

Vision Activity 3: Ikigai

Ikigai (pronounced i-kee-gai) is a Japanese concept. It's difficult to translate exactly but means a **reason for being**; including a sense of joy and purpose.

It's very unlikely your schooling up to now has encouraged you to reflect on your '*reason for being*' – we often think of education in terms of money and contribution to the economy. (Less '*what's your reason for being*' and more '*what job do you want.*')

By contrast, we have found the concept of ikigai very liberating when talking with students because earning power is only one of four equal considerations on the table.

The four things you should consider are –

- What you love
- What you're good at
- What the world needs, and
- What you can be paid for.

Together they look like this:



Note to designer: this will need to be redrawn to avoid copyright issues

Of the four, **two are internal**. They're about you (what you love, what you're good at) and require some introspection and thinking. **Two are external**; about the world around you (what the world needs, what you can be paid for) and might require some research, discussion and further thought.

Not all four need to be equal. You need to find the balance that best expresses who you are; what you stand for; your values, beliefs, hopes, plans.

So here's one way of making this diagram work for you. Be ready to make two lists – one list addressing the personal, internal questions, one list addressing the external questions. We're going to suggest you go through six steps:

Step One: INTERNAL factors: List what you love.

In this list, capture every interest you have. When are you happiest? What gets you excited? Be specific and exhaustive – precise rather than general. Make the list as long as possible. This may take more than one sitting as you capture everything you feel passionate and positive about.

Step Two: INTERNAL: Add what you're good at.

Extend the first list by adding things you're good at. Be kind to yourself – 'good at' doesn't mean 'the best at' or 'good relative to a world-class superstar'. It means *good enough*.

Then see if there are connections between things you love and things you're good at. Some might be straightforward – you might love and be good at the same thing. Others might have looser connections. Shift things about, link them, scribble additional ideas down, turn your list into a vast interconnected mess of thoughts and ideas.

Step Three: LET IT REST. Set your list aside. Chances are it'll look pretty chaotic and you'll need some time for it percolate into your subconscious, where your brain can begin to make some sense of it. Then return and re-work it.

Step Four: EXTERNAL factors: what can you be paid for?

Take your list of passions and strengths and begin to add your external factors over the top. You might use a highlighter, post-its, or coloured pens if that floats your boat.

Of the things on the list – what can you be paid for? And how important is that money to you? Freedom, flexibility, creativity, autonomy, risk, challenge... all of these things might be more important to you than cash.

Step Five: EXTERNAL factors: what does the world need more of?

Architects? Insurance advisors? Graphic novelists? Physiotherapists? Teachers? Soldiers? You have to make these judgements; they come from your experiences and world-view. One person's roster will look very different to another's... and there's nothing wrong with that.

Look at your crazy list and add a final layer – *what's already there that the world needs more of?*

Step Six: LET IT REST.

From all the noise, you'll start to see clear themes emerging. You're not looking for a sudden, specific job idea, necessarily – instead look out for repeated patterns.

These are the clues to pursue as you study.

How will you use this activity to improve your study skills / motivation?