



Short version

Introduction

The shelves of bookshops are groaning under the weight of self help books promising to make you happy and give you the life you want, whilst large numbers of ethical organisations are seeking to convince you that you only need to take a few simple steps to live ethically. Perhaps you, like us, find both these sets of claims unconvincing and are looking for a simple, no-nonsense way to reflect on your life and think about how you can get more out of life and live more in line with your values.

This course doesn't promise anything except to give you the chance to stand back from your life, explore how you're currently living and make some plans to move towards the life you really want.

What you get out of it will depend on how much you put in, and whether you're prepared to actually make the changes you come up with.

The course presented on these sheets is a quick and easy version of our main 'Just think...' scheme, which is a self-taught course that you do in groups for one evening a week over an 8 week period. If you enjoy this version, why not get more out of the course by doing the more comprehensive version in a group with other people? See www.lifesquared.org.uk/courses for details of the full course.

This short version of the course is made up of 4 simple steps to help you review your life and set out a plan for where to go next:

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We've also provided a template action plan document that you can download for free and fill in as you go through the course – download it at www.lifesquared.org.uk/courses.

Get started

Go to the next page to get started on this special short version of Just think...!

1. Get some perspective

Before you start to think about aspects of your own life and how to make them better, it may help to put your life in some perspective in the greater scheme of things.

Action 1a – gain some perspective

Watch some (or ideally, all) of the short videos below. Whilst you're doing this, think about how this makes you feel about your own life or your attitude to living.

- Size of universe - <http://www.5min.com/Video/Overview-Of-The-Universe-1383218>
- History of earth and its creatures <http://www.videojug.com/film/all-about-earth>
- Human history in the context of the universe - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g2gezQzfgIY>
- The modern world - <http://www.lifesquared.org.uk/images/stories/pdfs/The%20modern%20world.mov>

Action 1b – reflect on how this perspective affects your thinking

Once you've watched the videos, spend a few minutes quietly reflecting on the perspective they've given you about your life and how this perspective makes you feel about your life. For example:

- How does this perspective make you feel about your own life and existence as a human being?
- Does it give you any ideas on how you want to live your life or how you want to behave in your life?

2. Think about your values

In this section, you'll think about your values, how they manifest themselves in your day to day actions and decisions and how you can live in a way that's more consistent with them.

Action 2a – think about what your values are, and try to identify them.

To do this, we suggest you take yourself on a 'mini retreat'. Take yourself away to somewhere quiet for a few hours to do some thinking without the normal distractions of modern life. You could go to your bedroom, the library, the park, the countryside, the beach – wherever you want. It can often be best to get away from the house to do this – going into the countryside works brilliantly, where you can just sit somewhere for a few hours or go for a long walk. But wherever you decide to go, turn your mobile phone off and tell people not to disturb you. Take a notepad and pen with you.

When you're at your retreat location and ready to begin, think about what your values are. This is about your relationship with the external world and all the people, creatures, environments and other things in it. Are there some principles for life that you try to live by or think you should try to live by? Ways that you should behave or live your life? Draw up a list of these values.

It might help to think first about some general categories or principles. For example, how you think you should behave towards other people, or animals, or the environment or even yourself. Then you can start listing more specific things about how you think you should behave.

Once you've made as much of a list as you can, look over the list. Are there a few general categories of values or principles you could live by that would cover all the values you've listed? For example, 'Caring for the environment' might cover all your environmental values. If not, no problem, but where you can try to distil things into some overall headings or principles – maybe up to 10 things but it doesn't have to be that many – it could be just 4 or 5.

If you're using the action plan template that we've provided for you at www.lifesquared.org.uk/courses, then fill in the 'what my values are' section with your list of values.

Action 2b – think about how your values fit into your everyday life.

Our values feature in most things we do in our lives – including our attitudes, how we behave towards other people, the products we buy and how we travel. Now that you have your initial list of values, you need to think about how they fit into the different areas of your life.

To help you do this, you might find it useful to note a few headings to describe different areas of your life. For example, here are 6 simple categories you could use: 'at home', 'at work', 'shopping', 'leisure', 'travel' and 'people'. If you're using the action plan template that we've provided for you at www.lifesquared.org.uk/courses, then just fill in the 'living in line with my values' section, where the headings are already provided for you.

Now, for each of your values, go through each of these areas of your life and list some of the steps you could take to live more in line with your values in each of them.

Let's use an example. You've selected the value of 'caring for the environment'. In the category of 'at home', you might list things like using less energy, recycling as much as possible and reducing the amount you consume. There are many more actions for this particular value, so be creative and try to think of as many as possible. Or here's another example. You've selected the value of 'be kind and considerate towards other people'. In the category of 'work' this might mean making an effort to be nicer to your colleagues but it might also mean working for an organisation that doesn't have a negative impact on people in other parts of the world.

Once you've been through each category of your life for one value, do the same for all the other values you noted.

Action 2c – write an action plan of how you can live in a way that's consistent with your values.

You've now got a basic list of things you could be doing in different areas of your life to live in line with each of your values. Now, as a final step, you need to look through them and turn them into proper action points.

So go through your whole list turn each point into a specific, tangible action point (or several action points). For example, where you wrote 'use less energy at home', turn this into a set of action points to help you use less energy – from insulating your house properly to switching off lights and appliances when you're not using them. And next to each of these action points, give yourself a deadline - note the date you want to have done it by. This will really help you to take the actions. Try to be realistic but challenging with the deadlines you set yourself.

If you're using the action plan template that we've provided for you at www.lifesquared.org.uk/courses, then just fill in the 'moving forward - your values action plan' section towards the end of the document. You'll also be filling in your 'life priorities action plan' here in the next part of the course.

3. Think about what matters to you in life

In this section, you'll think about your priorities in life and how you can live in a way that's more consistent with them. The process is similar to the one you used to review your values in stage 2.

Action 3a – think about what your priorities in life are, and try to identify them.

To do this, we suggest you take yourself on another 'mini retreat' – in the same way as you did for your values (see action 2a).

When you're on your retreat, think about what your priorities in life are. When we're caught up in our day to day lives it's easy to forget what our priorities in life are, and what we really want out of life. Many of us seem to live our lives on autopilot – just responding to the demands we place on ourselves and others place on us in our daily lives. And many people don't even get the chance to stand back from their lives and think about what it is that they actually want from them. So, after a few years (often in the middle of our lives) we stand back for the first time and realise we're not living the lives we really wanted.

So, what are the things that matter to you in life or the things that you want from life? Watching your family grow up? Changing the world? Finding a fulfilling job? Finding more confidence? Or just being happy? It could be a combination of any of these things, or countless other ones. When you're making your list, try to note the big priorities – the things that you think will shape your life.

When you think about this try to be absolutely honest with yourself.

Once you've made as much of a list as you can, look over the list. You might have quite a long list, but are there 4 or 5 overall headings you could put most of the points under? For example, you might have listed that you want to spend less time at work so you can spend more time with your family, and another point might have been that you want to get involved with more activities with your kids. These two points could fall under the overall heading of 'give more priority to my family'. If you're not able to find overall headings for your list, no problem, but where you can try to distil things down so it's not a massive list – maybe up to 10 things but it could just be 4 or 5.

If you're using the action plan template that we've provided for you at www.lifesquared.org.uk/courses, then fill in the 'what my life priorities are' section with your list of life priorities.

One final thing to say about the retreat activity is that when you're thinking about your life priorities, make sure you use the perspective you developed earlier on to stand back from your thinking and work out whether these are really your priorities in life or whether they're just aspirations that you've inherited from other influences, people, or places, and that might not be how you really feel. Challenge yourself on each life priority – how do I really feel about this? Always try to be honest with yourself and only note down the things you really feel.

Action 3b – think about how your priorities fit into your everyday life.

Now that you have your initial list of life priorities, you need to think about how they fit into the different areas of your life, just as you did for your values.

To help you do this, you might find it useful to note a few headings to describe different areas of your life. We can add a couple of new headings to the list you used for your values – so, now it is ‘at home’, ‘at work’, ‘shopping’, ‘leisure’, ‘travel’, ‘people’, and the two new headings ‘money’ and ‘how I think and see the world’. If you’re using the action plan template that we’ve provided for you at www.lifesquared.org.uk/courses, then just fill in the ‘living in line with my life priorities’ section, where the headings are already provided for you.

For each of your priorities in life, go through each ‘category’ area of life and note the things you would ideally be doing in that area of your life if you were living in line with this life priority. For example, you might have a priority of spending more time with your family. So, as you go through each of the categories for this value, one of the things you might note in the ‘at work’ section is that you’d ideally want to be working a 3 day week so you can spend more time with your family.

Once you’ve been through each category of your life for one of your priorities, do the same for all the other priorities you noted.

Action 3c – write an action plan of how you can live in a way that’s consistent with the things that really matter to you - your priorities in life.

You’ve now got a basic list of things you could be doing in different areas of your life to live in line with each of your priorities. Now, as a final step, you need to look through them and turn them into proper action points.

So go through your whole list turn each point into a specific, tangible action point (or several action points). For example, where you wrote ‘try to set up a business on my own’, turn this into a set of action points to help you do this – from researching your idea and doing a feasibility study through to speaking with your bank manager about loans. And next to each of these action points, give yourself a deadline - note the date you want to have done it by. This will really help you to take the actions. Again, try to be realistic but challenging in setting your deadlines. Look through all the actions and deadlines you’ve set yourself to make sure they’re achievable – both individually and as a whole. If they’re not – or they’re not challenging enough – then just adjust them.

If you’re using the action plan template that we’ve provided for you at www.lifesquared.org.uk/courses, then fill in the ‘moving forward - your life priorities action plan’ section. You will be adding to the action points you’ve already started filling in with your ‘values’ actions in an earlier part of the course. We use the same document for the values and life priorities actions because it’s easier for you to maintain one document than to try to juggle two separate ones.

As you’re writing your actions for your life priorities you should also keep an eye on whether they are consistent with your values and the actions you noted for them previously. If there is any conflict between values and life priorities, a bit of reflection to prioritise them should help you work out how to clarify them or whether you have to remove one of them. Once you’ve written your life priorities action points, have a look over the whole action plan (including the actions you’ve noted for the values side) to check that there is consistency.

4. Do it!

So, you now have your action point list – all that remains is for you to do it!

There are a few things you can do to help yourself to complete your action points once you've written them:

- Firstly make a promise to yourself that you'll try to do your action points. Then, if you find yourself not being bothered to do them listen to the nagging voice in your head that you promised to do them!
- Second, tell some friends that you're doing this and some of the actions you're taking as this will make you more likely to do them.
- Thirdly, stick your list of action points to the fridge, put them in your diary or anywhere prominent where you will regularly see them and be reminded of them.
- Take a few minutes at the end of each day to review how you're getting on and what you've achieved in the day. Give yourself a pat on the back for the actions you've taken and remind yourself about the ones you need to do – set dates for them and resolve to do them.

Whilst you're doing this, you might want to note the actions you've completed in the 'Completed and ongoing actions' section at the end of your action plan document, so you can see how much you've achieved and remind yourself of any ongoing actions you need to continue. Each time you complete an action it will either be an ongoing action that you've started (including new habits or attitudes that you'll need to continue – such as doing the composting) or it will be a completed one-off action (such as ordering a composting bin). So move your completed action into one of these sections at the bottom of your action plan, and note the date that it was done. Keep an eye on your completed 'ongoing actions' to make sure you're keeping them up.

- Finally, also take a few minutes at the end of each week to review your progress and think about whether there are any new action points (and completion dates for them) you could add to the list, so that you keep moving things on.

Good luck!

A final note

We hope you enjoy doing this mini course and that it helps you to bring some positive effects to your life. If you've found the course useful, we'd love to hear your stories – email us at info@lifesquared.org.uk to tell us about your experiences.

Also, please tell other people about the course and Life² - as this really helps us to spread the word about our work.

If you've enjoyed the course and want to do the full version with more detail, more guidance and the support of a group, visit www.lifesquared.org.uk to find out more and register for a pack.

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