

**IT'S NOT
ABOUT
SUCCESS!**

**A Guide to
Finding Satisfaction
Through Authenticity.**

By Evan Hadkins

SUMMARY

It's not about success, well, mostly not anyway. Success can be very disappointing. But when we have a sense of who we truly are, then we are more likely to have an experience of deep satisfaction.

Is this a guarantee of success or perpetual bliss? No. Many things can happen to us, some out of our control. Success is always to some extent a matter of luck, and for most of us our satisfaction is affected by what happens to us.

However, when we know who we are, then some of the sources of our dissatisfaction will be removed. Rather than fighting with ourselves we will have a better chance of living with our own flow and rhythm. We will be far more likely to experience the elation that comes from not fighting between the different parts of ourselves but embracing them. And we will have a better chance of meeting others with depth when we are in touch with the depths of who we are.

This isn't magic, it is doing what we can do - for ourselves and for others. For most of us, most of the time, we can live with greater and deeper satisfaction.

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INTRODUCTION

Introducing Myself.

I've lived an unusual life for an Australian. I grew up as an evangelical Christian who took their faith quite seriously. After graduating from university I joined a Christian youth and community work organisation (Fusion Australia). Unusually for a Christian organisation Fusion took training very seriously and the training was of very high quality. I left Fusion in my early thirties (I will be 50 in March 2009). This all adds up to a very non-mainstream upbringing for an Australian.

It was while working for this organisation that I discovered Perls, Hefferline and Goodman's Gestalt Therapy. This book changed my life and it is still part of me. My first love is counseling, and the best theory of counseling is Gestalt Therapy as far as I'm concerned.

I left Fusion as I was becoming interested in my own physicality, becoming fascinated with massage and bodywork and how all this related to my own spirituality. (In short: this fitted not very well with evangelicalism but just brilliantly with Christianity. My brief critique of evangelicalism: the body is the shadow - always lurking and pushing us to do 'what we don't want to do'). I pursued western massage and then zen shiatsu massage and followed this into acupuncture. This was while maintaining my interest in counseling.

I was married for eight years and have now (July, 2008) been divorced for five. After my divorce I wrote a book with a colleague (Carmen Burnet) called Living Authentically. I had planned to do a series of retreats on this topic but this didn't work out.

It was in 2007 that I discovered blogging. I immediately felt that it was very important: that it could be the next big thing after the printing press. And that it suited my style of writing - compact delivery of what I hope is high quality information. My hope is to eventually make my income from blogging. I find blogging an extraordinarily exciting opening. My challenge at the moment is learning how to write well for this media and how to build readership. My particular struggle with writing at the moment is to be more personal - to not just present information but to let people know who I am as well. I am experimenting with different ways to build readership.

I hope this gives you some sense of who I am. You can read more on my [About page](#) on my blog.

Introducing What I'll Cover in this Report

This report is about satisfaction and how pursuing success can be a mistaken path to this goal. Firstly, I will lay out why I think success is not a good path to satisfaction. I will then go on to talk about our experience of satisfaction. This will involve firstly talking a little about what our experience is like. It will then move on to a map of our experience. This allows us to get more specific about satisfaction - and what gets in the way of it. This brings us to the core of who we are and the satisfaction we have when we live from our core.

I've tried to cram as much value as I can into this report. It may be that I have put in too much or that I haven't explained things enough. If this is the case please let me know and I will add more. I plan to modify it in relation to what people think so please tell me what you think in as much detail as you can. I will be most grateful for any feedback (from bouquets to brickbats and all points in between).

This report falls into two main parts. After the introduction (section 1) the first main part (sections 2 and 3) lays out my ideas about our experience and living a life of satisfaction. The second main part (section 4) is a whole lot of exercises about how to experience the satisfaction of living from the core of who we are. Feel free to skip to this second main part if theory doesn't interest you - you don't have to understand the first section to benefit from the exercises. Feel free to jump around and just read what captures your attention and do any exercises that grab you. I've tried to write this report in a logical and sensible way that will be easy to follow, but I don't want you to think that you need to follow the way I have done things.

This is not meant to be a quick read (it's about 50 pages long. Most of this is practical exercise you can do). I hope the exercises will help you change your life. Feel free to scan this report, go with what captures your attention, come back later and try something else. I hope that this is a report that is worth coming back to.

PART ONE:

IT'S NOT ABOUT SUCCESS

Perhaps you have had the experience of success and found it disappointing. Perhaps after years of effort you have achieved a goal and found that you didn't experience the elation or satisfaction that you thought you would.

As I see it there are four problems with making success our sole focus.

1. Success can be disappointing. Perhaps we didn't realise that the goal we were striving for actually symbolised something. Graduating a course perhaps symbolised being a mature person. Or gaining a job symbolised being an adult. We get the job or finish the course and then find we aren't satisfied because we didn't realise that they symbolised something else. We were working for the wrong goal all along.

Or it may be that we believed we would get a particular reward - if we have this kind of car then that kind of girl/boy will find us attractive, if I get that mark or above then my parents will show their love for me. Unfortunately these other people may not give us the reward we hoped for. We were working not for what we wanted but in the hope that if we did something then others would change.

2. Success doesn't always go to the deserving. Success can elude the deserving and come to the undeserving. Think of a field you know well and have some expertise in; then ask yourself: are the most highly rewarded always the most skillful? I suspect there is a mix - some of the most rewarded are very highly skilled but then there are usually some just as skilled who aren't nearly so rewarded. Success doesn't always come to the most deserving.

3. To some extent success is beyond our control. The circumstances of our lives are complex and fickle. And we don't control everything that happens to us. (Darren Rowse is someone in the blogging world who is intelligent and humble enough to say that his success owes a lot to just having been in the right place at the right time.) Those who believe that they can control everything are, in my opinion, deluded to a lesser or greater extent. (We are conduits of spirit, not the origin of spirit.)

4. Pursuing only success is also ethically dubious. The way we go about achieving our success is important. It is entirely possible for someone devoid of compassion to achieve success. So success may not mean that the person who achieved it is at all admirable. There are those who care only for success and little for how they achieve it - these people are technically called psychopaths.

I hope this is enough to show that success is not worth making our major focus. It can be delusory, we can't control whether we attain it and it doesn't indicate that we are an admirable person even if we do achieve it. In short it's not worth making success our goal.

Curiously, this is also the conclusion of some people who have studied the "enduringly successful". *Success Built to Last* is a book that studies how those who have been enduringly successful achieved their success. (The enduringly successful are defined as those who have been successful for more than twenty years.) The authors found that the enduringly successful weren't most interested in money, fame or power. They refer to the enduringly successful as "builders".

For Builders, the real definition of success is a life and work that brings personal fulfillment and lasting relationships and makes a difference in the world in which they live. p.19.

In a section headed "Betrayed by Success and Searching for Meaning" they go on to say,

Considering this mismatch between the dictionary definition of success [wealth, fame, power etc] and what you as an individual and your organisation might actually care about, it shouldn't be a surprise that you might yearn to "make something of yourself", only to find that you're strangely dissatisfied along the way because what you are working so hard for doesn't really matter to you. Indeed, too many people at some point in their lives set goals and go on to achieve them, often brilliantly, only to find that they are mysteriously disappointed, empty and unhappy. p.22

FURTHER READING

[Success Built to Last](#) - Jerry Porras, Stewart Emery

[Tactics](#) - Edward de Bono

THEORY

PART TWO: EXPERIENCE IS THE MEETING OF US AND SOMETHING

This section (parts two and three) is a little bit of theory. If theory doesn't interest feel free to skip it.

This report is about our experience - especially about how to experience satisfaction. This section will lay the ground work for understanding satisfaction by examining a little the nature of our conscious experience. It will be about everyday experience - we won't go into sleep or more esoteric states of consciousness (these may be important but they are not the concern here).

Putting it as simply as I can: our experience is us experiencing something. This means that our experience isn't entirely "inside us" - it occurs where we meet something. And our experience isn't entirely "outside us" either. Our experience of a meal is not just an experience of our mouth it is also about the food in it (as well as other things: the anticipation from the look of the food and its smell for instance). The enjoyment of a piece of music requires the piece of music as well as our ears (and our more or less formal training in, and past experience of, music).

Our experience can be viewed from two aspects. Our part of the story is "us" - our own sensations, thoughts, feelings, our actions and the choices we make. All these are fundamental to our experience and how satisfying we find it. The other part of the story is the "something" - all the stuff and other people that make up our world. This too is fundamental to our experience and satisfaction. Let's look at our experience - the "us" and the "something".

1. The "us" part of the story.

What happens 'inside us' is very important. There is much truth in the saying that 'it is with our thoughts that we make the world'. What we think influences what we see, and controls our actions to a very large extent. If we don't believe we can do something then this is usually a self-fulfilling prophecy. And if we believe we can do something and have a go we may well find out that we can. In my experience people do not overestimate themselves and their abilities - they underestimate themselves.

When we discover that we have been underestimating ourselves, and that we are capable of more than we believed; then it is tempting (buoyed by our new confidence in our achievements) to believe that we can achieve anything. Usually this isn't a

problem because what we want is both achievable and sensible. The problem comes when this is turned into some absolute dogma.

The way I understand that 'it is with our thoughts that we make the world' is not that if we just wish hard enough then we will get whatever we want. There is more to the world than me and my thoughts. For me the point of the saying is to highlight how important are thoughts are in how we see ourselves and our world. For me, there is a real world beyond myself and my thoughts. This means that there are real limitations to what I can do. You can't make a functional piano from concrete, you can't make a skyscraper from a piano. Skill can dazzle us with the possibilities revealed - but it is so dazzling **because** it deals with the limitations.

I want to draw attention to the "us" part of the story to point out that we are an active part of our experience. While there is much beyond our control we have the ability to choose how we respond to what happens to us. If you have been in love you will recall how different the world became. You saw different things as well as seeing the same things differently and your action was different too.

How we are makes an enormous difference. It is very rarely true that we are completely powerless. We may be impatient (for the best of reasons) and we may seethe with anger due to real injustices we have suffered - and we usually have some choice about what we do. It may be that there is much learning to be done, and much past trauma to be dealt with, but there are places to learn these things.

2. The "something" part of the story

We need to deal with a real world - and our satisfaction partly depends on how well we deal with this world. Any situation has possibilities and limitations. We can deal with our world, the situation we are in, skillfully or poorly. Someone truly skillful will amaze us with the unexpected possibilities that they will reveal in some situation. The extraordinary shot a tennis player can pull off, the beauty from tubes of pigment and canvas, the reconciliation achieved by a skilled negotiator: these skillful people remind us that we usually don't see all there is to see (of the possibilities **or** the limitations). Life has an element of experiment and learning-as-we-go. There is always the possibility of fresh exploration and being surprised.

Pretending that something is not as it is (even if this pretending is called 'being positive') is counterproductive. It is trying to pull the wool over our own eyes while trying to forget that we are doing it.

The external world 'resists' our thinking. And our actions need to adapt accordingly. It is important to see that this is an invitation to experiment. We don't know in advance what is possible. We can also be willing to take advantage of good fortune and nice surprises that may come along.

An example to make my point. Can we put an end to hunger in the world? Yes. By next Tuesday? No. Of course there is no reason for anyone on our rich and productive planet to starve. To make this real will take much work, not just wishing that it were so. It will mean dealing with the details of food production, distribution and consumption that make up our current world.

In summary: Our experience is the experiencing of something that is not-us: our perception, response to and acting on this not-us. It is us meeting the not-us.

FURTHER READING

Perls, Hefferline and Goodman - [Gestalt Therapy](#) excitement and growth in the human personality

PART THREE: A MAP OF EXPERIENCE

Introduction: About Using Maps

If you are not interested in theory please feel free to skip this part and go on to the practical section that begins with part four.

THE TRAPS OF MAPS

The map is not the territory.

The purpose of a map is to simplify. It leaves out lots of detail and so can be very misleading. With maps of physical terrain we all know this. It is a lot harder to remember with other kinds of maps (for success, self-improvement, performing well in a particular discipline and so on). With these sorts of maps we often think that we are to blame or that we haven't understood properly or that we need to just try harder (those selling the maps often encourage these thoughts). If you are not getting to where you expected to get it may be worth checking the reliability of the map.

Truth is a pathless land and life makes pattern.

Maps come from past experience. This works most of the time and is no problem when things don't change very much. The most common maps are of streets and land which may not change for decades or even centuries. (And when they do we usually hear about it - earthquakes and floods make the news.) Other parts of our lives can be far more uncertain (mountains don't move very quickly, but the business world can) so that relying on maps of these things can be much more hazardous.

As Krishnamurti said: the truth is a pathless land.

What I want to add to this is that "life makes pattern". Our lives, and the situation around us, have rhythms and patterns that are worth paying attention to. In familiar situations we usually have a good idea of what is going to happen next. Sticking to the road rules, eating healthily long term and being polite to others have results that aren't 100% certain, but are fairly predictable. Maps are useful for these usually predictable parts of our lives.

Maps can become a trap when we are in a new situation. The past can become a set of blinkers that means we don't look at the new things that are happening. These are the traps of maps.

THE USEFULNESS OF MAPS

The map is not the territory and this is its strength. A map gives us a simplified overview: the major landmarks that we can navigate by. So long as we remember that every map leaves out lots of detail they are very useful to us. If we forget this we can find that we have fallen down a hole too small or too new to make it onto the map. To get to know every detail of even one place could take a life time. A map helps us get around without having to know everything.

My maps are of human experience, and they are quite simple ones. Human experience is extraordinarily and beautifully complex; these maps are extremely simple in comparison. I'm not using them because they are the 'whole story' in any sense of the term. I am using them to give us a sense of orientation and as guidance to get to where we want to go (a life of satisfaction).

My Maps

I have two maps that I will use here.

1. A four stage map of our experience. The four stages are: rest (winter), emerging awareness (spring), engagement (summer) and learning/growing (autumn/harvest).
2. A four dimensional map of who we are. The four dimensions are: physical, emotional, mental and spiritual.

1. A FOUR STAGE MAP OF OUR EXPERIENCE

My map is a map of our process - the stages that our experience goes through. It has four stages (each with two parts that I won't go into in detail.). You can think of the stages as similar to the four seasons.

Rest/Winter

Rest and idleness are important. To be working and doing all day every day is no way to live a life. We need times for the field of our lives to lie fallow, times when we recuperate. This means taking breaks during the day, sleeping well each night, as well as taking days off and holidays.

This stage ends when we realise that something is disturbing us.

We will experience dissatisfaction if we stay disturbed instead of moving on. This may well mean us fidgeting constantly or feeling 'antsy' or not quite clear about what we want.

Emerging Awareness/Spring

When we realise something is disturbing us we start 'looking around' for what it is. This can be looking around the outside world or searching our inner world. We may find that we are peering at the contents of the fridge and realise we are a bit peckish; or we may find ourselves remembering an incident from the past and realise we are still upset by it in some way (or that we are feeling the same way now as we did then).

This stage ends when we take the first step to initiate action (such as reaching out to something in the fridge, or acting on the emotion we are feeling).

We will experience dissatisfaction if our awareness stays with only emerging, I will be foggy - not clear about what I perceive. I may feel a bit frustrated, or that 'I still don't get it'.

Engagement/Summer

After we've initiated action we follow through to engaging with what we are interested in. Our attention is fully focused on some 'thing' - an idea, artwork, sandwich, or whatever is related to our disturbance at the time. This means different things depending on the object of interest. But in each case it means dealing with the details and appreciating the whole. With an idea this would be seeing what smaller ideas make up the bigger idea and how it relates to other ideas. In a relationship with someone else we will try out different topics of conversation and may do different activities together. The result we aim for is getting a good sense of what this idea is and how it can be applied, or what this person is like and whether we will get on with them. This back and forth between the parts and the whole will usually be repeated many times. With an idea we may think something like "OK that's where that bit fits, now what about this bit", and so on. With another person it may be something like, "Oh, they are a great conversationalist, but their politics I don't want a bar of".

This stage ends with some sense of 'mastery' of the object of attention. We know the idea or object, or we've gotten to know the person.

We will experience dissatisfaction if we are not clear what to do with this idea or object or how to relate to this person. This may mean getting impatient or doing the thing over and over again. I may feel frustrated that I can't do what I want with this 'thing' or relate well to this other person.

Learning and Growing/Harvest-Autumn

After we have interacted with what we are interested in then we are no longer focused so exclusively on it. Our attention shifts back to ourselves. We assess what we have learnt and how we have changed.

Do we feel satisfied by the sandwich I have eaten or do I need something more? If it is a very complex experience that we are digesting (such as a philosophy, or a complex relationship like being married) then we will be engaged in this process on and off perhaps for months and years. The more complex the experience we are digesting the more complicated will our learning and growing probably be (lots of pluses and minuses in all sorts of different aspects).

We will experience dissatisfaction if we are not sure 'what it all means' for us. Being in two minds about whether it was worthwhile or not.

2. A FOUR DIMENSIONAL MAP OF WHO WE ARE

In my map of ourselves as individuals we have four dimensions: physical, emotional, mental and spiritual.

- By physical I mean our muscles, nerves, skin, brain and so forth as well as processes like respiration, digestion and elimination. Our world of sensation.
- By emotional I mean sensations being organised into patterns of action - fear with its readiness for flight or fright, anger with its tightening to fight and so on.
- By mental I mean analysis and creativity.
- By spiritual I mean purpose and our sense of meaning.

These are dimensions. We don't have different parts - one bit physical, the next emotional, another mental and yet a different bit that is spiritual. While we may focus on one aspect at any one time we are always all these dimensions. We are able to look at one side of a square at a time but it always has the four sides.

3. PUTTING MY MAPS TOGETHER

Putting these two maps together gives us the four dimensions for each of the four stages.

Rest

Physical. Good sleep. Muscles without chronic tension

Emotional. Not going over things constantly.

Mental. Examine with patience, flow with creativity

Spiritual. Sense of secure ground. Able to be open when desire to.

Emerging Awareness

Physical. Use senses to orientate, finding what I'm interested in.

Emotional. Awareness of physical sensations, forming into an emotion.

Mental. Something is not fitting, something is contradictory or doesn't quite hang together. Finding what the problem is or a new idea.

Spiritual. I need to be doing something more or different, it's not satisfying deeply enough.

Engagement

Physical. Engaging with the thing I've located.

Emotional. Experiencing and expressing the emotion.

Mental. Engaging with the problem or new concept or idea.

Spiritual. Finding a spiritual discipline or tradition that fits who I am.

Learning and Growing

Physical. Degree of physical satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

Emotional. Learning about my emotional triggers and how to express my emotions.

Mental. Finding how useful the new idea of concept is.

Spiritual. Assessing whether the new fits my need for now or if I need something more.

(I am offering a course that takes eight weeks to go through this process in great detail. Two weeks on each stage, five lessons each week. Initially I will be offering it for \$37AU. This will be for charter members who will be asked to make as many suggestions as possible to improve the course. After this I will make any changes needed and offer it for a higher price.)

FURTHER READING

Perls, Hefferline and Goodman - [Gestalt Therapy](#) excitement and growth in the human personality

Hadkins and Burnet - Living Authentically

PRACTICAL

PART FOUR:
THE CORE OF WHO WE ARE
(exercises to help us find, nourish and live from our core)

All of us are the same in some ways and all of us have our unique gift.

The Acorn Metaphor.

The best metaphor I know for speaking about the core of who we are and how it relates to us and our environment is the acorn. Just as each acorn has the potential to grow into a flourishing and splendid living thing, so do we. And every oak tree is different. And every oak tree is affected by the conditions it deals with - the requirements for nourishment and the kind of environmental challenges it needs to respond to.

I believe that each person - like the acorn growing into an oak tree - has the potential to be a flourishing and splendid person; that each person develops individually; and that the development of each person is affected by the situation they are in, just as the oak tree is affected by the soil and the weather.

If this is so then the question is how to find this part of ourselves, this acorn; and then how to nourish its development so that we live out its potential. How do we find our core, nourish it and live from it?

1. Finding our core

The following is a smorgasbord of options for finding your core. Feel free to choose the one or ones that appeal.

What did you enjoy doing as a child?

This can be complicated if you didn't have a lot of choice about what you did, or if you were abused, or if you were on medication. I was on prescription medication because I had a couple of fits when I was very young: so my memories up to year three and four of school are quite foggy. One thing that my parents told me is that I always wanted the real thing. I didn't want a toy hammer, I wanted a real one! I am someone who is impatient with fakeness and phoniness. I still want the real thing! I used to spend hours quite puzzled about the social world and why people did things. You think I may find psychotherapy fascinating - you bet I do.

When have you lost a sense of time?

Have you been doing something and then looked up at a clock and wondered where the time had gone? This is a good indicator that you are doing something that comes naturally to you: something that most likely comes from the core of who you are. Often these are quite humble things, those things we dismiss as 'everybody can do that'. A friend of mine is simply a brilliant organiser. There are many people who would gladly pay her, and pay her well, for bringing organisation into their lives. She however doesn't think this is important: so she doesn't take up the offers - she could earn good money doing something she finds easy to do but she doesn't.

I have throughout my adult life been writing about what I find important. It never occurred to me, until I discovered blogging, that it may be possible to earn money from writing: that people could be interested in what I was interested in writing about. I hope I have learned my lesson - and that I can do the other things involved in blogging well enough to earn my income this way.

When you have had a sense of completion, of a job well done

Some things we do lead us to a sense of a job well done. Other jobs we just do and forget. It is worth taking note of what the satisfying ones are. It is especially worthwhile to note the ones that you find were surprisingly satisfying.

I was surprised by how good it felt for me to screw up and throw away the used up sheet of printer labels. Reflecting on this led me to understand how important it was in this work to have a sense of completion. (I work at home and so I can forget to take note of jobs finished or just let them hang around. It is important to me to mark the completion of what I have been doing and reward myself, sometimes with a short break or a cup of good coffee.)

What can't you compromise on?

I know that my core is connected with being a psychotherapist - I simply can't tell someone that the session they did was a good session when it was crap. I'm hoping that through blogging I can provide information in a form that will bring some of the benefits of psychotherapy to many more people than I could in person.

When have you had a sense of elation - of 'the curse has lifted'?

Sometimes we have the sensation of being freed. We hadn't realised until this time that we had been imprisoned or inhibited, but now we feel liberated. We find ourselves surprised by a sense of elation.

I remember the liberation of a creativity workshop. We were asked to draw a line that we liked. It didn't have to be like anything and it didn't have to look any particular way or try to be beautiful, we just had to like it - and like every part of it. This was surprisingly hard work - try it and you'll see.

But the sensation of lightness was marvelous - I hadn't realised how much weight of shoulds and oughts I was carrying about art and creativity. (The damage that schooling does to children's creativity I think must be incalculable.)

Since then I have found it far easier to be creative. I can simply go with what is happening. This doesn't mean that the results are always great, or even any use - creativity isn't always successful. But if I can stay with what I am doing, then I will certainly be in touch with my core. And the results are often surprisingly good.

Writing a fairy tale too quick to think.

This is an exercise commonly used in psychotherapy. You have three minutes and you write without stopping. No pausing for thinking about plot or characters or what word would be best - just write. You set out to write a fairy tale, you have the starting point of "Once upon a time . . .", and then you just write. You will generally find that you have, perhaps crudely or perhaps brilliantly (or both), in some way written 'the story of your life'.

What you have written will usually repay much reflection. Of first importance perhaps is the ending. If the ending is unfortunate for you, then change it. And then ask what this means for your everyday life. You can also reflect on: the characters, events, incidents, and your character in the story.

FURTHER READING

Paul Rebillot - [The Call to Adventure](#)

This book contains a series of exercises specifically designed to find your core - though he doesn't call it this. The exercises involve movement, pictures and words. It is a great process, clearly laid out and it is very well explained. It is organised around the hero(ine)'s quest. If you do it I think you will find it invaluable. You will need to set aside time periods of perhaps two hours where you will entirely undisturbed.

2. Nourishing the development of our core

LIFE'S MEMBRANE

Life is a healthy membrane. Any organism is surrounded by a membrane that, in more or less complicated ways, filters the environment - taking in nourishment, keeping out what is not nourishing or poisonous, and then finally excreting the unused parts back into the environment. With an amoeba this process is fairly simple. With a person it is far more complex. To my way of thinking our human 'membrane' functions in the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual dimensions.

The following exercises are designed to give an experience of what nourishes you. To draw your attention to how you seek out and take in what is nourishing and reject what is poisonous. Some of these exercises are a bit more challenging than the others. The ones that I think deal with deeper issues I have called "Going Deeper". Please pick and choose the ones that feel best to you. If you feel like you want to deal with a big problem, or go deep, please ensure that you have the support you need to do this. Also know that there is no reason to complete any of these exercises, if you are nervous or reluctant then stop and ask yourself why - don't just press on. Always stay with what is safe and comfortable for you.

Putting Part of Me 'Out There'

Finding an object that 'chooses us'.

Either go for a walk or look around where you are. Find an object that stands out for you. It should be something that 'draws you to it' or that 'calls to you'.

The next stage is to specify what are the qualities that draw you to this. Be as explicit as you can about what these qualities are.

Finally put "I am . . ." in front of the qualities you have identified. You will find that you have identified qualities of great importance for you, which are at the core of who you are. Deeper reflection will usually show that these qualities are part of you and that you are uncomfortable with them.

Going deeper: heroes and villains.

Make a list of those who you see as your hero(ine)s and villains. Your heroes are those who seem to be just incredibly admirable people, those who cause you to gasp in admiration or who you find stunning. Your villains are those who just make your flesh creep, you may not even know why - they just do.

Now make a list of the qualities of your hero(ine)s. Then list the qualities of your villains. Be as specific as you can. And make sure that it is their qualities that you are

listing, not your feelings about these people nor how the villains should change or why the hero(ine)s are so great.

Then put, "I am . . ." in front of these qualities. This can be a very challenging process. Please note that it is qualities we are dealing with and not behaviour. Curiously, while it may be most affronting to look at the villain's qualities in yourself, it is often the hero(ine)'s qualities that are hardest to see as part of us.

Please don't push yourself with an exercise such as this. If you feel like stopping please do, and find what support you need to proceed with it safely.

Vomiting what we haven't digested

What they should do.

It's time to let loose and spew it all out. Imagine someone who should be different to how they are, or who should be doing different things to what they are doing. Imagine telling them exactly who they should be and what they should do. Don't hold back, let all those shoulds come pouring out. You may be surprised how many there are, and how long it takes. I know when I do this I find myself saying, "And another thing . . ." before I pour out some more shoulds. Once you have done this you may feel cleansed.

Then its time for some rational examination of the shoulds. Which do I want to keep? Which seem just plain silly? (That's OK, they are probably what we thought as children, and children aren't adults.) Which ones have got in the way of me living fully? Which ones have helped?

Doing this exercise will bring you close to your core beliefs and values. Underneath 'the should' lies what is precious to us.

Going deeper: What stops your pleasure? Examining good reasons and ethics. Some of us choose not to do something even though we would enjoy it. I think this can be a problem when this stopping is automatic, when we don't know why we don't do something.

Choose a time when you didn't do something that you know you would have enjoyed. Then give the reasons for this. They may be ethical - it would be wrong, or practical - I couldn't because I was doing something else.

Then play devils advocate. Does the ethical statement stand up to scrutiny? Is it a matter of the action always being wrong - or only in some situations? Do the consequences of an ethical decision count? Does the severity of the consequences

count - lying may be wrong if it is just a matter of convenience but what when peoples' lives may be at risk? (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Christian alive during world war 2, wrote the part book on ethics about lying while he was lying to the Gestapo).

Were the practical reasons really so clear? Was there no way at all that you could have done what you didn't? Would it have mattered terribly much if what you were doing was delayed?

This kind of examination has been the stuff of philosophy for millennia. I am not trying to help you solve the philosophical problems of the ages. The purpose of this exercise is to bring you in touch with your core beliefs and ethics. Its purpose is to help you be clear about what lies at the core of who you are.

Please don't engage in this kind of exercise if you don't feel reasonably secure in your ethics. A time of questioning and crisis is not the time for this kind of exercise.

For me: Once I did this exercise when I was studying at an acupuncture college with a very bad teacher. I thought that I had some feelings about teaching, but I was shocked at the strength of feeling that came pouring out. I spoke without stopping for about three minutes. This showed me very clearly how important to me teaching was, that it was (and still is) part of the core of who I am.

Doing to others what we were afraid to (and so did to ourselves).

Curing a headache.

For this you need a partner or perhaps several partners. You'll need to explain how you want them to help you.

The next time you have a headache, give it away. The way you do this is by trying to duplicate the sensation in your head on someone else's head. You squeeze and push on their head to duplicate the sensation going on in your own head. You have to try and duplicate the sensation in the other person with the same intensity that you are feeling inside yourself.

If you have more than one person to help you, then get them to sit or stand in a circle, their feet must be touching the ground. The person whose head you are squeezing passes on the energy through their hands to the rest of the group who visualise it going down into the earth.

Naturally you let the person you are squeezing know that they can tell you to stop at any time. I have done this several times myself, both as 'squeezer' and 'squeezee', and

seen it done numerous times, never has anyone been hurt, nor has the squeeze ever needed to ask the other person to stop.

Going Deeper: anger and rage.

Many of us have problems expressing anger and rage. There are good reasons for this - many of us have memories and experiences of the damage that anger fuelled violence can lead to. This means we don't express our anger and rage. In my observation this leads to depression and despair.

However, with a little consistent work it is possible to find ways to express our anger that does not damage anyone (including ourselves!) or the furniture. With a little more work it is possible to express our rage as well.

It is best to begin with fantasies and objects that aren't valuable. The most important thing is that you stop whenever you feel uncomfortable. If you stick with what you are comfortable with then it will be a pleasurable experience to return to. If you push yourself it will make it an unpleasant experience that you will be reluctant to try again. If you stick with what is comfortable it is usually surprising how quickly change comes.

One of the all time favourite objects is the tennis racquet. You hit the bed with it. This has the advantage of you being able to hit as strongly as you are able and never damage anything - the surface area of the racquet means that the force is dissipated. Or, you can also have a tantrum - kick and scream on the mattress of the bed (make sure you are far enough away from walls and the hard parts of the bed).

The next step is to use a symbol. You can then destroy it, or at least take it apart. The easiest is perhaps a cardboard box with something written or drawn on it. You can then find any number of ways to express your anger on the box: stabbing, tearing it apart, burning it, throwing it out . . . there are any number of possibilities.

The next step, if you can be on your own, is to add words. Voice your anger while you are dealing with the object. These are often obscene, it is these words that have the force of our childhood behind them.

Going Even Deeper

A whole new level begins when we are personally comfortable with our anger and then begin to express it to others. It is possible to begin with just reporting our anger rather than expressing. E.g. "I'm sorry something is happening for me right now, I need to take a break", or, "Something has triggered some anger for me, could I just

have a couple of minutes". There is no reason to say what the anger is about if you don't want to. If people ask you can say things like, "Oh, it just triggered an old memory that I don't want to go into at the moment".

From there you can go on to reporting that you feel angry. This will depend on whether you think it has much to do with what is going on at the moment. At first we can just use the word. E.g., "I'm feeling angry and need time to think this through".

Then, when we are comfortable doing so, we can go on to expressing our anger. You may or may not use the word anger. It can be things like, "I totally disagree!" or "I think what you did/said was outrageous!"

A word about the martial arts. These can be very good for dealing with our anger. However they usually take a couple of years before any level of proficiency is attained. They are not a quick option. There are other options for using the anger in defending ourselves physically like self defense classes - the ones where you get to hit someone dressed up in protective clothing may be particularly useful.

If you think you have lots of anger that you don't know how to express, please ensure you get the support you need, if you plan to change this. Always stick with what you are comfortable with. Small and steady progress is the safest way - and often the quickest too.

Rage can be trickier than anger because it can immobilise us. This leads to us 'being stuck about being stuck'. This is a very difficult and awful place to be. It makes it difficult to find a place to start - or to even have the motivation to look for one. So, it is even more important to have good support if you wish to get to know your rage.

One place to start is if you can identify how you freeze yourself. There will probably be memories or thoughts; you may be able to identify things you say to yourself, or which muscles you tighten. Depending on which of these you can identify you then try unfreezing it a little: You can experiment with tightening the tight muscles and then loosening them a little. You can examine and challenge the thoughts you have. You can work with the memory - if it is one where you are terrified, try introducing your grown up self to care for your younger self, or, you can imagine a magic object of some kind and use it to change the situation.

You will find that gradually you can be with your rage for a little longer and that then you can begin expressing it. It may help to have some artistic media as an outlet. One where you don't care about the results is best: you are using the art as an outlet - not

to create anything for others.

Please be sure with rage to only do what you are comfortable with. And please remember that the purpose is to be able for the rage to move a little, for us to get unfrozen. Eventually we establish control over when we freeze and when we don't. And I'll say it again, if you want to deal with expressing your rage please ensure you have the support you need.

Anger and rage provide great information about the core of who we are. We get angry or enraged because something important to us has been insulted or violated in some way. If we feel angry or enraged then something important is happening. It may be that we have been reminded of an incident in our past where we were insulted or violated, or it may be that we have been insulted or violated at the moment. Anger and rage let us know that our core is involved. By knowing why we are angry or enraged we will know what is at the core of who we are.

Doing for ourselves what we were afraid to (and so got others to do).

What do you think you can't do?

This isn't an invitation to recklessness. Those who only feel alive when they're in danger need some therapy in my humble opinion. Neither is it about those impossible things that we still wish for. (These can be valuable to examine, but that's another story).

This is about those things where you feel, "I couldn't possibly do that!", but which others find quite easy to do. It can be literally anything (cleaning toilets, being a salesperson, teaching someone something, learning a sport, talking about our feelings, expressing our anger (or some other emotion) . . . the list is infinite).

Imagine doing the thing you don't want to do. Notice the feelings that arise. Do you have specific fears (particular bad things happenings) or a more vague anxiety (its dangerous but not for any specific reason, you don't exactly what will happen but you know it will be something bad)? Notice whether you feel the age you currently are when experiencing these feelings, or whether you feel younger than you are.

The question is: how has this reluctance to do this shaped your life? Have you eliminated the need to do this action or activity from your life? Have you employed others to do it? Has it shaped you life a little, in decisive ways, or not at all? Would doing it mean being a completely different person; or just learning something with a little effort?

The purpose of this is not to persuade you to force yourself to do something. The purpose is to see how you have shaped your life and relationships.

Going Deeper: What's the worst that could happen?

When we contemplate doing some things we have a very strong reaction. We can have a visceral revulsion; just thinking about doing it can make us feel nauseous.

The challenge here is to imagine a situation where you could do this. If you don't imagine you could tell a lie, imagine you were being tortured by the enemy military in time of war - could you lie to save hundreds of lives? Let your imagination make as wild a fantasy as you like. This is just to help you get a little 'distance' from what you think you can't do. So that you can contemplate what it is without such a strong emotional reaction.

The next challenge is to try to be a little more realistic. If you did the thing you don't believe you could, what is the worst that could happen? Would anyone else know? Would it be that you would be ashamed or guilty? Would there be severe social ostracism or even prison? The purpose of this is to get some realistic assessment of what is at stake. This is because we often have catastrophic fantasies that are quite unrealistic. We believe terrible things will happen to us, but others have done it and suffered not at all.

This process is of most relevance when there is a part of you that is attracted to doing something, but another part that feels that you simply can't - or shouldn't - do such things. When you are in this situation of having two competing parts, it is important to pay attention to both parts. If you can, over time, pay attention to both parts and see if you can live into a way where both are honoured. This usually takes a good deal of work and some creativity. It can be done. It will usually require good support from others - at least others who are willing to listen, and perhaps provide assistance with finding ways to move forward. It is especially important (if you feel that the decision to not do something has blighted your life) that you don't become reckless - to do it and "damn the consequences". This is usually a desire of the childlike part of us. This part is valuable and should be honoured and cared for, and you don't want a four year old running your life. Four year olds don't have the experience or the sense of consequences needed to make wise decisions.

For me: I hate sales. I have not the slightest desire to be a salesperson and a positive dislike of selling. I feel fake and phony. Needless to say, developing a successful blog means marketing and, to some extent at least, sales. What have I done? Firstly, talk about the product and how people could benefit from it. To explain what it is about

and be upfront about why I think it is good. This is evasive in a sense. A way of avoiding sales. As is marketing - just letting people know about my blog and the course I have planned isn't sales. Talking about the stuff is fine by me. And if people are interested I'm happy to talk more. This may well lead to sales (and I hope it does) but it doesn't fall into the category of 'sales' for me and I don't mind doing it at all. Secondly, is directly confrontation to my attitude to selling. This came from a person I was in a group with. He was a very successful salesman. He said that to sell well you had to "speak from your heart". This directly contradicted my feelings about if I'm selling I need to be fake and phony. I thought, "If that is what selling is about I don't mind doing that at all". This offered me a liberation and a way forward. This was a couple of months ago now. I am still checking this out, seeing if it works and how it fits with me. So far it has been a very positive experience.

The baby and the bathwater, or, discrimination: getting beyond all or nothing.

Each of these experiences has been designed to you give you an experience of the 'membrane' that is you in action. Looked at another way it is the development of discernment and discrimination. Growing gradually more attuned to our experience and making smaller discriminations. It is helping us get better at allowing in the nourishing and excluding the poisonous or useless. The next section is a few practices that I have found to nourish my core - and that I hope you will find beneficial also.

Nourishment for our core.

Reflecting on experience

Finding a method that works for you.

Some people (like me) are wordy, others relate to music, others are doers. Whatever kind of person you are the trick is to find a method of contemplation that works for you. Journaling is my chosen method. I can sit down and pour out my experience in words in a quite uninhibited way. Others will prefer to listen to music. Others find drawing or moving the best way. The major consideration is that it is a way that lets you reflect on your experience. This means that trying to make something is not what it is about. If you are a writer, for instance, then journaling may be the worst way for you to try for contemplating your experience. Having to do it the right way is fatal.

Sitting and not thinking

One time honoured and tested way of nourishment is called 'meditation'. This word covers a multitude of practices and even different aims. Here our concern is with self-knowledge and nourishment.

This means taking time for calmness and self-examination. This usually requires quiet and a straight spine. (The easiest way to get a straight spine is to sit on the edge of a chair and rock your upper body backwards and forwards, gradually make the rocking smaller until you come naturally to rest. You will probably find that your spine is straight - your weight will fall into the chair through your hip bones, your head will be lightly resting on your shoulders. You may not get it perfect first time, but you will find that your sensitivity grows as you do it.) You can then just concentrate on your breath - the rise and fall of your chest or the difference in temperature of air as it goes in and out your nostrils. Choose a time and set an alarm if you can - that way you won't have to worry about time passing while you are doing it. It may be helpful to have a pad and pencil by you so that if you remember things you have to do you can jot them down instead of rushing off to do them immediately. Eventually you can aim for twenty minutes - it takes this long for our body's 'relaxation response' to kick in. At first five minutes, or even one, may be enough.

The benefits of this little period of calm can last all day.

Scheduled time with another

Getting someone else's perspective on our situation and behaviour can be a huge benefit. They may be able to see the bigger picture that we are too close to see; or they may have a different perspective or valuable experience and information that will help us greatly. Time with another can help us solve problems, get perspective, or help us

talk through troubles or problems. There are so many possible benefits that I think we should do it more. And this probably means we need to schedule it.

There are many levels of depth where we can talk to others. It could be just a minute or two at the end of the workday to ask our colleagues how it was and if there is anything we should know. It can be coffee with a friend who is a good listener. It can be advice and listening from someone in the same field of work (unfortunately often called 'supervision').

However, the person needs to be a particular kind of person. For time with another to be nourishing the other needs to have particular qualities - primarily that they are a good listener. Other qualities will depend on the sort of person we are (we may like someone who will help us lighten up, or need someone who helps us be serious and not so frivolous, someone who is good at seeing logical plans or someone who will help us be less obsessive about our goals).

After time with the right person we will feel refreshed and more in touch with our core.

New Behaviour

There are times when we feel stuck in a rut and stale. At these times some kind of new behaviour is needed. If we are to nourish our core then we need to find ways to do it, doing things we haven't done before.

Goals and timetables

One of the most popular ways to change behaviour is to establish goals and set out on a path to achieving them. This can be very damaging when part of ourselves is ignored. All that advice about not procrastinating usually means that a part of ourselves has been ignored. All that advice is to push on toward your goal - in other words either ignoring a part of yourself, or worse: being unkind to part of yourself. This self-punishment often goes under the name of 'discipline'. I find using goals in this way damaging and unhelpful.

However goals can be very useful - when our goals serve us instead of us serving our goals. New behaviour is usually strange - and the newer the behaviour the stranger it will be. We don't where we are and don't have a sense of how we are doing. In this situation it can help to have some markers on the journey. In this way goals can provide us with important and helpful information.

Doing the first thing

One of the benefits of vision exercises and goal setting is that it gives us a sense of our priorities. Once our priorities are clear then the options we have are much reduced, and to this extent our choices are made simpler. This alone can lead to much reduced stress and confusion.

The major benefit, from the point of view of new behaviour, is that we know the next thing to do. This is priceless. The longest journey does indeed begin with the first step. Taking the first step often feels surprisingly good, it puts behind us our indecision and confusion, and we often feel lighter as a result.

Symbolic actions

Symbolic actions can nourish us in at least three ways:

- being reminders/memorials
- marking significant moments of transition
- enacting new resolutions - symbolising the whole of ourselves or our life.

Reminders and Memorials

At the large scale these are things like pilgrimages. Most religions have ceremonies and rituals that are designed to remind people of the important values of the religion and the acts of past members of the religion. These can be huge festivals or reading a sacred text in solitude.

Visiting places of special significance can nourish us deeply. It can be as simple as going for a walk in a park that you especially like. Or perhaps a little deeper - a place where we had a special experience or made a significant decision. The doing of these things can reconnect us with our original decision, motivation and determination.

They needn't involve going away though. A woman I knew heard of a group who regarded the painting of their face as a nurturing of their soul. This entirely changed her attitude to putting on make-up each morning.

These reminders can be an ongoing source of nourishment for us.

Transition

Symbolic actions can help us get to grips with a transition we are making. Giving up a driving license can be a marker of the movement into old age. The marriage ceremony is probably the most widespread symbolic action that marks a transition. Throwing out a school uniform can mark the end of schooling. Getting a haircut and a suit can embody the transition to the job market. Signing a mortgage can mean far more than the acquisition of a debt.

Symbolising a transition can help us connect with the meaning of what is going on for us. In this way it can nourish us at our core.

New Resolutions

When we are making major changes we can feel that 'everything is different' but that nothing is different yet. And we can fear getting stuck again in old patterns. Symbolic actions can be useful as markers of the new having begun.

Someone worried about going back to an abusive partner they have left may burn their marriage certificate or smash their wedding ring. Someone who has decided to pursue a particular kind of career may buy the clothes or a piece of equipment for that career. Someone who has decided they need to improve their health may decide to go for a short walk. Someone who has decided to take better care of themselves may have a lingering bath or eat a particularly delicious kind of food.

This symbolising of resolutions can be deeply affirming and helpful.

Relaxation and calm

Comedy and Humour

Laughter: full on, laugh-out-loud, tears running down our cheeks laughter, is a wonderful antidote to stress. It gives our whole body a shake up and helps us get out of our mental ruts. In some places there are even laughter clubs that you can join.

It is hard to find genuinely funny stuff - if you've ever tried to write comedy you'll know why: it is incredibly difficult. Stand up comics, when starting out, are happy with one laugh per ten gags.

For me the funniest writer ever is P G Wodehouse (pronounced "woodhouse" for some reason). If you are looking for something funny to read I recommend him. Not all of his writing is equally good, he wrote a lot, but most of his writing is as good as anyone and the best is in a category all its own. If you want to send me your own recommendations for funny books, movies or whatever I'll include them in an updated version of this report.

After a good laugh we feel fresher, uplifted and back in touch with ourselves. It is surprising how little this is recommended in the self-help literature.

Rhythmic exercise

We can deal with some of our stress physically.

If it is at a peak we can do explosive stuff - like kicking or punching a pillow (see the section above on expressing anger). However, this is more for dealing with a crisis than the usual.

A way to process the usual stresses of the day is through rhythmic exercise - this will usually mean aerobic exercise. This means things like walking, swimming and bike riding. To be healthy and safe aerobic exercise should be done at 70% of capacity. Zero is lying down or asleep and 100% is running flat out. Our estimate of what is 70% is usually very accurate. If you want something more rigorous you should be guided by your pulse rate (the carotid pulse in your neck is the easiest to use). Here the formula is $220 - \text{age}$ and then take seventy percent of this. For me this would mean $220 - 50 \times 70\%$. This is $220 - 50 = 170$ then 70% of this (or 170×0.7) which gives 119. That is 119 beats per minute or 19 beats every six seconds or about 32 every ten seconds. For aerobic fitness you need to have your pulse at this level three or more times a week for twenty minutes or more.

For handling stress in my experience it is the rhythm that makes a difference. The aim is to slot into a groove, where you are cruising along nicely and enjoying it. It is enjoying the doing of the exercise that is important, being with the rhythm - what the exercise is meant to achieve (fitness and so on) are not relevant to the stress reduction. This means, if you are going walking for instance, try to have uninterrupted space - walk around a park where you won't need to stop at traffic lights and can keep your rhythm.

Relationships

Support

Our relationships can help us know who we are, feel secure, and experience pleasure and delight. There are few things better in life than when our relationships are going well (maybe nothing better).

Often a requirement of having our deepest needs met is being able to let people know what they are. Just telling someone can be a time of intimacy. It may be possible for our deepest needs to be met in our relationships. We won't know unless we ask.

Feedback

The other gift of relationships is feedback. Others can let us know how we are doing and how we are coming across. We can't see our behaviour from any other perspective than our own. And our perspective usually includes our intention. It is helpful to hear from others, who may not know what we are trying to do, and, and see only our behaviour.

This can help us both with tasks we are working on and in our relationships. In one sense any response we get is feedback and reflecting on it may be valuable. It is usually also valuable to specifically ask for feedback. Some people are all too ready to give 'feedback' (actually their opinion) while others are overly reluctant.

The best people to ask are those who give you information about how you are doing on the task or how others are responding to you. You aren't after their opinion but information about behaviour. People who can give feedback like this are worth their weight in gold.

Getting good at worthwhile work

What's worthwhile?

What is worthwhile work varies from person to person. "Worthwhile" is really just another way of saying it nourishes our core. The exercises in Finding Our Core section (above) should be a good starting point if you don't know what is worthwhile for you.

Measuring Progress

Then we need some kind of measure. Any established work or art or craft or sport has ways of measuring progress. These are useful when they offer ways of improving instead of just being rankings. Learning to play progressively more beautiful pieces of music is useful, that these may help you pass particular exams has nothing to do with them nourishing the core of who you are.

It is good to have specific things to do that can help you improve. In the fine arts this has been unfashionable of late, so you may have to look hard if this is your worthwhile work. However these disciplines and practices do still exist and a little digging and talking with others will usually unearth them. The satisfaction of making steady progress in worthwhile work can be profoundly affirming.

Idleness

Not recreation, not a break doing something different, not a busy holiday - just idleness. Just hanging around, not doing a whole lot, not achieving goals or working on something; just idleness.

If we were a car we'd be just ticking over in neutral. Our lives are usually too stressed and busy. Because of this we often respond automatically, we don't have time to respond with depth. Idleness allows us to let down our defenses and just relax, chat with friends, wander about.

After even a little time of idleness we can feel back in touch with ourselves again and profoundly refreshed

3. Living from our core

WHAT GETS IN THE WAY?

There are two kinds of things that get in the way of living from our core - things outside us and things inside us. Usually there are different ways of addressing the inside and the outside.

Being Frustrated by the external situation

As the Rolling Stones have reminded us, "you can't always get what you want". Sometimes, sadly, this is the case. How you respond will depend on what the frustration is.

When we are frustrated we know what it is that we want - at some level. It should be possible to get a clear idea of what this is. (We can do this by visualising how we would feel if we weren't frustrated.) If we can do this we may be able to think of other ways to get what we want.

It may be possible to remedy a lack by joining with others (to start a sports team or a company, to run a raffle or a lobbying campaign).

Just because we are in touch with the core of who we are doesn't magically transform the world. It is still the same world with all its strengths and limitations, beauties and tedium. There is a zen saying, "Before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water; after enlightenment, chop wood, carry water".

When we can't get what we want we have a choice. To let go or cling on. To let go may mean great mourning with all the anguish and tears that this involves. You may choose to cling on - and persist in a cause that you know is hopeless: you can choose to do this. If you do wish to cling you will need to find your satisfaction only in the doing. This is very unusual - most people want to achieve something with what they do. If you wish to cling on, you will need to have a clear eyed assessment of what this means - if you wish to avoid a life of disappointment, bitterness and cynicism.

Being split between competing desires

Conflicts inside ourselves are different to external frustration. It is, in principle, almost always possible to resolve internal conflicts. This is because they are in some sense different parts of us. And so they exist together already. The trick is for them to live happily together rather than fighting. Usually when we know what the desires are

(not the behaviour that the competing parts want but the desire) it is possible for both to be met. It is possible to be sad and strong, it is possible to love and stick to your boundaries. These are not irreconcilable, even though they may feel this way at first.

It is often the internal conflict that drains our energy. The external problems are usually manageable but the internal ones are always with us. The usual advice when we have competing desires is to choose one. If we do this some part of us suffers. "If you fight yourself, you lose - even if you win." However, once we spend the time to listen to both sides, we usually find that the desire is legitimate. For instance, it may not be a great idea to strangle that annoying person so you can dance on their grave; but your desire for respect and consideration is entirely healthy. This means that our attention in resolving a conflict between competing desires should be directed to supporting both sides. When the conflict is resolved and the competing desires reconciled the elation is marvelous.

LIVING FROM OUR CORE

Meeting Others

Staying with our first response

We usually live lives that are too busy. We often get to the end of the day and need time 'to catch up with ourselves'. With this kind of stress it is difficult to genuinely meet others.

Meeting another, if it is to be more than automatic or superficial, needs time. Time to listen, time to explore and time to stay with our own reactions too. Staying with our own reactions is probably less talked about than listening so I'd like to say a little about it.

Meeting another can be a complex experience. There are many things happening with words, actions and memories. And this can happen quite quickly - within the first few seconds of our meeting. We are often encouraged to dismiss this first reaction - 'first impressions' aren't always correct. What first impressions do tell us is something about ourselves. So I would like to invite you to practice staying with your first impression. You may find that your first impression is accurate, or you may find that you have a prejudice (which is also valuable information). I invite you to be conscious of your first thoughts, what your muscles do, what pictures come to mind, and what emotions are evoked (however subtly).

Noticing what we don't say (how we self-censor).

There are times when we restrain ourselves. This may be all to the good. "Saying what we think" can often mean that not a lot of thinking is involved. It is entirely appropriate, IMHO, to take the time to find a polite way to put something. But, censoring can become automatic. And when this happens we end up not knowing what we think/feel.

I invite you to see if you can catch yourself stopping what you say. See if you can become conscious of what it is that you don't say. You may like to start by thinking over your conversations at the end of the day. Then move on to reflecting on conversations you've just had. Eventually you will get quicker and quicker, until you are conscious of what you are not saying close to the time you are speaking.

Once you are aware of what you don't say you will probably be aware of some judgements: first of all, about what is appropriate to say. Then you can analyse these for assumptions about yourself and others (what motivates them, what kinds of relationships they want and so on). You may then want to check out some of these assumptions.

Taking 'safe risks'

Some people love risk. It helps them know they are alive and when risking they feel enlivened. These people will often encourage others to take risks - so that they too will feel alive (it works for them; so why not others?). I'm pretty much the opposite, if I could live a life free of risk I would - an adrenalin junkie I am not. I like reading books, going for walks, blogging, spending time with friends.

Those who advocate risks can often do dangerous things. For those who adopt this as a lifestyle there are often physical injuries and they may not develop very deep relationships - they may die next time - which isn't a great basis for marriage, parenthood or lasting friendship.

Those like me who dislike risk can get awfully bored and stale. We too need new things. Not wanting to risk what we have usually leads to it slowly ebbing away. Our relationships get stale and activities no longer satisfy.

What I invite you to experiment with is taking responsible initiative. Not just lashing out and maybe doing something dangerous; and not just doing the same old thing because it feels mostly OK. The purpose of the risk is to check out our assumptions and find better ways of living. The risk has a point: to deepen our relationships by expressing our love, to increase our skill by taking up a challenge, to learn new ways of thinking by challenging old thoughts.

The best time and place to do this is when we are feeling secure. It is easiest to step out when we are sure of our ground. It is better to risk deepening a relationship in one that is very secure already. It is easiest to learn new things in a field we know well. It is easiest to improve our skill in something we are already proficient at.

To live from our core does not mean constantly being on edge or anxious. It does mean being willing to challenge our old thoughts, feelings and behaviours when they become an impediment to living fully.

Opening and closing our heart

In some circles (especially some sorts of psychotherapy) openness is seen as good. This can lead to thoughts being poorly expressed and emotion not being felt fully before it is expressed. It can lead to people acting impulsively and not taking the time to formulate a response that comes from all of who they are.

It is also true that people are often inhibited. They can fear expressing even mild disagreement or expressing any kind of anger. The ideology of openness has the purpose of encouraging these people to loosen up; to find that they can be much more relaxed, and enjoy their lives much more in consequence. The motivation is a noble one.

The next couple of experiments invite you to become aware of this process.

Letting people know what is most precious to us

We can often be surprised about what people, even those close to us, feel strongly about. In one sense this is a tragedy. How can we spend so long with those we are close to and still know so little about them?

What I invite you to do - with someone you feel quite secure with - is to let them know what you care about. It may be a hobby you have (and you've never expressed adequately the fascination it has for you and how you feel when doing it). It may be an object that has special associations for you. It may be your work. Or it may be a relationship. I invite you to communicate to another person the depth of the preciousness that something has for you.

Staying safe and guarding your vulnerability.

Now I invite you to do the opposite. Instead of being open, to stay closed. You may choose to do this abruptly or subtly. You can develop the skill of evading direct questions, changing the subject, making distractions. Or you can simply say, "No" without explanation.

There are people in this world who are dangerous and who will abuse our vulnerability. (For the moment it isn't our concern why they are this way.) There may not be many but there are surely some. Some people you don't invite into the bedroom, some not into the lounge room, some you don't invite over the threshold, and some you avoid even meeting if you can. We are not invincible, we can all be hurt and, IMHO, it is entirely appropriate that we aren't foolish just because someone has told us that, "You should be open".

Doing work

There is a special joy reserved for those who enjoy the way they earn their income. Those who have the privilege of making a good living from doing what they love are very fortunate. There are books that will help you move to this situation. Here we will just look at those times where we are doing what we love.

Reflection: What do I do when I am just me?

What do you do without stress? There is no compulsion required to get you to do it, and when you do it, it just seems to flow. Doing it feels 'natural'. Usually you will find that your shoulders are relaxed - this includes even surprising things like martial arts: if you watch the good boxers when they're not throwing a punch you will see that their shoulders are relaxed. You may not feel on a high but you will be attentive, absorbed in what you are doing.

For me this is engaging with people about things that concern them. For me this kind of teaching/psychotherapy just comes naturally. I can be absorbed for hours with someone exploring what is important to them. Demanding? Sometimes. Stressful? Almost never.

Imagining: What if I had enough time and money?

Perhaps if you have not had much chance to do things without compulsion. If you grew up in a very regimented situation (either institution or family) you may not have found yourself doing what flows for you. So this is another approach to finding what that thing is. (There may be many things of course.)

Imagine as vividly as you can having as much time and money as you need. You may do this by seeing yourself having a bank account with vast amounts of money in it, by seeing yourself as a fairy tale ruler or having Aladdin's Lamp.

Then see what it is you want to do. If the first thing is to have a break and lie around that's great. See if you want to keep doing this after a few months. You may discover an activity that you could quite happily pursue for the rest of your life.

Please don't quickly dismiss whatever you imagine, however silly it may seem at first. It may help to see that our societies can be quite absurd in what they reward. Generally I think those who do the most important work (producing food and nurturing children) are poorly rewarded, while those who are engaged in things that don't contribute to our survival - sports stars, people who play dress-ups for movies and theatres - can be rewarded quite handsomely. This isn't to say that entertainment is unimportant. It is simply to try and short-circuit the immediacy of our judgments about what is worthwhile.

Start small finish big

Our paid work occupies a huge part of our lives. If you would like to try and make money from doing what you love you have my support, it is the quest I am on also. There are often many books on business planning that encourage you to be very planned and organised. This has its value - especially in existing markets. It is less value if you are trying to do something new, or are in a new or emerging field (like blogging).

It seems to me that the planning and goals are most important for setting our priorities and getting us to take action. It is almost certain that life won't fit your plans. There will be pleasant and unpleasant surprises. And you will need to be adaptable when they come along.

Many of the business books don't convey the feeling of what it is like to be in business for yourself. One that does is Start Small Finish Big - the first couple of chapters written by the author, not the rest. He conveys well the 'making it up as you go along' that is a part of being in business for yourself. As to the rest of the book, pick and choose the stories you want to read. You'll find some that you like and others you'll just skip.

Spend fifteen minutes each day for a month thinking of a way to make a few dollars. Think of one thing to do each day for a month to make some money from doing what you love.

There is simply no substitute for experience. Benefit as much as you can from the wisdom of others in person (those who know you are valuable as they can alert you to what likely stumbling blocks will be for you, even if they know nothing of your industry) or through media such as books, websites and blogs.

Goals are useful and we often don't achieve them

Our goals give us a measure of how we are doing. Especially when starting out this can be invaluable. The more new what we are doing is, the more important it is to try and have a good measure of how we are doing.

Usually we won't achieve our goals and this may be the best possible thing. Persevering with a poor initiative is just foolish. Taking advantage of great unforeseen opportunities is wise. It is important to set aside the time, to see if we are achieving our goals, and also to see if we want to revise them.

What can I imagine doing and enjoying everyday?

So it is important not to set goals too quickly. Make sure the goal feels good for all of you. See if you can imagine being happy and fulfilled doing the job all day every day. If you feel both grounded and elated this is a good sign. Don't forget to include all the incidentals - most jobs involve the tedium of paperwork or technical stuff that may not be exciting but needs to be done. You need to think about how to handle this - either; if you can afford to employ someone to do what you don't enjoy, or if you can find ways to make it enjoyable.

At the beginning of a new venture we often use our friends. Find ways that you can reward them - and decide how you are going to do it into the future: they are hopefully forming the basis of a lifetime income for you.

How can I get better at it?

It is important to get good at your trade - singing, drafting, selling, philosophising or whatever it is. It is difficult but it is important to have a measure of the quality of what you do. If you love what you do then you will want to get better at it. And our own experience isn't always the best guide.

If you are in an industry or discipline that has clearly established rules then you have a great advantage (even if you set about re-writing them). If not you will need to make up your own to some extent.

For me: blogging is conversational writing, but I don't want my writing to be advertising copy designed to sell. This means experimenting with writing more personally than in advertising. However I do use some of the insights of advertising for my headlines. So far the rules I have for myself in writing my posts are:

- make it personal
- give it a good headline (the headline is for those doing on line searches).

FURTHER READING

Zen and the Art of Making a Living - Laurence Boldt

Start Small Finish Big - Fred deLuca and John P. Hayes

John Piotrowski - [How to Make Money Doing What You Love](#) (a blog and membership course).

Serving Humanity

For many of us living from our core is tied up with serving humanity - having a bigger picture than just my immediate world. This will always be manifested in my immediate world and through my limited skills, but it has a bigger context too.

Thinking about serving humanity can also help us connect to our core. Thinking of the biggest picture can help us connect to what is most essentially ourselves.

So here are some ways that you can connect with your core in the service of humanity.

Writing our own epitaph

An epitaph needs to be short enough to fit on a tombstone - ideally a phrase rather than even a complete sentence. You can approach this in a few ways:

if I was to die now

when I die - you can choose the age you wish and what you want to have done before then

imagine what others have written

imagine writing it yourself

You can of course do all of them and see if there are any differences; But any one will give you a good idea about what you want to do, or what you value in the things you have done.

This can then become the basis of making decisions and taking action.

For me: I have done this exercise a number of times. The epitaph that still resonates most deeply with me is: he touched a few for good.

Our legacy

This is similar to writing your own epitaph but more focused on doing and achievements. Once again you can either imagine what legacy you would leave if you were to die now, or imagine yourself dying at the age you desire having done what you wish to do.

What are the achievements you value? Or what is it that you want to achieve?

For me: I would like to leave a college where people learn to heal. Where the students learn to heal in a way that flows from the core of who they are. Where most of the modalities pursued use light technologies; so that we contribute to making health care affordable to all, and having a light impact on our planet. And where students and teachers learn about learning so that it is always becoming a better college.

Joining with others

Almost everything we do involves other people. It may be that serving humanity will involve working with others. Think about how you would want to work with others. Are there skills others have that you need to serve humanity?

There are more profound questions too. Do you need to have the same vision? If so, do you need the same broad goals? Does there need to be a schedule of tasks to be done? If so how is this arrived at? Perhaps authority is delegated to one or more people to take decisions, or perhaps everyone contributes, or perhaps somewhere in between.

Think about the groups you have been a part of. Which ones did you enjoy being a part of? How were they different to the ones you didn't enjoy? The more specific you can be, the more useful your reflection will be, for how you join with others.

For me: my happiest times of working with others have been where we got to do what we were good at and we had the freedom and resourcing to just get on with it. This resourcing included people we could go to for advice, or to listen to us, and help us sort out problems. Sounds simple, and it is - also very rare in my experience.

Small steps are worthwhile

Talk of serving humanity can sound very grand and lead to us being discouraged. In the words of the wise book title: Don't Sweat the Small Stuff, It's All Small Stuff. This is profoundly true. Overnight success is often twenty years in the making. The journey of a thousand miles starts with the first step - and continues with thousands more. Maintaining focus while staying open and being adaptable are challenges along the way.

It can help to have quite specific goals to measure ourselves against (so long as we don't get tied to them). It is very helpful to celebrate even the smallest achievement. When we care it is easy to become despondent - which saps our energy. It can be helpful to cultivate a habit of looking for our successes and victories however small.

Each small step contributes to the whole. And even if we don't achieve what we set out to, then we have done worthwhile things along the way. Small gestures are precious.

When we have a sense that we are serving humanity it is easier to stay in touch with our core. There are many ways to remind ourselves of this. In religious traditions there are practices like meeting together, meditation, and book reading as well as more or less elaborate rituals. Other people have pictures or sculptures or jewellery that is meaningful for them. It may be useful to have some simple reminder near you.

CONCLUSION:

THE FRUIT OF OUR LABOUR

Being in touch with our core can take courage and effort. Living from it almost certainly will. So, why bother? There are three benefits that I have identified.

1. The Satisfaction of a genuine meeting

One of the great satisfactions of life is meeting others well. When we are listened to, when we experience moments of intimacy, these nourish us: they feed our humanity. Not everyone will want this, and certainly won't be able to give it at all times. But, the more we know our core, the more chance there is that people will know that we can do this and will be more willing to meet us.

Avoiding burnout

Knowing who we are, what our core is, means knowing our limitations as well as our strengths. This helps us avoid burn-out. Idealists don't take enough care of their limits and needs. They get caught up in their vision and forget themselves. If you are an idealist, one way to help counteract this tendency is the emphasis on 'be the change you want to see'. If you want a joyful world where friendship is valued; then you need to take the time to restore yourself - so you can be joyful and have time for friends.

When we withdraw from the other person we are left with things to process - this will be draining. We will need to 'finish' these experiences at a later time. If too many experiences of this kind accumulate we will collapse under their weight. If we can stay with the other person and their experience, we will avoid this accumulation and so be far less likely to ever burn out. It may well be that we can't handle some experiences right now. When this is the case, then we need to make time to somehow deal with these experiences later.

2. Vitality for living

It is usually unfinished situations that can sap so much of our vitality. The more we can stay with our reactions and responses, so that the situation is resolved, the less of these unfinished situations we will carry around with us. The fewer unfinished situations we carry around with us, the more vitality we will have available for dealing with what is happening.

If you can recall a time where something wouldn't let you alone, so that you kept replaying it in your mind, or kept worrying at a problem; you will find that it is something that is unfinished. If it was a very traumatic thing, like an accident, then our natural shock mechanism probably kicked in to help us survive the immediate situation. But the way we can loosen the grip of these things on us is by finishing them. This may be simply deciding that it isn't worth worrying about. At other times it will mean resolving questions of what our deepest values are.

3. A quiet joy beyond (most of) the ups and downs.

As we get to know our core, and increase how much we live from it, we develop more of a centre. We come, gradually, to have a sense of balance and resilience. We develop what I call a calm-elation that bubbles along beneath (at least most of) our daily ups and downs.

This will be different for different people. Some love the ups and downs of life, others (like me) like to cruise along on an even keel. But for all a quiet joy will stay with us.

A Course in Living From Our Core:

Finding Satisfaction Through Living Authenticity.

For me, my most satisfying and sustaining moments are when the core of who I am is touched. Image and success have their place in my life, but it is not the centre. I have written a course to help you find the core of who you are - and so experience moments of satisfaction and sustenance. Perhaps you too, like me, feel that this is what is most important.

In my experience, much of our stress is from being out of touch with ourselves. We may perform well, and even be very well rewarded, but this doesn't lead to the kind of deep satisfaction we crave. This course is a guide to finding that deep part of yourself that you need to be in touch with if you are to be deeply satisfied. I call it 'the core of who we are'. Put another way it is about living with authenticity. If you, like me, believe that it is only by living a life of authenticity that deep satisfaction can be achieved, then I believe this course is for you.

The course is eight weeks long and you will be sent by email five e-lessons a week for eight weeks. This means two weeks on each stage of my stages of experience map. Each week will have an introduction to the stage of your experience for that week and then five things for you to try so you can experience this stage of the process. The e-lessons will be in text, so you won't need broadband or a high speed internet connection to participate.

For the first group of people to enroll it will cost \$37.00AU. The enrollment in this first course begins on the 13th of October and will be limited to 100 people. I will then close enrollments for a little while and make any changes suggested by this first group of students. I anticipate the second course beginning in early 2009. The content won't change dramatically but I'm anticipating there may be some bugs to sort it in how it all operates. I have learned that, however much I plan, something unexpected can always happen.

You can find out more details on my [Living Authentically](#) page and about my story and authenticity on the [Authenticity and Me](#) page.

If you have any comments or questions you are most welcome to email me at: livingauthenticallyATgmailDOTcom (replacing the caps with the symbols named - I'm trying to avoid spam).

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