A PROCESS OF SELF-EXPLORATION DESIGNED TO HELP YOU ...

- Simplify, balance and prioritize your life
- Find focus, direction and purpose
- Ignite your motivation
- Achieve your goals

Presented by Pilar Gerasimo, Editor in Chief, Experience Life
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Program brought to you by:
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WELCOME!

Congratulations on taking a bold and exciting step into living at your full potential! And thank you for being part of this innovative course being presented by the en*theos Academy for Optimal Living.

The program is designed to present you with a proven process and a set of valuable life skills that you can apply to any and all areas of your life, from health and fitness to career, finance, relationships and more.

Seeing your best self takes vision. Becoming your best self takes guts. This process will support you in doing both.

The objective of the program is to supply you with the skills and perspectives you need in order to achieve greater life balance, satisfaction and success. It’s also designed to help you better manage your time, energy and choices so you can make steadier progress toward your most important personal goals and priorities.

Finally, the program is designed to be a fun, energizing and all-around positive experience.

Over the next four weeks, we will cover a variety of topics, including:

- Identifying your personal values and priorities
- Envisioning and connecting with your best reality
- Establishing goals, action plans and commitments
- Identifying and overcoming obstacles
- Assessing and celebrating your successes

Each session will consist of a combination of presentation, interactive discussion, and one or more in-class projects or exercises. Between sessions, you’ll have some independent work or journaling exercises to complete.
At intervals, you will also be provided with links to helpful articles from Experience Life magazine and other resources to help you go deeper with the material.

By the end of the process, you will have discovered a set of valuable skills with the potential to dramatically improve the overall quality of your life.

Thanks once again for participating in the Refine Your Life course, and congrats on taking such a powerful step toward living a life that brings out the best in you — so you can share your best with others.

If you have any questions, suggestions or requests, please don’t hesitate to ask.

Yours in health and happiness,

Pilar Gerasimo

Pilar Gerasimo
A FEW TIDBITS AND SUGGESTIONS

All sessions will begin promptly. Please call in on time to make sure you don’t miss anything.

Pilar is available to answer questions and provide guidance as needed. If you require more than a few moments during class, please connect with her by email after class to follow up.

A few tips and requests to help you make the most of your experience:

☐ Before each session, take a moment to eliminate background noise that might distract you from actively listening.

☐ Please take care of yourself during all sessions. If you need to step away from the call for a bio-break or to get a drink, go right ahead.

☐ Your questions are always welcome during class — and often, if you have a question, it’s a question several others in the group have, too. So please ask! One request: Whenever possible, keep your question in the form of a question. Strive to keep personal “storytelling” and deep-background info to a minimum, since it can absorb session time and make it challenging for others to get the information they came for.

☐ “Homework” assignments will be offered throughout the course. You can complete them during your free time, at your own pace. The more you put into these exercises, the more you will get out of the course.
A few additional suggestions ....

- **For now, keep this for yourself.** You may encounter information in this workshop that you are eager to share with family or friends, or that you feel is applicable to them. Until you fully integrate this information and make it your own by experience, though, sharing it with others will likely drain and distract you. It will most likely *also prove unhelpful* to whomever you are trying to assist. You have made the effort to be here, and by doing so, you have self-identified as someone who is ready to create this kind of change. Please respect the value of this experience and the copyright of this original material by keeping the information for your own use. Please do not photocopy or distribute the workshop materials. The most powerful way for you to help those near you is for you to become your best, most vibrant and happy self, and to model that in a way others choose to emulate. When someone asks how you did it, *then* you can share what you know and, if you like, send him or her this way to learn more for themselves!

- **Enjoy the ride.** Personal change is not a one-time, linear process. It’s a cyclical, continuous process of assessment, commitment, feedback and follow-through. Even though you may experience momentary setbacks, directional adjustments and “re-dos” in your action plan, remember: You can get back on track at any time simply by identifying where you are in this process and then choosing to take the next logical step . . .

- **Remember that “how you do anything is how you do everything.”** In other words, the way you pursue this process will tell you a lot about the way you pursue any process or commitment. Take note of where you excel and where you encounter resistance. Observe yourself with compassion and curiosity. As you develop skills for addressing your work in this program, you’ll find that they transfer to other areas of your life.
JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT: WEEKLY LOG

Log for Week of ____________________

Daily check-in and completion of journaling session:

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Each day, journal about your experience, touching on one or more of the following …

Big insights:

Action steps taken:

Successes:

Obstacles:

Supports:

What I am learning about myself:

What will I do differently going forward?
COACHING AGREEMENT

In order for you to get the most from your coaching experience, and in order to create a safe, respectful environment for all those who participate in the group coaching process, we ask you to commit to the following:

☐ You understand that the “Refine Your Life” program is not advice-giving, therapy, psychotherapy or counseling. If you need any of these services, you agree to seek them from a qualified provider.

☐ If you are currently receiving therapy or medical treatment for severe depression or mental illness, or if you have a condition that requires treatment by a licensed mental health professional, you agree to seek the advice of your doctor or therapist prior to participating in this coaching process.

☐ You agree to be responsible for the decisions and actions you take as a result of this process, and to be responsible for your own well-being during this experience.

☐ You agree to in no way hold the facilitators, Experience Life magazine, Life Time Fitness or en*theos Academy for Optimal Living liable or responsible for your experiences, choices or actions during or after the coaching process.

By continuing with the program, you are indicating that that you have had the opportunity to review this agreement, and that you agree to abide by it.
We must make the choices that enable us to fulfill the deepest capacities of our real selves. — Thomas Merton
PROCESS OVERVIEW

Values
Clarify what matters to you.

Momentum
Assess progress, harvest learning, celebrate success!

Adjustments
Work the plan, observe and overcome obstacles.

Goals
Establish goals, action plans and support strategies.

Vision
Connect with your chosen future.

The arrows represent action!
HOW CHANGE WORKS

Assessment → Commitment → Follow-Through → Feedback → Assessment

VISION

GOAL
SESSION 1: ASSESS YOUR LIFE

One way to prioritize your areas of focus is to evaluate which areas of your life are currently bringing you the greatest degrees of satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

By homing in on areas of relative fulfillment, frustration and ho-humness, you can begin to recognize which areas have received the benefit of your attention and natural strengths, and which might deserve additional focus. This exercise might also help you perceive where you are currently living in or out of alignment with your highest choices and values.

On a scale of 1 to 10, rate how fulfilled you feel in each area of your life. (1 = not at all fulfilled, 10 = totally fulfilled)

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EXERCISE: LIFE WHEEL

Transfer the scores from the previous page onto the Life Wheel below by tracing curved lines at the appropriate points between each set of spokes. Then shade in the pie-piece areas defined by the lines in each area.
LIFE WHEEL ASSESSMENT

Once you’ve traced curved lines at the appropriate points between each set of spokes, and shaded or colored in the pie pieces defined by the lines in each area, you will likely see an irregular shape appear . . . . Notice your reaction to it.
DEBRIEF: LIFE WHEEL ASSESSMENT

Next, it’s time to assess what your wheel is telling you. If you feel equally fulfilled in all life areas, your wheel will be round. If there is an area of your life where you are feeling dissatisfied, it will throw the wheel off balance. If you feel equally dissatisfied in several life areas, you’ll observe that there are several life areas that are “smaller” than they could be. This means you have an opportunity to improve the overall quality of your life. However, you might still have the best results by addressing them one at a time.

Consider the questions below to assess your Life Wheel. Use a journal to record your answers.

Which areas of my life are the most satisfying and fulfilling? Which areas did I rate the highest? Why is that? What is happening in this life area to cause me to feel this way?

In which area of my life am I feeling dissatisfied or unfulfilled? What is not working? What is causing me to feel this way? What is feeling out of my control? What is in my control that I can influence or change?

Which areas of my life could be even better? Where do I want to focus my time and energy to improve the overall quality of my life? Where would I receive the most benefit for investing my time and energy? Where am I feeling the greatest “nudge” to focus my resources now?

The wheel helps you to see where you may want to spend your time and attention during the Refine Your Life process, and on an ongoing basis. You can use the Life Wheel exercise anytime you want to evaluate where your focus might be best placed, and where you are making progress.
SESSION 1: VALUES

- Values are internal motivators. They form the bedrock or foundation of our most meaningful successes and our most important peak moments.

- Values define the essential aspects of our character. They express our true, best selves.

- Values help to clarify where to invest our time and energy and where we’ll get our best rewards.

- Values can uncover clues to our life purpose.

- There are no right or wrong values. Values are different than morals or beliefs. Values can evolve over time.

- When we are living in alignment with our values, we tend to feel alive, present, engaged, peaceful and fulfilled — even during times of challenge.

- When we are living out of alignment with our values, we tend to feel stressed, frustrated, “pulled apart,” helpless, desperate, numb, stuck or lacking in motivation — even during times of success.

- Engaging with our values can give us strength and help us choose our best course of action at any given time.

- Because values are intrinsic motivators, a deep awareness of them can be very helpful in helping us achieve our personal goals.

Today, right now, are you paying attention to what matters most?
EXERCISE: VALUES EXPLORATION

To get started on clarifying the values that are most important to you at this time in your life, consider the following questions:

What moments/achievements in your life have caused you to feel most present, alive, engaged, clear or proud?

What values did these moments represent? What values were you acting on, expressing, witnessing or being touched by?

What people in your life have you most admired, respected or been most positively influenced by?

What values did they represent? What values were you impressed or affected by in observing or interacting with them?

What are some moments or experiences where you’ve felt deeply frustrated, offended, disgusted or disappointed?

What values were being squeezed out, stepped on or stepped over, at these times?
VALUES DISCERNMENT

From the list of potential values you articulated in the exercises (in class or on the previous page), write down the 10 values that have the most meaning, power and impact for you at this time in your life. See the Appendix for a list of possible values inspirations, and feel free to add words or phrases of your own. Given your personal history and your current life situation, you are the only one who can choose and define the values that have the most meaning for you now.

**Top 10 Values**

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

5. 

6. 

7. 

8. 

9. 

10. 

Note: Choose the words that stand out as representing the values that are most important to you at this time in your life. Be cautious about including values you think you “should” have, or that have only a moderate level of emotional connection for you. While you may observe and respect many additional values, those listed here should resonate with you in a deep, personal and immediate way.
VALUES REFINEMENT

From the 10 values listed on the previous page, narrow the list down to five. Choose the five values that are most important or “up” for you at this time in your life.

**Top Five Values**

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

5. 

Using a marker or colored pencil, assign a color to each of the five values you have chosen based on the descriptions below:

- **GREEN**: A green dot means this value is alive and well in your life. You are living in alignment with this value.

- **YELLOW**: A yellow dot means caution. This value is not active in your life to the degree you desire. You want to pay greater attention to this value.

- **RED**: A red dot means warning: This value is not showing up in your life. You may be living out of alignment with this value, or ignoring it altogether. It may be causing you some discontent or dissatisfaction as a result.
VALUES DEBRIEF

Of your top five values, how many are green? Yellow? Red?

Which of the five values needs most of your time and attention right now?

Why are these values calling?

How did this exercise help you to evaluate where you are living in alignment with your values? Any surprises?

Where are you motivated to make changes to live in greater alignment with your values? How can you use your connection with your values to stay on track?

What current challenges or conflicts are you facing? What role do your own and others’ values play in these situations? How might you use your values to gain understanding or help direct your chosen course of action?
JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT: LIVING YOUR VALUES

Sit down to answer the journal questions below. You may answer them briefly in one sitting or work more deeply and spread your work over several days.

My top five values are:

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

5. 

Where did I live in alignment with my top five values this week? How did I feel about those areas?

What is the single area where I am most out of alignment with my values? Where was my life feeling “off” or wrong?

What would my life be like if I was living in alignment with all my values in all areas of my life?

What one change can I make in my life to live in greater alignment with my values?

How committed am I to implementing this change? When can I implement this change?
### APPENDIX 1: VALUES

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Session 2: *Clarify Your Vision*

The ability to perceive or think differently is more important than the knowledge gained.

— David Bohm
SESSION 2: VISION

■ A vision is a picture of what you desire to create in the future. A vision is a “pre-seen” picture of your ideal self and life. It’s a “visualization” of what you’d like to experience, a picture filled with meaning and fulfillment.

■ A vision that is fueled by and a direct outgrowth of your values has immense power to motivate and guide you in the direction of your highest choices.

■ A vision is a “pull” toward what you desire to create for yourself. It is not what someone else desires for you. It is not a “have to” or “should.” It is a picture that excites and inspires you and expresses your best, most true self.

■ A vision is a picture of what you’d like to see happen. A vision does not necessarily specify how it is going to happen. Visions can be dreamy or pictorial, but the more specific and full of sensuous detail you can make them, the easier they will be to manifest in your current life.

■ The practice of visioning is thought to affect our brainwaves in positive ways, and to prepare certain areas of our brain (such as our reticular activating system) to filter, “notice” and process information differently.

■ You may find it helpful to create a physical drawing, collage or other pictorial representation of your vision, or to describe it in detailed writing.

■ Once you have a vision, you can create goals and actions that will help you attain your vision. You can create a vision for a moment, a day, a decade or for an entire life.

■ Many people find it helpful to create a vision for one to three years out, and then identify goals and action steps that will move them in that direction.

■ A vision can include all areas of your life: your health and fitness, your finances, your job, your relationships, your living or work space — virtually anything that’s important to you.

■ When you work toward goals without a vision, it’s easy to lose track of the big picture, to veer off course, or to lose your sense of purpose. Under these circumstances, life can seem to “happen to you.”

■ Having a vision that’s informed by your values gives you a place to check in and see if you are currently moving in the right direction — and an opportunity to get excited about what’s next! It prepares you, at a deep level, to actually have and enjoy the experiences you currently desire.
A vision is a “pull” toward what you desire . . .
It is fueled by your values and accomplished via the path of goals, conscious choices and action planning.
EXERCISE: “IDEAL DAY” VISUALIZATION

Sit in a quiet space where you will be undisturbed. Allow at least an hour to complete the following visualization exercise.

You can read all the questions first, move into your visioning session, and then come back to answer questions and capture what you’ve seen. Or you can take one small section at a time, spend a few moments visualizing based on a group of questions, then jot down some notes at more frequent intervals. Do whatever works for you.

Either way, attempt to see and describe your experience in as much sensuous detail as possible (sounds, sights, flavors, feelings, etc.). Allow your vision-self to be different from your “real” self in whatever ways you like, and allow yourself room to experience things far outside your normal daily experience, if you like.

You don’t have to answer all the questions — just focus on those that seem significant to you. Capture as many vivid details as you can as you move through each group of questions. (Before beginning each vision session, center yourself by closing your eyes and take three deep breaths.)

1) Imagine it is some point in the future (perhaps a year or more), and you are living your ideal day . . .

How does your ideal day start? Where are you? What is the space like? What are you doing? What is different about how you begin your days?

2) You are now moving into your day’s activities . . .

Where are you going? What are you doing? How do you feel?

3a) If you are working . . .

Describe your work environment. How does your workspace look? What kind of work are you doing? Are you passionate about your work? Why?

What skills, strengths and talents are you using? What do you spend most of your time on? What are you learning?

Who are you working with? What kind of relationships do you have with your co-workers? What has changed or gotten better?

What is energizing and fulfilling about your workday? How is it different from your current reality?
EXERCISE: AN IDEAL DAY (CONT.)

3b) If you are not working . . .

Describe how you are spending your days. Where are you? What are the components of your day? What gifts and talents are you using?

What experiences are you having? Who are you encountering? What are you learning or exploring? What makes you feel good about yourself and your life?

4) As you end your day, describe your routine . . .

How do you wind down? How do you transition from your day activities into the end-of-day routine? Who are you with? What is pleasant and important about the end of your day?

Where do you spend time at the end of your day? What routines or practices have you implemented to ensure this part of your day goes smoothly? What is different about how you end your day compared with your current reality?

5) Before you retire for the day, look back on the day with gratitude and appreciation . . .

What are you particularly grateful for? What is filling your life with satisfaction, joy and ease? Who are the people that are making a positive impact on your life? How are you positively affecting others’ lives? How has the quality of your life improved?

***

Name some of the values that are apparent or implicit in the vision you just completed. Take note of how they play a role in creating your satisfaction and inspiration.

Are there any values you don’t see built into your vision, or represented in some way? Are there ways you can imagine building them in?

NOTE: Pilar recently completed a guided-meditation audio recording of “Your Ideal Day Visualization” and an accompanying set of affirmations. The MP3s are available free to participants of the Refine Your Life en*theos course. Learn more about this and other guided meditations and visualizations at www.Blissitations.com.
EXERCISE: VISION BOARD

1. Gather the materials you will need to create a Vision Board (essentially, a collage of images and pictures that represent your vision for your life, or an area of your life). You’ll want:
   - A piece of poster board, cardboard or mounting board
   - Scissors
   - Glue stick or other adhesive
   - Magazines or other sources of words and pictures
   - Markers, pens (and other art supplies, if you like)

2. Create a space to work on your Vision Board. You’ll need room to spread out and get creative — and maybe a little messy.

3. Review the images from your visualizations and what you have written about your Ideal Day. Jot down or highlight the words or phrases that are particularly meaningful and important to you.

4. From the magazines, begin to cut out pictures and words that capture the essence of your vision. These might be direct representations of the things you desire (a healthy lifestyle, for example), or they might be pictures that capture the mood or essence of your ideal life. Include phrases, images and symbols that having meaning to you. Don’t think too much and don’t filter too much! Cut out whatever speaks to or inspires you.

5. Arrange your pictures on your Vision Board. There doesn’t need to be any order or sequence; just arrange as you are inspired to arrange. Once you’re happy with the general composition, begin to glue the pictures onto your Vision Board. You may want to include a copy of your Ideal Day description or a list of your Top Five Values somewhere in the mix. Continue adding to your Vision Board, drawing, writing and filling in empty spaces until you feel complete.

6. Once you’ve completed your Vision Board, take time to look at it and let it soak in. Look at each picture, and observe the meanings you have assigned to the images. Remember: At this point, it isn’t about “how” your vision will unfold, it’s about capturing a “what” that you find inspiring and empowering enough that you get excited about the idea of living it for real!

7. Find a space to put your Vision Board where you can look at it often. During the next few weeks, make a point of looking at it daily.
JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT: VISION INQUIRY

Keeping in mind both your in-class visioning exercise and your vision-board collage assignment, consider the following questions:

1. What are the most striking specific words or images for you?
2. What qualities or characteristics stand out overall?
3. What areas of your life seem to be asking for attention?
4. What already-identified personal values do you see represented? Are there additional values represented or implied?
5. Is there anything about your vision that surprises you, or that you were drawn to for reasons you don’t understand?
6. Is there anything in your vision you felt obligated to include, but that doesn’t really seem to belong?
7. What appealed to you about the visioning exercises? What part of you resisted doing them?

Make some notes in your journal about your discoveries and insights, including the area you feel most called to work on now, and any areas in which you might like to do additional visioning work. Consider additional objectives, areas of your life wheel, or specific goal outcomes.

List your current area for focus here: ______________________________

Make a list below of five potential areas for future visioning:

1. ______________________________________________________
2. ______________________________________________________
3. ______________________________________________________
4. ______________________________________________________
5. ______________________________________________________
A FEW MORE THINGS ABOUT VISION

A vision may incorporate all areas of your life, or it may be focused primarily on one specific area (your health and fitness, your home, career, finances, etc.) It may be focused on the near future, or a bit further out. Generally, you will be able to see most clearly the horizon of the next few years or so . . .

Once you get to where that vision is taking you, you’ll see a new horizon ahead.

A vision is generally composed of a collection of desired outcomes or objectives. You might think of these as “rays” of your vision. For example, your career vision may include a better physical environment, better working relationships, more rewards, more or less creativity, responsibility, flexibility, and so on.

Each life vision can have many areas. Each vision area can give rise to one or more goals. We’ll cover goals and action planning a bit later. But for now, stay focused on clarifying and exploring your vision. Pay attention to what you desire, and to the areas of your “ideal day” visualization that energized you most.

Define and document as much of your life vision as you like, but initially, be prepared to focus primarily on just one major area. You’ll then be able to apply the same skills to additional objectives down the road. Express your objectives in your own words.
Session 3: **Cultivate Your Goals**

To accomplish great things, we must not only act, but also dream; not only plan, but also believe.
— Anatole France
SESSION 3: GOALS AND ACTION PLANNING

- Goals are the “commitment and action” phase of the change cycle. Working toward goals helps you accomplish things, and it also helps you discover a great deal about yourself — your priorities, patterns and so on.

- Goals are waypoints toward a larger vision that is pulling you into your chosen future. If a vision is a picture of what you’d like to see happen, **goals and action planning describe your best thoughts on how you can participate in making your vision a reality.**

- Manifesting your vision for your ideal life may require you to fulfill multiple desired outcomes (objectives) in various life areas (home, career, health, finances, etc.).

- Each desired outcome (e.g., “to have a meaningful, satisfying career” or “to enjoy more financial abundance” or “to be in a happy romantic relationship”) may call for the achievement of several distinct, well-defined goals, each with its own detailed action plan.

- Initially, it’s best to work on one goal at a time. As you gain confidence, skill and momentum, you may be able to handle several simultaneously.

- Conventional wisdom says that most successful goals are defined in S.M.A.R.T. terms:
  - **Specific**
  - **Measurable**
  - **Action-oriented and accountable**
  - **Realistic**
  - **Time-focused**

- The best way to make steady progress toward a goal is by developing and following a well-designed **action plan** that supports it. Action plans define known action steps and tasks, including the obtaining of necessary resources, skills and support, setting healthy boundaries and establishing workarounds for areas of challenge. These individual action steps are like “mini-goals.”

- The best action plans engage you in a process of continuous **assessment, commitment, feedback and follow-through.** They ask you to do what you know you need to do now, and to adjust your plan as you learn more. As long as you keep returning to this cycle, you are making progress toward your goal. Every time you complete the cycle, you get stronger and smarter. Accomplishing your goal becomes easier and more fun!
CULTIVATING YOUR GOALS

The goals that take us toward our vision are seeded by our desires and are fueled and nourished by our values. Goals are most successfully pursued when supported by an action plan. That plan may be composed of various tasks and tactics, including strategies for overcoming obstacles, setting boundaries and seeking necessary resources and support. As our goals are achieved, they flower into rewards consistent with our vision (along with some surprise rewards we might never have imagined!).
A SAMPLE GOAL

Goal:
To spend 2 hrs a day relaxing and having fun.

Paths:
- Yoga 2x week
- Sign up for class
- Sell guitar & amp for $50
- Ask Sarah to join me
- Get help

Steps:
- Schedule class w/ MIM
- Watercolor class w/ MIM
- Plan days
- Go to bed by 10:30 PM (1 hr down time)
- Set extra projects
- Ask for help

Roots to values:
- Discovery
- Health
- Family
- Joy
- Beauty
- More fun/relax
- Lower stress
- Time w/ friends and family
- Making more conscious choices
- More time outdoors
- Health
- Better quality of life
- More creative

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SUPPORTS, OBSTACLES AND BOUNDARIES

In the course of developing our action plan, it is wise to consider the range of influences and factors that are likely to come into play. This includes both the supportive and helpful resources at our disposal as well as potential obstacles that could block, delay or otherwise complicate our progress.

It can help to think about this in metaphorical terms: Imagine that you are planning to grow your goal flowers in a garden (the territory of your current life). What forces would be working for and against these flowers’ healthy growth? What skills and resources could you draw on to provide your flowers with adequate water, sunshine, fertilization and other supports? What could you do to protect your flower from unwanted weeds, pests and other obstacles?

Consider the images below, what they might represent in your own life, and how they might have an impact on a goal under cultivation. If you like, add additional images and metaphors of your own. What are your most useful and powerful resources for help and support? Your most troublesome drains and pests? Your most-needed boundaries and protections?

Supports and Allies

Obstacles and Challenges

Boundaries and Protections
GOAL-CRAFTING AND ACTION-PLANNING

Your assignment is to begin developing one goal flower in the service of a selected vision or desire. Use the sample provided to help get you started.

You don’t have to make your flower look a certain way, and it might not end up fitting neatly on one sheet of paper. That’s OK!

The point of the illustration is simply to model the relationship between vision, goal, action mapping, and so on. Feel free to create a larger more detailed drawing, or to jot additional details about your goal and action plan on separate pieces of paper. You might take one branch or leaf and expand it on a separate page or pages.

Similarly, the illustrations of obstacles, supports and boundaries are there just to get you thinking about equivalent influences in your own life.

For example:

- Who are your “wise gardeners,” or sources of trusted advice and insight? What skills and support systems do you need?
- Are there aspects of your goal that will require outside expertise?

- Where are the “weeds” showing up in your life?
- Who are the “rabbits?”

- Are any of your energetic or financial “wells” running on empty? Are there boundaries you need to set?

- Where do you need to wear “gloves,” erect a “fence,” or post a “keep out” sign in order to protect yourself and your priorities?

Once you’ve given some thought to these questions on the previous page, use your insights to develop and enhance your action plan, building in key steps and to-dos as you go. If you get stuck, come back to this guide.
In developing your goal and action plan, consider the following suggestions:

**Relate your goal to your vision and values . . .**

- What aspect of my vision am I most energized to claim and incorporate into my life now? What are the key components or essential themes of my vision? What change is calling out to be addressed first?

- What do I get by planting and nurturing this vision seed? What specific rewards do I hope to enjoy? How might my sense of self be different when I accomplish this?

- What goal has the most power to move me forward? Is that goal consistent with my values? Which ones, and how?

**Define your goal in SMART terms . . .**

- Choose a goal that feels challenging, meaningful and in the service of your vision. Make it . . .

  **Specific:** Can you describe it succinctly in terms a stranger could understand? Can you order it from “the happiness catalog” without risk of getting the wrong thing? Describe in concrete terms how your life is different once this goal is achieved. Try: “I’ll know I’ve been successful in this goal when ... and I’ll know I’ve made real progress toward this goal when ...”

  **Measurable:** Can you put a number on it somehow? Hours, dollars, quantity of pushups/pages/trips to the gym? Percentage change?

  **Action-oriented:** What will you be doing differently in terms of choices, time or behavior, to achieve this goal? What will you be doing differently after you achieve it? Do you know what steps you’ll need to take first? Can you define your goal in terms of action RATHER than outcome?

  **Realistic:** Is it challenging but not overwhelming and within your control? Are you willing to make the efforts and sacrifices necessary to achieve it? Can you pare it down to something more essential and doable? Something you are 99.9% confident you can accomplish?

  **Time-focused:** By when will you achieve this goal? How much time will you be spending to achieve it? When? Where will that time come from?

- Don’t worry too much about getting the “perfect goal.” You can refine it over time. Also, remember that this first goal is mostly about working through the process and understanding the moving parts. Pursuing this goal will help you develop the skills, insight and experience you need to successfully address other goals, and to work on multiple goals simultaneously.
Build out your action plan ... 

Use the stem of your flower to clarify key steps and sub-steps you’ll need to take in accomplishing your goal. Use as many branches, leaves and stems as you need to develop a detailed plan. Consider:

- Necessary actions you are willing to take toward your current goal during the next few days, weeks or months.
- Additional actions you might be willing to take later.
- Steps you are energized to take now (as soon as today).
- Sources of support you can engage, now and in the near future:
  - People, contacts
  - Information, skills, expertise, learning
  - Material resources and environments
  - Personal strengths you can call on
  - Values you can call on
- Some potential obstacles you might encounter:
  - Internal (fears, boundaries, beliefs, distractions, energy deficits)
  - External (time, money, other people, environmental influences)
- What are some strategies and resources you can use in eliminating, overcoming or working around each of these potential obstacles?
- What measures or benchmarks will you use to track your progress?

Build in accountability . . .

- At what points will you evaluate your progress (and harvest your learning)? Set some specific dates, based on your goal’s time horizon. Consider committing to your start date, then scheduling check-ins one week from that date, one month into your plan, and monthly thereafter. Also note a date midway to your intended completion date, three-quarters of the way, and, naturally, your actual intended completion date:
  - Start: ______________
  - One week: ____________
  - One month: ____________
Monthly: _________  ________  ________  ________  ________  ________  ________
Midway: __________
Three-quarters: ____________
Done: ____________

List these checkpoints on your calendar. Set advance reminder alarms, if possible. Ask a friend or coach to check in with you and hold you accountable on these dates.

In addition to defining major checkpoints, consider marking down weekly check-in dates to help you track your progress and to keep your goals top of mind. Doing quick daily check-ins each morning or evening can also be helpful — the more you invest in your goal flower, the more powerful it becomes.

At each checkpoint, make some journal notes about where you’re having success, where you’re running into challenges, and what strategies are working/not working for you.

Ask: What steps or course-corrective action will I take if I sense I am off course, or I am not where I committed to being for my midway checkpoint? (This should not be something you see as a “punishment,” but rather a supportive device that helps you regain lost ground, correct course or reconnect with your goal. Be a compassionate friend to yourself!)

Ask: What reward will I commit to giving myself as a celebration of my success? As a celebration of progress and learning?

Ask: What’s one thing I can do in keeping with my goal — this month, this week, today?

Use the information you’ve uncovered in responding to these questions in order to populate your goal flower’s vision seed, SMART definition, reward petals and the stems and leaves of your action plan. You can keep coming back to revise and add to your flower over time.

As you make progress on this goal, you’ll be inspired to start others. Over time, as your energy and goal-crafting skills evolve, you’ll be able to work on several goals and objectives at once. For now, though, strive to keep it simple.
Life shrinks or expands according to one's courage.

— Anaïs Nin

Session 4: Overcome Obstacles and Celebrate Success
SESSION 4: OBSTACLES

OK! You’ve identified an vision that energizes you, and defined a goal that moves you in the direction of that vision. You’ve gotten clear about the personal values fueling your goals and choices. You’ve learned some essential components of action planning — the art of developing a working strategy designed to help you achieve your goal.

Over the coming days (and weeks and months) you’ll have an opportunity to develop your plan further. You’ll also have the opportunity to work the plan and make refinements based on your observations and firsthand experiences with it. This is the FUN PART! And also the potentially messy part.

No action plan is perfect, and the best plans go through several cycles of development and adjustment before they are fulfilled. This is the process where some of our richest learning is harvested! Discovering where you typically under- or over-estimate, where you are easily blindsided or distracted, where you tend to self-sabotage or wander off course — these are rich veins of self-discovery.

So celebrate what you learn, make adjustments as necessary, and then follow through. Keep developing your goal flower and action plan. Remember, as long as you stay open, and stay committed to the cycle of personal change, you win!

Some of the areas you might want to explore going forward:

- Obstacles (internal and external) and resistance
- Belief systems and patterned behaviors
- Reaction vs. response
- Boundaries, resources and supports

However you proceed in evolving your goals, strive to adopt a perspective of compassionate curiosity — a perspective of learning vs. judging. If you find yourself feeling confused, frustrated or stuck, do your best to notice and “sit with” your feelings vs. reacting to them right away. Ask yourself what your best options and choices are now. Go in search of the new skills and support systems you need. Do the things you can do, and celebrate your progress as you go.

If you need additional support, consider seeking out a coach, counselor or mentor for guidance. You might also check out other courses and resources available through the en*theos Academy for Optimal Living (www.entheosacademy.com) and ExperienceLife.com.
# OBSTACLES — SHIFTING GEARS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OLD GEAR</th>
<th>NEW GEAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| See obstacles as negative. | See obstacles as opportunities to grow. Ask:  
> “What can I learn from this?”  
> “What can I do to address this obstacle?”  
> “Where is my opportunity to stretch?”  
> “How has this obstacle served me?”  
> “Am I ready to let go of this obstacle?” |
| See success on hold, stop taking action. | See success in sight. Continue to take action. Ask:  
> “What can I do to transform this obstacle?”  
> “What action steps can I take?”  
> “How can I keep moving forward?”  
> “What kind of attitude best supports me?” |
| Find self powerless in the face of an obstacle. | Ask:  
> “How can I reclaim my power?” |
| See the obstacle solely as an external block, something that is out of your control. | Realize the external obstacle also represents an internal belief asking for examination. Ask:  
> “What belief do I have that prevents me from thinking differently about this obstacle?”  
> “How can I influence this obstacle?”  
> “How can I look at this obstacle differently?”  
> “What resources do I have to address this obstacle?”  
> “How can my support system be of assistance?”  
> “What values can I call on (and what values might be in opposition) around this obstacle?”  
> “What would my wise, highest self choose to do?” |
### OBSTACLES — SHIFTING GEARS (CONT.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OLD GEAR</th>
<th>NEW GEAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Believe obstacle can be fixed using external mechanisms. | Resolve the obstacle by being:  
- Clear about what you want  
- Willing to take action  
- Willing to make changes  
- Willing to let go of something |
| See obstacle as insurmountable. | Break obstacle down into doable action steps. Do the “little things” you can do.  
Ask: What would you do if you COULD do it? Or if you DID have the confidence? |
| Believe you need to do it all on your own. | Form an obstacle-shifting support team. Engage expertise, perspective and help from others. Ask questions. Express appreciation. Trust that those who choose to help will find value in being of service. Invest in skilled, expert, inspiring help. Find a mentor or role model. Consider getting a coach. Build a helpful “round table” or posse of support. |
EXERCISE: OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Use your journal to step through this series of questions for each significant obstacle you anticipate or encounter:

My goal is:

Known or suspected obstacle:

Strategies to address obstacle (including strengths and support systems you can leverage):

Two action steps I can take this week to transform this obstacle:
1.

By when:

2.

By when:
IMMUNITY TO CHANGE

Most of us hold a collection of limiting (and often unconscious) beliefs and assumptions that cause us to hold back from our highest choices and our most effective behaviors. Read the article below to learn more about this phenomenon and how to overcome it.

How to Overcome Immunity to Change

Two prominent researchers share a step-by-step plan that can help you break through old patterns, and finally make the shifts that matter.

By Jessie Sholl

Most of us have changes we'd like to make in our lives, from our work and finances to our health and relationships. But often, despite years of effort, we don't get very far. So, what's standing in our way?

Two Harvard researchers, Robert Kegan, PhD, and Lisa Laskow Lahey, EdD, believe they have cracked the code. And they've used their discoveries to develop a process that helps people overcome ingrained obstacles and successfully make what's known in psychological circles as “adaptive change.”

Adaptive change requires a shift in mindset, not just behavior. And as Kegan and Lahey explain in their book, Immunity to Change: How to Overcome It and Unlock the Potential in Yourself and Your Organization (Harvard Business Press, 2009), this sort of change necessarily involves a certain amount of self-inquiry and self-exploration. Their systematic method for accomplishing that work, and for overcoming our inherent resistance to it, has now been successfully used by a number of organizations, from medical practices to government agencies. Kegan and Lahey have also trained dozens of psychotherapists and personal coaches who now use the system with clients, and they note it can work for motivated laypeople, too — as long as you're willing to see your own entrenched patterns through a fresh lens.

A Change of the Guard

Kegan and Lahey see our resistance to change as an immune system of sorts, and they note that our “immunity to change” has a positive purpose — namely, to protect us from the psychological trauma and danger that sudden changes can bring.

Unfortunately, this same system that's meant to keep us wary of negative and disruptive changes can also inadvertently dissuade us from making significant positive changes in our lives. Even the mere prospect of change can be enough to trigger our inborn defense mechanisms, causing us to sabotage our best efforts almost before we've begun.

Because our immunity to change is so often rooted in unexamined beliefs, Kegan and Lahey have found that shifting our behaviors typically requires first instilling a more conscious and constructive set of beliefs. The foundation of their methodology for this work is a four-column “immunity map” (see right), which guides people through a process of self-examination, thereby helping them identify and adjust assumptions that may be holding them back.

The Making of

Improvement Goal

To ease perfectionist tendencies

What I'd need to do differently:

- Delegate tasks at work.
- Ask for help on projects.
- Be willing to settle for “good enough” rather than absolute perfection.

Choose a goal that would make a big difference, one you truly want to achieve. Ask yourself (or imagine asking a group of people who know you well): What is the single most powerful change I could make to improve my life (or work performance, relationship, finances, etc.)?

Next, specify what concrete behaviors are necessary to achieve this goal. Frame them as positive statements (for example, “delegate more” vs. “stop doing all the work myself”).

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### IMMUNITY TO CHANGE, CONT.

**an Immunity Map**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column No. 2</th>
<th>Column No. 3</th>
<th>Column No. 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What You Do</strong></td>
<td><strong>Why You Do It</strong></td>
<td><strong>Assumptions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is where you list the behaviors that prevent you from achieving your self-improvement goal. Perhaps Simone, the perfectionist, lies when someone offers to help her. “I’m almost done,” she’ll say, as she loads reports into her briefcase to work on at home. Or perhaps she tells herself she’ll stop working at 10 p.m., but when she looks up from her spreadsheet, it’s well past midnight. You might be tempted to simply say, “I’ll just alter those behaviors, and voilà, I’m done!” But don’t give in to that temptation. A technical change — simply changing the behavior — won’t get at the root of the problem; it won’t change your mindset and soothe your subconscious fears. Only an adaptive change, which the next two columns address, will do that.</td>
<td>Typically, when you’re not doing something you believe would benefit you, it’s because you have “competing commitments” that are holding you back. These are typically rooted in the fears that arise when you read through column No. 2 and ask yourself: “If I imagine myself trying to do the opposite of this, what is the most uncomfortable or worrisome feeling that comes up for me?” What makes not doing column 2 feel so scary? When Simone imagines delegating part of her workload to a coworker for example, she worries that the results won’t be as good. She might also worry that if someone else does the work, she’ll become less essential or less respected at work. So Simone’s “worry box” would reflect these fears. Her competing commitments? To be necessary, indispensable, respected.</td>
<td>The competing commitments listed in column No. 3 are typically the result of some “big assumptions.” These are ideas we hold to be true even though, until we challenge them (more on that, next page), we have no way of knowing for sure. One way to uncover our big assumptions is to apply “If ____...then ____” thinking to our competing commitments in column No. 3. Simone’s assumption might be something like: “If I weren’t admired and seen as essential, then I’d just be average; I’d cease to be special.” You’ll know you’ve hit on a big assumption, says Kegan and Lahey, when you feel a sense of “oh, this is why I’m stuck” — even if part of you can see the assumption as flawed or at least questionable. Next step: Design a test of your assumptions — one that can help you get unstuck.</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Behaviors That Go Against My Goal</strong></th>
<th><strong>Hidden Competing Commitments</strong></th>
<th><strong>Big Assumptions</strong></th>
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| I insist on doing things myself. When someone offers to help with a task, I put him or her off by saying I’m almost done, even if I’m not. I take work home and stay up late getting it perfect, and often do much more than is really necessary. | **Worry Box:**
If I’m not seen as exceptional, I might be less respected by my peers, or even lose my job. | That people respect me and value me primarily because I work this hard, and if I did anything less, I’d lose their respect and admiration. That if I make even one mistake, or let up even a little, I will be considered less valuable, less special and more easily replaceable. |
| Competing Commitments:
I’m committed to being admired/respected for my hard work. | **Competing Commitments:**
I’m committed to not being seen as inessential/replaceable. I’m committed to being admired/respected for my hard work. | |
| Ask yourself (or an imagined observer): What’s the thing you do, or don’t do, that most gets in the way of your goal? Take stock of the things you do instead of the behaviors that could create positive change. You don’t need to explain or understand your obstructionist behaviors. Just notice them and write them down. Define your actions, not your feelings. | Your fears go into a “worry box” at the top of this column. They are assumptions that make each hidden commitment feel necessary.” Look for assumptions that anchor and inform your specific hidden commitments. Notice how your assumptions lead to the very behaviors that undermine, rather than support, your goal. | |
| | | **Big Assumptions,** says Lahey, “are the beliefs and internalized truths we hold about how the world works, how we work and how people respond to us. They are assumptions that make each hidden commitment feel necessary.” Look for assumptions that anchor and inform your specific hidden commitments. Notice how your assumptions lead to the very behaviors that undermine, rather than support, your goal. |
Experiment With Assumptions

Once you’ve developed your four-column immunity map (Kegan and Lahey’s book goes into great detail on how to do that), it’s time to begin experimenting with and evolving your big assumptions.

Start with a single assumption. Ask yourself which assumption gets most in your way. Which one, if changed or acted against, would make the biggest, most positive change in your life?

When testing big assumptions, Kegan and Lahey suggest that you play SMART. Your experiment should be:

- **Safe** (many experiments will involve a certain amount of risk, but don’t devise a test in which the end result could get you fired or badly hurt)
- **Modest** (start with a small test and work your way up)
- **Actionable** (make the test one you can undertake, not just think about)
- **Research-based** (you’re gathering information here, not trying to prove a point, or immediately trying to change a behavior)

An effective test of your assumption (one targeted toward gaining better insight into the accuracy of your beliefs and how they do or do not serve you)

Keep in mind that “the goal of the experiment is not to prove your assumption wrong,” says Jonathan Sibley, a psychotherapist in Montclair, N.J., who trained under Kegan and Lahey and who uses the immunity map with his clients. “The goal is to gather data.”

Your experiment will allow you to better understand how accurate your assumption really is, and whether the behaviors you’ve been engaging in to protect yourself from your imagined worst-case scenarios are actually helpful — or ultimately counterproductive.

For Simone, a test of her big assumption could involve selectively delegating a relatively low-value task to a qualified team member. She could then see what happens. Does the delegating really result in disaster? Do her coworkers really view her with less respect? Does her value and specialness actually drop the way she feared?

It’s quite possible that nothing noticeable at all will happen — even if the delegating itself doesn’t go perfectly. It’s also possible that over the course of similar experiments, as the result of delegating and setting better boundaries, Simone will find herself being more effective, not less, and thus better respected, too. Either way, as the result of her experiments, it’s likely that both her beliefs and her behaviors will continue to shift in healthier, more rewarding directions.

Obviously, retraining your psychological immune system requires both time and willingness. The authors suggest dedicating 30 to 60 minutes a week for several months to practicing your new habits. And you may want to consider working with a partner or a coach to maintain your momentum.

But as you continue to test a limiting assumption and begin the process of change, says Lahey, you’ll find that your assumption “will start to morph. It won’t have so much control over you. You’ll start understanding where it’s valid and where it isn’t valid at all.”

Jessie Sholl is the author of Dirty Secret: A Daughter Comes Clean About Her Mother’s Compulsive Hoarding (Simon & Schuster, 2010). She lives in New York City.

## Weighty Assumptions

While many people share the same obstructive behavior, such as overeating, Kegan and Lahey note, the individual motivations and assumptions behind such behaviors can be quite different.

“The columns 1s and column 2s for people trying to lose weight might look very similar,” they write. “Column 1 could include reasons such as health, vanity, so clothes don’t feel tight, etcetera. And when asked to identify behaviors that work against this goal, most of us get around to seeing that the problem has something to do with the way we are eating — we eat more than we should, we eat when we are not hungry, we eat food that is too carb-rich, and so on. As widely shared as the first two columns might be, though, everyone’s adaptive challenge will be different.

“One person might discover that his overeating is a solution for unwelcome feelings of emptiness and boredom. Another person might describe her feelings of being part of a food-loving family and eating is a way of showing love. A third person might have a competing commitment to appear unattractive as a way to keep romantic interest at bay.

“For each of them, losing weight will be an adaptive challenge, but for each a different adaptive challenge. None of them is likely to succeed by dieting. “The route to success for each will be different because each person’s immune system is unique.”
Choose a goal that would make a big difference, one you truly want to achieve. Ask yourself (or imagine asking a group of people who know you well): What is the single most powerful change I could make to improve my life (or work performance, relationships, finances, etc.)?

Next, specify what concrete behaviors are necessary to achieve this goal. Frame them as positive statements (for example, “delegate more” vs. “stop doing all the work myself”).

Ask yourself (or an imagined observer): What’s the thing you do, or don’t do, that most gets in the way of your goal?

Take stock of the things you do instead of the behaviors that could create positive change. You don’t need to explain or understand your obstructionist behaviors. Just notice them and write them down. Define your actions, not your feelings.

Your fears go into a “worry box” at the top of this column. They can point you to your competing commitments, which you list below the worry box. When you write down your hidden commitments, you are now able to see across the three columns how you have one foot on the gas pedal (column 1) and one foot on the brake pedal (column 3). This is the immune system “protecting” you from feared, undesirable outcomes.

Big assumptions, says Lahey, “are the beliefs and internalized truths we hold about how the world works, how we work, and how people respond to us. They are assumptions that make each hidden commitment feel necessary.”

Look for assumptions that anchor and inform your specific hidden commitments. Notice how your assumptions lead to the very behaviors that undermine, rather than support, your goal.

Worksheet courtesy of Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey. 
©Minds at Work; www.mindsatwork.com

Stepping through this matrix can help you identify competing commitments and transform limiting beliefs and assumptions that are no longer serving you.
CELEBRATING PROGRESS AND SUCCESS

During this Refine Your Life process, you’ve been learning about the cycle of assessment, commitment, feedback and follow-through. For the past few days, you’ve been focused on making proactive change in one area of your life using the tools of objectives, goals and action planning. And during the course of that work, you’ve been observing what works, and what gets in the way.

Our focus on obstacles may have sparked some insights about the variety of internal and external blocks that typically “stand in the way” of your claiming your own highest choices. You may also have observed that the richest rewards in this process frequently come out of these revelations — as much or even more than they come from the achievement of the goals themselves.

Working through an action plan and observing our responses to it with self-compassion (including how we do and don’t do what we’d planned, and how we feel and think about our actions or non-actions) helps us understand how our thoughts, assumptions and beliefs contribute to our life patterns and results.

This leads us quite naturally into the next and “final” part of our process, which is both a completion of the “follow-through” step and a return to the beginning of the cycle’s first step: “assessment.” In this case, we’re assessing progress, and also celebrating success.

It’s important to recognize that making clear, accurate observations about your personal areas of ease and friction is in itself an important form of progress and success. So is learning to identify the limiting belief systems that may be making desired change more challenging.

To the extent you incorporate that feedback into your action-based strategy — by including some personal-development, belief-shifting and support-seeking tasks in your action plan — you will succeed in making meaningful, steady progress toward your goal.

The more regularly you can recognize and claim your wins (including your own ability to make conscious change), the more motivated you will become to pursue your highest choices, and the more success you’ll have as the result of those pursuits.

For more on this phenomenon, see the work of Heidi Grant Halvorson, PhD, (www.heidigranthalvorson.com) and Barbara Fredrickson, PhD, (wwwPOSITIVITYRATIO.COM).
TOOL: CHOICE MAP

A large body of psychological research suggests that the questions we ask ourselves — and whether we adopt a “learner” (growth) or “judger” (fixed) mindset — are among the most important determinants not just in our goal-oriented successes, but in our life chances overall. This map and much of the information in the following article comes courtesy of Marilee Adams, PhD, cofounder and partner of the Institute for Inquiring Leadership,
LEARNER VS. JUDGER

Lines of Inquiry
By Pilar Gerasimo (December 2005, Experience Life).

The questions we ask can lead us down paths of discovery and delight, or down corridors of doom and gloom. Which road are you taking?

On the path to happiness and success, most of us think we get the greatest mileage from having all the right answers. According to Marilee Adams, PhD, cofounder and partner of the Institute for Inquiring Leadership, we’ll actually go further, faster, when we focus on asking the right questions.

And what might those be? According to Dr. Adams, a psychotherapist-turned-organizational consultant and executive coach, we get the most bang for our buck from “Learner Questions” — the kind that lead to discovery, intimacy, understanding and accountability — as opposed to “Judger Questions,” which more often lead to frustration, narrow-mindedness, blame and regret.

Adams, whose corporate consulting clients include Lockheed Martin, Siemens Building Technologies, Aventis Pharmaceuticals and Aetna U.S. Healthcare, as well as the National Defense University and NASA Goddard, is the originator of a problem-solving methodology called QuestionThinking™. She is also the author of two books: a psychology text titled The Art of the Question: A Guide to Short-Term Question-Centered Therapy (Wiley & Sons, 1998), and just published, Change Your Questions, Change Your Life: 7 Powerful Tools for Life and Work (Berrett-Koehler, 2004). This more recent work is an easy-to-read fable aimed at laypeople, specifically executives and others who are seeking a higher level of personal satisfaction and effectiveness in their professional and personal lives.

Empowering Your Observer
As Adams explains it, becoming more aware of and selective about the types of questions we tend to ask is one of the very best and most empowering tools we have for creating constructive change. “Questions are at the very core of how we listen, behave, think and relate, both as individuals and as organizations,” she says. “Virtually everything we think and do is determined by the questions we ask.”

But, she notes, if we are unaware of the questions that underlie our daily assumptions, reactions and behaviors, we can very easily wind up with flawed decisions and choose a less than optimal, or even tragic, course of action.
To illustrate this fact, Adams employs something she calls the Choice Map, a graphic that looks something like one of those old Uncle Wiggily board games, except that starting from the very beginning (an experience of thought, feeling or circumstance), players get to choose from two distinct routes: the Learner Path or the Judger Path.

One starts down the Learner Path with neutral questions such as: “What just happened? What’s useful here? What do I want?” One starts down the Judger Path with judgmental questions like: “Who’s to blame? What’s wrong with me? What’s wrong with them?”

Learner Questions generally lead you toward thoughtful solution-focused choices, says Adams. Moreover, they tend to produce win-win relating styles, which help build and solidify relationships. Accordingly, on the Choice Map, the Learner line of questioning leads toward the sun-dappled mountains of discovery, and even more expansive and productive questions, such as, “What’s possible? What are my choices? What’s best to do now?”

Questioning Your Judger
Judger Questions, by contrast, tend to be automatic, even unconscious, reactions; they are often blame focused; they typically produce win-lose relating styles. So while Learners are busy getting ahead, Judgers are often obsessed with how to get even. On the Choice Map, the Judger line of questioning leads to a “Judger Pit,” a trap filled with gruesome ooze. Once entrenched in the Judger Pit, one can be tormented with questions like, “Why am I such a failure? Why are they so stupid?”

There’s no question which path is most appealing. Yet we rarely end up in the Judger Pit by conscious choice. Often, notes Adams, we go barreling down the Judger Path out of habit, in reaction to fear or as the result of our own unconscious insecurities. Over time, if we wear a deep enough groove to the Judger Pit, and hang out there long enough, it may become the path of least resistance. We may even come to feel it’s “normal,” hardwired — just our lot in life. In reality, fortunately, it’s rarely our best available option.

The key to navigating your way onto the Learner Path, explains Adams, lies in identifying your own Judging triggers, noticing when you’ve inadvertently embarked on a Judging journey and then grabbing the first off-ramp you can find. On the Choice Map, this opportunity is represented by a convenient “Switching Lane,” which one can access at any time just by asking “Switching Questions.”
Switching Questions, it turns out, are really just a special type of Learner Question capable of diverting what might otherwise become a full-throttle Judger voyage. Switching Questions (see sidebar below) might include everything from the simple, “Am I in Judger mode right now?” to more probing questions, such as, “How else can I think about this? What assumptions am I making? How can I be more objective and honest? What am I missing or avoiding? What do I really want?”

According to Adams, these switching skills can be enormously helpful in navigating conflicts, rescuing failing teams and projects, transforming negative self-talk, even getting a lapsed diet or exercise program back on track.

Steering Clear of the Judger Pit
The whole idea behind QuestionThinking is using your best available line of self-questioning (and the best questions you can employ in relating to others) in order to minimize the time you spend thrashing around in the Judger Pit and maximize the time you spend in Learner mode. But that doesn’t mean you can avoid your internal Judger altogether.

Change happens through awareness and observation, notes Adams, so it’s important not to shut down your observations with an overly critical negative reaction every time you identify a Judging Question going through your brain (or coming out of your mouth). “We all wind up on the Judger Path from time to time,” she explains, “sometimes several times a day, or even every hour.”

When people first learn the Learner/Judger concepts, she points out, “they may have an initial tendency to ‘go Judger on their Judger,’” meaning they blame themselves every time they notice their Judger self coming into play. “Even though it’s understandable, it’s also a waste of time,” she insists. “I tell my clients to forget trying to banish their Judger, and instead focus on building their Learner skills.”

The mantra, says Adams, is “Accept Judger, practice Learner.” It’s not about eliminating every last judging instinct you might have, she concludes. “It’s about strengthening the observer self, becoming more discerning and disciplined about the questions you ask, both of yourself and others, so you can enjoy being in Learner more often. And then you get to see the great places that takes you.”

“What assumptions am I making? How can I be more objective and honest? What am I missing or avoiding? What do I really want?”

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Ready to get started down the Learner Path? Start by considering the Learner, Judger and Switching Questions below and on the previous page. Add a few of your own. Then pick up *Change Your Questions, Change Your Life* (it’s a fun, easy read that follows the highs and lows of a fictitious character named Ben, who receives Question-Thinking coaching at the urging of his concerned boss).

To find out more about Question-Thinking and inquiry-based coaching, visit www.marileeadams.com. Dr. Adams also conducts one-day “Change Your Questions, Change Your Life” workshops nationwide and offers inquiry-based phone coaching for individuals.

**Judger-Learner Questions**

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<tr>
<th><strong>JUDGER</strong></th>
<th><strong>LEARNER</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>What’s wrong?</td>
<td>What works?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who’s to blame?</td>
<td>What am I responsible for?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How can I prove I’m right?</td>
<td>What are the facts?</td>
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<td>How can I protect my turf?</td>
<td>What’s the big picture?</td>
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<td>How can I be in control?</td>
<td>What are my choices?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How could I lose?</td>
<td>What’s useful about this?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How could I get hurt?</td>
<td>What can I learn?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Why is that other person so clueless and frustrating?</td>
<td>What is the other person feeling, needing, wanting?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Why bother?</td>
<td>What’s possible?</td>
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Switching Questions
These are examples of some useful questions for when you find yourself veering into Judger mode and want to “merge” back into Learner.

- Am I in Judger mode right now?
- Where would I rather be?
- How can I get there?
- What are the facts?
- How else can I think about this?
- What assumptions am I making?
- Is this what I want to feel?
SEEING SIGNS OF PROGRESS

When it comes to accomplishing increasingly ambitious goals, “nothing succeeds like success.” That’s because as we hone our strengths and build our confidence through small wins, we become significantly more competent and motivated to take on bigger ones.

Healthy Progress

LIKE IT OR NOT, another 12 months have zoomed by. If you haven’t checked off every last thing on your resolutions list, don’t fret. Chances are you still accomplished a great deal, probably more than you’re giving yourself credit for. Really. We’re not just being nice.

Perhaps you’ve started eating a little healthier, and you’re feeling more energetic as a result. Maybe you’ve managed to put a few miles on the bike you bought three years ago. This is the stuff you need to acknowledge as forward progress, not as evidence of a larger job as yet undone.

Viewing this year’s successes in sharper relief can help prime you for even more success in 2012 — because it helps you see that you are, in fact, making health and fitness a priority in your life. Recognizing even a little forward progress lets you upgrade your pursuits from the dreaded “should” or “have to” status (or worse, “total failure” status) and helps you build positive momentum.

“Taking stock this way helps you clearly communicate to yourself that being active and living a healthy lifestyle are truly important to you,” says Jennifer Davis, MS, a health psychology counselor for the Duke Center for Living in Durham, N.C.

To help you get a better sense of what you’ve accomplished in 2011, we’ve compiled three checklists — for fitness, nutrition and quality of life. You can use them to take a quick inventory of your own healthy progress. (See Web Extra! for additional resources.)

Even if you check only a box or two, we hope that assessing your accomplishments over the past year will help you recognize and appreciate that incremental progress is real progress.

Here’s to celebrating it all, and to planning an even more successful 2012!


Healthy Progress

Planning and Contemplation

During the past year, did you . . .

- Recognize the need for more activity in your life? Take stock of your current fitness status?
- Get a health assessment or seek advice about an appropriate fitness program?
- Set any fitness goals? Take even a few baby steps toward them?
- Schedule (write in your calendar) specific times to work out or be active?
- Show up for planned workouts, even some of the time? Even once?

Education and Support

During the past year, did you . . .

- Direct some of your daily choices and actions toward achieving better fitness? (For example, did you start taking the stairs, walking after dinner, watching less TV, making it to the gym more often?)
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Take Stock, Take Credit

If you’ve been able to say yes to any of these things, congratulations. And if reading through these examples has shaken loose any insights about other areas of progress, give yourself some more gold stars! You’ve made headway, and with luck, you’ve also made some sense of what it takes for you to make positive change in any area of your life.

WEB EXTRA!
For expanded checklists and a “Your Year in Review” reflection exercise, check out the online version of this article at experiencelife.com.
JUST THE BEGINNING

In our final session, we’ll dedicate some time to reflecting on the progress we’ve made during the course of our time together. You’ll also be encouraged to identify some successes you’ve experienced.

As noted, each time we complete the cycle of assessment, commitment, feedback and follow-through, we re-encounter a period of assessment — a reflection on what we learned, what we achieved, and what we choose to focus on next.

Take some time to reflect on each phase of this experience as it played out during the course, and if you like, share some of your insights with a friend or conversation partner.

Ask:

- What have I discovered about myself, or gotten clearer about?
- What are my top five values?
- In a single sentence, what vision am I most focused on now?
- What is one goal I am committed to achieving?
- What primary obstacle must I overcome?
- What skills or support systems will I need to do that?
- What are some of my best strengths?
- How can I leverage these strengths toward my goal?
- What progress have I made over the past few days?
- What small victories have I created for myself?
- How will I take what I’ve learned home with me?

By completing the self-reflection and focused action planning this course involved, you have surpassed the personal work done by 98% of the population. Congratulations!

If you are interested in pursuing this work further, please let Pilar know, and look for other revolutionary offers from her and the Experience Life team.

Also, please feel free to offer any suggestions or feedback that you feel would make this workshop better.

THANK YOU — AND HAPPY REFINING!