

LIFE OBJECTIVE

Thinking Strategically About Your Life & Career

March 2014

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"It's not enough to be busy (the ants are busy), we must ask: what are we busy about?"

- Henry David Thoreau

Why are we here?

You have been told the following: get a good job, work hard, save money and retire as a millionaire. If you do these things, you will be happy and safe.

A traditional career path is hard to find and offers none of the security or benefits it once did. In addition, we now seek careers and workplaces that allow us to be our "whole self."

Instead of trying for a work-life balance, we now require a flexible work-life blend. This means that our work must be purposeful, and that we must enjoy the environment and people we spend so much of our lives with. (Work is where we spend 30% of our lives!)

I believe that you don't need a (career) path if you have a purpose, or a Life Objective. But some people find it difficult to uncover this driving, connecting force on their own.

Today will be part therapy, part self-actualization and part professional development. Our goal? To think strategically about our lives and our careers.

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"You are the steward of your own potential. The resources within you—and around you—are only tapped when you recognize their value and develop ways to use them."

- Scott Belsky

Self-Assessment

Let's look back to move forward; it's easier to analyze the past than to predict the future.

Our process today will begin by mining your past by auditing your experience, knowledge and skills.

It is important that you don't edit yourself during this process. You might overlook aspects of your past that could be leveraged in a beneficial way for your future.

Once we've put it all on paper, we'll connect the dots to discover patterns and gaps.

>> Keep in mind this statement as you reflect on your knowledge, experience and skills: "You will do what you do no matter where you are." In other words, which patterns of experience, work style or contributions begin to emerge as you mine the past? <<

Items you should gather or think about in preparation for your self-assessment:

- Past/current resume
- List of hobbies, skills and other useful knowledge
- Key successes or failures for further reflection

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Situation Analysis

Where are you today? What's the situation? Let's look at your performance as if you were a company. It is imperative that you do not self-judge here. Make sure to include the "small stuff" because it might be the key to unlocking a pattern or seeing a gap that needs filling.

Experience: What experiences have you had in your career and your life? This could include areas of expertise, events that have shaped you as a person, industries or environments you've worked in, etc.

Knowledge: This includes knowledge that is self-taught and also that comes from peers, social groups and formal education. What do you know?

Skills: Maybe you're a great cook or you can build things with your hands. Or, you have a knack for communicating with people or leading. What are you good at? What are you great at?

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Work Style Preferences

What are the distinct values, environment, work styles, leadership/management approaches that you were most successful working within?

Work Type: Imagine your dream work team and environment. Is it collaborative, flat, fast paced? Describe it below. Which leadership/management approaches do you find the most beneficial for your personality, work preferences and growth potential? What makes you feel successful?

Cultural Fit: Make a point to assess the cultural environments in which you have been successful and felt most like you were your “whole self.” Also make a note of those environments where you were not as successful as you would have liked—why do you think this is?

Personality (Optional): Assess your personality using a popular test, such as <http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/jtypes2.asp#questionnaire> In lieu of a personality test, what do you perceive your personality type to be? Do you tend to be introverted or extroverted? Are you in touch with your emotions and able to easily express your feelings to others? Do you prefer large crowds or small groups? What else?

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SWOT Analysis

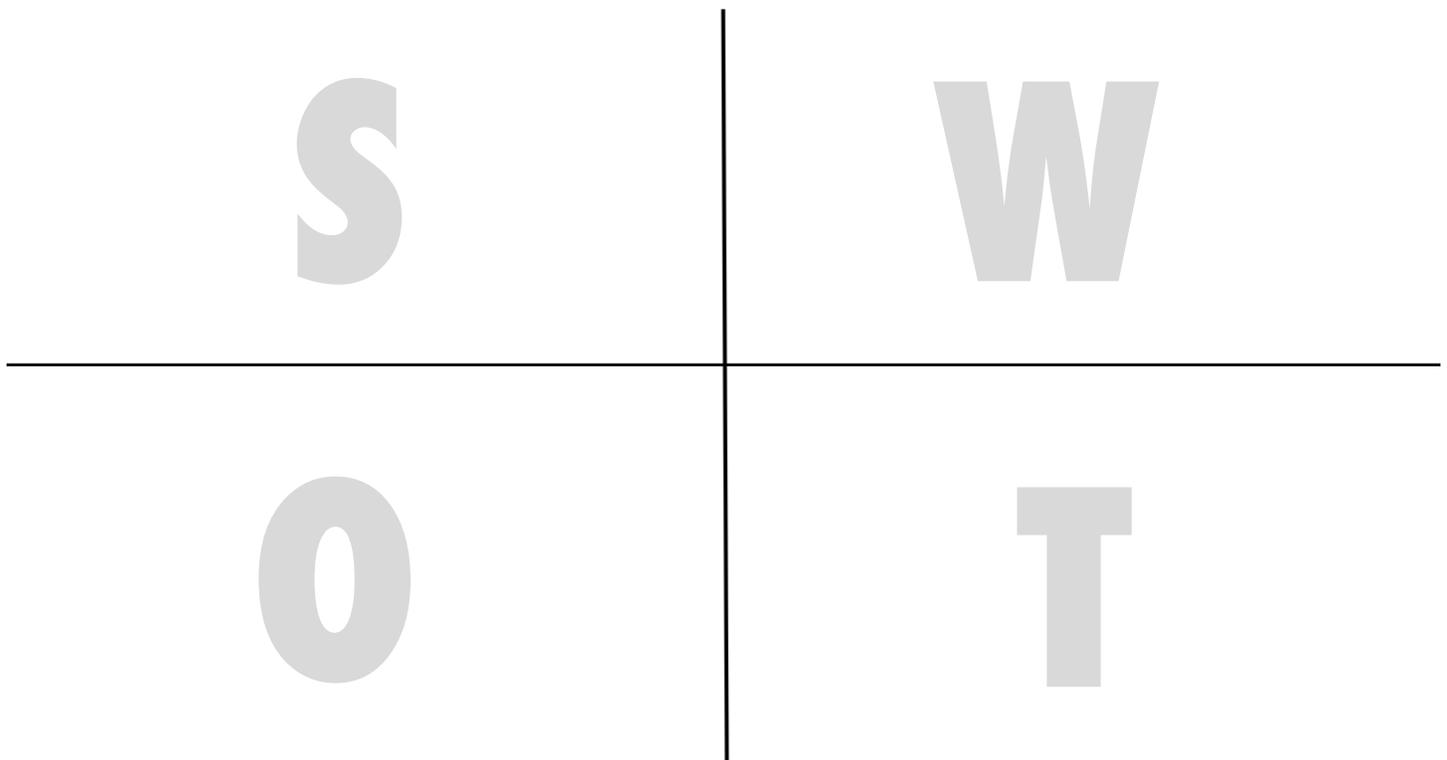
Once you've completed your situation analysis, begin to make connections with your "data," uncovering patterns and any gaps. Perform a SWOT analysis to understand which factors may help or hinder achieving your goals.

Strengths: List your personal or individual strengths. These could be skills, knowledge or experience-related, and these could also leverage your personality and work style preferences. These characteristics are your perceived advantage over others.

Weaknesses: List any gaps in your individual knowledge, skills or experience. Make sure to include soft skill or personality weaknesses here. These characteristics are your perceived disadvantage when compared with others.

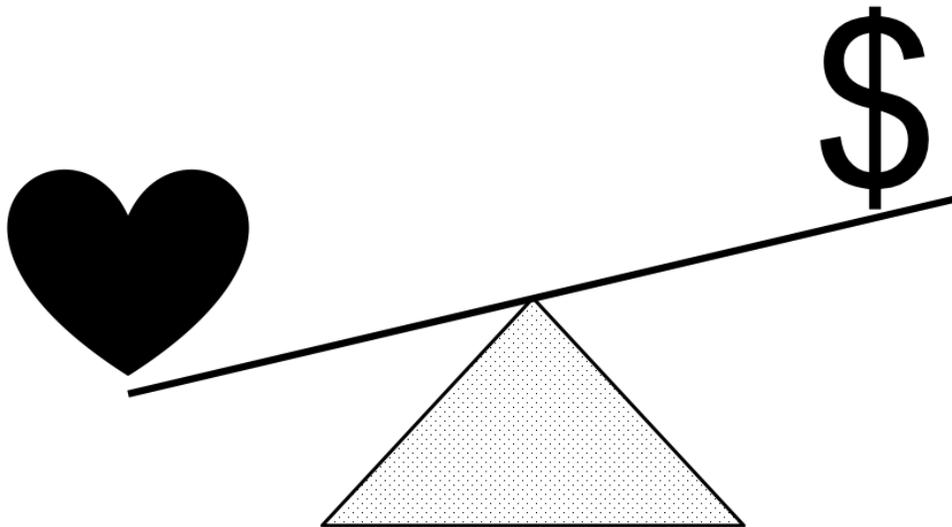
Opportunities: Based on your self-assessment, what opportunities exist where you might leverage yourself better for success? These could be new job roles, market factors, trends, etc.

Threats: Just as you've identified any career or skill-related opportunities, you should now list any external market threats. These are elements that may cause trouble and are perceived challenges you would be smart to avoid, overcome or be aware of during your path to success.



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Self-Discovery

It is important to clarify and separate what you CAN be doing from what you truly WANT to spend your time doing (and why), based on your unique attributes and characteristics.

Wants

Now that you've assessed yourself and your opportunities, it is time to think about what you WANT to be doing. These wants can be focused on a particular job function or on ways you can contribute, or on how you'd like to be working.

Give some thought to the type of lifestyle you'd like to lead as you identify your wants. List 5-10 wants below.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

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Whys

Let's test your wants. We need to uncover the motivations behind the wants you've listed above in order to separate those with purpose-driven intentions from those which feel safe or expected.

We will do this through asking WHY five times. Yes, it sounds silly. Let's get it over with.

EXAMPLE

Bree's patterns:

Making & Creating
Analog & Get Real
Discovery & Learning
Teaching & Sharing

Bree's life objective:

To remain connected to all things real and tangible, and to inspire and build connectivity for others—humans and companies alike.

Your Life Objective

So far, we have painted a great picture of you and your potential. Now, let's crystallize your life objective.

By pairing your self-assessment with your wants and whys, you will now begin to uncover the elements and patterns comprising your life objective, which is your vision for your life. Then we'll take this broad concept and use it to give direction to your career.

The life objective is a single, concise statement that sets the tone for your life. Instead of charting a predetermined trajectory or career path for yourself, you should be able to leverage your life objective as a lens through which you can look to make all career-related decisions and moves.

What do I do? My patterns:

My life objective:

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"Do the stuff only you can do. The urge, starting out, is to copy. And that's not a bad thing. Most of us only find our own voices after we've sounded like a lot of other people. But the one thing that you have that nobody else has is your voice, your mind, your story, your vision."

- Neil Gaiman

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Self-Brand

Now that you have your life objective, begin thinking about how you can make it tangible through your career. Remember, there is no perfect fit when you're looking for the next big thing to do. Think of uncertainty as an opportunity.

Reframe You

It is important that you reframe and rethink your skills, knowledge and experience in order to seek out new opportunities to leverage your whole self and work. Reframing takes more than hearing someone else explain a new way of looking at things. You have to DO things a new way before you can THINK in a new way. When we change the way we see the world, we can change the way we connect with people and think about the future.

How can you break out of ingrained habits and routines to see things differently?

Do Your Homework

As you've thought about how you can make your life objective tangible, it's likely that you've identified a few potential avenues to begin researching for future opportunities. Once you've found a few ideas or nuggets to research, do your due diligence to discover people who are the best examples of what you hope to be doing.

Who is doing it well? If you can't find anyone doing exactly what you'd like to be doing, look at similar figures in other industries or situations.

Perform a high-level analysis of your direct and indirect "competition." What exactly are these people doing well? What do you think contributes to their success? Is it easy to identify their niche or unique story?

What unique talents could you bring to this type of work? How are you different from others doing something similar? How can you tell your story differently?

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Create a Small Pond

Leveraging a unique story, you can develop a positioning statement for yourself that will effectively separate you from the others in your category (creating a small pond). This story should, in a concise yet powerful way, summarize what you seek to do, what drives you and why. Basically, this translates your life objective into an elevator pitch of sorts.

Personality & Attributes: Think about your self-assessment and discovery. Bring the personality and skill attributes from your assessment through to create an authentic voice and look for your personal brand. This will inform the look and feel, as well as how you speak and relate to the world. Your personal brand should be an authentic, natural representation of your whole self. It is important that you accurately represent who you are, not who you think you should be.

Values & Core Beliefs: It is important that you are able to articulate your values and beliefs. These represent the ways in which you work and relate to others. Example values: ambition, honesty, trust. Example beliefs: education through application, or everyone is creative.

Story: Create a framework to support your story and presence across all touch points. Use your own authentic voice.

- **Headline/Tagline**—In 140 characters or less summarize your distinction. This is typically used in social media, such as your Twitter profile or LinkedIn headline. Think of this as your platform or tagline.
- **Elevator Pitch**—This is the 30-60 second version of your story. Who, what, why, how and for whom.
- **Boilerplate**—This is your brief bio, which will include your current story and also 1-2 sentences summarizing your past achievements and your uniqueness.
- **Full Bio**—This is where you tell your complete story. This is useful for your web presence on your personal website or LinkedIn profile. It can act as a narrative version of your resume, though it does a better job of showing your personality and giving context around your accomplishments.

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Look & Feel: Based on your headline and personality, develop a simple look and feel framework you can leverage across all of your touch points to create a consistent image for yourself.

- Photos
- Color Palette
- Fonts
- Other Images or Graphic Elements

Presence: Determine which touch points (digital and physical) you will leverage to create your consistent presence. Prepare your story and look and feel elements and apply them to your touch points.

- Website
 - URL
 - Portfolio
 - Blog
- Social Media
 - Usernames
 - URLs
- Email Address
- Identity Materials
 - Business Cards
 - Letterhead
 - Resume
 - Stationary
- Personal Style & Wardrobe

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Self-Action

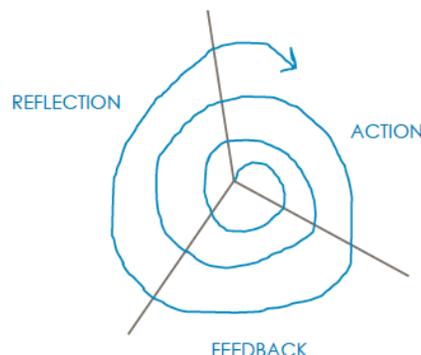
Action Plan

Just as everyone has a different life objective, everyone will have a different plan of action to achieve his or her goals. Chart out your major goals, breaking them into smaller pieces. These could be gaining new skills, performing tasks, practicing new behaviors, acting on new experiences, etc. All skill development and personal growth happens here and is given direction through this plan.

Experiment

Action means more than theory. It's time to act on the tension you're feeling—how can you get from where you are now to where you want to be?

- Develop daily exercises—steps taken each day add up and make your dreams become tangible through a series of small wins.
- Bite of small pieces of a larger goal. By splitting a larger goal into smaller modules, you can effectively plot out the goal on your calendar and literally schedule these tasks into your day. You must make time!
- Act like an agile startup! Pivot! Use the growth spiral (pictured below) to adapt how you go about achieving your goals. First, take action. Then, analyze any "feedback" you receive in response to this action. Reflect on this feedback and adjust your approach before acting again. If something isn't working, change it!



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Self-Accountability

Learnings & Failures

Reflect on your progress periodically (daily, weekly, monthly—this is up to you). This type of reflection should be built into your plan of action. Make sure to review your successes AND your failures. Assess what you've learned and determine what you still need more time and/or help with. Use the growth spiral to evolve your approach (action, feedback, reflection).

Do it Together

You might find it helpful to develop a mentorship or coaching relationship to ensure accountability. Possibly, the group from today's workshop could serve this function.

Make it a Priority

Make time and space. Take time to disconnect. Clean your space, clear your head. Take a walk. Remove distractions. Be curious and think critically. Crush your comfort zone.