



How to Build a Life System (Aquino, Y.L.)

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Created on **July 05, 2025**. Last updated on **July 06, 2025**.

Building a life system is a fundamental step to a fulfilled life. It's crucial to build a life system that builds discipline, while not being too restricting.

Table of Contents

[Table of Contents](#)

[How the Brain Works](#)

[How these all connect](#)

[What's the lesson here?](#)

[The Digital Space: Productivity](#)

[Habit Formation](#)

[My Personal Habits](#)

[Tasks: The 3 Things Approach \(Rule of 3\)](#)

[The 3 + 1 Rule](#)

 [Note](#)

[Calendar](#)

The Digital Space: Organization

Securing Online Accounts



1. Start by downloading BitWarden [here](#).

2. Then, RESET your passwords.

Browser

Extensions

Bookmarks and New Tab

Desktop

Google Drive and External Drives

Your Phone

Your phone is a tool, not an enemy.

Physical Space: Organization

Personal Room

Categories

Physical Files

Inner Space

What makes you happy?

Hell nah.

Live the present.

Happiness vs Fulfillment

That's fulfillment.

Stop Comparing Yourself to Others.

But, here's the catch.

However, that thinking is flawed.

I don't know. You don't know.

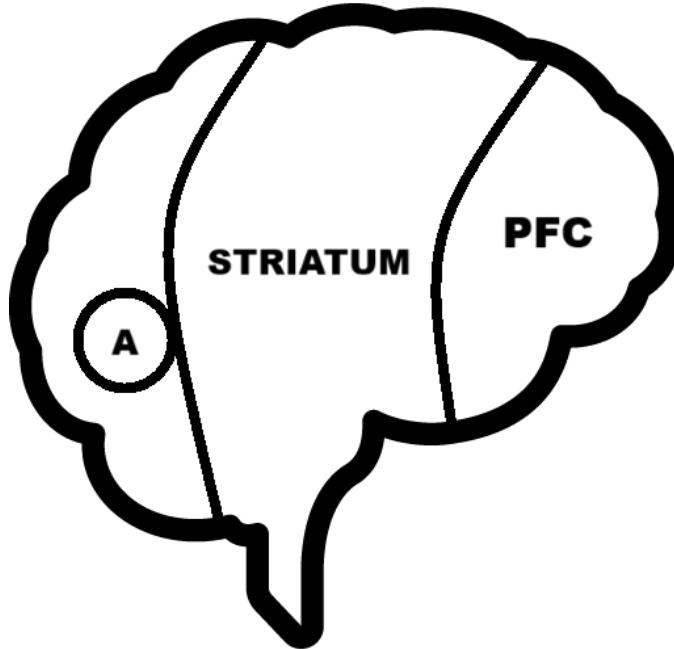
Bottom Line

Study your beliefs.

Connect spiritually.

Final Message

How the Brain Works



- The **PFC** or Prefrontal Cortex is responsible for impulse control and long-term planning.
 - For example, if you decide that in 1 year you'll be a good AWS developer, but somewhere in the middle your body says, "let's just play Dragon Nest all day," it's your PFC that's saying no.
 - Over the course of multiple "no" by the PFC, it does get exhausting for your brain. Until eventually, you say "yes" to everything. Yes to watching multiple YouTube videos, playing Dragon Nest for 5 hours, etc.
- The **Striatum** is responsible for decision-making and habit formation.
 - The PFC is like the president and Striatum is the vice-president. The president (PFC) doesn't need to make all the decisions; the vice president (Striatum) can make the smaller decisions)
 - The decision to say, brush your teeth, is taken by the Striatum, not the PFC.
- The **A** or Amygdala is responsible for stress and emotional regulation.
 - The Amygdala will notice things in the environment. It can be explained further below.

I learned this stuff [here](#).

How these all connect

Say, you want to go to the gym tomorrow. This decision was done by your PFC.

Then, suppose you went regularly for like a month. Then, this becomes a habit and then this decision is now done by the Striatum.

Now, each time you're about to go to the gym. When you suddenly want to watch YouTube instead, or eat some ice cream, it's the Amygdala that is being active here.

What's the lesson here?

Change your environment.

It's easy to mistook this as simply *cleaning your room or removing the ice cream in the refrigerator*. But, this also includes your digital space, your phone, your laptop, your accounts, etc.

Being disciplined in a messy environment is like trying to meditate while in a rock concert.

The overall goal is to do good, habitual things until they are now done by your Striatum and build an environment that does not overly stimulate your Amygdala.

The Digital Space: Productivity

In this digital world, it's very important to tidy up and organize your digital space. This is individualized and digital spaces vary from person-to-person.

But, I will try to generalize concepts, while also providing the specific objects that I interact with.

Habit Formation

Pick a habit app. These apps can vary with the amount of features they offer, but it's important that you pick one with, at the very least, unlimited habits. I decided to settle with **HabitNow**.



Now, it's up to you what habits you choose. This is not a tutorial on how to form habits. But, these are some important, generalized habits backed by research that you may consider:

Habit	How	Research
Exercise	150 minutes/week of moderate-intensity exercise. Or, 25 minutes/day for 6 days. Or, 30 minutes/day for 5 days.	Aerobic exercise improves memory and executive function (Harvard, 2014; CDC).
Sleeping well	7-9 hours/day with consistent sleeping/waking time. <i>Note: We are adults though so just getting 7-9 hours/day is enough.</i>	Chronic sleep deprivation increases risk of obesity, diabetes, and depression (NIH, 2019).
Healthy Diet	Fruits and veggies, whole grains, nuts, lean protein, limited sugar/UPFs.	Mediterranean diet linked to lower mortality and cognitive decline (NEJM, 2013).
Lifelong Learning / Cognitive Engagement	Reading, new skills, puzzles, language learning.	Cognitive activity reduces dementia risk (NEJM, 2003).
Purposeful Living	Set long-term goals aligned with personal values. <i>Note: This life system is a step to that.</i>	Sense of purpose associated with lower mortality (Psychological Science, 2014).
Habit of Tidiness and Organization	Set a daily habit of cleaning the superficial parts of your room. Then, set a weekly habit of cleaning	Cluttered environments linked to increased stress (UCLA, 2012)

	<p>the deep parts of your room. (What you see easily = superficial parts; What is hidden = deep parts)</p>	
Maintain Social Connection	<p>Dunbar's Number (Robin Dunbar, Oxford University)</p> <p>You only really need 1–5 deeply connected people to mitigate loneliness and boost well-being. And yes, your family and partner can count, if they are someone you deeply bond with.</p> <p>Hence, Nurture at least 2–3 meaningful relationships weekly (texts, calls, meetups). Even just one close connection makes a major difference in health outcomes.</p>	<p>Loneliness is as harmful as smoking 15 cigarettes/day (Holt-Lunstad, 2010).</p>
Stress Regulation	Daily meditation, journaling, or breathwork.	MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction) improves well-being (JAMA, 2014)
Financial Responsibility	Budgeting, saving, delayed gratification, avoiding impulse spending.	Financial insecurity increases anxiety and chronic stress (APA, 2022).
Mindful Use of Technology	Doom scrolling is a term that has been popularized recently. Avoid that.	Social media overuse linked to anxiety/depression (JAMA Psychiatry, 2019)

The goal is to form habits by doing these habitual things regularly to do the point that it's now your Striatum that is doing them, not your PFC.

My Personal Habits

I decided to have these following habits on my habit app:

1. Exercise 5x a week.
2. Sleep for at least 7 hours daily.

3. Daily Code.
4. 1x a week general cleaning and daily light (15-min) cleaning.
 - a. 1x a week general cleaning and daily cleaning of my desktop.
5. Catch up with 3 different people weekly. (It can be any day, they can be spread out. My partner counts, but not my family for this habit.)
6. Writing 3 things I'm grateful for at the end of each day. (It's very easy to fall into the trap of "perfect journaling." Don't do that, just writing 3 sentences each night is enough.)
7. Budgeting weekly using Google Spreadsheet.
8. Set monthly goals at the start of each month. (Not in my app, but I'll also be setting my goals for the year after Christmas and before New Year.)

I also decided not to include other habits, like less sugar. Since, I feel like it's perfectionism (after trying it out). It is important that I'm mindful of what I eat, but part of human life is enjoying these sugary treats. While also, **being disciplined** on what I put into my body on a regular basis.

Tasks: The 3 Things Approach (Rule of 3)

So first off, pick an app. If you're using **TickTick** or similar apps, then good for you, you don't have to find another app. Thankfully, **HabitNow** also has a **tasks** feature.

I actually find myself not being able to efficiently use the **Tasks** of productivity applications. What would happen is I would input the tasks I needed to do, but then I would forget (or be lazy) to check them because there's too many.

Also, the **Tasks** can be overwhelming.

Hence, the 3 Things approach. Here are some direct quotes:

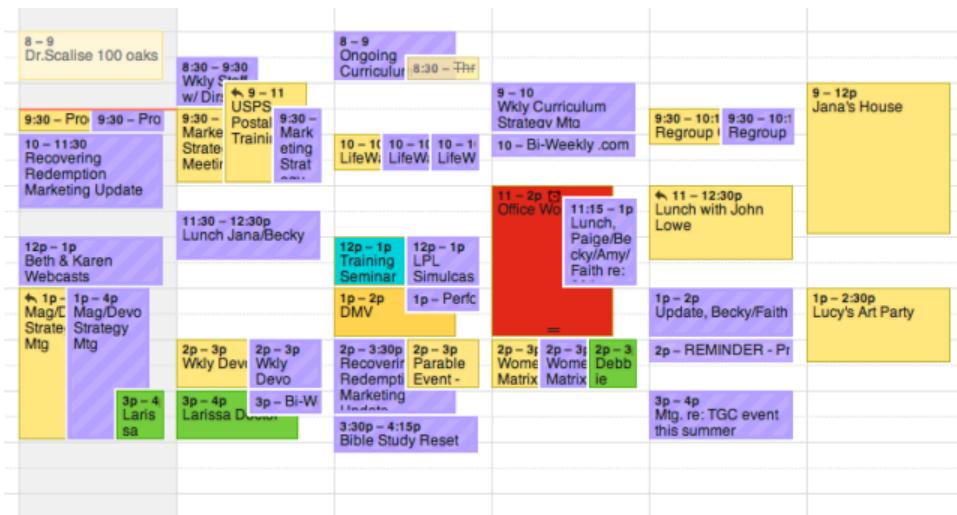
"Each day, identify 3 outcomes that would make it a great day.
Each week, identify 3 key results for the week." -J.D. Meier –
Getting Results the Agile Way (2010)

"I started beginning every day by writing down the three things I wanted to accomplish. Just three. This kept me laser-focused." - Chris Bailey – *The Productivity Project* (2016)

"Pick 1–3 Most Important Tasks (MITs) each day. Do them first thing in the morning." - Leo Babauta – *Zen to Done* (ZTD)

You get the point.

You really don't have to follow this. You can have your own philosophy. Some person can do well with fully detailed tasks in their **Tasks** app. Some person can maintain a strict schedule using Google Calendar (as sort of a Calendar + Tasks app like the one shown below).



Taken randomly online. [Source](#).

But, after trying different systems, I think this'll be the one that will work for me. It's low maintenance and it sets up how my day is going to be. I also like this since, it allows for spontaneity and breathing room for the day. You could do this 3 tasks and call it a successful day, while still being able to watch anime, YouTube videos, or play games.

But, I'll be using the modified one.

The 3 + 1 Rule

Well, it's basically the Rule of 3 but there's a +1.

The +1 will be anything that has to do with self-care and leisure. Want to try that new game? Want to unlock this specific character? Want to go on a date? This is the +1.

And this can range from something very simple as buying that cheap thing you found online up to playing a video game for 3 hours or watching half of that Netflix series.

The +1 should be something you really wanna do, and something you don't do habitually. If you're +1 is something like talking to your partner at night, even though you already talk every night, then your brain might not be satisfied with this +1, even if it's a good activity.

Note

This rule doesn't mean you are limited to 3 tasks per day. It's just your **most important tasks (MITs)**. You are free to have any other tasks in your app. I personally will add a new category (or label) that I only use for my MITs, to separate them from regular tasks.

Calendar

This is easy. Pick a day of the week where you analyze your entire week and upcoming week.

I pick Saturday as a day when I would analyze my entire week and what I have accomplished or what I can improve. Then, I plan what to do in the upcoming week.

This is where the Calendar gets handy for me. I use **Google Calendar** to mark the important dates such as **Passport Appointment** or **Graduation Day**. I do not use it as a **Tasks** app, only for important / key dates that I might forget if I just try to remember them on my own.

Be sure to always check it every Saturday (or the day you've chosen) and try to check them daily each night.

The Digital Space: Organization

Now that you have digital tools set up, it's also important to organize your digital space.

Securing Online Accounts

Raise your hand if you have forgotten a password multiple times.



Because I have. While I do remember passwords most of the time, there's this small percentage of times where I just don't remember my password, had to reset password, go to email to get code, and so on.

This is tedious. Let's fix that.

1. Start by downloading BitWarden [here](#).

Then, generate a 16-character password [here](#). You'll be using this password as your **master password**. Since BitWarden is a password manager, it's important that the account that holds all your password have a very strong password. Although, you have to input that password each time you log in, which can be troublesome, if you don't want a generated password, you can just create a really strong one that you can remember.

Save this **master password** by writing it on a piece of paper and taking a picture of it. BUT, never send it online, even to your account. For example, Messenger or Discord isn't really private, they have staff that scans through content so it's not 100% secure. Ironically, even Notion.

Optional step: setup the 2-step login in BitWarden. I recommend Authy, make sure to also save the backup key by writing it down.

I also printed the recovery code in BitWarden.

My BitWarden will **not** store **all** of my passwords. I will only reserve it to my important accounts:

1. Facebook/Messenger

2. Discord
3. Reddit
4. Github
5. Twitter
6. Gmail Accounts
7. Steam
8. Games (Mihoyo, Dragon Nest, Valorant, etc.)

Other accounts such as MyAnimeList, Backloggd, etc. will not be utilizing BitWarden. They are fine with Google Passwords Manager. It's also important that for passwords you store in BitWarden, you do not re-store them in Google Passwords Manager. To check your passwords in Google, go here: <https://passwords.google.com/>.

WARNING: DO NOT STORE YOUR BITWARDEN PASSWORD IN GOOGLE PASSWORD MANAGER.

2. Then, RESET your passwords.

It's time to reset your passwords, the ones you forgot. Go to the websites/applications of your important accounts and reset them, and store them in BitWarden. Also download the **recovery codes** for them, do **not** store these codes online.

Install the BitWarden Chrome extension (or the browser you are using)

You can skip this step tbh. Reset passwords → store them in a piece of paper and call it a day.

Browser

Pick a browser. Google Chrome has some privacy issues, but I'm sticking to it since it feels like home. It is inevitable that I switch out of this in the *future* though.

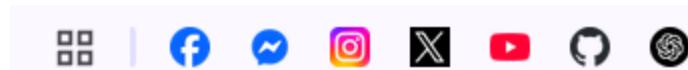
Extensions

Install extensions, but do not over-install since it may cause slowdown.

- BitWarden - If you are using BitWarden.
- uBlock Origin Lite - I recommend uBlock Origin, but they're no longer supported in Chrome so uBlock Origin Lite is what I recommend.
- FireShot - This is an amazing extension for taking screenshots, as it can take the screenshots of the whole website with its auto-scroll. And it also saves it to your Downloads folder with its own naming convention for better organization.

Bookmarks and New Tab

Then, I recommend setting up your bookmarks like this:

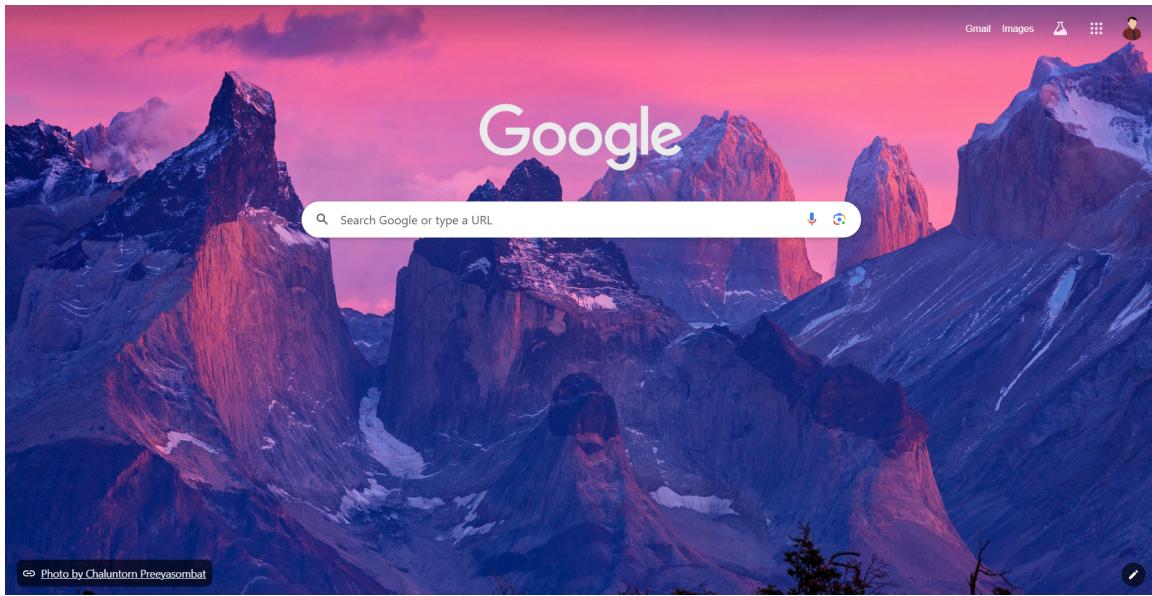


These should be sites that you regularly visit. I also recommend you do not overwhelm your bookmarks bar with every single site, since that may also overwhelm you. If you need to bookmark something, create a new folder or use the Other Bookmarks in the bookmark manager ([CTRL + SHIFT + O](#) in Chrome).

As a personal recommendation, you should also turn off "Show Shortcuts" in the New Tab.



And customize your New Tab to be something simplistic like this:



These are personal recommendations, and you are free to follow or not follow them. The most important thing is that you make use of shortcuts and things that will save you time, while not overwhelming yourself.

Desktop

This is simple. Clean your desktop.

I always find it cluttered whenever there's something in my Desktop, aside from the Recycle Bin. Having a folder or two is fine but if you can, just put them in Documents.

Also, use the Start menu to pin the apps you commonly used. Then, pin the apps you almost always use in the Taskbar. Going to Taskbar settings is also a good idea and tweaking it to your liking.

Google Drive and External Drives

Invest in a hard drive, and make your own file system.

I have two hard drives. The first one is where my important files lie (college files, etc.), while the second one is where my less important files lie (gaming clips, installers). Just do note that HDDs have a lifespan of 3-5 years, while SSDs have a lifespan of 10 years. So, you might need to replace them with a new one and move your files to the new one every years or so.

But, this is optional. You can settle with one hard drive or none at all.

The problem is you need some place to store your data, **if you're one of those people whole likes to archive things.**

Google Drive is also fine and the 100 GB plan is nice.

Do note that you can also create like 10 accounts to get 15 GB each or 150 GB total. The issue is

1. It's a hassle to move through different accounts.
2. While this does not violate their Terms of Service (ToS), their ToS might change and suddenly your files may disappear. This is unlikely, but not impossible.

So, my personal recommendations are either:

- You settle with Google Drive.
- You go with Backblaze B2 (Similar to AWS S3).

For a while, I'm gonna settle with Google Drive. Backblaze B2 seems like it will take a while to setup despite that lower pricing. As much as possible though, I'll stick with the Google Drive free plan (or might try their 100 GB plan) for the files I need online and use my hard drive to store my archived data. Though, my data is indeed at risk of being gone forever due to hard drive corruption/damage.

I'll try to explore other options such as using CDs/DVDs for archive. There are CD-Rs can last from 50 years to 300 years according to market claims. They are expensive though but it's a good investment as it may last my entire lifespan.

Your Phone

Look, I tried everything.

I tried Android launchers that would change the way my Phone system looks, to either be minimalist or more focused. I tried uninstalling every social media. I tried app blockers that will lock my app when it reaches the usage time limit for the day.

But none of that worked.

I would end up still be addicted to my phone despite the launchers. Uninstalling social media would just lead to me reinstalling them after a while. And app blockers, I would try to find way to bypass them or sometimes I would just extend the usage time limit if I needed to.

Now, this might just be me. And some people, they can actually impose these rules. And all I can say is, good for them.

But what changed me is the mindset of

Your phone is a tool, not an enemy.

There are hundreds and hundreds of videos online talking about Dopamine detox and one of the steps is typically not using a mobile phone.

But, your phone is a tool.

If you use it too much, you'll get addicted. If you cling to it too much, you'll form bad habits. But if you use it wisely, then you'll be reaping the benefits and experiencing the dreams of people who were born before the 2000s.

With that being said, I recommend the following app categories and apps:

1. **HabitNow** seems good for Android, a Habit and Tasks app. While, **OnRise** and **Structured** seems good for iOS. **TickTick** is the best option if you are willing to pay the monthly fee.
2. Social apps like **Facebook**, **Messenger**, and **Instagram**.
3. Video streaming apps are good too like **YouTube**, **TikTok**, and **Netflix**. Music streaming is **Spotify**.
4. **Notion** for note-taking. For offline use, use your phone's default notes app.
5. Developer-related apps like **X** (formerly **Twitter**), **GitHub**, and **LinkedIn**.
6. **Authy** for authentication
7. Essential tools like **GCash**, **Chrome**, **Drive**, **ChatGPT**, etc.
8. Uninstall Shopee. jk

Physical Space: Organization

Personal Room

This is straightforward. Clean your room.

Taking care of yourself also means taking care of your environment.

You most likely spend most of your time in your personal room (outside of college or work). So keep a daily cleaning schedule that may take 15 minutes per day. And then deep clean once a week. I'm telling you, having a clean environment soothes your soul.

There's not much to say on this section. This is not a "cleaning advice" article but I do recommend you categorize your items and keep these items in consistent places. I'm pretty sure you've experienced stuff where you can't find where your ID is or your wallet, and you're running late on whatever place you ought to be.

Categories

1. Clothing
2. Files & Documents
3. Electronics & Cables
4. Personal Care / Hygiene
5. Room decorations
6. Miscellaneous stuff

Physical Files

You might not have this problem but I have around a 3-feet tall archive of papers if they were to be stacked upon one another. I have archives of my school works from the start of my Junior High (2015) up until the end of my college (2025).

I plan to sort them out and then scan them which would take me probably around a week if I'm gonna be spreading out the scan to not be burned out. I plan to do

this before I temporarily settle to Clark for my Job Training.

The scans will be archived via Hard Drive and Online Storage, and I'm also considering using CD-Rs. This is to safeguard them since I do like archiving stuff, and physical objects can get damaged easier than digital objects.

If you don't have this problem. Then,

1. Buy a clearbook that would store your most important files (birth certificates, etc.)
2. Buy long envelopes for things you want to archive.
3. You can recycle the papers you don't want to archive or donate them to a paper recycling place. I would advise throwing them away since it's not good for the environment. (To be fair, it's the same as any other trash, and some trash are worse, so it's up to you.)

Inner Space

The inner space is the space that encompasses your mental space, emotional space, and spiritual space. Both the physical space and the digital space are external spaces; they are outside of your control.

What makes you happy?

Find what makes you happy? Is it watching Netflix? Is it playing video games? Is it watching movies at cinema? Is it talking with your loved ones?

Whatever it is, identify it. Then cherish the moments whenever you do that activity.

A lot of things could happen. You may suddenly stop liking watching movies, suddenly burn out from video games, and your loved ones aren't going to be around forever. But should you worry about that?

Hell nah.

Will worrying make you never stop liking movies? No.

Will it make you enjoy video games forever? Nopes.

Will it make you and your loved one immortal? Definitely not.

So why worry? The only thing you should focus on is to

Live the present.

Sure, those things may happen. But the most important thing is enjoying the emotions you feel right now. At this very moment. Not the future, but right now.

Happiness vs Fulfillment

I know I just asked you to identify what makes you happy.

But, do not chase happiness. Chase fulfillment. What's the difference you say?

Happiness is you winning the lottery. Happiness is you buying that thing you liked to buy for a while. Happiness is you going out on a date with your partner.

But you studying late at night for that exam. Or you spending significant time to prepare for your career. Or you exercising and getting yourself sweaty and tired. It's fulfillment if you are satisfied with doing these.

If you are sacrificing energy for an action that requires hard work, but you being okay with that because you know it's part of a bigger purpose.

That's fulfillment.

Stop Comparing Yourself to Others.

I saw a Reddit post the other day, and I love what I saw on that post.

I'll do my best to summarize/paraphrase it since it's a long post.

Suppose you are an individual, who suddenly got an increase in paycheck.

You're monthly salary of ₦25,000 has now increased to ₦40,000, after just 2 years of working. It's a huge raise in your company.

You got home, and you're so happy that you tell your family, your partner, etc.

But then, as you're scrolling through social media. Your college friend, Ashley, is now earning ₦120,000 per month. You were classmates back in the day, and while there's no direct comparisons back then, both of you were average students and you were pretty close.

Suddenly, you feel stingy. You want to be happy for Ashley, but deep inside, you feel bitter. You know it's bad to feel bitter, but you just can't help it. Suddenly, your salary of ₦40,000 looks so measly. You start thinking, *I could work for 3 months, and Ashley only needs to work for 1 month, and we'd both get the same money.*

But, here's the catch.

You only compared yourself to Ashley since you have so many similarities.

I know you've never felt bitter and compare yourself to Jeff Bezos and his net worth of \$236,800,000,000 (₦13,363,571,200,000). You might compare, sure, but you're not gonna feel deeply bitter about it.

You compare yourself with Ashley since you graduated at the same time.

You compare yourself with Ashley since you were classmates back then.

You compare yourself with Ashley since you have so many similarities, but suddenly Ashley is starting to get ahead of you (at least in your perspective).

However, that thinking is flawed.

Since in this case, the basis of comparison is money.

Then, would Jeff Bezos be the happiest human being in the world?

Well, definitely not, his marriage before his current wife ended in a divorce (previous wife), he's now getting old, etc.

Note that I do not mean to say that Jeff Bezos is unhappy. The reality is

I don't know. You don't know.

You don't know anything about Ashley. Ashley might currently be grieving the loss of a loved one. Maybe Ashley is unable to properly enjoy life because of a messed-up work-life balance, in exchange of high salary. Maybe Ashley is depressed deep inside, or maybe Ashley is fine all along.

But the reality is you don't know that.

When you scroll through social media, it's easy to see how successful different people from your life are. But the problem is that 95% of the time, people post about their highlights, not their lowlights. So the problem then is you might be comparing your regular day on someone's best day.

Bottom Line

Comparing yourself to another person is a problem because it's never going to be an apple-to-apple comparison. You might be doing an apple-to-orange comparison.

Now, to be fair, it's alright to gauge whether someone's better at you at a particular skill.

You can't pretend that this person is a beast when it comes to playing volleyball, coding, or any other skill in comparison to you.

But that doesn't measure how successful they are, or how happy they are.

Thus, the bottom line is you should compare yourself to a previous version of yourself. The week ago you probably do not know that new chess opening, that new designing patterns in web development, or that skills you learned playing that game. As Theodore Roosevelt said,

Comparison is the thief of joy.

Study your beliefs.

Pick a philosophy. It can be any philosophy as long as it's meant to nurture you, and not harm you.

I personally choose the ff:

- **Stoicism** - This is the biggest part of my mindset. Since,
 - It teaches mastery of your emotions.
 - Acceptance of life's unexpected events.

- Discipline and excellence.
- Enjoyment of things (video games, success, money) without being **owned** by them
- **Taoism** - This is focused on **balance**.
 - Balance in work and life.
 - Letting go when needed.
 - Living simply and appreciating what's essential.
 - Avoiding extremes like overworking or overindulgence.
- **Virtue Ethics (or Aristotelian)** - This is aligned with my drive to study, grow, and improve myself, not just for trophies, but most importantly, for personal excellence.

Overall, my philosophy is a **blend of Stoicism, Taoism, and Virtue Ethics**.

I strive for excellence, but with self-awareness and peace. I enjoy life, but with discipline. I strive to balance achievement with reflection. I play games and chase dreams—not out of addiction, but because I love personal growth.

Connect spiritually.

Connect to God. You might ignore this if you are not religious, but it's a short read.

I am personally a Christian, but I respect people's beliefs.

Talking to God, sharing your worries, and worshipping him daily is part of personal growth, in my opinion. I could've never achieved what I achieved, and I could never move forward without God.

So connect with Him spiritually. My God is Jesus Christ and I'm not ashamed to say it.

I recommend that you go on a spiritual journey of self-discovery yourself. And whether it turns out to be fruitful or you choose not to believe at the end, I respect that.

Final Message

Building a life system is not easy, but it doesn't have to be hard either. Try to build a life system that's not built on perfectionism, but is built around you, an imperfect human being. And by doing so, you'll be making a life system that is perfect for you.

I recommend you put in the sufficient time for the preparation of this life system. Putting too much time in building this life system might hinder you from actually achieving the purpose of a life system- to help with your life.

I wish you the best of luck, and God bless!

Cleaning and organizing is a practice, not [a task or] a project.

-Meagan Francis