

I was listening to a podcast by [Tim Ferris](#) who was interviewing [Debbie Millman](#). In the interview, Millman shared an exercise to create a vision for a wonderful life. Both Ferris and Millman were enthused about the exercise suggesting it works remarkably well for people. Millman signified that it is often remarkable that a person's life follows their vision with unerring accuracy.

I agree with the general sentiment that we are far more likely to succeed (whatever success means to a person, remembering that some people are happy with very little in the way of material goods, fame, power etc.) if there is a unifying and solid vision in life. If we know where we are going, we will succeed. If we do not, we will flounder in a sea of aimlessness. It is a good general rule to be fully conscious of.

While there are no guarantees in life, the proposition is as close as we can get to one. If we know where we are going and why we are going there, then the rate of success is somewhere between 90% and 95%. Even then, my rough estimation is likely to be erring on the side of conservatism.

The problem with a proposition that declares it is as good a guarantee as it gets is that it is likely to be thought of as a magic pill solution. The amount of work necessary in an endeavor of this sort is frequently glossed over in favor of some fantasy going on in the head. In practice, what is often required is a Zen like meditative focus that emphasizes paying attention to each small step. These small steps are akin to being the mantra of a grand vision. The steps should occur in the present moment again and again and again. This cannot be emphasized enough.

The power of Millman's exercise is undeniable. My life experiences including my work with psychotherapy clients attest to how well the exercise can work. Throw in that there is some sound scientific research to support the claims Debbie Millman makes and it's a very strong recipe for success. As I was writing this essay, I decided to include a bit of my own flavor to the vision exercise proposed by Millman. In addition, I decided to expand and include other facets needed to create a wonderful life which Millman did not go into.

Vision is a big part of the equation, it is the alpha and omega of where we want to be. But other factors such as goals, intent, conscious and unconscious blocks have a role to play in our ultimate success. They are all the letters between the alpha and omega. It is a strange and often perplexing journey which has not been covered well.

"Recreate the world in your own image and make it better for your having been

here.”

Ray Bradbury

There are many self-help books, counsellors, coaches and spiritual teachers professing to have a method for success. However, most are lacking the coherence and integration of different disciplines to fully address ‘the road to success’. Most books address a specific component of creating a wonderful life. They might focus on goals, or be focused upon grit, or intent and so on. But to the best of my knowledge, nothing has integrated disparate bodies of knowledge into a working model of how to create a wonderful life.

Another crucial factor is that there are many erroneous beliefs surrounding how to create a wonderful life. For example, the material proposed in the new age creating reality field is outright nonsense. Yet books like ‘The Secret’, ‘The Science of Getting Rich’, ‘Think and Grow Rich’ have made the best seller lists. These speak to a person’s level of gullibility rather than providing a way through to a wonderful life. Perhaps what is even more amiss is that many of these books attempt to tie in with modern science, most notably quantum physics even though the actual science says otherwise.

The tendency to put one’s thoughts above all else permeates into many different fields. The trope that there is a power of thought has reached plague proportions. In general, our society has a top down view, where conscious thought is placed on top of everything else. Our thoughts, our imagination, our visualizations, our positive thinking creates our reality they say. Right at the center of this popular meme is ego in all its self-absorbed glory.

However, these propositions are inconsistent with the large body of research which at times points in the opposite direction. In terms of power and influence, the ‘conscious thought’ is the least powerful of tools at our disposal. As a society and down to an individual level we frequently have it back the front.

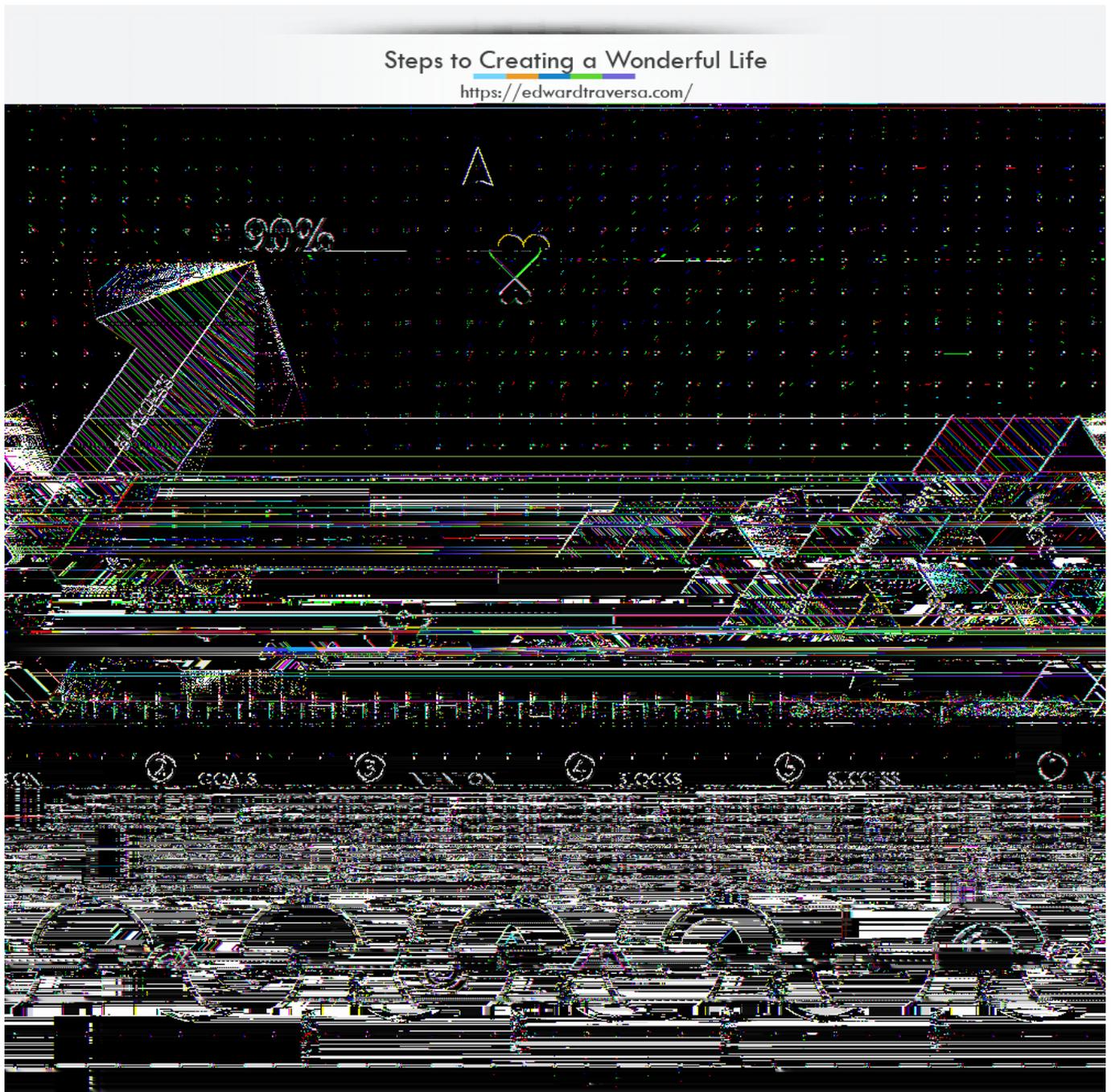
Creating a wonderful life has many facets which need to be explored in depth. That type of exploration is beyond the scope of this essay. For instance, one of the key components of mastering a skill is a continual cycle of practice. This practice by necessity calls for incremental improvement through replicating a set of behaviors or mindset repeatedly. Then there is a whole cycle of modification to consider. On top of that, a constructive critical feedback system also needs to be in place.

In all the former, there has been no consideration of procrastination and how we tend to

disengage and disconnect from our imagined future self. A true vision is a connective experience - albeit a form of unconscious connection. There is a lot that simply is not going to be covered in this article.

I do hope to provide a kind of skeletal framework on how someone might go about creating a wonderful life. All human beings have a high capacity for malleability. Science now knows that we are physiologically wired with the capacity for tremendous change (Doidge, 2016). Life does not have to suck. We can change our lives. We can expand into a vision of wonderful life.

At the end of this article, I will provide an amended version of the Millman vision technique which if done well by someone, is half the battle. Most of the other half of the battle I will discuss in this article but is summarized below in the infographic:



My intent is to provide something which is based on solid science which has a considerable body of researched evidence to back the claims. One of these is the relationship between the self-fulfilling prophecy and achieving success in life.

“Luck is believing you’re lucky.”—Tennessee Williams

The importance of developing a great vision for our lives should not be underestimated. For

confusion is that there is often a relationship between the two. There is a strong relation

- A vision is a clearly stated picture of a future state which is trying to be achieved. It is knowing where we want to go. It is our why and often provides a purpose for getting out of bed in the morning.
- A goal is the strategy and tactics used towards attaining a vision. It is the how of achieving a vision. We need goals to attain a vision but the goals are driven by the vision.

To appreciate the difference between the two, consider the following example. Let us say that at some point in the future I want a purple Lamborghini. The vision is the idea that I will have a purple Lamborghini. The goal is to be able to build up enough finances to purchase the Lamborghini. I can and should have sub goals which involve strategies that will help me achieve my aim. The imagery in my head, the beliefs, the thoughts, the emotional and psychological state of the purple Lamborghini are the drivers of the aim. The goal is more orientated towards the practical aspects of attaining the goal.

Goals are kept at the forefront of consciousness. They are the conscious motivational drivers towards success. Even though our conscious thoughts and beliefs are the least powerful mechanism to get us to where we want, it does not mean they do not play a role. Clearly in forming strategies, planning our conscious minds play a pivotal role. But as human beings, we should not be overly reliant on an analytical head based approach.

Another important point to consider about goals is we also should have strategies which account for setbacks. Absolutely we should keep our eye on the prize, but just as importantly we should be mindful that strategies for overcoming setbacks are an essential ingredient of the success path. In many ways, we have been trained to overlook obstacles. Yet there is a growing body of evidence (Oettingen, 2014) which suggests that if we pay attention and deal with obstacles appropriately, the success rate is increased.

Other related phenomena also play a part in achieving our goals. Take for example the concept of loss aversion. Loss aversion refers to the human tendency to try and avoid losses rather than acquiring gains. It goes a little like this. People are twice as likely to feel bad about losing something rather than gaining something from life. For instance, if we accidentally lose 50 dollars we are twice as likely to feel bad in comparison to finding 50 dollars and feeling good.

The effect being we then stop trying. See the section on learned helplessness found in the following link to appreciate what occurs neurologically in our brains.

<https://edwardtraversa.com/overcoming-destructive-inner-critic/>

One of the main points I am trying to get across is that there are many variables involved in accomplishing our goals. It is not as straightforward a matter as putting our happy faces and thinking good thoughts. To be insanely successful requires an extraordinary application of our entire being.

“You don’t have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.” ~Martin Luther King, Jr.

Another very important facet to consider is intentions. There is a lot of confusing material and some outright erroneous notions on intentions. As such intentions are widely misunderstood which often leaves the person missing the mark.

An intention is closer to a daily practice which sets the tone, orientation, and demeanor for the day. It is not a carefully worded statement of intent - though sometimes this is a useful exercise. Such a statement can help us clarify our intentions but they are not the intention itself. Intentions are fundamentally a feeling type of phenomena. Feelings are a non-verbal movement which occurs in the mind.

Feelings differ from emotions. A useful distinction to make is that emotions occur in the body and feelings in the mind. We can tell the difference between thoughts and feelings by understanding that thoughts are a verbal narrative which occurs in the mind. While a thought can create a feeling which in turn can trigger an emotion, its typically the other way around. Generally, its feelings which trigger thoughts (Watkins, 2014).

Intentions act as a type of bridge between the conscious and the unconscious. Consider the following as an example. In the morning, I get out of bed and think I am going to get some exercise today. The goal for the day might become going for a 3-mile walk. In my head, I

(unconscious). If we have our intention set well, then the body also sets itself to meet the challenges of the day ahead. An intention is something which is felt energetically through the human system.

One of the difficulties people frequently encounter is that they have difficulty holding the intention for a prolonged period. A New Year's resolution is a good case of this phenomena. A person might set a goal but often it's the intention which causes the goal to extinguish itself. It's the intention which needs to be affirmed again and again. Then it needs to be backed by action which in turn needs to be rewarded. A simple "well done" to ourselves is an example of a reward.

One of the reasons we need follow the above sequence is that it creates a new set of neural pathways in our brains. Sometimes these pathways take a long time to form. There is not as much truth in the myth that it takes around 30 days to create a habit. On the contrary, sometimes it can take many months of constant practice before the beginning of a habit is formed.

It is important to have dogged persistence which is sometimes known as grit or purity of intent when it comes to intentions. Our purity of intent should be applied to our intentions. We should push ourselves repeatedly with our intentions. To a lesser extent, this same practice is also applied to our goals. However, it is not applied at all to our vision. The last point is very important because we want to keep the vision in the unconscious. Where many people go astray is by trying to apply purity of intent to a vision, where as they should be applying it to an intent.

Our egos often get in the way of what we want. Since intention is feeling based phenomena, there aren't the thoughts or narratives associated with it. A good vision for life should consist largely of unconscious processes. We try and forget the vision for a period hence keeping ego out of the way. We can and should come back to it periodically to adjust it. And if we do remember parts of it, it is not a big issue. Simply, let it go and do not pay much attention to it.

If our unconscious minds are not on our side, then no amount of will power or effort will see the fruition of the desired outcome. This is another very important point to remember.

discussion of this nature. The same could be said of keeping ego out of the way, or developing grit, or expanding on how to negate blocks. Perhaps one day, I will write something more in depth on these topics. For now, let's get to the promised envisioning exercise.

“What is impressed in the subconscious is expressed in the conscious” - William James

As alluded to earlier, though this exercise initially is one done in full consciousness, it is best left in the unconscious. We can just forget about it, or just not give it a whole lot of attention.

We can pick a few things out of our vision to initially work with and set goals around that. That is fine and encouraged, but do not fall for the trap of trying to do it all at once. The value of an exercise of this nature is that we are more likely to develop good habits and intentions which support us in our vision for life.

I mentioned earlier that I really liked the life envisaging exercise proposed by Debbie Millman. I consider it to be very powerful and many aspects of it resonate with me. Here is a slightly amended version:

Pick a date, ten years into the future.

: Write an essay on what you are doing during the day on this date and how you are feeling during the day. A point of difference from the original exercise is that I suggest putting in emotions, feelings, thoughts and physiology as well. For example, it is not just owning a house but how the house makes you feel and how does your body react to being in the house. What kind of thoughts are occurring about the house?

The essay should be very detailed. Ten pages of writing would be a good guide to follow, but don't be afraid of making it longer if you cannot fit everything in. Ten pages might seem out of reach, but consider the following as an example. What kind of mood were you in when you first woke up? What kind of bed did you sleep in? Describe it in detail. What kind of sheets? What is your bedroom like? What is the view from the bedroom window? Are you looking forward to the day? Are you in bed alone? If not what is

the other person doing? What kind of things are you thinking about as you lay in bed? And you haven't even gotten out of bed yet. Think about whether you have pets. What kind? What type of friends do you have and how many? But also, think about how they make you feel and what they bring into your life. Are you single or married? What are you having for breakfast? What is your social life like? There are literally many things which could be included, but start from when you wake up to when you go to sleep and make it really detailed.

Dream big. This is not a time for holding back. Just let go and allow your unconscious to bring images, desires, emotion, and feelings to the fore. Just remember dreaming big does not mean dreaming of the impossible. An example, I might become healthier, but I am not very likely to ever make the Olympic team as a sprinter.

Do not edit the essay. Analytical thought gets in the way of the creative process required for this exercise. It is far more important to allow your mind to be in a free-flowing state rather getting caught up in our heads. Imagination before analytical thought is a good way to approach this exercise. Also, write without worrying about grammar, style etc.

Our vision will help guide us to where we want to be in life but remember we also should pay attention to many of the things outlined in this essay.

Hope this article helps you in some way

Cheers

Edward

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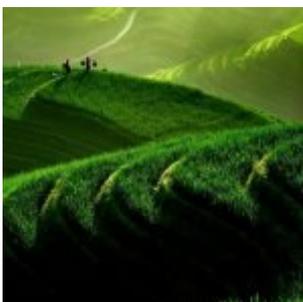
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Freudian Slips and Young Max



A Way to Lose Our Unique Talents in Life



A Way to Understand Shadow and Persona



Free Will and Our
Relationship with the
Unconscious