

Life Vision / Values Exploration

Worksheet

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The below is a series of optional exercises that some people find helpful in clarifying or updating their individual purpose and values. It is designed to accompany my Every piece, [*In Defense of Radical Self-Betterment*](#)—particularly the section titled “Step 1: Articulate your vision”. Not every exercise will be helpful to everyone, so feel free to pick and choose the ones that speak to you, or adapt them in whatever way will help you connect with what’s important and dear to you.

Exercise 1.

- a) *Highest highs:* Looking back on your life, what are some times when you’ve felt most alive, energized, like there was nowhere else you’d rather be and nothing else you’d rather be doing? Close your eyes and travel back to some of those times. Anything they have in common? What were you working on? How? Where? With whom? What were you feeling, and why?

- b) *Lowest lows:* When have you felt the most depleted, burnt out, distressed, self-doubting, such that it was hard to keep going? Close your eyes and travel back to some of those times. Anything they have in common? What were you doing, how, and with whom? What words of wisdom, guidance, or inspiration would you want to share with your then self, if you could go back now?

Exercise 2.

(Note: If you notice any confusing or particularly fraught emotions while filling out this exercise, you may consider setting them aside for now and using the “[Self-coaching worksheet](#)” to work through them when you can.)

Notice, without analysis or judgment, any emotions you’re feeling right now, or have felt in recent days. Check off the **three or four that resonate the most**, or feel free to write in others that aren’t on the list.

For each emotion you check, fill in the sentence: “I feel X because I care about _____. ” E.g.:

- “I feel nervous... because I care about connecting with like-minded people (and therefore don’t want to screw it up).”
- “I feel sad... because I care about my friend (who is terminally ill).”

If no value comes to mind: is there any other emotion hidden under this one (e.g., anger or fear under boredom, longing under guilt, etc), for which you can fill in the blank?

For each value you identify: How important is it, in your considered judgment? Are there any deeper underlying values that make it important to you?

X	I feel/have felt....	Because I care about...	This is (slightly/somewhat/very) important to me because...
	Excited		
	Hopeful		
	Proud		
	Satisfied		
	Interested		
	Disappointed		
	Sad		
	Afraid		
	Angry		
	Frustrated		
	Nervous		
	Irritable		
	Impatient		
	Inspired		
	Grateful		
	Determined		
	Ashamed		
	Lonely		

	Bored		
	Disgusted		
	Anxious		

Exercise 3.

Imagine you just celebrated your 100th birthday, and you're writing a memoir reflecting back on your life and how you've lived it.

How would you like to be able to say you've lived your life, supposing psychological barriers weren't an issue? What kinds of stories would you like to be able to tell? What would you like the "narrative arch" of your life to look like, from here onward? (See also the "Values Based Roadmap" exercise below)

In particular: what would you like to be able to say about how you approached this current chapter of your life, and what it meant to you in the grand scheme of your life's narrative?

E.g., what kinds of choices will you have made, and what kind of person will they have helped you become? What kinds of challenges will you have faced, and what kinds of actions will you have taken in the face of them? What kinds of relationships will you have built, and how will those relationships have impacted your life? etc.

Note: This is not a question about what you *currently expect* to be able to say, but about what you would *ideally like* to be able to say, in your personal best case scenario. That said, this is not meant to be an easy exercise, and in many cases it may bring up difficult emotions (e.g., to the extent that you don't feel like you're currently on track toward your best case scenario, or you don't have as clear an idea of your best case scenario as you'd like). These feelings are healthy, and there is courage in persevering through them.

4. *Other clues to consider:*

- What chokes you up? What are the stories, movie scenes, memories, moments, etc that make you unexpectedly sentimental, and what is it about them?
- Who are your particular heroes, and what is it about them?
- For what or whom are you willing to feel the most uncomfortable or take the greatest risks? Why?
- What are you proudest of, out of everything you've done to date? Why?
- If you run a company or belong to an organization whose core values resonate with you: which of them resonate most strongly? Why? For any that resonate less: what competing or complementary values of yours might be driving this?

Map of valued activities

(Adapted from an exercise originally developed in collaboration with Gregory Salmieri, Ph.D.)

Write out the 5-10 most valued activities you engage in *or would like* to engage in on a regular basis. Put a “+\$” by any activities that provide (or could provide) some form of remuneration, and a “-\$” for any activities that cost money. You can optionally put more or fewer \$’s to indicate the relative magnitudes involved. If an activity neither earns nor costs money, you can leave it blank or put an “F” for “free”.

Next, draw arrows to indicate any activities that enable and/or support any of the other activities, whether financially or in other ways.

Finally, look over the map you’ve drawn. Are there any notable “clusters” of activities with lots of arrows pointing to and from them? Can you think of any core value themes that relate these activities? For any activities that don’t have arrows pointing to or from them, are there any arrows that could be forged? How many double-headed arrows did you end up with, and what do you notice about those activities?

Core Values Blueprint

Based on the exercises you completed above, try to identify the 3-5 valued activities, pursuits, or qualities of experience that would together constitute a happy, fully-lived life for you. It might help to start with a longer list of specific pursuits or valued aspirations, as in my linked example below, and then try to boil them down to a handful of core ingredients.

Try to go beyond generic value statements to personalized descriptions that are highly stylized to *you*, so that a friend who knows you well could pick you out of a lineup based on your core values blueprint. You should also find that your core values naturally flow from and reinforce each other, so that leveling up on any one of them tends to level up the others (and vice versa, unfortunately).

As an example, [here's](#) my own latest pass at this exercise, including my longer list and then the 5 distilled “core” values I narrowed it down to. Obviously yours will be different, so try not to over-index on mine!

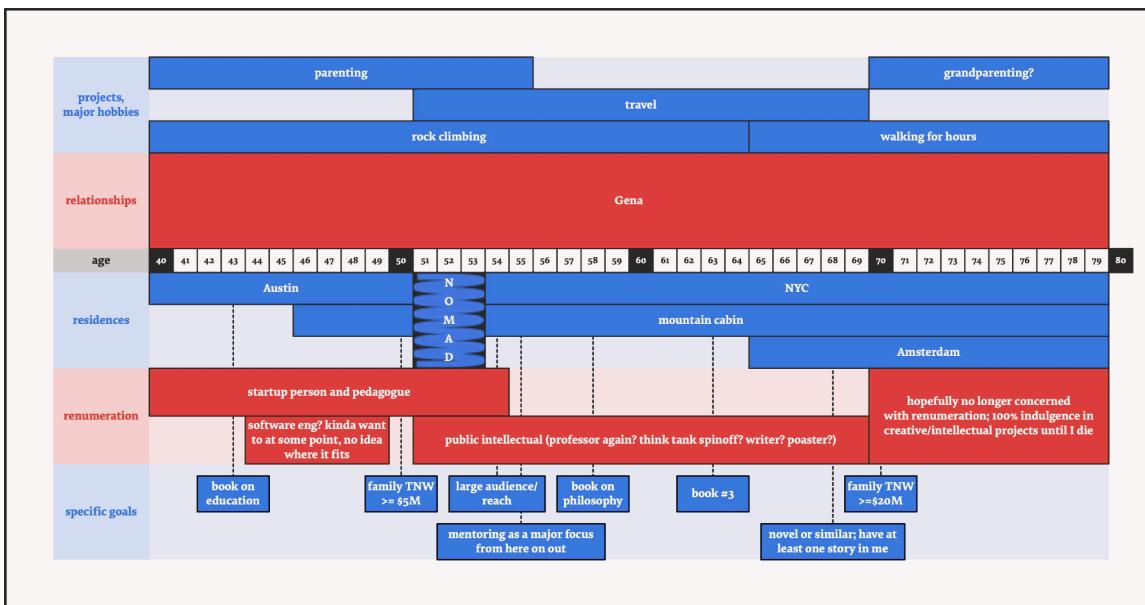
Values-based Roadmap

Taking into account the values you've identified and the interrelations between them, see if you can envision a plausible timeline—or better yet, several alternative timelines—on which you get to live out a consummately full, rich life from here on.

Some questions that might be helpful to consider:

- What are the big goals or milestones you care about that will take roughly predictable stretches of time and/or resources to achieve (e.g., getting a degree, writing a book, raising kids, buying a house, etc)? What are the interdependencies between them?
- What kinds of work can you expect to find fulfilling at various stages of your life? Where, how, with whom, and at what scale would you ideally be doing that work?
- What experiences do you long for most deeply in your relationships, your friendships, your home, your family life? What are the interdependencies between them? What are the different paths you could take to maximize these experiences (or some subset of them), and what would be the relative upsides and tradeoffs of each?

If you need inspiration, here's an example life map that my husband Matt Bateman created for himself on the occasion of turning 40 (see [his full X thread](#) for context):



Pro tip: ChatGPT can be a big help in brainstorming potential roadmaps! For example, you can try giving it your responses to the preceding values exercises (plus any other biographical info you'd like it to have as context), then prompt it as follows: "Could you draw a projected timeline of my life starting from my current age [YOUR AGE] to age 100 that includes the major professional projects, relationships, and any other important features / aspects, like "major hobbies" or "self-improvement themes", assuming I've lived as ambitiously and authentically as possible?"

Values-based Goal-setting and Planning

For any given core value you've identified:

- How important is this value to me right now, all things considered?
- To what extent am I currently building this value into my life?
- What's a building goal I want to set for the coming week in order to move in the direction of this value?
- What's my specific action plan for executing this goal? When/where/how?
- *What obstacles (internal or external) will I need to overcome in order to take these actions? What's my plan for overcoming them?*
 - o What risks do I need to be willing to take? How willing am I? Why?
 - o What tolls (physical or emotional) do I need to be willing to pay? How willing am I? Why?
- What signposts / reminders will help me keep the value of this building goal in sight? What's my plan for accessing them when I need them most?