Crafting the Story of Your Life

When most novelists sit down to write, they don’t know everything that is going to happen in their story. They start with an idea, a compelling central question that they work out through the plot and characters. I invite you to approach the story of your life in this way – to start with the life questions you want to most explore, and shape these into a rough outline. Don’t worry about the details or about how you will accomplish your objectives. You will get to that later. Start by letting your imagination follow the track of the questions or issues that grab you.

Of course, you are the main character of your life’s story as well as the author. In a good novel, the main character grows and develops; so too in a good life. A good novel has an interesting plot; so does a good life. An author must be able to step back and see her story from a distance—to objectively consider whether or not it achieves her purpose. Ask yourself, “If I could look at it objectively, would I want to read the story of my life? Does it grab and hold my attention? Does it have the elements of a good story: challenges to overcome, growth, direction, confidence, a larger-than-self purpose?” If the answer is no, then perhaps the main character needs development; the plot needs to be clarified, expanded, sharpened; or excitement needs to be generated by increasing the tension between what could be and what is. If you can honestly answer yes, then—where is the next chapter going?

Your Story’s Elements

You can conceive of the action of lifework planning in terms of the elements that go into crafting a story.


Act II—The Game of Life’s Work: Developing the Characters and Their Roles. Particularly the main character.

Act III—The Battle for Life’s Work: Clarifying the Conflicts. Tension between what could be and what is.

Act IV—The School of Life’s Work: Identifying Character Growth. How is the main character (you) to become a better, more capable person?
What in the World Could Be?

In the space below, write your version of the world you would like to live in. Do not concern yourself with how realistic your vision is, how it would be implemented, or what your part in creating it might be. Simply write your vision as though you could wave a magic wand and have it manifest in one fell swoop. This is your opportunity to create your utopia.

Write your vision of the world you would like to live in.

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Now write your vision of the nation you would like to live in.

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Now write your vision of the community you would like to live in.

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After reviewing what you have written above, ask yourself, “What insights do my answers give me about the direction I would like my life to take?”
Your World Needs Your Love

This process provides you with the opportunity to assess the needs of your world, nation, and community. One of the key components to a satisfying and fulfilling life’s work is the sense that you are making a contribution to the world you live in. This exercise is a problem-solving approach to your world, which will help you determine what you can do to make it better.

In your estimation, what are the most critical needs on the planet that are going unmet, or what are the greatest sources of pain and suffering in the world?

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In your nation?

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In your community?

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What situation or need in your community, nation, or world most moves you to want to take action? “More than anything, I really want to do something about.”
What situation in the world, in your nation, or in your community do you notice yourself complaining about the most? “Somebody really ought to do something about…”

How could you ultimately be most effective in working on these problems? “If I were to take responsibility to do something about this, I would.”

What elements of human suffering speak to your heart?

After reviewing what you have written above, ask yourself, “What insights do my answers give me about the direction I would like my life to take?”
What: The Way You Want to Serve

In the exercises that follow, you will begin to construct a “Work-Purpose Statement.” The first step to developing your work-purpose statement is to identify what you would like to do by identifying the fields in which you would most like to make a contribution. Below are examples of “I want to” statements that express work purposes. You may be able to use one of these as a skeleton of your work-purpose statement and amend or adjust it to suit your purpose. You may want to start entirely from scratch, using the statements that follow as guides in constructing your own work-purpose statement. However you arrive at it, your work-purpose statement should be your own reflecting what you most want to express or accomplish.

You may realize that you have more than one work purpose. In that case, pick the one that represents the area you want to focus on most over the next three to five years. If you still end up with several areas of focus, rank them and pick one major area of focus. The alphabetical list below is not intended to be complete or exhaustive. It represents just a few of the more common areas in which people with whom we have worked have expressed interest.

**Agriculture:** I want to produce or advance the production of the foodstuffs that will provide people sustenance and nourishment in a manner that is environmentally sound.

**Animal Care:** I want to see to it that the animals are protected and treated with care, compassion, and dignity.

**Architecture:** I want to design structures that are at once functional and uplifting to the spirit.

**Art:** I want to portray, through artistic media, universal truths that uplift and inspire.

**Business:** I want to provide valuable products and services including:

**Clothing:** I want to design, manufacture, or distribute quality clothing that is aesthetically pleasing, comfortable, and healthful.

**Communication:** I want to provide communication technologies and/or services that will help people to achieve their goals.

**Culinary Arts:** I want to design, prepare, and/or produce delicious, nutritious foods. I want to provide an atmosphere that will make eating a fulfilling, even spiritual experience.
Defense: I want to provide for national security and defense. I want to see to it that people are safe,
Economic Development: I want to assist people in developing a higher standard of living. I want to do so in a manner that respects values of human dignity and ecological balance. I want to ensure that economic growth is based on the production of useful goods and services.

Education: I want to train and develop people’s minds, character, knowledge, and skills. I want to help people broaden their horizons and deepen their understanding.

Energy: I want to design, develop, or promote safe, efficient, nonpolluting, and replenishable energy systems. I want to increase the efficiency if existing energy systems until new ones are in place.

Engineering: I want to design, construct, or manage roadworks, waterworks, building, machinery, etc., which will serve to improve people’s lives.

Entertainment: I want to provide laughter, drama, song, or dance to lighten and enlighten people’s lives.

Environment: I want to clean up and protect the environment and to do all I can to see that it is kept as safe and pure as possible.

Family: I want to provide services that will strengthen and support family units and family happiness.

protected, and free to pursue happiness in their own way.

Government: I want to work with government institutions to ensure that government remains responsive to the people and provides them with the best possible services.

Health: I want to share with people the skill, knowledge, love, and energy necessary to care for their health and physical well-being.

History: I want to help people to better understand their past, to see how things have come to be as they are, and to understand the great historical processes of change and their consequences.

Industry: I want to manufacture materials that will make people’s lives more fulfilling, free, and productive.

Information Services: I want to provide people, in an easy-to-use and readily available form, the information they need to make informed and effective decisions.

Interior Design: I want to create the kinds of interior spaces that elevate people’s spirits and bring out the very best in them.

Journalism: I want to inform people about current events and issues. I want to help them to be aware of the people and events that shape their lives.
Justice: I want to protect people’s rights and ensure that they are treated fairly and with human dignity.

Landscaping: I want to create exterior environments that provide people with upliftment and joy.

Law: I want to write, interpret, or practice legal remedies for human problems, conflicts, or grievances.

Life Sciences: I want to help people better understand and utilize the biological and organic processes of life to further their well-being and minimize the dangers of their health.

Management: I want to manage organizations that serve people’s needs and aspirations.

Music: I want to share beauty, joy understanding, and harmony through the vehicle of music.

Organization: I want to help people to be more effective by organizing personnel, material, ideas, and financial resources that will facilitate the achievement of their goals.

Peace: I want to promote world peace. I want to further international cooperation, understanding, and harmony. I want to exemplify and promote universal love and brotherhood.

Performing Arts: I want to take an active role in portraying the wonder, poignancy, beauty, and drama of the human experience before live audiences.

Philosophy: I want to challenge people to think of deep and fundamental issues of life. I want to encourage them to examine their beliefs and the effect that holding these ideas has upon themselves and others. I want to share with them the wisdom of the ages.

Physical education: I want to teach people how to utilize their bodies to maximize efficiency, promote health and longevity, and reduce physical stress and tension.

Physical Science: I want to help people understand the physical world in which they live and how it can be made to serve them even better.

Politics: I want to help people gain a voice in the decisions that affect their lives.

Psychology: I want to help people better understand their minds and emotions, their motivations, drives, and desires. I want to help them unlock the power of their minds and emotions to achieve their highest potential.

Recreation: I want to help people relax, play, and rejuvenate. I want to facilitate the relaxation of their bodies, minds, and spirits.

Religion: I want to minister to people’s spiritual needs. I want to help them to discover who they are, what it is to be, and how to be free.

Sports: I want to help people discover the joys of efforts, persistence, cooperation, teamwork, and physical development that sports provide.
Technology: I want to design, manufacture, or promote technological advances that will help people to achieve a happier, richer, more productive lifestyle.

Transportation: I want to help people to get from place to place in a clean, economical, and safe manner and in a way that makes the most efficient and least destructive use of natural resources.

In the space below, construct your own statement indicating how you want to serve in the areas you most want to make a contribution. If you have more than one work purpose, indicate the one that you most want. Example: I want to assist people in developing a higher self-esteem.

Statement of the Way I Want to Serve:

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Whom: The People You Want to Serve

Your next step is to identify the people you want to serve. These people are your constituency, the people for whom you are responsible in your work. The purpose of work is to serve, to contribute. We are all serving someone. Review the list below and identify the primary beneficiaries of your work.

Age
- Prenatal
- Infants
- Preschoolers
- Children
- Adolescents
- Young Adults
- Middle Age
- Elderly
- All Ages

Income
- Destitute
- Economically deprived

Lower middle
Middle
Upper middle
Wealthy
Extremely wealthy
All incomes

Special cases
- Prisoners
- Homeless
- Pregnant
- Physically disabled
- Mentally disabled
- Victims of specific diseases
- People of other countries
- Disaster victims
- Armed forces
- Orphans illiterate
- Animals
- Delinquents
Hungry
Sick
Veterans
Immigrants
Dying
Other

Ethnicity
White
African-American
Hispanic
Asian-American
Native American
Other
All Races

Sex
Males
Females
Both sexes

Now construct a statement that explains who you want to serve. **Example:** I want to serve adolescents from economically deprived areas who need help in improving their academic ability.

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**Taking the Talent Quiz**

Rank each of the following talents on a scale of one to ten, with ten representing an extraordinary level of talent; five, an average level of talent; one, an extremely small amount of talent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Talent</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An ability to organize</td>
<td>______</td>
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<tr>
<td>An ability to motivate</td>
<td>______</td>
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<tr>
<td>An ability to mediate</td>
<td>______</td>
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<tr>
<td>An ability to instruct</td>
<td>______</td>
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<tr>
<td>An ability to manage</td>
<td>______</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
6. An ability to execute
7. An ability to lead
8. An ability to inspire
9. An ability to counsel
10. An ability to make things work (mechanical ability)
11. An ability to build things
12. An ability to design things
13. An ability to heal
14. An ability to put people at ease (diplomacy)
15. An ability to contemplate (philosophize)
16. An ability to arrange things beautifully
17. An ability to make beautiful things
18. An ability to perform (entertain)
19. An ability to communicate through speech
20. An ability to tell stories that instruct
21. An ability to be playful
22. An ability to persist
23. An ability to perceive the essential
24. An ability to juggle many responsibilities or activities at once
25. An ability for efficiency
26. An ability to be loyal
27. An ability to be appropriate
28. An ability to be self-disciplined
29. An ability to be tolerant
30. An ability to concentrate
31. An ability to love
32. An ability to be happy
33. An ability to be balanced
34. An ability to be generous
35. An ability to be compassionate
36. An ability to be dignified
37. An ability to be tender
38. An ability to be strong
39. An ability to be impeccable
40. An ability to be popular
41. An ability to be enthusiastic
42. An ability to express through the written word (writing)
43. An ability to express through movement (dance)
44. An ability to express through the visual arts
45. An ability to express through music
46. An ability to analyze
47. An ability to be persuasive
48. An ability to synthesize ideas
49. An ability for logical or abstract thought
50. An ability for imagination and vision
51. An ability for athletics
52. An ability for tactics
53. An ability to strategize
54. An ability to interpret or translate languages
55. An ability to make things grow (plants)
56. An ability to negotiate
57. An ability to protect or defend
58. An ability to invent things
59. An ability to evaluate or judge
60. An ability to explore or discover
61. An ability to experiment
62. An ability to nurture
63. An ability to invest
64. An ability to cooperate
65. An ability to inspect
66. An ability to investigate
67. An ability to plan
68. An ability to discern
69. An ability to perceive opportunities
70. An ability to clarify
71. An ability to harmonize
72. An ability to establish rapport
73. An ability to be decisive
74. An ability to initiate or begin
75. An ability to complete or conclude

Your Top Five Talents

After receiving feedback from others and doing your own careful analysis, write your top five natural strengths or talents below.

My Top Five Talents

1. ____________________________________________
2. ____________________________________________
3. ____________________________________________
4. ____________________________________________
5. ____________________________________________

Now restate your work-purpose statement below:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Integrating Your Talents and Purpose: How will you employ your talents in the furtherance of your life’s work? Review your work-purpose statement and think of how you can put each of your top five talents to work in the pursuit of your life’s work.

Talent #1 ________________________________________________________
I can use my ability to: _____________________________________
To further my work purpose by: _______________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________

On another sheet of paper, do the same for each of the rest of your top five talents.

Your Personal Strengths

When it comes to your career, you are more than a sum of your education, skills, and work experience. You have already considered your visions, values, purpose, talents, and goals. Beyond this, what are the personal qualities that make you a unique individual?

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What do you consider your strongest character traits?
Below is a list of traits or personal qualities. Selecting from these (or others you may want to add), choose the five traits (no more) that best describe you.

Adventurous
Amiable
Artistic
Assertive
Athletic
Aware
Calm
Commanding
Committed
Compassionate
Confident
Courageous
Creative
Curious
Dedicated
Dramatic
Empathetic
Energetic
Entertaining
Enthusiastic
Excitable
Gentle
Happy
Hard-charging
Hardworking
Honest
Humorous
Imaginative
Independent
Intellectual
Intuitive
Joyous
Kind
Levelheaded
Loving
Loyal
Persuasive
Philosophical
Playful
Positive
Practical
Rational
Reliable
Responsible
Self-motivated
Self-assured
Spiritual
Tactful
Thoughtful
Tolerant
Trustworthy
Wise

My five strongest character traits or personal qualities

1. ____________________________________________
2. ____________________________________________
3. ____________________________________________
4. ____________________________________________
5. ____________________________________________

More than anything, what sets you apart as a unique individual?

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Act I: Action Steps

If you still don’t know what your life’s work is, do and learn until you do.

1. Volunteer your time working for causes you believe in.
2. Study global, national, and/or community problems, firsthand if possible.
3. Study philosophy, religion, mythology, sociology, history, anthropology, science, art, etc., with a view toward developing personally meaningful values.
4. Read the biographies of great individuals with a view toward learning effective strategies and raising your expectations.
5. Study success principles generally, and develop or strengthen a positive mental and emotional attitude toward life.
6. Develop skills that will stand you in good stead, regardless of your later career choices. For example:
   a. Speaking
   b. Writing
   c. Negotiating
   d. Managing
   e. Teaching
   f. Mentoring
   g. Performing well under pressure
   h. Planning
   i. Critical thinking
   j. Creative thinking
   k. Public relations.
7. Learn techniques such as speed-reading, super-learning, and meditation, which will help you keep up with all you will need to learn, and yet remain relatively unburdened by it.