When I was a little girl, knowing what I was going to be when I grew up was easy. I loved animals, demonstrated by the large number of stuffed bears, monkeys, snakes, and horses on my bed. So, like other children who loved animals and only knew of one job working with animals besides a zookeeper, I was going to be a veterinarian. It was simple because I thought that once I decided to be a veterinarian at nine years old, that life would just follow a sequence like it did from first to second grade and so on. I was smart and I loved animals; that’s all that’s needed, right? In my later college years, I had to leave the pre-vet program at Virginia Tech from feeling faint from seeing pain on the farm animals faces during Animal Science lab procedures, and the pesky concussion and amnesia I suffered from fainting and hitting my head on the lab’s basement floor when my lab partner said that she needed to squeeze another drop of blood from my thumb to view under the microscope. Around that time, my father was dating a therapist and she posed a question to me that was designed to illuminate my future. I wake up on a perfect day. What am I doing? My mind’s eye answered with an image of myself stepping into a kitchen, pouring out food into bowls on the floor and two or three dogs running straight to the bowls with their heads lowered for food. I then stepped away and stood in front of a doorway. On a wooden desk sat a typewriter with a partially written page inserted. Out the window was a stretch of rolling hills with a tree-lined driveway splitting two pastures of grazing horses all the way up to the house. So, that was my heart’s desire. The job. The place. The animals.

But, it’s more than what we do or where we live that makes our life stories. It’s about who we are.

# Introduction

As an inquisitive and questioning child, I always had a robust inner voice. I sought to determine why things are the way they are and why people do what they do. I looked for patterns and the relationships between things and concepts.

Being the avid reader who found solace in the library, I grew up living though the heroes in the books I read. I was Velvet Brown in *National Velvet*, whose mother challenged her to be her best, whose father warmly and quietly supported her, and who was steadfast in her determination to train The Pie and win The National with him, even though girls weren’t allowed to run. The heroes of my childhood were profoundly loyal, resourcefully clever, dedicated to animals and to doing “the right thing”. They had the fortitude to carry on even when the odds were against them. They relied on their intelligence, passion, and inner strength. I learned my life lessons through them and their fictional parents or mentors.

After studying Human Development, Education and Literature, the riddles of the human condition, of why people do what they do, made more sense to me. When I had the great fortune to receive intensive training in facilitation skills by the PhDs in psychology from The University of Arizona and facilitated the university’s curriculum in life skills for the U.S. Navy, my world view was expanded. I recognized that my life was not something to find, but something to create for myself. That it was up to me to create my own life story and live my story with the qualities I valued in my childhood heroes.

I have spent decades dedicated to pursuing my personal life story and making adjustments and expansions as I have grown to discover more about myself. The story has its challenges, obstacles, and its villains, but they are part of the story. Afterall, what is a story without challenges? And, without challenges, there is no growth. It is holding your personal vision close to your heart that sees you through the perils. People who have known me for long periods of time remark that I have worked hard for what I have. People who have known me for decades recognize how vastly my life situation has changed from where I started. Although I have had to persevere, knowing that I am working toward a life that has such meaning to me, reduces my stress, and gives me a sense of purpose and meaning.

Recently I invited a friend over to walk a path on my ten acres and sit on my big, white front porch to visit. Looking out over the pasture, the towering fir trees, and the Cascade foothills, she stretched her arm toward the view and exclaimed, “Look what you have done all on your own. You should be proud!” She reminded me of my mindset over the years when I told her, “This, this is not the first time I have started my life over. I have done it many times. I just see myself as the hero of my own life story and think about what I would do if I were that hero in every situation. Doesn’t everyone think like that?” This smart, creative, and industrious woman responded that no, not everyone thinks like that and that maybe I should write about it for others.

So, I am sharing my mindset, my insight, and breaking down the process so that you, too, can see yourself as the hero in your own life story that is so unique and treasured for you that you, too, can persevere through the challenges, reduce your stress, have a sense of purpose and meaning.

Feeling overly stressed, frustrated, or overwhelmed by your life? Do you feel like you could use a restart? Many people walk through their days, their months, their years, or most of their lives focusing on immediate satisfaction and reacting to their immediate needs. They feel overwhelmed, lost, and unfulfilled. They are searching for meaning in their lives. When the COVID-19 virus left people without jobs or sent them isolated at home, we became more aware of the value and condition of our lives. We were reminded that life is tenuous and short. We started to question how we spent our time, whom we spent our time with, and if we were fulfilled. From this, people emerged from the virus seeking what matters to them.

Looking for Answers?

So, you may be ready for a change. We root for our favorite heroes whether they are Marvel heroes, DC Comics heroes, Olympian heroes, or American Idol heroes, we live vicariously through them. We feel the rush of excitement and adrenaline as they face challenges and rejoice with the dopamine we feel when they overcome the challenge and become even stronger and more confident. But, most of us aren’t our own heroes, living our own heroic lives. Instead, we focus on our jobs to make our lives work.

Looking in the Wrong Place?

What’s wrong with looking for satisfaction in a job? Should we focus on job satisfaction as our biggest goal? According to David Sturt and Todd Nordstrom, most of us are not satisfied with our jobs. In their March 8, 2018, Forbes article, they describe the issues Americans have with their jobs. According to their article “10 Shocking Workplace States You Need to Know”:

* We work for managers that most likely don’t have any management training and “not necessarily good at making the people around them better” (58% don’t have any management training)
* We leave jobs because of our managers. It turns out that “89 percent of bosses believe employees quit because they want more money”; yet, only 12% of us leave jobs for more money.
* We don’t trust our bosses. “A Harvard Business Review survey reveals 58 percent or people say they trust [strangers](https://blog.octanner.com/engagement/would-you-trust-a-stranger-more-than-your-boss) more than their own boss.”
* We don’t feel appreciated. “Global [studies](https://www.octanner.com/content/dam/oc-tanner/documents/global-research/White_Paper_Performance_Accelerated.pdf) reveal that 79 percent of people who quit their jobs cite ‘lack of appreciation’ as their reason for leaving.”
* We don’t feel like we can take the vacations we earn. In 2017, we only took 50 percent of our vacations, and 10 percent of us took no vacation days at all. “According to a study by Glassdoor, the fear of falling behind is the number one reason people aren’t using their vacation time.
* We are unhappy. “The Conference Board reports that 53 percent of Americans are currently unhappy at work.”

We Are Hollow

What happened to your dreams, your hopes, or your visions for yourself? We discover that it is easier to follow the well-worn path that ensures financial security and/or approval from our family and friends. T.S. Eliot’s haunting words leave a power image of our hollow bodies, emptied of spirit and passion trudging through our days until our deaths in “The Hollow Men”. The poem begins:

We are the hollow men  
    We are the stuffed men  
    Leaning together  
    Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!  
    Our dried voices, when  
    We whisper together  
    Are quiet and meaningless  
    As wind in dry grass  
    Or rats' feet over broken glass  
    In our dry cellar

And, the poem ends:

*This is the way the world ends*  
*This is the way the world ends*  
*This is the way the world ends*  
*Not with a bang but a whimper*

Do you want to end with a whimper or a bang? It’s easy to feel like you have all the time in the world to get our “bang, and often that time disappears and leaves us with just the whimper. We see people step outside the unexamined life to create their “bang”, and we decide that they, unlike us, are lucky or have some unique, special talent or quality. What if we could each live with a bang? Our own version of what a “bang” could be?

Can You Be a Hero?

There are many possible reasons why you may be open to taking charge of your life. You may be graduating from school, going through a divorce, lost a job, or lost a friend or family member. You may be leaving a dangerous or abusive situation or be recovering from a major illness or injury. You may just realize that you are spending your life without direction, dissatisfied, or feeling your dreams slip away. Regardless of your situation, you can make a difference in your own life. Becoming the hero of your life story is more than taking a few quizzes and finding what job or career you should have. It encompasses your full life. Your relationships, your hobbies, your career, your dreams, your environment – based on what is important to you.

In This Book

This workbook draws from my life experience of taking on obstacles, studying human development, literature, and education as well as experience teaching, training, coaching, mentoring, and practicing, for over 30 years, the life skills I learned and facilitated for the Navy’s CAAC wellness classes.

**I’ll guide you, step-by-step, on how you can see yourself as the hero of your own life story and plan a life strategy that incorporates what is most important to you.**

The Way I See It

### You are the expert about YOU. Based on your experience and knowledge about your strengths and weaknesses, your skills and experiences, who in the world is better to determine what is right for you and what you can accomplish.\*\*\*\*

### \*\*\*\*Regardless of when or where you born, how much money you have, the color of your skin, your gender, your sexual preference, or your appearance, you are in charge of what matters to you and what you can do with your life. There will be obstacles, but part of the living as the hero of your life is confronting those obstacles by recognizing them, planning for them, and incorporating all your resources to overcome them.\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

### \*\*\*\*You eventually get to the point where you recognize this and start to trust yourself.\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*It’s about breaking down the barriers imposed on us by society. The answer to breaking those barriers lies inside us. Deep inside. No one can tell you what they are, but someone can lead you to discovering them for yourself

Time to Start

There is no right time or best time to become the hero of your own life story. Well, except for right now. Every day is a new opportunity to live the journey that will give you a sense of purpose and belonging. Our lives bring us opportunities to discover ourselves and our world daily. We can meander through our lives with a sense of longing and disconnect, subject to the whims and actions of events and other people, or we can take control and design our paths. The first way leaves us frustrated and stressed. While the first method may be a more difficult life; it takes work to invest in yourself to live the second life. And it can feel scary to get started.

Many people have restarted their lives in different ways. While it can feel like circumstances may force us into making changes, wouldn’t it be nice if we could be proactive and set out to make those changes ourselves? As someone who has proactively set out on a new life story more than once, I want to help you change your life into a proactive one, walk you through how to do it, and to make it less scary, too.

# PART 1: THE HERO

## About Heroes and Life Stories

If you are going to be the hero of your own life story, it helps to get familiar with heroes. You are probably accustomed to recognizing the protagonist, or hero, in your favorite books or movies. From Winnie the Pooh to Luke Skywalker, we learn about the hero from what a hero says, does, thinks, and looks like. We also get to know the heroes from what others say about them or react to them. For heroes to be true to themselves, there is an essence they have that ties all those factors together. The work behind each fictional character is done by a writer who creates that essence for each hero through research, examination, and exploration. For your life story to be true to who you are, get to know who you are as a hero.

To make a life story fit for you, get acquainted with yourself as a hero. We certainly would not build a life story for Hermione Granger as the hero embarking on a career as a stand-up comedian. It just isn’t a fit!

### 

### Will It Be Easy?

Just as for every hero in every story, there will be challenges to overcome. At nine years old, I decided that I would become a veterinarian because I loved animals and that was the only occupation that I was aware that worked with animals (except zookeepers). Although I loved books and stayed indoors from play to write stories, I focused on science. Fortunately, I am an abstract thinker and picked up complex concepts easily. I could follow the scientific logic of biology. I was accepted into the Virginia Tech Pre-vet program, and I thought my path was clear. Until my second quarter, when I stayed up all night to write a paper then had a biology lab the next morning at 8 a.m. As a night owl, mornings were not easy for me, but I was still young. The lab was in the basement of the biology building across the drill field. I sprinted over and hurriedly took my seat as the instructor was telling us that we would be looking at blood samples under the microscope.

As someone who had no sleep and a history of passing out when my sister shed a drop of blood when getting her ears pierced, I was determined that I could carry on in the name of science. I was a little more nervous when we were told that we would be pricking each other’s fingers and looking at our own blood, I was a little more concerned. I felt triumphant after the first pricking of my finger since I was still standing. When my lab partner said that she needed to make another prick to get more blood, that is the last thing I remember.

I awoke in the college infirmary days later after being unconscious for over 24-hours with secondary amnesia. The infirmory president came by my room every day asking me what year it was and who was president. When I asked why he always asked me, he told me that they were afraid they were going to lose me. Those word were pretty scary for an 18-year-old on her own working through college.

With no home to return to, my only option was to carry on with the next quarter after asking all my previous instructors for an extension to finish my coursework. Back then, no one understood how much impact a serious brain injury has, and I struggled to retain information in math and science because my memory function was affected. This event was a huge obstacle to what I envisioned as my life story, but like the storybook heroes of my youth, I persevered and kept moving forward, doing what the hero of my own life story would do.

The difference in living your life as the hero of your own story is that you are working toward what matters to you. Obstacles will be on your path, some more difficult than others, but that is what life is. What would a story be without obstacles? There would be no growth, no new experiences. You will find pride in your accomplishments as you see the way you can make things change. It will be a journey.

## Own Your Story

To become the hero of your own life story, it is essential that you BELIEVE it is possible. For those who see themselves as helpless in shaping their destinies, who believe things happen out of luck or chance, or that they just don’t have any control over anything have an external locus of control. This means that they believe that control of their lives comes from external sources.

### Victims

Feel like your life is in the hands of others? Your life would be different if only things people hadn’t let you down, or hadn’t given you what you wanted? Or maybe the world owes you for things that have happened to you. There are plenty of people who feel like they bear no responsibility for life situations and that someone else needs to do something about it.

I have a relative who has not held a job for several decades and depends on an elderly parent to pay for a roof over her head, food, clothing, cell phone, and eating out. She refuses to apply for government assistance, even though she is eligible. She has trashed every house or apartment she has lived in and been evicted several times. She now moves from hotel to hotel, leaving animal excrement and urine embedded in the carpets, food packaging with dried and rotting food, and the stench of rot and decay behind her. She resists suggestions and encouragement of help from others, claiming they are “bossing her around”. She requires an older sibling to drive an hour each way to take her to get food or to move her to her next hotel room, screams at her sister with angry tantrums. It’s not her fault, she says. She is a good person and too many bad things happened to her. Her stressful life has exasperated her rheumatoid arthritis and she has flares. She believes that it is her mother’s and her sister’s responsibility to make sure that she has what she needs.

It’s a sad cycle that has carried on for decades. This person is stuck in a never-ending cycle. Yet, it is a cycle that could end. If you find yourself in a scenario anything like this, there is one simple choice to make to initiate a change in your life story. Accept ownership of your life. Take the responsibility to turn your life into the one you want to live. No matter your circumstances, no matter your challenges, taking ownership is empowering.

### Second Bananas

Do you find yourself feeling like you are giving more to a relationship than you are getting? Are you spending your time as a cheerleader for others’ lives but not your own?

You might be a second banana.

We see them on television and movies all the time. Lucy had Ethel, Batman has Robin, and Michael Scott had Dwight Shrute on *The Office.*

Ethel, Robin, and Dwight are second bananas.

The “second banana” originally described the dynamic of the supporting role of a comedy duo. Always there to lend a helping hand, offer a word of encouragement, and forego their own needs and plans. They are devoted beyond reason.

Ethel’s job was to make Lucy look good. In fact, Lucille Ball required Vivian Vance to be twenty pounds overweight playing Ethel. She always had to be “less than” Lucy for the relationship to work. Robin will always be the sidekick to Batman, and Dwight consistently sought approval from Michael Scott not only because Michael was his boss, but he was also his “hero”.

Second banana fictional characters play a big role in making a storyline work, but can it work for real people? And how do you know if YOU are a second banana?

The problem with being a full-time, real-life second banana is that you do not get to focus your energies, talents, and attention to your own life story. It may a romantic partner, a sibling, a parent, a friend, or a work colleague who has you playing second banana.

The closer you are to this person, the more intrusive the influence may be. The time you may spend as a second banana can range from short-term of a few weeks to long-term that can be decades. You may be going through a vulnerable period and not aware that you have slipped from supportive and caring friend to a second banana.

Being an intuitive and empathetic middle sister, I was prone to yielding to the needs and expectations of my siblings, several whom had narcissistic traits. Because of the relationships in my family and times of emotional and financial vulnerability, I struggled with finding myself as a second banana occasionally. I learned how to recognize when relationships were unbalanced, and I was carrying the support load. People looking for a second banana struggle with self-esteem and have no interest in understanding a friend’s character, abilities, or dreams. Now, I am more careful about investing in relationships. I do not want to be a second banana; I want to be the hero of my own life story.

In case you wonder if you are a second banana, here are some signs you might be one:

* You give up your time and energy working on someone else’s life story and do not have the time and energy left for your own.
* Your time and help are expected not requested.
* You feel like you are always playing “sidekick”.
* You fear losing the relationship if you put yourself first or say “no”.
* You feel like you have to be “less than” or avoid shining.
* You discover that the credit for your ideas and input are stolen.

If you think you may have become a second banana:

1. Take stock of yourself and figure out what you really want to do instead of what you feel obliged to do.
2. Practice assertive behavior. State what you need and stand firm.
3. Work on areas of your life that make you vulnerable.
4. Take steps to find the path of your own life story.
5. Invest in yourself and expand your activities and circle of friends.

### Chapter Summary

## Exercise 1: Where Is Your Locus of Control? Mix these together and enter A or B…Total As and Bs

Leaving our destinies to fate or external sources will never produce a life story that is tailor-made to who we are or what is important to us. If you find that you have an external locus of control, contemplate how it may feel to be able to take control of your life.

Let’s find out where your locus of control lies. It’s important to know because the knowledge can help you better prepare for your hero story. Take a few minutes to respond to the statements on the Locus of Control exercise. There are no right or wrong answers, so don’t overthink your responses. Your gut response works best!

Respond to the following statements with a *T* for *True* or an *F* for *False*. Next, add up the *T*s in each section and enter that number in the blank for *Total* T*s.*

\_\_\_\_ What happens to me depends on my circumstances.

\_\_\_\_ I need to get approval before I take action.

\_\_\_\_ When good things happen, it is because I am having good luck.

\_\_\_\_ The competition makes it too difficult to be successful.

\_\_\_\_ Others let me know what I need to do.

\_\_\_\_ What will be, will be; it’s up to fate.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Total *T*s Section 1

\_\_\_\_ I am responsible for my choices.

\_\_\_\_ I have to rely on myself to make things happen.

\_\_\_\_ Luck doesn’t determine my future.

\_\_\_\_ I listen to advice but make my own decisions.

\_\_\_\_ It’s up to me to make things happen for myself.

\_\_\_\_ I don’t leave things to chance; I work toward something.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Total *T*s Section 2

Enter the totals of each section below.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Total *T*s Section 1 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Total *T*s Section 2

If you have more *T*s in Section 1, you have an **Internal** Locus of Control.

If you have more *T*s in Section 2, you have an **External** Locus of Control.

Fill in the blank. I have an \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Locus of Control.

## What You Own in Your Life

If you have an internal locus of control, you are in a great place to set out to determine your life story. You recognize that you have the control and responsibility for your own fortune and that when you cannot control all the events and circumstances around you, you recognize that you are responsible for making adjustments as the need arises. You are ready to start doing the groundwork toward your life story.

If you have an external locus of control, this knowledge is important to keep in mind while you determine your life story. This mindset will challenge you and be a first opportunity to work on having an open mind as you do the groundwork toward your life story.

The groundwork and foundation of the self-responsibility it takes to change your life story is recognizing your personal ownership.

### Own Your Thoughts

That voice inside your head is yours. You own it. Every word. You may have heard the term “self-talk” and it is just as it sounds. It describes how you talk to yourself. We have reactions to everything we see, hear or feel. The response is so quick that we don’t always recognize that we generate those thoughts based on our past experiences and opinions.

What are you saying to yourself? Are you supportive or are you critical? If you are not familiar with the way you talk to yourself, spend some time listening to your self-talk when you are driving alone in a car. Turn off any music or electronics. You may discover that you say negative things to yourself that you would never say to a friend. The good news is that you can change the way to talk to yourself. Turn the driving exercise around and when driving in a silent car by yourself, say aloud every thought that comes into your mind. It is easier to catch yourself being negative this way, and it is easier to change negative words into affirming and encouraging self-talk.

An exercise I used to do when facilitating a class had to do with being stuck at a long red light or a train crossing when you are running late and feeling pressure to get to work. The common self-talk people share was often: “I’m stupid for leaving so late”, “the boss is going to be so mad”, “I have the worst luck”, or “why do I always mess up?” A way to change that self-talk could be: “The light is red, and there is nothing I can do about that. Getting upset isn’t going to help me. I’ll do my best to hurry in when I get there.”

Because you can control your thoughts, you can own your thoughts.

### Own Your Feelings

If you think your feelings are a result of your thoughts, you are right! Our feelings originate with the thoughts we tell ourselves. Sometimes people brush off responsibility because they “can’t help the way they feel”. Feelings do arise on their own, and we can’t control our feelings directly, but we can control the information that elicits our feelings. Since our thoughts prompt feelings, we can control our feelings by choosing the way we think.

In the scenario about the traffic light, consider the feelings that would be elicited in the initial self-talk. “I’m stupid for leaving so late” may elicit feeling disappointed, depressed, or hopeless. “The boss is going to be so mad” may elicit feeling fear, hurt, embarrassed. You get the picture. When the self-talk is changed to “The light is read, and there is nothing I can do about that”, the feelings are probably more neutral.

Feelings do influence our physical reactions. Take the example of the impact of the self-talk of “The boss is going to be so mad”. The feeling response may be fear. The physiological response to fear is the complex physiological changes that occur during our fight or flight response. Muscles tense, acid may increase in the stomach, blood circulates to the major muscle groups, the heart beats faster, and the mouth may go dry. These responses can have serious long-term health repercussions over time.

Own Your Actions

Since we have ownership over our thoughts and feelings, we also have ownership of our actions. We choose our actions based on our thoughts and feelings. Let’s say we are at the red light. We have choices to make.

Because our feelings are generated by our thoughts, we can have ownership of our feelings too. Let’s say that my self-talk elicited fear of repercussions from my boss. I may decide to run the red light, risking a ticket or an accident (and other potential risks) instead of the risk of dealing with the fear of my boss. Or, I may choose to call the boss to reduce the risk of his anger. Either choice I make is one that I own.

### *I* Statements

I statements demonstrate to others that we own our thoughts and feelings. This is why people in therapy are asked to speak in I statements. Effective I statements start with “I think” or “I feel”. Be careful not to confuse thoughts and feelings in I statements like many people do.

A statement like “I feel that you are not listening to me.” is an I statement about thought. Thoughts are conclusions based on a response to feedback or observation. There would be measurable behaviors that would give an indication that someone is not listening to you. For example, if someone covered his ears, turned away, or hummed loudly when you were talking, those behaviors may lead you to assume that the person is not listening to you.

An accurate I statement would be “I feel disrespected because I think you are not listening to me.” Talking in accurate I statements reinforces your ownership of your thoughts and feelings, especially your self-talk. Without a strong sense of ownership of your own thoughts and feelings, it is difficult to have a sense that you can make essential changes in your life.

### Chapter Summary

## Your Personal Values

Values are the driving force behind what makes a hero and defines heroes within their worlds. One of the key challenges in crafting your own life story is discovering what you stand for. Values influence every faction of our lives, and without being mindful of our values, we live feeling frustrated and unfulfilled. For example, if you value independence, you might feel discomfort in a situation where you have to rely on others or be given direction without being able to give input.

What would Luke Skywalker, The Lone Ranger, or Wonder Woman do without personal values as a guide? In most stories, it is the personal values that determine if a character is a hero or a villain. Then, there are anti-heroes who appeal to us because they have some “redeeming values”.

Examples of Values

Some commonly recognized values include:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Freedom | Power | Respect | Independence |
| Family | Relationships | Achievement | Recognition |
| Security | Knowledge | Influence | Philanthropy |
| Loyalty | Service | Competition | Beauty |
| Nature | Health | Peace | Exploration |
| Prestige | Academics | Religion/Spirituality | Fame |
| Fitness | Justice | Privacy | Patriotism |
| Socializing | Stability |  |  |

### Exercise 2: What Are Your Initial Thoughts?

Each of us could say that we possess every single value, but we don’t shape ourselves from every value. We have priorities that speak to us as individuals. After reading the list, reflect on how you have prioritized things in your life and select 3 or 4 values that speak to you. No rhyme or reason is necessary. Jot each down in the following spaces.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1. |  |
| 2. |  |
| 3. |  |
| 4. |  |

## How Values Impact Your Life Story

The foundation of your life story is based on your own personal values. While there are many values that we all share as a society, your personal values are the ones that matter to you the most. Throughout your life so far, you have garnered a sense of what you value based on your experiences. Using those values as the foundation of our life stories gives us the opportunity to make our life stories tailored to who we are. Being aware of your values not only gives you a reference for decisions throughout your life story, but it also impacts your stress level, and potentially, it can impact your health.

### Out of Sync with Your Personal Values?

When we think about having a life of purpose and meaning, we envision a peacefulness, a confidence and a self-assurance about us as we move through our days. Our bodies are looking for that state as well. It’s called *homeostasis*. When we are in homeostasis, there are no stressors that threaten our state of being. Think of being in homeostasis as being in a sailboat on a smooth, glassy water. Nothing to rock the boat. Not a ripple in sight. We are free to enjoy the sights, think our thoughts, feel the sun, and relax. Stressors come into our lives like motorboats that pass by. Some are small jon boats with small engines or even a small paddling of ducks. They create small ripples that create a little bit of interest and variety just as small surprises or problems do for us. Then, there are medium-size stressors that create larger waves for us. Good events or bad events, they impact our homeostasis. Larger impacts can be made from events that recognized as life changing. Being accepted into a desired collage program can create a wave in the same way that the loss of a well-paying job can.

Our bodies are impacted by stress even when we are not aware that we are under stress. Our bodies are preparing for “fight or flight” regardless of the stressor. Since modern conventions don’t really provide us with the opportunity to fight or run away physically, the stress and the physiological responses can remain and build. Without a physical release like exercise or making changes in our situation, the physiological responses can eventually lead to long-term injury or illness that include ulcers and heart conditions.

When we have a life story in sync with our values, our experiences with stressors changes. So many stressors occur because we are not living in sync with our personal values.

### Explore Signs of Your Personal Values

Internal Clues

* Signs of Discomfort
* Signs of Joy
* What instills passion

External Clues

* What others say
* How you spend your time

### Internal Clues

### Discomfort

One way to discover your personal values is to consider situations that give you a sense of discomfort. We may be following a goal or even what we may consider a personal value in our lives. One of the interesting things about life is that we often don’t realize what really matters to us. We have a tendency to listen to others’ ideas for us, follow an obvious path, or a socially acceptable path. We may be pursuing a goal but not aware of different paths to attain that goal. Usually, we just “put up and shut up” and take the “mind over matter” approach. Fortunately for us, our bodies are never at rest and ready to give us clues if we would only listen to it. When things are quite right for us, our bodies know, but they can only communicate to us through discomfort.

How do we recognize discomfort in a situation? Here are some examples of ways your body may be trying to tell you something through discomfort.

Signs of Discomfort

Tense muscles

Shallow, short, fast breathing

Stomachaches

Restlessness

Fast heart rate

Gut feeling (Intuition)

Note:

Something I Learned

I once had a job that eventually required that I travel across the country delivering training. Although I enjoyed visiting different cities and meeting the interesting people, my enjoyment was limited. I had young children at home, and I wanted to be home with them. The time I was most conflicted was when my youngest son had the lead in his 4-year-old preschool Holiday show. At the hour the show started, I was sitting on the tarmac at Dulles Airport on a plane headed to Seattle. My stomach was upset, my muscles were tense, and my head ached. Most of all, I felt overwhelmed and helpless. I recall asking myself, “What am I doing?”.

### Exercise 3: When Do You Feel Discomfort

List signs of discomfort you have experienced and the situations where you felt those signs of discomfort.

1. Sign of discomfort: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Situation: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Sign of discomfort: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Situation: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Sign of discomfort: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Situation: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What do these answers tell you about your personal values?

### Joy

Another way to recognize your personal values is to look at how you spend your time by what activities give you joy. How do we seek out things to do that give us moments of positive feelings? We often make choices that we are not aware of that give us these clues. We may not realize that we are getting joy from these activities until we reflect on it.

Do you tinker with a car? Crochet? Volunteer on a hotline? Do you go to yard sales and revitalize old objects? It is not the activity itself that gives us a clue, but it is the motivation or the emotional pay off we receive. Someone who crochets may enjoy the peacefulness, quiet and alone time, thinking about donating crocheted items to a charity, or sharing tips and ideas with a social crochet club.

Sometimes we are not aware of where we find joy in our daily lives because we get so bogged down in getting through our days, our weeks, or months. We may have hobbies or past times that may or may not give us a sense of joy. What do I mean by a “sense of joy”? I am talking about moments where you are 100 percent present and the worries that dance in your mind do not exist. The people, places, things, or experiences that give us joy can give us clues to what we value and need in our lives.

When my kids were older, my youngest son and I were on a drive in the country when we came across a sale barn where I discovered my heart horse. He was a retired cutting horse who had arthritis with a deep red coat, long graceful neck, rippling muscles, a half-moon, a stripe and a snip down his face. His eyes were deep brown and soulful. On Saturdays, when I went to the barn to see him, I felt as if I had stepped into a Zen temple. All my thoughts, concerns and worries drained from me into the sawdust floor. I could stand in front of him, wrap my arms at the base of his arched neck and shoulders, press my head against his cheek and melt into him. There was no better medicine than wrapping my arms around the neck of a big, red horse. That was pure joy for me.

Something I Learned

### Exercise 4: Where Is Your Joy?

To discover some ways you find joy, quietly reflect on the following questions and jot down your responses. Think about your gut responses to the following questions and write at least two responses.

What gives you a sense of peace?

What people or living beings give you comfort?

What do you daydream about?

What do these answers tell you about your personal values?

### Passion

Passion is different than joy in that passion is a driving force while joy is a calm, content feeling.

Each of us has at least one passion. What injustices rile you? Is it the demise of our planet? Is it unfair laws? Or, do you have a passion that drives you? Are you a musician? A painter? A poet? A teacher?

Of course, there are plenty of injustices to feel passionate about, but we can’t be passionate about all of them – we just don’t have the capacity. So, we must choose. When we narrow down our passions, we can discover that behind our passions lies a value that can bring us meaning.

### Exercise 5: What Instills Your Passion?

What topics excite you to talk about?

What are you willing to fight for?

List your personal passions.

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3. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What does this tell you about your personal values? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

## The World’s View

Sometimes we can learn about ourselves from external sources. Our experiences and the impressions or impacts we leave on others can tell us things about ourselves that we may not be aware of.

### What Others Say

One of the ways that we learn about heroes in stories is from what other characters say about them. Harry Potter did not have confidence until he had people around him who told him that he was special. You may have people around you that can see ways that you are special in ways that you may not know. In our culture, we don’t usually share with our friends what unique traits make them special.

I recently heard a story about a woman who was miserable in high school because she didn’t have any friends. She felt unwelcome and not accepted by her peers. When she found her high school yearbook, she discovered that so many people wrote in her pages that she had inspired them, made a difference for them, or appreciated her. She was dumbfounded to learn that not only did others like her, but they also saw qualities in her that she had not realized.

I visited with a college friend this week whom I hadn’t seen in decades; we lived on opposite coasts, and she was visiting her aunt an hour north of me. We had been in the pre-vet animal science program together at Virginia Tech as freshmen. Back then, there were no buses on campus, so when we discovered that the animal science lab classes were a good distance from campus, out in the fields, we asked each other, “how are we going to get there?” My friend volunteered, “I have a bike!”. And she rode me on her handlebars to the barns and back at least once a week for a quarter. I was able to tell her aunt this story about her niece’s generosity and loyalty (and fitness, too!). My friend was able to see qualities in herself through my eyes. And she revealed some of my qualities in her stories too.

In addition to stories from others, we can learn about what people think of us when we overhear them. Think about when you were a child and you feigned sleep to listen to the grownups. Or, we may hear something when a friend introduces us to someone new.

"It is as hard to see one's self as to look backwards without turning around," wrote Henry David Thoreau.

Learning about choices you have made, things you have said, things that you have done that have left impressions on others allow us to see who we are that we may have never seen. To become aware of these things will take some work. It will take reflection on recalling what others have said, and it will take some research on your part. Invest in the time to talk to people whom you believe know you well and whom you trust. Remember that the goal is awareness and any insight we can garner from others is a gift toward creating a life that suits you specifically. Remember, too, that we need to know our shortcomings or struggles as well as our triumphs. If you hear something that challenges you, receive it as that gift and use it to incorporate a lifestyle that maximizes what you may consider a weakness or shortcoming.

### Lessons Learned

We also learn more about our personal values from our experiences. These lessons may come from previous jobs, volunteer work, relationships, or subjects we have studied. As we go through life, we continue to grow in our experiences and become exposed to new things. With the internet, we can become exposed to information we may have never seen or read otherwise.

At the end of projects, project managers hold a lessons-learned meeting. The goal is to garner information that would be helpful in similar circumstances in the future.

Is there something you learned from a job, a vacation, a relationship that shown you something that you value? I learned how important respect on a job was to me after leaving a project at the Defense Security Service Front Office. In that office, the Acting Chief of Staff and the Executive Officer demonstrated a respect for me and my role that gave me the sense that they would have my back if I ever had an issue reinforcing guidelines. They trusted and respected me as a professional and if I said something was true, they were behind it. Not long after that, I had moved to the Seattle area and worked in a training group at Boeing. I received the opposite response form a much more junior-level.

Think of personal values you discovered in your life experiences.

### Chapter Summary

### Exercise 6: What You Didn’t Know

Take some time to reflect on what you may not know about yourself. There are hidden gems in that information that could give you the confidence in ways that you never expected.

Part 1: Create an environment where you can reflect comfortably to recall what you have heard others say about you. It may have been things you heard as a child from a relative or a teacher. It may also be behaviors that these people had that gave you a sense of having their trust or appreciation. Take about 10 to 15 minutes to reflect and then write these down. As you think of additional things in the future, add them to the list. We are constantly learning more about ourselves.

Hint: Thank about parents, teachers, aunts, uncles, grandparents, neighbors, bosses, co-workers, friends, boyfriends, girlfriends, coaches and more.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Part 2: Research responses from parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, friends. Think of those who knew you well and whom you can trust.

Hint: Ask “What are some of my strengths?”, or “what was I passionate about when you knew me?” or what was I passionate about when I was a child?”

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What does this tell you about your personal values?

## Putting It All Together

**tie everything up and end on a positive note. Encourage the reader to start implementing these actions immediately. Ideally, at the end of each chapter, you’ll give the reader an assignment to complete.**

Based on your discoveries in these exercises, you can learn more about what most matters to you personally. Narrowing down your personal values to a number of five or six is the foundation of building a life of meaning. These values are the requirements you need in your life to have fulfillment and propel you to meet your personal goals.

So, let’s put it all together and reflect what we can garner about ourselves from the exercises.

What I Learned

Things that give me discomfort:

* Being away from loved ones
* Micromanagement
* Lack of fitness
* Not having a voice
* Not feeling emotionally or physically safe

Things I am passionate about:

* Advocating for animals
* Supporting others’ dreams
* Improving communication
* Sharing what I have learned

Things that give me joy:

* Being around animals
* Being fit and strong
* Being creative
* Storytelling
* Being in charge of my time
* Helping others

What I learned from others:

* I am a free spirit
* I am persistent
* I am creative
* I create a positive learning environment

### Exercise 7: Put It All Together

From this, I choose the following values to represent what I need in my life:

* Freedom
* Safety/security
* Relationships (people and animals)
* Fitness
* Creativity
* Stewardship of animals

Write down your results.

Things that give me discomfort:

* \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
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Things I am passionate about:

* \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
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Things that give me joy:

* \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
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What I learned from others:

* \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
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From this, I choose the following values to represent what I need in my life:

1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
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In *Think About This: Values*, you selected several values that rang true to you. With the introspection that you have gained, think about what each of those values means to you.

For me, safety/security rings true as a value, and it takes on a personal meaning based on my life. Having moved around most of my life, I didn’t have consistency and didn’t feel like I had a “home”. And, “home” to me means a place where I can unpack boxes, paint walls, and bury the ashes of my beloved animals. A place where I can grow and feel safe. “Safe” because I have personal experience with not feeling safe physically.

I spent over seven years to create that sense of home and safety. I selected the land, the house plan, and every color, appliance, and material. And it feels safe to me because I am half a mile from the road, with a locked gate, surrounded by enormous evergreens, and I have two large Great Pyrenees that are dedicated to my personal safety.

I also have “freedom” as a value. For me, freedom means several things in my life. One of those is my need for freedom to move about and not be stuck sitting in a chair all day while a manager counts butts in their seats. I feel restless and need to get up, move around to generate creativity and to have interactions throughout my day. I found that working remotely gives me the freedom to meet both my work goals and my person goals.

### Exercise 8: What Do Your Values Mean to You?

Select two or three values that you identified as ringing true to you on page X, and reflect on the reason. Listen to your gut and feel the feelings. Use this space to identify the root (the experience and associated feelings) and then identify the need that value generates for you. A single value can be expressed in multiple ways in your life. For example, the value of *Freedom* can mean freedom of movement and freedom to make one’s own choices.

Value 1: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Root 1: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Need 1: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Root 2: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Need 2: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Value 2: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Root 1: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Need 1: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Root 2: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Need 2: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Value 3: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Root 1: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Need 1: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Root 2: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Need 2: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

# PART 2: The Hero’s World

## Assess Your Circumstances

## Your Circumstances

As the hero of your own life story, you do not stand alone in a neutral environment. Look around you. The circumstances of our lives don’t need to make or break our chances for achieving our goals, but they do impact them. Your life story is impacted by the people in your life (characters), your environment, your resources, and your skills.

Every story has more elements than the plot. There are other characters, the environment, and the hero’s resources. Without considering these elements in your life, your goals may become only dreams.

Consider how Harry Potter could have met his goals without the support of Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley. Harry also had the greater community of the Weasley family, Hogwart’s student body, and his mentors, Professors Dumbledore and McGonigall. Harry’s goals were detoured and influenced by his foes, the Malfoys and Lord Voldemort, and his obstacles were both overcome and generated by magical resources in his environment.

If you are not familiar with the Harry Potter series, think about the Lord of the Rings trilogy. Frodo Baggins’ journey would not be the same without Samwise by his side or the sidekicks Merry and Pippin. Frodo’s journey eventually became a quest with the support Aragorn and Boromir, Legolas the Elf, and Gimli the Dwarf. The ups and downs and ins and outs of the paths to the milestones on the way to that one great goal to drop the ring into Mount Doom are influenced by Gandalf’s mentorship, and the villains Gollum and Sauron.

Both Harry Potter and Frodo Baggins came from backgrounds with few resources; they had neither wealth nor power. Imagine their stories if they had wealth and power to accomplish their goals. We can guess that it would have taken less time and sacrifice on their parts to accomplish those goals. Of course, their stories would not be as engaging nor compelling without having to overcome the multitude of challenges that they encountered.

We often see individuals who come from families of wealth and influence and given opportunities hosting morning talk shows or owning billion-dollar businesses. Their successes don’t necessarily mean that these people have talent or intelligence beyond others, but that they may have been able to meet their goals more quickly through family wealth and influence. Most of us have years of work to get ourselves through the challenges that bring us the growth and resources to meet our goals.

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Without challenges, we don’t have personal growth. The life story for a hero is impacted by many factors:

* The cast of characters
* The environment
* Personal skills and resources
* Obstacles

## The Cast of Characters

The hero, the protagonist, isn’t the only character in the hero’s story. These characters influence the hero, the hero’s choices, and the hero’s story.

### The Environment

## Value Conflicts

## Obstacles

## Overcoming Obstacles- What you can control, what you can’t control

When you can’t change a circumstance, how can you change yourself?/

## Create Your Life Story Plan

# PART 2: THE LIFE STORY

### Your Life Story

First, your life story is a series of events and milestones throughout your life. In books and movies, this is the plot of the story. The reason the plot in books and movies works out is because a writer is designing and crafting it. It doesn’t “just happen”. When you become the hero of your own life story, you become the writer as well as the protagonist of the story.

Second, when you take ownership to designs and craft your life story, it becomes a fit exactly right for you. It’s like wearing a custom-made suit instead of a “one size fits all” suit. It’s comfortable, you can move easily through your day in it, and you feel more confident and successful.

INSET: The less control we have in a situation, the more stress we have.

## Turn Values into Goals

This section focuses on building a balanced life based on your personal values. This means carving out time in your life to include the things that matter to you. From the work you have done to discover your primary personal values, you can create a plan to include activities that give you the opportunity to live a life that satisfies you. As you think about activities you want to include in your life, be honest to yourself, don’t edit yourself, and be open. There are no right or wrong answers.

### Creating Goals

As you work on the exercises in this section, focus is on what is possible, not on what exists. This is where you do the work to realize how you can bring your personal values into real life experiences. Even when you may currently have realized some personal values in your life, this is the time to pull in the big and the small ideas to round out your life experience and bring a balance. I have some personal values that aren’t “big” concept values, but they are things I value. I feel something missing when I am not spending time living out those values.

There was a time when I regularly worked out and I enjoyed feeling strong and energetic. I valued fitness. As “life got in the way” as the saying goes, I fell out of the habits that gave me fitness. So, for me, a goal to support my personal value of fitness would be to “become fit”. The definition of that and what it looks like is up to me.

As you work through your personal values to generate ideas on how you can create goals that support those values, allow yourself to be the expert on YOU. Push out all self-talk about what goals “should” look like. Practice ownership of your ideas and your knowledge of yourself. Trust yourself. No one needs to see your goals, and no one will judge them.

### Life Areas

Like most people, you probably have multiple areas of your life that you would like to devote your time to, but you find yourself finding some of those areas neglected. To live a well-rounded life that gives you the satisfaction and meaning that you long for, setting goals for each of those life areas creates the opportunity to move forward with assurance that the full life that your mind’s eye envisions can be attainable. The foundation life areas to devote your time and focus on are:

* Physical - Health/Beauty
* Emotional
* Mental
* Professional
* Social
* Spiritual

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Foundation Life Area | Examples of Personal Values | Possible Goals |
| Professional | Career, Accomplishments, Recognition, Achievement,  Expertise, Financial Compensation | Become certified as a Microsoft System Administrator; Make a 6-figure income; Give a Ted Talk |
| Personal | Relationships, Family, Financial Security, Service, Humor, Authority, Justice | Have a child; Live within an hour of grown children; Create a non-profit organization; Be in charge of planning a family vacation |
| Mental | Intellect, Curiosity, Knowledge, Education, | Learn how to speak a foreign language; Read The Great Books; Take a self-improvement class |
| Physical | Health, Fitness, Condition, Appearance |  |
| Emotional | Emotional Security, Safety, Love, Respect, Freedom |  |
| Spiritual | Religion, Love, Sacrifice, Service, Nature |  |

You may have values that may or not be attributed to more than one foundation life area. For example, “Security” may refer to financial security, emotional security, or physical security. “Freedom” may refer to physical freedom, financial freedom, professional freedom, or emotional freedom. The important factor is that you are aware of the types of security or freedom that you need.

### The Body – Mind Connection

### Exercise 9: Generate Your Activity Goals

In *Exercise 8: What Do Your Values Mean to You?*, you evaluated what your personal values mean to you. In this exercise, take what you wrote in the *Need* field for each value and brainstorm ideas that would satisfy that need.

1. In the *Need* field, write down a need from Exercise 8.
2. In the *Ideas* field, write your brainstormed ideas.
3. Consider which idea best works for you and write it in the *Activity* field.

For example, for my personal value of freedom, I realized that I need to get up to generate creativity and to have interactions throughout my day. I found that working remotely gives me the freedom to meet both my work goals and my person goals.

Need #1\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Ideas\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Need #2\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Ideas\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Activity\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Need #3\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Ideas\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Activity\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

## Create Milestones

To prepare to meet your activity goals, build in milestones that make each goal possible. Milestones are the activities that set you up to meet your personal value activity goals. In my example, my activity goal to satisfy the need to get up to generate creativity and to have interactions throughout my day was to work remotely.

The activity of working remotely doesn’t just happen. To determine the steps to make that activity happen, I work backward from the activity goal. Working backward from the goal of working remotely, there are steps I would need to take to make that happen. Some of those steps could be:

* Search for and find a job that is remote
* Prepare for the qualifications of the job
* Set up a home office
* Apply for the remote job

Each of these steps become a milestone. Each milestone may have steps to prepare to meet the milestone. In this section, you will analyze your goals, identify your milestones, and generate activities to meet each milestone.

The milestone *Prepare for the qualifications of the job* may have the following tasks:

* Research the qualifications needed
* Find an online course or workshop to gain a skill or certificate
* Sign up for the course or workshop
* Take the course or the workshop

The milestone *Set up a home office* may have the following tasks:

* Evaluate what is needed
* Purchase materials, software, and equipment
* Set up equipment
* Become familiar with the software and equipment

### Exercise 10: Create Milestones and Tasks

For each activity goal in Exercise 9, generate the milestones and the tasks that support each milestone.

Activity Goal #1

Milestone #1

Task #1

Task #2

Task #3

Milestone #2

Task #1

Task #2

Task #3

Milestone #3

Task #1

Task #2

Task #3

Activity Goal #2

Milestone #1

Task #1

Task #2

Task #3

Milestone #2

Task #1

Task #2

Task #3

Milestone #3

Task #1

Task #2

Task #3

Activity Goal #3

Milestone #1

Task #1

Task #2

Task #3

Milestone #2

Task #1

Task #2

Task #3

Milestone #3

Task #1

Task #2

Task #3

# PART 3: THE JOURNEY

Now you have some milestones set, and you are ready to be on your way to living the life that gives you meaning and purpose. If only life was so easy that we just needed to take a step toward your milestones without any issues or challenges, but that just isn’t so. The journey is full of challenges and drama.