



From hustle to holism

In the wake of the pandemic and various global seismic shifts over the last three years there has been a “big rethink”, a resetting of priorities. This doesn’t necessarily mean changing your job or relationship, but it does mean re-evaluating how you deal with various aspects of your life. If you are having your own life audit, here is a guide to doing it with honesty and purpose.

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There is currently much discussion about the significant number of people redefining their priorities in work and life and modifying the balance between the two. The last few decades have been dominated by hustle culture with many people finding themselves working longer and longer hours, hustling for the larger pay cheque or the fancier title.

It sometimes takes a significant negative event, such as natural disaster or medical diagnosis, to shake us out of autopilot. Seeing the fragility of life and the suffering of so many has us asking ourselves, “What is most important?” Are we living a life that is meaningful? Are we making the most of the time we have? Are we focused on the things that really matter and spending time with the people who really care?

The pandemic has certainly been a contributing factor in this shift for many people; however, for some it’s also a natural stage of emotional development. Middle life is often a period of reflection and change where many undertake an internal audit, re-evaluate priorities and emerge with a slightly different outlook. Perhaps the long periods of isolation in the past two years, providing subsequent time and space for introspection, has led to this trend becoming more widespread.

Re-evaluating your work, lifestyle and priorities to ensure you are on the path to greatest fulfilment is worthwhile at any stage of life. Actively undertaking this process may help to reduce the feeling that the world has come crashing down around you — a sentiment that many of us have identified with at one time or another since the beginning of 2020.

A “rethink” doesn’t always have to lead to resigning from your job or changing careers. It can involve improving emotional regulation, strengthening personal interactions, working smarter not harder and investing more time in your wellbeing. If you currently find yourself on the threshold of an existential crisis, sitting at a crossroads of a big life decision or would just like to spend some time ensuring you are on a life path that brings you contentment, here are some things to consider.



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A focus on wellness over wealth

Numerous studies have shown that greater wealth does not equal greater happiness. Research has also demonstrated that individuals with goals that are highly orientated towards wealth and possession report lower personal wellbeing. In conversations with end-of-life patients, regrets that are most often expressed relate to having worked *too* hard and having put *too much* focus on status and material wealth.

The pandemic has brought with it a deep appreciation for our vulnerabilities along with an increased focus on health and the importance of preventive healthcare measures. When we talk about wellness, we are not just referring to physical health. Mental wellbeing is just as important, with the complexity of challenges faced by those suffering from mental health conditions being further highlighted during the pandemic.

Genuine wellbeing could perhaps be considered the greatest wealth of all. Wellbeing is not just the absence of disease or illness but can be defined as the combination of feeling good and functioning well. Experiencing positive emotions, developing one's potential, having a sense of purpose and enjoying positive relationships are contributing factors to healthy functioning.

According to Dr Alan Wallace, author and Western expert on Tibetan Buddhism, an ideal state of wellbeing results from "freeing the mind of its afflictive tendencies and obscurations and realising one's fullest potential in terms of wisdom, compassion and creativity." He adds that genuine wellbeing is a sense of wellbeing that is derived not from what we can get from the world, but from what we can bring to it. This includes social and environmental wellbeing that flows from treating other people and the environment with respect and restraint.

Psychological wellbeing encompasses pursuing healthy goals, cultivating mental balance and emotional intelligence and facing reality. To further expand on the concept of facing reality, it refers to facing and acting, as opposed to burying one's head in the sand or conflating reality with our own projections.

According to Wallace, spiritual wellbeing can be gained by "exploring the innermost depths of who we are and how we relate to the world around us." It can be facilitated through reflective practices such as mindfulness, meditation, psychological or talking therapies or prayer. For some people, spiritual wellbeing is aligned with faith or service to others.

Moving the focus away from the size of your bank balance and towards your physical and emotional wellbeing can

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propel you on a path towards greater contentment and fulfilment. However, at the same time it's important to recognise the need for financial stability and security. Loss of these things in the search for greater meaning can be counterproductive if it becomes detrimental to your wellbeing. If you can't make the mortgage payment or cover your child's school fees, you will find yourself under a great deal of stress and emotional discomfort. As always, seek balance and moderation as opposed to going to the extreme of forsaking one to attain the other.

Further develop your sense of self

If income generation begins to assume a lesser importance in your life, from where do you derive your sense of self and self-worth? Attaching your self-worth to your job title or earning capacity is fraught with danger, because at some stage in life you will reach retirement age.

Are you considering all facets of your personality, or have you just been focused on one dimension, such as productivity and achievement? Have you put enough emphasis on such areas as creativity, connection, interpersonal reflection and self-care? People can feel inhibited or unfulfilled if they don't engage in both personal and social experiences that allow for the expression of all their inherent qualities.

Pursue emotionally meaningful goals

When you can articulate your purpose, that clarity drives you and shapes your decisions and goals. The best place to start is with a values audit. As people move through life, values tend to shift and priorities, goals and aspirations are subject to renegotiation. Reflect on your core values and whether your actions, decisions and behaviours align. As Wallace teaches, "Authentic values may lead to the discovery of deep truths, and the experiential discovery of such truths may bring greater richness to one's values."

As part of the current "Rethink" movement, there is reluctance by many people to tolerate a work situation that feels unsuitable or unsatisfying. People are looking for a sense of meaning in all their activities and interactions, including work. Before making significant, life-altering changes, consider how important it is to you to find your purpose in your paid employment. Can you seek to make

your role more meaningful by delegating tasks that don't align with your purpose and putting your hand up for projects that do? For some, work is a means for security and stability, and they look for purpose outside paid employment. Other people, including myself, retrain later in life in order to pursue a role that is both financially secure and purpose-driven.

I currently split my work hours between a part-time corporate wellness role and my nutrition practice and writing. One position offers greater security, salary and future opportunities. The other offers flexibility, personal growth and freedom. In both roles I am undertaking work that I find meaningful and rewarding. Although the financial returns would be higher if I only pursued the corporate work, I would have less time to dedicate to my family and my wellbeing. It's emotionally meaningful to me to spend time with my children and be available to watch and facilitate their sporting and social activities.

Emotionally meaningful goals also look beyond self-interest. Caring for and contributing to the welfare of other people and of the next generation can bring great personal fulfilment. This may also refer to actions that preserve, and increase the amount of time spent in, the natural environment. Research suggests that time spent in nature, in particular near water, significantly reduces stress, accelerates healing, increases feelings of wellbeing and improves cognitive function.

Self-fulfilment vs social acceptance

When you move your focus away from external influences, and your actions and behaviours are based on what you find emotionally meaningful, keeping-up-with-the-Joneses ceases to be a motivating factor. One of the most liberating shifts you can make is realising that what other people think about you doesn't matter. Once your choices and behaviours are aligned to your values, you become less inclined towards pleasing or placating others or seeking recognition and admiration. You become more comfortable expressing your authentic nature and begin to naturally align with people who are driven by the same intrinsic motivations.

Put more time into your relationships

Countless studies demonstrate the importance of your social networks and



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personal connections for positive mental health and wellbeing. Social connection has been linked to happiness, longevity and resilience and has been shown to be protective against stress.

As you start to pursue more meaningful goals, this naturally spills over to relationships. Seek out emotionally rewarding relationships based on mutual respect and understanding. These are the relationships in which you feel seen, heard and understood. It's worth extending this reflection throughout your various social networks. Consider ways to maximise positive emotional experiences and move away from negative social interactions. This can be more challenging in work-related environments; however, cultivating tolerance and understanding for other people's differences and strengthening emotional regulation is always worthwhile.

Engaging in a life audit may involve ending a relationship or, at the other end of the spectrum, adjusting the expectations you are placing on a partner or friend. Keep in mind that making such external changes is far easier than changing yourself, so seek to develop your sense of self first. Then you can be assured subsequent decisions are not based on alleviating your personal discomfort but are the result of a deeper

understanding of what constitutes a satisfying emotional connection.

Become more mindful

When redefining your priorities, it can be helpful to move the focus away from the future and allow for more emphasis on the present moment. There are very few wellness pieces I have written that don't touch on the role of mindfulness! Being mindful keeps the autopilot switch in the off position. It's when you are on autopilot that the years can fly by while you are caught up in a trajectory that does not have you on the path towards greatest happiness and contentment. By living in the present moment, you are more likely to savour experiences and take pleasure in the little things. Personal contentment often comes from appreciating what you already have.

The practice of mindfulness also leads to greater self-awareness, emotional regulation and mental balance. Future-related goals are important; however, so are goals aimed at emotional connection and regulation. You can effectively train your brain through mindfulness to achieve higher levels of psychological functioning. Mindfulness has also been proven to increase focus and attention and eliminate distraction. By focusing more deeply and completing your work

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more quickly, you can free up time to spend with the people you love and on personal projects you find meaningful.

Choosing the right path

Always come back to your values, undertake this process regularly and reach out for support. There are some incredibly knowledgeable and insightful therapists and coaches who can support you on this journey. It's also important to remember that you don't have to find the answers immediately. Small tweaks and revisions can still propel you in the right direction and it can be a process of testing and modifying as you go. The journey may not always be smooth, and the best path may not always be obvious, but we evolve through learning and grow through our discomfort. 🌱

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