

Vision Activity 7: Odyssey Planning

Bill Burnett, a professor of engineering and design, and his colleague Dave Evans (who also co-founded the games company Electronic Arts) run a course at Stanford University called Designing Your Life. It's a class you can take by choice but it's hugely popular and oversubscribed. The class helps students develop their vision, and the activity that follows is adapted from Burnett and Evans' book, also called Designing Your Life.

Odyssey planning (an odyssey is an epic journey) requires you to do *three five-minute pieces of writing*. In these short pieces, you write down an imaginary future. It's not an activity you can do in your head or skip through quickly – we really recommend you do this with a high level of focus and concentration. You'll be glad you did!

Here's how it works...

You imagine three possible future lives; three timelines. Each require you to imagine yourself five years into the future. The three must be substantially different, representing three different paths your life might take.

Timeline 1 is the thing you think you're most likely going to do. It's the path you're currently following. You'll finish your courses, you'll get a job or go to university, you'll look for employment... the first timeline is the likely, logical and obvious one.

Timeline 2 asks what you'd do if timeline 1 was completely out of the window. Here, you need to choose a different university course; the employer you're imagining in timeline 1 doesn't give you a job. Your career plans need to be completely reimagined. You need a plan B, and this timeline is it. Remember to make it completely different from timeline 1!

Timeline 3 asks you to consider what the next five years would look like if you didn't need to think about money, about expectations, about parents' hopes, about your ability. You're free of all those concerns. Total freedom! This is the timeline where you can do anything you've ever dreamed of.

For each timeline, describe your life five years from now. Write for five minutes. Don't overthink things or stare at a blank piece of paper; don't agonise or aim for perfect. Scribble it all down. If you want, use these prompts to help:

Where do you live? What are you doing? What does your daily life look like? What's a typical week like? Who are you surrounded by? What are your responsibilities? What's your leisure time like? What roles do you have in life? How are your family, friends and finances?

Timeline 1 – my current path	
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Timeline 2 – <i>an alternative and different plan</i>	
Timeline 3 – <i>what if money and expectation wasn't a problem?</i>	

Once you've got these radically different versions of your future, it's time to become a bit of a detective. The clues to your interests, motivations and ambitions all lie somewhere in these three pieces of writing.

So what themes or ideas seem to recur? Is there something about where you imagine working, or working in teams, or being creative, or solving problems? Perhaps there's something about being physically active, working outdoors or helping others; maybe there's a clue about leadership, improving the performance of others or challenging injustice. Start exploring these themes. What do they say about what's important to you? Are there things here that you really need in your life?

OK, hopefully you're getting somewhere!

Now a plan might be forming – the beginnings of a thought about what you might want to be doing with your life. Remember, *you have options*. Any one of these future timelines has the potential to happen as long as you work towards it.

So what action could you take next to further explore your options?