

What is Fulfillment?

What fills you up? What nourishes you? What gets your blood going? What's the fizz in your ginger ale? When you are most alive, who are you? What are you doing? Who are you with? What's happening around you at that moment?

Most people are never asked questions like that. They are too busy trying to untie the twisted knots of their lives to get at what they hope will be the magic treasure inside.

Clients often come to coaching with plans and goals for escaping the prison they've found themselves in. They've been digging tunnels looking for a way out. Clients come to coaching short of breath from running after their lives, trying to catch up or get ahead so that someday they can have the life they really want. It's the life they are planning to have... as soon as (fill in the blank) the house is paid for, the kids are in college, they find the career (or partner) they love, this current misery ends, they find out what they want, their organization becomes enlightened. Clients are living their lives while holding their breath.

Even with good intentions and a goal, people often have great difficulty making things happen. That's partly because they've focused on the goal as the means of fulfillment: the thing, the answer, the solution, is invested with the power to grant fulfillment or happiness. Actually, this puts the emphasis in the wrong place; fulfillment is not something you can get or own. It is something you must live.

Another challenge to finding individual fulfillment is the demanding world that surrounds our clients and us. We are all pulled in 40 directions at once by expectations of others and current responsibilities. To make it even tougher, we are sometimes dragged down by voices in the dark saying things like, "You don't deserve it. Why try? You'll just mess it up anyway. It's too risky. Who do you think you are?"

We believe it is possible for people to have fulfilling lives today, right where they are, even as they make plans to transform and evolve.

It starts with answers to questions like those at the top of this page — it starts with knowing what you want out of life. That's a big step for lots of people. Lots of our clients have never really asked themselves that question, not at the deepest level. "No, really. What do you really want in your very own life? You get to make it up from a blank page."

To actually claim that life means breaking free of boxes that may have become quite familiar and neatly decorated, lined with the soft illusion of safety. These boxes may look comfortable, but so do those cushy, satin lined coffins.

Living a fulfilling life is a radical act. We all live in a world that favors, supports and provides incentives for going along to get along. Honoring who we really are can mean making difficult choices. In the end, however, we believe that Fulfillment is worth the challenge. At the end of the day, we believe people want to say they went after their dreams, they sought out and nourished robust, life-giving relationships and they fulfilled their purpose in their own unique way. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes once said, "Too many people die with their music still in them." Coaching for Fulfillment gets clients to sing their own special song and dance their own special dance.

It's no surprise that Fulfillment is one of the core principles of Co-Active® Coaching — and no surprise that it is the first of the Intermediate courses. The work we do with our clients starts here. We ask them to take a stand for their fulfilling lives. We give them tools for getting clear about what that would be at the most fundamental level, and tools for staying on course when the tides and currents of their lives tend to pull them off course.

In coaching, if there were just one or two fundamental questions that capture the search for Fulfillment, they would be: “Client, who are you? What’s really important about how you live?”