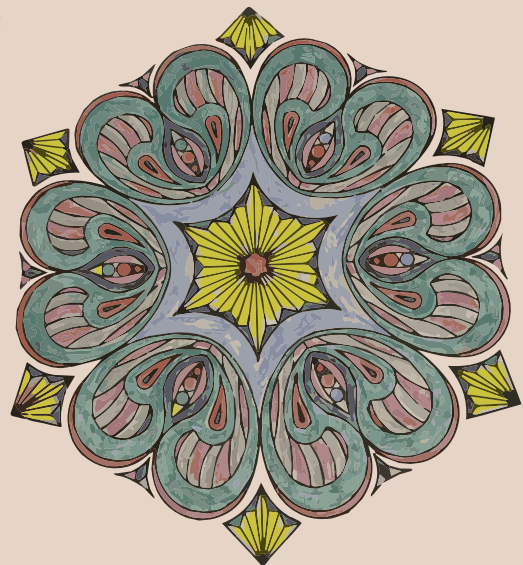
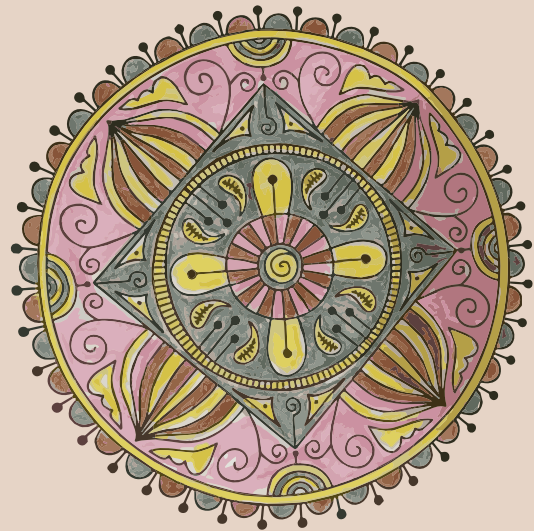
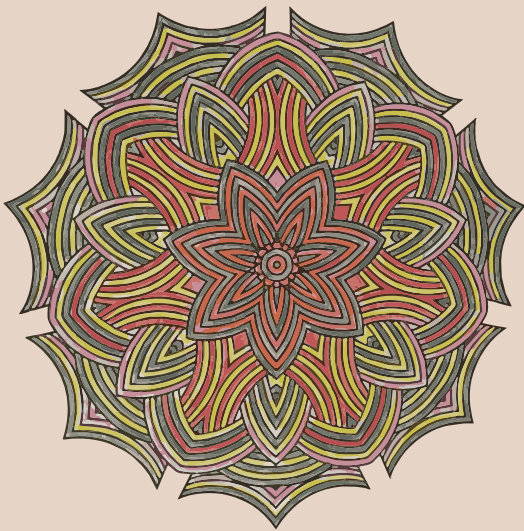


LIVING FROM THE INSIDE OUT

7 STEPS TO CREATING A LIFE PLAN



THOMAS NOBLE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MELISSA HOSTETTER

LIVING FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Seven Steps to Creating a Life Plan

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By Thomas Noble

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Also by Thomas Noble:

Anticipating Divorce

Mastering Negotiation

Basic Estate Planning



Dedicated to my granddaughter

Audrey Claire Noble

**In hopes that she will take my ideas,
Use them to her benefit, and
Improve upon them.**

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PREFACE

About 15 years ago, in my late 50's, I confronted my mortality. As I approached 60, the stark reality that I only had so many years left hit me like a stiff left jab. My mother died at 63. My father made it to 78. Being a life-long fitness advocate, I believed that I had a good chance to best them both. A stress test confirmed my wishful thinking. Then, about ten years ago, a rare form of prostate cancer hit me more like a groin kick than a left jab. That experience included differing opinions by two “world-class” urologists, one telling me, “NO BIG DEAL” and the other telling me, “VERY BIG DEAL.”¹

I began giving deep thought to how to maximize what time I had left and study the age-old question of how to live the good life, or, in other words, how to optimize what I had left of the life experience. I came to the conclusion that we all have two basic choices about how to live our lives:

1. We can live randomly, reacting to every curve ball life throws our way, making impulsive decisions, without a plan, while often procrastinating and avoiding the challenges.

¹ Ultimately, I had surgery, and, in 2014, another world-class surgeon removed my prostate with the help of a robot. This led to an entirely different set of problems, which I will not get into here, but I have been cancer free since then.

2. Or, we can live “from the inside out.” In order to do that, we formulate a “life plan”, based upon our “mission” in life², and we stick with it as best we can, making adjustments when external circumstances change or we feel it is appropriate. We live according to *our* plan. This may not have been our parents’ plan or our spouse’s plan or our employer’s plan. It’s *our* plan. That’s critical. With this approach, most of our decisions become proactive, not reactive; and they will be based upon *intrinsic* motivation, not *extrinsic* (more about that later).

How do you create a life plan? My goal, in this brief book, is to give you some guidance and suggestions about that topic, along with a number of relevant resources for those of you who want to drill down on one sub-topic or another.

I started creating life plans about ten years ago, working on my own and then helping my coaching clients develop theirs. This book is a culmination of the lessons I have learned to date from my DIY approach and, to give it a little more heft, a blend of recent, relevant research about my ideas.

Every theory comes along with certain biases. My theories on life plans are based upon these:

1. we all want a “happy” life;³
2. a “balanced” life is better than an unbalanced life;
3. good goals lead to good habits, and good habits lead to good lives;

² Some refer to this as a “purpose,” and some refer to it as a “calling.” To me, they are all synonymous. I prefer “mission.” This is discussed more thoroughly below in Step Three.

³ How we define “happy” is discussed below.

4. living fully means consistently learning and growing, and, in order to do that, we need to have a “growth mindset”;

5. to improve our lives, we have to find ways to break the inertia that keeps us stuck to old, worn-out patterns of behavior, which have long since outlived their value and problems that we have been persistently avoiding; and

6. living our lives with an unselfish (or “self-transcendent”) mission will produce more well-being and gratification than not.

Experts have explored and debated what a “happy” life is and how to accomplish it for hundreds of years, from the early Greeks to the positive psychology movement, which began in the mid-1990’s and continues to evolve and grow today.

If you research this topic, I believe you will find all roads lead back to Aristotle, who is reputed to have said, “Happiness is the meaning and purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence.”

Evolutionary biologists may have different opinions, but many positive psychologists start with Aristotle and take him as the “unmoved mover” on how to live the best life.⁴ Among other things on this topic, Aristotle taught “happiness depends on ourselves,” a maxim, which would become a cornerstone of Stoicism.

The good news for our generation, is that experts now agree on many aspects of what constitutes a happy life. Nevertheless, pain still has a place, as shown in the recent book, *The Sweet Spot: The Pleasures of Suffering and the Search of Meaning* by Paul Bloom⁵. Experts also continue to debate whether it is more

⁴ A weak attempt at humor for philosophers.

⁵ “The pleasures of suffering”! I do love a good paradox or oxymoron or *non sequitur* or whatever you want to call this.

important to emphasize “meaning” than happiness, as demonstrated most recently in *The Power of Meaning: Finding Fulfillment in a World Obsessed with Happiness* by Emily Esfahani Smith.⁶

No one argues about the benefits of goal setting.

Researchers have known for years that setting a goal, regardless of its size, brings about more behavior change, motivation, effort, concentration, and persistence than does simply being asked to ‘do your best.’⁷

More on goals in Step Six.

Charles Duhigg discusses the benefits of good habits in *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business*.

Carol Dweck’s classic book, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, is must reading for good living. I will discuss her theories briefly in Step Six, but I encourage everyone to read this book. It could be transformative for many of you, as it was for me.

I will discuss mission statements, one of my favorite topics, in Step Three.

Inertia, in conjunction with human behavior, presents an interesting topic about which I have yet to find a lot of research. Why do we procrastinate or fail to do what we want or know we should? Why do we stay in dysfunctional relationships for far too long? Why is there one item on your to-do list every day that you cannot ever seem to do? I hope to expand upon this in future editions, but, for now, interested readers may want to review *Stuck: Why We Can’t (or Won’t) Move On* by Anneli Rufus.

⁶How’s this for a multi-cultural name?

⁷*Life on Purpose*, at p. 40.

The question of living a “balanced” life also presents fertile ground for further study. I have not come across anything empirical on this subject. For that matter, what do we mean by balance? You can find books about balancing your chakras, your PH, your budget, your roles in life (a favorite topic of Stoics and Confucius), and international balances of power. In the context of life planning, one normally sees books about “work-life” balance.

The topic of balance attracts its attackers and defenders. For those of you who are interested in the nuances of balance, here is a short list of resources:

- *LifeBalance: Bringing Harmony to Your Every Day Life* by Linda and Richard Eyre;
- *On Balance* by Adam Phillips, which takes a contrarian position, quoting William Blake as having said, “The road to excess leads to the palace of wisdom”;
- *Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less* by Greg McKeown, also takes a contrarian view;
- the recent bestseller, *Four Thousand Weeks: Time Management for Mortals* by Oliver Burkeman (who also wrote *The Antidote: Happiness for People Who Can't Stand Positive Thinking*, which may give you a hint of where he is coming from); and,
- the very entertaining and well-illustrated book *The Art of Balance: Staying Sane in an Insane World* by David J. Bookbinder (no kidding!).

No doubt “great men” have made “great accomplishments” by being laser-focused on one area of life, eschewing balanced lives.

- The great chess player, Bobby Fischer, comes to mind. Anyone familiar with Fischer can attest he may have been the greatest chess player ever, but the rest of his life was a mess!
- Moses' wife complained about his long absences to hang out in the tabernacle.
- Buddha left his wife and infant child to go on his mission.
- Socrates' wife complained constantly about his refusal to get a "real job" instead of just hanging out in the Stoa all day irritating people and entertaining young men.
- Paul Gauguin, the famous artist, left his wife and five children to run off to Martinique to paint.
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, despite being one of the most influential writers of the 18th Century, had five children and left each of them at a Paris orphanage because he thought raising children was too inconvenient.

Dedication to a mission and singleness of purpose come at a price, and the price is often an unbalanced life. Therefore, while having a mission is an important component of fulfilling your potential in life and satisfies those who argue that "meaning" is critical, I contend dedication to a mission must be tempered with a balanced approach to life.

In other words, my bias is a "balanced life" (as I define it) is better than an unbalanced life, but having a mission is still one of the most important things we can do to improve well-being and live from the inside out. We can do both, especially if part of your mission is to have a balanced life!

I have spent over 40 years dealing with divorce cases as an advocate, mediator, and coach. Show me a life unbalanced, and I guarantee you will find fertile ground for emotional and relationship problems.

The most obvious examples are the addicts and “aholics.” Whether you are a workaholic, alcoholic, golfaholic, sex addict or drug addict⁸, if you are spending too much time on one area of your life while neglecting the other basic areas, trouble is coming. It may not be here yet, but, if not, based upon my anecdotal research, it’s on the way. Best to prepare ahead of time for the potholes in the road ahead if we believe they are there.

Therefore, I have a bias to nudge people to balance the main areas of their life: mental, physical, spiritual for starters; and, then family, financial, social, career, leisure, and self-care. The more your life can hit on all of these cylinders, the more well-being you will experience, and the more that will influence those around you. Well-being, like moods, is contagious.

As we proceed, I will also share with you some brief suggestions about using signature strengths and archetypes to sharpen your self-awareness.

⁸ Why do we refer to someone addicted to alcohol as an “alcoholic,” and someone addicted to sex or heroin as an “addict”?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As stated above, my methodology is original, in part. The rest is cobbled together from a number of sources, including:

- the many excellent books of Dr. Martin Seligman;
- the work of Dr. Victor Strecher, professor at University of Michigan and author of *Life on Purpose: How Living for What Matters Most Changes Everything*;
- Dr. Alex Lickerman's fine book, *The Undefeated Mind: On the Science of Constructing an Indestructible Self*;
- Jay Shetty's recent book, *Think Like a Monk*;
- Viktor Frankl's classic, *Man's Search for Meaning*;
- the work of Laurie Santos who teaches "The Science of Well-Being" at Yale⁹;
- various works by and about the Stoics; and,
- Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

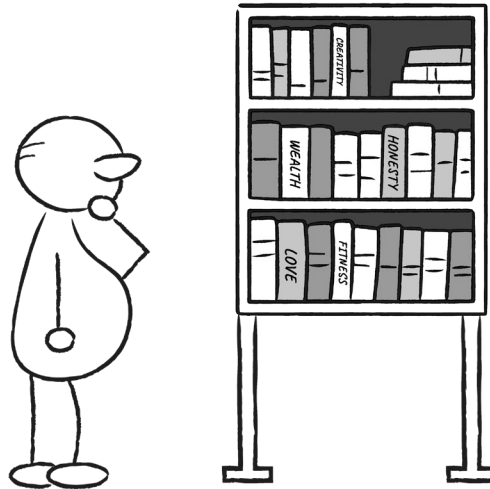
I also want to thank my children and my cats¹⁰ for their support and feedback.

The prescription I offer helps me bring my life into sharper focus and increase my well-being. My goal is to share it with you in hopes you too can benefit by living from the inside out.¹¹

⁹Which is also available online.

¹⁰ There is nothing quite like writing a book with cats crawling all over you and playing on your keyboard!

¹¹ I have been using this phrase for as long as I can remember. I have recently learned I am not the only one. I did not steal it. I promise!



STEP. 1 WHAT ARE YOUR VALUES?

Start by listing your top five to ten values. Here are some examples:

- Order
- Creativity
- Love
- Honesty
- Curiosity and love of learning
- Wisdom
- Discernment
- Fairness
- Humor
- Fitness
- Friendship
- Family
- Reliability
- Cleanliness
- Wealth

You can find various lists of values on the Internet. Here is one example:

<https://scottjeffrey.com/personal-core-values/>

The best book I have found so far on the subject of values is: *Values Clarification: A Practical, Action-Directed Workbook* by Simon, Howe, and Kirschenbaum.

This is a good place to review the distinction between “eudaimonic” and “hedonic.” These terms are usually associated with different types of happiness. Eudaimonic = unselfish, self-transcendent, other oriented (e.g., acts of charity, compassion, altruism, empathy). Hedonic = hedonistic pleasures (e.g., fame, wealth, vanity).

Aristotle was probably the first to draw this distinction and point out hedonic happiness is fleeting and inferior to eudaimonic happiness. Psychologists and neuroscientists have validated this theory in hundreds of studies.

Values can be subject to this same analysis. If your values tend to be hedonic, you will be constantly chasing the next high, and you will experience less well-being than if your values tend to be eudaimonic.

Aristotle stated that eudaimonia is found more among those who have ‘kept acquisition of external good within moderate limits’ and that ‘any excessive amount of such things must either cause its possessor some injury, or, at any rate, bring him no benefit.’¹²

Abraham Maslow wrote, “The fully developed (and very fortunate) human being working under the best conditions tends to be motivated by values that transcend his *self*. They are not selfish any more in the old sense of that term.”¹³

Don’t worry. You can still enjoy a piece of chocolate cake, but making a steady diet of chocolate cake will not lead to the same feelings of deep and contented happiness as helping a sick friend, regularly visiting an elderly relative, or practicing random acts of kindness; and, if you eat chocolate cake daily, you will find it becomes less and less of a pleasure for you.

¹² *Life on Purpose* at p. 30.

¹³ *Life on Purpose*, at p. 63.



STEP. 2 WHAT ARE YOUR STRENGTHS?

What are your strengths? If you have not already done so, take the VIA Strengths Survey at [authentichappiness.com](https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/questionnaires/survey-character-strengths): <https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/questionnaires/survey-character-strengths>

List your top five. These are called your “signature strengths.”

Marty Seligman and his legion of followers have verified scientifically, that applying your signature strengths to whatever you are doing in your life increases well-being.

You will hear the term “well-being” a lot in this genre. Seligman defines it as a combination of the following five elements (otherwise known by the acronym PERMA):

1. Positive emotion (of which happiness and life satisfaction are all aspects;
2. Engagement¹⁴;

¹⁴ As in being fully engaged in whatever you are doing or with whom you are with, also sometimes referred to as “flow.”

3. Relationships;
4. Meaning; and
5. Achievement.

Seligman's theories are well supported by the history of philosophy. As a student of Stoicism, I am constantly amazed at how much it has influenced current trends in psychology. In the introduction to his seminal work, *Cognitive Therapy and the Emotional Disorders*, Aaron Beck wrote:

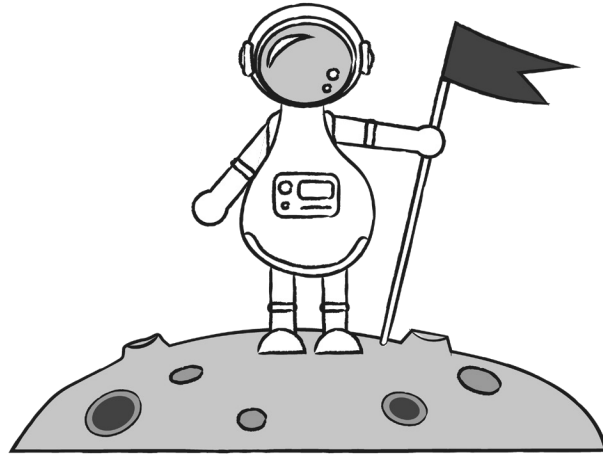
Nevertheless, the philosophical underpinnings of this approach [cognitive therapy] go back thousands of years, certainly to the time of the Stoics who considered man's conceptions (or misconceptions) of events rather than the events themselves as the key to his emotional upsets.

Epictetus, one of the great Stoic philosophers, believed knowing one's strengths helped a person determine what roles to play in society and what roles not to play ("those who have extraordinary abilities should take up the role that employs their special talents"). Perhaps Ecclesiastes was correct: there really isn't anything new under the sun.

I have taken the VIA survey many times. I find it interesting that my strengths are dynamic and not static. This explains why, if you take this test multiple times, you are likely to get different results. Some, however, will remain consistent. For me, "love of learning" has been consistently in my top five. Knowing this has made a big difference in my life. It increases my self-knowledge, and it allows me to simply learn without the accompanying guilt of "should be making money."

As stated by Carol Dweck, in *Mindset*, "Howard Gardner, in his book *Extraordinary Minds*, concluded that exceptional individuals have a 'special talent for identifying their own strengths and weaknesses.'"¹⁵

¹⁵ *Mindset*, at p. 11.



STEP 3. WHAT IS YOUR MISSION?

Woe to him who had no sense in his life, no aim, no purpose, and, therefore, no point in carrying on. He was soon lost.¹⁶

Don't all great men and women have a mission? Buddha, Socrates, Jesus, MLK, Gandhi, Mother Teresa, James Meredith, Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks?

What is your mission (or calling or purpose) in life? Articulating this is a challenge for some people, but once you bring it into focus, you will find it is worth the effort; most of your personal decisions will then align with your mission.

I want to spend a little extra time on this topic because it has made such a dramatic difference in my own life. My coaching clients will attest to the fact that I persistently nag, “What is your mission?”¹⁷ You might say I am a “mission statement evangelist.”

¹⁶ Viktor Frankl.

¹⁷ I first wrote about the importance of mission statements in a blog dated January 17, 2014.

In my own experience, I felt that finding my purpose was like a boat finding the right current and wind that then moves me effortlessly at a high speed. My only 'job' – purposeful living – is to find the current and wind and to be able to steer within them.¹⁸

Paulo Coelho, author of *The Alchemist*, refers to this concept as finding one's personal legend, which he defines as “the path we decide to take that fills our heart with enthusiasm. It is the path of our dreams.”

We started with values and strengths because how you define your values, and knowing your strengths, will guide you in defining your mission in life. It is your WHY for living.

He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how.¹⁹

A mission alone is not sufficient, however. Hitler had a mission. Stalin had a mission. To be sustainable, your mission should be eudaimonic. Selfish missions will not result in increased well-being and, obviously, will not add value to your community or the planet. You may find “the current and the wind” and still crash on the rocks of selfish greed or narcissistic obsessions. Selflessness is key. A selfish mission will not produce happiness and well-being, more likely just the opposite.

Taoists call this getting in touch with the Tao. Buddhists refer to one's dharma (or truth). Aristotle called it teleology: an acorn's mission is to become an oak tree. But, then, acorns don't have free will (to screw up)²⁰ or self-awareness (to know their mission), so mission fulfillment for an acorn is pretty easy.

¹⁸ *Life on Purpose* at p. 96.

¹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche.

²⁰ The extent to which we humans do, I will save for another day. Interested? Take a look at *Free Will* by Sam Harris, a short, but dense, exposition of the topic.

The Undefeated Mind does an excellent job of discussing mission statements and how they benefit us. In one example, Dr. Lickerman (a medical doctor) is treating a patient for depression and insomnia, and he suggests medication and that the patient develop a mission statement. Once the patient discovers his mission, he eschews the medication. But, how does one develop or know his mission? Here is an excerpt worthy of note:

Unfortunately, some people approach the task of finding their mission by first deciding what they think it should be – a choice often influenced by parental expectations or a need to project a certain image to others – and then attempt to stir up a requisite amount of passion for it. But forcing ourselves to feel something we don't is probably futile. We might find a better approach in attempting to articulate a value-creating statement about which we already feel the most excited. For that value-creating statement, whether we realize it or not, represents the mission to which we are already committed. As if a precious jewel had been sewn into our clothing without our knowledge, we only need to realize it's there to take advantage of its full worth.²¹

Dr. Strecher defines “purpose” in life as “a central self-organizing life aim.” He suggests that, in developing your mission statement, you consider the following 7 questions:

1. What matters most? (Review your answers to Step One).
2. Who relies on you?
3. Who inspires you?
4. What causes do you care about?
5. What are you grateful for?
6. What gets you out of bed in the morning?
7. How do you want to be remembered (“mortality salience”)?

²¹ *The Undefeated Mind*, at p. 39.

He calls this setting “be goals.” Most people set goals about what they want to do or acquire. This is about what you want to be.

I would add one more: Would you do it for free?

Do you care so much about helping abused children, or saving the polar bears, or spreading wisdom, that you will do it even if no one ever pays you to do it, and you receive no praise or recognition of any kind? If so, you are in the land of “intrinsic motivation,” and that’s a good place to be.

How strong is your passion for your mission?

Studies...demonstrate that people reporting a strong purpose in life, on average live longer lives than those with a weak purpose. A recent study following over seven thousand middle-aged American adults for fourteen years found that even a one-point increase on a seven-point scale of purpose resulted in over 12 percent reduced risk of dying.

In a study of over 1,500 adults with heart disease followed for two years, every one-point increase on a six-point purpose-in-life scale resulted in a 27 percent lower risk of suffering a heart attack. In a study of over 6,000 adults followed for four years, every one-point increase on a six-point scale resulted in a 22 percent reduced risk of stroke.²²

Write your mission statement down. Try to make it as brief as possible, so you can remember it. Put it on your phone. Review your mission statement at least weekly for a while. It will likely evolve. If you do this and find that 4-5 weeks in a row, it has not changed, then review monthly.

As your life changes, you may find a need to adjust your mission.

²² *Life on Purpose* at p. 12, 13.



STEP 4. WHAT ARE YOUR ARCHETYPES?

How many voices do you have in your head? How many members are there on your mental board of directors? Who are you when you are at your best?

For those of you who are not familiar with archetypes, I could refer you to the work of Carl Jung or Joseph Campbell. Caroline Myss, however, is an easier read. In her book, *Archetypes: Who Are You?* She offers details on some of the more common archetypes, as follows:

- The Advocate
- The Artist/Creative
- The Athlete
- The Caregiver
- The Fashionista
- The Intellectual
- The Queen/Executive
- The Rebel
- The Spiritual Seeker
- The Visionary

The idea is there are these non-fictional personas, which we all take on, many times unconsciously. Getting in touch with them will help you define your purpose or see your purpose in a different way, and you can gain self-knowledge by comparing your archetypes with your signature strengths. Understanding archetypes can also help you understand other people, so long as you don't let the archetypes keep you from seeing other people's nuances and complexities.

When you do this exercise, you may discover you have more than one archetype, and it changes from day to day or hour to hour or situation to situation.



STEP 5. WHAT ARE YOUR INTENTIONS?

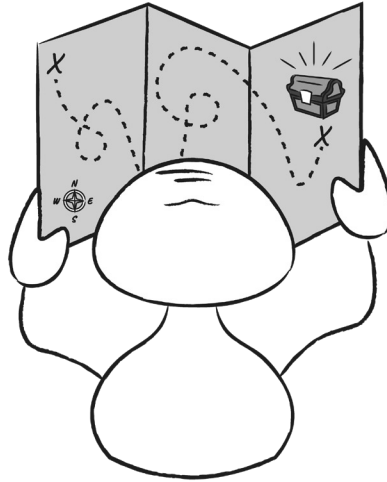
What do you intend to do with the rest of your life? The rest of the month?
The rest of the day?

Many people confuse intentions and goals. The difference is intentions are vaguer than goals. You are painting the canvas of your life with a broad brush. We will bring it all into sharper focus when we set goals, but, for now, it is okay to just have some general idea of how you will go about accomplishing your mission, along with anything else you want to do with your life.

“I want to lose weight” is an intention. “I want to lose 10 pounds in the next 60 days” is a goal.

“I want to read more” is an intention. “I want to complete 25 books this year” is a goal.

Dr. Strecher calls this setting “how goals.”



STEP 6. WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS?

We now get into what Dr. Strecher calls “do goals.”

SMART GOALS:

Most of the literature on goals will recommend that you set SMART goals. SMART is an acronym representing: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Bound (or time frame). If you are interested in what Tony Robbins has to say on this topic, you can go to: <https://www.tonyrobbins.com/career-business/the-6-steps-to-a-smart-goal/>

SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY:

Those who write about SMART goals, even those who walk on hot coals, typically ignore the extensive research done on self-determination theory (SDT).

SDT teaches us that for optimal well-being, if at all possible, we should set goals that will result in *intrinsic* and not *extrinsic* rewards (i.e., goals that are based upon *intrinsic* motivation and not *extrinsic* motivation). Once again, the idea is to live from the inside out.

Numerous studies have found people who set goals because of *extrinsic* rewards, such as money, fame, or to please someone else, will be much less happy with the outcome, will be more likely to suffer depression and anxiety, and will score lower on general measurements of well-being than those who set goals because of *intrinsic* (preferably unselfish) rewards. When your goals align with a self-transcending mission statement, you are on the right track.

That's not all, however. SDT teaches us that for optimum living, our goals should satisfy three basic psychological needs: (1) autonomy, (2) competence, and (3) relatedness.

Autonomy? This is another confirmation of the importance of living from the inside out. When your goals are autonomous, you're the decision maker. Goals depending on what other people think or do, or any myriad of external circumstances, will not lead to the same level of well-being.

Competence? Whatever your goal, you should feel like a more competent human being after achieving it.

Relatedness? At least as far back as the Stoics, students of wise living understood we humans are social animals. Goals promoting relations with other people will produce more well-being.

Of those three, autonomy is probably the most important.

THE RISE OF VIDEO GAMES:

You select an avatar (autonomy), you move up from one level to another as you reach certain goals (competence), and you can play with (or against) other people (relatedness). This is a recipe for success. That example is not to encourage you to spend your precious time playing video games, but rather it shows why they are such a huge money maker for those who create them.

DEBUNKING THE LAW OF ATTRACTION:

In a recent article, I discussed the early “positive thinkers” and the “Law of Attraction,” which holds that if you believe something strongly enough, and let no doubts creep into your mind, you will manifest that belief, and your beliefs or thoughts will manifest into tangible reality.

Maybe my background as a lawyer is to blame, but I have always been cautiously pessimistic, always considering the downside and the worst-case scenario. For the positive thinkers this is an anathema.

A few years ago, I had a debate with a self-anointed guru who worked out of Durango, Colorado and helped people “clear” negative emotions and get in touch with their prior lives. She chastised me on my risk-adverse style of thinking because, she contended, I was “attracting negative outcomes with my negative thinking.” I countered that I would rather anticipate the potholes in the road than be surprised when I popped a tire.

Recent psychological studies have validated me in spades. Not only is it a good thing to anticipate obstacles, but people who do are more motivated to accomplish their goals. This is called “mental contrasting.” In fact, people who visualize only succeeding at their goals are less likely to accomplish them because they feel as though they already have. Obstacles are, indeed, essential to achievement.²³

WOOP:

When I see the extent to which social scientists have studied goal setting, I am amazed. I was convinced when I first heard the positive thinkers say, “You can’t hit a target that doesn’t exist.” No peer reviews required! The psychologists and neuroscientists have taken this to a new level, proving that goal setting

²³Those interested in this topic may enjoy *The Obstacle is the Way* by Ryan Holiday.

provides many benefits that lead to more well-being, and the higher the goals, the better.²⁴

The state-of-the-art in goal setting is known as the “WOOP” method.²⁵ WOOP stands for:

- Wish
- Outcome
- Obstacles
- Plan

Researchers have concluded that visualizing obstacles we must overcome in order to reach our goals serves to motivate us.

I have already taken up enough of your time on this topic. If you want to drill down on this, take a look at *Rethinking Positive Thinking: Inside the New Science of Motivation* by Gabriele Oettingen.

There is also a WOOP app, which you can download to your phone or other device.

LIFE CATEGORIES (THE BALANCING ACT):

As I stated at the outset, one of my biases is a “balanced” life is better than an “unbalanced” life. What is a balanced life? I offer no empirical research to substantiate my methodology, but those familiar with the “wheel of life assessment”, commonly used by coaches, will note similarities. The idea is to pay attention to ten basic categories of life (feel free to add or subtract, as you please; this is about you).

²⁴As an undergraduate, I was taught those who set the most reasonable goals were most likely to achieve more. The low goal setters did not accomplish much because they did not try to accomplish much, and the high goal setters failed a lot and became frustrated. Goldilocks, the middle way, the golden mean: whatever you want to call it, the middle is always the sweet spot. Ask any chess player what his main goal is, and he will say, “Control the center of the board.”

²⁵ I’m not completely satisfied with this acronym, but nobody asked me first!

Let's start with a very simple self-inventory. Your self-reporting will tell you what needs more attention or less.

How do you evaluate the following areas of your life? Score each area as follows:

5 = I'm doing great!

4 = I'm doing well, but I could be doing better.

3 = So-so.

2 = Not so good.

1 = Miserable!

Learning new things: _____

Mood: _____

Fitness: _____

Spiritual development: _____

Staying connected with friends and relatives: _____

Career development: _____

Family harmony: _____

Financial security: _____

Leisure activities: _____

Self-care: _____

Long-term goals: It is now time to set long-term goals for each category. Where do you want to be in 20-30 years (your age will matter here)?

Short-term goals: Now you are ready to break your long-term goals down into yearly, monthly, and daily goals. Personally, I don't usually set monthly goals, but I set goals for the coming year around December of each year, and I have a list of daily goals.

Life is unpredictable. When external circumstances change, your goals are likely to change as well.

MINDSETS:

I want to end this section by introducing you to the concept of mindsets. In 2006, Carol Dweck, a Professor of Psychology at Stanford University, published a groundbreaking book, called *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*.

The purpose of goal setting, intentions, mission statements, living from the inside out, and everything else we have been discussing is to accomplish more in life, to milk life for all it is worth, to be your best self, and to maximize your well-being so you can optimize your life experience. Our efforts will not get us too far without an understanding of mindsets. I encourage you to read Dr. Dweck's book, but here are a few excerpts to give you the gist:

For twenty years, my research has shown that the view you adopt for yourself profoundly affects the way you lead your life.

Believing that your qualities are carved in stone – the fixed mindset – creates an urgency to prove yourself over and over. . . Every situation calls for a confirmation of their intelligence, personality, or character. Every situation is evaluated: Will I succeed or fail? Will I look smart or dumb? Will I be accepted or rejected? Will I feel like a winner or a loser?²⁶

There's another mindset in which these traits are not simply a hand you're dealt and have to live with, always trying to convince yourself and others that you have a royal flush when you are secretly worried it's a pair of tens. In this mindset, the hand you're dealt is just the starting point for development. This growth mindset is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts. Although people may differ in every which way – in their initial talents and aptitudes, interests, or temperaments – everyone can change and grow through application and experience.²⁷

²⁶ *Mindset*, at p. 6.

²⁷ *Mindset*, at p. 7.

*The passion for stretching yourself and sticking to it, even (especially) when it's not going well, is the hallmark of the growth mindset. This is the mindset that allows people to thrive during some of the most challenging times in their lives.*²⁸

Let's say Ben and Jerry share a love for the game of golf. Ben has a fixed mindset, and Jerry has a growth mindset. For years, many people have been feeding Ben's golf-ego, telling him what a beautiful swing he has, what a great putter he is, how he should turn pro. Jerry, on the other hand, simply enjoys the game and practices a lot.

One day, Ben and Jerry go out to play a round. By the 5th hole, Jerry is up five strokes. Then, an amazing thing happens. Ben grabs his cell phone, tells Jerry there is a "crisis at the office," and he's got to go. They will have to finish the game some other time.

Or, Ben grabs his back, says he threw it out, and can't continue. Because Ben has a fixed mindset and knows he is a great player (everyone says so), he must have an excuse for losing to a shlep like Jerry. He might even say Jerry "rigged" the game by moving his balls when Ben wasn't looking.²⁹

Now, let's say Ben and Jerry finish their round of golf and, as expected, Ben wins by a wide margin. What does Jerry do? He doubles down on his time at the driving range, spends extra time practicing at the putting green, takes some lessons, and watches some videos on how to improve his short game, all the while, still loving the game. Losing creates a challenge for Jerry; it does not contradict his self-image.

That's the difference between a growth mindset and a fixed mindset. Having a growth mindset is similar to the Zen concept of "beginner's mind." You just keep learning and growing. And, that, my friend, is wisdom.

²⁸ Id.

²⁹ Any comparison to current American politicians is purely coincidental.



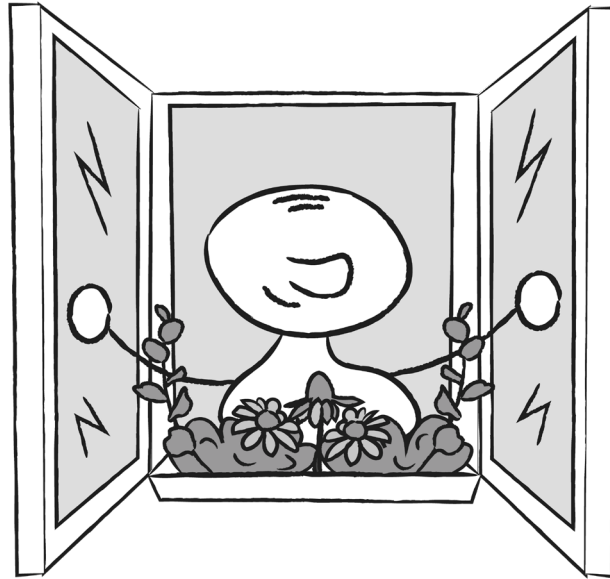
STEP 7. REVIEW AND REEVALUATE REGULARLY

Review and revise your life plan to make sure your strengths, archetypes, purpose, intentions, and goals are aligned and integrated. Review it frequently. The circumstances of your life will change. That's the way life is. As your circumstances change, you may feel the need to adjust your life plan. Regardless, you will be living from the inside out.

Why limit yourself to “New Year’s Resolutions”? Go all the way.

A life plan is always a work-in-progress. As life changes, be agile, and change your plan.

This is what I call practical wisdom. People with life plans make wiser decisions. People who revise their life plans regularly make even wiser decisions, and they experience more well-being by living from the inside out.



SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Step One: What are your values?

Step Two: What are your strengths?

Step Three: What is your mission?

Step Four: What are your archetypes?

Step Five: What are your intentions?

Step Six: What are your goals?

Step Seven: Remember the three “Rs”: review and reevaluate regularly.

Please send your feedback to tom@coachingwithwisdom.com.

Thanks, and good night, Audrey. Sweet dreams!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tom Noble was born and raised in Dallas. His family dates back to the founders of the city who came over from France. He attended public schools, graduating from Hillcrest High School in 1967.

After graduating from Washington University (St. Louis) in 1971 with a B.A. in Economics, Tom spent a semester in graduate school studying philosophy at SMU and a few years in the family business. He then went on to law school, graduating from SMU in 1980.

In 1990, Tom added to his credentials by becoming a Certified Financial Planner. In 1991, he became an attorney-mediator and was active in the formative years of family law mediation in Dallas County.

In 2012, he worked with the Dallas Bar Association to form negotiation study groups to help lawyers develop their skills as negotiators. The same year, he became interested in coaching and attended various training courses.

In 2018, he presented the Advanced Negotiation Seminar to the Dallas Bar, which is available on YouTube.

Along the way, he wrote two books: “Anticipating Divorce” and “Mastering Negotiation,” both of which are available on Kindle and PDF, and “Basics of Estate Planning.”

While still practicing family law, mediation, and estate planning on a part-time basis (tnoblelaw.com), Tom is now devoting most of his career to helping clients through coaching.

As a dedicated life-long learner, and in order to enhance his skills as a coach, Tom has completed the following certifications:

- Life Coach (IAP Career College)
- Happiness Coach (IAP Career College)
- Foundations in Positive Psychology (University of Pennsylvania)
 - Positive Psychology: Martin E.P. Seligman’s Visionary Science (University of Pennsylvania)
 - Positive Psychology: Applications and Interventions (University of Pennsylvania)
 - Positive Psychology: Character, Grit, and Research Methods (University of Pennsylvania)
 - Positive Psychology: Resilience Skills (University of Pennsylvania)
 - Positive Psychology Specialization Project: Design Your Life for Well-being (University of Pennsylvania)
- Introduction to Self-Determination Theory: An approach to motivation, development, and wellness (University of Rochester)
- The Science of Well-Being (Yale)
- Finding Purpose and Meaning in Life: Living for What Matters Most (University of Michigan)

- Know Thyself - The Value and Limits of Self-Knowledge: The Examined Life (University of Edinburgh)
- Know Thyself - The Value and Limits of Self-Knowledge: The Unconscious Mind (University of Edinburgh)

When not working, Tom enjoys spending time with his family and friends, playing chess, staying fit, and successfully negotiating the myriad of problems of surviving a pandemic with the help of his three cats.