

"The practice of ikigai leads to a longer and more joy-filled life."

—Elise Marie Collins, author of Super Ager



# HOW TO **IKIGAI**



Lessons for Finding Happiness  
and Living Your Life's Purpose

**TIM TAMASHIRO**

HOW TO  
**IKIGAI**

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CORAL GABLES



This book is dedicated to Jackson and Kennedy.

*“I did not ask for success; I asked for wonder.”*

—Abraham Joshua Heschel





# **Contents**

## **Introduction**

### **Realizing Your Life's Worth**

CHAPTER ONE **Welcome to Ikigai**

CHAPTER TWO **What Is Your Life's Purpose?**

CHAPTER THREE **Slomo Is No Longer an Asshole**

## **The Science of Ikigai**

CHAPTER FOUR **The Unexpected Lesson**

CHAPTER FIVE **Ikigai Gets Clearer with Positive Psychology**

CHAPTER SIX **What's Stopping You?**

## **How to Ikigai**

CHAPTER SEVEN **Miyagi's Okinawa**

CHAPTER EIGHT **Half Ikigai/Full Ikigai**

CHAPTER NINE **Start Your Ikigai**

CHAPTER TEN **Grab Your Lab Coat**

CHAPTER ELEVEN **Meditating Your Way to Ikigai**

CHAPTER TWELVE **Taking an Ikigap Year?**

CHAPTER THIRTEEN **Kyoko Chases Dragons**

CHAPTER FOURTEEN **The New Habit of Ikigai**

## **About the Author**

# Introduction

Dave Thorsell has the most wonderful Ikigai. He's a pleaser of people.

Dave is a friend that anyone would feel lucky to have. He's loyal and generous. He's my best friend from high school. Over the years, he's become my chosen brother. He's family. There's something about Dave that is immediately obvious. He wakes up every day to please people.

I met Dave within the first ten minutes during the first day of high school at Lacombe Composite High School in Lacombe, Alberta in Canada. Like most first days of high school, the morning reeked of excitement. I had a copy of my schedule in hand and went about trying to find my first class. It was 1981. There was no such thing as a school map. Each student had to use their deductive skills to find their way. My first class of the day was chemistry with Mr. Koole.

I took a wild guess that the class might be on the second floor. I located the hallway that led me upstairs. I bolted up the stairs, two by two, and then flung open the steel door at the top. Right there on the other side of the door, just a few steps down the hallway, I saw a long-haired blonde dude with his back to me. He wore a faded and worn blue jean jacket with a large Honda patch sewn across the back. I thought to myself, "Honda? What a loser." Then the young fella turned around and our eyes met. I asked, "Do you know where Chemistry is?"

He said, "Nope, but I'm in that class too. Let's find it. My name is Dave."

It was Dave Thorsell. It was immediately obvious that he was loyal and generous. The first thing he offered me was a chance to make my day a little brighter. We've been friends ever since.

Dave's himself when he pleases people. His Ikigai is to please people. It's as easy for him to do as breathing.

As with Dave, your Ikigai is the reason you get out of bed every day. It is your purpose. Ikigai is an attribute that every person has. Sometimes it's obvious, as it is with Dave. Other times, it's not so obvious.

I am writing this book to help you understand what Ikigai is. More importantly, my intention is to help you figure out what *your* Ikigai is. To bring it to light, you must become an Ikigai researcher.

My motivation for this book is rooted in my own Ikigai, which is *to delight*. I hope to delight you because it's the reason I get out of bed every morning.

Here's another thing I've learned about Ikigai. I've learned that when I send delight out to the world, I get delight back in return. Whether I'm singing a song on a stage, hosting a podcast, or chatting with a clerk at the grocery store, my Ikigai is to delight. I have a clear understanding that each day is full of chances to make use of my Ikigai. Ikigai is easy to share, and it's easy to feel the rewards of sharing it. Ikigai is a cycle of perpetual purpose.

I'd like to delight you in this book by sharing thoughts and ideas that I hope you find helpful on your journey toward discovering your purpose. My deepest desire is that, with my ramblings, you can realize the benefits of self-exploration. Within this book is a treasure map to help you find your Ikigai. All you have to do is follow the clues.

I won't pretend to be a wise sage who has spent the past ten years sitting cross-legged on a mountaintop pondering meaning. Instead, I can tell you that I'm an ordinary dude who has experienced an unbelievable streak of cool stuff over a lifetime. The singular thread that ties all of my crazy experiences together is my Ikigai.

I did not always know my Ikigai. For a long time, I didn't even know that Ikigai existed. But I've always had a strong suspicion that life has a purpose. Now that I know my purpose, my work is to realize my fullest potential and to offer it to the world.

My mission over the past fifty-two years has been to be a researcher of life's meaning. It's been a lot of work. I've been scouring for hints, paid attention, followed the clues. I've used my deductive skills to connect the dots, one by one. Sometimes they led to dead ends. OMG, this is driving me crazy! Then, when I least expected it, there was my Ikigai: to delight. A-ha! For years I worked at jobs that provided me with hints of Ikigai. I didn't see that the jobs followed a pattern that connected the hints together. I played in

bands, worked as marketing rep at a record company, and hosted TV and radio shows. Each job provided glimpses of Ikigai. When I finally connected the dots, my Ikigai became crystal clear. Each of these jobs that I believed identified me as a “successful” man were actually providing me with opportunities to be myself. I felt “successful” because I found ways to delight. I was attracted to these jobs because they gave me a part of my Ikigai every day.

In discovering my purpose, I also discovered that Ikigai is an action. With this practical north star, I now understand that I want to share my Ikigai as often as possible. I feel that writing this book is an unbelievable gift that offers me a chance to delight you.

I hope you view my thoughts and lessons as worthwhile. You are an Ikigai researcher. Follow the clues. I’m cheering for you. I hope your Ikigai is soon within your reach.



# Realizing Your Life's Worth





# CHAPTER ONE

## **Welcome to Ikigai**



Welcome to the concept of Ikigai, your life's worth. Ikigai is “the reason you get out of bed in the morning.” It’s what you do, every day, that’s meaningful to you and to others. You might not understand what your Ikigai is right now, but this book is here to help you figure it out.

The first thing you need to know is that Ikigai is a word and concept that comes from Okinawa, Japan. To pronounce the word correctly the first thing you must do is smile. Lift your cheeks in a bright grin and start with the sound EE, as in *we* or *free*. The Japanese pronounce the letter *i* as EE. Since there are three *i*’s in Ikigai, then to pronounce the word properly, you say EE-kee-guy (with a smile).



In addition to its being your purpose—the reason you get out of bed in the morning—Ikigai is a map. When you practice your purpose, you are also following a map that can lead you to discovering your gifts.



The second thing you need to know is that your Ikigai is within reach. This book is intended to help you shine a spotlight on your Ikigai. Once you zoom in on what you’re good at, and what you love to do, your Ikigai will begin to offer you rewards. You’ll get out of bed every day with a clear understanding of why you got out of bed in the first place.



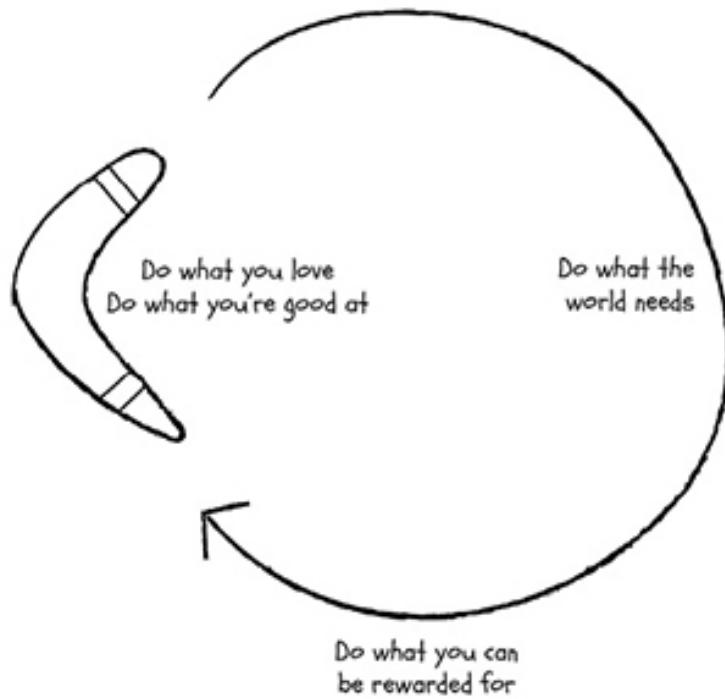
Ikigai is a map. When you practice your purpose, you are also following a map that can lead you to discovering your gifts.



In addition to its being your purpose—the reason you get out of bed in the morning—Ikigai is a map. When you practice your purpose, you are also following a map that can lead you to discovering your gifts. Once you discover your gifts, every day that you practice your Ikigai, you will also become more in tune with these gifts. You’ll find yourself sharing them often

and others will reward you for doing it. Ikigai is a map that travels in a circle of gifts.

## Ikigai Circle Of Gifts



When I was hired to be a radio host at CBC Radio 2, little did I know that I would find a dozen chances each day to feel the full circle of gifts that come from Ikigai. On the surface, the job description was to research the songs that would be played on each night's broadcast and to share details with the listeners. I was pleased to learn that being a radio host was much more than that. I got twelve chances to tell meaningful one-minute stories on each show.

The job of a radio host is to be a companion to the listener. 90 percent of the people that listen to the radio are tuning in by themselves. They are driving a vehicle or listening through headphones on their smartphones as they ride on a train or bus. Some listeners could be at home doing the dishes or working on a project in the wood shop. My job was to make the spaces between the songs as meaningful as, or more meaningful than, the songs.

CBC provides wonderful support for radio hosts. I worked with trusted producers and two radio coaches. Early in my training, the coaches taught me that there are only four kinds of stories to tell on the radio. They cited radio coaching expert Valerie Geller, sharing that “head, heart, pocketbook, and transformation” radio stories would be the focus of the narratives I would tell. The stories I would write and share each day would make the listeners think and feel. I would tell stories that could provide information about financial security. I would also tell stories of full transformations that began with “once upon a time” and ended with “they lived happily ever after.”

The coaches inspired me to find tales that would matter to the listeners. The stories needed to be meaningful. I worked very hard each day to find ones that related to the songs, the artists, and the songwriters. When I found a story, I would have to figure out a way to understand why it felt meaningful to me. Did it share facts or an emotion? My challenge was to write each story and to deliver it on the radio so that it delighted the audience.

I worked very hard at researching, writing, and delivering the stories every day. Then one day, a thick envelope arrived in the mail. It was a from a man named Gerry who lived in a tiny town called Estevan, Saskatchewan. Inside the envelope, I found a handmade cardboard card and a small stack of photographs and photocopies. Gerry was an avid gardener and a former jazz musician. He was writing to tell me how much he enjoyed the radio show each night. Gerry also sent along photos of blossoms in his garden. He had Oscar Peterson roses and he had set up speakers outside, so he could listen to jazz all day long as he tended his flowers. Gerry had sent me the most wonderful gift. He showed that the music and the stories mattered to him every day.

Many more listeners would share their own stories of the delight they found in the radio show I hosted. I sent delight out each show through the radio waves, and the listeners sent delight back to me in return.



Ikigai is a map. When you practice your purpose, you are also following a map that can lead you to discovering your gifts.



Figuring out your life's purpose may feel like a daunting task. Where do you start? Is there science that supports 'life purpose'? What steps do you take, and how do you know you're on the right path? These are all overwhelming questions that keep people from even beginning the Ikigai journey. Instead, people tend to default to the beliefs that society and institutionalized education have peddled to us for years because they are what is safe and familiar.

We've been told that when you get a good education, you get a good job, and then you live a good life. But there is more. Follow the Ikigai map and you will see for yourself.

The Ikigai map has four simple directions to follow:

1. Do what you love
2. Do what you're good at
3. Do what the world needs
4. Do what you can be rewarded for



Ikigai is a map. When you practice your purpose, you are also following a map that can lead you to discovering your gifts.



These directions are deceptively simple, but they take work to understand and put into action. The good news is that the work you put into following these directions will result in immediate rewards.



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Ikigai comes in two parts. They are half Ikigai and full Ikigai. Half Ikigai focuses on you: What do you love and what are you good at? Full Ikigai shows you the full cycle of Ikigai: seeing how doing what you love, and what you're good at, provides for the world and flows rewards back to you. As soon as you commit to your half Ikigai, you will begin to see benefits. Your half Ikigai will bring you clearer understanding of yourself and you can begin your work.

Eventually, you will begin to understand that Ikigai is more enjoyable when you share it with the world. That's when magic starts to happen. You'll be on the path to realizing your full Ikigai, and your work will be as easy to do as following a star in the sky.

## The Story of Ikigai

Ikigai is an idea that comes from the people on the tiny islands of Okinawa, Japan. If you were to look at a world globe, you would find Okinawa equal distances away from the southern tip of Japan and the east coast of China. To find Okinawa on a globe, make sure you have a magnifying glass handy. The islands are microscopic. They look as small as grains of salt.

Okinawa seems an impossible place for people to live and thrive. It's tiny. It's incredibly hot. Some might even believe that the islands are inhospitable. Yet many have called Okinawa home for tens of thousands of years. Today, almost one-and-a-half million people live in Okinawa Prefecture.

Even though Ikigai has been a concept for over a thousand years (from the Heian period, 794–1185 CE), only the Okinawans and a few Japanese outside of the islands have been the lucky beneficiaries of its lessons.

Originally, Ikigai started out as another word: *ikikai*, or “life shell.”

In the waters surrounding Okinawa, or Ryukyu, as it was known in the Heian period, there was something special living and growing below the water’s surface. Ryukyu was the keeper of its own special sunken treasure. On the ocean floor lay oysters with beautiful red thorny shells, or *kai*. These shells were so beautiful and rare that people throughout Asia wanted to own and wear them as jewelry. The shells were as valuable as gems.



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The red thorny shells were found on the ocean floor surrounding Ryukyu. They were part of the daily harvest of seafood in Ryukyu, gathered by the Ama. Ama are female divers renowned for their ability to dive deep down to gather shellfish and other treasures from the sea bed.

The Ama of Ryukyu would gather on the shores in the early morning hours when the ocean was calm. If the waters were clear, they were able to see deep and far into the water. With their hair tied back, and dressed in only a white loincloth, the Ama would swim out into the ocean, pulling a large wooden bucket along with them. When they had swum out deep enough, they’d hold onto the side of the floating bucket and dip their faces into the water looking for bounty below. When something grabbed their interest, they’d dive down as deep as sixty feet to push over rocks and poke around the coral with sticks.

If they were lucky, they’d find a red thorny oyster. They’d grab the oyster and return to the surface, where they’d plunk it in their floating bucket.

Ama start their training as young girls and continue to dive into their old age. Diving is something they are good at and that they love to do. They gather food and red thorny shells (*kai*) for others to enjoy, and they get paid well to do it. Ama share a sisterhood with their daily get-togethers. They talk about what’s going on around their town. They gossip and giggle before

and after they dive. These incredible women were early embracers of the benefits of Ikigai.

The waters have always been cold, but the Ama believe that the job was tailor-made for women. They believe that they enjoy an extra layer of fat that keeps them warm. The men can't handle the cold the way the Ama do. In addition, over the centuries, the Ama have developed the ability to hold their breath for up to two minutes at a time. As they make their way to the surface, they breathe out with a haunting whistling sound made deep in their throats. Ama were like mermaids who helped feed the people while they earned a living doing what they love.



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Ama are still working in the same traditional way today in Japan and Korea. They still gather at dawn. They still gossip and giggle. They still dive without the aid of scuba gear. Ama are the very essence of Ikigai.



The key to Ikigai is to do what you are meant to do. You have gifts that are begging to be put to good use. Understanding Ikigai is a way to put your gifts to work, so you can enjoy their benefits.



Thanks to the Ama, the shells were a valuable part of the Ryukyu economy. Eventually *ikikai* then morphed into meaning more than *life shell*. *Ikikai* became *Ikigai*. *Ikigai* then is made up of two words: *iki* translates to life, *gai* means worth. *Ikigai* = *life's worth*.



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The Okinawans and Japanese believe in Ikigai. In fact, the Japanese are well-known practitioners of the art of mastery in whatever they pursue. This means doing what they love, doing what they're good at, doing what the world needs, and doing what they can be rewarded for. This is a practice that has inspired masters in a wide variety of Japanese careers. Ikigai is part of a balanced life that is productive and enjoyable.

Masaaki Hiroi is an elderly Japanese man with a joyful face and smiling eyes. Each day, he sits on a short stool in his workshop, making spinning tops. He is a fourth-generation toy maker whose greatest hope is to make tops that will make people laugh.

Mr. Hiroi loves to make things. He's made tops that power little wooden personalities for over fifty years. One of his toys is a plump lady with an umbrella over her head. As you spin the umbrella her arm moves in a dainty, whimsical manner as if she is powdering her face in a hurry. In her other hand she holds a mirror. She is a busy lady with no time for fuss or muss. Her powder will restore the glow of her youth.

Another toy depicts a happy man- eating ramen. He holds the noodles in a large wad with a pair of chopsticks. As the top spins above the little man, he lifts his noodles gleefully up and down from his mouth. As his mouth opens up, his pink tongue twirls around as if he is in ramen-tasting bliss.

Yet another top shows a rotund little person staring into space with large tired eyes. This toy has two movements: As it holds a tiny ice cream cone to its mouth, a tiny red tongue sticks out repeatedly in a licking gesture. In its other hand, the toy waves a minuscule Japanese fan.

Masaaki spends his waking and dreaming hours thinking about his wooden spinning tops. He crafts them on a small lathe in his workshop, surrounded by wood filings, paint brushes, and trays of supplies stacked randomly throughout his small space. His workspace is a little room in his house. Dust fills the air of the workshop like pollen. There is an open window that brings in fresh air right next to his workbench. This is his happy place. He makes objects that deliver happiness. He is the Mister Geppetto of Japan.

Master Masaaki has no blueprints. His mind, and hands, guide his creations. Throughout the day, he carves and sands. He grinds and balances metal rods to incorporate into the tops. He paints his characters sparingly with primary colors. He gives them the faces of playful characters you would find at a city market on a Sunday afternoon. At the end of the day, Mr. Hiroi will have crafted a toy purely from his imagination. Whatever he is making, it's guaranteed to be charming. The simple ten to twenty seconds of action you see with each spin will light even the darkest of days.



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A fourth-generation toy maker, Master Masaaki learned how to make toys from his father. At eighty years old, he loves to work on his tops every day. He's a master toymaker who has traveled the world giving workshops and guidance to aspiring toymakers who hope to follow in his footsteps. His Ikigai moves him every day to create wooden toys to make those who see them happy. He still seeks mastery every day. He never stops learning. He enjoys his full Ikigai cycle by creating toys that will bring people joy, and as a result, he receives joy in return.

The key to Ikigai is to do what you are meant to do. You have gifts that are begging to be put to good use. Understanding Ikigai is a way to put your gifts to work, so you can enjoy their benefits.

## **A Venn Approach to Ikigai**

The world has only just begun to understand Ikigai. If you were to look up Ikigai on the internet, one of the first things you'll find is a commonly referenced figure. It's a Venn diagram made up of four circles arranged in a diamond pattern. The circles clearly explain Ikigai in an instant.

Clockwise, the circle at the top represents the first lesson of Ikigai: Do what you love; the second circle, below and to the left, provides the next lesson: Do what you're good at; the third circle, at the bottom, encourages

you to: Do what the world needs; and the last circle, just up from the bottom circle, teaches the lesson: Do what you can be rewarded for.

Part of each circle overlaps parts of the others, so that they meet in the center in a confluence. Where all four circles come together in the center is where the magic of Ikigai is realized.

Ikigai is an ancient philosophy created by the sages of Okinawa. Okinawa provided the philosophy, concept, and word Ikigai. This Venn diagram, however, is a modern interpretation provided by philanthropist Marc Winn. Marc is seldom given credit for his distillation of Ikigai, but he has provided a simple interpretation for millions to understand.

According to Marc, his idea for the Ikigai Venn diagram popped into his head in 2014. He was writing a blog post about Ikigai for his website. Marc had been inspired to write his post by Dan Buettner's celebrated book about longevity called *Blue Zones*. In the book, Dan brought Ikigai to the attention of his readers when he described a village in Okinawa called Ogimi.

Ogimi is renowned for its elder citizens. They are respected and revered for their wisdom and health. A stone declaration stands in the village, proudly stating that the town is the village of longevity. The declaration reads, "At eighty years old, I am still a child. When I come to see you at ninety, send me away to wait for one hundred." Ogimi is the home of many one-hundred-year-olds who have secrets to share and lessons to pass on about many things, including Ikigai.

Marc instinctively connected Dan Buettner's longevity research in Ogimi and its unique perspective on Ikigai with another idea he had once come across. He recalled a Venn diagram of four circles arranged in a diamond pattern with the word "purpose" in the center. He changed purpose to "Ikigai." That small one-word change would prove to be profound. Marc included his simplification of the Ikigai into a Venn diagram in his blog post. In the months and years that followed, his translation caught on like wildfire.



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By Marc's account, millions of people around the world now understand Ikigai since the diagram first went viral. He sees his interpretation pop up in books and articles every day. His act of symbolizing Ikigai in an easy-to-understand, relatable Venn diagram launched Ikigai into the consciousness of seekers of meaning around the globe. High five, Marc! You deserve far more credit than has come your way.

Ikigai is purpose. By exchanging one word, Marc Winn has given the world a great gift: a searchable infographic that is a simple map to life's purpose.

Try doing a search for any of these terms on the internet:

Meaning of life

Life's purpose

Job satisfaction

Career guide

Personal brand/branding

What makes life worthwhile

Meaningful life

How to find the meaning of life

What's the meaning of life

Living a meaningful life

Every single one of those search terms will deliver a myriad of ideas, philosophies, and opinions. But if you do a search for Ikigai, there's a good

chance you'll see Marc Winn's simple Venn diagram that provides you with an easy-to-read map for Ikigai and life's purpose. Marc made life's purpose searchable.



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Marc, your connection to purpose and Ikigai is masterful. Thanks for providing us with the Ikigai Venn diagram!

If Marc Winn's Venn diagram made Ikigai user-friendly and searchable, then I hope this book makes Ikigai doable. Doing your Ikigai is essential to carrying out your long-term purpose. As you know, life doesn't come with an owner's manual. Through Ikigai, you are at last provided with a map that can lead you to your life's purpose and everyday meaning.

Follow the map and you will discover your wonderful gifts. Your mission is to share these gifts with the world. When you share your gifts with others you feel rewarded for doing it. A reminder: Ikigai has just four directions.

1. Do what you love
2. Do what you're good at
3. Do what the world needs
4. Do what you can be rewarded for



Ikigai is a map. When you practice your purpose, you are also following a map that can lead you to discovering your gifts.



Your Ikigai will be distinctive to you, as unique to you as the iris of your eye. So how do you find it? The answers lie in following the four directions.

As simple as the directions seem, they may feel difficult to execute. If you initially consider each of the directions as a question—What do you love? What are you good at? What do you think the world needs? What can the world reward you for?—each of the directions needs an answer to bring full clarity to your Ikigai. Your answers will come to you through your efforts. The effort is the tricky part, because as much as most people want higher purpose, it's the last thing most people need for basic survival. A life of Ikigai makes purpose a high priority to take action with each day. A little bit of meaning every day will turn into a lifetime of joy.

In the morning, when your alarm clock rings and you reach over with your eyes still closed, blindly smacking at the off button, are you waking up to merely survive the day? You deserve more than that.

Many would have you believe that your days are supposed to be dedicated to achieving success. But success is a measurement of the ego. It only matters to you. You, and the world, deserve more than that.

When you put your Ikigai into action, you'll wake up each morning with greater purpose. You'll awaken to each day full of wonder. Ikigai has your map to wonder.



## CHAPTER TWO

# **What Is Your Life's Purpose?**



If you're like most people, you've wondered at some point in time, "What is my life's purpose?" It's a question that people have been considering for a millennium, but it's one most people will not answer in their lifetime. This book is meant to put your life's purpose within reach.



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When it comes to solving a mystery, it's often said that the simplest answer is the best answer. This answer is Ikigai. It has just four directions for follow.

If you're searching for your life's purpose, consider this: Your soul has an issue that it needs to resolve. What steps can you take to get the answers you need? My own steps have taken me on adventures that might seem wild to some people. But the search for life's meaning starts at a time when we are fresh and young; when we are full of piss and vinegar. For most people it started on the first day after high school graduation. But then what happened?



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No kid fresh out of high school knows what the hell they are going to do with their life. At best, they are guessing, but aren't we all? An eighteen-year-old's job is to be beautiful and to parade around seeking companionship. Their job is to do what their hormones command. They must be seen. They must also experiment with as many grown-up life experiences as possible. Carl Jung called them "athletes." Nature is doing its job. Their job is to parade their young bodies around in search of a mate.

I often share the immortal words of a fake Buddha quote with fresh graduates. I hold my finger in the air in a professorial manner and state, “Your work is to discover your work and then with all your heart give yourself to it.” Buddha didn’t really say that, but it’s still profound because when it comes right down to it, fake Buddha was talking about Ikigai.

In 1987, I was a twenty-year-old young man with long hair, a feeble moustache, and an eager smile. They were my only assets. As far as I knew, my life ahead was meant to be a series of well-paying jobs to earn a living. There was no such thing as having a life purpose. But there was something in my gut that insisted there was more. It whispered to me.



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Every day I would wake up in the morning and dutifully grab a quick breakfast and a coffee before heading out the door to go to my job. I was employed on the highways as a survey crew member. My job was to go where the crew chief asked me to go. He’d send me up the road a hundred meters at a time. Then, I’d turn to face him while holding a red-and-white striped pole straight up and down on the road for him to guide through his scope. I would move it incrementally left or right, as he directed me, with his hand movements. If he held his arm out to his left, I moved the pole to my right. If he quickly moved his arm to the right, I moved the pole a little to the left. When the pole was bang on where he needed it, he lifted both arms above his head and formed an X. I dug the pole’s steel tip into the road and marked it with a piece of chalk. Ultimately, what I did was help to make straight lines.



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This job helped me to realize that life was so different; life is not a straight line. It's a meandering, drunken stumble that goes forward and left and right and backward. And there is no one directing you where to go. We go through life like we are barefoot in a monstrous pitch-black room, with a few random pieces of Lego scattered sparingly throughout. Our task is to find our way through the room by learning a little more about the room every day. With age and wisdom, we learn to avoid stepping on the pieces of Lego. The Legos are the painful parts of life. The rest of the room is everyday life.

But what if a dimly lit red-and-white traffic pylon suddenly appeared in that room? It would catch your attention. It might glow just bright enough for you to see in the distance. Would you pay attention to it? Would you walk toward it?

In June of 1987, I lay in my narrow single bed on a Saturday morning, staring at the ceiling. I looked forward to every weekend, so I could have some time to enjoy myself. My job as a survey assistant was a well-paying job but wasn't fulfilling for me. It was a job, but it wasn't my passion.

As I lay flat on my back, I wondered what my future had in store for me. Is my current situation what life is supposed to be? Do I work from Monday to Friday doing something that pays well? And then enjoy Saturdays and Sundays, dreading the Mondays, repeating ad nauseam, until I retire? It didn't seem possible that this is all that life was intended to be.

My dad's life was like this, though. He was a hard worker. He worked on the highways too. During the summers, he would be gone for months at a time, paving long stretches of black asphalt roadways. He'd start his days at five in the morning. He worked twelve to fourteen hours a day. At the end of the day, he'd grab a quick bite to eat, then head to his bunkhouse to crumple in exhaustion onto his bed. His generation did life that way.



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It was depressing to think about my life going forward in the same way his did. I was conflicted. Surveying is a good and respectful line of work that I wanted to be thankful for. But why was I so miserable? What could I do with my life that would be interesting and fun? Was that even possible?

I took a deep breath. *Think.*

An idea exploded in my head like a firework. I sat straight up in my bed and exclaimed out loud, “I am going to music school.” At that moment I made a thousand decisions about my life going forward. The main decision was that I would focus on aspects of music for my upcoming jobs. I’d look into music business and sound engineering. I’d work at record stores and volunteer at music festivals. I’d study music management and music copyright. Any and all roads seemed possible to me. Music would be my *thing*.



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Even though I didn’t fully understand the impact of that morning, I realized later in life that music has been a guide for me. It’s been a glowing red-and-white-striped pylon that I can see up the road. It has given me direction. Whether or not I chose to walk toward it was up to me. When I committed to approaching it, I was delighted to learn that I could trust in the gift of clear direction.

I made a trip to my local college to gather information. Red Deer College offered a music program that seemed like it was right up my alley. I didn’t have much experience in music. I had taken a few piano lessons when I was around ten. Surprisingly, after only a few months of lessons, my mom and

music teacher saw a pattern. I would take my music lessons each week. I wouldn't practice, but instead would play songs by ear all week. When I showed up at piano lessons, I hadn't progressed at all in theory or playing scales. I could play the heck out of songs by ear, though. Mom and the teacher decided, that since I wasn't learning anything in the lesson, I might as well stop. More importantly, they recognized that I enjoyed music. So, why not just let me do my thing on the piano and enjoy playing it? This might have been the most important decision they made in my life.

According to the info I picked up at Red Deer College, I would have to pass a two-stage process to get accepted into the music program. First, I would need to prepare two pieces of music to perform in a live audition. No problem. I'd just play and sing along to some tunes I had learned by ear. The second part I needed to pass was basic music theory. I hadn't ever learned theory. I thought I was doomed.

My audition at Red Deer College took place in a small, windowless, hard-to-find room located in an impossible-to-find basement. The air was old and musty. The brown piano was scuffed and scraped on every corner. Its keys were as chipped and jagged as a prizefighter's smile. It sounded good, however. It had been freshly tuned.

I liked the gentlemen who auditioned me right away. Ken Mallet and Keith Mann had firm handshakes and eager smiles. They showed authority and confidence. I respected and wanted to impress them. I played two songs. One was a cover of a pop song (probably "Hello" by Lionel Richie), and the other tune was one I made up as a joke.

The audition went over extremely well. Both Keith and Ken had grins on their faces throughout our time together. They accepted me to the music program on the spot... with one condition. I needed to pass a basic theory test. We shook hands on it. It was as if another pylon had popped up in front of me. I knew what my next step needed to be. Pass that theory exam.

As luck would have it, there was a young woman on one of the surveying crews that was already in the school of music at Red Deer College. She was a guitar player named Nancy Laberge. I asked Nancy if she would be kind enough to help me learn basic theory so that I could come and be part of

the music program. Thankfully, Nancy was happy to help out. Over the next few weeks, Nancy taught me what the lines and the spaces on a sheet of music meant. She showed me what the circles, dots, and tails were. I learned about time signatures and note values. Nancy was instrumental in getting me through my theory exam. When it was time for me to take the test, I scored a mark just high enough to be fully accepted to RDC. My excitement swelled in my heart for what my life was about to become. I believed that music was my life's calling.

## Music: The Irrational Career

When I told my parents that I was going to attend music school, they were surprisingly supportive of me and my decision. They saw how I lit up with joy when I plunked the black and white keys and belted out songs on the old downstairs piano. If music was going to be my post-secondary-education path, then they were on board 100 percent. I'm thankful that they were so cool about it. There was just one small concern though.

My sweet dad found time one day to lovingly offer some advice to me. As we sat having a coffee one morning at the kitchen table, he said, "Tim, music is a great hobby, but you might want to learn welding or something to fall back on." That was entire extent of his wise advice. He made his suggestion, and then accepted that the cards would fall where they would. I'll never forget his loving gesture to show his concern for my future. I understood that his worry was for my financial stability and well-being. He was doing what parents of the day were expected to do: give practical wisdom. I could never fault him for that. He also trusted that my life would mean more than financial security.



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Most people think that a career in music seems irrational. The first thought is, "How will you make money?" What they are really wondering is, "How

will you pay rent, feed yourself, get ahead in life, thrive, be successful, make babies, pay taxes, etc.?” How is a music career a rational path? It’s not. It’s a path of fulfillment.

A rational path is the way most of the industrialized world approaches life and career. It’s rational to go to school and get good grades. Grade one leads to grade two. Grade eleven leads to grade twelve. After high school, the world is your oyster. You can do anything you dream of. At eighteen years old, it’s “rational” to know what you want to do for the rest of your life. If you are rational about school and you get good grades, you can go to any college or university you want to. You can learn any skill on the planet. Just apply to the school that offers the classes you need and get “accepted.” When you’ve been “accepted,” then you’ll just pay the necessary fees to attend your classes. Eventually, you will get a diploma or a degree. When you’ve completed all your courses, you’ll be handed your degree and that’s when the money starts rolling in.

It’s rational to believe that, sometime between eighteen and twenty-five years old, you will have your whole life all figured out. You will have a path that will give you a roof over your head, put food in your belly, and ensure your long-term financial success. The rest of your life will focus on your career success and financial goals. Then one day you’ll retire. You’ll finally get to do whatever you want with your time and money.

Is it rational to believe that your life’s purpose is apparent when you graduate high school? Is it rational to believe that good grades will ensure that you will be a good employee and climb the ladder of success, just like in school? Is it rational to believe that your adult life between eighteen and sixty-five is to be spent on building finances and impressive titles on a business card? Where does life’s purpose fit in?



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A music career is far from rational.

I chose an irrational path in life. My plan was to immerse myself into the world of music, to learn lessons as they presented themselves, to use my skills and gifts to inch forward. As I learned more and more about music, I began to see the many career paths music has to offer.

In college, I began to hang around a group of young dudes who were fun and talented. We decided to start a four-piece cover band called The Mile High Club. It was easy to get a gig at the college because we knew the decision-makers in the student union. The band played regularly at the college lounge and at special events when headliners would come through. The Mile High Club earned money. In 1980s terms, we could easily make a couple of hundred dollars each a night. It was well worth our while to rehearse new fun music to play for our friends at college. Starting a band was rational.

When I wrapped up at Red Deer College, I started to work at the local branch of HMV Records. HMV was the “hip” record store in town. The staff acted as taste makers for the local music aficionados. My specialty was new hit music. Even though the majority of my time at the store was spent doing inventory to replenish stock, the perks and prestige of working at HMV were worth it. I spent my days hanging out with cool people and sold music to anyone who wanted it. Working at HMV was rational. Plus, I was still playing with The Mile High Club. I was enjoying a career in music with two income sources. Each day was fulfilling and exciting. I loved what I did, and I was good at it, too.

Around a year and a half later, I moved to Edmonton, Alberta. I eagerly began to look for the next steps in my career in music. I still worked for HMV, but now I was in a bigger store. It was fast-paced, and it moved twice the volume. One day, I heard that one of the major record labels was hiring a new rep for the Edmonton region. This made perfect sense as a next step for my career. A regular salary, an expense account, and a chance to sell music to ALL of the record stores seemed rational and, more importantly, fun. I applied for the position.

The branch manager for MCA was a man named Terry McArthur. I wrote out my thin résumé and added a handwritten cover letter that reflected who

I thought I was at the time. I wrote, “I’m severely underqualified for this job, but I’m applying for it anyway. If you’re looking for someone who wants to learn, has a gleaming toothy smile and has personality to burn, invite me for an interview.” My cover letter was cocky but riveting; it was a desperate attempt to use charm to get my foot in the door.

Terry had never heard of me. He had a list of candidates already compiled when he was on his way from Calgary to Edmonton to conduct interviews. He rode in the passenger seat during the three-hour drive, so he could look over some notes and contact the people he wanted to interview. As a lark, and at the last minute, he decided to look at my application. My irreverent cover letter served its purpose. It grabbed his attention. He was intrigued. In a last-minute decision, he took out his mobile phone and dialed my number at home. Terry asked me to come for an interview.

The next day, I arrived at Terry’s hotel suite late in the afternoon. We shook hands at the door and Terry invited me to take a seat at the small round conference table in the suite’s common area. Terry was upfront about the fact that he didn’t have any intention of interviewing me. We chatted about music and the Edmonton scene. He quizzed me about business matters. I improvised the whole interview. At the end of the interview, he asked me, “Where do you see yourself in five years?” I answered, “I’ll have your job.” We laughed out loud.

The interview went well. In fact, the interview was fun. I shook Terry’s hand one last time as I left, and thanked him for taking the chance to interview me. I was happy I made it as far as I did.

An hour later, my phone at home rang again. I picked it up to discover that it was Terry on the phone. He wanted to know if I would like to go grab a beer with him. He offered me the job.



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At twenty-four years old, I had a job with an expense account, a car allowance, and an endless supply of any music I could ever want. I had concert tickets, T-shirts, posters, and access to the biggest music stars of the day. I had landed a dream job. On top of it all, I was also singing in a local eight-piece jazz band called The Jump Orchestra. My irrational music career was starting to be more rational.

I started to notice that a trend had begun: I was doing what I loved, and I was doing what I was good at. Focusing on those two inspiring aspects of my life made every day more fulfilling than the days on the survey crew. Every time I was ready for something new, all I needed to do was to find something that I loved to do and that I was good at. Music was my red-and-white-striped traffic pylon. It signaled me to follow in a meaningful direction. I focused on it. Each new experience in music felt worthwhile.



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If you experience life as a meandering, drunken stumble that leads you forward, left and right, then backward, remain vigilant and keep a lookout for the signals in your life. They will provide you with direction.

They are easier to see if you know these two things: what do you love to do and what you are good at? Your answers are the first steps you'll need to take to find your Ikigai.

## Everybody Has Gifts



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Everyone has special gifts. Your gifts are the actions that feel easiest for you to do. For some, that might be mathematics and problem solving. To others, it could mean arts and crafts. Are you good at sports but not at cooking? Focus on sports. Cooking is probably not your thing.

Your gifts are innate talents unique to you, but they might also seem irrational to explore. After all, if something is easy for you to do, then why would you choose to do it all the time? Society tells us that it's better to fix our weaknesses instead of focusing on our strengths. Society is wrong.



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According to studies conducted by Gallup through their CliftonStrengths service, your strengths can be amplified. When you put energy into developing your strengths, your growth is exponential. When you focus on trying to fix your weaknesses, your growth is slow, uninspired, and only modestly incremental. In other words, when you work on your strengths, you kick ass. When you focus on your weaknesses, you kick rocks.

The *Clifton* in CliftonStrengths is Don Clifton. When Don was a young man, he fought in the Second World War as a pilot. Don earned a Distinguished Flying Cross for heroism in the face of the enemy. In addition to being a brave hero, Don had heart. After the war, he focused on the unexplored psychology of “what is right with people.” Up to then, psychology had been primarily focused on dealing with psychological problems, or what is wrong with people. Don saw the potential for psychology to be a more positive science, one that could be applicable to the general public.

Don began to study what people did to become successful in life. His goal was to learn whether successful people shared similarities in their approaches to life. Don and his colleagues developed rigorous studies to interview people and study the new science of success. Over time, Don saw patterns start to emerge. He arranged the patterns into themes and referred to them as strengths. In all, Don found that people have thirty-four

strengths. Each person has a specific order in which the strengths fall. Your top strengths are the ones you will kick ass with.

Don Clifton is known today as a pioneer in helping others see the best in themselves. His strengths helped us see ours. The benefit of his groundbreaking research is that, when it's applied, people have the ability to wake up each morning and live life with a focus on their strengths. Imagine doing what you're good at every day.

When it comes to kicking ass, CliftonStrengths is in a category of its own. The CliftonStrengths *StrengthsFinder 2.0* book is one of the best-selling nonfiction books in history. It's helped over nineteen million people find and focus on their strengths. It's helped millions discover one part of the Ikigai map: do what are good at.



## CHAPTER THREE

# **Slomo Is No Longer an Asshole**



While it's true that your strengths can lead you to amplified success, where does your happiness in life enter the equation? One of the directions of Ikigai is to do what you're good at (your strengths). Happiness comes from another of the four Ikigai directions: do what you love.



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How much of each day do you spend focusing on your happiness? What percentage of each twenty-four hours do you concentrate on doing what you love? When you were a child, a hundred percent of your day was dedicated to doing what you love. When you became an adult, your priority of experiencing a joyful day vanished. Being an adult means a focus on finances becomes more important. But does being an adult mean you have to become an asshole?

When John Kitchin was fifty-five years old, he believed he was an *asshole*. He was a successful, extremely well-paid doctor who lived in a mansion and drove expensive sports cars. He even collected exotic animals as a hobby. He thought he had it made. Then he started to go blind.

He began to notice that his vision was blurred in the center. It became so bad that if he looked at medical documents or X-rays, he couldn't read them. Faces he had known for years were blurred too. He could look at a colleague dead in the eye and not recognize them at all without hearing their voice. John knew it was time to make a decision about the rest of his life. He chose to stop being an asshole.

What made John decide to stop being an asshole? It was a short, benign conversation he had at the hospital one day. He recalled a cheeky chat with an elderly gentleman he had met one time in a cafeteria. John stood patiently in line behind the old man as he piled more and more food items on his plate. John smiled and asked the old man how old he was. "Ninety-

three,” the old fella answered. John took one more deep step into the conversation.



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He quipped, “How does a strapping young man like me get to be an old codger like you?” The old man’s answer stuck in John’s mind like a red-and-white-striped pylon at a fork in the road.

“Do what you want to!” he snorted.

As John stood at the sudden fork in the road ahead of him, he saw himself taking one of two paths. One path was suicide. The other path was to take the old man’s advice to “Do what you want!” John chose to do what he wanted to do. Of all things, he chose roller skating.

Despite the financial success he had found throughout his medical career, he wasn’t *really* happy. He spent each day focused on nothing but financial success, and no time at all focused on his spiritual happiness. He realized that when he was a kid, spiritual joy had been his only focus. He wanted to be like a kid again.

John strapped on a pair of rollerblades and started gently gliding up and down the sidewalks along the beaches of San Diego. It was pure bliss. He felt joyful like a kid again. There was something about the push of one foot and the glide of the other that put him into a perpetual meditative feeling of ecstasy. It was as if he were skating in slow motion. The grin on his face had a certain wonder about it. He skated day and night.

As the year passed, John’s presence did not go unnoticed. The locals along the beach started to recognize the man who would skate with an always present look of surprise on his face. The locals started to call John Kitchin Slomo. Who is this man? What’s his story? Why does he do what he does? They appreciated him.

John's new life as Slomo allows him to live with his own set of life rules. His medical description for his current state is that he believes in and lives his own personal delusion. He lives his life the way he does because he chooses to. Best of all, it works for him and only him.



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When the locals see Slomo skate toward them, they cheer. They call out, "Hey Slomo!" They applaud for him. Slomo doesn't see a single one of their faces, but that doesn't matter. He's not an asshole anymore. He escaped. The people are cheering for him because he does what he wants to. Slomo's Ikigai is *to feel joy*. It's what he's good at. It's what he loves to do. It's what he sends out into the world. It's what he gets back in return.

If you could do what you wanted to, what would you do? There are no limits or rules. I know a man who is a Scotch whiskey expert. I know another man who finds joy each day in handcrafted Japanese knives. I also know a "wolf lady." Dr. Seuss had it right when he wrote, "Today you are you, it's truer than true. There's no one alive who is youer than you." But who are you?

## You Are Not Your Job. You Are Your Work.

You are not your job. You are your work.



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According to Dictionary.com, the definition of a job is “a paid position of regular employment.” You need a job, so you can pay your bills, have a roof over your head, and put food in your belly. It’s a reality of the world you live in. It costs money to live and survive.

But work is something much different. The definition for work is “activity involving mental or physical effort in order to achieve a purpose or a result.” Work is something you do on purpose. The result is a more meaningful you. You are your work.

When John Kitchin lived his life as a successful doctor, he lived his life as his job. He realized that he went to his job every day, so he could build his bank account. It seemed fulfilling to him at first. But as his job progressed, so did his commitment to the almighty dollar. Money was the way he measured his success. But over time, he began to question his motivation. John recalled days when he would be driving home in one of his fancy sports cars and wonder, “How much of the day promoted me spiritually, and how much of it promoted me financially?”

John was asking profound and important questions about the way he lived his life. John was asking about the way most of us live our lives. Most of us start off life as spiritual beings. We did activities every day for the pure joy of it. We grew older and more educated. We began to see the world as a collection of needs. Then the adulting started, and we got sucked into the vortex of money, money, money. We believe that our days are meant only for making money. When we earn more money, we can buy more stuff. We believe that more money and more stuff would make us happier. Eventually, John realized something that shifted his understanding of reality. In a video interview about his life, John said that focusing every day as an adult on financial progress is “the most absurd, stupid way of going through a life, but we are all doing it.”

Again, he wondered, “How much of my day promotes me spiritually, and how much of it promotes me financially?” Try asking yourself the same question.

## **Let Serendipity Be Your Copilot**

If you're like most people, you live life like John Kitchin once lived his life. It's what we've been conditioned to do. Is it possible to live any other way? You bet it's possible. Mike and Anne Howard have followed their *Ikigai* without having a job for the past eight years. They focus on their work instead. They focus on their *Ikigai*.

Leading up to their wedding, Mike and Anne dreamed about all the amazing places they could go to on their honeymoon. They started to write out a list of places to go and things to do. Their list grew longer and longer.

They figured that they could go on a ten-day honeymoon anywhere they wanted to; but was it enough? What would life be like after the honeymoon?

As they scratched out more and more ideas on their honeymoon list, their minds began to shift. Anne and Mike began to dream bigger. A honeymoon would be lovely. A HoneyTrek would be an adventure. They came up with the most amazing idea to take a one-year trek for their honeymoon. When the year was up, then they'd come back home and resume life like everybody else. Boy, were they in for a surprise. They've been on their HoneyTrek for eight years.

Mike and Anne's reasoning for their adventure turns conventional thinking on its head. Conventional thinking steers people to get a job, earn money, save money, retire, and then travel. Instead, the HoneyTrekkers decided to travel early and to do all the things they wanted to. They chose to see their HoneyTrek as an investment in their entire lives. They were especially inspired by one pearl of wisdom from writer Randy Komisar, who wrote, "And then there is the most dangerous risk of all—the risk of spending your life not doing what you want on the bet you can buy yourself the freedom to do it later."

They were excited and nervous about starting. The first place they traveled to was the Amazon rainforest. During their first week in the Amazon, they hired a guide, hopped into his small wooden boat and paddled their way silently through the dense vines hanging over the river. On the fifth day of their HoneyTrek, they slept high in the trees under a canopy of palm leaves. It rained through the night. They stayed dry. As they slept, their guide stayed awake to keep on the lookout for jaguars.

Once Mike and Anne had the first taste of international travel, they were hooked. They saw with their own eyes that, once they were out doing the travel, it got easier. They quickly learned that travel is not about the places you see, but the people you meet and the experiences you have with them.



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I asked Mike and Ann Howard what they believe their Ikigai is. Their answer was lovely. They believe that their Ikigai is to share kindness with strangers. The HoneyTrekkers have developed a deep understanding of themselves and others over their years traveling. They have opened their hearts to offer the international language of kindness to everyone they meet. Their kindness allows them to crack open instant trust between themselves and the people they meet. They are often invited to join in on the experiences their new friends are taking part in. When they give kindness, they get kindness in return. That's the beauty of Ikigai; it's a cycle.

A small plaque in their old but reliable Toyota camper reads “Let serendipity be your copilot.” They let the wind decide where they go next. And...no, they have no plans to end their HoneyTrek anytime soon. Track them down and follow their adventures on Instagram @HoneyTrek.

## Do What You Want!



If you look at their lives through a standard Western lens, they'd probably be considered crazy for how they made choices in life. After all, Gandhi was a lawyer who chose a life of simplicity...



Why are people so inspired by the special people who do what they want in life? I'm thinking about Gandhi, Mother Theresa, Slomo, and “the world’s

happiest man,” Matthieu Ricard. If you look at their lives through a standard Western lens, they’d probably be considered crazy for how they made choices in life. After all, Gandhi was a lawyer who chose a life of simplicity and nonviolent demonstration to help millions achieve their civil rights. Then there’s the story of Mother Theresa, who chose a life of poverty so she could care for the sick and poor. Slomo/ John Kitchin is a doctor who gave up his practice, so he could roller-skate every day and feel the bliss of perpetual acceleration. Matthieu Ricard was an acclaimed molecular scientist who chose to become a Buddhist monk and develop an endless capacity to live in a state of happiness. By every Western measure, all of these people could be considered batshit crazy, but instead we are inspired by them. What do they have that shifts them from the long list of implausible dreamers to the short list of inspiring heroes?

The answer: They each have their own personal delusions.



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Delusions aren’t always harmful irrational beliefs held only by people who are mentally ill. Delusions can also be a set of highly specialized beliefs that you, and only you, choose to live by. Your brain uses your own set of rules to help you maneuver through each day. You choose the drums that you will march into everyday battle with. Pick those drums that resonate with your soul. The people we are inspired by are the ones who have found their own drums to march by. You, too, used to have a unique set of drums that only you marched to. They were the tiny drums of your childhood. They were small, yet powerful and loud.

When you were a little kid, playtime was the only thing on your mind. Your work was to use your imagination to build forts and chase your friends around the neighborhood. In childhood, anything was possible. Playtime dominated your days and the adult world was something far off in the distance that was alien. What happened to that feeling?

As you grew older, you began to encounter the rational world. Right at the time when you learned that  $2+2=4$ , the reality of impending adulthood began creeping into your innocent brain. From that moment on, there were rules. Learn to read. Learn to do math. Learn how to write. Those three actions would propel you to a long, successful life of stability and wealth. What about happiness?

The great majority of everyday life for most adults centers around financial success. We've grown up and become cynical. We've graduated from high school. We've bought into the idea that institutionalized education leads to stability and predictability. Thoughts and actions about money outweigh thoughts about happiness, by a thousand to one. Freedom to do what you want is no longer an option because it's not what everyone else is doing. Yet, when you are presented with a person like Matthieu Ricard, you find his story hopeful. He has no possessions. His financial future is not a priority. His only focus every day is on happiness.



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If your focus is on finances, and Matthieu Ricard's focus is on happiness, then at the end of each day, what will each of you reap? If you have two dogs named Hope and Fear and you only feed one, which will grow stronger?

Why are people so inspired by the ones that do what they want? Because they do what they want. Do what *you* want.

## **Everybody Gets a Turn**

When you were born, you were assigned a seat on the most incredible ride in the universe: your life. Will your life focus on your job or your work? I know one guy who regretted the focus he put on his life. He focused on his job. It was my dad.



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My dad was the ultimate provider. He did a job he hated, but it was the job he could feed his family with, while also saving for retirement. Security, and saving for retirement, was the battle cry for life back then. Our parents came from lean times. They lived through the Depression. They knew what it was like to not have money and food on the table. My dad did the best he could with the information and circumstances he had.

Dad would always be generous with providing us with things that he didn't have when he was a kid. I always had a great bike. We had motorbikes. He and Mom took us to Hawaii when I was eleven years old. No kid in my town had motorbikes and took trips to Hawaii. The kids would often say, "Your family is rich." I suppose we were very well provided for, but it came at a price. Growing up, I barely saw Dad.

When my dad retired at sixty-five years old, he didn't have a clue about what he was going to do with his time. He tinkered around his house. He built a new fence and took up golfing. He went for coffee every day at A&Ws throughout the community. Every once in a while, he'd arrange for a trip to Las Vegas, so he could play the slot machines. He made friends. He helped people out when they needed it. He had a lot of time on his hands.

I once was enjoying a chat with my dad about one of my many adventures. He listened to my stories intently. When I wrapped up, he looked at me and quietly said, "I wish I had seen more of the world."

I replied, "Well, it's never too late!"

He quipped, "It's too late for me."

At the time, he was in his late eighties. I helped him try to get his passport so that, if he decided to travel, he could. There were complications with getting his passport. We never did get that damn thing.

In a sterile hospital room with the combined light of a grey winter window and bluish fluorescent tubes buzzing above, I had another conversation with my father. The day was November 16, 2014. I asked Dad if he knew what day it was. He said yes. It was the anniversary of my mother's death twenty-four years earlier.

Dad gasped for air. His breaths were short and labored. The dust and chemicals from the job he had on the highways combined with the bunkhouses he slept in at gravel pits had given him COPD. Plus, like everyone else in his day, he used to smoke a pack of cigarettes a day. His lungs were failing. It was as if he was sipping his air through a cocktail straw, a tiny bit at a time. It was tough to watch him suffer. I asked him, "Are you afraid of what's happening, Dad?"

He answered, in a surrendering tone, "Everybody gets a turn, Tim."

He died the next day.



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My dad was no scholar, but his answer to me that day would eventually lift me as if Plato himself had uttered it. Dad was clear in his intention with his answer; everybody does get a turn to *die*. But in order to get your turn to die, you first get your turn to live. That is the message I chose to see. Thanks, Dad!



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I don't know how long I'll live for. I just want to fully enjoy my turn. I'll bet you're the same.

It's your turn to live. What will you do with your turn? Will you spend your days chasing financial or spiritual well-being? Or will you be more like John Kitchin or Slomo?

There is another way. With Ikigai, you can choose a bit of both.



# The Science of Ikigai





## CHAPTER FOUR

# **The Unexpected Lesson**



It was a sleepy Sunday afternoon. I planted myself on the couch and the roots started to grab hold of me, tighter and tighter. My plan was to be a couch potato and to let my eyelids droop toward a snooze in front of the TV.

I have a strategy for afternoon snoozing. The volume for the TV needs to be set at a muttering level. The blinds in the living room are closed. The house is quiet. The dog has been freshly let outside to have a pee. Nothing will interrupt me. Let the inaction begin.

The key to my scheme depends on finding the best low-key, interesting but not too interesting, uncelebrated TV show I can find. My go-to program is usually one called *How It is Made*. That day, dang it, the show wasn't on.

I flicked through channels one at a time. The program I found to settle on that day seemed perfect to fall asleep to. It was a reality TV show that I had never seen before. It was a furniture design and building competition. I figured that this doozy of an innocuous show would have me asleep in no time.

The contestants were just finishing up their projects. They had each built couches to fit within the show's theme. One by one, the designers presented their masterpieces to the judges and awaited their feedback. My eyelids grew heavier.

The next couch on the screen was pretty hip. It looked like one of those bachelor pad couches from the 1960s. It had a design embroidered in the seat back. The design was four circles arranged in a diamond-like pattern. Each circle met the others in a confluence in the center. It was hip. The judges asked the designer what the pattern was. "It's an Ikigai symbol," he said. "Ikigai is a Japanese way to live a meaningful life."

My attention was captured. I took out my iPhone and looked up "Eekeeguy" on the internet. I had no way of knowing how to spell it! I kept searching until I found Ikigai. I read up a little bit more on it. Then my eyes grew as big as manhole covers. Holy crap! Not only was Ikigai a Japanese concept, but it came from Okinawa. My grandparents were from Okinawa.

Was it a coincidence that I was so committed to my life of doing what I'm good at and what I love to do, or is it part of my DNA?

From that moment on, Ikigai bobbed around in my brain like a Ping-Pong ball constantly afloat on top of my swirling sea of thoughts. Nothing could make it sink.

I wondered what my Ikigai could be. I thought my life's purpose was music, but I'd grown weary of music. There was no way I could imagine myself dedicating my entire life to jazz and singing and crooning at cocktail parties. There must be more.

So, I began to look for clues, lessons, and teachers. The first teachers I looked to were jazz masters. Then, I looked at all that I did in life and sorted everything into categories and themes. I wondered about what I was good at and what I loved to do.

## **Ikigai Is a Superpower**



Ikigai is a map. When you practice your purpose, you are also following a map that can lead you to discovering your gifts.



When you put your finger on what your Ikigai is, it's like you gain a superpower. It's like you get a GPS for your life. You become aware of where you are in your life and where you have the potential to go. It's remarkable how clear your present and future becomes. Clear purpose has been a trait enjoyed by geniuses throughout history.

In 1944, a young trumpet player named Miles Davis felt it was time to make a trip home and have a serious talk with his dad. He knew in his heart that he had a new clear mission in life. In order to follow his mission, his life would have to change. He needed to share his thoughts with his dad.



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Miles had been living in New York, attending Juilliard. By day, he learned about classical music. At night, he played trumpet in jazz clubs throughout Manhattan with the biggest names in bebop. Miles wanted to talk to his dad about the reality of quitting school.

Miles boarded a train from New York on his way to St. Louis, where his parents lived. Miles's dad was a successful oral surgeon in St. Louis. He had been paying for Miles to attend Juilliard.

When the train pulled into the station near his father's dental office, Miles went straight to Dad to have his chat. He took a seat in his father's office and told his pops that Juilliard was teaching him about music written by dead white men. On the other hand, jazz was new and exciting. He wanted to focus on jazz.

Dad took the news well. He knew that Miles was a talented trumpeter. He gave Miles his blessing immediately, with one wise stipulation. He said, "You can't sound like any other trumpet player." That piece of advice stuck in Miles's brain like a javelin that fell from the sky and pierced the earth. His dad even told Miles that he would pay for his rent and give him money for food until he got on his feet. Dad saw that Miles had something special about him.

Miles traveled back to New York with his new mission at the top of his mind. He started to experiment with jazz. At the time, bebop was the hot music style of the day. Bebop was what excited Miles when he moved to New York. Musicians like Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie were the originators. They were the most celebrated musicians in the city. "Why," thought Miles, "would I want to play and sound like Bird and Diz?"

Instead of playing the frantic fast-paced cacophony that was bebop, Miles focused on playing fewer notes. Miles's dad asked him to not sound like any

other trumpet player. Miles chose to play his trumpet sparingly.

He was entirely capable of playing bebop with any musician anywhere. It was how he paid the bills. But, as a composer, he sought something cooler. He eventually morphed his sound into the *Birth of the Cool*.

Miles Davis morphed his trumpet sound more than once. He is considered the great chameleon of jazz. His Ikigai may have been *to innovate the trumpet*.



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My theory is that Miles Davis had both wisdom and luck land in his lap that day he went to talk to Dad. When Dad told him not to sound like any other trumpet player, it just happened to be what he was born to do. It was his Ikigai.

Consider the people you have in your life. Chances are, you know some people who exude something special and unique. Tell them what you see is special about them. Your friend might already have a suspicion about what you see. Ikigai is about confirming the suspicions we might have about our lives. You can help your friends and family discover their Ikigai by being honest about what you see in them.

It worked for Miles Davis.



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Most of us won't have the luxury of getting Ikigai help from our friends and families. Ikigai is a journey of self-discovery. It requires you to pay attention, follow the clues, and learn as you go. When you become fully aware of your

Ikigai, it will be the greatest knowledge of your lifetime. It will be your superpower. Use it like Thor, not Loki.

## Preparing for Ikigai

When is it time to change how you're doing your life? Traditional beliefs might say that you have to be at the absolute bottom of your ditch to make any big change. Change in that scenario might be inevitable, but it doesn't sound like it's going to be fun.

What is fun is when you make change because it feels good to learn about yourself. It's exciting to put energy into the stuff that you're good at. You get the feeling of a quick win when you do what you're good at and do what you love.

To prepare for your Ikigai, *your task is to choose change*. You either choose to do what you want, or you stay exactly where you are at.



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Pay attention to the things that pique your interest. If something pops up out of nowhere that makes you sit up and pay attention, follow up on learning more about it. When you are preparing for Ikigai, you are getting yourself ready for a powerful personal transformation. Get ready to have a lot of fun, because you are about to learn a lot about yourself. You are your favorite topic to learn about, and you're about to get really good at being you.

In preparation for discovering your Ikigai, consider these three important realities:

1. You are not your job. You are your work.

2. “Take your pleasure seriously.” —Charles Eames, American designer, architect, and filmmaker
3. Follow the clues. When you find things you enjoy, then do them. They will lead you to more.



## CHAPTER FIVE

# **Ikigai Gets Clearer with Positive Psychology**



In 1886, Sigmund Freud was at a crossroads. He wanted a change of direction in his career. He was working at a hospital, studying the effects of cocaine in palliative care. It was interesting work, but he felt that there had to be more to learn about the human condition.

Freud quit his job at the hospital to open a private practice out of his home. He focused his practice on studying and treating “nervous disorders.” It was a pivotal moment, both in Freud’s life and in the study of the human mind. Freud was a pioneer in the science of treating mental disorders. That first wave of psychology was all about understanding mental illness and treating the sick. The disease model of psychology became the primary focus of psychiatric medicine for decades. But mental illness is only part of the human condition.

Psychology developed a reputation as the science that “fixes” people’s mental abnormalities. Psychology was only for sick people. It wasn’t a type of medicine that could help the average person. What would it feel like if your spouse or friend noticed that you were struggling with stress and anxiety and they asked you to go see a psychologist? You might get offended by the suggestion and think, “I don’t need to fix anything about myself.”



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While it’s true that psychology provides paths to help people deal with mental illness, a new idea has begun to emerge only recently: *mental wellness*. This new area of psychology opens up opportunities for all people to use research and science to increase mental health. Positive psychology is described by writer Christopher Peterson as “the scientific study of what makes life worth living.”

Psychologist Abraham Maslow coined the term “positive psychology” in 1954 as a way to explain and explore human virtues and aspirations.

Today, Martin Seligman is known as the father of positive psychology. He studies ways to improve people's lives. He focuses his work on what he describes as flourishing, human potential, and optimism. Although positive psychology is not a perfect science, it has revealed worthwhile insights into ways people can develop and work on actions that improve overall well-being.



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In my opinion, Ikigai falls squarely within the realm of positive psychology. This ancient concept that identified the idea that each person's life has value is now finding traction through science. Martin Seligman and the other researchers understand that people like you and me want to explore ways to maximize our life's worth.



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Positive psychology and Ikigai are ways to assist you to be more. When you study and implement Ikigai and positive psychology, it makes you feel more optimistic about life. You feel like you're accomplishing something special. You are special, so why not put in the effort to realize how special you are?

## The Science of Well-Being

Most people who take the stage at Woolsey Hall at Yale University arrive in tour buses followed by semi-trucks full of music and sound gear. Woolsey Hall is the biggest venue at Yale, so it's used for large-scale events. It's a concert hall and a convocation hall with over a thousand seats. But twice a week, Woolsey Hall is turned into a classroom.

Dr. Laurie Santos arrives at Woolsey Hall about thirty minutes before class. She's got a technical duty to check off her list prior to greeting her students. She gets outfitted with a wireless microphone that gets clipped to the edge of her scarf. The microphone's square receiver gets clipped to her belt or the back of her shirt. Dr. Santos gives the theater technicians a quick "Check, check," to make sure the mike is working properly. If it is, she's ready to go.

When she gets the thumbs-up from a stage manager, it's time for her to hit the stage. Laurie Santos teaches twelve hundred students at a time. Her course is called "The Science of Well-Being." The students call it "Laurie Santos' happiness class." It's the most popular class in the 316-year history of Yale.

One of the first lessons Dr. Santos teaches in her course is that the human mind is lousy at guessing what makes us happy. A typical stupid human brain guesses that happiness includes having a great house and car, a high-paying job, a perfect sexy body, and the accumulation of every gadget or toy we have ever dreamed of. In other words, your brain believes that if you lived like you were on the television show *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*, you'd be the happiest person on the planet. Turns out, the human brain is a terrible guesser.

Through her casual and relatable approach to teaching psychology, Dr. Santos demonstrates through dozens of studies that money, material things, jobs, and grades do not make us happy. They have little to no significant impact on our overall well-being.



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What does make us happier? Dr. Santos demonstrates that studies show you can improve your well-being through regular efforts at eight things:

1. Acts of kindness

2. Exercise
3. Social connection
4. Meditation
5. Time affluence
6. Good sleep
7. Gratitude
8. Goalsetting



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Each and every one of these actions are things you can do every day. Studies show that conscious effort toward these actions improve your overall well-being. Every single one of these scientifically studied activities help you take care of yourself to grow in meaningful ways.

Acts of kindness, exercise, and meditation don't pay the bills. But well-being is not based in financial measurements or rewards. It's based on what makes life worth living. If money is where your mind automatically goes when it comes to happiness, then you may be stuck in a static feedback loop.

Yes, the hours you put into your job every day do pay the bills. You can implement acts of kindness, exercise, social connection, meditation (a few minutes at a time), gratitude, and goal-setting into your job. That leaves time affluence and good sleep for you to do outside of your job.

The students at Yale see the value of learning about well-being from Laurie Santos. They are beginning to experience the benefits of well-being. Santos uses tools that allow her students to measure their base-level well-being at the start of the course and at the end. Students see their well-being scores

improve as they gain understanding of what really makes an impact on their overall happiness. In fact, it's not only the students who benefit from the course; Professor Santos herself reports that her own level of happiness has increased as well. If it's good enough to teach at Yale, why wouldn't it be good for you to learn too?

There's good news: If you're interested in growing your mind, consider taking Dr. Laurie Santos' class, "The Science of Well-Being." You can audit the course for free at [www.coursera.com](http://www.coursera.com). When I personally took the course, it was like binge-watching an exciting new Netflix series. Each class provided bite-sized and relatable information about how brains work. I learned that there's a lot I can do to get mine to work better. I felt invigorated as I learned how to increase my well-being. It was like I was being given a secret with scientifically backed research that I had been wondering about for years.

I highly recommend that you take this course. Tell your friends about it. Talk about it like you talked about *Mad Men*.

## Time Affluence = Real Wealth



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If you believe in the standard model of Western life of work/save/retire, then there's potential for a lot more happiness. The truth is that you have today and your entire lifetime to enjoy, not just retirement.

Your retirement may be far, far off in the future. Then again, maybe you plan to retire in a few years. Sure, you want to have a happy retirement, but what are you going to do about happiness right now and until you retire? According to research, your personal choice between the value of money vs. the value of time is one of the biggest contributors to happiness.

Hal Hershfield and other researchers asked thousands of people what they valued more, time or money. As you might expect, most people (69 percent) answered that they value money more than time. Only 31 percent of the people surveyed believed that time was more valuable than money. But who was happier: the money or the time believers?



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The time believers' overall happiness levels (4.89 out of 5) were much higher than the money believers' (3.53 out of 5). Even though the majority of people value money more than time, they are sacrificing their happiness because of it. In the happiness stock market, money would be known as an overvalued stock. Money and its happiness return on investment is a sucker bet. An investment in your time would be the best gamble, for immediate returns.

So, your life's meaning boils down to whether you're time-rich or time-poor. If you put all your energy into your job and feel like you don't have time for anything else, then you're time-poor. You might even be facing time famine! If time is worth more to you than money, then congratulations, you're time-affluent.

Time affluence means you have the time to do all the things you really want to do in life. You can do what you love and do what you're good at and experience more happiness. Or you can chase more money and stress with a much higher possibility of less happiness. What will you choose?

To search for your Ikigai means believing you have the time to do it. It doesn't mean you have to work on it twenty-four hours a day. It could mean ten minutes per day, but the first challenge you must overcome is that you have the time to do it. Change your context about the value of your time.

## **The Why of Mindfulness**

Most people find the concept of mindfulness tough to understand. It doesn't have to be. Mindful.org has a great definition: "Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us."

That's one of the clearest definitions of mindfulness that I've ever found. But to fully understand mindfulness, the world not only needs to know what mindfulness is. It needs to know why it should practice mindfulness. Enter author Simon Sinek.



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Simon Sinek is the famed author of the book *Start with Why*. His book states that the most successful companies and individuals have a clear understanding of why they exist. Their *why* drives *what* they do and *how* they do it. I'm paraphrasing the brilliant thesis of *Start with Why* into this embarrassingly short description, but the reason for this point is this: why you would want to practice mindfulness is profoundly important.

Why be mindful? To notice and break the habit of judging moments as they happen.

How can you be mindful? Practice regular mindful meditation and be mindful.

What is mindfulness? To remember to notice moments as they happen.

Why be mindful? Here's one exercise that will help you see mindfulness firsthand. Try doing this for the next week: Imagine you're driving on a busy street during rush hour. It's 5:15 p.m. and the traffic is thick and heavy.

Try this:

1. Remember to relax. Don't make a judgement. No one is doing this traffic to you.
2. Leave two generous car lengths between you and the car ahead. Let other drivers fill the space as they need it. Then leave two more spaces even at red lights.

According to new traffic research, the simple act of leaving two car lengths ahead of you allows drivers from other lanes to change lanes. Your generous gesture allows the traffic to flow more freely. Science shows that one driver doing this has the potential to unblock an entire traffic jam. Why give this mindful experiment a try? *To help others get home easier (including yourself).*

Mindfulness is an important skill to develop for your Ikigai to thrive. Mindful meditation rewires your brain to understand each moment as it happens in a clearer way. You're calmer and more tuned-in. You're kinder and even-tempered. Mindfulness is an attribute that makes life easier. The more you do it, the more enjoyable your time becomes.



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By the end of the week of your remembering to leave spaces, take time to notice whether it made your drive home nicer. Did you feel kinder or more generous? Did a few people thank you with a wave or a tiny honk? For one week, you helped thousands of people get home safely and easily. Remember to notice the moments in traffic as they happen.

Mindfulness helps you break the habits that rule your life and cloud your mind. In traffic, if you automatically pull right up to the bumper of the car ahead of you, chances are you're doing it out of habit. By simply noticing when you do it and choosing to leave two generous spaces in front of you instead, you are rewiring your brain for mindfulness. Ikigai needs mindfulness. To live your life's purpose, you must remember to notice what

you love to do and what you're good at. You must notice what your Ikigai provides to the world. You must notice the rewards you receive from your Ikigai.

The science of positive psychology is still a relatively new field of study, but the research that it's been sharing is compelling. It's a way for you to use your brain to make your brain work better. That's like using your car engine to make your car engine work better. Self-actualization and Ikigai have the potential to realize your life's purpose.



## CHAPTER SIX

# **What's Stopping You?**



Life is unfair. It doesn't come with an owner's manual. You have to figure out your own path to fulfillment, and dozens of people will plant ideas in your head that they expect you to follow regarding what is right and wrong. There are social norms to adhere to, spiritual teachings, financial laws, and your own internal demons to deal with on a daily basis. It's a wonder that anyone survives long enough to thrive, but we do.

I've always been amazed by people who really thrive. They carry one common trait that is hardly ever recognized or celebrated. Thrivers from Albert Einstein to Slomo to Oprah Winfrey all share the common trait that is essential for Ikigai. They are different.

The different ones are the ones who march to their own drummer. A different has their own set of beliefs that act as the guard rails and keep them on their unique paths throughout their lives. By establishing their own rules to use throughout their lives, they build an immunity to outside influences. They stand out for their beliefs and actions. They know what works and what doesn't work in their worlds. They are their own persons. They do what they want.

## What If I'm Not Good at Anything?



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If you think you're not good at anything, or feel like there's nothing in the world that you love, how can you start your Ikigai? You'd be surprised at how many people have shared with me that their reality doesn't offer any hints to Ikigai at all. Don't despair. There's something you can do about it. You're a human being. Your life is complicated. I get it.

You have an Ikigai like everyone else does. You just have a few extra steps to take right now. The starting point for your Ikigai begins with adapting a few things you do for the next few weeks. Consider these actions:

## **1. Do Kind Things for Other People**

According to studies, acts of kindness have powerful effects that can shift you into a new reality. It humanizes you to open your heart up to others.

When you do something nice for someone else, you experience physical and chemical rewards. Being kind reduces stress. It cleanses you of anxiety and negative emotions. One small random act of kindness can even give you a lift out of depression. Imagine what acts of kindness can accomplish every day.

Make a list of some kind things you can do this week. Do them. Watch how your attitude changes.

## **2. Learn How to Meditate**

Meditation rewires the brain to reduce negative emotions and boost positive emotions. If you haven't tried meditation, don't dismiss it.



Meditation helps build compassion. It puts a damper on self-criticism.



Meditation is getting to be as popular as grabbing a cup of coffee at Starbucks. It takes just a few minutes of the day. You'll get a lift when you do it. Meditation helps build compassion. It puts a damper on self-criticism. If you haven't tried meditation, don't knock it until you try it. It's more popular today than ever. Best of all, it's free.

## **3. Spend Time with Friends and Family**

Friends and family are medicine that can help you live longer. According to a review of 148 studies that encompassed over 300,000 participants, people with strong social connections enjoy a 50 percent increased likelihood of survival. Your friends and family add quality to your life and make it awesome. Your brain and body benefit from quality time with your favorite people. More time with them gives you plenty of opportunities for more acts of kindness and laughter.

## 4. Set a Goal



Meditation helps build compassion. It puts a damper on self-criticism.



Set one goal that you can accomplish in one month. You will focus on it and have a clear direction of where you're going. You'll have a sense of purpose. The feeling of motivation will pump through your veins again. By setting even one goal, you'll touch base with what's important to you. Accomplishing an objective is like rebooting your meaning in life.

And if you set and accomplish one goal, why not set another to follow up with?

You have an Ikigai. You might need a reminder about how precious life is. You've already won the lottery of being born. Don't waste your turn to live.

## Family Work Scripts and Tiger Parents



You have an entire set of *shoulds* and *shouldn'ts*, constantly telling you where to go and where not to go, that you might not be aware of.



Do what you want. It seems so obvious. But there are forces at work outside of what you want. You have an entire set of *shoulds* and *shouldn'ts*, constantly telling you where to go and where not to go, that you might not be aware of. You've lived your entire life with invisible but loving guardrails that you didn't set up yourself on your life's journey. They are the messages that your parents have imbedded into your life.

What if your parents want you to be a doctor, architect, or lawyer? Welcome to the confusing world of family work scripts and *tiger parents*.

When I gave a TED Talk in Calgary at TEDxYYC, many people approached me afterward to tell me how inspired they were by Ikigai. Each person I spoke to that day had a sense of wonder and confusion swirling around their heads like rogue satellites when it came to life's purpose. They'd tell me that they would love to find their Ikigai, but they just don't have any idea about how to go about it. More than anything, they wondered how they would even begin to search. I replied with a question, "What do your parents want you to be?"

Yes, I asked fully-grown adults what their parents hoped they would be when they grew up. Some people answered, "They wanted me to be an accountant/doctor/engineer, so I went to school for it, but I didn't like it, so I dropped out." As they answered, their eyes glazed over with despair. Their shoulders slumped, and the corners of their mouths lifted in a painful wince. It was clear that they felt disappointment as a result of the direction they had followed.

But a few people answered, "They let me do what I wanted to do." The latter had little to no air of desperation in their voices. They lifted their chests and the light in their eyes twinkled.

Parents have a massive impact on what their kids will choose to do with their adult lives. Like life itself, parenthood does not come with an owner's manual. As much as children believe that parents know what they are doing, most days of parenthood are just controlled, well-intentioned winging it. One of the first things new parents learn is that they are capable of making most situations bearable, fixable, or manageable. Parents wing it with the

best intentions possible to steer their children toward safety and security. That includes jobs and careers.



You have an entire set of *shoulds* and *shouldn'ts*, constantly telling you where to go and where not to go, that you might not be aware of.



When it comes to pre-choosing careers for their kids, parents often come equipped with a set of wishes and hopes. Over time, Mom and Dad have come to their own conclusions about what lines of work are safe, secure, and acceptable for their kids to go into. Throughout their children's upbringing, Mom and Dad have imprinted their own set of career standards onto the kiddies. Their beliefs are projected onto their offspring in loving (but sometimes forceful) ways. These messages are referred to as family work scripts.

Most parents would be overjoyed if their child chose to become a doctor. If their kid becomes a doctor, they will also gain the hallmarks of respect, wealth, charity, and security for their entire lifetime. No need for a fallback plan. A doctor will be a doctor for life.

What if the kid really wanted to be a painter? There's no safety or security in being a painter as a career. There's no steady income. Painting doesn't come with a pension plan or medical benefits.



If *you* choose a career as a doctor, lawyer, architect, teacher, accountant, or engineer because you are passionate about it, then *your* Ikigai is more likely to be realized.



Family work scripts often develop into lists of acceptable and unacceptable professions. Parents will argue that all they want is for their kids to be healthy and happy. The interpretation is a little more complicated. They want their kid to choose a job from their highly personalized list of acceptable careers. The professions that most often fall into most acceptable

columns include doctor, lawyer, architect, teacher, accountant, engineer. Would your parents be overjoyed if you chose a career off that list? Sure they would. Those are noble professions, but they are not guaranteed to deliver Ikigai if the choice is made by the parent, not the child. If *you* choose a career as a doctor, lawyer, architect, teacher, accountant, or engineer because you are passionate about it, then *your* Ikigai is more likely to be realized.

Parents aren't doing anything nefarious with the work scripts they deliver to their kids. Instead, they are doing what falls within the acceptable column of society in general. Remember, parents are just winging it. They are steering you down the road that so many other parents also embrace and understand. It's their job. Your job is to love your parents and give them kindness, but do what you want.

Your parents aren't going to disown you if you don't do what they wish. They'll still cheer you on and support you. That is, unless you grew up with tiger parents.

The first time I heard of a tiger mom, or tiger parents, was when I followed up on a sweet email from a young woman who had heard my "How to Ikigai" TEDx Talk in Calgary. Her name is Ashley Wong. She tracked me down on the web and sent me a very kind email to say how much she enjoyed my talk. I was flattered and inspired that she had felt such connection to Ikigai. I asked if I could meet with her to learn more about her life.

A few days later, Ashley and I met at an upscale cafeteria in downtown Calgary for lunch. As with the other attendees of TEDxYYC, one of the first questions I asked her was, "What do your parents want you to be?" She responded by asking me if I had ever heard of a tiger mom. I was intrigued. Ashley went on to describe that a tiger mom is a parent that holds high expectations over her children. Tiger moms expect high marks at school, excellence in music studies, and that their children will follow in the careers that they choose for them. My heart sank. I had no idea that children were being parented in this way. It bothered me.

The family work script that tiger parents deliver is to place heavy expectations on their children in academics, sports, and music. Their primary expectation is for their children to live the lives that they design and thrust upon them. I wondered how this can ever lead to happiness for either the tiger parent or the child. Ashley sees her own mother as a bit of a tiger parent. Her mother's expectations still carried weight with her. She was afraid of disappointing her mom. When does the adult child stop trying to please her parents and focus on trying to please herself?

Ashley and I enjoyed our lunch and visit. I was especially thrilled to see her excitement when I asked her what she is really passionate about. She said, "I love journalism."



You have an entire set of *shoulds* and *shouldn'ts*, constantly telling you where to go and where not to go, that you might not be aware of.



"Why don't you do that then?" was my simple reply. Journalism doesn't have to be a job that you go to every day to earn a paycheck from. It can also be a hobby. Anyone can research and write stories to share them online, especially if you enjoy doing so. Pick a platform and set up a blog. If you love journalism and you're good at it, then you'll find enjoyment when you take part in it. Your Ikigai doesn't have to be something you get paid to do. *It's something you will feel rewarded by doing.* Tell the stories you're passionate about. Once you start sharing your stories with the world, then your readers will show you their appreciation in return.

A proven method of separating other people's feelings from your own is to go through a simple exercise. Write down what you believe other people expect of you. The exercise allows you to separate your desires from theirs. When you start to make changes in your Ikigai, you'll see that the steps you take are your own. You won't be following anyone else's hopes and desires. You'll be following your own. Ikigai is a script that you adopt for yourself. It's a one-person journey that might seem selfish at first glance. But, in truth, Ikigai is about sharing the best you have to offer. No one but you has

the ability to fully understand what your meaningful life is going to look like. If you've been holding back on doing what you love and what you're good at because of your parents' expectations, it's time to stand up for yourself.

To reach your full potential, you will eventually need to change your focus to your own dreams and aspirations. When it comes to Mom and Dad, just give them an endless supply of kindness, respect, and love. You'll be surprised at how much they will appreciate it.

### **STOP “SHOULD-ING” ON PEOPLE**

A wise man once asked me to “Stop should-ing on people.” The wise man shared that he had eliminated the words “should” and “shouldn’t” from his vocabulary. Those two words imply that the person using them has greater intelligence and authority than the people he uses the words with. Since then, I too have promised myself to stop should-ing on people.

Ikigai is a kindness that allows you to be you on your own terms. It also provides the same kindness to all other people to be themselves. If you choose to “Stop should-ing on people,” you are choosing to not cast your opinion and worldview onto them.

Ikigai is all about your life’s worth. No one else has a say in what your life’s worth is. You are the only influence. You cannot influence others by should-ing on them. Let that stew for a bit.

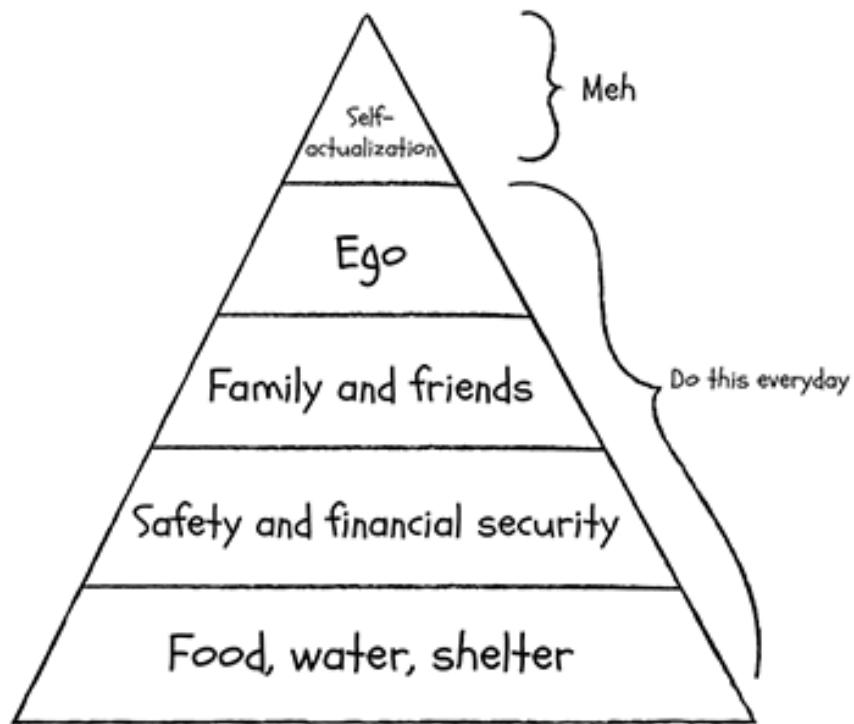
## **Your Hierarchy of Needs**

More than anything, psychologist Abraham Maslow believed that you want to reach your potential. He was a shy man who once thought he wanted to be a philosopher, but changed his focus to psychology. He saw psychology as a science that could help regular people realize, reach for, and achieve more.

He once scratched his head, leaned his chin against the palm of his hand and wondered: *If people's basic needs are met, why don't they focus on fulfilling their life's potential?* In other words, if you're lucky enough to have food, shelter, love, security, and accomplishment, why aren't you focused on reaching your maximum potential? Good question, Maslow.

Maslow studied healthy aspects of the human condition. He said, "It is as if Freud supplied us the sick half of psychology and we must now fill it out with the healthy half." Maslow was curious about the positive potential of people. Through his research, he and his colleagues developed a theory that, on a daily basis, humans have five needs. He displayed the needs in the shape of a pyramid, which is called Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

## Maslow's Hierarchy Of Needs



Stacking up the pyramid looks like this:

Base layer—Physiological needs, such as food, water, air, shelter, sex, Doritos... you know, the essentials.

Layer two—The need for safety. Everyone likes to be safe from danger. You also like to be financially secure, healthy, and emotionally secure too.

Layer three—The need for love and belonging. Having family and friends is the bomb.

Layer four—The need for esteem. It's nice to have a daily feeling of accomplishment. Esteem lifts you.

Layer five—Self-actualization. This is the need to be creative and to develop spiritually. It's the work you do to reach your maximum potential. Apparently, you don't need this every day.

Maslow theorized that the first four layers of his pyramid represent the must-haves of everyday life. Every day, you are driven to take care of your four basic needs. Once they're achieved, each day you'll find that it's easier to rest until the next day. If you don't achieve your basic four needs daily, you get antsy. For example, if you don't eat or drink for a day, you'll be hungry and thirsty. You'd get pretty anxious about it. If you have \$3.42 in your bank account, but you need milk that costs \$4.97, you'll feel pretty concerned and insecure about your finances. If you had no friends and no family to talk to, you'd feel unsupported, lonely, and depressed. If you accomplish nothing every day, your self-esteem takes a beating.

However, if you don't grow creatively or move a tiny bit closer to self-actualization every day... meh... no big deal.

You might be saying to yourself, "Well, after I finish at the office every day, cook supper, put the kids to bed, and answer a few emails, I don't have any gas left to do anything else." You're right. Basic needs are exhausting.



Meditation helps build compassion. It puts a damper on self-criticism.



While it's true that you need a job to provide food, shelter, and security, it's not ensured that your job will fulfill your life's purpose. Society and our intellect dictate that the jobs we do every day will take care of our every need. That's not what happens in most scenarios. A few lucky people have jobs that take care of them spiritually, in addition to financially. We all want to be like them, but we can't.

Maslow believed that there's much more in store for you. Yes, you might consider yourself a regular person who goes through life on a day-to-day basis just trying to make ends meet. Maslow knew that there's more in store for every person *if they choose it*. He said, "If you deliberately plan on being less than you are capable of being, then I warn you that you'll be unhappy for the rest of your life." By not choosing to put energy into your own self-actualization, you are choosing your lesser self. You want more than that, don't you?

## THE ENEMIES OF IKIGAI

Your Ikigai is in constant battle with forces from within. Fear is the enemy of Ikigai. It's logical that you might be fighting one or more manifestations of this enemy. Studies show that the fear of the unknown is the root of all fears. If you're feeling antsy about moving closer to your Ikigai, consider that fear is holding you back. Here's the top four types of fearful enemies and some sharp words to fight them with:

*Fear of failure:* What if your Ikigai leaves you broke, without a roof over your head, and unable to make the payments on your Mercedes? Your

Ikigai will make you happier and more fulfilled. Failure will lose its power. You'll be fine.

*Fear of success:* What will life look like when your Ikigai is fully realized? Will you be unrecognizable? Your Ikigai will bring you more joy than you can ever imagine. Success will bring you to yourself. You'll be fine.

*Fear of what others will think:* It's your life. No one else gets a say. Happiness is a one-person job. You'll be fine.

*Fear of discomfort:* When you start to learn more about your Ikigai, you might have the occasional moment of discomfort. You'll learn stuff about yourself that might be uncomfortable. Remain calm. All discomfort is temporary. You've flown in economy on a long-haul flight before, haven't you? It will soon be over. You'll be fine.

There's only one fear that carries water in your quest for Ikigai. The fear of not finding it. You'll figure it out. It's already there. You just have to uncover it. Keep looking. Besides, it's fun to keep looking! You'll be fine.

## **Seek the Help of a Professional**

Ikigai help is available to you if you would like it, but it might not come from where you expect. Consider the services of a psychologist. Positive psychology, especially, has evolved into a powerful method to increase overall well-being. A personal therapist or psychologist can be a powerful partner in life and Ikigai.

While it's fair to assume that professional psychological help would help in your search for your Ikigai, most people haven't considered its advantages. Counselling can provide answers for the issues you most desperately need answers for. It shines a light on who you truly are... your positives and your negatives.

But you might think that counselling is expensive and time-consuming. It might feel like a real pain in the ass to go to. You don't know what you would talk about. You may wonder why you would want to pay for someone else to help you be more you. If that's the case, try thinking of a psychologist as a personal trainer for your well-being. The cost and the time you put into yourself will last a lifetime. Your need for additional services in the future will diminish over time.

The average cost of a new annual gym membership, including initiation fee, adds up to eight hundred dollars a year. If you hire a personal trainer, you could easily triple or quadruple that cost. People snap up new gym memberships and personal trainers every January like crazy. The inspiration for perspiration overwhelms the brain's need for change. Millions of hopeful, well-intentioned folks will sign up for a year's worth of treadmill torture at their local Workout World to start off the new year and a new you. By the beginning of May, most of the new members won't return to the gym. According to statistics, only 18 percent of gym members use their memberships on a regular basis.



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Consider this: For eight hundred dollars a year, you could see a shrink for four to six sessions. It would mean a time commitment of around six hours. The insight you would gain into the way you live your life would progress your life's purpose forward. Counselling can clear away obstructions, internal conflicts, and self-imposed limitations. As you learn and adapt, you'll enjoy the satisfaction of personal growth and self-actualization.

Every now and then, you'll learn a big lesson that will change your life forever. Studies show that benefits from counselling sessions persist for years to come. The biggest changes often come down the road when you least expect it. You continue to grow after each session. You'll gain perspective for your future well-being from your sessions. When you leave each session, it's

like you get a little life coach that stands on your shoulder and reminds you of the stuff that makes you happy.

This would be interesting: What if, at the beginning of January each year, hundreds of psychologists offered deep discounts for annual counselling memberships and “new year, new you” packages for your well-being? Imagine the learning! Imagine the growth! Imagine a personal trainer that can help you understand your life! One of the best gifts I ever gave myself was the permission to go see a shrink. I chose to be vulnerable, even though I thought I was already perfect (sound familiar?). But once I allowed myself to share my stories with a psychologist, I realized that I have a lot to learn. Turns out I’m imperfect. I still am imperfect. I will never be perfect. But I can learn.

You can learn too. I highly recommend it.

## **Abandon Fixed Mindsets. Seek Growth.**

Imagine a prince who had every luxury in the world at his beck and call. The prince could do anything he ever wanted to. His every whim was accommodated by a staff of a thousand loyal servants. The prince could live in the vastest, most extravagant kingdom in the world, but he could only stay within the walls of the kingdom. He was not allowed to see or know anything of the world outside. The prince just lived every day in total bliss. He knew nothing of suffering. He could live like that until he died. The end.

On the surface, this story might seem like a perfect life. If you were a rich prince who could be a baller for your entire lifetime, would you do it? All you would know was one palace, one set of friends, and the food from one kitchen. You could party like a rock star every day and drink magnums of Cristal, but would that be enough?

This story might be familiar to you. It’s the story of a young prince named Siddhartha Gautama. Siddhartha did live his life as a rich prince. He had every luxury in the world, and he even found true love in the confines of the palace. But Siddhartha wondered what was outside the palace walls.

He worked out a scheme where he could escape the palace one day, so he could see for himself the mysteries outside. One of the first people he saw was a frail, thin old man. He was suffering the pain of his years. This bothered Siddhartha very much. He didn't know anything about pain. The image of the old man stuck in his mind like a spike driven in by a sledgehammer. He didn't like what he saw, but he wondered what it was.

Siddhartha decided to leave the palace. He left his beautiful wife and baby son, his parents, all the people he knew and loved, and all the riches he had grown accustomed to behind. Why? He sought growth.

For years, Siddhartha sought teachers and insight. He struggled to find lessons that made sense of what pain and suffering was. He tried starving himself to see if he could find the answer for suffering in his own pain. His agony brought him no new answers.



Meditation helps build compassion. It puts a damper on self-criticism.



He resumed eating and taking care of himself, realizing that extreme pain would bring him no more answers than extreme luxury had when he was a prince. He decided that the way to enlightenment was not through extremes. Instead, he reasoned that the answers would come through a balanced approach. He chose to live his life in neither luxury or poverty. He called his path "the middle way."

Siddhartha believed that the middle way was the path to enlightenment. One night, he sat beneath a fig tree called the Bodhi tree, with the intention of considering all his experiences through meditation. He would not stop meditating until he had the answers he sought. Siddhartha meditated for forty-nine days and reached enlightenment. Siddhartha became the Buddha.

Buddha's enlightenment teaches us that life is painful. The way to deal with the suffering is to learn the lessons that the pain is trying to teach you. Once

you learn that lesson, you will move on to the next lesson. You will become enlightened, once you have learned all the lessons your soul has not learned in past lives. Enlightenment will keep your soul from going through the pain of another lifetime. You have reached nirvana.

Whether you believe in the teachings of Buddha is up to you. His lessons are profound. If you remain static, where you are right now, with no intentions of learning any more lessons in life, you will suffer greatly. You'll experience the same thing over and over again, without ever seeing anything outside the walls of your convictions.



# How to Ikigai





## CHAPTER SEVEN

# **Miyagi's Okinawa**



“Wax on, wax off.”

Those four words capture a small part of the very first lessons that the character Mr. Miyagi teaches his student Daniel Russo in the 1984 hit movie, *The Karate Kid*. Just the mere mention of “Wax on, wax off” can instantly conjure up images of a master teaching his student the first defensive movements in karate. The more important lesson of the movie came later in the story. It was a lesson about grit.

The scene begins outside Mr. Miyagi’s house, dimly lit in the dark. Daniel-san stands on a ladder with a can of dark gray paint and a large brush. He has been painting Mr. Miyagi’s house using the technique his master had shown him. The technique was to “paint house side-to-side.” Out of the corner of his eye, Daniel spots Mr. Miyagi walking toward him, carrying a fishing pole. Daniel gets upset at Miyagi’s presence. He wonders why Mr. Miyagi has been out fishing while Daniel is busting his ass painting his house. Mr. Miyagi snaps at Daniel. He didn’t see Daniel at his house when he left. Besides, this, he claims, is part of Daniel’s training in martial arts.

Daniel gets angry at Miyagi’s response. He thinks he’s being taken advantage of. He has worked his tail off for four consecutive days sanding Miyagi’s floors, waxing his truck, and painting his fence and his house. Daniel is beginning to think he is Miyagi’s slave, not his student. Finally, Daniel throws his hands up in disgust and begins to storm away. Mr. Miyagi shouts out tersely, “Daniel-san! Come here!” Daniel stops and returns to Mr. Miyagi.



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Mr. Miyagi asks Daniel to show him “sand floor.” With his hands gesturing in the air, Daniel demonstrates the action he was shown by Miyagi to sand the floor. Miyagi demonstrates how “sand floor” is a way to block a punch coming at him.

Then he asks Daniel to show him “Wax on, wax off.” Again, this action was another way to block blows. He follows with “Paint fence,” then “Paint house.” Each repetitive move Daniel had been doing over the previous four days was teaching him muscle memory. Mr. Miyagi had given him tasks that would become reliable blocking techniques for punches and kicks.

When Daniel thought he wasn’t learning, he was. At that moment, Mr. Miyagi taught Daniel his most important lesson for learning karate: He said, “Come back tomorrow.”

The secret for progress in anything is to *come back tomorrow*.

Ikigai is like karate. You gain more insight each day you return to learn more.

Ikigai is like karate in another way too: They both came from Okinawa.

Karate has been Okinawa’s special brand of martial arts for centuries. It was created during the period of the Ryuku Kingdom as a brand of self-defense that people could always carry with them. They called their martial art *te*. Over the centuries, *te* would evolve into *kara te*. *Kara* means empty + *te* means hand. So *karate* is a phrase that translates to *empty hand*.

It’s a good thing that the Ryukyu people had karate as a way to defend themselves. It came in handy when Japan showed up to invade the islands.

In 1609, Japan invaded and conquered the Ryukyu Kingdom. As part of the new Japanese occupation, the enforcers insisted that the islanders surrender all their weapons. The Ryukyuans turned over their weapons, but in their hearts, they knew that they still had the ability to defend themselves. They reasoned that their hands would be their weapons.

During this time, karate was a private practice passed down from father to son. For karate to stay alive after the Japanese invasion, it was practiced in secret only, in the dark, after night had fallen. Masters would quietly teach just a small handful of students at a time. The masters passed on their knowledge to their students as an act of service; they never charged for their lessons. Students would earn status for each year they remained with the

teacher, and more importantly, students were appraised for their abilities, sense of honor, and strength of character.

The Japanese invaders knew nothing of karate. The Ryukyuans kept their secrets to themselves for as long as possible. The rest of the world would know nothing about karate for hundreds of years, as it was only practiced in Okinawa.

Then, in the last part of the Second World War, American troops waged yet another invasion on Okinawa. A fierce battle took place over months against Japanese forces on the island. After the war, American troops occupied Okinawa as a strategic stronghold at the edge of the Pacific.

Soon afterward, American servicemen were exposed to an exotic form of fighting they'd never seen before, called karate. It was a fascinating way to practice combat that the rest of the world had never seen.

The Americans became fascinated and started to learn karate from the Okinawans.

Eventually, a handful of soldiers brought karate back to America and began to teach it to others. Over time, karate would morph and evolve into American karate, but the seeds of this martial art came from Okinawa. Anybody can learn it if they put in the time and energy. The secret to mastering karate is you have to *practice today and come back tomorrow*.

It's fair to say that nobody would be able to become a master of karate overnight. It's a physical and mental practice that takes years to master, but practitioners develop further each time they return. Karate master Shoshin Nagamine summed up karate mastery by saying, "Karate may be considered as the conflict within oneself or as a life-long marathon which can be won only through self-discipline, hard training, and one's own creative efforts."

The same can be said about Ikigai. Ikigai takes time, practice, and creativity. You must have a singular goal to work toward. You must understand the conflict within yourself in order to realize your full potential. Ikigai is a singular understanding of what you love to do, what you are good at, what the world needs, and what you can be rewarded for. Grit helps you do your

Ikigai today and come back tomorrow. You need grit if you are to realize your Ikigai.



Meditation helps build compassion. It puts a damper on self-criticism.



Psychologist Angela Duckworth is a leading expert in the study of grit. Angela has learned that “grit is about having a goal you care about so much that it organizes and gives meaning to almost everything you do.”

Furthermore, “Grit is passion and perseverance for very long-term goals. Grit is stamina. Grit is sticking with your future, day in and day out; not just for the week, not just for the month, but for years and working really hard to make that future a reality.”

Grit drives you forward and even helps you overcome failure and setbacks. Your grit helps you see every effort as a *win or learn* endeavor. Grit will propel you forward over extremely long periods of time. The combination of Ikigai and grit is a winning formula that will move you forward a little bit each day. When you get knocked back, you pick yourself up and chalk it up to experience. Then you move on.

Grit is an attribute that you nurture through an open mind and a willingness to learn. Grit is best practiced with a growth mindset. If you believe that each attempt at growth will make fundamental changes in your brain, you can chalk up each experience to a win or learn.



You have an entire set of *shoulds* and *shouldn'ts*, constantly telling you where to go and where not to go, that you might not be aware of.



I hope you’ll make just one more connection between karate and Ikigai. Like karate, there are stages to go through in Ikigai. The first step is to commit to your Ikigai. Your potential for a fully realized life was granted to

you on the day you were born. Consider your birthday the day you received your white belt in Ikigai. There is so much more to learn about yourself. Do some work today on your Ikigai and come back tomorrow.

## The Belt System



You have an entire set of *shoulds* and *shouldn'ts*, constantly telling you where to go and where not to go, that you might not be aware of.



Contrary to folklore, the belt system of karate is not an ancient practice. Colored belts are a development that only came into practice in the late 1800s. Belt colors indicating rank came from the newer and safer Japanese sport of judo. Although standardized ranking for karate didn't come into practice until 1938, the belt color ranks still tell a wonderful story.

Belt colors in karate signify growth and development. As it was first done, all students started with a white belt. As each student gained more and more knowledge and skills, she would, over time, traditionally dye her belt a darker color.

The first color the belt would be dyed was yellow. Yellow showed that the student was aware that she was receiving her first beams of knowledge, or sunlight. The student had opened up her mind to learning and growth.

Next, the student would earn the privilege to dye her belt orange. Like the glowing sun warmed the earth to nurture new seeds, so too did the lessons that accompany the orange belt. The student could feel her strength grow and her understanding deepen.

A green belt showed that the student, like a seed, had broken out above ground and was reaching toward sun stretching for more knowledge.

Blue belts represented the sky, as the student grew farther toward the sun.

Purple demonstrated that the student had developed deep and more advanced knowledge. They started to understand the significance of

maturity and the power of knowledge.

When the student dyed their belt brown, they were nearing earnest wisdom. All their hard work and determination had fruits to bear. They were just beginning to understand what the fruits meant.

Red meant danger. When a student had earned her red belt, she was capable of inflicting great harm. She posed great danger if she didn't remain vigilant and respectful of her capabilities. The objective of the student with a red belt was to be cautious and seek more knowledge.

The student finally earned her black belt only when she fully understood the profound power of her knowledge. Black represented the vastness of space beyond the sun. There is much more to learn. The student became a teacher who continues to learn, forever.

It's a beautiful story, isn't it? The belt system is rooted in power and respect for power. The lessons contained in each belt rank are lessons for life.

The belt system for karate gives a visual representation of progress. Ikigai is like karate in that it encourages commitment, growth, and knowledge. With your life's worth at stake, is Ikigai something that you will come back to day after day? Will you commit to the next level of Ikigai, your yellow belt?

## Commit to Your Yellow Belt



Meditation helps build compassion. It puts a damper on self-criticism.



To commit to your Ikigai yellow belt, open your mind to the first rays of knowledge your Ikigai has for you. You are in search of wisdom and truth. In the case of Daniel-san, he was rooted in self-defense and protecting the weak. You are in search of something proactive. *If karate is self-defense, then Ikigai is self-offence.* Ikigai moves you forward as you embrace what is true

about you. You share your Ikigai with the world, and you feel rewarded for doing it.



You have an entire set of *shoulds* and *shouldn'ts*, constantly telling you where to go and where not to go, that you might not be aware of.



The biggest challenge with reaching your maximum potential in life is to understand what it is you're looking for in the first place. You have to start someplace. Open yourself up to the rays of knowledge that Ikigai has to offer. Explore. Experiment. Dream. Look to your childhood for hints.

When I started to explore my own Ikigai, I made a list of dreams. I included general dreams like exploring music business and relationship-building in music. I had specific dreams too. Sing jazz like Harry Connick Jr. Be a crooner. Start a band. Make an album. Sing at the Montreal Jazz Festival. All the specific dreams were like tick boxes I would check off one at a time. I read books like *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, *Start with Why*, and *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. I tried anything and everything that interested me.



You have an entire set of *shoulds* and *shouldn'ts*, constantly telling you where to go and where not to go, that you might not be aware of.



As I tried more and more stuff, I began to understand what I was good at and what I wasn't. I'm good at entertaining. I'm not good with managing other people. I'm good at working a room. I'm not good at working a checkbook. I figured out what I love to do and what I don't love to do. I love to come up with new ideas. Once I've accomplished new ideas, I don't love to do them long-term. I love to find new adventures. I don't love to do the same thing over and over again. Each new experience fell into one of two lists: Ikigai yes or Ikigai no. I looked for Ikigai patterns.

Eventually, I took a course offered by Simon Sinek. It's called *Discover Your Why*. In the course, I wrote out a wide variety of stories about my life. When the stories were ready, I asked my friend Jane Pierce to be my supporter and partner for the course. As we sat across my dining room table, we began to see a pattern emerge. I have a deep desire to win people over. We saw that my "why" relied on an action that had a benefit to me and the world around me. My "why" and my Ikigai is *to delight*.



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Start a list of the things that you love to do and what you're good at. Take actions to do something from your list each day. Your list will be completely unique to you. If you get an itch, then scratch it. When ideas and curiosities pop up in your mind, look deeper into where they take you. Dream do. Don't just dream your dreams. Do your dreams. Take action. Looks for patterns. Read books that help you dig deeper into who you are. You'll start to see a pattern of your own. You'll start to see "Ikigai yes" and "Ikigai no" lists.

Your Ikigai will not be realized overnight. Like a marathon runner, you must train and study what works best for you. You need grit.

Each moment you invest into what you love to do and what you're good at brings you closer to seeing your first glimpses of Ikigai. Only you can take the steps necessary to look deeper into the potential of your joys.

You are conducting research about yourself. Your job is to look deeper into your heart. Be honest every day about the things you love and the things you find challenging. Explore your wants and needs. Start a journal. Keep track about the stuff you find fascinating. Do it today. Come back tomorrow.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

# **Half Ikigai/Full Ikigai**



To be a sixteen-year-old high school dropout and the father of a new baby would, to most people, be a terrifying, life-challenging experience. But for Casey Neistat, it meant opportunity. He was excited to be a dad!

Casey was a typical teenage boy with an atypical way of looking at life. When he learned he was going to be a father, he was confident that he would be the best father he could be. There was no use putting energy into what the neighbors thought of him or to worry about what his life was going to look like from now on. His intention was pure: He was going to be the best dad he could be.

As a way to provide for his new family, Casey took on a job as a dishwasher. The seafood restaurant he worked at made massive batches of chowder each day, in huge pots. The pots were so big that Casey would have to reach in right up to his armpit to get to the bottom of the pot to scrape and scrub it. Casey believed in his heart that he was the best dishwasher that the restaurant had ever hired. He took pride in taking on each sticky baked-on, dried-cream cauldron that came his way. While most people would view a dishwasher's job as menial, Casey saw his role at the restaurant as an opportunity. He chose to be the best dishwasher he could be.

When Casey changed jobs at the restaurant to become a line cook, his work ethic followed. He felt obligated to be the best line cook he could be. He took pride in what he did.



Meditation helps build compassion. It puts a damper on self-criticism.



Around this time, Casey began to see that his life in Connecticut had limited room for growth. He loved being a dad, but his relationship with his girlfriend was falling apart. He felt like he wanted to explore the world a bit more. So, with a promise to continue be the best dad he could be, Casey moved to New York. He worked as a bike messenger, and eventually scored

a job as an art studio manager. His goal was to put one hundred dollars aside each week, so he could spend it to be with his son on the weekends. Casey was the best art studio manager he could be.



You have an entire set of *shoulds* and *shouldn'ts*, constantly telling you where to go and where not to go, that you might not be aware of.



One after another, Casey embraced opportunities as a way to learn about the world and to better himself. The way Casey Neistat saw his world was an important factor in his success. As new prospects popped up in his path, Casey made a go or no-go decision. He based each opportunity on whether he could advance in life. He loved the feeling and reward of getting ahead. The one thing that eluded Casey was a focus.

One day, Casey was visiting his brother, Van, at his New York apartment. His brother was eager to show off to Casey a new toy he had just picked up. It was a computer that could do something that no other home computer was ever able to do before. It was a brand-new candy blue iMac computer. This computer was a beast, because it was the first machine that had enough juice to edit movies. Casey was gobsmacked by Van's purchase. He thought that this technology was the coolest thing ever. He and Van shot a little movie that day and pieced it together. It was exhilarating. Casey's creative juices started to flow. For the first time in his life, Casey saw moviemaking as a possibility. It was a new opportunity. The potential was massive.

Moviemaking was something Casey loved the second he tried it. He also happened to be a gifted storyteller. In that simple visit with his brother, Casey discovered something with limitless opportunities. There was no way he could understand where moviemaking could take him. He was inspired, and that was all that mattered. He believed that he could be really good at it, too, so Casey Neistat started calling himself a filmmaker. With his fresh focus, Casey's life began to change.

Casey began making movies about anything that inspired him. He started out with little films about his young son. He dreamed up experiments that he could film and turned them into stories. Casey made videos with a small video camera and an iMac just like his brothers. He maxed out the only credit card he had to buy the computer. He had the tools and the creativity to do anything he dreamed up. He might as well be the best filmmaker he could be.



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In Casey's case, the law of averages states that the more he wanted to earn credibility for the creative work he was doing, the more creative work he needed to do. He wasn't making movies for customers. He was making movies for himself. It was what he loved to do. It was what he was getting good at. Casey made movie after movie on any topic that grabbed his attention. Each time he made another film, the rewards kept coming. Each film he made for the world to see, the higher his chances of landing something worthwhile.

When Casey was in the very early days of his filmmaking aspirations, there was no such thing as YouTube. There was no mass distribution network that made independent films accessible to audiences. Casey made films anyway.

Then, in 2003, Casey found himself with a problem. Eighteen months earlier, he had spent a bunch of his hard-earned money on a brand-new Apple iPod. The iPod was a groundbreaking new device that let him carry a thousand songs in his pocket. But, tragically, the iPod's battery was dead after just eighteen months. Casey did what any responsible gadget owner did in the early 2000s. He called technical support at Apple to see if he could get his battery replaced. The customer service agent he spoke with told Casey that he could get the battery replaced, but it would cost as much as buying a brand-new iPod. Casey had a problem with that answer. It

seemed like he couldn't do a darn thing about the battery. The one thing he could do about it was making a film about it.

So, Casey and his brother Van came up with a saucy idea to use Apple's own marketing as a way to share the message about the short-term battery life of the Apple iPod. He filmed himself cutting out a stencil of words on a piece of cardboard. Then he and Van went out with the stencil and a couple of cans of spray paint, on the lookout for Apple iPod posters around Manhattan.

Casey approached a set of brightly colored iPod posters that had been pasted up on a wall. He held his freshly-cut-out stencil over the posters and sprayed white paint over them. He left behind a message that read, "iPod's irreplaceable battery only lasts 18 months." Casey and Van went throughout the city, stenciling this same message on Apple posters. Van documented the entire endeavor with Casey's video camera. Then they made a film out of it. They called their film iPod's Dirty Secret. The film's end title read, "This is a public service announcement from the Neistat Brothers."

This was at a time when there was no such thing as YouTube. Casey and Van had to figure out a way to get the short three-minute film up on the internet. When they finally posted it online, the film blew up. Out of the dozens of films Casey made, iPod's Dirty Secret was the one that went viral. In just six weeks, the film was viewed over six million times.

The media picked up on it. Hundreds of news outlets around the world wanted to talk to Casey Neistat about his iPod problem. He did interviews with CBS News, BBC, The Washington Post, and even with Rolling Stone magazine. His irreplaceable battery problem was something that affected millions of iPod owners. His predicament, and the renegade way he dealt with it, was a David and Goliath story. Casey Neistat took on a big tech company by doing what he loved to do and what he was good at. He told a story that mattered to him and a whole bunch of other people by making a movie about it.



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More new opportunities were on the way for Casey. More than he could ever dream of.

If there is a central theme in Casey Neistat's life, it is one of opportunity. Casey has said that he feels like a lottery winner for being born in America and for his freedom to seize opportunities. There are so many people around the world who don't have the same luxury that he does. Casey sees his life as a series of opportunities, each one leading to the another. To find new opportunities, he embraces his fearless attitude to do more. You could say that Casey Neistat's *Ikigai* is to do more.

There was one more massive opportunity about to come into Casey's field of view. It just needed to present itself, and when it did, Casey was ready to pounce.



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The Oxford Dictionary defines opportunity as "a time or set of circumstances that makes it possible to do something." The pattern that Casey Neistat has followed allowed him to be available and unafraid to try new opportunities when they are possible. Casey was good at making short movies, and he loved telling stories. Enter YouTube.

YouTube started out as a video uploading and sharing site way back in 2005. Casey made his first YouTube video in 2010. As a filmmaker, YouTube was a pipeline for distributing short films to viewers. Casey saw it as another opportunity to make quirky films about stuff he was curious about. His first video was called Emergency Brake by Casey Neistat. Casey

was curious about how and why NYC subways have emergency brake cords on every train. What would constitute a good reason for pulling the emergency brake? He went through a variety of different scenarios that could happen on a train and pointed out why each situation was the wrong time to pull the emergency brake. His movie was rebellious and a bit juvenile. The film had moderate success, and he made another film later that year.

Each time Casey made another video and posted it on YouTube, he created another opportunity to go viral. His next viral video came when he was faced with another problem. He had been riding his bike in Manhattan when he was pulled over by a cop and given a ticket for not riding in the bike lane. Casey was furious. He went straight to his tried-and-true method of taking on the establishment: He made a movie. The result, called Bike Lanes, has been viewed twenty-one million times.

Over the next five years, Casey Neistat made a movie for YouTube every few months. One day, he was contacted by Nike. They wanted to know if he would make a film for them in support of their new fitness tracker, called Fuel. Casey saw the opportunity to do what he loved and to do what he was good at, but not on Nike's terms. He countered their offer with his own idea. He would make a film for them in support of the Fuel fitness tracker, but they'd have to give him the entire budget and trust what he would do with it. Nike agreed.

Casey took the Nike money and invited his friend Max to go on an adventure. They jumped on as many planes as they could and traveled to as many countries as possible until the money ran out. They'd film the whole thing and include inspirational quotes about taking life by the balls. They jetted around the world in ten days. The resulting movie is called Make it Count. It's a wonderful film. Look it up. You'll enjoy it.

While Casey and Max were on their trip, Casey got a tattoo on his forearm that reads "Do more" in his own handwriting. Ikigai had become a huge part of Casey's life.

If "Do more" is a meaningful prescription for Casey Neistat, it can work for you, too. Ikigai is all about doing more...of you.

# Half Ikigai



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When Casey Neistat set out to find his place in the world, he had no idea where to start or what was meaningful to him. Casey was like any other sixteen-year-old kid. He was inexperienced, but his work ethic was a benefit to him. His job was to try a bunch of different things out to see what resonated with him. Once he found a focus, he was ready to inject his work ethic into it and get off to a rolling start.

Casey discovered his Ikigai in parts. He started by doing what he was good at. Casey's unique advantage was that he insisted on being good at any job he did. He believed that he could excel at anything he tried. He put his heart into everything, so he was good at a lot of things.

Next Casey searched for what he loved. It took many tries, but he finally had a eureka moment when he visited his brother with the new iMac. Filmmaking was so much fun. It was cool and right up his alley. Making movies inspired him and energized his thoughts. Since he already had the work ethic to be a great filmmaker, loving it was like lighting a match to a can of gasoline.

For years, Casey put his heart and soul into doing what he loved and what he was good at. He wasn't doing it to make a bunch of money from it. He did it because it felt good. Every once and a while, he'd get a bunch of attention from one of his creations, but when it happened, it was gravy. The most important thing about doing what he loved to do and what he was good at was that he always felt rewarded by doing it.

That's the magic of Ikigai. When you start doing what you love and what you're good at, the benefits are immediate. Do what you love and do what you're good at as often as possible. That's the first half of Ikigai. Experience

what it's like firsthand to feel the energy and satisfaction from your strengths in action. You don't have to earn an income from it. The rewarding feeling of satisfaction is already built in.

## IKIGAI HALVES

### Half Ikigai vs. Full Ikigai



## Full Ikigai

On March 25, 2015, Casey Neistat set up his camera high on a hill overlooking a beautiful bay on the island of St. Barts. He had been preparing for this moment for his whole life. He turned on the camera, pressed record, and casually stepped in front of the lens. It was his birthday. He was thirty-four. Casey had an announcement.

Casey Neistat put thousands of hours into filmmaking before he decided to make this announcement. His motivation was to move forward. Financial rewards may or may not come later.

Over the previous five years Casey had been making videos and posting them on YouTube. He decided that he wanted to do more with YouTube. For his thirty-fourth birthday, Casey announced that he was going to commit to making a new movie every day and post it on YouTube. This was not only a unique and brash announcement, but it was sincere. Casey made the commitment of making a new video blog every day until he couldn't do it any longer. He figured that if he could find moderate success from posting

a film once in a while on YouTube, what could happen if he filmed, edited, and put up a new movie every day?

Casey's bold promise set him up for a tsunami of opportunities to come his way. He dove in headfirst with his first vlog. The next day, he came through with another new film. On the third day, he did it again. Casey made movies about anything that popped up in his mind. He made a film about how much he loves running. Another film was all about turning a basic Apple Watch into a gold Apple Watch. He told stories about airplane food. Casey used his creativity to dream up stories about his daily life that mattered to his viewers.



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Five months into committing to his daily vlogs, Casey reached one million subscribers on YouTube. In the year that followed, he had earned four million subscribers. Today, Casey Neistat has reached ten million subscribers for his YouTube channel.

When Casey made the leap to a daily vlog, the second half of his Ikigai eventually came to light. *Do what the world needs and do what you can be rewarded for.*

Casey wasn't making videos for the whole world. He was doing it for himself and the people who resonate with his message. Ten million people and counting have clicked the subscribe button for Casey's YouTube channel. Neistat fans are as passionate about him as the fans of *The Bachelor* are for that TV show. Casey has a nation of his own believers, and he keeps communicating with them in ways that matter to them.

The second half of Ikigai is to go beyond yourself and fully realize the value you provide to the world. Casey Neistat fans find value in each new video he puts out and in his infectious enthusiasm. They love his storytelling skills and his joy of life. It's interesting to see what Casey is up to day-to-day, in

the same way one would watch a soap opera to keep up to date with the characters.

Casey gets personal, financial, and many more opportunities from following his Ikigai *to do more*. Casey Neistat is a shining example of Ikigai in action.



## CHAPTER NINE

# **Start Your Ikigai**



What do you love?

What are you good at?

It seems simple to believe that those two directions are the starting point of your Ikigai, but they are. The starting point of Ikigai asks the two most profoundly obvious questions you could ask yourself. There is no direction forward without answering those two questions. What do you love? What are you good at?

These questions can lift you or frustrate you. How easily your answers come to you relates directly to how well you know yourself. How do you start a trip if you don't know your destination? How can you cook a meal if you don't know what you are cooking? How do you plan your wedding day if you have no one to love?

You're about to start your half Ikigai. It's time to grow.

## Experiment



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If you choose to grow, you are choosing to look for answers.

Ikigai is a way for you to look for answers. Each time you find a new answer, your life becomes more exciting.



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Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck believes that your mindset is the key to what you will achieve in life. In her book, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, Dweck points out that the mindset each person has will determine their capacity for happiness. If you have a *fixed* mindset, you believe that you are who you are. You can work on changing yourself, but your efforts are wasted because your lot in life is already determined. Having a fixed mindset means your creative, intellectual, and personal attributes are already set in stone. There's no use in even trying to change them. Every day is already lined out to be the same as the one before.

A *growth* mindset, Dweck believes, loves a challenge to figure out. You are hopeful that you will learn from every new experience you take on. Difficult scenarios don't deter you because you know you'll either win or learn, or in a perfect situation, both. Every day is another chance to ask questions, to learn, and to grow.

Whether you're someone with a fixed mindset or a growth mindset is up to you. Studies show that deliberate practice on your relationships, creativity, and intelligence will adjust your mindset and result in personal growth. By facing your flaws and embracing your lessons, you are opening yourself up to a growth mindset. Yes, it will require effort, but you are worth it.

If you are truly interested in discovering and practicing your *Ikigai*, it's imperative that you embrace your ability to grow. Like anything in life, you start at the beginning. When you start to read, you must first learn the alphabet. When you start to learn to play the piano, you must learn your scales. In *Ikigai*, the first thing you must learn is the answer to two questions: What do you love? What are you good at?

## Part-Time *Ikigai*

When Al Muirhead was asked to play trumpet in the circus, he was thrilled. The circus was coming to his home town, Regina, Saskatchewan, and the band leader needed a talented trumpet player who could read music well. Al was just the man for the job. Except, he wasn't quite a man yet. Al was twelve years old.

Playing music was a part-time job for Al. He loved playing trumpet, but his main job in life was to go to school. He was expected to get good grades, just like all the other kids. By all indications, Al was a talented kid who would grow up and take on the world like most other adults. Trumpet was just a hobby. There was no way he would make a living from it.

As a twelve-year-old, Al was doing all the big music jobs around Regina. He played all the time. He played in the symphony. He'd have gigs in country bands, big bands, polka bands, and every other kind of band you could think of. To play in the circus band, Al had to be a member of the local musicians' union, so he dutifully signed up and got his union card at a time when he couldn't even get a driver's license.

Al completed high school and continued to play his trumpet every chance he got. His dad, like many parents, wanted to make sure that Al had a life of security and stability. So, Dad asked Al to go to college and take accounting. Al was a good son. He signed up for accounting classes like Dad had wanted. The only problem was that Al didn't have time for school. He was too busy playing music. Al learned quickly that he didn't have a flair or desire to be an accountant. He was too passionate about playing trumpet. Al was bound and determined that he would be a highly-skilled "sideman" for his career. He'd be a hired gun who would expertly play in a wide variety of bands as many days of the week as possible.

Al did what most people only dream of doing. He turned his part-time passion into his full-time work. He's been doing it ever since. Al is eighty-one years old.



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Al Muirhead's strategy for his life as a musician was to make sure he was the best sideman he could be. Al didn't have any aspirations of being a band leader or a star. His happy place was to bring solid, well-executed trumpet parts to any band that he was invited to play with. You might say that Al's

Ikigai is *to be reliable*. He is rewarded for his reliability with a community of bandleaders who adore it. He gets booked by a wide variety of bandleaders who love working with him.

Something special came to Al a few years ago. He's such a beloved contributor to the music scene in Calgary that one of his friends approached Al to see if he'd be interested in recording his very first album. Al had never thought of recording an album as a bandleader. He always thought, "The world doesn't need another trumpet album."

Al accepted the offer to finally record his debut album. He decided to name his album *It's About Time*. When it was released, it was received extremely well all over the world. When the music awards season approached, Al learned that his album had received an official Juno nomination. Since then, he's been working steadily as the band leader of his own group. He was recently invited to perform at the largest jazz festival in the world, the Montreal Jazz Festival.



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How does an average person turn a part-time passion into full-time work? You can start out like Al did. Forget about full-time; start with part-time Ikigai. Use a part of your day for what you love to do and what you're good at. There are twenty-four hours in a day. If you split the day into three equal parts, you'll have eight hours for work, eight hours for recreation, and eight hours for sleep.

Your eight hours for recreation are perfect Ikigai hours for you to make use of every day. Plus, you have weekends too.

Much like your personal values, Ikigai is a big part of who you are every day. Your spiritual beliefs, parenting values, and fitness goals all play a role in your day-to-day activities. Ikigai is no different; it's part of who you are.

I want you to feel what it's like to have Ikigai as part of your day. So, I'm going to recommend starting your Ikigai off part-time. There are a couple of ways you can do this: You can start a side hustle or a side helpful.

## Side Hustle

Before Al Muirhead was even a teenager, he started his first side hustle by accepting gigs to play trumpet. Everybody knows that a side hustle is an activity that you do in your spare time (your recreation hours) so you can make a little bit of spare money. Side hustles are a growing trend and you don't have to be a musician like Al to start one.

According to a survey by GoDaddy, up to 50 percent of millennials and baby boomers have side hustles. On the surface, a side hustle is a way to earn a bit of extra income, but, deep down, the reasons are more Ikigai-related. A side hustle is a way to do what you are passionate about. It leaves open the possibility to transition your side hustle into your full-time work. Side hustles can be anything that falls into your Ikigai.

For Kath Younger, her passion was healthy food and writing. Even though her passions might not seem groundbreaking, her situation is similar to many people throughout the world. She wanted to eat well and stay healthy. She decided to share her story because others might see value in her approach.

In 2005, Kath was a young woman wrapping up her studies at college. She was having fun sipping wine and eating late-night snacks. Those extra calories, combined with an injury to her foot, meant she was over-consuming and under-moving. Kath knew that she needed to implement a change in her diet and lifestyle.

She decided that she would feel healthier if she lost thirty pounds, so she went about finding ways to prepare healthy delicious food to achieve her goal. Her foot healed and she was able to get out running again. Now, she had the combination of healthy food and an active lifestyle.

Kath started a blog where she would write three meal posts per day: one for breakfast, one for lunch, and one for dinner. She quickly gained a few

subscribers. Her blog, *Kath Eats Real Food*, began to gain momentum and change lives. Her part-time passion was making progress, and she felt rewarded by doing it on her blog at [www.katheats.com](http://www.katheats.com). At the time, Kath worked full-time in public relations, but she went back to school to become a registered dietician.



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Kath's story sounds familiar, doesn't it? She had a desire to "share the how behind living a healthy life." She had a noble goal. The time she could find to do it was during her recreation hours. She started part-time, and it grew into a bigger part of her life.

Kath Younger is now a full-time blogger. She's turned her passion into her work by blogging. Her scope has developed as she has. Kath still blogs about healthy eating, but she also writes posts about being a mom, travel, budgeting, and gardening. She's turned into a lifestyle brand through blogging. Kath has become a thought leader for thousands of subscribers by just being herself and living her Ikigai. Her Ikigai is *to share truthfully*.

You can start a side hustle just like Al and Kath did. Find something that you're interested in and sink some time and energy into it. Be cautious not to start a side hustle just because you think you can make a boatload full of cash from it. While side hustles can make you a bit of extra money, an Ikigai side hustle rewards your spirit more than your bank account.



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People are taking on work like:

Dog walker

House sitter

Social media manager

Photographer

Social media influencer

DJ

Graphic designer

YouTuber

Freelance writer

As you put energy into your side hustle, you'll gain more of an idea of what your Ikigai is all about. Like I've said, Ikigai is an action. You might think that you want to be a dog walker, but as you walk more and more dogs, you might come to realize that your Ikigai is *to care for animals*. Part-time Ikigai is all about exploration and digging deeper into what makes you tick.

Part-time Ikigai allows you to test ideas. You'll get to prove concepts and see outcomes. Over time, you're going to build a list of go or don't-go signs, based on your part-time Ikigai experiments. There is no win or lose. There is only win or learn.

## Side Helpful



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Not all Ikigai is based on making money. Your true Ikigai is something that you would do for free if you were given the chance. When it comes to Ikigai,

think of the rewards you'll get, instead of the money. Rewards are still valuable. They fill your emotional bank account.

Volunteer, help out a neighbor, coach a baseball or hockey team. Any offer of your Ikigai in service to others will feel rewarding. It's rewarding to give your Ikigai away.

To serve, to create, to delight, to nourish, to provide, to teach, and to heal are all Ikigai that can help others in endless ways. Offer your Ikigai in creative ways and reap the rewards.

In 2013, Robi Garrity had a dream. She dreamed of gathering a group of her family, friends, and colleagues and inviting them to the Dominican Republic to build houses. Robi takes care of people. Her Ikigai is *to care for people*.

Robi set an annual trip to the Dominican Republic in motion to help families get reliable houses for the first time in their lives. The homes would be made of cement cinder blocks, and the roofs built of wood and tin. Each house would have running water and a toilet. Although the homes seemed bare compared to North American standards, to the families receiving them, they looked like mansions.

For five years, Robi invited people to the D.R. to build houses. The days were long. It was hot and humid. The bug bites made the volunteers' shins look like they had been pierced with multiple fork stabs. Yet, Robi and the volunteers were happy as clams. Robi used her organizing Ikigai to make the trip and the work tick like a Swiss clock. The teams were happy doing the work. Many of those building the homes were also builders at home. They were using their own skills and Ikigai to erect homes through a gift of their time. Given the challenging conditions of the environment, house building was one of the most rewarding experiences ever.

Her Ikigai allows her to take care of Dominican families just like she takes care of her family and friends at home. She takes care of the volunteers in the process. To take care of people has a multitude of possibilities. She takes care of her parents and her grandkids. When she was a business owner, she

took care of her employees. If you know someone like Robi, you know what it's like to feel cared for.

When Robi had a dream, she invited family and friends to be a part of it. She used her Ikigai to make it happen. In the five years she organized house building trips to the Dominican Republic, her teams built hundreds of homes for thankful families. They now have solid, safe, and clean homes for the rest of their lives. It all happened because of Ikigai.

The people who take part in activities like this will all tell you that they are thankful for being included. The rewards of Ikigai are indescribable, and they will be important memories of a life well-lived. Set up a side helpful, and you'll be able to see for yourself.

## **Everyday Ikigai on the Job**

When you start to look through job listings on LinkedIn, the first thing they do is put you to work. They ask you to complete a list of the locations you'd be open to working at and the type of work you're interested in. You click whether you'd be interested in part-time, full-time, casual, remote, or contract work. Then you complete a list of industries you prefer.

Like magic, LinkedIn compiles a list of, what is often, a lot of jobs that fall into the categories you have requested. Right there at the top of your search results is a listing of "jobs you might be interested in," complete with the logos of the companies and prestigious titles.

Right in the middle of the page, you'll see a picture of yourself. It's an ad specifically aimed at you. There you are, in the most viewable part of the screen, and directly below your photo, it reads, "See jobs where you'd be a top applicant." LinkedIn wants you to sign up for their premium service. If you do, they promise you'll get access to the good stuff. But will you really?



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Job descriptions are sterile and cold. They are listings of tasks that you'll be required to do in exchange for money. If you get the job, then you're required to do x number of tasks each week. How many times have you seen a job list and read through the job requirements and thought, "Ugh, that is definitely not me!" and moved on to look for something else? You could just apply for the job if it looks interesting. If you get the job, you could start job crafting.

Job crafting is where you make changes to your job that bring on positive changes for both you and your employer. You design your job with the intent of ensuring your time is spent effectively on the key roles you're responsible for, and you also include tasks that are meaningful to you. Job crafting injects your Ikigai into your job. It enhances your job satisfaction, engagement, grit, and well-being. Best of all, it's good for you and for your employer when it works.

Studies show that job crafting is a growing trend with meaningful consequences for both employees and employers. Granted, there are some situations where job crafting is one-sided, and it has to be scaled back. Ultimately, well-executed job crafting provides a middle ground over long periods of time for all parties involved.

Each morning when Angela Knight gets behind the wheel of her car to head to work, the one thing she knows is that traffic will not be a problem. Even though Angela lives in a very busy city, her drive to work is usually calm. It starts at around four thirty in the morning. She arrives at the office around fifteen minutes later.

Angela's official job description is co-host/traffic reporter at CBC Radio One in Calgary. Angela is an expert conversationalist and a warm, gracious ambassador for CBC. She brings thoughtful insight to the topics of the day, and delivers up-to-date traffic news during the morning commute for listeners who might need some help getting to the office. Angela is also a job crafter.

I worked with Angela for ten years at CBC Calgary. What constantly inspired me about the way she embraced her job is that she has a unique point of view about her role. It felt like she was there to help people. Her co-

hosting and traffic duties were certainly in her job description, but Angela showed up every day to make Calgary a better place. I'll always admire her for that.

One day at CBC, I was taking my daily stroll through the offices to say hello to my friends and catch up on what was happening. Angela had a desk at the epicenter of the office. Anyone who came through CBC would have to go by Angela's desk. She embraced her location like it was the best desk in the place.

As I approached Angela that day, she looked up at me and asked, "What could a name be for the CBC volunteer group?" The first words out of my mouth were, "Call it the Do Crew." She immediately agreed that her volunteer group was now called the CBC Do Crew. Even though it wasn't part of her assigned job, Angela had used her time on the morning show to gather Calgarians together to volunteer. She'd been taking volunteers out to paint walls, help with book drives, and work at women-in-need centers. There is no shortage of great causes that the CBC Do Crew can help out with in the community.

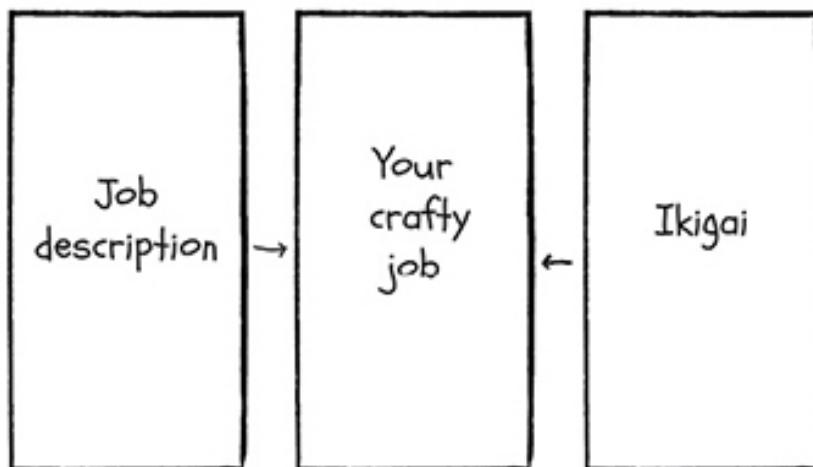
What does handing out water at a marathon or sorting food at the Calgary Food Bank have to do with being a co-host/traffic reporter at CBC? Nothing, according to the job description. What Angela has done with the Do Crew is to job craft her way into a role that is both rewarding for her and beneficial to CBC and the community. Angela is a big-hearted soul who loves to help the community. By figuring out that volunteering is something she could include in her job every day, she injects her Ikigai into her job daily.

The Do Crew has become an important part of the CBC mandate in Calgary. It's been so successful that other CBC branches in Canada have adopted it. There are Do Crews in Montreal, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island! Angela Knight's job crafting in cooperation with her employers has turned into a benefit for thousands of people.

## **HOW TO JOB CRAFT**

Job crafting is a proactive approach to adapting your employment into meaningful work.

## How to Job Craft



You have an entire set of *shoulds* and *shouldn'ts*, constantly telling you where to go and where not to go, that you might not be aware of.



Job crafting is not just an approach to the job you do with employers. It's also a tool that has been used by business owners forever. In 1963, Tsutomu Murashima and his wife opened a restaurant called Ginshariya Gekotei in Sakai, Japan. As many restaurant owners understand, the job often means cooking, sweeping, accounting, HR, plumbing, and any other work that is necessary to keep the business afloat. Tsutomu reduced the typical job description of the restaurant owner drastically. He focused on just cooking rice.

Tsutomu felt that his dedication to cooking rice well would be important to the restaurant. So, he turned all of his attention to the rice. His wife took over all the other cooking duties for the restaurant. For fifty years, Tsutomu has set his alarm clock to get him and his hard-working wife up at four in

the morning to get to their restaurant. Once there, he goes straight to work cooking rice.

The first step is to wash the rice. Tsutomu measures out a predetermined portion of it into a large bucket in one well of the kitchen sink. On the other side of the sink, he has a smaller bucket that sits under a running tap of cold water.

The key to washing rice is to wash it fast. The first step is to rinse the rice to remove residual starch. Tsutomu quickly pours a bucketful of water over the dry rice and puts the empty bucket back under the running water. He gives the rice a quick two or three swirls with his hand, then pours the cloudy water out into the sink. He rinses the rice like this twice. In total, he spends only about twenty seconds rinsing the rice.

The next step is to wash the rice. With the water that remains with the rice, Tsutomu reaches in with his fingers splayed open like a claw. He's more aggressive in this step. He scrubs the rice in a quick circular motion and counts out thirty cycles.

He reaches over for more water from the bucket. He rinses the rice quickly and pours the water out again. The washing of the rice requires three or more washes, depending on what he feels and sees after the rinses.

Once the rice is visible, with just a hint of cloudiness in the water, the rice is ready to cook. His method of cooking it depends on starting with low heat and turning it up midway through the cooking process.

Whatever Tsutomu does with his rice, it works. Over the decades, his restaurant's food, and especially his rice, has been celebrated for its deliciousness. Tsutomu has earned the nickname "The Rice Wizard" by the people in Sakai. He's so serious about cooking rice that he's been asked by the Chinese government to act as an ambassador of rice for their country.

The work that Tsutomu does every day could never be described in a job description, if he was looking to hire an apprentice. He finds joy, meaning, satisfaction, and appreciation for the rice that he cooks every day. His job crafting didn't rely on adding tasks to his workload to find rewards. Instead,

he eliminated a bunch of restaurant tasks to focus on what he considers important to him and to his customers.



## CHAPTER TEN

# **Grab Your Lab Coat**



You will be starting your research based on the topic of half Ikigai. There are two questions you'll be working toward a conclusion on:

1. What do I love?
2. What am I good at?

Your goal is to come up with answers that you feel comfortable with. Your answers will be unique to you. Throughout your research, remember to have fun and to look for ways to enjoy yourself. Although you are conducting research, it's more important to stay true to your overall mission: Ikigai (to know why you get out of bed in the morning).



Meditation helps build compassion. It puts a damper on self-criticism.



## Conduct Interviews

Ikigai research involves self-reflection and introspection. That doesn't mean you have to be inside your head all the time. Instead, it means quite the opposite. Lean on your family and friends. When it comes to self-actualization, the people who know you best are the people who want to help you succeed in life. They see what you excel at and struggle with in life. If there is a secret library of information about you anywhere in the world, it's being kept in the minds of the people you resonate with the most. *The people who love you the most are often your best teachers.*

Plan to get together with your most trusted people so you can have meaningful conversations about Ikigai with them. Where you'll meet them is up to you. Consider meeting at a place where you feel safe to talk about yourself. Will you choose a pub or a coffee shop? Will you invite them to your house or ask for an invitation to their house?

Introduce them to Ikigai. Share that you are in the beginning stages of figuring out what your Ikigai is. You want to know more about your life and who you are. You need them to understand what you are going through and provide support. Ask them two questions:

1. What am I good at?
2. What do I love to do?

There's a good chance that you are going to hear a lot of stuff about yourself that you know; however, there's an equally good chance that you're going to hear a lot that you don't know. Your mission is to listen and gather facts.

I recommend you bring along a special Ikigai notebook or use your smartphone to write down what you hear. If your friend is comfortable with it, you could even record your chat on your phone.

Share with them what you feel your answers are for your half Ikigai. They might agree or disagree, but they'll probably have some valuable insight to share either way.

Book chats with as many people as you feel you need to. You have a variety of friends and family that see you in different ways. They will all see a theme to what you love and what you're good at. You will have to see the thread that ties everything together.

Important: Write down a synopsis of what you learned and what you believe. These clues will be the foundation for your research going forward.

## Conduct Research

Based on what you and your teachers have discussed, your independent research now begins. What did you learn about what you're good at and what you love? There is a whole world's worth of information about what you discussed.

The avenues you can look down are limitless. *Go online, to the bookstore, and to the library.* Research involves gathering a wide variety of sources that will bring clarity to your Ikigai. You are looking for information that resonates

with you. If that means scientific research papers full of statistics and three-dollar words, then so be it. On the other hand, if infographics and YouTube videos give you the most bang for your buck, then use those.

You're conducting research so that you can delve deeper into the action of your Ikigai.

## THE GOOGLE KEEP METHOD

It seems like everyone in the world has a smartphone these days. To keep better notes about yourself and your research, open a Google Keep account. Every time you have a question or find information that you'd like to explore further, start a new note. It's like having the world's most handy thought-keeper at your disposal 24/7.

You'll have access to your notes on your smartphone, your computer, and your tablet at all hours of the day, so there's no way you'll miss setting up or reviewing your notes as needed. You even have access to your notes offline.

Make notes about things you're curious about. Keep links for articles that get you pumped up and excited about life. If a great idea pops into your head, make a new note. When you realize you have a new goal, make sure you document it and follow up on it.

The purpose of taking notes is the same in Ikigai as it is in a classroom or a meeting. Your notes are a record of important information, and they will aid in making things clearer in the future.

Studies show that note-taking helps learners paraphrase, conceptualize, and summarize ideas. That's what your first steps of Ikigai are all about; you are searching for a better understanding about what you love and what you're good at.

# Experiment



Meditation helps build compassion. It puts a damper on self-criticism.



Like any worthwhile research project, experiments are essential to getting a firm understanding of what works and what doesn't work for your Ikigai.

The experiments you conduct will be up to you. Your interviews and research will lead you to concepts that you'll want to flesh out. The key to your experiments is to try out what your teachers and research have helped you discover about yourself.

This is play time, not work time. If your experiments feel like they are a pain in the butt, then you're barking up the wrong tree. Try something else.

Your experiments are meant to bring you small joys. These are not experiments where you set up elaborate scenarios with cameras, surveys, etc. Your experiments are simply ways to get back to your natural "youness."

One or two small joys every day will add up to a lifetime of joys.

You are gathering intelligence on how you tick. You're trying to get back to how it felt to be a child again. Remember those carefree days of childhood? Your days were made up of minute-to-minute whims and fantasy. Your only mission each day was to have as much fun as you could. These experiments are meant to help you experience that feeling all over again.

Start a list of things that you're good at. The list has no rules at all. It's just a list of things that you know you excel at. Your list can include anything at all. Mine includes:

Cooking Sunday supper

Singing songs

Telling jokes

Being friendly

Making friends

Having fun with kids

Making coffee

BBQing

Hosting radio shows

Loving my kids

Driving safely

Typing out short stories

Researching stuff that I'm interested in

Spending time with friends

Learning about myself

If I were starting the search for my Ikigai, I would start looking deeper into my list of things. For example, I'm good at cooking Sunday suppers. An experiment I've recently tried is to do a little bit of cooking throughout the day and not leave everything until the last hour before supper. I learned that it's pretty relaxing to put on a pot of potatoes at four thirty in the afternoon. It's one little job that I can do in a quick minute or two. I also learned that it's fun to go shopping for the Sunday supper groceries in the morning instead of the afternoon. It's not as busy in the grocery stores in the morning, and I can take my time.



Meditation helps build compassion. It puts a damper on self-criticism.



My experiments with cooking Sunday supper are about looking for little joys. A day with a bunch of little joys is a great day. It sure beats a day with a bunch of little shitty things that happen throughout the day.

Sit back and take a look at the list of things you're good at. Look for a thread that connects your strengths. In my case, the thread that brings things together is that most of the things I'm good at include other people. More importantly, my list of strengths is rooted in making people happy. My Ikigai is to delight. My most Ikigai-filled days are rooted in the opportunity to send delight out into the world and get delight back in return. The action of delight is the reason I wake up in the morning. Your Ikigai will be an action, too. It will be the reason you get out of bed in the morning.

The reason you are experimenting and making lists (and reading this book) is so you can get to know yourself better. The research information you gather will be a valuable tool in getting to the next stage of your Ikigai. You're working toward a conclusion. You're looking for an answer. This research is going to be a big part of the next step in discovering your Ikigai.

## **CONSULT YOUR FRIENDLY NEIGHBORHOOD PSYCHOLOGIST**

You are embarking on a substantial journey of self-discovery. You are not expected to do this all by yourself. As mentioned in Chapter Five, it's extremely worthwhile to seek help from a professional psychologist. Bear in mind that there is nothing wrong with you. A visit to a psychologist does not mean that you're broken and they will fix you. If you tell your psychologist about your mission to find your Ikigai, they will have a ton of valuable information to share with you.

A psychologist will ask questions that will help you dig deeper into your subconscious. They will lead you to answer questions you did not know you had. Your true self will emerge with the help of counselling sessions. Don't be afraid to get help from a professional who wants you to succeed and has the expertise to help you do it.

## **Present Your Findings**

The friends and family members that you first discussed your Ikigai with are also going to be the people you present your findings to. This research project is taking on a whole new chapter. By being accountable to your teachers, you are opening yourself up to constructive criticism.

Arrange a time to gather your friends and family together so you can make a short presentation about your findings. The setting will need to be a place where you can be heard and hear the feedback from your supporters.

You are probably freaking out right now about the idea of presenting your findings. It's perfectly natural to be nervous about it. You're about to share very personal information about who you truly are. It's understandable why you'd be nervous. Relax and know that the most loving people in your life will be the best, most supportive audience you'll ever speak in front of.

Start your presentation by saying something along these lines:

"I've gathered you here today to share some fascinating details that I have recently learned about myself. As you know, I have been searching for my Ikigai, my life's worth. I feel it's important for me to understand what makes my life meaningful. Over the last x days/weeks/months I've been speaking to my most supportive teachers (your audience). I've even sought help from a professional psychologist (if you did, then share your experience). You've helped me gather many ideas and thoughts that needed further investigation. So, I've followed through with further research. I've learned so much about myself.



A key part of this exercise is to get feedback...



“The research I’ve pulled together is interesting and worthwhile. So, I would like to share it with you and get more feedback.”

Present your findings to your audience. Tell them about your list of strengths. Give them a list of the things that you love to do. Show them what you’re good at. If it is at all possible to provide a demonstration of what you’re good at and what you love to do, then do it. Your teachers will be duly impressed that you took your presentation as far as you did.

A key part of this exercise is to get feedback on what you’ve come up with in your research and to take your findings even further. If your people have further insight for you to follow up on, then write it down and follow up on it.

In time you, will come to a conclusion. You will have arrived at a short action that is your Ikigai. It will begin with the word *to...*

## Your Conclusion = Full Ikigai



You have an entire set of *shoulds* and *shouldn’ts*, constantly telling you where to go and where not to go, that you might not be aware of.



Your Ikigai is an action. It will boil down to a phrase that will make absolute sense to you and you alone. Believe it or not, even after the big exercise of talking with friends and family and presenting your findings, your Ikigai is a private conclusion. It’s up to you whether or not you want to share your Ikigai with anyone else.

Full Ikigai is an action that has universal benefit. Your full Ikigai provides benefits to you and the world around you. You serve others with your Ikigai, but you feel the rewards of providing it.

Full Ikigai is a cycle of gifts. Therefore, the conclusion you come to includes ramifications for you and the world. When you wake up in the morning, your Ikigai will do good for you and everyone who comes in contact with your Ikigai. In a perfect world, your Ikigai will do good for the world because you were born.

Your Ikigai is a phrase that starts with *to*... *Here's a starter pack of Ikigai phrases:*

To Serve

To Create

To Delight

To Nourish

To Provide

To Teach

To Heal

To Build

To Bond

To Connect

To Communicate

To Make

To Begin

To Help

To Believe

To Include

To Continue

To Speak

To Offer

To Remember

To Reach

To Wait



Ikigai is a map. When you practice your purpose, you are also following a map that can lead you to discovering your gifts.



If you see an Ikigai in that list that resonates with you, follow up on it. Your research can start with a curiosity item, or even a point you read in this book. But it's so valuable to follow up on the ideas or moments that grab your attention, even for a second. Like a black-belt karate master, you will never stop learning. You will continue to learn throughout the rest of your life. Who knows, maybe you'll continue to learn after life as well.

Full Ikigai has a power unlike anything else in your life. It's a profound opportunity to follow one north star each day. It gives you confidence in your daily endeavors. Your reason for getting out of bed every day is apparent. Your work for the day is obvious. You know that you can just be yourself. When you realize your full Ikigai, it is apparent to you and anyone who comes near you.

Chances are you have met a few people in your lifetime that beam Ikigai when you're near them. They are effortlessly at ease with themselves. Call it confidence or contentment. When full Ikigai is present, you feel it. I felt it

once from a man I didn't know. He radiated his Ikigai like the bright and warm rays of the sun. Everyone in his presence could feel it.

It happened at the greatest concert I ever saw. It was the show that Leonard Cohen gave in Calgary when he was seventy-eight years old. I had been asked to present an introduction of Leonard Cohen to the audience on behalf of CBC Radio 2. If it hadn't been for that invitation, I wouldn't have been at the show that night. I wouldn't have witnessed the most generous performance of my life. I wouldn't have felt firsthand the energy of Leonard Cohen. I'm so thankful that the gift of that night showed up in my life.



You have an entire set of *shoulds* and *shouldn'ts*, constantly telling you where to go and where not to go, that you might not be aware of.



Leonard Cohen's band took the stage first, dressed head-to-toe in black and wearing matching fedoras. The men wore black suits. The ladies wore black dresses. The stage was set up, organized and tidy. The lighting cast a glow over the stage in a comfortable tone. At that particular moment, I was not a fan of Leonard Cohen. I'd heard some of his music in the past, but I wasn't a devout follower of his.

Then Leonard took the stage. He skipped out into the light without an introduction, like a happy boy on his way to his friend's house on a carefree Saturday afternoon. His enthusiasm was glorious. In a matter of seconds, he transformed an arena full of people into believers. At that moment, I became a huge Leonard Cohen fan.

Throughout the night, Leonard shared little stories between his songs about his fascinating life. Each story was like a bite-sized life lesson that wedged its way into my brain for further examination. He joked that he was planning to start smoking again when he turned eighty. (He was true to his word. On his eightieth birthday, he enjoyed a cigarette outside in the sunshine with a "No smoking" sign behind him.)

As he performed, throughout the show, he would kneel at the edge of the stage, singing softly into his mike with his thundering low voice. When each

song arrived at the musical interlude where his musicians performed solos, he would stand up and turn to them. He'd take off his hat and direct his full attention to their offering. It was the most generous musical performance I have ever seen. He moved me with his gestures throughout the night. It was like being in the presence of a teacher. I listened carefully and watched every gesture intently.

He shared the heartbreak tale of how all of his money was once pilfered by his manager. The theft happened when Leonard was living as an ordained monk at a Zen monastery on Mt. Baldy, California. Leonard had been on tour in the early 1990s and felt the need to gain more perspective on his life from his teacher Kyozan Joshu Sasaki. Sasaki ran a monastery in a former Boy Scout camp in the mountains. If Leonard was serious about learning from Sasaki, he would have to shave his head and become an ordained Buddhist monk. So that's what he did.



Ikigai is a map. When you practice your purpose, you are also following a map that can lead you to discovering your gifts.



For five years, Leonard lived as a monk. He learned to meditate and to cook. When it snowed, he found a snow shovel and cleared the walkways. He learned lessons from Sasaki. At the end of five years as a monk, Leonard felt as though a circle of his life had ended. So, he left the monastery and entered back into his regular life. That's when he found out that he had no money left. He wasn't at all happy about it. Thankfully, he had learned a valuable lesson about life at the monastery. He summed it up by sharing, "The first and most discernible lesson is to stop whining." He set to work building up his music career again.

I believe in my heart that Leonard Cohen's Ikigai was to learn from his shortcomings. He was admittedly a flawed man, and he embraced his flaws as opportunities to learn. But that first lesson to "stop whining" is a doozy. I want to be Leonard Cohen when I grow up.

A major part of Leonard's lesson to stop whining came from meditation. When you learn how to meditate, you gain understanding that thoughts are often just unreasonable fears that have no bearing on the moment you are in. Meditation helps you to control your thoughts and to see them for what they are, momentary and harmless. When you meditate, day-to-day situations like traffic, rainy days, and annoying co-workers become nothing but things to notice and move on from. Mindful meditation is a tool that can help you understand and embrace your Ikigai.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

# **Meditating Your Way to Ikigai**



Mindfulness meditation is the most wonderful skill to teach yourself and to practice. Of all the things I've learned in my lifetime, I can honestly say that meditation is the best gift I've ever given myself. I love it because I finally have control over my busy mind.

Meditation is a way for you to realize what a busy place your mind is, and then do something about it. All you have to do is notice it, then move on. If you've ever sat in a waiting room with nothing but your thoughts, you'll know that your brain is a random untamed zoo full of monkeys smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee. Where do all the random thoughts come from? One moment you can be thinking about your car payment, and the next, you start to stress out about the dinner party you're planning on the weekend. Then, suddenly, you'll think of a pencil sharpener. What the hell? A busy brain is a strange place to be stuck in for long periods of time. But we've become used to it.



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According to studies, the average person will have around twenty thousand thoughts per day. The frequency of your thoughts is like the chaos of a Saturday afternoon at a shopping mall the week before Christmas. Your brain is stuck in pandemonium every minute you're awake. That's a very busy brain you have up there in your skull. It could use a regular break.

Meditation gives your brain the break that it needs. As you sit quietly meditating, concentrating on counting your breaths, your brain stops processing so much information. It doesn't stop altogether. You're just giving your brain a chance to relax. Instead of it constantly pedaling uphill, you're giving it the chance to coast downhill. Imagine how good that could feel in your head right now.



You have an entire set of *shoulds* and *shouldn'ts*, constantly telling you where to go and where not to go, that you might not be aware of.



With meditation, you simply notice the thoughts that pop up in your head. Instead of focusing on them, you see them for what they are: part of a busy mind. Meditation helps you notice when thoughts come into your head. When they do, you gently shoo them away, bringing your attention back to the more peaceful task of counting your breaths from one to ten.

You can't fulfill your Ikigai if your mind is busy doing a million other things. You'll need to focus on just your Ikigai for periods of time. The spirit of Ikigai is to fulfill what you were born to do. You can't be a gardener and tend to the garden if you're mowing the lawn, painting the house, repairing the car, putting shingles on the roof, cleaning the house, rearranging the furniture, and washing the dishes because you have company coming over to see the garden. None of those other things contribute to your Ikigai. Just tend to the garden. Everything else is noise.

## Meditation with a Smartphone

I'll always remember the first time I meditated. It was a liberating and profound experience that will be vivid in my memory forever. My wife and I were gifted a weekend rental in Canmore, Alberta, a small town in the Rocky Mountains just outside of Banff National Park. Canmore is a charming small town surrounded by nature and massive craggy mountains. We chose a weekend in January to take some friends out for a weekend of skiing. I chose not to ski on the trip. I wasn't in the skiing spirit at the time, but I was interested in trying out a new meditation app.

The place we stayed in was an old home near the center of town. The interior of the house had that "olde time" Swiss mountain lodge vibe about it, with rough white walls, wooden floors, and the musty smell of old construction. We played games on the first night and hit the sack early.

In the morning, the skiers in the group gathered up all their supplies and headed out to the mountains for the day. I stayed behind with my pal Kent Rupert, who would usually go skiing, but during this trip, he was healing from an injury. We were enjoying our second cup of strong coffee, when I decided it was time to excuse myself. I was going upstairs to meditate.

There are many applications that will teach you how to meditate on smartphones. I chose one that I had researched heavily online called Headspace. Headspace promised lessons in guided meditation to get the process started. I popped in my headphones and started up the app.

The guide for Headspace is a calm-voiced, knowledgeable man named Andy Puddicombe. Andy is a meditation expert and a professional speaker who understands the uniquely subtle energy of guided meditation. The beginner's meditation I chose to jump in with was a mere ten minutes long. I pressed the start button and followed Andy's guidance closely. He spoke about how to sit and to relax. He guided me toward a soft focus with my eyes and their eventual closing. Then he calmly got me to breathe and to concentrate on the breathing.

The ten minutes disappeared effortlessly. As Andy guided me out of my very first meditation, I opened my eyes and listened intently to his epilogue. His instructions were to pay attention to each time I stood up until the next session. Just notice what it feels like to stand up and take note of it in the moment. It sounded like a reasonable request. If paying attention is part of the meditation experience, then that's something I could do quite easily. I pulled the headphones away from my ears and stood up. I noticed how it felt to move my buttocks away from the chair. I felt my upper leg muscles engage and how my view changed as I moved upward. Standing is usually an action I take for granted. This time, it was different. I appreciated it.

I grabbed my coat and put on a few extra layers to head outside with Kent. We walked around town for the next few hours. I'll never forget how I felt for the rest of the day after that first meditation. Walking outside in the cold air was exhilarating. I felt buoyant. Everything that I came across felt fresh and new. Each time I sat down and stood back up, I tried to pay attention to the sensations of what I was experiencing. Standing up felt liberating. I

imagined what it would be like to not be able to stand up. I was appreciative. The air smelled clearer all day. Colors were more vibrant. I was having the best day ever.

The feeling of freshness and light lasted the entire day. I remember thinking, “If this is what meditation can do, then I’m hooked!” I eagerly waited for the next day’s session with Headspace. I used it for the entire year.



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The benefit that meditation has provided to millions of people with is *clarity*. It’s like a ZeroWater purifier for thoughts. You pour your attention into meditation, and out of the other end, comes a clear mind. A clear, uncluttered mind is an important part of the practice of Ikigai.

You don’t need a brain full of ideas to live your Ikigai. Ikigai is pure and simple intention that gets turned into action. That’s it.

Meditation brings many more benefits as well. It reduces stress, controls anxiety, and boosts self-awareness, to name a few. Meditation improves mental health. If that isn’t a prescription for a tool that will assist you in a meaningful life, I can’t imagine what could be.

## HOW TO BELLY BREATHE

You can meditate anywhere. All you do is sit comfortably and breathe in and out from your belly. Belly breathing is what you naturally do when you’re sleeping, so you already know how to do it. If you can’t remember how to belly breathe, just think about laughing. The stomach muscles you use when you laugh are the same ones you use when you belly breathe. Try a small laugh and engage those muscles. Now breathe in and out like that. That is belly breathing.

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If there was a way to become more like Leonard Cohen, I'd be the first one in line for it. I'd embrace my flaws and search the world to understand how to shed them and to grow. But Leonard's Ikigai is not my Ikigai. It's not your Ikigai either.

It's essential for each person to work on their own Ikigai. Follow the directions. Stick with it. Do it today. Come back tomorrow.

Meditation is a tool that restructures your brain to work more efficiently. A clear, focused, and uncluttered mind will be your most important ally in sticking with your daily Ikigai.

Meditation is becoming as prevalent as yoga pants at home on a Sunday, and there are many ways for you to study it and practice it. Do yourself a favor and set a goal to try meditation for a month. You'll be thankful you did.



## CHAPTER TWELVE

# Taking an Ikigap Year?



You've heard of a gap year, haven't you? A gap year is when a student takes a year off right after high school before they decide what the rest of their life is going to be all about. Best. Idea. Ever.

A gap year can be a liberating experience for any young person. It gives them a chance to spread their wings. It opens their mind to new possibilities and new experiences. Taking a gap year when you're young allows you to travel and enjoy physical experiences when you're in your prime. It looks good on your résumé, especially if you volunteered while you were on your gap year.



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A gap year is a time where you'll make new friends and connections. It's a time to learn through direct experience. A gap year is an excellent opportunity to become a more well-rounded human being. How come only young people take gap years?

An Ikigap year is a concept that's very similar to a regular gap year. There are a few additional considerations to work around, but the basic idea is the same. Harvard University encourages students to take a gap year before beginning their studies. There are many reasons why a student might choose to take a gap year. They include travel, new experiences, and gaining maturity before starting college. If it's good for students to defer Harvard for a year to become more rounded, then why wouldn't a gap year provide the same for you?



You have an entire set of *shoulds* and *shouldn'ts*, constantly telling you where to go and where not to go, that you might not be aware of.



An Ikigap year is worthwhile for any grown-up who sees value in learning more about themselves. It's a year of growth and new challenges. For one year, you allow yourself to be entirely yourself, to do whatever you want, and to go wherever you choose. Does that sound like something you would love to do?

The supreme benefit you'll gain from an Ikigap year is time affluence. You'll finally have the chance to do whatever you want to do with your time. Time affluence basically means you're time-rich; you choose to prioritize your time over money. You do what you want with your time, instead of what you feel you are supposed to do with it. When most people think about retirement, they're thinking about time affluence. In retirement, you have all the time in the world to do whatever you want. Isn't that the essence of life after going to a job your whole life? You get to finally do whatever you want to do with your time. The problem with waiting for retirement to cash in on time affluence is that there's a possibility you might also be experiencing health problems. My own father-in-law spent so much time looking forward to his retirement, so he could do whatever he wanted to with his time. A few months after he retired, he injured his back and was debilitated in one form or another for the rest of his life. Poor guy.

An Ikigap year gives you all the benefits of retirement, with the added bonus of good health. Dedicated time affluence for a whole year allows you to see the world in a whole new way. I know this firsthand.

In March of 2017, I made a decision that would affect my life forever. I decided to take an Ikigap year. At the time, I was Canada's one and only national jazz radio host. I enjoyed a ten-year career at CBC Radio 2, but I felt it was time for a change. I fully realized that I had a great job, but I was growing stale. I had been poking my nose around to see if there was a chance to do some job crafting, but nothing seemed to stick. It was a challenge for me to grow at CBC when the only job I could do in the eyes of the management was to keep doing what I was doing. I was on a treadmill.

To have a hosting job at CBC is like having a paycheck for life. The network was an incredibly supportive broadcaster to work for. The environment at CBC Calgary, where I was located, was warm and inviting. The people

working there are well-read, well-informed, and open-minded in their approach to work and life. I enjoyed warm friendships and daily chats with my CBC friends.

I had radio coaches that would go over scripts with me to work out kinks. They'd push me to perform better in supportive and effective ways. I liked my bosses there.



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But when I asked for chances to experiment with new ideas outside of jazz, I felt my requests were met with confusion and resistance. I wanted to grow, but the options weren't there. At fifty-one years old, I was at a crossroads. I could choose to continue with the safe and secure hosting life at CBC, or I could toss it all out the window and start all over again.

Through the preceding months, I had many conversations with my wife about the change. Yes, we lived a comfortable life with two abundant salaries. What would life look like with one salary for a while? Could we even make ends meet? My plan was to reduce my own imprint on our finances to the bare minimum. I insisted that I would cut all the fat from my lifestyle. She could continue to live in the way she was accustomed to. I cut. She continued. That was the deal. Plus, I had some savings that would be a buffer. My wife was supportive, but understandably concerned. But I had decided that growth and freedom was more important than security. I had decided that I would quit my cherished and secure job.

I set up a call with my team leaders at CBC to share my decision.

When we gathered on the phone line, we started with our usual gracious greetings and high fives. Then I took the reins of the call.

I told them that I would not be renewing my annual contract at CBC. I was choosing to try something new that I explained as Ikigai. I planned on finding a more meaningful me.



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Their reaction was as expected. I believe they had anticipated my decision for some time. One sat in complete silence while the other replied with, “Well, first of all, holy f\*\*\*! Second of all, good for you.” He shared the sentiment that ten years was a good time to put a bow on a cherished career. I would begin the process of departing from the airwaves. June 30, 2017 would be my last show.

The day came quickly. I was so excited to try on my new life, but I had no idea what my steps would be. My only intention was to seek out adventures and to say “yes” to any new and interesting opportunity that came my way. The year that followed was the most satisfying experience of my lifetime. The year was full of spectacular chances to explore and learn about myself.

There were many days when I sat on my ass and did nothing at all. Honestly, those were the toughest days because I knew I was in transition. I reminded myself that I needed to be patient, so I could see where these days would take me. Sometimes, they led me to watch to the craziness on CNN. Other times, the days took me out of the house to go for coffee with a friend or to meet someone new and interesting. I focused on having a little bit of joy every day.



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I’d take a walk in the snow and stay in the moment with each step. On some days, I’d focus on making a nice healthy lunch. Other days, I’d take a drive out to my friend’s house to help them harvest honey. I was open to every experience that came my way. Every once in a while, though, there were days of incredible joy. They showed me my full Ikigai in technicolor.

There was a day when I was asked to be a host for a special event with legendary singer/songwriter Ian Tyson. It was on Canada's 150th anniversary of Confederation. My Ikigai that day allowed me to host a sing-along with Ian of his 1963 hit song, originally sung with his former wife Sylvia Tyson. Their song, "Four Strong Winds," has become an important Canadian song and ad hoc anthem for the province of Alberta. That day, seven hundred musicians brought their guitars, banjos, ukuleles, and basses down to Olympic Square in Calgary, and they strummed and sang along with Ian. It was a day full of joy and pride. He reminded me of my dad in so many ways. His gruff personality charmed me like a visit to the days of my upbringing in rural Alberta.

A few weeks later, my wife and I drove to Portland, Oregon. We had arranged a visit with our dear friends Jennifer and Carsten Seemann. Our goal was to witness the totality of the full eclipse during the third week of August, with our own eyes.

We woke up very early on the day of the eclipse. The plan was to get out of Portland and to drive south about an hour to a point where eclipse totality would be directly over us. We didn't know what to expect on that day, in terms of traffic. It seemed like everyone we talked to was planning on driving south of Portland to see the eclipse just like we were.

We chose to travel the backroads that morning. The eclipse was expected to start its path to totality at around 10:15 a.m. Totality would come fifteen minutes later at 10:30. We meandered down narrow paved roads as far south as we could. As the clock passed 10:00 a.m., we thought we'd better find a place to stop as soon we could. Up ahead, we saw a farmer's field with a bunch of cars parked. We turned in and joined them, quickly making friends with the others around us. One happened to be an astrologer. He had a ton of great insight about what was about to happen.

To witness a full solar eclipse is an out-of-body experience. The moon remains out of sight in the sky until it starts to drift in front of the sun. It looks as if there is a nibble taken out of the sun when the moon creeps in front of it. People were screaming uncontrollably. Everyone wore special viewing goggles that protected their eyes from the sun. Over the next fifteen

minutes, we witnessed one of the most uniquely special sights we had ever seen. The moon slowly dominated the sun, chewing away at its overwhelming brightness. The light where we stood seemed unchanged. Even a sliver of the sun gave off enough light to make the morning feel like normal. But then the moon slid directly in front of the sun.

A total eclipse of the sun is one of the most awe-inspiring experiences a person could ever have. You can't accurately describe it in words. It's as though there's a black hole hanging in the sky, surrounded by a thin wedding ring giving off cosmic white rays of energy. It's simply divine. The light on earth changes to a dull whitish grey. It feels like dusk, but not entirely the same. Most surprising, though, is the horizon. If you can pry your eyes off the eclipse and look any direction, there's a 360-degree sunrise/sunset. Turn in any direction and you won't believe your eyes. You feel like you are standing in an impossible time, somewhere between dawn and dusk. It's bizarre and beautiful at the same time.

At that moment, everyone witnessing the eclipse was at peace. We were one. It was a satisfying thrill that happens too infrequently. I adored the whole experience.

In September, I was invited as a lucky participant to travel on an icebreaker across the Northwest Passage on Canada's north coast. The Canada C3 expedition was a 150-day journey that traveled from Toronto around all three of Canada's coasts to finish its adventure in Victoria. I met my travel companions in Edmonton. We flew to Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, and then on to Kugluktuk, Nunavut. We met the crew and expedition staff there and began to explore.

We went through safety procedures needed to ride on the Zodiac boats that would take us out to the icebreaker. The Arctic Ocean is an unforgiving place. The water is deathly cold. We carefully boarded the Zodiacs and made our way out to the vessel, a decommissioned icebreaker that once was part of the Canadian Navy. Its official name is the *Polar Prince*.

The icebreaker is a fairly big ship. To board from the water, the crew used onboard cranes to lift a special set of metal stairs and hang it from the side. Once aboard, each of the participants would check in and make their way

into the ship to explore. Our quarters were shared accommodations with bunk beds. My roommate, Patrick Dell, is a photographer and videographer for the *Globe and Mail*.

The next morning, we gathered for breakfast and a briefing about what the day would hold. We had a choice of two activities: a fourteen-kilometer hike to Bloody Falls, or an exploration of the tundra with botanist Paul Sokoloff. I chose the tundra.

The tundra is the most beautiful living thing I've ever seen. It's a vibrant array of colors ranging from green to purple to red to white to brown to yellow. When I took a step off the gravel road we arrived on, I looked down at my feet and saw more life than I had ever experienced. I fell to my knees in wonder. I got as low as I could. There were leaves and tiny pine-needled plants. I saw what looked like berries. "Hey Paul! Can I eat these?" I called out. Paul walked toward me and said, "Yes, you can! Those are crow berries." The berries were a deep blackish purple and were surprisingly plump and juicy. I popped a few into my mouth and started to chew. They tasted tart and meaty like a dense muesli blueberry. I wondered if it was possible to make a crow berry pie. The seeds inside were coarse and hard. They had one of the most memorable flavors I had ever tasted. It was earthy and rugged.

I also ate mountain sorrel on the tundra that day. Imagine a tiny leaf that resembles rhubarb. The leaf I ate was no bigger than a baby fingernail. It had a crunch and an explosion of juice that defied explanation. It exploded in my mouth like a bite of watermelon.

I could write a whole book about the Canada C3 expedition. It was the most satisfying adventure of my lifetime. We learned about the north and the Inuit. We shared stories and songs. Most precious to me was the chance to learn about Canada's First Nations and to make friends from a few of those nations. They taught us their point of view about reconciliation. We shook with empathy. The Canada C3 experience opened my heart to humanity at home in Canada.

In September, I traveled with my family to Japan. We visited Okinawa and dug our toes into the sands of Hamahiga Island, where my grandmother

was born.

In January, I launched a one-man play.

When February arrived, we boarded another plane to make our way to the Dominican Republic. Our mission was to help build roofs on cement houses for families who needed them.

In April, I was invited to give a TED Talk at TEDxYYC. I chose to talk about Ikigai in a playful but informative manner. The name of that TED Talk is “How to Ikigai.” Check it out online at TED or on YouTube.



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Lastly, in June, I began rehearsals for the Calgary Stampede Grandstand Show. I had been asked to play the part of host and singer for the show. It's almost impossible to describe the scope of the Grandstand Show. It's described as the largest outdoor show on earth. Each night, twenty thousand people gather to watch a variety show unlike any in history. It's like the Olympic Games' opening ceremonies for eleven nights in a row, with a cast of two hundred. Each show ends with a humongous fireworks display. My job (believe it or not) was to sing on a flying piano that rose eighty feet in the air over the top of the stage. The stage then turned into a massive fountain, à la the Bellagio fountains in Las Vegas, with fountains lit on fire.

There was no way of predicting any of the adventures that would come my way. I was open to anything: even failure. The ace that I had up my sleeve, though, was my past experience. I have had so many wonderful experiences throughout my life, so I felt confident that I would be okay. It feels like there is so much more to learn. I feel like I am a young man again about to go back to school.



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That list of my experiences merely shows the highlights of my Ikigai year. What it doesn't show is the dozens of days that I sat alone on a chair at my home pondering what steps to take next. Those alone days are bound to happen. They are an essential ingredient for thinking through next steps.

What I'm most proud of is that I studied self-actualization and Ikigai constantly throughout the year. My studies feel like I've been writing a thesis on happiness and meaning. I have discovered what my own Ikigai is. It's *to delight*.

The reason I get up each morning is to delight. When I'm at the grocery store and I walk past people in the aisles, I can smile at them. At the checkout, I share a short and positive chat with the clerk. If I'm singing a song on a stage, I send delight out to the audience. When I'm filming a YouTube or Facebook video, my goal is to delight the viewers. Right now, as I am writing this book, my goal is to delight you. When I send delight out into the world, in fifty ways, every day, I get fifty gifts of delight returned back to me.

You have the same potential. You don't have to quit your job to take an Ikigai year so you can discover it. You can keep on doing what you're doing, but add more self-realization into your days. Studies show that it's possible for this to have a significant impact on your overall happiness.

I've learned that the search for Ikigai is a tremendously enjoyable process. The discovery is the cherry on top. When you learn more and more about your natural capabilities and how they impact the world, it's like getting a shot of happiness espresso. You're boosted, and you stay that way until you learn more. Then you're boosted again.

I believe that Ikigai and positive psychology work hand in hand to help build our raw potential into understandable reality. Whether you choose to

take the steps to discover your Ikigai is up to you. To Ikigai or not to Ikigai, that is the question.

## How to Take an Ikigap Year

If the notion of taking an Ikigap year is appealing to you, then you probably have a thousand questions. If you're anything close to sane, you'll have concerns as well.



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As with anyone at any time of their life, the key to a year off is preparation. You have to be ready for it mentally and physically to make it your best year ever.

Start by saving up or putting money to the side that you can live on for the year. How much could you live on for one year? One hundred thousand dollars (seriously?)? Fifty thousand dollars (now you're getting closer)? How about twenty-five thousand dollars (now that's a noble goal)? You'll need money for a roof over your head and food in your belly. That's it. Forget the expensive sports car and the membership at the golf and country club. An Ikigap year is based on whatever you consider the bare minimum. The only must-have for the next year is you.

Plan your Ikigap year. Decide if you will travel or stay close to home. Prepare for what you will do in the next twelve months. Do your dreams. If you've always wanted to climb a mountain, make sure you get 'er done. Search for things that inspire you and take part in them. Volunteer. Raise money for your favorite charity. Work with senior citizens. Go for coffee with people you don't know. You understand what's important in your life. If you don't, then your Ikigap year is where you'll figure it out.

Warning: You will have some days, perhaps many of them, where you'll do nothing at all. Netflix and YouTube will be your constant companions.

That's okay. Use those days to rest yourself fully. An Ikigap year is not a year of boundless energy.

It's a year of self-reflection. Meditate. Go for walks. Make sure you get out of the house to spend time with people you love.

If you plan on traveling, ensure that you're not traveling just to see things. Instead, travel to enjoy other people. Every destination you go to has the potential for a new friend. Travel is best when you wrap yourself in the community you're visiting. Spend time with the locals. Make a friend or two. The greatest travel experiences in the world come from the locals who befriend you and show you around.



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Travel frugally. Forget about the five-star resorts that have every amenity on earth to make you comfortable. Opt for a bed to lay your head on and a Wi-Fi connection. Choose uncomfortable digs, so you are eager to get out of the hotel to explore.

Reflect daily about what you're enjoying about your gap year. Appreciate the moments as they come and cherish your good fortune. Keep notes about what you are learning.

If gap years are worthwhile and life-changing for students, then they are just as beneficial for grown-ups. The one advantage you have over a young person's gap year is wisdom. You'll learn more about yourself during your gap year than any other year of your life.

A question you might want to keep handy during your gap year is, "What do I have to show for the last year of my life?" For someone in normal life, that question might be incredibly hard to answer. For the person in an Ikigap year, the question will be an inspiration, not only to you but to others.

The benefits you'll receive from the year will be immeasurable. This is a short list, but they include:

- You'll reconnect with yourself. The day-to-day stresses of life pull you away from things that matter to you. When was the last time you didn't have time to exercise or to go on a holiday because you were too busy? A gap year will give you all the time you need to get back to the important work of being you.
- You'll discover new passions or expand on ones you already have. What have you always wanted the time to do in your life? Hopefully, you're not waiting until retirement to take up golf or painting. Your Ikigai relies on you being in the moment as often as possible. Your Ikigap year will give you the time to explore and expand on the good stuff about life.
- You'll reboot and refresh. Just like that infuriating computer you toil on every day, your heart and soul can afford a reboot as well. When you take a vacation, you reboot. But when you take an Ikigap year, you not only get a reboot, you get a new operating system that is far superior to the old one.
- You'll dream. Dreams are not better when you wait to fulfill them. Dreams are best realized when they are fresh in your mind and you're young enough to do them. Dreams don't have to be elaborate and expensive. They can be cheap and simple, too. No matter what, your dreams are meant to come true. They will fulfill you. Think of all the dreams you could accomplish with a whole year to yourself.
- You'll have something to talk about. How many times have you seen someone you know and asked them, "So, what's new with you?" The most depressing answer in the world is usually coming your way. You

asked for it. When they answer, “Same old, same old,” it’s your own damn fault for asking. When you are on your Ikigap year, you’ll have the best answer ever. Tell the world you’re on a year off to make life more meaningful. They’ll have a million questions, and you can share all the details with them. They’ll want to take their own Ikigap year, thanks to you.



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This will be your year to improve yourself. Your Ikigap year starts with half Ikigai. Do what you love and do what you’re good at. A whole year of just that is the prescription for the best year ever. Imagine all the insights you’ll gain about yourself.

Clarity. You’ll work on your own clarity in life. It’s about time you figure out what’s important to you, isn’t it? With 365 days at your disposal, clarity is easily within reach (especially if you include meditation. See Chapter Eleven).

Your Ikigap year will make you more financially responsible. Without income, or with reduced income (take a deep breath), your way of looking at money will change. You’ll begin to see the value of experiences versus things. Your wants and needs will lessen. You might even purge a whole bunch of stuff you already have because you’ll realize you don’t need it.

Benefits aside, an Ikigap year is a way to discover your own Ikigai. By putting your full attention on your life’s worth, you’ll be investing in a lifetime of Ikigai.

By the end of your Ikigap year, you’ll have experienced what it’s like to be more you. It’s a powerful feeling to know what your life’s worth is. You’ll want to implement it into your life on a regular basis.



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

# **Kyoko Chases Dragons**



It was a sunny morning when Kyoko awoke in her bed, exhausted from what she had accomplished. The day before she had finally slain the dragon and restored the kingdom to Emperor Shoma. Today was the first day of happily ever after. She sat up in bed, blinked, and breathed a sigh of relief. Overnight, her room was filled with blossoms. The emperor had ordered that her dreams would forever be filled with joy. Her room would be forever be filled with flowers. It was his way of saying, "Thank you for taking care of us." As she gazed in awe at the sweet gesture, she rubbed her eyes and wondered, "Is it really over? Am I truly free now to do as I please?" She was content with the feeling of accomplishment. She felt rewarded by people's gratitude.

Kyoko had never known a life without the dragon. When she was a baby, her parents had been burned alive by its fiery breath. Her whole village had burned. She was the only survivor.

She had been adopted by her aunt and uncle from the next village. As she grew up, her heart ached for the love of her parents. More than anything, Kyoko wanted revenge. She wanted to ensure that no other village suffered the way hers had.

As Kyoko grew up, she focused on building her strength and fighting skills. She became an expert in the bow and arrow, the sword, and karate. Kyoko dreamed of the day that her fighting skills would be so mighty, she could leave the village to find the dragon and slay it.

You know already that she succeeded. Now, she had a new life, one she had never thought about. She was a hero in retirement.

Kyoko lived a life of bliss. Each day when she awoke, she opened her eyes to the room full of flowers, took a deep breath, and exhaled the blossoms' fragrance in thanks. Her breakfast was a feast of rice porridge, soup, vegetables, and fish. The emperor had the finest silk brought to the so the royal tailors could make Kyoko all the outfits she could dream of. Her every

whim was taken care of. There was nothing she would ever need. She even fell in love.

For three years, Kyoko enjoyed her life of leisure, but each day, she felt there was something missing. Her life was epic. She had friends and respect throughout the kingdom. Why did she feel so empty inside? Was this what happily ever after was supposed to be?

Kyoko put a smile on her face out of appreciation, but inside her heart, she was miserable. Her life tracking down the dragon had been full of adventure. She was constantly on the move, looking for clues for where the dragon was. Her battles with the dragon's warriors were dangerous and fierce, but she was triumphant. Her only goal in life was to find the dragon and destroy it.

She had done exactly that. Now she was, for lack of a better term, bored. Kyoko thought hard about what she could do to find more satisfaction in life. "What could be more glorious than a life in the kingdom?" she reasoned.



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On a cool morning in autumn, Kyoko awoke to a new day and a new room full of fall flowers. She rolled her eyes back in her head and smacked her forehead with her palm. "Ugh, this again?" she sulked. She had come to the end of her rope. For the rest of the people in the kingdom, easy luxurious living was enough. Kyoko needed more. She decided, then and there, that she needed to find a new dragon to battle.

Later that day, Kyoko had a small bag of clothes packed. She had wrapped her sword in cloth. She hid the bag and sword in some bushes just outside of the walls of the kingdom. She kissed her lover softly and told him she was going away to visit her aunt and uncle. Then she left for what she believed would be forever.

Outside of the kingdom, Kyoko grabbed her bag and sword and ran to a stand of trees to change. She had packed the outfit she had worn on the day she killed the dragon. She tied her hair back like a peasant and stuffed her fancy clothing back in her pack. She would discard her kingdom clothing later, she figured. For now, she needed to start looking for a new dragon to slay.

Just beyond the trees, she saw a little boy digging through the roots, foraging. The little boy had a stick, and he playfully poked through bushes, pretending to stab at a dragon. Kyoko stayed in the trees to remain hidden. The little boy poked the stick through the foliage one more time, jabbing Kyoko in the ribs. “Ouch!” she yelled. The little boy was startled.

“Who’s there?” cried the little boy. Kyoko hadn’t planned for this. She didn’t expect to be confronted about her identity so soon. Kyoko cried out, “My name is... Maro. I’m on a quest to find a dragon to battle.”

“Oh, is there a dragon around here?” asked the little boy. “No, but I want to find one. I can’t sleep at night. I worry about dragons,” Kyoko shared. She pulled herself out of the bushes and stood up in front of the boy. “You’re a girl!” said the little one. “Maro is a boy’s name, isn’t it?”

“Well, I didn’t have any say in what my parents named me. They named me Maro, so that’s my name. Why are you poking in the trees so much? What’s your name?” asked Kyoko.

“My name is Yuuto. I’m looking for bamboo shoots to provide for my village.”

“What are your parents’ names?” asked Kyoko.

“My parents are no longer alive. They died in a fire.”

“Oh... I’m sorry to hear that. I’m an orphan too. Do your relatives care for you?” Kyoko asked.

“The village takes care of me. I help the village find food,” replied Yuuto. “That’s why I am named Yuuto. The village gave me that name. It means helper.” He showed Kyoko his bag stuffed with bamboo shoots.

“It’s nice to meet you Yuuto. Great job on the bamboo shoots! Can you take me to your village? I’d like to meet a wise man who can tell me where to find a dragon to battle.”

“Why do you want to fight a dragon?” asked Yuuto.

“I’ll be fulfilled when I can fight a dragon to kill. I’ve done it before. I need to do it again,” answered Kyoko.

“You’re not fulfilled right now?”

“No, I’ll only be happy when I battle and kill a dragon.”

Yuuto shrugged his shoulders, confused by this answer. He gestured to Kyoko to follow him. They walked for hours to get to the village. As they walked, Kyoko figured it would be best to ask all the questions. She asked Yuuto about his age and his village. She asked him about his dreams in life. Yuuto was seven years old. His dream was to be adopted by someone who would love him and accept him for what he was: an orphan who helps. Kyoko’s heart was breaking. She knew firsthand what it was like to be an orphan. It’s like having a hole on your heart.

Yuuto and Kyoko arrived at the village at dinner time. The whole village gathered for a community dinner made even more delicious by bamboo shoots that Yuuto had found. Yuuto took Kyoko by the hand and led her to a wise man. “Sir, this is Maro. She has a boy’s name, but she’s a girl,” he said in a cheeky way. “She’s looking for a dragon to fight and kill. Do you know where she can find one?”



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The wise man looked at Kyoko with a smile. “Maro certainly is a boy’s name. It means *myself*. Are you really searching for a dragon, or are you looking for yourself?” prodded the wise man.

“I’m looking for a dragon to battle. I’ve done it before, and it was the most glorious time of my life. I want to find more dragons to kill, so they will never bring terror to people again,” Kyoko replied.

“Dragons are the most dangerous creature on earth. They bring fear and destruction wherever they are. I haven’t heard of a dragon for a few years; however, I know that there is one dragon that you can battle if you choose.” considered the wise man.

“If there is a dragon alive, I won’t rest until I destroy it.” Kyoko was adamant. Her only focus would be that dragon.

The wise man saw that Kyoko was serious. He knew in his heart she needed something, but he doubted that killing dragons was the root of her problem. He told Kyoko, “You must be true to yourself. Go to the forest. Follow the river to the mountains. When you have arrived at the mountains, find the blue mountain that stands highest in the sky. Climb that mountain. In the cave near its summit, you will find your dragon.” The wise man paused for a brief moment, then he looked Kyoko in the eyes, “While you are on your journey, be on the lookout for your Ikigai, your reason for being.” He turned to Yuuto, “You must go with Maro. She will need your help.”



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Kyoko didn’t want Yuuto to come with her. The journey was perilous. When she found the dragon, it would surely be a battle of life or death. Having to look after a seven-year-old boy would be a huge responsibility. Besides, the old man told her to keep on the lookout for her Ikigai. Tracking a dragon, babysitting a young boy, and staying on the lookout for her Ikigai was a lot to handle all at once.

She reasoned, though, that she already knew her Ikigai. She had learned of Ikigai from her aunt and uncle, but she only partially understood the

concept. To find her Ikigai, she would have to fully understand her life's worth. She felt she already knew her life's worth was to kill dragons. She just needed a dragon.

Reluctantly, Kyoko agreed to let Yuuto come along with her. She liked the little guy and he was nice to talk to. He was smart and kind. He would help her find food during the journey. She agreed to let him travel with her with one condition: When she found the dragon, he must leave her to battle it alone. Yuuto agreed.

In the morning, Kyoko awoke in a small bed in a hut. For the first time in years, she didn't see a room full of flowers. All she saw was Yuuto sleeping on the floor beside the bed. She touched his shoulder and shook it gently. "Come, Yuuto. We must leave on our journey to the dragon."

Yuuto gathered together a small bag full of supplies. He brought a small knife, a bag of rice, and the stick he'd been poking around with the day before. He and Kyoko began walking to the forest.

"Will it take long to get to the dragon?" Yuuto asked.

"It will take as long as it takes. The wise man told me to go to the forest, follow the river, find the blue mountain and then to climb it to find the dragon. There's no telling how long that could take. Just stay close to me, don't get lost, and keep on the lookout for food you can gather for us," Kyoko explained. "Once the dragon is dead, I'll be fulfilled."

By day's end, they had reached the forest. Yuuto foraged through the trees to find enough bamboo shoots and mushrooms to make a meal. The night sky was clear. The two travelers sat by a fire and talked about what it felt like to be orphans. They both missed the feeling of family. They dreamed of having love and support. They wished they had someone to depend on and to trust for the rest of their lives. Most of all, more than anything, they wanted to belong. Kyoko and Yuuto fell asleep exhausted after their long day of traveling. Who knew what tomorrow could bring?

By noon the next day, the dragon trackers had located the river. It was a lovely stream with cloudy emerald-blue water. Yuuto playfully stepped into

the water and screamed in pain. The water was freezing cold, so they knew it must be coming from the snow from the mountains. Yuuto splashed Kyoko with the water. She screamed too. The water was too cold to swim in, but it was fun for a quick water fight. Neither of them remembered who won the water fight, but they did recall that it was fun. They kept going upriver.

At the source of the river, they found a small lake. Sure enough, just like the wise man had predicted, the mountains stood on the other side of the lake. Knowing how cold the water would be, Kyoko and Yuuto decided that they would need to spend time building a raft and making some paddles to get across the river. They went about gathering supplies. Kyoko found dry logs and Yuuto gathered together vines.

Throughout the evening, they worked away at tying the logs together with the vines. They worked on the raft until the moon was high in the sky. Tomorrow would be a big day of paddling and climbing the mountain. They had better get some shut-eye.

When Kyoko woke up at dawn, Yuuto was missing. Her sword, the raft, and one paddle were missing too. Kyoko turned toward the lake. There in the middle of the lake was Yuuto. She called out to him, “Yuuto, come back! Why are you leaving me? Where are you going?”

“I’m going to slay the dragon!” he yelled back. “I don’t want you to get hurt. If I kill the dragon, then you won’t have to!”

Kyoko was terrified. If anything happened to Yuuto, she would regret it for the rest of her life. She had to get to the raft. With every fiber of her soul, she dove into the freezing water and swam to the raft as hard as she could.

Yuuto saw Kyoko swimming out to her. He couldn’t believe his eyes. His heart filled with fear of her drowning, so he started to paddle the raft to her.

The freezing cold water of the lake chilled Kyoko to the bone. She had only been swimming for a couple of minutes when she could feel her arms going limp. She struggled to keep kicking her legs. Yuuto was still far away. She must keep going.

Kyoko began to get tired. She felt confused and unsure of what was happening. Yuuto paddled closer. “I’m coming!” he called out. Kyoko breathed in a mouth full of water and began to choke. “Hold on, I’m almost there!”

Kyoko’s arms and legs ached from the cold water. They didn’t feel like they would work anymore. She tried to kick but nothing was happening. She gasped for breath. She started to feel herself going to sleep. Her head sank below the surface of the water.

Just then, Yuuto reached into the water and grabbed her by the collar. He pulled with all his might to get Kyoko out. Kyoko woke up and saw Yuuto struggling to get her on the raft. With one last burst of strength, she grabbed one of the raft’s ties and pulled her torso aboard. Yuuto rolled her into the middle of the raft. She had survived, thanks to Yuuto.



Ikigai is a map. When you practice your purpose, you are also following a map that can lead you to discovering your gifts.



Yuuto paddled the raft to the other side of the lake. He helped Kyoko onto shore and gathered wood to start a fire to warm her up. In a few hours, Kyoko felt well enough to move on. The two dragon hunters made their way to the blue mountain.

When they arrived at the base of the mountain, they looked up at it in awe. The mountain was huge, but what was more challenging was that its slope was straight up. It would take a miracle for Kyoko to climb the mountain, but she must. When she found and confronted the dragon, it would all be worth it. Kyoko turned to Yuuto and said, “This is where I must leave you. Thank you for being my friend. You have been a joy to be with, but this mountain is much too dangerous for you to come with me. The dragon is too mighty. When I find it, I will kill it, and then I hope that I will see you again, Yuuto. You have been the most wonderful helper.”

Yuuto's eyes began to well up with tears. "Please let me come with you," he begged. "I won't get in the way. I want to help you fight the dragon. I need to help you. To help is my Ikigai."

Kyoko felt sad to see Yuuto cry. She knew that the climb and the upcoming battle would be too brutal to bring him along. She told Yuuto, "You must help your village. You are too important for your village to lose. Your Ikigai is too valuable to waste. Go back to your friends in your village. I will come to you when I have fulfilled my destiny."

Kyoko started to climb the mountain, and Yuuto walked back toward the lake.

The mountain was cold and impossible to climb. The face of the cliff offered very few options for Kyoko, but she climbed it anyway. As each new section came into view, she had to plan carefully how she would conquer it. She climbed for hours.

She came upon a small ledge. She pulled herself up on it to sit and have a rest. When she turned around to sit, she looked down the mountain. To her astonishment, she saw a small boy climbing the mountain below her. It was Yuuto.

Kyoko cried out, "Yuuto! What are you doing? Why are you following me?"

No reply.

Kyoko wondered if Yuuto was okay. But he kept climbing. In a short time, Yuuto was just below Kyoko. She called out again. "Yuuto, come to me. I'm on the edge of the cliff." Yuuto looked up and saw Kyoko. "I'm coming!"



You have an entire set of *shoulds* and *shouldn'ts*, constantly telling you where to go and where not to go, that you might not be aware of.



When Yuuto reached Kyoko on the edge of the cliff, they embraced each other in relief. They were well past the half-way point of the mountain. In

fact, the summit was only about an hour away. There was no other choice. They had to keep climbing.

“Why did you follow me?” Kyoko asked.

“I need to help you. It’s my destiny. To help is my life’s purpose.”

Kyoko’s shoulders dropped. She saw the passion in Yuuto’s eyes. He must help. She had to let him. If he doesn’t help, then he is denying his Ikigai.

Kyoko gave the boy a big hug. “If you must help, then I understand. Let’s keep on climbing. When we get to the dragon’s cave, please, do whatever you can to protect yourself. I will battle the dragon. You must not get in the way.”

The dragon hunters resumed their climb.

Near the top of the blue mountain, Kyoko climbed onto another ledge. This ledge was much bigger than any other one they had sat on. It led around to the other side of the mountain. She grabbed Yuuto’s hand to help him onto the ledge. “Stay behind me. We must see where this ledge leads us,” she told him.

Kyoko took her sword out of its sheath. Slowly, she stepped around the ledge to the other side of the mountain. She poked her head around a large rock and saw a cave. “It’s the cave of the dragon!” she thought. She turned to Yuuto and whispered, “Stay here.” Yuuto agreed.

Kyoko cautiously peeked around the rock once again. She pulled herself around the rock and crept into the cave.

Kyoko was inside for what felt like a long time. Yuuto sat outside on the ledge, worried about her. He waited and waited. Finally, he couldn’t take it any longer. He crept around the rock and made his way into the cave.

The cave was shallow. It wasn’t really much of a cave at all. Yuuto saw Kyoko sitting cross-legged near the far end of the cave, looking at the wall.

As he walked closer to Kyoko, he saw that she was staring at words carved into the wall of the cave. He gently tapped Kyoko on her back. “Maro, are

you okay?” he asked.

Kyoko paused before she answered. “Yes. I’m okay. I feel foolish though.”

“Why? What do the words say? Is the dragon dead?”

Kyoko answered, “The words have taught me that there are no dragons. There are only fools.” Reluctantly, she added, “The words read, ‘Ikigai today. Come back tomorrow.’ ”



You have an entire set of *shoulds* and *shouldn’ts*, constantly telling you where to go and where not to go, that you might not be aware of.



“There are no dragons. I will not be fulfilled when I kill dragons. I’ll only be fulfilled when I live my life’s purpose each day. I learned something important today, Yuuto. My Ikigai is not to kill dragons. It’s *to take care of others*. My name is not Maro. It’s Kyoko. The wise man told me that Maro means myself. I also know that Kyoko means mirror. I needed this reminder to be true to myself. I have killed a dragon in the past. I was not clear why. But I now know that I killed the dragon to take care of others. To feel fulfilled each day, I must take care of others. I need to fully understand my Ikigai.”



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Kyoko and Yuuto sat together in the cave for a few minutes longer. Kyoko promised the boy to take care of him today and tomorrow. Yuuto promised to help Kyoko do it...today and tomorrow.

Philosopher Alan Watts was a staunch believer in the here and now. He once declared, “If happiness always depends on something expected in the future, we are chasing a will-o’-the-wisp that ever eludes our grasp, until the

future, and ourselves vanish into the abyss of death.” Ikigai cannot be found in the future. It can only be lived now.

Instead of chasing the title of “self-made millionaire” in the future, be a “self-directed believer of wonder” today. Ikigai today. Come back tomorrow. It’s not a command. It’s not a secret. It’s a choice.

A small investment of your time today, to do what you love and do what you’re good at, is the determining action that will affect your life’s worth. Your half Ikigai will make a profound difference in your life if you make it a priority today and tomorrow.

In order to feel like today has meaning, you must put forth effort to do what’s meaningful to you. When tomorrow comes, repeat. It seems simple. It’s far from it. It takes work. Your work will result in something more meaningful. Ikigai today. Come back tomorrow.

There’s no easy way to live a meaningful life. It requires work every day. It’s easier if you are mindful. Kyoko accomplished a great thing when she slew the dragon that had killed her parents. But the day after her victory, she lost touch with the reason why she did it. She killed the dragon to make sure it didn’t hurt anyone else. She killed the dragon to take care of everyone else. To feel fulfilled, Kyoko needed to become aware of her true Ikigai and take care of others. All the flowers in the world, every luxury, every servant, every delicious meal couldn’t be as fulfilling to her as simply caring for others. Yuuto was a blessing to her. He needed her, and she needed him.

Prioritize your Ikigai daily. Be mindful to include it as an important aspect of your day.

Why is it impractical to make Ikigai an important aspect of today? Your job will take care of your food, shelter, security. We live in a time where we can choose among a million degrees of comfort. You can live in a downtown two-bedroom apartment with one bathroom or in a four-bedroom house in the suburbs for the same monthly price. Which is more rewarding? Comfort is subjective and negotiable.

Do what you love and do what you're good at today. Or don't. Which is more rewarding? Ikigai is not subjective or negotiable. You either do it or you don't. Your life's meaning will be reflected back to you accordingly.

It can change. With a small investment into just your half Ikigai daily, you can immediately feel the joys and benefits that come along with Ikigai. Do what you love. Do what you're good at. Start today. Come back tomorrow.



## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

# **The New Habit of Ikigai**



This book is called *How to Ikigai*. The question that really begs for an answer is the one that Simon Sinek wants you to answer to truly know your Ikigai. Like his book title prescribes, *Start with Why*. So, why Ikigai?



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If Ikigai resonates with you, there's a good chance that it does for a reason. You want to do what you love, what you're good at, what the world needs, and what you can be rewarded for. *You want more of you in your life*.

If that's true, then *How to Ikigai* boils down to this: It's time to start a new Ikigai habit. Throughout this book, you've read at least twenty stories of people sharing their Ikigai with the world. Matthieu Ricard, Miles Davis, Siddhartha, Casey Neistat, Massaki Hiroi, and every other person in this book all share one thing in common. Each person prioritizes Ikigai as part of their day. They might not call it Ikigai, but they are doing what they love, what they're good at, what the world needs, and what they can be rewarded for. They've developed their action for sharing their gifts into a habit. Why do they include Ikigai as a habit every day? Because they feel the rewarding cycle that their gifts provide to the world.

I hope this book has been a gift to you. It's been a gift to me to write it. As I researched and learned more about Ikigai, I was delighted to see a pattern emerge. Ikigai is an ancient philosophy with unrealized potential. Only a small portion of people have been able to embrace Ikigai throughout the centuries.

But then Dan Buettner mentioned Ikigai in his book *Blues Zones*. It triggered something in the collective mind of the wonderers. Marc Winn read about Ikigai in *Blue Zones* and it led to a connection to another idea about purpose. He melded Ikigai into the Venn diagram that's found throughout the world

today. Winn's viral image has brought a clear understanding of the "how" of Ikigai to millions.

Now, I believe that Ikigai has powerful connections to positive psychology. The practices of meditation, time affluence, and goal setting are proving to be effective tools for self-actualization. Dr. Laurie Santos is teaching those tools in her course, *The Science of Well-Being*, at Yale. Is Ikigai ready for prime time? It could be, if mindful meditation is a key part of the habit.

A theory: Ikigai has the potential to change human needs.

Abraham Maslow researched and wrote his theory of the hierarchy of needs in 1943. In his theory, he proposed that human beings have a set of four needs that must be met daily and one that is optional. Maslow theorized that people required that their food/shelter, security, social connection, and recognition (ego) needs be met each day before they could even consider work on self-actualization. At the time, the practice of self-actualization was in its infancy. It stands to reason that no one would choose to put effort into it.

Since then, advances in psychology, self-help, and social acceptance of well-being have flourished. Can a new habit of Ikigai shift the daily requirement for ego to the "less needed" pile? Would that be something?

Consider this: The Ikigai Hierarchy of Needs.

## Ikigai Hierarchy of Needs



As you can see, the Ikigai Hierarchy of Needs pyramid includes Ikigai as a daily need. It is a daily priority that has the potential to turn mindfulness, self-actualization, and life's worth into a habit. This new habit has the benefit of reducing the ego and making it less consequential. *The secret is to include daily mindfulness meditation.*

Is that possible? Could a more mindful you work more intentionally on your Ikigai? In doing so, would your ego become less prevalent?

The new habit of Ikigai looks like this:

1. Set a goal to do thirty days of half Ikigai.
2. Experiment, start a side hustle, start a side helpful, do some job crafting.  
Start doing your half Ikigai immediately. Make time daily to do what you love and do what you're good at.
3. Set a time to do daily mindfulness meditation.

4. Be mindful of how you're feeling. Keep a journal or notes in your phone.
5. At the end of the thirty days, how does Ikigai feel?

I'll be the first to admit that I have not conducted any research on this theory at all. I can only say that I am hopeful about the advances positive psychology is making in the lives of people. Ikigai is a worthwhile practice that has enormous potential to bring meaning to your life. Like anything worthwhile, it takes effort.

A new habit of Ikigai will open your eyes to how wonderful your days can be. Don't wait until tomorrow to start your new habit. Ikigai today. Come back tomorrow.

# About the Author



Tim Tamashiro is a former CBC Radio host who is passionate about Ikigai, or life's worth. His Ikigai (to delight) has provided him a delicious string of careers and experiences. He has wrangled rock stars for MCA Records, worked as an entertainer and a television host and, incredibly, now he's an author. Tim is a celebrated "drinky jazz" singer with six albums to his credit. He once distributed two of his own albums to Canada's largest lingerie chain La Senza.

Tim is a passionate adventurer and storyteller. He once sang on a flying piano. Tim is a TEDx speaker. He loves to interact and to share smiles with people. He lives in Calgary, Canada.