



My name is Kristoffer Carter.

My wife and friends call me KC. My mom still calls me Krissy.

My mission is to help individuals and organizations  
reframe passing events into

**REVOLUTIONARY EXPERIENCES.**

# THIS LIFE

## THE FRAMEWORK.

Two of my favorite compliments for my work are as follows:

- ① "What are you on, and where can I get some?"
- ② "What the hell is wrong with you?"

The articles that follow represent my sincere attempt at answering those questions, in the hope of giving you a framework to amplify your life, and work.

# FOREWORD.

By Karen Wright, MCC, CHC

Author of *The Complete Executive*

Every once in a while, we meet people who challenge our notions of what it takes to balance multiple (full) plates in their business, artistic, and family lives, and when we meet them, we need to pay attention to what they're doing.

In my efforts to understand the magic convergence of health, happiness and success, I've studied thousands of leaders over 17 years, both in the research for [my book](#), and in coaching others to do the same.

Kristoffer Carter is a uniquely potent force. KC brings his personal habits, practices and disciplines for health, reflection and building brilliant relationships into his work: helping companies create culture that inspires, energizes and drives results.

Add to that his secret sauce of certifiable insanity eloquently expressed, and he has much to teach.

So open your head and your heart, (or at least be open to KC doing it for you.) – KW

## PROLOGUE: *BACK FROM ZERO.*

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### **My pursuit of full-life integration began on October 25<sup>th</sup> 2001, when my entire life imploded.**

The implosion revealed itself on a phone call. I was standing in my cubicle, on the phone. The problem was that I couldn't remember if I had called this person, or if they had called me.

My coworkers were only vaguely recognizable. I couldn't remember anybody's name. My brain was misfiring. I appeared lost and confused, so a woman sat me down and called a doctor.

My wife met me at the hospital where I would undergo a CT scan and a spinal tap. Our physician was concerned I was having an aneurysm. I was 26.

My vitals bottomed out while under anesthetic. The doctors scrambled to bring me back.

### 3 | this epic life: *THE FRAMEWORK.*

The months leading up to that day had been dark, and stressful. I had moved my young wife, and funk band out to Los Angeles. Despite our massive efforts, nothing was working. We weren't getting along. The music felt forced, and sterile.

I had been married just over two years, and we barely saw one another. She would hang out with our neighbors while I rehearsed, or slept at the studio. During the day we both worked full-time, with log-jammed, 5-lane freeways between us.

L.A.'s soul-crushing traffic became a metaphor for my inner, and outer life. I was completely stuck, and helpless in my ability to find the cause of it. I would just sit in my crappy car, feeling the days fall away.

If *Integration* is defined as "...the act of combining or adding parts to make a unified whole", my life was the polar opposite. My marriage was an obstacle to my dream of being a rockstar. My creative energy was blocked, and it was filling me with hate. I was lucky to have my day job, but it was a depressing, endless study hall.

I ate like shit. I drank, and smoked weed way too often.

I was completely checked-out. Outwardly I had started a solid *grown-up* life, but I was so closed-off and secretive that inwardly, I had no comprehension of my potential.

My brain lapse was my body's way of calling me back, demanding that I *man the hell up* and start taking responsibility for the life I signed up for.

The news from the doctor was the best it could've been. My "episode" was a precursor to a debilitating migraine, which was obviously brought on by all the stress and anxiety. I would experience a couple more similar episodes in the coming weeks.

And so, it began... My slow build.

Redesigning my life felt like salvaging scattered debris from a crash site.

Gayle and I took a long walk and I told her everything. I came clean about my self-destructive habits, the depths of my self-loathing, and resentment. She was shocked, then pissed off, but incredibly understanding.

It's so obvious now, but I had no idea how to be the person I was trying so desperately to become. There was no manual for this odd blend of married-rocker-guy-working-stiff. Nothing jived, so *I assumed I was broken.*

My passions and interests were a rag-tag, gang-of-misfits. Somehow they would need to get along, because none of them *felt optional*.

There's never been a shortage of wet blankets who told me "...sorry, Krissy. You just can't have it all." My instinctual reaction would've been to pelt them in the face with Skittles, but I was starting to see it had nothing to do with them.

Their unsolicited advice was just another reflection of my inner state of disconnection.

I needed to inventory my life. I needed to designate certain things as sacred. Above all, I needed to evolve beyond this negative, judgmental ass-clown I had become.

I started by committing myself to enjoying things a little differently.

I became a lot more transparent, working hard to drop the sarcasm and cynicism I had used to mask any vulnerability. My high school friends didn't believe I was legit at first. I drastically reduced the partying, and started working out.

## 6 | this epic life: *THE FRAMEWORK.*

But these were only baby steps in what would become my life-long journey.

Like anyone on an *Epic Quest*, there have been plenty of missteps and dead-ends through the years. All of our lives are a continuous, iterative process.

My greatest gift has been my ability to apply scientific scrutiny to living *an examined life*. It can be maddening at times for those close to me, but my meta-mind has a meta-lens with outer meta-rings. If I am obsessed about anything, (and those close to me would say the list is long) it would be figuring out ways to take on more, be more effective at what I take on, and somehow manage to have more fun doing it than the people around me.

My other gift has taken me 11 years to accept.

I used to be too shy or afraid to admit it, but I am hellbent on putting my money where my mouth is. My path has been lit by too many inspired influences to list here. The least I could do is share my example, and live by it. All of this is to help as many people as possible progress toward self-actualization.

**My mission is to uplift others through my creativity and inspired example.**

## 7 | this epic life: *THE FRAMEWORK.*

My hope is that in these coming stories you'll spot some patterns and short-cuts you can apply in your journey. Keep in mind, that when it comes to your inner-alignment, there are no shortcuts.

The great news, is that working harder on these key components can potentially spare you months and years of writhing in pain or confusion. You'll simply know what to do next, and trust the path will materialize beneath your feet.

This document is separated into 2 halves. The first is an introduction to *The Framework*, a model anyone can use to achieve a calm, yet staggering level of alignment with their life inventory and virtues.

The second is my personal story of how I put these ideas into practice.

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It's up to each of us to write our own owner's manual for our epic lives. My work is designed, and curated to help you cut out as much extraneous bullshit as possible.

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The other night, I dreamed back to that morning in my cubicle all those years ago. I was on the phone, completely lost in the life I created.

But in my dream, the mystery caller on the other end was me, **now**: my present-day, happy, relaxed, and integrated self.

**I whispered these 3 simple, yet powerful steps:**

*“Upgrade your lens. Define your non-negotiables.  
Pursue, and achieve Full-Life Integration.”*

And that shattered, younger me was able to arrive at this place *a helluva lot faster.*

I promise you’ll soon have a crystal-clear idea of how the concepts work, but these are the essential steps I would’ve killed to know when I was 18.

**I’ve also created a free workbook to help you get there.**

Thank you for joining me. We’re gonna have FUN, but we gotta go DEEP.

POWER. UP.

*-KC*

November, 2012

# Quick Start Guide

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*Active links with additional content look [like this](#) . [example]*

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YOU CAN KEEP

YOUR FACE GLUED TO THE  
SCREEN OF **WHAT IS...**

**OR,** YOU CAN STAND UP.

**STRETCH. BREATHE...**

**AND HAMMER DOWN  
TOWARD**

**WHAT COULD BE.**

# THE FRAMEWORK.

[ epics aren't known for their brevity. ]

## INTRODUCTIONS

- 001 | the need for an integrated life
- 002 | terminology
- 003 | my lens, and its origin
- 004 | our work, together - part 1, the 1:1 victory
- 005 | our work, together - part 2, the group victory
- 006 | this epic life - a manifesto
- 007 | the journey begins

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## ADDENDUM. (MY PATH)

Living **my** non-negotiables.

- 008 | NN#1: SOUL
- 009 | NN#2: VITALITY
- 010 | NN#3: FAMILY
- 011 | NN#4: ART
- 012 | NN#5: WORK



AUDITORY?

\*All 12 chapters of this document are also available in an **expanded-audio format**, (mp3) which includes additional exercises & music.

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## 001 | the need for an integrated life

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### The best days of your life deserve reverse engineering.

We recall days as kids that felt like *everything* happened within a single 24-hour period. These were endless, effortless days of gliding between situations with friends and family, usually on our bikes or running yard to yard.

At night we'd fall asleep fulfilled; knowing everything and everyone we needed was within reach. We had seen and done it all, and tomorrow it could happen all over again!

On a recent Thursday in Chicago, I was singing *Ignition Remix* by R. Kelly. OK, admittedly I was playing guitar and singing back-up. The lead singer was on my left, yelling "Can I get a..." to which I'd chime in with a "Beep Beep!" or a "Toot toot!"

But we weren't just a couple drunks at a karaoke bar.

The singer was the founder and CEO of our \$200 million dollar company. We were performing for 50% of our coworkers against a backdrop of the Chicago skyline.

I had learned the song a couple years back, when I'd "loop" all of the musical pieces parts before getting our Chief up to sing.

This semi-ridiculous, yet fully-engaged and integrated event, (one I'll recall in detail for the duration of my life), can be broken down into very specific ingredients. We hear of similar events when a new mother relays her birth story, or when colleagues recall the day they landed their fat new jobs.

### What if you could create days strung together by events worthy of life-long memories?

By the time I step into a conference room, whether on a pitch or to motivate a team, my support structure runs 5 levels deep. This wasn't always by design, as you'll see in the coming chapters. Over time though, our habits must evolve to meet new demands.

Fourteen hours before we sang R. Kelly that night, I rolled out of bed and onto the hotel room floor. I resumed the familiar lotus posture. My goal upon waking is to align my cerebral-spinal axis into a straight vertical line, one I picture to be an *antenna to the cosmos*.

After 30 minutes of focused Kriya meditation, I hit the streets for my favorite run up Lakeshore Drive. My current goal is to compress 4 miles into 30 minutes, which is fast for me. There's a parade of smiling people, all grateful to be out for the sunrise.

I hit up my favorite juice bar on the way to the office, after some FaceTime with my wife and 3 kids back in Ohio. It's not the same as being home, but it's great to see their faces.

The day has hit a stride by 8:15 am. There's still time to write for my site before walking over to the office. There is the usual workday stuff of meetings, client and team calls. The main event, at least on this day, was filming my new presentation for 20 new hires. Those poor noobs. I'm who they get for 60 minutes at the tail end of orientation week, just before the buses pull up for *New Hire Happy Hour*.

Many of my favorite *old-timers* from around the company sit in on my talk. It's a mash-up of Digital Media Complexity meets Positive Psychology. The screen projects giant flux capacitors and Voltron robots intertwined with our 4 core principles.

By the time we have our coworkers singing "Toot Toot" and "Beep Beep" a couple hours later, the energy has become a fast-moving stream.

There's no clear line between work and rock, between teammates and family, or challenges and solutions. I prefer to operate with zero toggle—flowing from one kickass situation to the next, as we did on our bikes as kids.

Granted, this doesn't resemble *every* day, much less the day before when I was working in my pajamas and prepping for the trip. Not every day is supposed to be full-tilt *#EPIC* (!!!) However, life can be designed to catalyze these epic days happening more regularly.

My name is Kristoffer Carter. My wife and friends call me KC. My mom still calls me Krissy. My mission is to help individuals and organizations reframe passing events into **revolutionary experiences.**

These can be in our personal or family lives, throughout our careers and beyond. First, we must *consciously recognize* these events as opportunities, prolong and savor them, and then maximize their impact and frequency.

**Pop quiz:** What's the matter with stringing together a series of unforgettable, revolutionary events and rocking them *the hell out* with clients, coworkers, friends, or family?

<crickets>

Hahaha, you're right, crickets! Not a damn thing! This is conscious lifestyle design, and it only improves with practice.



Two of my favorite, recurring compliments for my work are as follows:

- ① "What are you on, and where can I get some?"
- ② "What the hell is wrong with you?"

*What I'm on* these days is the culmination of all I've ever lived. Any of the not-so-fun stuff was left on the cutting room floor years ago.

I now define my life and work by what I call my *non-negotiables* (or NNs): The sacred life ingredients that cannot be removed or substituted. By working to expand our non-negotiables, we're able to practice and achieve a higher state of flow I call *full-life integration*.

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"But Krissy, what is *Full-Life Integration*, and why the hell should I care?"

**Great question!** I was actually **JUST** about to cover that.

This is where it gets COOL you guys.

## 002 | terminology

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### 002.a | Overview

Grab your phone from your pocket and hold it up to your face. Oh, you were already doing that... Sweet, sweet.

This might get Meta for a minute.

Think of your life as this mobile device. Chances are you have your go-to “life” apps (even though you probably have more than you have time to use).

Now, picture the ability to *merge* all of these apps into a single dashboard. No need to toggle. No lag time. Every capability you’ve ever acquired, bought, or developed is now accessible to you simultaneously, in real-time.

*What if you could wake up every morning... brimming with all you've ever lived?*

Everything you’ve learned or created— your soul-connection, fitness and vitality, your network of family and friends, your talents and skills that have been collecting dust in

separate silos... All of it: cued up and instantly accessible to meet the demands of the current day, in **\*this\*** moment.

What if you could tap any aspect of your diverse human experience and direct it toward any desired outcome? No scrambling for external information or rethinking your approach.

No stammering of thought or frantic cramming. No mental debate on whether you know enough or have enough to offer.

All that remains is the knowing... that you are equipped, that you are enough, and that you will handle whatever is in front of you with grace and with swagger.

Through expanding our non-negotiables, we realize we've been building something massive, (and of singular value) with **\*all\*** of our time.

This could be as simple as bringing your legendary sense of humor to work with you. This could be as complex as applying your chess prowess to maneuvering through political minefields.

How would your personal and professional relationships benefit from experiencing the *whole of you* versus the limited facades we're trained to share in certain situations?

What if you didn't need to compartmentalize your life into family, work, play, creative expression, physical vitality, and so on?

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Would you have more **time**?

Would you have more **energy**?

Exude more **power** and leverage it on a more **consistent** basis?

.....

This is **full-life integration**, a force-multiplier compounded by each of our sacred life ingredients.

**OUR NON-NEGOTIABLES.** Whether we were conscious of it or not, we have always decided what to include in our lives. Once we distill these down to our absolute essentials, we protect them within a special classification I call our *non-negotiables*.

We can then arrange our non-negotiables in a way that builds upon, amplifies, magnifies, and sets up the next in line.

Each non-negotiable expands by its proximity to all others until we operate in a self-actualized state of full-life integration.

It's my sincere belief that all of us chase various levels of freedom and creative expression.



**FIGURE 2.1.**  
Voltron™ LIONS

Upgrading our lens, defining our non-negotiables, and achieving full life-integration are the means to attain heightened levels of freedom and expression in everyday life.

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002.b | **“Enough of this shit.  
We’re forming Voltron.”**

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My fellow 1980’s latch-key friends may remember a (rad) anime cartoon called Voltron™. It was about a badass, giant robot that was formed by five separate robotic lions.

*See figure 2.1*

Each had their own unique special power. Every episode, some new alien threat would push the lions around to the point where their leader basically said: “OK, enough of this shit. We’re forming Voltron.”

You could always count on Voltron whooping some alien ass and restoring peace to the galaxy.

FIGURE 2.2. - Voltron™

full-life integration



Whatever your sacred life ingredients may be, over the years you've already disproven all the doubters or plain-old haters by saying, "I'm not giving up on my NN's, simply because *I don't know any better.*" It's right there, in the name, you dirty hater: **NON-Negotiable.**"

Just like Voltron,

you'll need each *NN* (lion) to create the *whole of you.*

In the nurturing of our seemingly disparate talents and skills,

we experience moments of Full-Life Integration,

where the *whole of us* beats alien ass

on a whole other level.

See Figure 2.2.

non-negotiables

But none of this is possible without  
our most fundamental requirement:

002.c | *THE LENS*

From gritty super-8 to pristine high-definition, our lens captures, magnifies, and either enhances or diminishes *all we experience*.

We must embrace our singular perspective of the world. Our lens includes the go-to filters we choose throughout our lives. The lens cannot be duplicated.

Thousands of corny books have been written on *attitude*, and I've enjoyed most of them. The digital age, with its relentless visual, auditory, and social stimuli requires us to go beyond maintaining an agreeable attitude. I, too, need to know *what the hell is wrong with me* when it comes to achieving and maintaining optimal levels of positivity.

Prior to discovering the integration model, I would trip over fleeting moments of full-life integration. Now I make a conscious effort to reside here.

But it all begins with...



THE LENS



[ it either  
enhances,



(or diminishes)

all we experience.]



You have to nurture a healthy way of viewing whatever is coming at you. You have to love and embrace what makes up your Voltron. When asked the question, "How do you view your life?", if you hesitate, start whacking the gavel like Judge Judy, or cringe, you really need to start by checking your lens.

Is the cap on? Did you fall asleep, eyes open, face down in a large pad of butter?

When life demands it, we may need to upgrade our lens immediately. In the meantime, we always have the opportunity to focus, and expand it. # # #

**REMEMBER:** The Lens governs all we experience  
in This Epic Life.

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**Up Next:** Why some people ask *what the hell is wrong with me.*



## 003 | my lens, and its origin

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Our Grandfather chose to be called Poppa, which was later shortened to Pops.

Luis E. Bejarano possessed more than a few of my highest ideals: a family of 6 kids with a gorgeous wife of 64 years, a castle of a homestead in the epicenter of his community, a deep love of oratory and the fine arts, and mastery of the balance between the intangibles of *grace* and *swagger*, to name a few.

The cat could thoroughly rock a pair of white slacks and a lighthouse sweater or a captain's hat with a leather nautical jacket. Many people only ever knew him as Captain Bejarano.

Pops was in full command of his complex life, yet maintained the incessant fascination of a child. He was in awe of everything. He retired from a decorated career as a serviceman, and later, as a college administrator before taking up philanthropy. In the mid-80s, he used his gift of rallying others to form the Fire Island Preservation Society. The museum at the base of the restored lighthouse pays tribute with a few of Poppa's quotes about "honoring our maritime heritage."

And yet, out of everything he accomplished in his outer life, nothing came close to the magic he and Nana created within the walls of their home. Their family was iconic; an idyllic American dream lived by first generation immigrants.

Pops was the Walt Disney of the neighborhood, hosting elaborate backyard carnivals featuring magicians, petting zoos, disappearing acts, strong men, and sing-alongs. At 92, Nana still runs her household with the precision of a Swiss watch.

Poppa inspired many through his example. He was already the Captain. He later became The Lighthouse. He gave everyone in his path access to a world that was wide-open with possibility.

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But how did he do this? Pops had a broken lens.

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Through a life of tireless duty and tenacity, he developed unshakable optimism. His mantra was the anonymous quote: *It always works out in the end, so if it's not working out, it's not the end.* He filtered the entire world around him whether good, bad, or neutral through a lens of possibility and wonder. If Adobe created Photoshop plugins for the filters Pops viewed the world through, they would be called *Tremendous* and *Magnificent*. Those were his two speeds.



## 27 | this epic life: *THE FRAMEWORK.*

His lens could magnify, color correct, ratchet up vibrancy, and project images back in 1200 dpi or 1080p HD. He brought everyone around him into the frame and on to the screen. Through his lens, the ordinary became extraordinary.

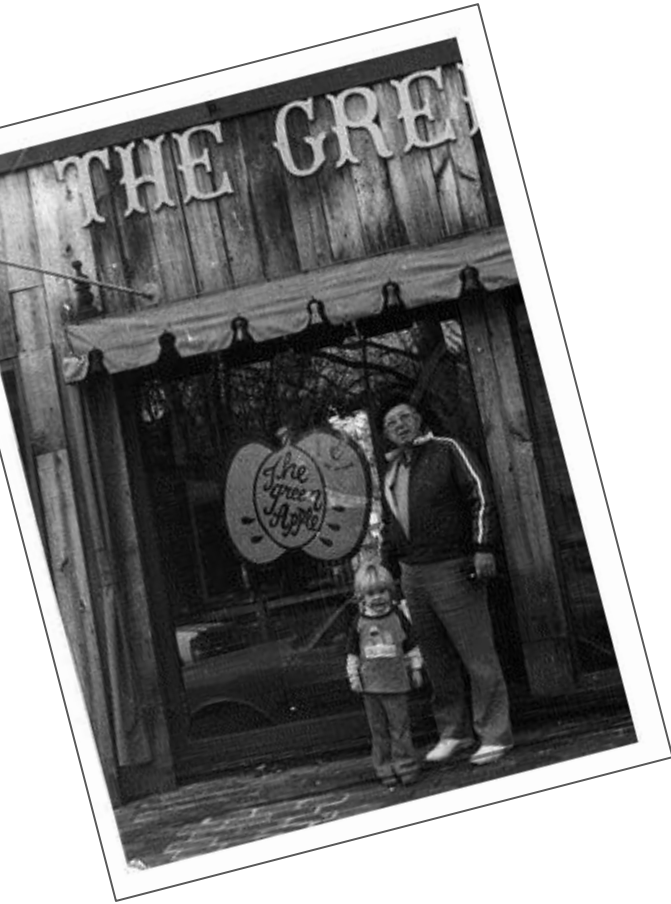
The mundane churn of life for many was revolutionary for Poppa. He would constantly scribble and share grand schemes for simple things, like constructing more than 50 birdhouses for the backyard. The annual Bejarano Christmas card was received (and responded to) by countless Presidential administrations.

In the '50s, Pops turned the card into an origami tree ornament, featuring one of the kids and the family dog on each side. The whole tribe of kids would form an assembly line to build these by hand for hundreds (if not thousands) of lucky recipients. Archives from nearly 70 years of Christmas cards line the shelves of the homestead.

The breakfast table was a forum for his oratory, and the stories exploded in vivid detail. In every retelling of the family legends, I was always right there with him.

Even as a 4-year old kid, I felt like I had always been there with him.

At his funeral in 2008, my uncle Lu summarized him beautifully by saying, "My Dad was a grand man." The badass patriarch of an epic family adventure, he wouldn't let us call him *Grandfather*. It felt too formal. It's obvious now how these two words capture his legend: Grand, Father.



Pops, I now recognize you as a *Divine Guru*. You set the standard. You gave me so many gifts, yet the best I've ever received in life has been your epic lens.

At some point in the late '70's, The Captain removed his multi-filtered lenses and fastened them to the eyes of his young grandson.



The automatic response to life events from  
that point forward has always been:  
*I believe in everything, and everyone, all the time.*



I've experienced countless visits from Pops since 2008, usually when holding a newborn infant or pushing a peak of physical endurance. The familiar, loving, power-ripples of vibes through my body let me know he's borrowing my view, *through our lens*.

Our kids usually keep us from making the trip back to Long Island to commemorate the Captain's birthday. Last year during the party, there was an exposed brick poking up through the patio they built in the '90s. One of my uncles asked Nana how long it had been that way.



## 29 | this epic life: *THE FRAMEWORK.*

She responded: "That brick has always been that way. I think Poppa left a letter or a time capsule under there."

Anyone within earshot yelled, in unison: "What?!"

The brick was pulled, and sure enough, beneath some sand and grit was a plastic bag.

They carefully lifted it and dusted it off.

Minutes later, uncle Lu was reading Poppa's message of loving welcome; of the strength of family; of the importance of coming together, to his four generations of assembled guests.

There were more smiles than tears, but it still kicks my ass to contemplate *THAT POWER.*

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THROUGH LIFETIMES  
& BEYOND...  
THE LENS ENDURES.

DON'T NEED TO MISS YOU

FACE INTO GUITAR

Belly up to the table  
The old man's holding the floor  
Are they memories or are they fables  
I really can't tell anymore  
Sunlight enters the kitchen  
Breakfast cooking away  
Teach me all of my lessons  
Tell me everything's OK

As the days roll on  
we'll get far away  
Now you're gone, all I say

You probably had more to do with  
who I am  
than I do **AI DO**  
You're closer than you've ever been so  
I don't need to miss you  
But I do  
miss you

Take me into the city  
A story for every stone  
I'll soak up every second  
but I can't wait to get back home  
This is where I'll return to  
Archives lining the shelves  
Show me how to do what it takes  
to make life turn out so well

As the days roll on  
we'll get far away  
Now you're gone, all I say

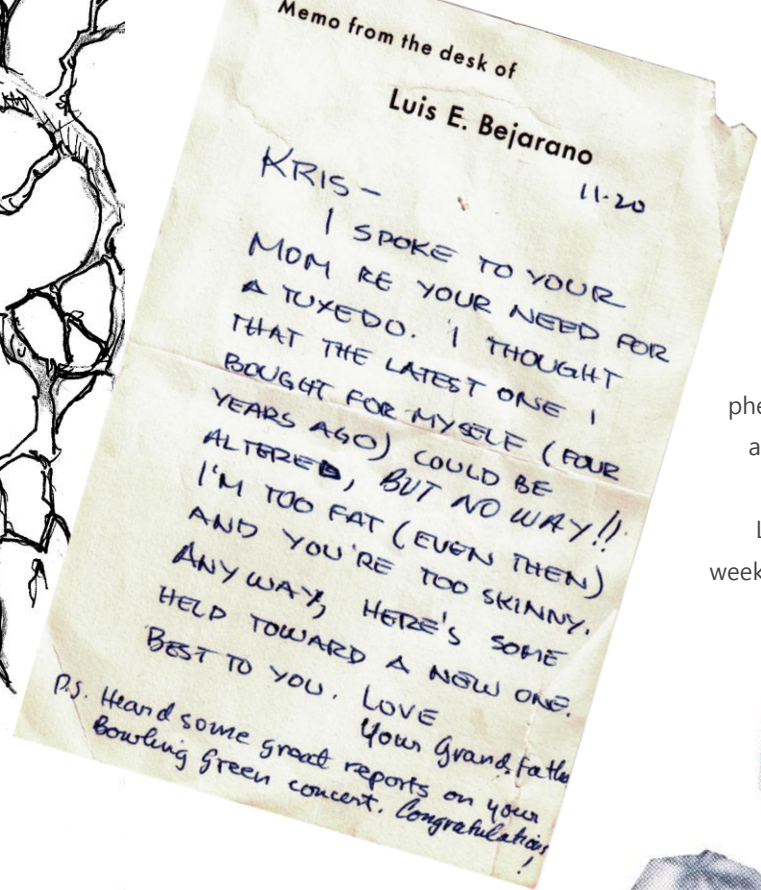
You probably had more to do with  
who I am  
than I do  
You're closer than you've ever been so  
I don't need to miss you  
But I do  
miss you

CELLO PICKS UP

ALL THE TREES IN  
THE BACKYARD  
GREEN LIKE  
MONUMENTS  
& THEY FOLLOWED  
YOU OUT POPS

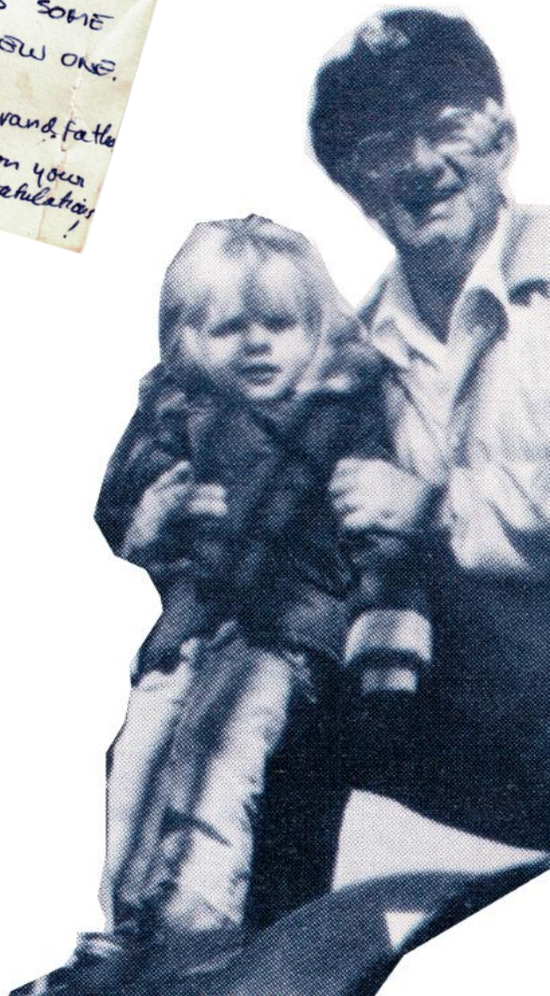
LEARN VOCAL MELODY ON  
CELLO

BACK TO 8 MIN. LATER SOLO SECTION



visitations.

I've lost count how many handwritten notes, photos I don't remember ever having seen, and other random phenomena magically appear when I think about my Pops. Left, a note I found weeks after his passing.



**AUDITORY? ::** Hear the song *Don't Need To Miss You* by kc [on Soundcloud.](#)

## 004 | our work, together.

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### The 1:1 Victory

The spectator probably didn't mean to sound like such a tool when he cheered the runner in front of me, yelling: "Keep running, old man!"

I pulled alongside the runner, a small, but obviously fit older gentleman. His shock of white hair and matching beard elicited the idiotic "old man" comment.

"Don't worry, he's talking to *me*," I told him. The runner laughed. "What's your name?"

"Allen."

Making a new friend momentarily pulled his attention away from any pain, his pace, or onlookers.

Mile 23 of a marathon is no joke. I would liken it to centimeters 6 through 9 of natural child birth. Having participated in a few of each of these profound mental and physical tests, I recall the goal at either point is to maintain heavy concentration while putting your body on autopilot to do its job. Jokes and smiles have ceased by this point.



In between lightning bolts of pain, your mind wants to run amok. Ridiculous questions with complicated answers surface: *"Why did we do this again?"*

The question of pace becomes all-consuming, because shit, you've made it this far. You'll have to maintain enough grace and stamina to finish, while simultaneously begging and pleading for it to all be over. *"How far along are we? Are we even making progress?"* Timed mile markers check in like pushy nurses, begging the question: *"Do we even have what it takes to finish?"*

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*"What the hell were we thinking?!?"*

.....

This was the first time in years I didn't register to run our hometown race. Our neighborhood is 3.2 miles from the finish. That Sunday, I woke up needing to squeeze six miles in, and I wanted to feed off the energy from the marathoners. I could hear the cheers from our house, so I laced up.

*"How are you feeling, Allen?"*

His voice sounded pained, and I could tell he was pissed off. *"Not great. My knee melted down 6 miles back. I'm at least a minute off pace. I'll finish a few minutes behind goal."* Then it occurred to me. This guy is sweating a "few minutes" in a marathon?

He had to be a serious runner. I hadn't paid attention to our speed up until this point. Suddenly I realized we were both *hauling ass*.

"Uh, what's your typical pace, Allen?"

"6:50. But with this damn knee, I'll be lucky to finish at 8:00 overall."

Running sub-8 minute miles is not an easy thing to do. It's pretty quick, even without running 23 consecutive miles before hand. My natural pace is around 9:00, so 8:00 feels like I'm pushing it. In fact, I hadn't even tried it at this point. In Allen's mind, he was "losing" with 8-minuters, and only because his knee gave out.

"OMG, I completely picked the wrong guy to run in." We still had three miles to go at an ideal pace of 7 minutes. His demons had already caught up to him, and mine weren't too far behind. Perhaps, "...maybe I'm not cut out for this coaching stuff".

*Nah, screw that noise.* We had hit it off. I managed to pull him out of his head (and his knee). But if both of us were going to be happy at the end of these final 3.2 miles, we would need to *consciously reframe the entire experience*. We needed to transcend circumstances and move solely into The Heart; to begin the celebration from where we were, ultimately carrying us through to the desired outcome.

It was hard for me to talk while running this pace. Still, I hid any signs of wanting to puke up my lungs or collapse on the curb like a large, blubbering man-baby.

I needed to learn enough about him to remind him *who he is* on a deeper, more profound level. Selfishly, I also needed to learn how the hell to run 7-minute miles when I'm 60.

The line of questioning sought to meet him wherever he was, and pull him up through pain and into belief. I wanted to learn what his non-negotiables were. They would tell me where the love was in his life, which I could use to restructure his current headspace into having fun.



**My Questions (NN)**

**His Responses**

"How's this weather treating you?"	(lens)	"I had a tailwind most of the way." (hopeful)
"Do you work around here?"	(work)	"30 years at the power company." (pride)
"Why do you run?"	(vitality)	"I started when I was 30, and just never quit." (lens)
"How many marathons have you run?"	(lens)	"I lost count. Over 60. I've run Boston 18 times."
"Where are you going to celebrate?"	(lens)	"We do a big dinner at Great Lakes Brewing."
"Do you have kids? Do they run?"	(family)	"My daughter is running Chicago, trying to qualify."



He was now beyond the knee issue, and enjoying our conversation. We just happened to be running. I grabbed him drinks at the tables and discarded his trash. We learned enough about each other to have a few laughs. We knew a couple of the same people. He asked me what I was doing out on the race course.

"Making friends? I wanted to find a fellow runner in need, and then run them in to the finish. You're kicking my ass though, Allen."

"Well, I sure appreciate it, Kris. I was definitely in need."

My lens took the surface curiosity I had for Allen's life and magnified it into genuine fascination, before settling into deep reverence and belief. We were *meant* to intersect and help each other along this stretch of road. His run had begun long before I woke up this morning, yet we had been on a collision course.

An explosion was building, the type that only occurs when someone sees in us what we had a hunch was already there.



The upward spiral of thoughts, oxygen, and love escalated. "This guy next to me is a fucking badass, and this guy <imagining my thumbs to my chest> is miraculously holding pace and speeding up toward the finish... Holy crap, I feel *SO ALIIIIIIIIIIIIIVE!*"

By the time we took the last hill and turned right onto Main, the streets were lined with crowds— holding signs and shaking cowbells, respect glowing in their eyes, witnesses to athletes at the tail end of 26.2 miles. I didn't want to be mistaken for someone who had gone the distance, so I redirected my energy onto Allen.

My hand hovered over his head, and I yelled to the curbs:

.....

"Over 60 marathons down and 57 years old! Give it up for my man, *ALLENNNNNNNNN!!*" My arms went up, the Flavor-Flav to Allen's Chuck-D. The crowd *erupted*.

.....

Allen was so humble and determined, but I saw the formation of an unmistakable, proud grin on his grill. We hammered down and sped up.

Soon we'd be within the final .2 miles, the equivalent of *transition* in child birth. In transition, the infant's head crowns, and the mother experiences what is called the *ring of fire*. This is the harshest, most impossibly acute pain, just prior to the relief of a new human entering the world.

Marathoners often describe the final .2 as the longest piece of the race.

The body is toast, and the mind knows relief is just a couple football fields away. In both cases, it's truly the darkest just before dawn. We acknowledge the impossibility of our

circumstances. It doesn't matter how many have come before us. It hurts us on a level we've never experienced. Sweat pours into our eyes and burns. Primal, guttural moans just happen.

Are they even coming from us? We've transcended the ego hours back. In both cases, a *new human being* is about to emerge.

Until then, the entire soul can only scream:

*Must. Be. DOONNNE.*

We were quickly approaching the barricades lining the entrance to the stadium, where Allen would enter to cross the finish. If I didn't bail now, I'd get sucked into the crush of runners.

"Allen! It has been an honor, brother! You're a machine! You enjoy this finish for me, alright?"

"I already am. Thanks so much, Kris. I'll look for you at the other end. Thank you."

He disappeared behind the wall and into the stadium. I fell back and joined the crowded curb. Allen & I couldn't find one another outside the finishing corrals. We were two strangers, who spent a total of 22 minutes together.

.....

But, what had been accomplished? Were we just two guys on a run, or were we collaborators in an *epic life event?*

.....

What placed us on one another's path, and how can you measure the compounded benefits of such an experience?

Allen finished at an overall pace of 7:53 per mile, for a total marathon time of 3:26:52. He came in 149<sup>th</sup> total, out of 1391 finishers. Even with the knee meltdown, he finished 1<sup>st</sup> in his division of M55-59. He also smoked every person I've ever run with.

# # #

**Is it possible to create similar energy swells in our work lives?**



**How can we inspire and influence our teams and organizations?**



## 005 | our work, together

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### The Group Victory

Last summer in Chicago I closed our digital media company's national sales conference. As I wrapped up an unfiltered talk on "why we do what we do" and "what qualifies our team to change the digital media industry", things veered off into Weirdsville.

Four years ago, I began motivating our cozy team of 40 with metaphors like: "you need to mount your inner Pegasus and soar over that double-rainbow!" or, "...we need you on the path, so stop wrasslin' in the weeds with the turkeys like some damn hillbilly."

Now, I stood before my 200 teammates, including our executive team and finished with: "I'm known around here as kind of a nut, a goofball. I like to laugh. We have a lot of fun. But when it comes to my love for this company, and your success, which is directly tied to my family's success as an extension of this organization...

I am dead f\*cking serious."

*<tumbleweeds blew through the ball room, pins dropped, old ladies fainted>.*

"If there is ever anything I can do for any one of you... to lift you up, to help you out, or realign you with our mission... You just hit me up, OK? Well OK, then..."

With that awkward close came applause, followed by disco music. I had one more trick up my sleeve. Two weeks earlier, I MC'd my little sister's wedding. The reception had escalated into a muddy, (yet somehow classy) dance-frenzy. It also became the lab for the experiment that was about to follow.

Our executive team fell into position, lining everyone up into a horseshoe formation, facing one another. I started shepherding our 200-person work family through a two-sided, infinite "high-five" tunnel; tall guys from sales high-fiving little ladies from finance, and childlike shrieks coming off of typically grumpy developers, high-fiving their brothers and sisters in account management.

The disco grind of Scissor Sisters blasted from the overhead speakers. The hotel staff had to think we were a cult.

The next day, a coworker from D.C. reminded me how I must've completely lost my shit at some point, because I yelled:

**"It's WORKING! It's FREAKIN' WORKING,  
you guys!! Keep it going!!!"**

Smacks of infinite high-fives reached a fever pitch. After a good old-fashioned group chant, all I could properly end with was:

.....

"I love you guys! See you at the top!"

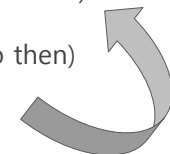
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The wireless mic fell loudly to the floor.

Centro has been a blessing, because they not only tolerate my wily brand of *Inspirado*, they actually encourage it. They amplify it.

For the second year in a row, Crain's Chicago Business [rated Centro as the #1 best place to work in Chicago](#), ahead of Google, Microsoft, and every other start-up with offices there. Our *Corporate Manifesto*, which our founder and CEO Shawn Riegsecker wrote as an extension of his Mennonite heritage, preaches *humility* as one of our core principles. Still, it gives me chills whenever we're recognized for creating such a special culture, one that creates an upward spiral, or *Happy Client Continuum* :

- ① The company takes incredible care of the employees (who then)
- ② Take incredible care of the client & vendor partners (who then)
- ③ Take incredible care of the company (repeat)



Over the last few years, I've designated myself as a Culture Catalyst, reminding my teammates when "...it's WORKING, you guys! Keep it going!"

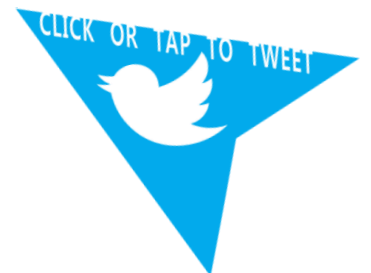
In training my new hire classes on the full-life integration exercises, I'm able to identify those special few with *catalyst* potential.

**These are the operatives we can deploy in challenging times, and count on to elevate an entire culture.**

###

When challenging times  
inevitably hit,  
WE CAN COUNT ON  
THE CATALYSTS  
TO ELEVATE A  
ENTIRE  
CULTURE.

-kc-





Watch a 30-second preview of the free Full-Life Integration [Workbook](#).

## 007 | the journey begins

“You’ve gotta start **somewhere**, or you get **nowhere**.”

- Bob Marley

If I have a motive in any of this, it’s to give you what my Pops gave me all those years ago:

- ① A framework to clarify, simplify, and amplify your own life.
- ② A clear understanding and acceptance of your potential.

We **deserve** to be happy more often than not, excited more often than not, increasingly calm in more turbulent times, and constantly reminded of our singular value.

**Take the first step.**

I’ve compiled the essential exercises from my first 5 years motivating individuals and teams, and created a free “Full-Life Integration” workbook. You can tap/click the image in the upper left, or [visit here for a 30-second preview](#).

## I've distilled it all down to 3 alignment exercises:

- ① **upgrade your lens, upgrade your life:** crafting your personal "lens" statement.
- ② **define your non-negotiables:** narrowing down your sacred life ingredients.
- ③ **full-life integration:** threading your non-negotiables into rituals throughout your week.

It's my mission to help you continually upgrade your lens. Along the way, we'll identify and create space for your non-negotiables. From there, we'll practice and achieve periods of Full-Life Integration. Above all, we'll have a great time doing it.

## Thank you. And YOU. And that lady, in the sweats...

I take nothing for granted. You've made it this far into *The Framework* because you've had questions, and hopefully, this little doc has provided a fresh perspective.

I'm sincerely **grateful** you've found this work, and have taken the time to join me. *This Epic Life Manifesto* will conclude the introductory portion of *The Framework*. From there, please continue on into The Addendum, which begins with **SOUL**.

Mad Love & Spirit Fingers,



Kristoffer Carter | *chief catalyst* | [thisepiclife](http://thisepiclife.com)  
November, 2012.

# this epic life manifesto.

**W**e define our lives by our **non-negotiables**: our **sacred** life ingredients that cannot be removed or substituted. We **remember** Who We Are and what we're capable of. We **evaluate** success based on the continual expansion of our **non-negotiables**. We **design** our path, and let others design their own. We **expect** to be tested, pushed and pulled; it only increases our flexibility and points us toward destined outcomes. We **honor** where we come from, and carry with us only the good. We **upgrade Our Lens** whenever necessary. We **recognize** ourselves in everyone, all the time, and treat them accordingly. We **require** only vitality and clear space to create, or to recreate any prior level of success. We **feel** everything from everyone, and are quick to filter what's worth keeping. We **will** always show up, and once engaged, we're **All In**. We **work** through creative means, whatever the job. Our work does not define us. Why we work, and our method of creation defines us. We **complete** our work. We **serve** others consistently, only after we nourish ourselves. We **deserve** only a fraction of the value we create for others. We **rally** when relied upon to do so. We **rejuvenate**. We **will** come through for ourselves and others because **that is what we do**. We **laugh** unapologetically, with sincerity and with **force**. We **surprise** one another. We **inspire** one another. We constantly express gratitude. **We celebrate this epic life.**



TAP or CLICK to  
LISTEN TO THE  
[MUSIC/AUDIO version](#)

(!!!)



# ADDENDUM.

From this point forward, I've included my personal path toward Full-Life Integration.

**Let me be clear:** *This Epic Life* is only about YOU, and your journey. If sharing my saga entertains or inspires in some way, please proceed. It all begins with... S O U L .

## CONTENTS:

Living my non-negotiables.

008 | NN#1: SOUL

009 | NN#2: VITALITY

010 | NN#3: FAMILY

011 | NN#4: ART

012 | NN#5: WORK



## 008 | **defining my non-negotiables**

### **NN#1: SOUL**

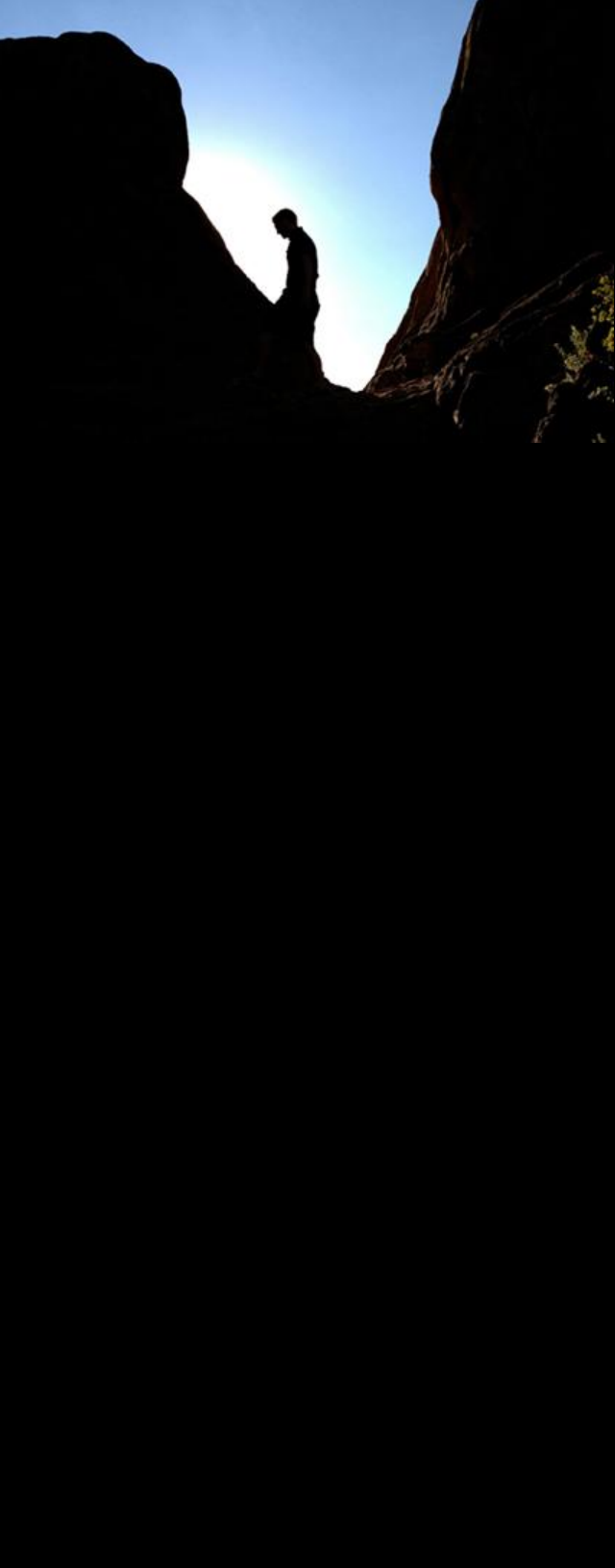
The relationship we cultivate with our inner selves, or Higher Power, is the foundation for everything in our lives. When you're out of sync with your *Self*, everyone and everything around you knows it. You can tell by the quality of people or circumstances you're attracting in a given week.

Are they cooperative, or uncooperative?

All other non-negotiables orbit around the foundational relationship we hold with ourselves, and our spiritual core. The simple term for this is *soul*.

Within our soul is where we cultivate the strength to conquer life's battles. Before we can even affect our outer world, (including our own physical vitality and families) we must develop, and nourish our inner world.

All religions are converging pathways back to our *soul*, which can be discovered on the altars of countless faiths, or traversed regularly through meditation. Whatever you have that works for you, I am 100% completely down with. I was thrown off course by a fire-and-brimstone TV evangelist at a young age, but decades of insatiable, tireless seeking have proven the same truths found at the heart of every true religion:



.....

When we express enough gratitude,  
create enough space, and truly listen.....  
the answers have been inside us all along.

.....



We just need to shut down our ever-increasingly noisy outer world long enough to let them through.

I've intersected with my soul during weddings, whether in a pew or later on the dance floor. I've certainly felt the *Magnitude Of Being* during the natural births of each of our 3 kids. Your soul can be felt within the panorama of breathtaking natural beauty or in hearing an immaculate funk groove bump on the jukebox.

You can't let your soul become something you merely run into on occasion. You have to practice regular contact, and build the relationship the same way you would any other. Regular contact with the soul is the difference between having to pull off for fuel every few miles, or, riding shotgun alongside yourself in the front seat of an endless Love Rollercoaster.

Since starting with it 7 years ago, I've recently increased my meditation practice to twice daily. I've found the more I take on, and the deeper levels of happiness I experience, the more time I need to spend in meditative communion.

My Soul is my primary, absolute non-negotiable because I'm not willing to sacrifice any inner-guidance for any potentially temporary aspect of my life. Our freewill & creative expression as self-aware beings drives everything else.

If Daddy doesn't have his vibe on, I'm sorry, but he doesn't have as much to offer. He's now vulnerable to the wicked nonsense of the world, and his bullshit will roll downhill.

The flipside of this, of course, is that when Daddy tunes up with his inner shredder, he is now ready and willing to melt faces with searing finger-tapping solos, screaming "yes. yeS. YESSS!" while performing impossibly deep lunges.

The entire universe conspires to work *through* him, and all of us are better off by that example.

So, if you're going to rock any other non-negotiables on some level, you must bring your gorgeous soul with you. You two are going to need to get along.

You'll need that calm, All-Knowing part of you when life gets crazy.     # # #



## 009 | **defining my non-negotiables**

### **NN#2: VITALITY**

It's interesting how our fundamental needs are the first to get the axe whenever we're clamoring for more moRE MORE! If *soul* powers the experience, our *vitality* dictates whether we'll even be able to pull it off.

For *vitality*, I'm referring to physical well-being, and the simple things we can do to maximize it. We'll need to confront the two arch nemeses of the modern American way of life: 1) Diet and 2) Physical exercise.

### **Part 1: Diet**

Who doesn't love the euphoria of sitting at your computer on a Friday morning, jacked up on coffee and doughnuts, firing off witty zingers to clients and coworkers? It's all that sitting and sugar that inevitably have us circling the drain, before eating out for lunch and face-planting into the hellish mid-afternoon lull. No wonder our moods swing so violently.

I'm grateful to have realized the levels to which food and drink affect my mental, spiritual, and emotional clarity. It helps me make smart choices more often than not, all in the interest of maximizing vitality.

My Mom always insisted on cooking from scratch, and would never let us spend money on fast food or candy. This created an interesting duality in my approach to food. My wife would argue it turned me into a high-and-mighty health food purist in public, who then binges on junk food in filthy secrecy.

All of my experimentation with different bodily fuel (2-Whoppers for 2-bucks in college, vegetarianism, veganism, Ph Miracle high-alkaline diet, raw juicing, etc) has led me to one very simple conclusion:



If it makes you feel like shit, do **NOT** eat it.

If it makes you feel great, do your best to eat **MORE** of it.



The key here is to *consciously pay attention* to how food affects you and your energy level. Every person's constitution is unique, and although we'd probably evolve a lot faster as raw-juicing vegans (potentially becoming telepathic in the process), I can see where it isn't for everybody.



It bugs me when people assume something healthy tastes gross while they're crushing a bag of sugar-dipped Cheesy Poofs and a beer. Just because it looks like pond water doesn't mean it tastes like it. To them I say, "Nothing tastes as good as Amazing FEELS!"

To which, they may argue, "Well nothing feels as good as Amazing TASTES!"

---

Hey, I'm jealous of your Cheesy Poofs. My mom never let me have those. They've always been delicious, but they also left me feeling like a guilty, boiled turd.

---

In the end, if you truly care about vitality, you have to agree that feeling trumps taste. If you discover foods that both taste great to you *and* make you feel great over the long term, eat those. If we're both trim and feeling great, we're not going to waste time arguing over what to eat.

We'll be too busy dancing, or practicing grand entrances like fierce runway models.

## Part 2: Physical Exercise

Last Saturday, I took my daughter to Karate. There were the usual demo and training vids looping to entertain the parents. These students were doing all sorts of insane, ninja-like jumps and kicks, shredding the bow staff and nunchucks. I was riveted. I was sort of jealous I was never exposed to something like this as a kid, but it probably would've cut into my precious *Legend of Zelda* quest.

Between loops of the DVD flashed a powerful message:

.....  
*If you own a body, you are an athlete.*  
.....

This made so much sense. I was angry I never heard this as a kid. Lettering in track or wrestling doesn't make you an athlete. Possessing natural ability in throwing a football or swinging a bat doesn't make you an athlete.

Choosing to put your God-given body to work through physical activity makes you an athlete. It's an in-the-moment choice to shake a leg, to spaz out and move, to fire up your human mechanism and move some energy.



Don't get me wrong, I know absolutely zero about professional sports or sports-related matters. When I've had to take clients to sporting events, my cheer is always, "Gooooooo SPORTS!" Because of my lens though, I have mad respect for athletes and their superhuman powers. They are physical proof of the evolution of the species.

The irony is that although I picked up a few instruments as a kid and quickly gained proficiency, I never thought it made me a musician. My time spent mastering the language and creating music made me a musician. It was my conscious choice to show up, day after day, either to rehearsals or to the woodshed: honing my chops and memorizing scales.

I never understood this as it related to being athletic.

My brother was the athlete. I was the musician. This made it easier for my parents to tell us apart. It would take us decades before my brother picked up a guitar, or I laced up my running shoes.

Shortly before I turned 30, I moved to Chicago with my wife and 3-month old daughter. I had no job to support us, and we had to pay our health insurance out of pocket. Part of my "Category-5 Hellbent on Reinvention Strategy" was to get in shape. I worked out sporadically over the years, mostly to barely maintain my metrosexual, skinny-jeans physique.



Mile 19 of the Chicago Marathon

.....

Something about running always appealed to me. It had to either be the shoes, shorts, or taut thighs, because honestly, the act of running looked damn taxing and painful.

.....

One morning, I threw on some crappy old sneakers and ran down the street. By the end of the block I was hurting, but turned right anyway and headed east toward the lake. I knew from my walks to the train it was exactly a mile from our street to the shore. There was a light at Clark, thank God. I swallowed my lungs back down and pressed on another 3 blocks before walking.

The next day, I made it 6 blocks, then 10 blocks, then finally to the shore by the weekend. I wanted to shout it from every corner, like an old-timey paper boy: *'Musician and Decidedly NON-Athletic Kristoffer Carter Ran an Entire Mile!'* I told anyone who would listen. Most didn't.

That first full mile stands as one of my greatest physical achievements, ahead of numerous half and full marathons, and the hundreds (wow, thousands?) of training miles I've run since. There wasn't any crowd, any glory, or free Gatorade.

I was just far beyond my comfort zone, relying on myself to dispel the bullshit myth I learned as a kid—that I wasn't an athlete.



That first mile ignited my obsession to chase the dragon down every street in Chicago: to circulate more blood and oxygen, to cover more ground, to percolate more profound creative thought, to transmute any nonsensical emotional pain into visceral physical pain, to transcend my human machine by working sympathetically with it.



So when people tell me they aren't runners or athletes, I say: "neither am I". It's a choice you make in the moment to move that body and shake dat ass.

The best days of my life have followed runs I initially resisted. The oxygen and scenery got me out of bed, then, the serotonin and adrenaline sustained me, returning with too many personal, spiritual, and creative realizations to list here.

My summer runs finish with my sweaty, grinning mess lying on my back in the front yard, feeling my entire life breathe in sync with the cloud-filled sky. The kids climb all over me, no doubt excited by the old man's vitality. ###

FAMILY

NN #3

## 010 | defining my non-negotiables

### NN#3: FAMILY

Once my happy soul swigs from the ruby-encrusted goblet of vitality, I'm now worthy of my peoples.

Last week, I returned from a long road trip of work. I set down my suitcase, threw my keys & wallet on the table, and turned the corner into the family room. The couch was full of people. I still can't believe there are now 4 (holy smokes, FOUR!) of them. Gayle and I have three fairly badass children: Elliott (8), Frankie (4) and Leon (1).

Together, we comprise what I jokingly call *The Carter Force 5*.

My family is the miracle that quietly manifested during my pursuit of everything else. Easily the sickest family funk band I've been associated with, yet I have no idea how we formed or what I did to deserve membership.

Last month we randomly graced the cover of *Akron Life* magazine.



## 60 | this epic life: *THE FRAMEWORK.*

Gayle and I have been married for 13 years, and we're still predominantly young. We met at a rock club 17 years ago, when I fell disturbingly ass-over-elbows in L-O-V-E with her shaven headed, tattooed, dog-collared, nose-pierced, and other-worldly gorgeous little self. Her Mom, my now Mother-in law, introduced us.

I saw it all: the wedding, the cross-country moves, the kids, and the house we live in now.

Our oldest daughter Elliott was born when we lived in L.A. She's now 8 and is easily the smartest person in our house. She knows this, but her giant heart doesn't let her abuse it too much. Her eyes also make her too easy to read.

Frankie is our crazy one. She attacks everything in her path with a spirited, punk-rock ferocity, all the while laughing maniacally. Her first year of life was like a prolonged hurricane season in the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of our home.

Leon is the brown-eyed little Buddha, our "Little Brownie," or "Babyhead". He regularly shrieks with joy while yanking violently on my bottom lip. Leon stays eternally tan and genuinely amazed at everything.

.....

My family reminds me why I do what I do, how long I have to get it done, and where we want to celebrate later over dinner.

.....





## 61 | this epic life: *THE FRAMEWORK.*

I make them breakfast every morning, and we eat dinner together every night. The kids each get a (overly-elaborate) bedtime routine of baths, books, and a few songs. Every. Single. Night. We've tried to curtail this depending on our levels of exhaustion, but it never works. The routine anchors our evenings.

It's honestly hard to be certain, but I can't tell anymore if we're the most textbook, "normal" family on our block, or the most cutting-edge. The whole world has shifted around us more than a few times. We no longer seem to be the norm. The era I grew up in was wracked with divorce and two working parents who barely spoke.

Becoming The Cleavers seemed to be the most anti-establishment, shock to the system thing we could do. Last year, we even bought a Ford.

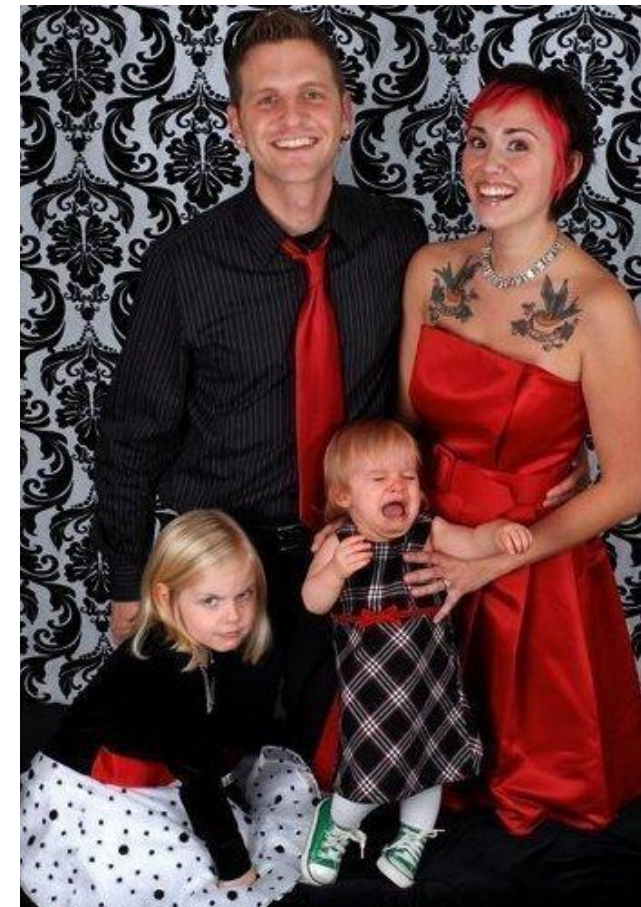
The most important thing you can teach your kids is that life is all about creative expression, and being whoever you want to be. This is my department. I love the dichotomy of living a rock-and-roll lifestyle while pushing a state-of-the-art ergonomic stroller up the street. Gayle keeps the trains running on time, and lets us know where to find things like shoes, my laptop, or my ATM card. On her Facebook page, she humorously lists her current career as "wipes asses and cleans up everybody at Daddy Warbucks, Inc".

**We all do our part, which is why it works.**

Our household is the most complex, demanding, and relentless 24/7 job we've ever worked. The days are long, but the years are a blur when you've got more love than you know what to do with.

We're nowhere near perfect, and we have our share of grumpy moments.

Yet, we've also figured out how to make it work at a level few are crazy enough to attempt these days.     # # #





## 011 | defining my non-negotiables

### NN#4: ART

Shortly after we moved to Chicago, I booked a little show just to remind myself I could play. The only people we knew in the city were coworkers, and a few actually showed up.

One brought her fluffy-haired, drunk and jaded roommate from college. This woman now had kids and a giant house, and just seemed really bored with all of it. After my first set she complimented me, and followed it with: "Your wife must really be a saint, to stay home with the baby and let you keep doing your hobbies... so late on a work night."

I laughed, and said, "Fortunately, you don't know me or my wife."

A lot of well-meaning friends and even fellow musicians have attempted to "talk straight" to Gayle about my obsession with music over the years. She looks at them dumbfounded, like: "Do you think I don't know who I married? He has always been this way.

It's who he is."

.....  
**All work and no ROCK makes Krissy rather intolerable.**  
.....





Music remains my longest practice. It informs my spirituality, my family, my work, and my life. It levels me out.

I've been consumed with music for as long as I can remember. As a five year old, I wanted to be Barry Manilow. (Don't judge-- Barry knows what's up.) I took up cello and piano lessons in elementary school. Later, I soaked up every single second of hair metal and Shit-Rock on MTV.

As a teenager, I discovered Flea and Les Claypool from Primus. From that point on, it was all about bass.

*"Before you went to college, or could ever afford that suit  
Before you met your wife and kids, or Ron Burgundy rocked the flute  
When the internet was farmland as far as the eye could see  
You'd lock yourself up in your room, and rock that energy"*

- **"You Played Bass"** <video [here](#)>

Back in college, I got an audition for one of my favorite ska bands. For the next few years, we averaged 200+ shows in more than 35 states. Our disgusting, creepy, converted school bus became home schooling for music and comedy. It was a period of blissed out, sleepless insanity. My chops and comfort zone desperately needed the push. Later, I



moved into singing and songwriting, taking up guitar. For the last few years, I've put out records as *The Kristoffer Carter Show*, playing all the instruments on my albums but the drums. I still perform my one-man show at campuses around the country with an arsenal of loop pedals.

Music was one of the first languages I fully understood, and could express with any level of confidence. It always represented pure joy and fathomless power. The weeks and months spent in marching band rehearsals kept me out of trouble and provided structure and discipline. I made many of my life-long friends through music, and continue to do so.

There are so many aspects of playing or performing that can be applied to every other aspect of my work life.

.....

Music taught me that life can be viewed from the top on down, standing above a labyrinth of frets and strings, seeing and hearing only possibilities: "Get in there and work it out, kid. Make people dance and enjoy themselves. Make sure you're enjoying yourself."

.....



## 66 | this epic life: *THE FRAMEWORK.*

In recent experiments, I've combined meditation and bass grooves. Both are somewhat simple in theory, yet mystical, bottomless and somewhat elusive in practice. In both cases, you always know when you're screwing up, but you unquestionably *feel* when you're *in the pocket*.

.....

Life is an endless cycle of falling in, and out of sync with The Cosmic, Infinite Groove.

.....



Tracking bass parts for *Hamell On Trial*

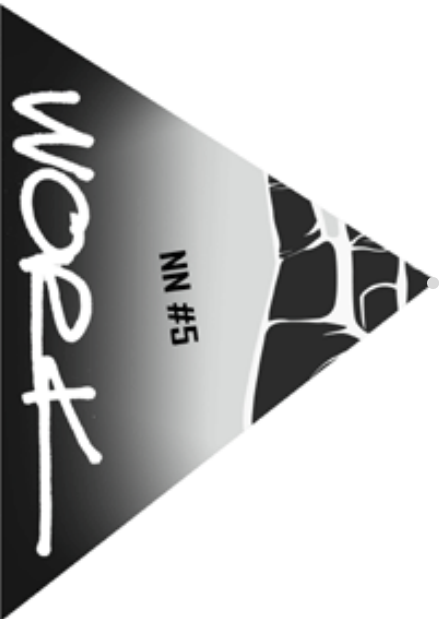
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For me, music has become synonymous with spirituality: the more I learn, the more there is to know. The more I know, the more I'm dying to learn.

I take my band experiences into every sales meeting, whether reading the room, collaborating with clients, or ratcheting up the energy. It all has to ROCK. If it doesn't, why bother?

Music and life are about moving people, be it ourselves, or the lucky few in attendance. Bass moves the most air from the subs, and I can feel my DNA shift whenever I have that religious experience.

###



## 012 | **defining my non-negotiables**

### **NN#5: WORK**

By now, the institutionalized, worker-bee part of us may be asking: How can you get away with putting *work* at #5 on your non-negotiables? We all have bills to pay. Doesn't it deserve or demand higher priority?

The short answer is, yes. It does.

All of the work on ourselves and families is meaningless if we're not adding value to the outside world through service and creativity.

We owe it to the world to contribute every shred of passion and creativity we have to offer. *That is our work.*

By placing work in the outer-most orbit from the spiritual center, it receives the benefit of each of the non-negotiables that come before.

Many of us have made the mistake of placing work at the center of our galaxies, sacrificing health, relationships, and potentially greater financial reward because we were too consumed with toiling away in the trench. Work becomes an all-consuming obsession, our chief distraction from higher ideals and our go-to excuse for self-neglect.

Our work turned on us. But how does this happen so easily?

*What we do* can too easily get mistaken for *who we are*, but for good reason. If we've found a great fit in a job, our work employs our talents and skillsets, and provides the means for elevating our quality of life. It's a beautiful transactional relationship, and definitely one worth making the effort to understand, nurture, and maximize. Work becomes the stage where we put our talents to use in the service of others.

Day jobs were always part of my equation, because I was never comfortable with the struggling artist lifestyle. Of course I have mad respect for artists and the sacrifices they make for their work, but my lens put family and homestead on a higher pedestal. Once, while on tour, I played 11 shows in 7 days before getting the luxury of showering. I would raid local thrift stores for disposable stage wear. It was hardcore, and I can appreciate it now, but *Sweet Biscuits, did I reek!*

Gayle and I moved to L.A. a few months after we were married, and getting a job with benefits was high on the list. I settled into what would become five years in sales support, working in the home entertainment division of a movie studio. This was the DVD boom, and business was exploding. Single mass-retail accounts carried sales goals north of

\$70 Million, and the demand for our janky catalog of films was mind blowing. The emerging market for DVD was wide open.

I supported a region of outside sales reps, all of whom worked from home. Every week I'd FedEx their mail, build elaborate pitch decks for meetings, and draft sales letters. One rep became the blueprint for my current career in sales. At 31, he carried our largest account and sales goal, and crushed it every quarter. He had a natural, infectious charisma. Both clients and internal teams loved the guy. Every time he flew in from Minneapolis felt like an event.

We spent a lot of time together traveling and working conferences, sharing greater ambitions of freedom and family as we went. He was obsessive about music, especially reggae. He taught me everything I needed to know as far as servicing clients, maintaining autonomy, and staying motivated. I hipped him to countless bands, relayed old touring stories, and willingly accepted insane dares, like cannon-balling into a pool wearing a 3-piece suit in front of hundreds of conference attendees.

Another pivotal role model when I needed it, he showed me the paths to becoming a rockstar weren't limited to music alone. After attending a private set by the Foo Fighters, we made a serious dent in the minibar. We were looking out over the vast expanse of nighttime Hollywood, cackling like hyenas. Never once did we feel like corporate slaves, because we were anything but.

## My Path to Full-Life Integration

As we were leaving Chicago years later, I landed my current gig in digital media sales. My company was opening a field office in Ohio. The territory would stretch from my front door in Akron, south through Cincinnati to Louisville, KY, north to Rochester NY, east to Pittsburgh, and west at times to include Chicago.

This opportunity was a good 10x beyond my skillset at the time.

Intense levels of self-improvement were needed to grow into my new work role, while simultaneously expanding all other facets of my life. I had already hopped the personal development train in Chicago, but the magnitude of this new job and household forced a steep upgrade.

I devoured anything I could read on sales, digital media, and attitude. This deepened my spiritual seeking, which led to increased mileage in my runs, more yearning for family time, and more creative expression to balance me out.

In opposition to the work-centered universe described earlier, the demands of my work required mandatory upgrades for each of the other areas of my life. In this process, each non-negotiable became mutually supportive scaffolding: capable of sustaining more cumulative weight, yet flexible enough to adjust for unusual demands in any one area. When a new baby arrived, the family NN needed to expand.

When it's time to train or heal, vitality shifts into position. Our work demands tend to ceaselessly expand and contract depending on the season.

Not one of these components can atrophy. They are **not negotiable**, even with us. We finish what we start, because that is who we are and what we do. We show up, and once engaged, we are **All In**.

Life success, then, cannot be gauged by measuring growth in any single area. It's Earl Nightengale's "progressive realization" within *all* non-negotiable areas that creates the **fully-integrated life**. If failure is an option in any area, I'd argue its inclusion is negotiable. Remove it. Move on without it, and rock the hell out of the rest.

---

Success is the realized, continual expansion of  
each of our non-negotiables.

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It is in the remembering of who we really are, as Voltron: the fully-integrated, experienced, and capable life.

# # #



# ABOUT THE AUTHOR.

Every. Damn. Day. Lens Statement: I serve others through my creativity and inspired example. I remain humble in the miracle of my circumstances. Sobriety guides my destined outcomes. I joyfully expect everything to work out. I consciously pursue excellence. I have FUN, and that's what I do...

7# NN

4# NN

5# NN

2# NN

1# NN

WORK

TRAVEL

SOUL

VIRACTY



TAP TO CONNECT:



## IN CLOSING ...

Wow. **Thank You** for making it to page 74. I'm incredibly excited to have this project complete, and out in the world.

I sincerely hope you've found this document helpful, or at least further support for the journey you've already been on.

If there's any major takeaway here, it's this: YOUR life... (Your job, education, zany relatives, talents, skills, attitude, soul connection, relationships) All of it... is beyond valuable to the rest of us. The integrated YOU could probably beat *Voltron's ass*.

**The rest of us deserve *The Whole of You*.**

**In the interest of spreading The Framework to as many people as possible, I respectfully ask you to graciously consider any of the following options...**

1. **Share** this link around *The Webispheres*: <http://www.thisepiclife.com/manifesto>
2. **Join** our brand-spankin' new communities at either [Twitter](#) or on [Facebook](#).
3. **Bounce** over to iTunes and Subscribe to the [Podcast](#).
4. If you haven't already, **snag** [The Workbook](#)

Above all, **please** let me know how it's going! Email me [here](#). Much love! 

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Jennifer Boykin of [LifeAfterTampons](#) – for your brilliant, sassy consistency

And first, there was Gayle – the heroine of our home.

We'll always have Detroit.

Elliott, Frankie, & Leon too.

*I LOVES MY PEOPLES.*