



If only I had more time - How to be more effective in what you do

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A few introductory points ...

- ❖ I am not an expert in task management.
- ❖ I am not being paid to sell a particular method or piece of software.
- ❖ However, I have been using task management techniques and tools for at least 10 years, in particular David Allen's Getting Things Done philosophy, which I will cite frequently.
- ❖ The main purpose of this presentation is to raise awareness of what you can do to be more effective at work in a scientific environment.
- ❖ I would be happy to provide a longer training course at a later time if there is interest in the details.

So what is work all about

FOCUS

- ✦ That's all there is to it!
- ✦ To FOCUS, you need to have two things in place:
 - ✦ You need to know what the next thing you should be doing is -
PLANNING
 - ✦ You need to get yourself to actually doing it without distractions -
EXECUTION
- ✦ Both components are important and you won't succeed if one of them is not working

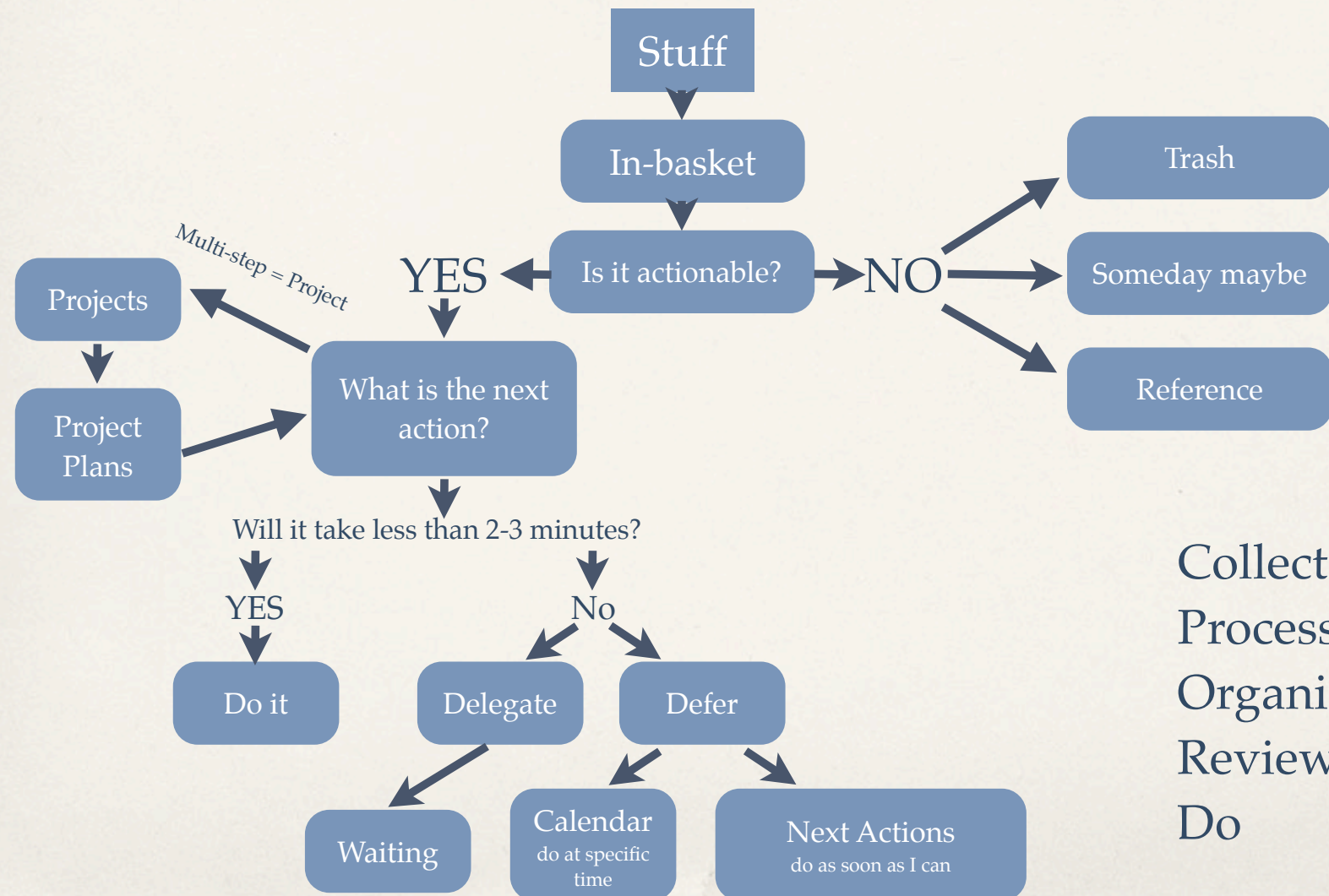
Planning

- ❖ Use mostly GTD ideas for this
- ❖ A key issue for our type of work:
 - ❖ Most of the time, the task is not given and it is part of our job to actually determine what the task is!
- ❖ What can you actually manage?
 - ❖ Time? - Hardly - it just goes by; Priorities? - Hardly, you just have them.
 - ❖ What you can manage is actually your actions - the stuff you do!

Planning

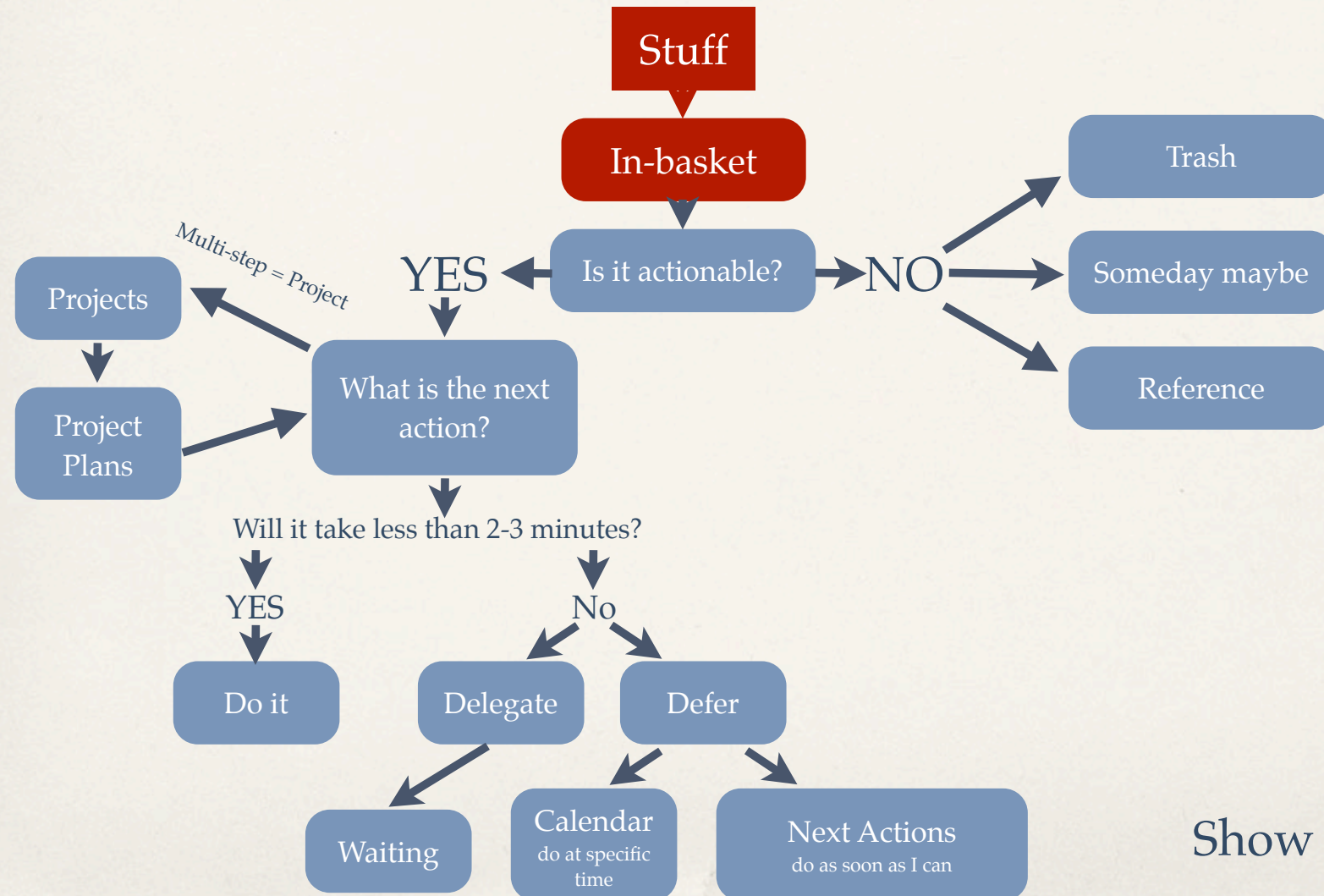
- ❖ Some **basic principles** of planning:
 - ❖ get **EVERYTHING** out of your head - requires a trusted system of information storage - often some piece of software (show Pagico - others at the end of this talk)
 - ❖ Break down ALL YOU DO in **projects** and **actions**.
 - ❖ Projects are simply things that require more than one action (like “write a paper on ...”).
 - ❖ Actions are the smallest granule of what you need to do (like “download this piece of data from NCI...”)
 - ❖ Only assign deadlines to things that really have them! Don’t make up personal ones. It makes you inflexible!
- ❖ All you need to worry about for each project is what the **NEXT ACTION** is - you can ignore the others for now!
- ❖ The choice of what to do next is now a much reduced choice from all the **NEXT ACTIONS** you have identified

The workflow chart of GTD



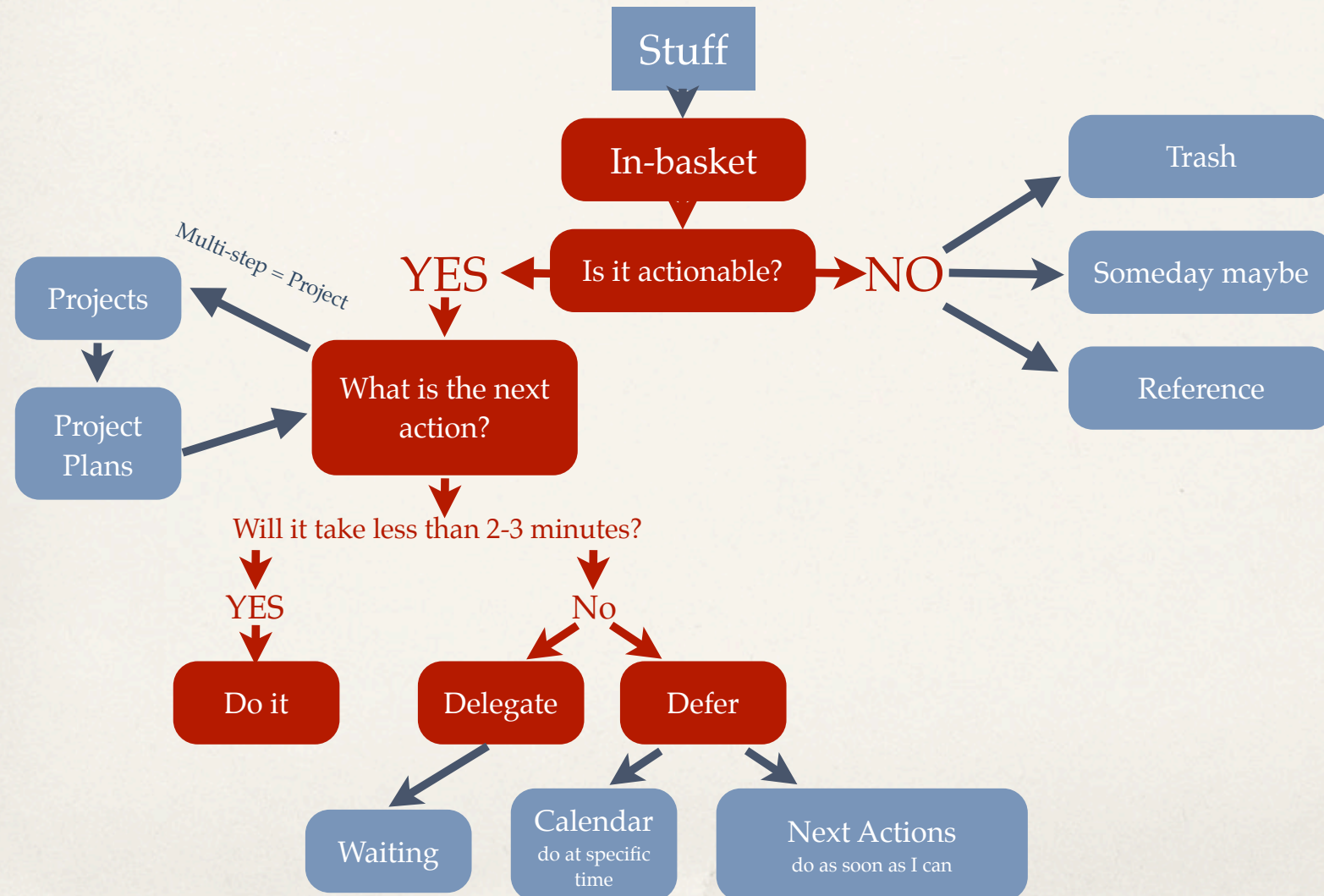
Collect
Process
Organize
Review
Do

Step 1: Collect

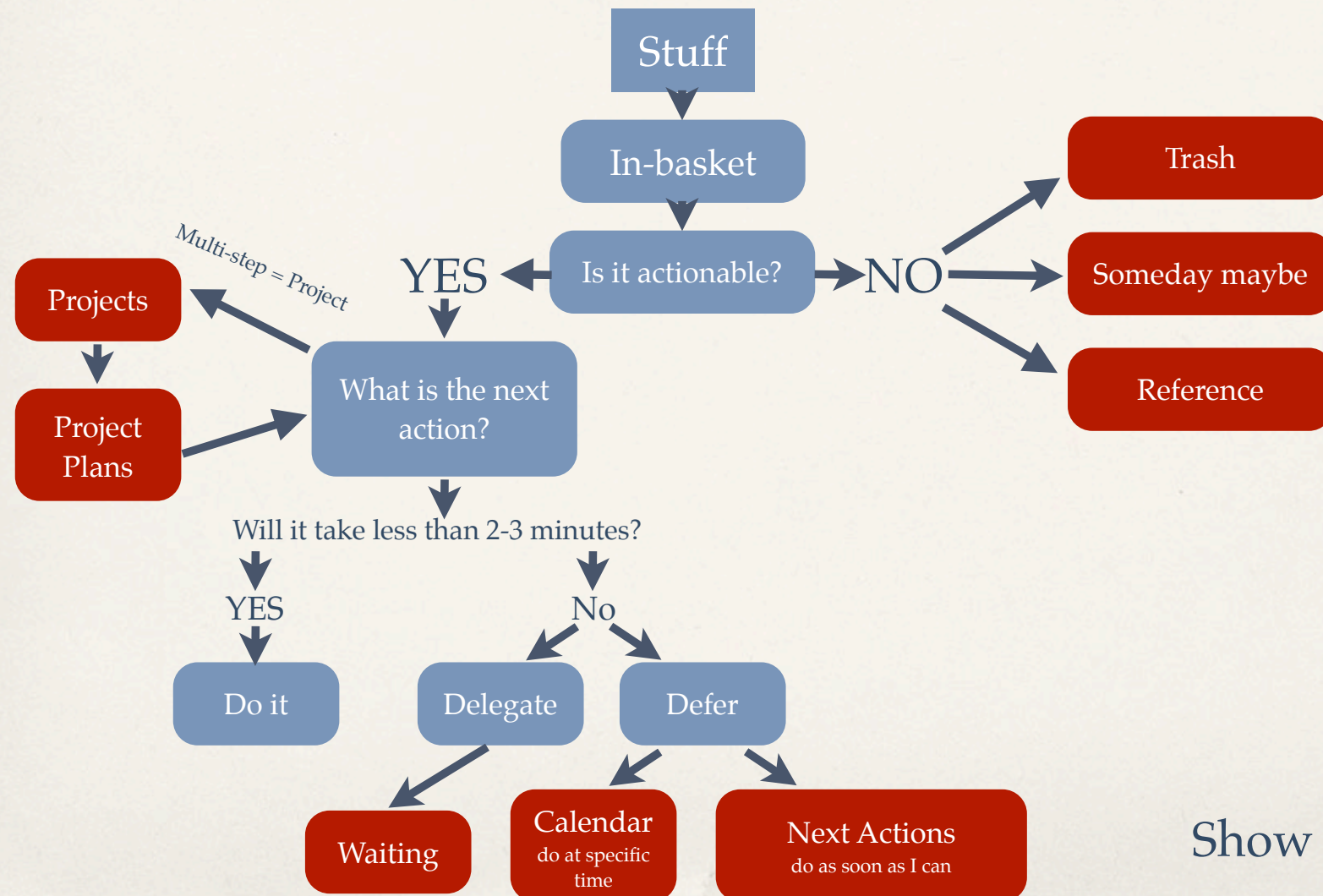


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Step 2: Process



Step 3: Organize



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Step 3: Organize - Projects

- ❖ Everything that takes more than one action to accomplish is by default a project!
- ❖ Natural project planning steps:
 - ❖ Defining purpose and principles
 - ❖ Outcome visioning
 - ❖ Brainstorming
 - ❖ Organizing
 - ❖ Identifying next actions

Audience
participation

Contexts to help the organization

- ✦ A great way of helping you to organize tasks is to tag each task with one or more “contexts”
- ✦ Common contexts/tags I use
 - ✦ Location: Office, Home, Errand
 - ✦ Duration: 10m, 30m, 1h
 - ✦ People: Andy, Anna, Michael, ...
 - ✦ Type of task: Read, Write, Discuss, Think, ...
- ✦ You can then sort your task by context.
 - ✦ When working on emails, list your email tasks.
 - ✦ When you have an hour to read, list the “read” and “1h” tasks!
 - ✦ When you want to knock over a few short things before going home, list the “10m” tasks and do 3!

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Step 4: Review

- * To stay on top of things it is important to review everything you do. This review should happen at different levels with different frequency.
- * I use the GTD “Flight Level” model of the review process. From bottom to top this means:
 - * Runway: Current actions - Review more than once a day - Expect to have hundreds of hours of work in them!
 - * 10,000 feet: Current projects - Review about once a week - Expect to have 50-100 projects at any given time!
 - * 20,000 feet: Areas of responsibility - Teaching, Students, Admin, COE, Research, ... - Review balance of activity in these areas about every 1-3 months
 - * 30,000 feet: One-to-two year goals - What are the big things to achieve in the next couple of years? - Review every 3 months
 - * 40,000 feet: Three-to-five year vision - Where do I want to be in 5 years? - Review every so often
 - * 50,000 feet: Life! Why do what I do? Does it all make sense? Is the answer really 42? - Review all the time ;-).

Step 5: Do

- ❖ We have planned well and know what our next actions are! However, we still need to do them. How can we make ourselves do what needs doing?
- ❖ Procrastination is our worst enemy.
- ❖ I use the “Pomodoro” technique to overcome this common problem.
- ❖ Basic idea:
 - ❖ Break work down into 25 minute blocks
 - ❖ Write down what you are going to do in the 25 minutes
 - ❖ Work on it without distraction
 - ❖ Take a 5 minute break after each 25 minute interval
 - ❖ Take a longer break every 3-4 intervals!
- ❖ Show Vitamin-R software

Step 5: Do

- ❖ For this to work you need periods in your day where you do not have meetings or other distractions.
- ❖ Plan your days so that those periods exist, ideally first thing in the morning when your head is clear and your energy levels high.
- ❖ My trick: The mornings are mine, the afternoons belong to others.

Some email tips

- ❖ Do not watch your email all the time!
- ❖ Instead define 2 or so Pomodoro intervals a day to process it using the GTD method - at the end of this processing your Inbox should be empty!
- ❖ As usual, short replies (<2-3 min) will be done as part of the processing. Longer replies will just enter your task management system like any other task!
- ❖ When working on something not email in a Pomodoro DO NOT CHECK email. Switch it off if you want!

Software that helps with this

- ❖ GTD software I have tried:
 - ❖ Easy: Things, Firetask
 - ❖ Medium: Omnifocus, OrganizePro, **Pagico**
 - ❖ Advanced: The Brain
- ❖ Pomodoro software: Vitamin-R (expensive); Time-out (Free)
- ❖ Brainstorming software: Mindmanager, FreeMind