



Developing a Vision for Your Future “Best Life”

This handout explains how to use solutions focused thinking to develop a vision for your future “best life”. The aim is to explore positive experiences, strengths, values, and resources to help you set goals and build on what motivates, matters to, and works for you. Once the vision is clarified, then you can take specific and concrete steps to move towards your “best life”.

How to do it

This exercise is based on the work of Laura King. Participants in Dr. King’s most famous study were given the following very simple instructions:

Take a moment to imagine your life in the future. What is the best possible life you can imagine? Consider all of the relevant areas of your life, such as your career, academic work, relationships, hobbies, and/or health. What would happen in these areas of your life in your best possible future?

For the next 15 minutes, write continuously about what you imagine this best possible future to be. Use the instructions below to help guide you through this process.

1. It may be easy for this exercise to lead you to examine how your current life may not match this best possible future. You may be tempted to think about ways in which accomplishing goals has been difficult for you in the past, or about financial/time/social barriers to being able to make these accomplishments happen. For the purpose of this exercise, however, please imagine a brighter future in which you are your best self and your circumstances change just enough to make this best possible life happen.
2. This exercise is most useful when it is very specific—if you think about a new job or different career, imagine exactly what you would do, who you would work with, and where it would be. The more specific you are, the more engaged you will be in the exercise and the more you’ll get out of it.
3. Find a time when you will not be disturbed, and you feel rested and relaxed. Let the words flow in whatever way is comfortable for you. Remember that this is just for you. No one else needs to see it. Be as creative and imaginative as you want, and don’t worry about grammar or spelling.
4. Do the same exercise again to the very same prompt on each of the following three days. Then take some time to read all three. What do you notice? What are the recurring themes of your “best life”?
5. Then consider the following questions and write down your answers:
 - What does your “best life” vision say about your priorities and values?
 - What does it say about what you enjoy most deeply?
 - How do you experience elements of your “best life” in your life now?
 - How could you get more of that in your life now?



- How could you get more of it in your life in the future?
- What strengths and resources could you use to make that happen?
- What other people could help?
- Is there one specific thing you'd like to commit to doing this week to move in that direction?

Why you should try it

Sometimes our goals in life can be elusive. Research suggests that building optimism about the future can motivate people to work toward that desired future and thus make it more likely to become a reality. As with most of life, both what we think and what we do make a big difference.

This exercise asks you to imagine your life going as well as it possibly could, then write about this best possible future. By doing so, research suggests that you'll not only increase your happiness in the present but pave the way for sustained happiness down the line.

Why it works

By thinking about your best possible future self, you can learn about yourself and what you want in life. This way of thinking can help you restructure your priorities in life in order to reach your goals. Additionally, it can help you increase your sense of control over your life by highlighting what you need to do to achieve your dreams. It also provides the motivation to take concrete steps toward making the vision a reality.

Sources

Laura A. King, Ph.D., University of Missouri

Jeffrey Huffman, M.D., Harvard Medical School, Massachusetts General Hospital

Sheldon, K. M., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2006). How to increase and sustain positive emotion: The effects of expressing gratitude and visualizing best possible selves. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 1(2), 73-82.