



Crafting your life with know-how

Part 1. Crafting life – living with purpose

Crafting your life means creating a vision of how it could be and taking charge of making it happen; in essence, making your life happen on purpose – proactively rather than reactively. When we do something “on purpose”, it is deliberate, with intent ... but, with intent based on what? Something guides us. When this guidance system is failing, we may find ourselves feeling that there is, or should be, more to life – we may have a nagging dissatisfaction with where we are, or what we are doing, or not doing, or who we have become. When this strikes people between the ages of 30 and 60, it is often jokingly referred to as a mid-life crisis. So what is it that might be missing?

Have you seen those posters around town that say “Discovering your purpose changes everything”? Did you wonder what it meant, or think it was some religious propaganda? Determining your purpose in life (or, what am I here to be/do?) or designing your ideal life may seem like activities for spiritual gurus or daydreamers, but you might be surprised by what REALLY knowing what you want can do for you. Corrupting a quote from the famous American baseball player, Yogi Berra, my husband often says, “If you don’t know where you’re going, you might not get there”.

Consider this comparison: Imagine two customers at airline ticket counters – one simply steps up and says “I’d like a ticket to fly somewhere”; the airline employee, after giving them a quizzical look, selects a ticket and issues it for the client – the other asks “Could you sell me a ticket to fly from Denver to Rome on January 14th 2005, I have a discount coupon which should make the fare \$700, and I’d like to request vegetarian meals and an aisle seat if that is possible”. While both of these passengers have the potential of having a wonderful trip to an interesting destination, it’s obvious which of these is actively engaged in achieving the outcome they want? What have they done to achieve their goals?

There are two key components to getting what you want –

- one is REALLY knowing what it is, and
- the other is getting really SPECIFIC about what it takes .

Determining what you really want from life (or for that matter what you really don’t want) may require determining who you really are, what you need and what you value. Getting specific about how to get to where you want to be may often start with figuring out the smallest first step in the right direction. Living the life you really want is a constant dance between a big picture and the details.

Part 2. Seeking balance

Often when we are dissatisfied with life (wanting more of some things, less of others, or something completely different), we may have a sense that things are out of balance – that one part of our life is dominating the others – some things are getting squeezed out. Exploring this sort of imbalance in more detail can help us generate strategies for getting back onto a more even keel.

By completing our exercise, you have done at least two key things:

1. explored the nature of how you would like things to be different in your life, what you REALLY WANT (instead of just feeling annoyed, unsatisfied, irritated or drained), and

2. generated specific APPROACHES/OPTIONS/ACTIONS to making change for the better - to enhance you level of satisfaction.

AND you may have noticed:

1. That you are really quite satisfied with you life right now, and,
2. That you can improve you satisfaction score by either getting more of what you want or by wanting less - the score is relative!

Part 3. Staying on course - using values and purpose.

By determining what we really value most in life, and aligning our actions and habits with these values, we can maintain a path towards a sense of wholeness and fulfillment. When people live according to their values, they are healthier and have more satisfaction.

This probably seems so obvious that you might wonder why we don't all live according to our values all the time - some reasons that come to mind include:

- we don't really know what they are,
- we are distracted by less important things,
- we haven't prioritized them,
- they may have changed,
- we are distracted by the values of family, friends, peers, or society - "hand-me-downs", or
- we have unmet needs that get in the way.

What do we REALLY value?

Values are beliefs, qualities, or highest principles or philosophies, things we consider worthy in their own right. We are willing to shape our lives and actions in their image. A value is a trust or conviction - a feeling, idea or opinion - about a principle, standard or aspect of life that you consider to be true, desirable, and inherently worthwhile.

Whether we are aware of them or not, we all own a set of values, and these values shape our choices - some may be relatively superficial, such as the "shoulds" that haunt us, others we have chosen and attempt to uphold. At the deepest level, there are said to be 3-5 critically important personal core values. When we are not living out of these consistently, we are likely to feel dissatisfied, depressed, embarrassed and even ashamed. We cannot live a truly fulfilling life that does not honor our core values.

From Values to Purpose

A shorthand way to keep track of our values and how to honor them in our lives is to generate a *life purpose statement* - a brief description that focuses your attention of the essence of who you are. It can act as a compass to keep us on track and to make it easier to know what to say "yes" to and what to say "no" to on a daily basis. The essence of this workshop is about living "with" and "on" purpose.

Don't be concerned about sounding too grandiose; you do no one a favor by playing small at this task, and you don't have to share it. However, there is something empowering and clarifying about sharing your purpose statement with others when you are crafting it - you can see how it resonates; does it fit well? Is there something missing? Will it be useful, and so on?

Many of you will have heard about *life purpose statements*, *vision statements* and *mission statements*, and you might be wondering if they are all the same thing. Here is a distinction that makes sense to me:

- *Life purpose* is a particular way that we are moved/driven/called to be. Purpose is what we enact throughout a lifetime - it's who we are and how we "be". Some people see their purpose coming to them from a deity (= God), for others, it's up to each individual to determine their own purpose and make meaning in life.
- *Mission* is the particular way or ways you choose to fulfill your purpose at a particular point in your life.
- *Vision* refers to a specific, compelling image of the future that an individual holds

A good purpose statement pulls you towards it. Does your statement help clarify for you what you REALLY want to do in your life, at work, at home, alone and with others? If you have a good connection with your purpose statement:

- you will feel the connection with the purpose you have described,
- you have a desire to fulfill it,
- you feel deep pleasure when you act in concert with it, and
- your interests and energy naturally gravitate towards fulfilling it.

Revisit this statement over the next few weeks, and from time to time after that. See if you can use it to stay on course in crafting the life you REALLY want. Tweak or rewrite it so that it accurately reflects who you are and how you need to be to have a fulfilling life

Conclusion

For many of us, living the life we want is about making changes - in attitudes, actions, or whatever. In general, I think that change is about combining possibility - the vision of new options - with opportunity - the chance or occasion to be or do something different. By deliberately and consciously creating both possibility and opportunity in our lives, we can promote an almost-effortless path of change in our chosen directions. I hope that the tools I have introduced you to here today will assist you in this process.

Knowing what want to do and being motivated are a great start, but on your own, they may not be enough to actually make it happen. Think of the struggle many people have with fitness or weight loss plans. For many of us, engagement with other people can give us the edge, and help us to achieve our goals. Witness the avowed benefits of personal trainers or Weightwatchers. A personal life coach can make achieving your goals easier and quicker by providing support, clarification, encouragement, intuition, accountability, energy, empathy, curiosity, and so on. Keep this option in mind, for you or a friend or colleague.