

Chapter 5.1: Contemplation

*The indispensable first step to getting the things you want out of life is this:
Decide what you want.
—Ben Stein*

Some people get into network marketing and dedicate themselves to developing a financial pyramid scheme based on selling cleaning products and cosmetics to their friends and relatives. The success of a sports team or political party is vitally important to some individuals; for others it is a particular religious or philosophical structure that gives meaning to life, while still others care only about getting laid.

How do you evaluate these motivations? Do some seem more foolish or more base than others? Not everyone would agree on which are the foolish ones. You were impressionable as a child, and the conditioning that you received when “the cement was wet” may have produced perspectives that are no longer valid, yet continue to influence your beliefs and motivations. Now that you are an adult and want to change your course, what criteria will you use to determine which is the path of greatest advantage?

There are many ways to view the world, and some have enthusiastic advocates who are motivated to convert others to their value system. Since the goal of this kit is self-direction, the only values of importance are yours. How do you appraise the alternatives available to you? The criteria by which you evaluate other people’s motivations can tell you something about your own. For example, Ms. X evaluates people on the basis of how much joy or pain they bring to others; Mr. Y evaluates people on the basis of their income and social status; and Ms. Z evaluates people on the basis of how judgmental they are.

Appreciating your core motivation enables you to honestly appraise the choices available to you so that you can go for what you really want, rather than rebelling against, or slavishly complying with, the “*shoulds*” you have been conditioned to accept. There may be people who think they know what you should do—for your own good. But they have their own biases, and they don’t know all there is to know about you. The important question is: How do *you* select among motivations? What do you *really* want? And what are you willing to sacrifice to get it?

If you have never thought deeply about what is important to you, what you stand for, and what you want to be sure to include in this limited lifespan, then what is the source of your core motivation? Do you even know what your core motivation is?

You are now at a crossroad, and are pulled in different directions. You will have to choose between maintaining your relationship with the incentive and following your path of greatest advantage; you cannot do both. So now is a good time to revisit or develop your core motivation, so that you can make honest choices.

Contemplation

If you want to exercise will, you have to know what you will. Contemplation exercises provide a method to appreciate and elaborate your core motivation. Contemplation often involves posing a question such as: “What do I really want for this one life I have to live?” and then letting the mind explore, without editing, the thoughts and images that come along. Investing your cognitive resources in a contemplative investigation is interesting in the short term and, over the long term, may show you the way to the most profound of payoffs.

Several strategies to facilitate the contemplative process are recommended here:

[Short Harmony](#) – Audio file to quiet the mind and evoke contemplation.

[Ask Alice](#) - Flash presentation on deciding which way to go, approximately 20 minutes.

[Dickensian Exercise](#) - Flash presentation on the wages of corruption, approximately 20 minutes.

Thought Experiment: Contemplation.

To access and investigate your core motivation you are invited to participate in an experience that combines a script designed to evoke a calm, clear mindset (presented as a trance inducing audio file) with an intention (in you) to discover or review your core motivation. Contemplation questions provide opportunities to dispassionately consider important aspects of your life. So now, or when convenient for you, get into a dispassionate mind set, listen to the contemplation audio file, let your mind go, and watch what happens.

Occasionally, this exercise yields clear insights and specific answers. If you know what you want and have the motivation to do what it takes to get it, you are ready to complete the [Decision Matrix](#) presented later in this chapter. If there is any ambivalence, then continue working with the exercises in this chapter and elsewhere to answer questions such as:

Who am I and where am I going?

What is meaningful for me?

What do I stand for?

What do I really want for my finite lifespan?

What must I do to get what I want?

Thus Spake Zarathustra

Another invitation to self-discovery was suggested by Nietzsche. His protagonist, Zarathustra describes two roads:

“One leads from the past, the other from the future, meeting at a gateway where I now stand (the present moment). But the complex of causes in which I am entangled will recur—it will create me again! I am part of these causes of the eternal recurrence. I shall return, with this sun, with this earth . . . not to a new life or a similar life. I shall return eternally to this identical and self-same life, in the greatest things and in the smallest, to teach once more the recurrence of all things.”

Nietzsche was proud of his ‘discovery’ of Eternal Recurrence, and there is more to it than at first meets the eye. The value of this exercise is unrelated to the validity of the concept; instead, the focus is on the choices you would make if it were true. Suspending your disbelief and acting as if this weird premise was valid can reveal your core motivation.

Thought Experiment: Eternal Recurrence.

Consider a crossroad in your life that requires a decision from you: In evaluating your choices assume nothing but the premise of Eternal Recurrence. Act as if the path you select now will be the very same path you will be condemned to repeat for eternity. How would you behave if you were free from all constraints? Abandon all the “shoulds” and all the restrictions associated with the morality conditioned into you since childhood. For this experiment we are purposely choosing to ignore any concept of good and bad. You are free to make whatever choice you want, knowing that you will encounter the same choice point and make the same decision with the same consequences again during each of your recurring lifetimes—for eternity.