Insights from *Getting Things Done* by David Allen

"Reflect for a moment on what it actually might be like if your personal management situation were totally under control, at all levels and at all times. What if you had completely clear mental space, with nothing pulling or pushing on you unproductively? What if you could dedicate fully 100 percent of your attention to whatever was at hand, at your own choosing, with no distraction?" – David Allen

Here's How: Build a trusted system (an external brain), and actively capture, clarify, and remind yourself of whatever you need to do at the time you need to do it. Here is my GTD (Getting Things Done) system and the three habits that allow my GTD system to be successful:

Capture

"There is no reason to ever have the same thought twice, unless you like having that thought…Anything you consider unfinished in any way must be captured in a trusted system outside your mind, or what I call a collection tool, that you know you'll come back to regularly and sort through." - David Allen

The Cue	The Sequence
Think of an idea, or action item.	**1a.** Capture the idea or action item in Evernote by using the Evernote app on smartphone.

Note: I use Evernote, but you could use any other list-making app on your smartphone. If you don't carry a smartphone, carry a small notepad and pen to capture items. The tool you use doesn't matter. What matters is how fast you can capture items. Capture ideas and actions in their undeveloped form. You'll decide what to do with them during the next phase: processing.

Process

"You must clarify exactly what your commitment is and decide what you have to do, if anything, to make progress toward fulfilling it…You must use your mind to get things off your mind." - David Allen

The Cue	The Sequence
Receive a daily calendar notification at 4pm.	**1. Open** capture list within Evernote, look at one item at a time (starting from the top), and ask: "Do I want to act on this soon?" **2a. If No:** add item to the someday/maybe list or reference folder. If completely useless, delete it. **2b. If Yes:** convert item to a next physical action, determine the outcome, and add outcome to the project list if it requires more than one action to complete. Then complete the next action item in **2-minutes or less** OR move it to an appropriate location (see table below).

Where I put my processed items:

Reference List	Someday/Maybe List	Calendar	Follow-up List	Next Action List(s)	Project List
Location: Evernote. **Thought process:** "This idea might be useful one day but it's not actionable at this time." I keep all documents and reference files in Evernote with the appropriate tags so I can find them when I need them.	**Location: Evernote.** **Thought process:** "I might want to do this, but not now…and I'd like to be reminded of it periodically." Examples: Books to read, recipes to try, movies to rent, weekend trips to take, web sites to surf.	**Location: Outlook.** **Thought process:** "I need to do this at a certain time on a certain day. Otherwise I'll miss my opportunity." The calendar is sacred space. ONLY put time specific items in the calendar, otherwise, you'll devalue all items.	**Location: Email.** **Thought process:** "It's out of my hands but I should follow-up on it soon." I use boomerang in Gmail to send an email to myself in the future for all follow-ups.	**Location: Index cards I carry with me.** **Thought process:** "Not time specific but should get done as soon as possible or when possible (in the right context)." Item format: action - item - detail. Create separate lists for different contexts: @home, @office, @store.	**Location: Index card I carry with me.** **Through Process:** "This is an outcome that requires many actions to be completed and I can't forget that." Project = something that requires many actions to be completed in a year or less.

Note: Never spend more than 2 minutes on any one item; clarify or complete each item in 2 minutes or less.

Review

"The more complete the system is, the more you'll trust it. And the more you trust it, the more you'll be motivated to keep it…(each week) Get clean, clear, current, and complete." – David Allen

The Cue	The Sequence
Receive a weekly calendar notification on 3pm each Friday.	**1.** Spend 5 minutes **writing a 3-5 year vision**: "What does a typical day to look like 3-5 years from now?" **2. Re-write project list** on a new index card in order of importance (leave out any projects that were completed during the past week). **3. Re-write next action lists** on new index cards, in order of importance (leave out any projects that were completed during the past week).