



9 steps to creating your Life Plan

To achieve anything in life you need to have a plan. Here is a step-by-step guide to developing your own personal plan to create the life you want.

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Have you ever felt you wanted more out of life but did not know exactly what you wanted or where to start? Or maybe you have already decided you want to make some changes, but what next? Starting on your journey can be daunting as there seems to be so much to do but no clear path to do it or even where to start. Well, today's your lucky day: get out your notepad and let's get started.

Step 1. Make a list — a small one!

What would you like to change about yourself and your life? Make a list of all the things you want to tackle about yourself and your life. If you're having trouble pinpointing what you want to change, think about where and how you want to be and then think about what you need to change to get there.

Maybe you'd like to be more confident, more relaxed (or less anxious); perhaps you'd like to change your career trajectory or move up the corporate ladder. Or you might wish to change the way you handle stress, be less angry, alter your view on life and also work on creating a happier relationship.

The combinations are endless but make the list small — don't pick yourself to pieces thinking of everything that you think is wrong with you. Use the 80/20 rule: most people have between two and five main things they'd like to change, so focus on those. When you tackle the big stuff, the ripple effect will deal with the rest of the 80 per cent.

Initially, when you create your Life Plan and look at the issues you want to work on, it can be very overwhelming and seem like there's too much to work on. Facing it head on as you're doing can be a daunting process, so do it with kindness to yourself (which means not beating yourself up). Remember that everyone has issues, no matter how perfect their lives seem on the outside. Everyone has something they could work on to improve their lives and working on yourself is a sign of tremendous inner strength and courage, not weakness.

Now is also the time to be honest with yourself. Often it can be the hardest thing just admitting to yourself that you do have this issue that you haven't been able to sort out. It's important to remember you're doing this for you and if you really want to change you have to own up to what's really going on. Then you have a base to work from.

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Step 2. Why do you want to make these changes?

The next step is asking why you want to make these changes. How would you feel once you have made these changes? What would you say to yourself? How would your life be better?

Now think about spending your life without making the changes and how that would feel, especially if you gave up all the things that helped you numb your feelings such as alcohol, food, TV and so on. Which feelings do you prefer?

The main reason people work on themselves is to create more joy, happiness and contentment. It's about reducing the number of times you are reactive, defensive and stressed and increasing the times you are peaceful, relaxed and reflective. It's not about perfection.

Once you're clear about why you want to change, you've already started changing. Change cannot occur without you first having the desire and intention to do so. So, even now in these first steps, you can feel you're on the right track rather than meandering along in life. You're taking life by the horns rather than settling for what is. So congratulations — you're feeling better already.

Step 3. Where might these problems have come from?

Look at yourself with a healthy curiosity. Wonder where did this come from, how long have I felt that way, what memories do I have around this issue?

Asking questions, even to yourself, often evokes answers and can start to give you an idea of what you're working with. Go back to your list of things to work on and then add this element to each item on the list. See what memories and events come to mind that are connected to that feeling.

Trust yourself with what comes up. Making the connection between your present-day issues and knowing what caused them can greatly assist you in your healing process. Don't worry if you get lots of memories or if you get nothing at all. What's important is that you've started the process and opened your awareness. Once you have the intention to change, things are then able to pop into your mind when the timing is right.

Step 4. Commitment

Commitment is essential; you do need to decide this is what you want to do and jump in with both feet. Committing to yourself in this way is a huge act of self-love. It says, "I deserve more out of life and I don't have to settle with things the way they are."

In saying that, however, change can be difficult and there may be times you want to pull out when things get overwhelming and confronting. Part of your Life Plan is to have tools in place to help you stay on track in the tough times: friends to call on, professionals to get support from, activities that you know relax and centre you and so on. It may also help to think in advance of potential obstacles and how you can overcome them so that you are ready in advance.

It's also about tapping into that part of yourself that believes you can make the change, that knows the change will last and you'll be better off as a result. Also keep in mind your long-term goals for when times get tough.

Every little thing you do contributes to your goals, so it's good to keep them in mind to keep you motivated and help you see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Step 5. Dealing with denial and defences

Everyone has denial to some degree — it's part of the human condition — so no one exists without it and no one escapes a dose of it (some, however, get a bigger serve than others). The opposite of denial is awareness, so the more you learn about yourself the less denial you'll have and in turn the more freedom, flexibility and conscious choice you'll attain in your life.

In your PDP, write what you think about denial. How do you deny your issues or how do you rationalise or play them down? How do you block thoughts from awareness or stuff them down when you're feeling stressed, anxious or overwhelmed? Think about the crucial areas where people do this, which is in relationships, at work, with friends or with family.

Also at work with denial are your "defences". Your defence system is created in early childhood to keep you safe and everyone has one (no exceptions). Defences are the reactive parts of your personality that say things you regret later on, that make you shut down, withdraw, act out, drink or smoke too much, sabotage your life, be rude to the ones you love and isolate yourself from life.

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The more awareness you have of your defences, the less likely it is you'll act from them unconsciously. You will always have defences but, again, it's the degree that differs — the difference between getting defensive occasionally and it happening frequently.

In your PDP, start to notice: What are my defences? How do I handle confrontation? Do I split off and daydream a lot? Do I act out a lot with addictive behaviour? Do I shut down and withdraw? Do I get angry and attack those around me? Am I critical and judgmental with people? Do I demand people take care of me? Do I pretend everything is OK when underneath I know it's not? These are all behaviours that our defences engage in.

This is not the time to judge yourself for what you do and have done in the past. Just notice your patterns and by noticing them you'll become more aware in your everyday life how much they come into play and you'll begin to learn how to make new choices.

Step 6. What are the patterns and themes in your life?

The next part of the plan is to look at what patterns are in your life. Do you create happiness, joy and spontaneity or do you find you create a lot of pain, suffering and loss, or maybe a combination of the two?

I hear you saying, "But I don't create the bad things; they happen to me." Of course, you don't consciously create the bad things, but part of you does create them based on your beliefs and past experiences. It's time to look at how the way you behave, think and speak keeps creating this cycle.

Everyone has patterns. They show up by attracting the same sort of partner, the same type of job, the same friends, the same experiences and recurring feelings. Patterns and themes are recurring situations that feel the same, as if you're stuck on a treadmill, never getting anywhere. It's a very frustrating feeling as part of you has an idea of what you want in your life but what you're getting is the opposite.

The first step to changing your patterns and themes is to recognise them. Ask yourself, "Why is this happening to me? What is it about my beliefs, values and past history that fits in with that pattern and theme?"

Looking at what you have in your life is also an indication of what you need to heal. Do you do things to please others but always feel disappointed when they don't give you the amount of support you need? Do you trust people who always end up betraying you in some way? Do you seem to have friends who gossip about you or talk down to you? Do you often feel criticised or judged by others around you? Do you often feel not good enough in other people's eyes? All these things are clues to your underlying beliefs.

Take the time to think objectively about your life from another person's perspective,



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just as if a friend was telling you the story of their life and you could see clearly the themes and patterns even though they couldn't. This is what you now need to do for yourself.

Step 7. Get help

The next crucial part of your Plan is what sort of help you should get. Everyone needs support to be their best. Do you think people like the President or Prime Minister, Cadel Evans and other sports stars or Oprah Winfrey don't have people supporting them? They actually have teams of people helping them. Yet you wonder why you can't achieve what they do.

You can achieve whatever is in your heart but it takes help and hard work. You cannot be objective about yourself; you need experts outside of you and your family to help you.

Decide what sort of help you need for your growth. Ask yourself if you have limiting beliefs that need addressing or past experiences that are standing in your way. Do you have body issues that are also playing a part, such as illness or recurring injury? Do you need to learn stress management and relaxation? Once you've made your list about what you need to change it can give you an indication of who you need to help you get started.

There are many professionals qualified to help: psychotherapists, psychologists, counsellors or life coaches. What's important is finding someone with whom you feel you have a connection and who works in a way that feels right to you. Visit their websites and then give them a call and see if they've had experience with what you want to work on and see if you can connect with this person on the phone. Make sure they have relevant qualifications such as a degree or diploma and membership of the relevant regulatory bodies.

Also worthwhile is asking them if they've ever done work on themselves and if they've been a client before. Someone who has been a client before will have a far greater understanding of what it's like and has also walked in your shoes before. It tells you that they value personal development and walk the talk, not just sprout theories they've learnt about.

Then there are practitioners such as kinesiologists, body workers, acupuncturists, cranio-sacral practitioners, naturopaths, yoga and Pilates teachers, meditation teachers and osteopaths (and many, many more) who are all valuable for specific problems or at certain points of your path. Ask professionals in your area for referrals as they will often know like-minded professionals who will fit what you need.

So, when you make your Plan, think about what sort of help you need. There is so much great stuff out there but you also have to be financially savvy as well and figure out what you really do need. But remember, doing something is always better than doing nothing.

Step 8. What extra tools do you need?

There are many other practices you can establish that will keep you aligned and on track. In fact, it's essential to do things to maintain your sense of inner peace and keep you connected.

Think of it like running: you can't just run once a month and expect to perform your best and not get injured; you have to run every day or every other day to maintain your fitness. You are on a lifelong journey that's not about what you need to fix but how you want to be. So it's a daily practice, a belief system and a way of living that builds over time.

Here are some extra things you can do:

Meditate Quieting the mind is a wonderful thing. Don't give up if you can't do it at first. It's the mind's job to generate constant thought so don't blame it for continuing to do so when you're trying to be quiet. Find some meditations that help you get into a peak state of relaxation, contentment, passion, motivation and so on. Find at least five minutes several times a week to quieten down. You don't have to lie down to meditate, either — a lot of meditations work more effectively when you do them walking.

Journal Start a journal where you can look at certain issues. Often by writing them down you can find out a lot more about how you think, feel and act around a particular issue and it can be particularly useful for venting unwanted feelings and being able to let them go (don't keep these venting entries though they should be thrown away with a little prayer or deleted off the computer). It's a great way to track your progress so you can see how much you've changed. When using it for venting it's a great way to free up the energy from within and see the problem with better perspective and less blame. Another benefit of journaling is to identify issues, patterns and themes that present themselves in different ways and keep on coming back to haunt you.

Read There's a plethora of information out there on self-help and some really great reads. Find books that suit your PDP and your personality and you'll learn a lot from them. They'll open your awareness, plus they can be great when you want something low key to do but want to feel like you're doing something. This doesn't have to cost a lot, either — check your local libraries as they always have copies of the popular books. If not, suggest they buy them.

Exercise Exercising in the right way can be very grounding and help your energy to move. When you exercise, make sure you are present in your body and you are focused. Make sure you can feel your legs and connect to your energy. You can then use exercise to discharge stress and anxiety and get your energy moving again when it's stuck. Interval training is particularly useful in activating our creative energies and bringing our awareness right into our body.

Clear out your energy system Clean your aura and chakras. The aura holds all your life experiences and if it's not cleaned out it gets sluggish and dense and attracts unwanted situations into your life. A swim at the beach, a cold shower and vigorous exercise clear out the aura; there are also meditations that clear the chakras (you could also make one up).

Keep updating your PDP As you change, your PDP changes. Review your goals and intentions and adjust them according to where you are. Remember, your goals change all the time so often this needs to be reflected in your PDP: what do you need to achieve those new goals, who can help you and so on. Keeping a goal list on the fridge can be an excellent way to keep you motivated and on track. When you update your PDP, reflect on how much you've achieved in that period of time.

Step 9. Lighten up!

Life is a long journey. It's not like a course where you work hard for a few years and then don't have to do anything else.

Your Life Plan should be something that you always adjust and update. You work on things for life — you never "get rid" of issues completely; rather, they transform and you become better at noticing and sorting them out.

Defences do lessen over time and your ability to be flexible and flow with life becomes easier. So you don't want to get all intense about trying to change in a really short amount of time or not do anything else but your PDP. It's all about living life to the fullest and having some fun at the same time as having goals and dreams for how you want to be.

So find some gaps you'd like to fill with fun things. You might like to make more friends, find a hobby or start a study course. Whatever it is, find something that really blends with who you are and what you enjoy and love.

By choosing to develop yourself, you have chosen an amazing journey full of reward and fulfilment and you are destined for good things. Anything is possible with courage, commitment and hard work.

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