

The Not So Big Life

Chapter Three: Identifying What Isn't Working

Your Turn: Heart's Desire

Bring to mind something that you recently set your heart on owning - whether it is something now in your possession or something you are still longing to have. Now turn that thing around in your mind's eye. What is it about this thing that so seduces you? Do you believe that it will improve your image? Do you believe that people who own this type of thing are more respected? Do you believe that you need this thing in order to live in the manner to which you would like to become accustomed? Is it something you believe to be beautiful? Or is it something that will allow you to do something that you currently are unable to do?

Exercise: Understanding Your Relationship to Time

It's time now for you to take a good hard look at yourself, and at your own relationship to time. Keep in mind that for things to change, you must start from the place that you are right now in your life. It requires no other preparation. The important step is simply to begin.

First, try to really understand the way your life is organized at the present time—how you live day to day, and how you orient yourself with respect to time. For this we need some data, and the best way to get it is to ask yourself the following questions. If other questions occur to you as you answer these, feel free to expand upon the list and tailor it to your own life circumstances. Use your notebook to record your answers under the heading "Chapter 3 Exercise: Time Orientation Questionnaire."

By undertaking this exercise, you are really assembling the raw material with which to evaluate your life's relative balance. Don't be too shocked when you discover discrepancies both from the way you thought you were living, and from the way you wish you could be living. For most of us who don't normally look at our lives in this way, the difference between what we think is happening and what is actually happening can be overwhelming.

But this is not a time for resignation. Simply entertaining the exercise is the first step towards reconfiguration, but it won't come all at once, and you won't be personally responsible for its implementation. When you start to see imbalances in the system, and when you recognize the desire for a more integrated, balanced and meaningful existence, things will automatically begin to shift. When you perceive the possibility for

change, providence moves to support that perception. Watch as things shift over the next few months, and you'll discover that the results provide you with your own personal window into the dynamics of consciousness in action.

You may want to designate an hour or two some evening or weekend when you can devote yourself to the exercise without interruption. If at any point you find yourself getting bogged down, skip ahead and come back to the troublesome question or questions later. This exercise is only a valuable tool if it helps you to see yourself. If it causes consternation, it's not serving its purpose.

Time Orientation Questionnaire

General Relationship to Time

- How much "time-clutter" fills your day? Make a list of the things that seem superfluous or unnecessary.
- Would you characterize your own pace as fast, slow or somewhere in between?
- How do you prioritize what you do during your day?
- Are you a list keeper? If so, how do you relate to that list? Is it a tool that helps you to organize your day, or has it become a burden?
- Do you do the things you enjoy the most first or last, or somewhere in between?
- Is your general approach to the things you engage efficient, inefficient or somewhere in between? What makes it so?

- Is your general approach to the things you engage effective, ineffective or somewhere in between? What makes it so?
- Do you feel awkward when you find yourself with time to spare?
- What would you do if you *did* have time to spare?

Sleeping

- How much sleep do you get typically?
- Does your weekend sleep schedule differ dramatically from your weekday schedule?
- What are your attitudes and beliefs about sleep?
- Are you aware of how much sleep your body really needs in order to feel fresh and rested the next morning?
- How does this compare with the amount of sleep you are typically getting?

- Have there been periods of your life when you have had difficulty sleeping? What did you learn from these periods?
- Do you remember your dreams often?
- Do you wish you had more time to sleep?
- Do you think you sleep too little or too much?
- Are you a “morning” person or an “evening” person?
- How does this orientation affect your sleeping patterns?
- Have you ever experimented with intentionally changing the time you go to bed and the time you rise? If so, what did you learn?
- Do you look forward to going to bed? Do you know why this is the case?
- Do you look forward to getting up in the morning? Do you know why this is the case?

Adrenal Stimulants

- What are your favorite “Nut” generators?
- Do you consume significant quantities of caffeine each day? If so, in what forms?
- Do you consume significant quantities of sugar each day? If so, in what forms?
- Are there any other drugs or stimulants that you depend upon to keep you alert during the day? If so, what are they?
- Are there any other drugs or intoxicants that you depend upon to help you calm down after an over-stimulated day? If so, what are they?
- Are any of the above being consumed in quantities that suggest addiction?
- If so, what would be a more appropriate quantity for balance?
- What do these adrenalin producers or suppressers do for you?
- Have you ever tried shifting your behavior patterns related to them?

- If so, what did you notice about the quality of your day?

Physical Exercise

- Do you engage in a regular form of exercise?

- If so, what type and how often?

- How long do you exercise for?

- How much difference is there between your plans for exercising, and what really happens?

- Why do you exercise? Is it an obligation, a way to discharge, or a way to make yourself more alert?

- Do you enjoy the form of exercise that you do, or do you do it only because it is supposed to be good for you?

- Does it give you an opportunity to get outside?

- Does it give you a chance to engage in a team activity?

- Does it provide an opportunity for social interaction, or is it a time to be alone for a while?
- What are your beliefs about exercise?
- Do you struggle with exercise in any way? If so, how?
- Do you over-exercise? If so, why do you think this is? What would be a more appropriate amount for balance?

Relaxing

- What do you do to relax?
- When do you relax?
- Do you have unscheduled time with your spouse or significant other? (Pets count too).
- If so, when does this time usually occur, and what are some of the things you tend to do during that time?
- Do you have unscheduled time with your children?

- If so, when does this time usually occur, and what are some of the things you tend to do during that time?
- How often do you take vacations?
- How long are the vacations you typically take?
- Do you take vacations alone or with others?
- Do you find vacations relaxing or taxing, exciting or frustrating, or none of the above?
- What are your goals for the vacations you typically take, and do they meet those expectations?
- Are there any observations you have made about your “normal” life, upon returning from a vacation?
- Are there any changes you have made in the past based on these observations?

Screen Time

- What do you watch on TV and or web?

- How much TV/web watching do you do and when?
- Do you turn on the TV for background noise, even when you aren't watching?
- Does your spouse use the TV differently than you would if left to your own devices?
- Do you have the TV on while you eat?
- Do you get the munchies when you watch TV?
- Respond to the same questions for your children.
- Respond to the same questions with respect to computer and mobile device usage while at home
- How often do you check your phone for messages, alerts etc.?
- What would life be like if you turned off the TV/computer/smart phone?
- What else could you do with that time?

Working

- Is success preoccupying you?
- Do you like or dislike your job?
- Do you like or dislike your immediate supervisor?
- Do you enjoy the company of the people you work with?
- Do you work from home? If so, are there any problems associated with this?
- Do you prefer to work at home or away from the home?
- How far is your place of work from your home?
- How long is your commute each day?
- Do you drive or take some form of public transportation?
- Do you engage in any other activities during your commute? If so what are these?

- Do you put in more hours than your coworkers? If so why?
- How many hours a week are you at work?
- Is your job particularly stressful? If so, what makes it so?
- How many people do you interact with on a typical day?
- What gadgets, gizmos and devices do you use on a regular basis?
- What have you discovered about their use?
- Do you find any of these devices running you rather than being a helpful tool?
- How many phone calls do you receive in a day?
- How many phone calls do you answer in a day?
- How many emails do you receive in a day?

- How many emails do you answer in a day?
- How many meetings are there in a typical day for you?
- How much time do you really have to accomplish what you are hired to do?
- Do you bring work home to do in the evenings or on weekends? If so, why?
- Do you consider yourself a workaholic?
- Have others implied or explicitly stated that you are a workaholic, even if you don't perceive yourself that way?
- Do you consider yourself lazy?
- Do you consider yourself a procrastinator?
- Write down your weekly schedule.
- What are the underlying beliefs behind your schedule?

Other Involvements

- Do you engage in any evening and weekend activities?
- Do you often have friends or business associates over for dinner?
- Do these occasions make you tense, or do they relax you?
- Do you have any objectives in organizing these events, or are they for fun?
- Are you involved in any extra-curricular activities associated with your children, such as attending sporting events, or taxiing from place to place?
- If so, when and how much time per week is devoted to these kinds of involvements?
- Do you have any passions that you regularly pursue outside of your job?
- If so, how much time do you spend engaging in these activities?
- If not, are there things you'd like to be doing, but have never made time for?
- Do you engage in any hobbies, or are you a collector of some kind?

- If so, when, and how much time do you spend?
- Are there other activities in your life that aren't covered by any of the above topics?
- If so, identify when they take place, how much time is devoted to them, and what purpose they fill in your life.
- With any of the above, do you engage in them excessively? If so, what would be a more appropriate way of engaging?

Aspirations

- Does the way you live now resemble the life you aspired to when you were younger?
- How would you change that picture to more accurately depict your longings?
- What makes you feel most alive?
- Does this have any relationship to the things you do each day?
- What engagements and activities would you like to "retire" from things because they have lost their meaning?

- Do you have something you love to do that you are putting off until you retire or until you've accomplished some other goal?
- Do you ever plan to retire?
- If not, what are your reasons? Do you love what you do? Do you have trouble imagining what you would do if you didn't work? Or is there some other reason?
- If you plan to retire, at what age do you plan to do so? How many years is that from now?
- Is the way you are living in alignment with your longings for meaning and significance?
- What are you not fully engaging right now that you wish you had time for?

With your answers to all the above questions, you now have the raw material with which to evaluate your life's relative balance. As you proceed, your primary objective is to be on the lookout for patterns of time use that necessitate multi-tasking and rushing, or that bring on procrastination and resistance. These are areas where there's work to be done to bring things into balance, so that you can engage each activity wholeheartedly, without the current splitting of attention.