

## Try Stuff

### Workview and Lifeview

1. Write a short reflection about your Workview. This should take about thirty minutes. Shoot for about 250 words—less than a page of typed writing.
2. Write a short reflection about your Lifeview. This should also take no more than thirty minutes and be 250 words or so.
3. Read over your Lifeview and Workview, and answer each of these questions:
  - a. Where do your views on work and life complement one another?
  - b. Where do they clash?
  - c. Does one drive the other? How?

## Wayfinding

**M**ichael was happy. A popular boy living in a small college town in central California, he played sports, hung out with his friends, and enjoyed the fairly carefree life that comes with being a popular boy who plays sports and hangs out with his friends. Michael didn't spend a whole lot of time thinking about or planning for the future. He just did whatever was in front of him, and life seemed to work out fine. His mother, however, had plans. Lots of plans. She planned for Michael to go to college, chose where he would apply, and even chose what he would major in. This resulted in Michael's attending Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo and majoring in civil engineering. Michael wasn't particularly invested in being a civil engineer; he was simply following Mom's plan.

He did fine in his major and graduated from college. Michael then fell in love with Skylar, who was finishing her degree and moving to Amsterdam to take a corporate consulting job. Michael followed Skylar and took a perfectly good civil-engineering position in Amsterdam, where he did a decent job. Michael was again happily following a path in life that had been chosen for him, and

him? Was he just supposed to put up with it? After all, it was only a job, right? Wrong.

## Finding Your Way

Wayfinding is the ancient art of figuring out where you are going when you don't actually know your destination. For wayfinding, you need a compass and you need a direction. Not a map—a direction. Think of the American explorers Lewis and Clark. They didn't have a map when Jefferson sent them out to travel through the land acquired in the Louisiana Purchase and make their way to the Pacific. While wayfinding to the ocean, they mapped the route (140 maps, to be exact). Wayfinding your life is similar. Since there's no *one* destination in life, you can't put your goal into your GPS and get the turn-by-turn directions for how to get there. What you can do is pay attention to the clues in front of you, and make your best way forward with the tools you have at hand. We think the first clues are *engagement* and *energy*.

## Engagement

Civil engineering hadn't failed Michael. He just wasn't paying attention to his life, and all he knew was that something wasn't working. At thirty-four years old, Michael didn't know what he liked and what he didn't like. When he came to us for help, he was

## Designing Your Life

not once having stopped to consider what he wanted to do or who he wanted to become. He had never articulated his Lifeview or Workview, and had always let other people steer his course and determine his direction. It had worked well enough so far.

After Amsterdam, Michael traveled back to California with Skylar (now his wife), who found a great job she loved; Michael took a job in a nearby civil-engineering firm. That's when the trouble began. He was doing all the things respectable civil engineers do—but he was bored, restless, and miserable. His new-found misery left him confused. He had no idea where to go or what to do. For the first time in his life, his plan wasn't working, and, without a direction, Michael felt absolutely lost.

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**Dysfunctional Belief:** *Work is not supposed to be enjoyable; that's why they call it work.*

**Reframe:** *Enjoyment is a guide to finding the right work for you.*

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Lots of people had advice for Michael. A few friends suggested he start his own civil-engineering practice, believing that his problem was due to his working for someone else. His father-in-law told him, "You're a smart guy. You're an engineer, so you know your math. You should be in finance. You should be a stockbroker." Michael thought about all the many suggestions and started calculating how he could quit his job and go back to school to study finance, or maybe go to business school. He considered all of these options because, frankly, he wasn't sure what the problem was. Had he failed as a civil engineer? Had civil engineering failed

on the verge of upending his life and career completely, and for no good reasons. We had him spend a few weeks doing a simple logging assignment at the end of every workday. Michael wrote down when during the day he had been feeling bored, restless, or unhappy at his job, and what exactly he had been doing during those times (the times when he was *disengaged*). He also wrote down when he was excited, focused, and having a good time at work, and what exactly he was doing during those times (the times when he was *engaged*). Michael was working on what we call the Good Time Journal.

Why did we have Michael do this (and, yes, we're going to ask you to do it, too)? Because we were trying to get him to catch himself in the act of having a good time. When you learn what activities reliably engage you, you're discovering and articulating something that can be very helpful in your life design work. Remember that designers have a bias to action—which is just another way of saying that we pay a lot of attention to doing things, and not just to thinking about things. Logging when you are and aren't engaged and energized will help you pay attention to what you're doing and discover what's working.

## Flow: Total Engagement

Flow is engagement on steroids. Flow is that state of being in which time stands still, you're totally engaged in an activity, and the challenge of that particular activity matches up with your skill—so you're neither bored because it's too easy nor anxious because it's too hard. People describe this state of engagement as “euphoric,”

“in the zone,” and “freakin' awesome.” Flow was “discovered” by Professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who has been researching this phenomenon since the 1970s. When he first described the state of flow, he had studied the detailed activities of thousands of people going about their daily lives and was able to isolate this very special form of intense engagement.<sup>1</sup>

People in flow report the experience as having these sorts of attributes:

- **Experiencing complete involvement in the activity.**
- **Feeling a sense of ecstasy or euphoria.**
- **Having great inner clarity—knowing just what to do and how to do it.**
- **Being totally calm and at peace.**
- **Feeling as if time were standing still—or disappearing in an instant.**

Flow can happen during almost any physical or mental activity, and often when both are combined. Dave goes into flow while editing minute details in a class lesson plan, or out on his sailboat, trimming the sails as it heels into a rising wind. Bill admits to being a flow junkie and finds advising students, sketching in his idea log, or chopping an onion with his favorite knife to be moments most conducive to flow. Flow is one of those “hard to describe but you know it when you feel it” qualitative experiences that you'll have to identify for yourself. As the ultimate state of personal engagement, flow experiences have a special place in designing your life, so it's important to get good at capturing them in your Good Time Journal.

Flow is play for grown-ups. In the life design dashboard, we

assessed our health, work, play, and love. The element we all find the most elusive in our busy modern lives is “play.” You might think that we all have too many responsibilities to have much time for play. Sure, we can strive to have our work and our chores engage skills we like using, but face it—it’s work, not play. Maybe. Maybe not. Flow is one key to what we call adult play, and a really rewarding and satisfying career involves a lot of flow states. The essence of play is being fully immersed and joyful in what you’re doing, without being constantly distracted by concerns about the outcomes. When we’re in flow, that’s exactly what’s going on—we are fully present to what we’re doing, so present we don’t even notice time. Seen this way, flow is something we should strive to make a regular part of our work life (and home life, and exercise life, and love life . . . you get the idea).

## Energy

After engagement, the second wayfinding clue to look for is energy. Human beings, like all living things, need energy to live and to thrive. Men and women used to spend most of their daily energy on physical tasks. For most of human history, men and women were working at hunting and gathering, raising children, and raising crops, most of their time consumed with energy-intensive physical labor.

Nowadays, many of us are knowledge workers, and we use our brains to do the heavy lifting. The brain is a very energy-hungry organ. Of the roughly two thousand calories we consume a day, five hundred go to running our brains. That’s astonishing: the

brain represents only about 2 percent of our body weight, and yet it takes up 25 percent of the energy we consume every day. It’s no wonder that the way we *invest our attention* is critical to whether or not we feel high or low energy.<sup>2</sup>

We engage in physical and mental activities all day long. Some activities sustain our energy and some drain it; we want to track those energy flows as part of our Good Time Journal exercise. Once you have a good handle on where your energy goes every week, you can start redesigning your activities to maximize your vitality. Remember, life design is about getting more out of your current life—and not only about redesigning a whole new life. Even if questions about some big change in your life may be what brought you to this book, most life design work is directed at tuning up and improving the life you’re in, without having to make huge structural changes like changing jobs or moving or going back to grad school.

You may be wondering, “Isn’t tracking my energy level kind of the same thing as tracking how engaged I am?” Yes and no. Yes, high levels of engagement often coincide with high levels of energy, but not necessarily. A colleague of Dave’s, a brilliantly fast-thinking computer engineer, found arguing for his point of view an engaging activity, because it made him think on his feet. He was great at it, and often found other people at work asking him to make their arguments for them. But he noticed that getting into those arguments totally exhausted him, even when he “won.” He was not a contentious person, and though it seemed fun at the time to outwit others, he always felt terrible when it was over. Energy is also unique in that it can go negative—some activities can actually suck the life right out of us and send us drained into whatever comes next. Boredom is a big energy-suck,



but it's much easier to recover from boredom than from being de-energized, so it's important to pay specific attention to your energy levels.

## It's About Joy

After working on his Good Time Journal and paying attention to when he was engaged, when he was in flow, and what was energizing for him, Michael realized that he loved his job as a civil engineer when he was working on difficult and complex engineering problems. The times that drained him and made him miserable were those when he was dealing with difficult personalities, struggling to communicate with others, and performing other administrative tasks and distractions that had nothing to do with the intricate task of engineering.

The end result was that, for the first time in his life, Michael was paying detailed attention to what really worked for him. The results were amazing. By simply discovering when he was enjoying himself at work and what caused his energies to rise and fall, Michael discovered that he actually enjoyed civil engineering. It was the people stuff, the proposal writing, and the fee negotiations that he hated. He just had to find a way to craft his job so that he was doing more of what he loved and less of what he hated. Instead of business school (which would probably have been a disaster, and an expensive one at that), Michael decided to double down on engineering. He ended up entering a Ph.D. program and is now a high-level civil and structural engineer, who spends his time, mostly alone, working on the kind of complex engineer-

ing problems that make him really happy. And he's become so technically valuable that no one asks him to do the administrative stuff anymore. On good days, he goes home with more energy than when he left for work in the morning. And that's a pretty great way to work.

Here's another key element when you're wayfinding in life: follow the joy; follow what engages and excites you, what brings you alive. Most people are taught that work is always hard and that we have to suffer through it. Well, there are parts of any job or any career that are hard and annoying—but if most of what you do at work is not bringing you alive, then it's killing you. It's your career, after all, and you are going to be spending a lot of time doing it—we calculate it at 90,000 to 125,000 hours during the course of your lifetime. If it's not fun, a lot of your life is going to suck.

Now, what makes work fun? It's not what you might think. It's not one unending office party. It's not getting paid a lot of money. It's not having multiple weeks of paid vacations. Work is fun when you are actually leaning into your strengths and are deeply engaged and energized by what you're doing.

## What About Purpose?

At about this stage, we're often asked, "Well, this is all great, but where do purpose and mission come into it? There's more to life than just being engaged and energized. I want to be doing work I care about, work that's important to me and that matters."

We couldn't agree more. That's why we addressed building your





compass (your well-integrated Workview and Lifeview) in chapter 2. As we suggested, it's crucial for you to assess how well your work fits your values and priorities—how *coherent* your work is with who you are and what you believe. We are not suggesting a life singularly focused on engagement and energy level, suggesting that focused attention on engagement and energy level can provide very helpful clues to wayfinding your path forward. Life design consists of a whole set of ideas and tools that work together flexibly. We'll give you lots of suggestions, but in the end you'll decide which things to focus on and how to organize your life design project. Now let's get started on your Good Time Journal.

## Good Time Journal Exercise

We're going to ask you to do a Good Time Journal, as Michael did. Just how you build yours is up to you. You can make your entries all by hand in a bound journal, or use a three-ring binder with loose sheets, or even do it on your computer (though we strongly recommend you try it by hand, so you can sketch in your journal or binder). The most important thing is that you actually do it and regularly make entries; whatever format you will most enjoy and will use most often is the way to go.

There are two elements to the Good Time Journal:

- **Activity Log (where I record where I'm engaged and energized)**
- **Reflections (where I discover what I am learning)**

The Activity Log simply lists your primary activities and how engaged  and energized  you were by those activities. We recommend that you make Activity Log entries daily, to be sure to capture lots of good information. If every few days is easier, that's fine as well, but log activities at least twice a week or you'll miss too much. If you're using a binder, you can make log sheets using the worksheet at the end of this chapter, which has little gauges for how engaged  and energized  you are by your activities (or download it at [www.designingyourlife.com](http://www.designingyourlife.com)). You can also just draw gauges (or whatever engagement and energy symbols you like) into your journal book. Do what works for you—just get the information down on paper.

All of us are motivated by different kinds of work activities. Your job is to figure out which ones motivate you—with as much specificity as you can. It will take a while to get the hang of this, because, if you're like most people, you've not been paying detailed attention to this sort of thing. Sure, there are times when we all come home at the end of the day and say, "That was *great*," or "That *sucked*," but we seldom sift through the particulars of what contributed to those experiences. A day is made up of many moments, some of which are great, some of which suck, and most of which lie somewhere in between. Your job is to drill down into the particulars of your day and catch yourself in the act of having a good time.

The second element of the Good Time Journal is reflection, looking over your Activity Log and noticing trends, insights, surprises—anything that is a clue to what does and doesn't work for you. We recommend doing your Activity Log for at least three weeks, or whatever period of time you need to be sure you capture all the various kinds of activities that arise in your current situ-

ation (some activities may only come around every few weeks). Then we recommend that you do your Good Time Journal reflection weekly, so your reflections are based on more than just a single experience of each activity.

Write your weekly reflections on blank pages in your Good Time Journal.

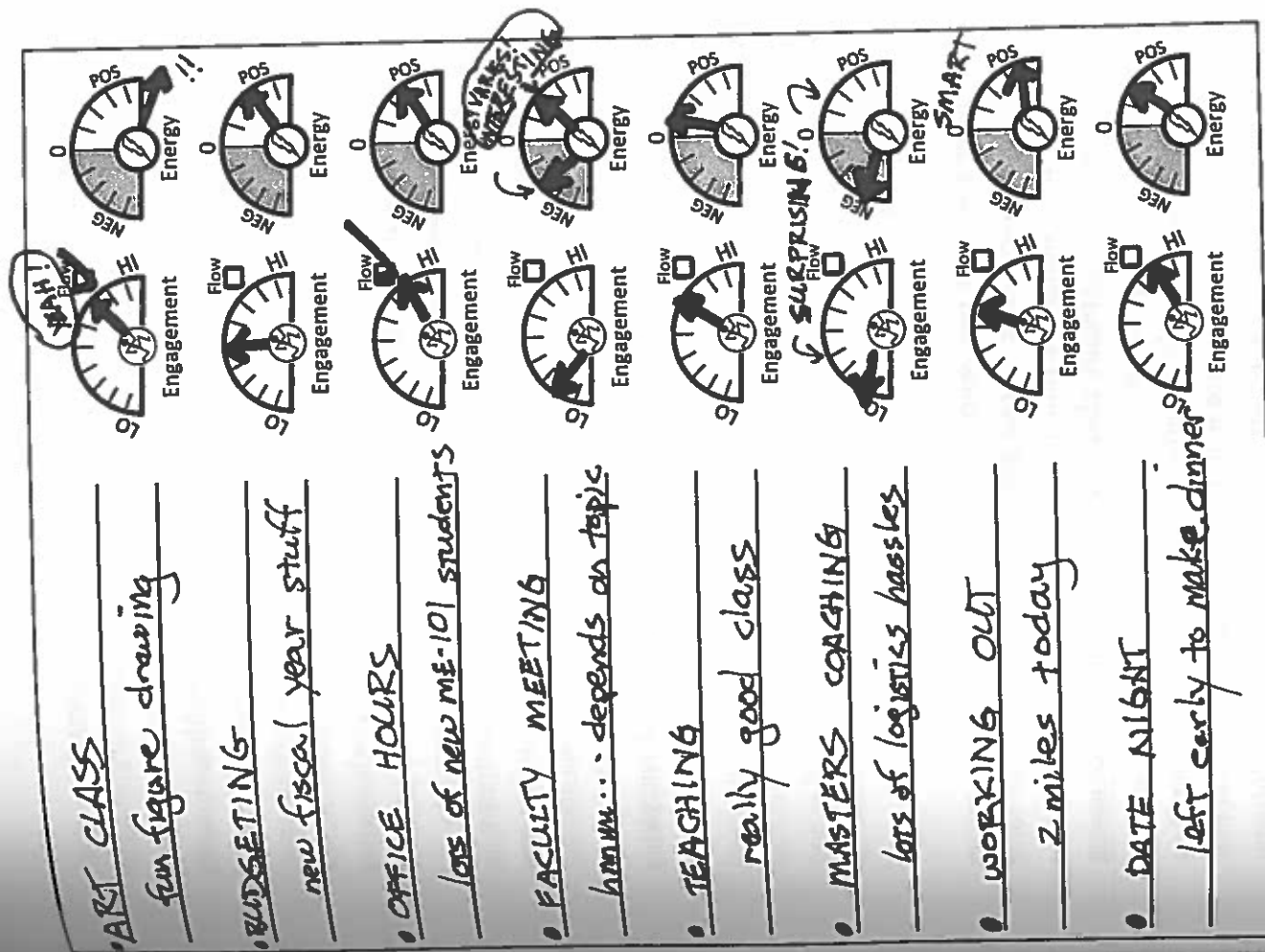
We've included a page from one of Bill's recent Good Time Journal Activity Logs.

Bill's reflection included these observations:

He noticed that his drawing class and office hours reliably created flow states, and that teaching and "date night" were the activities that returned significantly more energy than they consumed. Doubling up on those activities would certainly be one way to energize his week. His weekly faculty meeting is sometimes full of interesting conversations and sometimes not, so he drew two arrows on his energy diagram. He was not surprised that budget meetings sucked energy out of his day—he's never liked the fiscal side of things much (though he appreciates that they're crucial).

Bill adjusted his schedule to surround these less engaging activities with more engaging activities, and to give himself small rewards when he completes "energy-negative" tasks. The best way to deal with these energy-negative activities is to make sure that you are well rested and have the energy reserves needed to "do them right." Otherwise, you might find yourself doing them again—costing you more energy than they should.

Bill was surprised that coaching master's students, the students he likes and spends the most time with, was such a drain on his week. After journaling a bit on that subject, he discovered two things: (1) he was trying to coach in a bad environment (the



ART CLASS

fun figure drawing

BUDGETING

new fiscal year stuff

OFFICE HOURS

lots of new ME-101 students

FACULTY MEETING

hmm... depends on topic

TEACHING

really good class

MASTERS COACHING

lots of logistics hassles

WORKING OUT

2 miles today

DATE NIGHT

left early to make dinner



noisy graduate studio) and (2) his coaching interaction wasn't effective—his students weren't "getting it." Those two observations resulted in a redesign of his Tuesday-night class environment (he changed classrooms) and a shift in the coaching structure from meeting one to one with each student to coaching in small groups, so students could help one another during the interactions. These changes worked so well that a few weeks later he was regularly going into flow during coaching sessions. The budgeting still sucked, of course, but it's not that big a part of the job, and the new coaching flow moments help make it more bearable.

Bill was using his Good Time Journal primarily to improve his current life design. Michael did the exercise in search of what strategic career path to take. They had very different goals and got very different results, but both used exactly the same technique—paying detailed attention to what was engaging and energizing them.

## Zooming In— Getting to the Good Stuff

After a week or two, when you've got a decent body of entries in your Good Time Journal and you're starting to notice some interesting things, it's time to zoom in and take the exercise to the next level. Typically, after you start to get the hang of paying more detailed attention to your days, you notice that some of your log entries could be more specific: you need to zoom in to see more clearly. The idea is to try to become as precise as possible; the clearer you are on what is and isn't working for you,

the better you can set your wayfinding direction. For instance . . . What you initially logged as "Staff Mtg—Enjoyed it for once today!" might, after you've looked at it again, be more accurately restated as "Staff Mtg—Felt great when I rephrased what Jon said and everyone went 'Oooh—exactly!'" This more precise version tells a much more useful story about what specific activity or behavior engages you. And it opens the door to developing even greater self-awareness. When your entries have that kind of detail in them, your reflections can be more insightful. When journaling your reflection on the log entry about that staff meeting, you might ask yourself, "Was I more engaged by *artfully rephrasing* Jon's comment (getting the articulation dialed in just right) or by *facilitating consensus* among the staff (being the guy who made the group's 'Now we get it' unifying moment happen)?" If you conclude that artful articulation was the real sweet spot of that staff meeting moment for you, that important insight can help you be on the lookout for content-creation opportunities over group facilitation opportunities. Take this sort of observation and reflection as far as you find helpful (and no further—you don't want to get stuck in your journal).

## AEIOU

Getting great insights out of your Good Time Journal reflections isn't always easy, so here's a tool designers use to make detailed and accurate observations—part of getting good at the curiosity mind-set. It's the AEIOU method<sup>3</sup> that provides you five sets of questions you can use when reflecting on your Activity Log.



**Activities.** What were you actually doing? Was this a structured or an unstructured activity? Did you have a specific role to play (team leader) or were you just a participant (at the meeting)?

**Environments.** Our environment has a profound effect on our emotional state. You feel one way at a football stadium, another in a cathedral. Notice where you were when you were involved in the activity. What kind of a place was it, and how did it make you feel?

**Interactions.** What were you interacting with—people or machines? Was it a new kind of interaction or one you are familiar with? Was it formal or informal?

**Objects.** Were you interacting with any objects or devices—iPads or smartphones, hockey sticks or sailboats? What were the objects that created or supported your feeling engaged?

**Users.** Who else was there, and what role did they play in making it either a positive or a negative experience?

Using AEIOU can really help you to zoom in effectively and discover specifically what it is that is or isn't working for you. Here are two examples:

Lydia is a contract writer. She works to help experts document their procedures in manuals. And she'd come to conclude that she hated working with people—mostly because of how awful she felt after going to meetings, and how great she felt when she got to write all day. She was wondering how she could make a living without ever going to a meeting again when she did the Good Time Journal and used the AEIOU method. When she zoomed in, she observed that she actually liked people fine—when she got to meet with

only one or two of them and either work hard on the writing or do rapid brainstorming on new project ideas (activity). She hated meetings about planning, schedules, and business strategy and any meeting with more than six people in it; she just couldn't track all the different points of view (environment). She realized that she was just an intense and focused worker, and that her intensity could be either nurtured or frustrated by other people (users), depending on the form of collaboration (interactions).

Basra simply loved higher education. It didn't matter what she was doing—if she was doing it on a university campus, she was a happy camper (environment). So she went to work at the university where she had done her undergraduate degree. For five or six years, she was very happy doing anything and everything from fund-raising to new student orientation (activity). Then it all began to fade, and she was nervous that her love affair with education was over. She did a version of the Good Time Journal and realized that she still loved the university, but had gotten into the wrong job. As she approached her thirties, environment alone was not enough; role mattered now. She'd accepted a promotion that transferred her from student affairs—and lots of interesting student interactions—to legal affairs—and lots of meetings with administrators and lawyers (users), and paperwork (objects). She figured it out and took a slight demotion to accept a position in the housing office, where she once again could have interactions of a more constructive nature and less paperwork.

As you work on your reflections in the Good Time Journal, try using this AEIOU method to get more out of your observations. It is important to record whatever comes up and not to judge yourself—there are no right or wrong feelings about your experience. The thing to focus on is that this kind of information is going to be incredibly helpful in designing your life.

## Mining the Mountaintop

Your past is waiting to be mined for insights, too—especially your mountaintop moments, or “peak experiences.” Peak experiences in our past—even our long-ago past—can be telling. Take some time to reflect on your memories of past peak work-related experiences and do a Good Time Journal Activity Log and reflection on them to see what you find. Those memories have stuck with you for good reason. You can make a list of those peak experiences, or write them out as a narrative or story. It can be very enjoyable to set to words the story of that great time when you were on the team that planned what they’re still calling the Ultimate Sales Meeting, or when you wrote the procedure manual that they still pass out to new writers as the standard for doing it right. Having the narrative of your peak experiences written down will make it easier to extract from those stories the activities that most engaged and energized you, and to discover insights that you can apply today.

Using past experience is particularly useful if you aren’t currently in a situation that lends itself to a successful Good Time Journal exercise, such as if you’re between jobs. It’s also helpful if

you’re just getting started on your professional life and don’t yet have much experience. If so, think about activities that you did in other areas of your life (perhaps even decades ago) when you felt that life was working. A historical Good Time Journal on past projects from school, summer programs, volunteer projects—anything that you were seriously engaged by—can be useful. When looking back, do beware of revisionist history—being too kind to the good days or too critical of the bad times. Just try to be honest.

## Enjoy the Journey

This new way of noticing will help guide you in finding what’s next for you. Like Lewis and Clark, you are starting to map some of the territory you’ve already covered, and are starting to see new possibilities in the territory ahead. You are moving from one level of awareness to another, really exploring how things make you (not your mom, dad, boss, or spouse) feel. You have started to wayfind—moving from where you are to the next possible place. Armed with your compass and your Good Time Journal insights, you can do a great job of wayfinding.

Michael found his way.

Lewis and Clark found their way.

You can find your way as well.

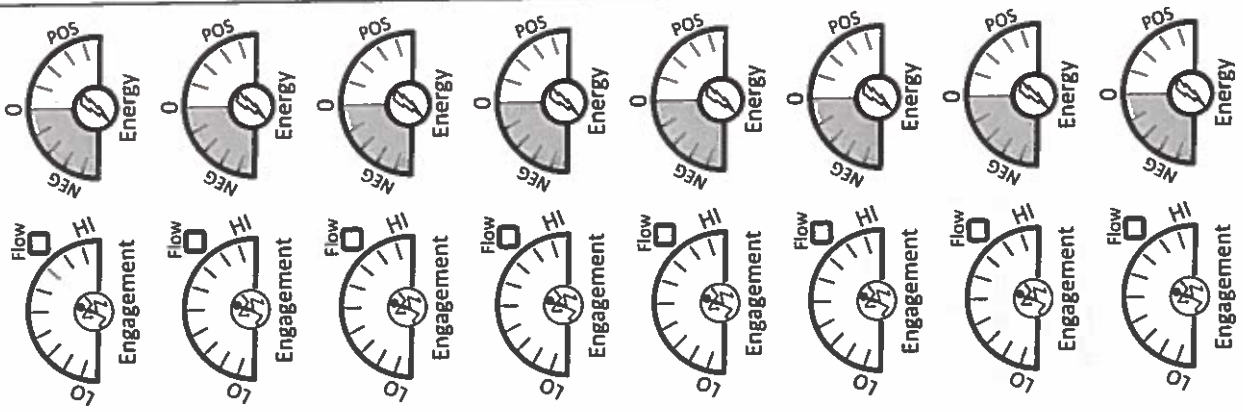
The next step is to generate as many options as possible, so you have lots to experiment with and prototype.

For that, we’re going to need to do a little mind mapping.

## Try Stuff

### Good Time Journal

1. Complete a log of your daily activities, using the worksheet provided (or in your own notebook). Note when you are engaged and/or energized and what you are doing during those times. Try to do this daily, or at the very least every few days.
2. Continue this daily logging for three weeks.
3. At the end of each week, jot down your reflections — notice which activities are engaging and energizing, and which ones are not.
4. Are there any surprises in your reflections?
5. Zoom in and try to get even more specific about what does or does not engage and energize you.
6. Use the AEIOU method as needed to help you in your reflections.



Blank lined space for journaling, consisting of 18 horizontal lines corresponding to the 18 gauges above.



## Getting Unstuck

Grant was stuck. He worked for a major car-rental company, and after doing his Good Time Journal, he realized he was spending the majority of his days in activities that neither engaged nor energized him. He hated dealing with irate customers. He didn't like completing endless boilerplate contracts. He hated reciting the same exact script every day. He didn't like having to up-sell customers constantly. But most of all he hated feeling as if he didn't matter. He didn't want to be a small, unimportant cog in a giant corporate machine. Grant wanted to work someplace where he could leave his mark. He wanted to have influence. He wanted what he did to be important to someone. Anyone.

Grant didn't completely hate his job, but he couldn't think of a single time when he had ever experienced anything close to a state of flow. Work equaled a kind of dull misery. He watched the clock. He waited for his paycheck each week. And the weekends couldn't come soon enough or last long enough. The only time he liked what he was doing was when he was hiking among the redwoods, or playing a pickup basketball game with his friends, or helping his niece and nephew with their homework.

None of which would pay the bills.

Grant was about to be promoted to store manager, and this made him feel more stuck than ever. He had never dreamed of working for a car-rental agency, but, no matter how long and hard he thought about it, he couldn't come up with a realistic idea for a different career. He had no idea where to begin, even. Sure, he would love to be a rock star, or a major-league baseball player. But he didn't sing or play an instrument, and he had bailed out of Little League at the age of twelve. A literature major in college, he had taken the first job that paid more than minimum wage. And now he was trapped. Grant didn't want to resign himself to renting cars for the rest of his life, but he felt there were no other options. "Some guys are just unlucky," he thought. "Some guys just aren't meant to leave their mark."

Grant felt defeated because he thought that all he could do was what he'd always done—and because he wasn't thinking like a designer. Designers know that you never go with your first idea. Designers know that when you choose from lots of options you choose better. Many people are like Grant: they get stuck trying to make their first idea work.

Grant needed to start thinking like a designer.

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**Dysfunctional Belief:** *I'm stuck.*

**Reframe:** *I'm never stuck, because I can always generate a lot of ideas.*

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Sharon is a paralegal who worked at a prestigious law firm in Boston until she was laid off. Now she spends six hours a day on the

Internet, looking for a job. She's been doing this for over a year. She's completely demoralized; any shred of self-confidence evaporated long ago. In fact, being a paralegal wasn't her goal in the first place—it was her backup plan. She went to business school, but the economy was in the dumpster when she graduated in 2009. She could not find a job as a marketing executive, which she had been told was the "right thing" to do with an M.B.A. Like so many, she thought that doing the "right thing" would make her happy. But Sharon wasn't remotely close to happy. The truth is that Sharon had no idea what she really *wanted* out of business school, and this lack of genuine interest was probably apparent to the people who interviewed her. She had spent a long time trying to do the right thing instead of doing what was right for Sharon. A year into her job search, she felt she was out of options. She felt defeated. But Sharon wasn't really out of options—she just hadn't come up with a lot of real options in the first place.

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**Dysfunctional Belief:** *I have to find the one right idea.*

**Reframe:** *I need a lot of ideas so that I can explore any number of possibilities for my future.*

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With no idea other than to keep on doing what she was doing, Sharon, like Grant, was stuck.

Most people do the same thing Sharon did when they need work: they look at the job listings and look for a job that they think they can get. This is one of the worst ways to get a job, and actually has the lowest success rate (we'll discuss the phenomenon in

detail in chapter 7). This way of thinking is not design thinking; it's just grasping whatever might be in reach, and it's unlikely to result in long-term satisfaction. If the kids are hungry, the bank is about to foreclose on your house, or you owe a guy named Louie a lot of money, then by all means take whatever job you can get. But when the wolf has backed off a bit, it's time to wayfind to jobs you might actually want. And don't worry about being stuck. Designers get stuck all the time. Being stuck can be a launching pad for creativity. When you think like a designer, you know how to ideate—how to “flare”—to come up with lots of options for lots of possible futures.

Look, it's simple. You can't know what you want until you know what you *might* want, so you are going to have to generate a lot of ideas and possibilities.

Accept the problem.

Get stuck.

Get over it, and ideate, ideate, ideate!

## Ideate This

We're going to ask you to get out of the box of being realistic and venture into the wide world of “what I might want.” It's time to embrace being stuck. Grant was stuck. Sharon was stuck. We're all stuck in some way in some areas of our lives. That's where we need ideation, which is a fancy word for coming up with lots of ideas. Wild ideas. Crazy ideas. We're going to teach you how to have more ideas than you ever thought possible. So many people get stuck chasing their first idea, or the perfect idea, or that one

big idea that will solve the problem, will be the answer, and will dig them out of whatever hole they are currently stuck in. That's a lot of pressure. Believing that there's only one idea out there leads to a lot of pressure and indecision.

“I'm just not sure.”

“I don't want to blow it.”

“I really need to get this right.”

“If I just had a better (the right, a killer) idea, then all would be well.”

Let's stop right here, so we can be the first to tell you an amazing fact: All will be well.

It will.

Those of us fortunate enough to live in the modern world with access to some degree of choice, freedom, mobility, education, and technology spend most of our time immersed in a world obsessed with optimization. There's always got to be a better idea, a better way—even a best way. That kind of thinking is pretty dangerous to life design. The truth is that all of us have more than one life in us. When we ask our students, “How many lifetimes' worth of living are there in you?,” the average answer is 3.4. And if you accept this idea—that there are multiple great designs for your life, though you'll still only get to live one—it is rather liberating. There is no one idea for your life. There are many lives you could live happily and productively (no matter how many years old you are), and there are lots of different paths you could take to live each of those productive, amazingly different lives. So do the math; this adds up to tons of different possible ideas you might have. And we're going to give you the tools to generate such ideas. Quantity has a quality all its own. In life design, more is better, because more ideas equal access to better ideas, and better



ideas lead to a better design. Expanding your thinking improves your ability to ideate and allows for more innovation. If you work through lots of ideas, your chances of hitting on some that can be really energizing for you go up, which increases your chance of creating something that can work and that you'll love. More ideas also equal new insights.

Designers love to ideate broadly and wildly. They love the crazy ideas as much as or more than the sensible ones. Why? Most people think that designers are just "out there" and prefer crazy stuff because they're edgy, avant-garde, dark-sunglass-wearing kinds of people (think berets, cool shoes, and the hippest restaurants). That may be true, but it's not the point. Designers learn to have lots of wild ideas because they know that the number one enemy of creativity is judgment. Our brains are so tightly wired to be critical, find problems, and leap to judgment that it's a wonder any ideas ever make it out! We have to defer judgment and silence the inner critic if we want to get *all* our ideas out. If we don't, we may have a few good ideas, but the majority will have been lost—silently imprisoned behind the wall of judgment our prefrontal cortex has erected to safeguard us from making mistakes or looking foolish. Now, we love the prefrontal cortex and wouldn't be caught in public without it, but we don't want it taking our ideas hostage prematurely. If we can get out into the wild idea space, then we know we've overcome premature judgment. The crazy ideas may not be the ones we pick (and rarely are, actually), but often after having the crazy ideas, we have moved to a new creative space, and we can see new and innovative possibilities that can work.

So let's bring on the crazy.

Usually our students find this part of the process to be the most exciting, engaging, and just plain fun. Who doesn't like to generate a lot of great and crazy ideas? You may or may not think that you are a creative person, but that doesn't matter. Remember our motto "You Are Here," and get ready to work with whatever level of personal creativity you think you have. We'll build from there. Our goal is to energize and expand on your capacity for generating lots and lots of solutions to the myriad problems that come up when you are designing your life.

As a life designer, you need to embrace two philosophies:

1. **You choose better when you have lots of good ideas to choose from.**
2. **You never choose your first solution to any problem.**

Our minds are generally lazy and like to get rid of problems as quickly as possible, so they surround first ideas with a lot of positive chemicals to make us "fall in love" with them. Do not fall in love with your first idea. This relationship almost never works out. Most often, our first solutions are pretty average and not very creative. Humans have a tendency to suggest the obvious first. Learning to use great ideation tools helps you overcome this bias toward the obvious and helps you regain a sense of creative confidence.

Even those of you who might think that you are not creative can probably remember back to a time when you didn't feel this way. Perhaps it was in kindergarten, or first or second grade, when singing, dancing, and drawing seemed like natural forms of self-

expression. You were not self-conscious, nor were you judging whether your drawings were art, or your singing professional, or your dancing worthy of others' attention. You felt free to create any natural form of your own self-expression without limits.

You can probably also remember, typically in vivid detail, a time when a teacher said, "You're not an artist, you can't draw," or a classmate said, "You dance funny," or some other adult said, "Stop singing, you're ruining the song for everyone." Ouch! We're sorry if this creativity-killing moment happened to you. And the creativity-killing moments kept happening in middle school and high school, where social norms took the place of scolding adults, and we learned to rein in our differences for fear of being called out. It's a wonder that any shred of our personal creativity survives as we grow up.

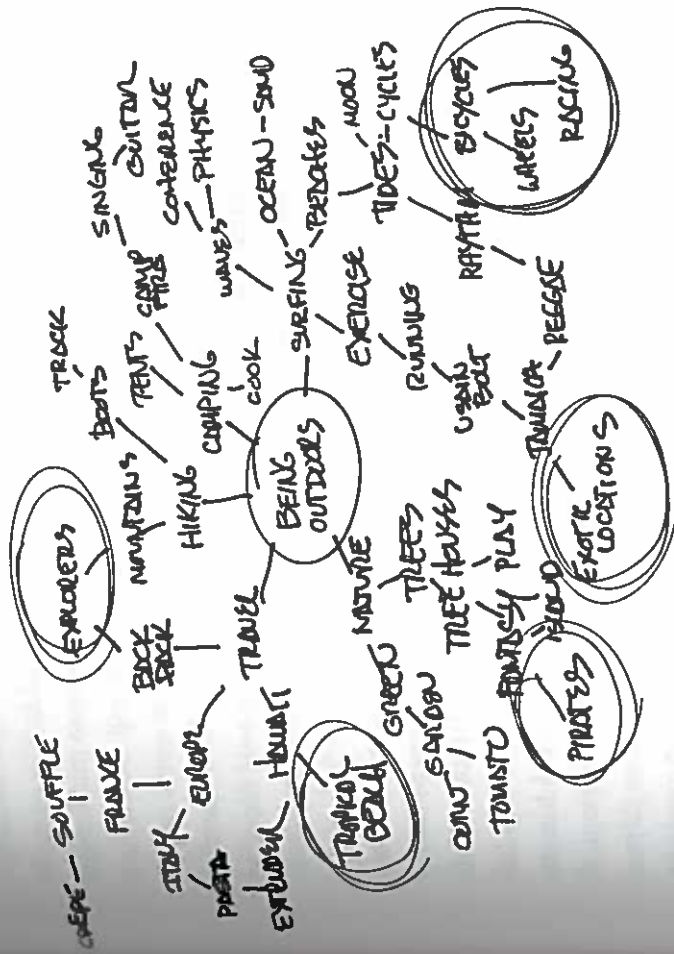
But trust us, it's in there. We're going to help you discover it.

## Mind Mapping

The first ideation technique we're going to teach you is called mind mapping. It's a great tool for ideating by yourself, and a great method for getting unstuck. Mind mapping works by using simple free association of words, one after another, to open up the idea space and come up with new solutions. The graphical nature of the method allows ideas and their associations to be captured automatically. This technique teaches you to generate lots of ideas, and because it is a visual method, it bypasses your inner logical/verbal censor.

The mind-mapping process has three steps:

1. Picking a topic
2. Making the mind map



3. Making secondary connections and creating concepts (mashing it all up)

The image above is of Grant's mind map, which he made while being stuck on the problem of how to find the "perfect" job. You'll remember that when Grant looked over his Good Time Journal the only positive experiences he could find had something to do

with hiking in the redwoods near his house. So he decided to mind-map around that. You can see he put **BEING OUTDOORS** in the center of his mind map and drew a circle around it. This is step one.

Step two is making the mind map. For this, you take the original idea and write down five or six things related to that idea. Be rigorous in writing down the first words that come to mind. Now repeat this process with the words in the second ring. Draw three or four lines from each word, and free-associate new words related to these prompts. The words that come up for you do not need to be associated to the words or question in the center, only the word in the second ring. Repeat this process until you have at least three or four rings of word associations.

In Grant's example, he wrote down travel, hiking, surfing, camping, and nature. These things are all related directly to his idea of **BEING OUTDOORS**. He then took each of those words and created new branches of word associations. Hiking reminded Grant of mountains, which led to explorers. Travel led him to Hawaii, Europe, and backpacking, and Hawaii led him to tropical beaches. France, an association with Europe, took him to crêpes, which took him to Nutella, which, though interesting, turned out to be a dead end. But surfing led to beaches, which led to tides, which led to cycles, bicycles, and racing. It also led to Jamaica, then through Usain Bolt (Grant's brain turns out to be more creative than he thought), and on to the idea of exotic locations.

This whole process of creating layers and word associations took three to five minutes; you want to give yourself a time limit so you do this fast and bypass your inner censor. The next step is to take this random association of words and highlight a few things that might be interesting (or that jump out at you) and

mash them together into a few concepts. You want to pick from the very outer layer or perimeter of the mind map, because that is the stuff that is two or three steps away from your conscious thinking. Even though being outdoors eventually took Grant to bicycle racing and Usain Bolt, in Grant's hidden unconscious these are all linked back to his original prompt. Grant pulled out the random words that seemed interesting—in this case, explorers, tropical beaches, pirates, kids, exotic locations, and bicycle racing. Then he took these individual components and mashed them up into a couple of possible ideas.

Could he work part-time at an Explorer Camp for kids who liked the outdoors? Better yet, make it a Pirate Camp and have it at a beach? How about accepting the promotion he was offered, but only if they let him move to a rental office near a beach (he looked it up and found that his company had an office in Santa Cruz, California—yes!)? Or, even better, someplace really exotic, like Hawaii, where he could coach at a Pirate Surf Camp for kids (turns out his company had an office there, too). And maybe, if he accepted the promotion, he'd make enough money to afford a four-day workweek so that he'd have some time to "explore" some of these new ideas.

This is innovation.

Grant is no longer stuck. In fact, he has more good ideas than he knows what to do with. And, more important, he's starting to think that it's not about finding the perfect job, it's about making the job he has "perfect." It turns out it pays to work for a multinational car-rental company with offices all over the world. Doing his mind map made Grant realize that he has more to work with than he thought, and he can use his current job as the springboard to what's next.



had an amazing shop, so of course Dave had to have a cool shop, too. But Dave is less craftsman and more fix-it guy, so he didn't need quite the same shop layout as his dad. This means that, with careful planning and maintenance, Dave has been able to achieve the all-time garage twofor—a killer shop that still allows room to park the cars inside.

Don't judge Dave's dreams.

He loved it and vowed he'd have that kind of garage the rest of his life. And then he moved to the beach. And in that move he found out he had a fifth of his former storage space to fit his stuff in. And he found himself with an anchor problem, an anchor problem that's lasted years.

For the first few years, Dave had to rent three storage units in addition to filling the garage at the beach. One by one, year after year, he got rid of the storage units, but the last car-evicting pile of junk has never been cleared from the garage. And as far as getting the shop properly laid out . . . well, don't ask. He's lived with the All-American Garage Disaster for over five years now, and of course he's gotten too used to it. Every summer for four years, he's vowed to clean it out and get the shop set up, but he's been overwhelmed every time. Though he's got a vision of his old, near-perfect garage layout, he fears he'll just never get there. He begins in earnest, removing the first layer of old bike parts and VHS tapes, but then he gets discouraged at the looming pile, and distracts himself with something more doable—like replacing the alternator in the truck. Fix-it guy strikes again. Then it's Christmas, with all those boxes down from the attic, and . . . fuhgedaboudit.

Dave is anchored on this problem because he's anchored to the one and only solution he's been willing to accept—a perfect cars-

It's important to remember when you do this not to censor your words. That's why we suggest you do it fast. Just write down the first words that come to mind. If you censor yourself, you limit your potential for generating new and novel ideas. David Kelley, the founder of the d.school, says you often have to go through the wild ideas to get to the actionable good ideas. So don't be afraid to come up with crazy stuff. It may be the jumping-off point for something really practical and really new. Also, you should create your mind map on a big piece of paper. You are looking for lots of ideas—so make your map as graphic and as big as possible. Go out and get a giant piece of butcher paper or a large white board, and have big ideas.

The bigger the better.

## Stuck on Steroids: Anchor Problems

There's a certain class of problems—the ones that just won't go away—that we call anchor problems. Like a physical anchor, they hold us in one place and prevent motion. They keep us stuck, much as Grant and Sharon were stuck with their career problems. If we are going to practice good life design, it is important to notice when we are stuck with an anchor problem.

Dave found himself with an anchor problem, but it didn't have to do with his career, like Grant and Sharon; this problem hit closer to home. You see, Dave is a shop kind of guy—as in “workshop.” His dad (Dave the Third) was an incredible craftsman and

plus-workshop layout. It's such a huge job now, Dave doesn't even try, so everybody gets to slalom through the obstacle course of the garage while the ocean sun and salt air fade the paint on the cars parked outside.

The only way Dave can get unanchored from this immovable situation is to reframe his solution and prototype a little. *He* could:

1. **Reframe so that the goal is just a workbench and inside storage for bikes and camping gear.**
2. **Reframe so that he still needs just one small storage unit (for life), and buy back his garage for about a hundred dollars a month.**
3. **Be mindful of process and break it into smaller projects: (a) give away old books and music, (b) reduce to only four bikes, (c) clear the floor of boxes, (d) clear the workbench of old project detritus.**

The big move here is to get rid of the image of the perfect garage and reimagine a different result or steps along the way. If Dave keeps the picture of his old, perfect garage (*the* solution) pasted on that refrigerator door in his mind, he's never going to get anywhere, because it's too hard. Too hard doesn't work.

This isn't a gravity problem—it's not impossible. It's just that Dave's stuck because he's anchored himself to a solution that can't work.

Melanie taught sociology at a small liberal-arts college and was impressed by developments in the burgeoning fields of social

innovation and social entrepreneurship that were transforming what nonprofit organizations could do using insights from the start-up and venture capital world. Knowing that students were really interested in new approaches to social impact, she started teaching a course and sponsoring social innovation projects. It went great, but she wanted to do more. She longed to make a lasting impact on her college and dreamed up a vision to found a new Institute for Social Innovation.

All she needed was fifteen million dollars to endow it properly and do it right. So she set about the task of raising the money. She developed a strategy and a killer pitch for the idea. Students loved it. Administrators were supportive. The development office hated it.

Like most small colleges, Melanie's school was underfunded and struggling to keep up. Its alumni roster was not overloaded with zillionaires, and the development office vigilantly guarded relationships with the few major donors the college had recruited. Melanie was given a long "Hands off!" list of the college's key donors, including individuals and foundations. She was free to solicit anyone not on the list, but that was it.

This was quite a setback, but Melanie had a dream worthy of her time, so she went for it. You can guess the rest. She networked and pitched tirelessly for two years—and got nowhere. She signed up a few commitments, but they were all way too small. Any big donors she discovered got scooped up by the development office for other things. Melanie's goal remained totally out of reach. Without access to the few strategic donors to the college, she'd never raise the fifteen million.

She was stuck. Unnecessarily.

Melanie believed that her problem was getting fifteen million

dollars to fund her social innovation institute. But that wasn't her problem; that was just her first idea of a solution to her problem, and she got so anchored to that idea that she was mired in stuckness and failure. Oh, and did we mention that she was getting depressed by all this rejection, and that her teaching was suffering from the fund-raising distraction, and that her colleagues, sick of the Melanie money lament, had begun avoiding her? You see, when you anchor yourself to a bad solution, it just gets worse and worse with time.

Melanie's real problem was wanting to make a lasting impact on her college through social innovation—not funding an institute. She made a classic mistake of jumping to one solution too quickly. With help, Melanie got unstuck by adopting a design thinking mind-set, remembering what her real problem was, and exploring some prototypes. She realized that she'd come up with the institute idea (and its fifteen-million-dollar price tag) all on her own one day and had never really considered alternatives. She applied the mind-set of curiosity to the situation and did some more investigating before finally settling on just what it was she was trying to do.

She decided to frame an interesting question and talk to lots of people on campus. She began interviewing campus leaders, asking, "How do you think social innovation can be a part of our college, and where would we start?" She had lots of great conversations and got lots of ideas. People suggested theme dorms, alternative spring-break programming, a summer internship program, and a new senior thesis project curriculum. There were lots of ways to make an institutional impact on the college without having to start (and fund) a new institute. Sure, the institute would be cooler and bigger and sexier and would maybe even have more

of an impact, but it was also nearly impossible. The other ideas were much cheaper and also enlisted more new supporters, so Melanie was no longer the sole advocate on campus. She formed a joint student-faculty team, and they concluded that a social-innovation theme dorm was the best idea.

So they prototyped it. First they canvassed all the existing theme dorms to see what they were doing that worked and didn't work. In the process, they met the students who liked the new dorm idea. The team invited those students to form a club on campus as a first step. The club ran for two years to test projects, work the idea into the campus culture, and build credibility. Then four club members jointly applied to be resident assistants in the same dorm their senior year and got the dorm manager's permission to run a social-innovation pilot program the next year. It went great, and was renewed the following year. The year after that, the dorm was officially themed for social innovation, Melanie was named its faculty adviser, and the VP of student housing became its staunchest advocate.

By reframing the problem, using curiosity, prototyping, and a little radical collaboration, Melanie made a permanent change in the campus culture and the housing system. She had a lasting impact on the institution, without ever having to fund an institute.

John also had an anchor problem. Ever since hearing about it when he was a Boy Scout, he had dreamed of taking the mule trip from the rim to the bottom of the Grand Canyon, and promised himself that one day he would do it. Then life got in the way; he had a career to launch and a family to start. No problem—he would make the trip with his wife and kids and create an awesome family memory. But by the time John could afford that vacation

for his family of five, he'd grown in size, too, and now weighed in at 221 pounds. The mule rider limit was 200 pounds. Every spring for five years, John went on a diet to try to get down to 199 pounds so he could make the trip that summer. One year he died down to 212, another year 208. Once he got to 203 (well . . . 209 fully dressed with a water bottle). He was getting better at dieting, but not fast enough. His kids were getting older and had other plans for their summer than hanging around donkeys with their parents for three days.

It never happened. That family memory doesn't exist.

John got anchored to his idea about the solution. It had to be the mule ride. If he'd stepped back and recognized that his one solution, though not impossible, was taking too long to achieve and had a lousy chance of success, he could have saved it. He could have reframed the idea from "Take the Grand Canyon Mule Ride" to "See the Grand Canyon Top to Bottom." There were lots of ways to do that—by helicopter, by river, and by foot. John's chances of training successfully for the hike up and down that trail were about ten times better than his chances of ever tipping the scales under 200.

The moral to the stories of Dave, Melanie, and John is this: Don't make a doable problem into an anchor problem by wedging yourself irrevocably to a solution that just isn't working. Reframe the solution to some other possibilities, prototype those ideas (take some test hikes), and get yourself unstuck. Anchor problems keep us stuck because we can only see one solution—the one we already have that doesn't work. Anchor problems are not only about our current, failed approach. They are really about the fear that, no matter what else we try, that won't work either, and then we'll have to admit that we're permanently stuck—meaning

we're screwed—and we'd rather be stuck than screwed. Sometimes it is more comfortable to hold on to our familiar, failed approach to the problem than to risk a worse failure by attempting the big changes that we think will be required to eliminate it. This is a pretty common but paradoxical human behavior. Change is always uncertain, and there is no guarantee of success, no matter how hard you try. It makes sense to be fearful. The way forward is to reduce the risk (and the fear) of failure by designing a series of small prototypes to test the waters. It is okay for prototypes to fail—they are supposed to—but well-designed prototypes teach you something about the future.

Prototypes lower your anxiety, ask interesting questions, and get you data about the potential of the change that you are trying to accomplish. One of the principles of design thinking is that you want to "fail fast and fail forward," into your next step. When you're stuck with an anchor problem, try reframing the challenge as an exploration of possibilities (instead of trying to solve your huge problem in one miraculous leap), then decide to try a series of small, safe prototypes of the change you'd like to see happen. It should result in getting unstuck and finding a more creative approach to your problem. We will talk a lot more about prototyping in chapter 6.

Before we leave the topic of anchor problems entirely, we need to make clear how they differ from the gravity problems mentioned in chapter 1. They are both really nasty problem types that keep people stuck, but they're entirely different in nature. An anchor problem is a real problem, just a hard one. It's actionable—but we've been stuck on it so long or so often that it seems insurmountable (which is why such a problem has to be reframed, then opened up with new ideas, then knocked down to size by



prototyping). Gravity problems aren't actually problems. They're circumstances that you can do nothing to change. There is no solution to a gravity problem—only acceptance and redirection. You can't defy the laws of nature, nor do we live in a world where poets reliably make a million dollars a year. Life designers know that if a problem isn't actionable, then it's not solvable. Designers may be artful at reframing and inventing, but they know better than to go up against the laws of nature or the marketplace.

We are here to get you unstuck.

We want you to have lots of ideas and lots of options.

When you have lots of ideas, you can build prototypes of your life and test them out. That's what life designers do.

## Mind Mapping with Your Good Time Journal

If you didn't do your Good Time Journal in the last chapter, please go back and do it now; you are going to need it for this exercise. We are going to do three different mind maps, each one extending out at least three or four layers, and with at least a dozen or more elements in the outermost ring.

### Mind Map 1 — Engagement

From your Good Time Journal, pick one of the areas of greatest interest to you, or an activity during which you were really engaged (e.g., balancing the budget or pitching a new idea), and

make it the center of your map. Then generate a bunch of connected words and concepts, using the mind-mapping technique.

### Mind Map 2 — Energy

From your Good Time Journal, pick something you've identified as really energizing you in your work and life (e.g., art class, giving feedback to colleagues, health-care access, keeping things running right) and mind-map this out.

### Mind Map 3 — Flow

From your Good Time Journal, pick one of the experiences when you were in a state of flow, put the experience itself at the center of a mind map, and complete your mapping of your experience with this state (e.g., speaking in front of a large audience or brainstorming creative ideas).

Now that you've done these three mind maps, we're going to invent an interesting, though not necessarily practical, life alternative from each.

1. Look at the outer ring of one of your maps and pick three disparate items that catch your eye. You'll know which ones they are intuitively—they should literally “jump out” at you.
2. Now try to combine those three items into a possible job description that would be fun and interesting to you and would be helpful to someone

- else (again, it need not be practical or appeal to lots of people or employers).
3. Name your role and draw a napkin sketch of it (a quick visual drawing of what it is), like the one shown here. For example, when Grant (who was languishing away at the car-rental agency) did this exercise based on when he was engaged in his life (hiking in redwoods, playing pickup basketball, helping his niece and nephew), he ended up drawing a sketch of himself leading a Pirate Surf Camp for children.



4. Do this exercise three times — once for each of your mind maps — making sure that the three versions are different from one another.

## Now What?

You might now be thinking, “This is terrific! There are some really cool ideas here I can definitely use!” If so, that’s great—but it’s not guaranteed and it’s not typical.

Or... you might have completed this and are now saying to yourself, “Well, *that* was silly! What the heck is the point of coming up with all these random nonsense ideas?” If that’s you, you didn’t get your money’s worth out of the exercise. The whole point was to defer judgment and quiet your internal problem-finding critic. If you never did, you probably found the exercise pretty silly. If that’s you, welcome to the club of smart modern people trying to do the right thing (which is to get the right answer right away). Take another look at your work, and find out if you can see it in a new light, or come back and try again in a few days.

Or you might be thinking, “Well, that was pretty fun and interesting, but I’m not really sure what I’m getting out of this yet.” If that sounds like you, you’re doing great. The point of this exercise isn’t to generate a specific result; it’s to get your mind going all over the place and ideating without judgment. By taking the exercise all the way to imagining how to combine elements creatively into surprising roles or jobs, you’ve successfully moved out of problem solving (what do I *do* next?) into design thinking (what can I imagine?). Now you’re working with a designer’s mind-set, and you’ve got lots of important ideas down on paper in a creative format.

It’s time to start the task of innovating three real alternative lives.

It’s time for your Odyssey Plans.

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## Try Stuff

### Mind Mapping

1. Review your Good Time Journal and note activities in which you were engaged, energized, and in flow.
  2. Choose an activity that you were engaged in, an activity that you felt highly energized from, and something you did that brought you into flow, and create three mind maps—one for each.
  3. Look at the outer ring of each mind map, pick three things that jump out at you, and create a job description from them.
  4. Create a role for each job description, and draw a napkin sketch.
- 

## Design Your Lives

**Y**ou are legion.

Each of us is many.

This life you are living is one of many lives you will live.

Now, we are not talking about reincarnation, or anything with religious implications. The plain and simple truth is that you will live many different lives in this lifetime. If the life you are currently living feels a bit off, don't worry; life design gives you endless mulligans. You can do it over at any point, at any time. "Correction shots" are always allowed.

Working with adults of all ages, we've found that where people go wrong (regardless of their age, education, or career path) is thinking they just need to come up with a *plan* for their lives and it will be smooth sailing. If only they make the *right* choice (the *best, true, only* choice), they will have a blueprint for who they will be, what they will do, and how they will live. It's a paint-by-numbers approach to life, but in reality, life is more of an abstract painting—one that's open to multiple interpretations.

Chung was stressing out. He'd worked hard all through his career at UC Berkeley and was graduating with honors. He