

# LIFESCRIPTING – A GTD Implementation

Corey Wofford ©2006



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## Abstract

Lifescripting is a life management system built on GTD methodology that involves cataloging the things in your life which generate commitments and then developing a script that you continuously execute to meet those commitments in a balanced way. Your life is made up of your roles and focuses, people and places and things, activities and projects and actions, all of differing importance. You are already executing a script by these. This paper provides a construct and supporting syntax to put that script into writing. A thorough familiarity with David Allen's Getting Things Done methods is presumed. The practice detailed herein will provide you clarity, focus, coherence, and ultimately balance (after you run it for a while).

## Implementation

First, you catalog your life elements, those things in your life which generate commitments: roles (\*) and focuses (~), people (&) and places (@) and things (+), and activities (\*) and projects (-) and actions (.).

Next, you organize these into a hierarchy. Any of these elements can be subordinate to any other, but generally, roles and focuses will be at the very top (your drivers), people and places and things will be attached to roles and focuses, and activities and projects and actions attach to anything and are where the rubber meets the road: they are your everyday things you actually do (vice just think about).

Then, you generate a script which will either be a big stack of index cards sorted by date or a task list in a computer program such as Palm Desktop or Outlook. Computer programs are more searchable.

Now, you execute your script on a daily basis. You think about or act on the life elements of the day and then cycle them forward to a future date for further thought or action. If you take an action on or redefine an element, normally annotate that and cycle 1 or 7 days forward for further thought or action. If not (you leave it incubating), normally advance 2, 7, 30, 90, or 270 days for further thought or action.

If your list of elements is mostly comprised of things that MAY generate commitments with little action called for NOW, you will find that Lifescripting is just a way of forcing you to periodically think about the elements of your life and possibly renegotiate your commitments or add/subtract

from the things you've taken on in life. Conversely, if you are overwhelmed by urgent actions, seeing your script on paper will better enable you to make changes and balance.

**Definitions (in conceptual order)**

- Life element – something in your life which may generate a commitment or an action to do
- Role – something you are in life which defines other life elements you take on
- Focus – internal doctrine you have on what life elements you take on
- Activities – something you do on a recurring basis
- Project – something you do that has an end state and takes more than one action
- Action – one atomic thing you do that has an end state
- Driver – a life element that is subordinate to no other life element (no parent)
- Idolatry\* – the existence of things as drivers
- Slavery\* – the existence of persons as drivers
- Mission in life – a project which is a driver
- Addiction/OCD\* – the existence of activities as drivers
- GTD – Getting Things Done, a methodology and book by David Allen
- Task – a life element that has been formalized with a title and body; the body of a task is its parent ID (if it has one), status, constitution, discussion, history, and supporting materials list; for an action, a body could be empty or have an explanatory blurb
- Constitution – constituent lines (informal life elements) and daughters (subordinate life elements formalized as their own tasks)
- Constituent – a life element that exists only as a constituent line in a task; these elements can have no daughters unless formalized themselves as tasks
- IRH – internally rewarding habits, manners of doing things to create a stronger internal drive, prevent demoralization of oneself, or maintain one's integrity (left out for brevity)
  - \* a matter of semantics; try defining a role instead like •.homeowner, •.husband, or •.crackhead and then subordinating the element within

**Task Template**

<i>title</i>	<i>date due</i>	<i>context</i>
=====		
<i>[parent ID] &lt;- if applicable</i>		
STATUS: <i>next action</i> or “->” to indicate someday maybe or “~” to indicate incubating or “&” to indicate delegated		
<i>constituent lines</i>		
<i>constituent lines</i>		
<i>constituent lines</i>		
DISCUSSION:		
<i>Plain language text for amplification of what this task is all about.</i>		
HISTORY:		
<i>One line log entries by date to provide context.</i>		
SUPPORT MATERIALS:		
<i>Identity and location of all supporting documentation (people places things are life elements and should be constituent lines, not listed here).</i>		

NOTE: a task that is just an action will have only a title and optional discussion; since there is no STATUS to tell you what you're doing, the title should include an action verb in this case

## Syntax

### Title examples

.buy milk

*An action to be checked off upon completion.*

3.buy milk

*An activity repeated 3 days after previous completion.*

3.buy milk.^

*An activity that is the daughter of another life element.*

\*.buy milk.^

*An activity of discretionary periodicity that is the daughter of another life element.*

\*.buy milk.^v

*An activity that is both a parent of other life element(s) and a daughter.*

W.buy milk

*An activity repeated weekly.*

\*.buy milk

*An activity due to be advanced 2, 7, or 30 days.*

3".buy milk

*An activity, which if not completed today and advanced 3 days, will be advanced 2, 7, or 90 days.*

W"".buy milk

*An activity, which if not completed this week, will be advanced 2, 7, or 270 days.*

-.buy milk.^, •.dairy farmer.v, @.food mart.^, ~.calcify me.^v, +.fisher space pen

*How other types of life elements may appear.*

NOTE: only drivers and actions should have no parent if your script is fully defined

### Constituent examples

[] buy milk

*An action yet to be completed.*

[/] buy milk

*An action partially completed.*

[x] buy milk

*A completed action.*

8/24/06[] buy milk

*An action that is due on 8/24/06.*

8/24/06[] buy milk(\*)

*A recurring action next due on 8/24/06.*

[8/24/06] buy milk

*An action completed on 8/24/06.*

[#] buy milk

*An action being handled by another life element.*

[%] buy milk

*A cancelled action.*

[&] buy milk{1}

*An action delegated to person listed by note 1 in DISCUSSION field.*

->[] buy milk{1}

*An action deferred due to reason in note 1 in DISCUSSION field.*

3.buy milk

*An activity not formalized as a daughter task or tracked in this task. An assumed behavior.*

[8/24/06] buy milk(3)

*An activity of definite periodicity not formalized as a daughter task and tracked in this task.*

[8/24/06] buy milk(3)!

*An action that is overdue, last completed on 8/24/06.*

[8/24/06] buy milk(\*)

*An activity of discretionary periodicity not formalized as a daughter task, but tracked in this task.*

[] buy milk(\*)

*An activity of discretionary periodicity neither formalized nor tracked. If you don't intend to track, use "\*.buy milk" instead to indicate an assumed behavior.*

[3.buy milk]

*An activity formalized as a daughter task.*

~.calcify me

*A focus not formalized as a daughter task.*

[~.calcify me]

*A focus formalized as a daughter task.*

+ .milk jug

*A thing not formalized as a daughter task.*

[+ .milk jug]

*A thing formalized as a daughter task.*

D.wash milk jug

*A daily activity not formalized as a daughter task or tracked in this task. An assumed behavior.*

•.dairy farmer

*A role not formalized as a daughter task.*

3[] buy milk

*An action which must be completed in order (after 1[] drive to store, 2[] walk in door, e.g.)*

3\*[] buy milk

*A recurring action which must be completed in order (after 1\*[]..., 2\*[]...)*

&.milk man

*A person not formalized as a daughter task.*

@.Joe's Dairy Mart

*A place not formalized as a daughter task.*

[-.raise a cow]

*A project formalized as a daughter task.*

2[-.learn to milk cows]

*A daughter project to be completed in order with other projects or actions.*

### **Periodicity Codes**

D daily

B business days

N non-Sabbath days (Su-Fr if you prefer) or non-holiday or whatever

W weekly

M monthly

Q quarterly

S semi-annual

A annual

\$ special (like for calling Mom on Mother's Day)

-N- every -N- days after prior completion

Tu every Tuesday

Mo-Th every day Monday through Thursday

Da every day before noon

Tup every Tuesday afternoon

1stMo every 1<sup>st</sup> Monday

Nov4 every November 4

5Y every 5 years

NOTE: periodicity codes are only for activities, replacing the \* symbol

### **Organizing Your Tasks**

Once you have all of your life elements formalized as tasks or resident as constituent lines of parent tasks, sort them by date and context. Vanilla contexts are \*, @Agendas, @Calls,

@Computer, @Errands, @Home, @Waiting For, @Work. \* is your root context that travels with you everywhere you go. Generally, it is where your drivers, incubators, and someday maybes live (as well as things you can do anywhere). Additionally, you should have three buckets labeled [Tomorrow], [Next Week], and [Process Bin]. [Process Bin] is where you throw something indefinitely because it needs some serious redefinition and you need it to percolate some more. Congratulations, you have a script.

### **Executing Your Script**

As you go about your day moving through contexts, take action on tasks due or just reflect on those that are incubating. If you take action, annotate appropriately and cycle to tomorrow, a week from now, or next periodicity. If you did not, throw it into the [Tomorrow] or [Next Week] buckets. Alternately, kick it out 2, 7, 30, 90, or 270 days. Alternately, put in the [Process Bin] to redefine later or...kick it out of your life. At the end of the day, all contexts should be empty. Tomorrow, you will need to dump the [Tomorrow] bucket into appropriate contexts based on next actions. On Monday, you will do likewise with the [Next Week] bucket, though in this case, you can plan an appropriate day to put them in (i.e., don't dump them all in Monday).

### **Getting Started**

You won't develop a script overnight. It's an ongoing process as you really decide what is part of your life and what isn't and what commitments and actions are entailed from those decisions. At the very least, write down what your roles are in life and the names of all the people you care about. The rest will come. As Lifescripting is effectively an ongoing GTD "mind sweep", you might start with David Allen's "Incompletion Trigger List" template and build those into your script. Poor man's Lifescripting would be a big stack of 3x5 cards, one for everything in your life. So you and Aunt Mary don't talk anymore and don't exchange Christmas cards. But...she's still in your life. Look at her name on a card every 90 days or so and someday you just may bury the hatchet. A card with just a picture of your hot rod might make you get the oil changed.

### **A Day in the Life**

You wake up and right after your first cup of coffee (or ESPN Sportscenter or prayer and breaking your fast or whatever you do first thing), you open today's folder in your 43 folders and process the contents. Sort your [Tomorrow] bucket into the contexts for today. Review what's due in each context. Come up with a plan. Grab a collection device and go. In the middle of the day, a task not due comes to mind. Grab it, redefine it, annotate as such, and then kick it to tomorrow or a week from now for further thought or action.

### **Greek to Me**

This document is cryptic by design, only meant to provide a flavor in order for the author to solicit comments and gage interest. I have left out mountains of philosophy and methodology (and some of the more complicated syntax). For the near future, I will only provide these in posts on Yahoo! Group GtD\_Palm.

### **About the Author**

Corey Wofford (aka MSU Corey, [msucorey@msn.com](mailto:msucorey@msn.com)) is a US Navy officer on active duty who lives with his wife and four children in San Diego, CA. MSU Corey graduated from Michigan State University and previously served as an enlisted Marine in the USMC Reserve, a Southern Baptist deacon in Monterey, CA, and a computer programmer for a DARPA project. MSU Corey has used paper planners from 1990-1999 and Palm devices from 1999+. MSU Corey always has a collection device and empties his in-box daily.

## Appendix A: Sample Task

Lifesc scripting as the practice I've described is an art. Two people with identical lives may actually write their script differently based on their differing caffeine usage or typewriter symbol fetishes.

Here's a purely hypothetical example of a project [-.raise a cow] which is a daughter of [\* .drink more milk] which is daughter of [~.calcify me] which is a daughter of [\* .maintain health] which is a daughter of [\* .human being] which is a driver in this life. Note this project also has daughters.

-.raise a cow.^v	9/9/06	@Home
=====		
[* .drink more milk]		
STATUS: researching		
&.husbandry guy [&.frieda farnsworth] @.cow hospital [/] research raising cows [x] pick a name 1[9/7/06] check out book @city library 2*-9/17/06[9/7/06] return book(10) 3*[9/7/06] recheck book(10) -.new cow party 1[] ask [&..wife] about having a cow party 2[] launch cow party project ->[] paint sign out front with name{1} D.let kids pet cow 1[-.build cowpen] 2[-.buy cow] [] Google "do cows like music" ~.be more outdoorsy +.milk jug [7.wash milk jug] [* .animal husbandman]		
DISCUSSION:		
{1}supposed to be raining all weekend I will drink more milk if I have a cow in my back yard. Often accused of being a "technogeek," I hope that this endeavor, successful or otherwise, will make me more "down to earth." We will entertain more at home if we have a cow to enliven conversation. "David was a shepherd boy whose simple life had brought him joy"		
HISTORY:		
8/3/06 met frieda who has her very own cow 8/7/06 frieda says her cow likes me and that I'm very good with cows 8/13/06 babysat cow for three hours (see journal) 8/19/06 husbandry guy recommends a bostonian		
SUPPORT MATERIALS:		
Folder 'RAISE A COW' - @project folders - home "Raising Cows" manual - @home library - top shelf		