your thinking current at all horizons is a dynamic process—as your world and your awareness of it change, so must these arenas of your focus be continually updated.

Following is a generalized list of the Horizons of Focus, with typical formats and suggested frequencies of visitation. (Samples given from a hypothetical business—Gracie's Gardens)

HORIZON 5: PURPOSE AND PRINCIPLES Ultimate intention for something, and the standards for its success. Why are we doing this? What are the critical behaviors?

Formats: Off-sites with partners, board, team, family; initial discussions for launching projects, meetings, whole enterprises; life planning

Frequency: Whenever additional clarity, direction, alignment, and motivation are needed

(Gracie's Gardens: "Provide the highest-quality landscape and garden materials to delighted retail and wholesale customers;" "Strong and lasting customer relations; environmentally friendly products; well-supported staff," etc.)

HORIZON 4: VISION What it will look, sound, feel like with successful implementation. Long-term outcomes and ideal scenarios.

Formats: Off-sites with partners, board, team, family; initial discussions for launching projects, meetings, whole enterprises; life planning; annual revisiting of enterprise direction; ideal scene development; personal treasure maps

Frequency: Whenever additional clarity, direction, alignment, and motivation are needed

(Gracie's Gardens: "Recognized as the #1 garden and landscaping store in the tri-county district; a fun, interesting, creative, informative place to browse and shop, attracting discriminating clientele who love to spend time and money on an on-going basis;" etc.)

(continued)

(continued)

HORIZON 3: GOALS AND OBJECTIVES What do we want and need to accomplish, specifically, within the next 12 to 24 months, to make the vision happen?

Formats: Off-sites with partners, board, team, family; strategic planning; annual goal-setting and broad planning sessions; life and family planning

Frequency: Annually; quarterly reviews and recalibrations

(Gracie's Gardens: "By year-end, 15% sales growth, 20% profitability, wholesale business established and in the black," etc.)

HORIZON 2: AREAS OF FOCUS AND ACCOUNTABILITY Important spheres of work and life to be maintained at standards to "keep the engines running."

Formats: Job descriptions; organization charts; employee manuals; personal lifestyle checklists; family responsibility designations; project checklists

Frequency: Performance reviews; monthly personal check-in's; whenever job or life changes require reassessment of accountabilities

(Gracie's Gardens: "Executive, administration, PR/marketing, sales, finance, wholesale operations, retail operations," etc.)

HORIZON 1: PROJECTS Outcomes we want to achieve that require more than one action and which can be completed within a year.

Formats: Overview list of all projects; project plans (defined sub-projects)

Frequency: Weekly review; whenever next action contents are not current

(Gracie's Gardens: "Set up wholesale division, get the books current, hire Director of Marketing, finalize Acme contract, upgrade HVAC system," etc.)

GROUND: CALENDAR/ACTIONS Next physical, visible actions to take on any project or other outcome; any single action to take about anything.

Formats: Calendar, Next Actions lists (e.g. calls, errands, at home, at office, talk to boss about...); action folders or trays (e.g. read/review, bills to pay)

Frequency: Multiple times daily; whenever a question about what to do next

(Gracie's Gardens: "Draft plan for wholesale division, email Sandy re: bookkeeper recommendations, call Brandon re: lunch meeting, review Acme purchasing history, surf web for competition ads" etc.)