

Life Skills Workshop

Gokulmuthu Narayanaswamy

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Version 1.0

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ISBN: 9781093308884

Contents

Contents	i
Foreword	iii
Some Basic Wisdom	1
A Selection of Quotations from Swami Vivekananda	7
Managing Yourself.....	12
Exercise 1: Know Your Core Values	12
Know More About Yourself	13
Exercise 2: Set SMART Goals	15
More About Goal Setting.....	19
Exercise 3: Manage Time	20
Exercise 4: Make Difficult Decisions	23
Exercise 5: Overcome Obstacles.....	23
Exercise 6: Be Positive	24
Exercise 7: Think Creatively	25
Exercise 8: Think Critically	28
Exercise 9: Manage Your Emotions	29
Exercise 10: Manage Stress	31
Exercise 11: Take Risks	32
Exercise 12: Keep Learning.....	34
Working with People	38
Exercise 13: Work as a Team	38

Life Skills Workshop

Exercise 14: Become a Leader	41
Exercise 15: Know Your Team Members	42
Exercise 16: Communicate Effectively	43
Exercise 17: Deal with Conflicts	45
Exercise 18: Delegate	47
Exercise 19: Serve People	48
Worksheets.....	50
Worksheet 1: Know your Core Values	51
Worksheet 2: Wheel of Life	52
Worksheet 3: Set SMART Goals and Do SWOT Analysis.....	55
Worksheet 4: Time Quadrants.....	60
Worksheet 5: Calendar	61
Worksheet 6: Make Difficult Decisions.....	63
References	64
About the Author	66

Foreword

World Health Organization's Department of Mental Health has come up with a list of ten Life Skills that every person should develop. They are:

- Self-awareness and empathy
- Inter-personal and communication skills
- Creative thinking and critical thinking
- Decision making and problem solving
- Coping with emotions and coping with stress

Here, I have taken up some of them and designed a Workshop to develop those. The Workshop is a series of Exercises, which are presented in the topics below. It will be good if they are worked out in the order that that are presented. There are additional information and exercises, which can be used as extended exercises based on necessity. You can find the Worksheets that can be printed out separately and used for the Workshop, in addition to the text provided here.

To be able to understand, appreciate and implement these Life Skills, some basic worldly wisdom is needed. Without these, many of the concepts in life do not make sense. So, a list of ideas under the topic Basic Wisdom is also given.

Some inspiring quotations of Swami Vivekananda are given to show how he presents the same ideas in his own characteristic way.

I hope you find this useful. If you want us to conduct Workshops based on the contents in this book, please contact me. You can find the contact details in my blog at <http://www.practicalphilosophy.in>

Gokulmuthu Narayanaswamy

“A human being is part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. We experience ourselves, our thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest. A kind of optical delusion of consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from the prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. The true value of a human being is determined primarily by the measure and the sense in which they have obtained liberation from the self.”

Albert Einstein

Some Basic Wisdom

Here are some basic concepts that you should know. The stronger you assimilate these, the better your life will be. The references to some this knowledge are in the list of References given at the end.

- (1) **You are a valuable person in this world.** You are here for a purpose. You are unique. You are irreplaceable. You have your own core values. To be successful, you must be yourself. You cannot be someone else. Being someone else will not serve your life's purpose. You don't need to compete with others. Each person is running his or her own race. You only need to compete against yourself. You should strive to be a better person than you were yesterday. You should try to be the best you.
- (2) What you are now is the result of your past decisions and actions. Your future will be the result of your current decisions and actions. You are fully responsible for your life. **Blame no one.** The results of your current actions are affected by several factors, including your past actions. You have full control only over your current action. So, the results may or may not be as you expect. You need to be ready for any result. With the right attitude, you will be able to learn your lessons and develop yourself through both success and failure.
- (3) Everyone in this world has made many mistakes due to ignorance, stupidity, carelessness or wrong judgment. Everyone has many physical and psychological limitations. Everyone has many deep secrets that he or she does not want anyone else to know. Despite all these, the way forward is to **accept yourself as you are and move forward.** It is OK. Go forward. Try not to make more mistakes. Give your best to yourself and the world.
- (4) You can achieve anything and everything that you set your heart on. **Achieving anything in this world is a matter of time and effort.** By focused attention and intelligent effort, you can learn and achieve

Life Skills Workshop

anything. Research by Josh Kaufman has shown that reasonable competence can be attained about anything with just 20 hours of systematic goal-oriented practice with constant feedback. However, be aware of the Dunning-Kruger Effect. The least experienced are the most confident. After gaining the initial level of competence, to become a master, you will have to put in really a large amount of effort. Research by Malcolm Gladwell has shown that to become the top of the world, you need to put in about 10,000 hours of effort.

- (5) It is not wrong to lead a prosperous and comfortable life. The success of virtuous individuals in the society is what results in the success of the society. The wealth of the country and society is the sum of the wealth of all the individuals belonging to it. **Your prosperity is your duty to the society.** As long as you are honest, pay your taxes and add real value to the society, your prosperity will lead to a prosperous society. It is your duty to support the increase of knowledge, wealth, health, living conditions, employment opportunities and culture of the society. Also, do some social service.
- (6) **Your company defines you.** If you want a certain kind of life and develop certain habits, be in the company of likeminded people. Even if you do not have the necessary behavior now, being in the company of people like whom you want to be, will fix your behavior easier than using only self-effort. When the repeated behaviors become your habit, they become your second nature.
- (7) You win or lose together. If you want something, work for everyone around you to get that. You are not alone. You cannot get anything alone. **Wish for others what you want for yourself.** Help people and relieve the sufferings of people who are facing unfortunate circumstances. Be happy with the success of others. You should spend some amount of your resources for the welfare of the underprivileged people, betterment of the environment, etc.

Some Basic Wisdom

- (8) Human relationships are more important than material success. **Being kind is more important than being clever.** Always strive for a win-win deal. You should be fair, and you should be perceived to be fair. Be genuinely interested in the welfare of the other person. Respect the dignity of others. Even when you win or when the other person is found to be wrong, treat the person with dignity and empathy, so that your relationship is stronger than before. Do not corner people and arm-twist them to agree to you. It is not worth it.
- (9) Always ask yourself how you can add value to the world and people. Don't worry about what you will get back from the world and people. If you **focus all your energy on providing the maximum value**, the Universe will take care of your basic needs. Even when you seek help or opportunity, highlight what you have and how you can contribute, if your current obstacles are removed. Always focus on ways to contribute. To an animal, success is to be able to survive and get everything in life without working for it. A successful human being is one who has contributed more to the world than what he has taken from it.
- (10) When doing an action, the person is convinced that it is the best thing to do. If people make mistakes, it is because of wrong conviction and not malicious intent. So, **blame wrong actions of people on their stupidity and not on malice.** This is called Hanlon's Razor. When you see people making mistakes, try to understand what they have gone through in life, to come to the convictions that they have, which made them act in that way. You will find that there is more reason to feel pity for those people than to be angry about.
- (11) The quality of your thoughts determines the quality of your life, and not the objects around you. The quality of your thoughts depends on what you feed your mind with and what you deliberately think about. So, **be very selective and careful to feed your mind with positive ideas and have a positive attitude.**

Life Skills Workshop

- (12) **Always carry a smile** externally and internally. Be enthusiastic. Have straight posture and a spring in your walk. This cheerfulness will keep your brain alert and also help others to enjoy working with you. You will be much more creative and happier when you have a smile on your face.
- (13) **This world is a good place and it is getting better.** The time you are living is the best time so far. Research by Steven Pinker has shown that now is the time when there is least violence. In the whole history of humankind, now is the time when there is the least probability of a person being subject to unnatural death like violence, war and disease. Now is the time when so much knowledge is available. Now is time when there is so much opportunity is available. You are in the best of times. And, the world is getting better and better.
- (14) Taking risks in life and moving out of your comfort zone will make you develop faster. **Seek out and get exposed to different ideas and experiences.** Of course, it should be positive and liberating. It should not be negative or binding. Travel to a new place. Learn a new language. Learn a new musical instrument. Learn to draw or paint. Try a new cuisine. Read books by authors from a different culture. Read translated books. Read a new genre. Watch a movie from a lesser known country. Talk to people from different cultural backgrounds. Join a short-term course where you will get to know new people.
- (15) You are very lucky to be where you are. Several people like your parents, teachers, friends, etc. have contributed to what you are. You are better than several people in the world, who are poor, lack opportunities, are not loved, have bad diseases, subject to violence, etc. There are several things and people that you need to be grateful for. The more you **count your blessings**, the happier you will be and the more blessings that you will attract.
- (16) There is no place for organized non-state violence in a civil society. Individual unplanned reactive violence purely in self-defense or defense of a victim of violence under an extraordinary circumstance is fine.

Some Basic Wisdom

Punishment by a court of law after due process of law is fine. But, no individual or a group of people can resort to violence for any reason whatever it be. There is no justification for violence. Planned **violence is totally unacceptable.**

- (17) The more you expose yourself to ideas that conflict with what you believe or think you know, the more you will grow. It is very easy to fall into the trap of “Confirmation Bias”, which restricts you into seeing, reading and thinking only what you want to. This will trap you into ignorance, bigotry and fanaticism. To avoid this, you need to **actively seek out contrary ideas and evaluate them** without any bias. Also, what you believed or knew sometime back, need not be the truth. So, you need to periodically challenge your own beliefs and “knowledge” to see if they still hold good. Also, actively seek out negative feedback and criticism about you and improve yourself if needed.
- (18) You have no obligation to change your ideas and opinions based on what others say. You have no obligation to convert other’s ideas or opinions. Listen to everyone. **Understand everyone.** Change if you are absolutely convinced, if you want. Violence in speech, slander and use of demeaning words are not acceptable. Present beliefs, facts and logic in a polite way. Freedom of thought and freedom of speech are non-violable. However, what you speak and what you hear should be polite. Respect the beliefs of others but make it clear that it is purely a belief and not a fact. Similarly, demand respect to your beliefs, making it fully clear that it is a belief and not a fact.
- (19) Lust, anger, greed, arrogance and jealousy are defects of the mind. They are not the qualities of a healthy mind. They are the psychological equivalents of the vestigial organs in the human body, which we have unfortunately inherited from our animal ancestry. The lesser they are, the healthier you are, and the more human you are. **You must recognize these defects of your mind and work proactively towards reducing**

Life Skills Workshop

them. Forgiveness, charity, social service, helping others, meditation, etc. are several ways to reduce them.

- (20) In most situations, **the 80-20 rule** applies. This is called Pareto's Principle. 80% of wisdom in a book comes from 20% of it. 80% of results come from 20% of effort. 80% of profits come from 20% of revenue. To be efficient in life is to identify the 20% in every situation and pay maximum attention to them.
- (21) **Knowledge is all about induction and deduction.** From every situation, you make some generalizations and come up with some knowledge and skill that have a wider application. This is called induction. To any new situation, you can customize the general knowledge and skill as appropriate and apply them. This is called deduction. From every activity, irrespective of success or failure, ensure that you pick up the lessons by generalization. Often, these lessons are more valuable than the gain or loss of the activity. To be able to do this, you need a certain amount of detachment from narrow contexts and interests.
- (22) All your happiness comes from four chemicals in the brain. Dopamine is generated when you achieve a goal. Oxytocin is generated when have a loving human relationship. Serotonin is generated when you feel you are leading some people. Endorphins are generated when you physically exert yourself. Research has shown that happiness achieved by acquiring material possessions is very short lived compared to that achieved by life experiences. Also, more happiness is got by helping others than by self-indulgence. Knowing more about happiness can help you seek it the right way. **The most efficient way to be happy is to serve other people.**

A Selection of Quotations from Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda is a great inspiration for the youth of India. His lectures, writings, letters and conversations contain powerful ideas expressed in strong words. Here are some important quotations from his works, which are particularly relevant to the youth of India. The references to the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda are given.

Strength

We are responsible for what we are, and whatever we wish ourselves to be, we have the power to make ourselves. If what we are now has been the result of our own past actions, it certainly follows that whatever we wish to be in future can be produced by our present actions; so we have to know how to act. (CW I 31)

Men in general lay all the blame of life on their fellowmen, or, failing that, on God, or they conjure up a ghost, and say it is fate. Where is fate, and who is fate? We reap what we sow. We are the makers of our own fate. None else has the blame, none has the praise. The wind is blowing; and those vessels whose sails are unfurled catch it, and go forward on their way, but those which have their sails furled do not catch the wind. Is the fault of the wind? (CW II 224)

Say, 'This misery that I am suffering is of my own doing, and that very thing proves that it will have to be undone by me alone.' That which I created, I can demolish; that which is created by someone else, I shall never be able to destroy. Therefore, stand up, be bold, be strong. Take the whole responsibility on your own shoulders, and know that you are the creator of

Life Skills Workshop

your own destiny. All the strength and succor you want is within yourselves. (CW II 225)

Whatever you think that you will be. If you think yourself weak, weak you will be; if you think yourself strong, you will be. (CW III 130)

Anything that brings spiritual, mental, or physical weakness, touch it not with the toes of your feet. Religion is the manifestation of the natural strength that is in man. A spring of infinite power is coiled up and is inside this little body, and that spring is spreading itself. ... This is the history of man, of religion, civilisation, or progress. CW VIII 185

Work

Even the least work done for others awakens the power within; even thinking the least good of others gradually instils into the heart the strength of a lion. I love you all ever so much, but I wish you all to die working for others — I should rather be glad to see you do that! ... Get up, and put your shoulders to the wheel — how long is this life for? As you have come into this world, leave some mark behind. Otherwise, where is the difference between you and the trees and stones? (CW V 382-383)

Take up one idea. Make that one idea your life — think of it, dream of it, live on that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body, be full of that idea alone. This is the way to success. (CW I 177)

Isn't it man that makes money? Where did you ever hear of money making man? If you can make your thoughts and words perfectly at one, if you can, I say, make yourself one in speech and action, money will pour in at your feet of itself, like water. (CW VI 455)

Three things are necessary to make ever man great, every nation great.

- (1) Conviction of the powers of goodness.

A Selection of Quotations from Swami Vivekananda

- (2) Absence of jealousy and suspicion.
- (3) Helping all who are trying to be and do good.

(CW VII 29)

Serve People

The watchword of all well-being, of all moral good is not “I” but “thou”. Who cares whether there is a heaven or a hell, who cares if there is a soul or not, who cares if there is an unchangeable or not? Here is the world, and it is full of misery. Go out into it as Buddha did, and struggle to lessen it or die in the attempt. Forget yourselves; this is the first lesson to be learnt, whether you are a theist or an atheist, whether you are an agnostic or a Vedantist, a Christian or a Mohammedan. (CW II 353)

You cannot help anyone, you can only serve: serve the children of the Lord, serve the Lord Himself, if you have the privilege. If the Lord grants that you can help any one of His children, blessed you are; do not think too much of yourselves. Blessed you are that that privilege was given to you when others had it not. Do it only as a worship. (CW III 246)

After so much austerity, I have understood this as the real truth — God is present in every Jiva; there is no other God besides that. ‘Who serves Jiva, serves God indeed’. (CW VII 247)

This is the gist of all worship — to be pure and to do good to others. He who sees Shiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the diseased, really worships Shiva; and if he sees Shiva only in the image, his worship is but preliminary. He who has served and helped one poor man seeing Shiva in him, without thinking of his caste, or creed, or race, or anything, with him Shiva is more pleased than with the man who sees Him only in temples. (CW III 141-142)

In one word, the ideal of Vedanta is to know man as he really is, and this is its message, that if you cannot worship your brother man, the

manifested God, how can you worship a God who is unmanifested? (CW II 325-326)

Serve India

This national ship of ours, ye children of the Immortals, my countrymen, has been plying for ages, carrying civilisation and enriching the whole world with its inestimable treasures. For scores of shining centuries this national ship of ours has been ferrying across the ocean of life, and has taken millions of souls to the other shore, beyond all misery. But today it may have sprung a leak and got damaged, through your own fault or whatever cause it matters not. What would you, who have placed yourselves in it, do now? Would you go about cursing it and quarrelling among yourselves! Would you not all unite together and put your best efforts to stop the holes? Let us all gladly give our hearts' blood to do this; and if we fail in the attempt, let us all sink and die together, with blessings and not curses on our lips. (CW III 461)

I too believe that India will awake again if anyone could love with all his heart the people of the country — bereft of the grace of affluence, of blasted fortune, their discretion totally lost, downtrodden, ever-starved, quarrelsome, and envious. Then only will India awake, when hundreds of large-hearted men and women, giving up all desires of enjoying the luxuries of life, will long and exert themselves to their utmost for the well-being of the millions of their countrymen who are gradually sinking lower and lower in the vortex of destitution and ignorance. I have experienced even in my insignificant life that good motives, sincerity, and infinite love can conquer the world. (CW V 126-127)

India will be raised, not with the power of the flesh, but with the power of the spirit; not with the flag of destruction, but with the flag of peace and love ... One vision I see clear as life before me: that the ancient Mother has awakened once more, sitting on Her throne rejuvenated, more

A Selection of Quotations from Swami Vivekananda

glorious than ever. Proclaim Her to all the world with the voice of peace and benediction. (CW IV 352-353)

My hope and faith rest in men like you. Understand my words in their true spirit, and apply yourselves to work in their light. ... I have given you advice enough; now put at least something in practice. Let the world see that your reading of the scriptures and listening to me has been a success. (CW VII 175)

Managing Yourself

You are responsible for your life. Animals live life unconsciously. Man leads life deliberately. You decide how you want to live. Don't sleep-walk through life. Even before you realise the passage of time, years would have rolled over. Knowing to manage yourself is the key to a happy and purposeful life.

Exercise 1: Know Your Core Values

Being self-aware is very important to develop yourself and to work with others. Everyone has a set of core values. You should know your core values. These will change gradually over a period of time. But for now, these are what you want to be known for. These are the words that you want to hear about you when your mother, spouse, friend, colleague or neighbor say about you in your memorial after your death. They need not be what you have already now. They are what you want to be known for. To decide your core values, look at the words in the list below. Choose top three words that best defines what you want yourself to be known for.

- Achieving
- Adventurous
- Artistic
- Authentic
- Charitable
- Cheerful
- Courageous
- Creative
- Determined
- Empathetic
- Enthusiastic
- Flexible
- Focused
- Forgiving
- Free
- Friendly
- Fun-loving
- Generous
- Gentle
- Hardworking
- Healthy
- Helpful
- Honest
- Humble
- Humorous
- Independent
- Ingenious
- Intelligent
- Intuitive
- Kind
- Learning
- Loving
- Loyal
- Optimistic
- Patient
- Peaceful
- Respectable
- Romantic
- Simple

Managing Yourself

- Smart
- Spiritual
- Spontaneous
- Strong
- Tolerant
- Traditional
- Trustworthy
- Well-read
- Wise

Use the worksheet on page 51. Write down these three values. Write a paragraph about each of them, why you think these define you, why these are important to the world around you and the people with whom you interact with. Write why these values matter more than some others. Keep these three values in mind as a guiding light whenever you need to set goals or take hard decisions. These are going to be your secret first-aid bands to recover from any emotional hurt. These are going to help you get out of anger, jealousy and any feeling of worthlessness.

Know More About Yourself

Here are some additional exercises you can do to understand yourself better.

You can use some standard system like the Sixteen Personality Types of Myers-Briggs. It evaluates four factors of personality:

1. Introvert (I) or Extrovert (E)
2. Sensing (S) or Intuitive (N)
3. Thinking (T) or Feeling (F)
4. Judging (J) or Perceiving (P)

Another standard system is the Big Five System, which uses a set of five factors of personality:

1. Openness to Ideas (curious or cautious)
2. Conscientiousness (organized or easy-going)
3. Extraversion (outgoing or solitary)
4. Agreeableness (empathetic or self-centered)
5. Neuroticism (stressed or relaxed)

Life Skills Workshop

There are several free tests available to find out the personality type of a person. You can take a test and know your type. This will help you understand yourself better.

There are some thought experiments that can reveal your core values to you. Here are some questions, which you can try to answer genuinely by thinking about them for 1 minute each. It is good to write your answer as one or two sentences.

- If you are given Rs.10 lakhs at your disposal, what will you do with it?
- If all your financial needs are taken care of the rest of your life, how will you spend the rest of your life?
- If you are given a vacation of one month with all financial needs taken care of, what will you do in that month?
- If you are to die in the next 15 minutes, without any loss of health or capability to your faculties, what all will you do during the 15 minutes?
- If you are to die in the next 3 months, without any loss of health or capability to your faculties, what all will you do during the 3 months?
- If you are given an opportunity to meet any three living celebrities in the world, who would you choose to meet? If you can ask one question to each, what would that be?
- If you are given an opportunity to meet any three people from the past, who would you choose to meet? If you can ask one question to each, what would that be?
- If you can change one decision or action that you have made in your life, what would that be?
- If you are given all the material, scientific, technological, intellectual, military, manpower, economic and cultural resources in the world, what are the top three human problems do you want to try to solve?

By listening to the answers to these questions of others, you can get to know how others think and feel. That also will be a good learning for you.

Exercise 2: Set SMART Goals

Complete the exercise to identify three core values mentioned in the previous section before attempting this exercise. Use the worksheet on page 52.

There are 12 areas in life:

1. **Family** – Family is our nearest expansion of ourselves. Everything we do is for them. They may not be the most knowledgeable in everything we do, but they have only good intentions for us. They have unconditional love towards us. Most of the family member are not chosen by us. We have no option but to live with them. We must accept them unconditionally.
2. **Friends** – Friends are people whom we have chosen to share our lives with. They usually are very similar to us in character. They share the similar interests. They are the people whom we can depend on when we are in need. We need not have many friends. However, a few close people, with whom we can entrust our family responsibilities for short periods of time, are needed to give us an emotional grounding.
3. **Adventure** – We need to learn to break out of our shells. We need to get out of our comfort zones. We need to challenge our limits and beliefs. Travel helps us to see different places. Reading out of our usual genre gives us new knowledge and experience. Climbing walls, rappelling, skydiving and such adventure sports pushes our sense of security to their limits and breaks our biological hardwiring which resists risk and change.
4. **Character** – The worth of a human being is his or her character. Character is in three aspects – honesty, compassion and self-control. Being absolutely truthful to yourself and others under even the biggest temptation or threat is the ideal of honesty. Wishing good for others and helping others even under great inconvenience or loss to yourself is the ideal of compassion. Being able to push yourself to get things done as you think is right, pushing your biological limits like the needs of timely food and sleep, and pushing against psychological niceties like applauds, conformity, whims and fancies, is the ideal of self-control.

Life Skills Workshop

5. **Health** – Being able to forget the body and aspire for higher human possibilities if the objective of health. The body should not be an obstruction or inconvenience in your pursuit of your goals. You should have sufficient strength, agility, health and immunity. You should have enough understanding of your own body to have the right diet, exercise, rest, hygiene, etc.
6. **Intellectual** – Being able to think rationally without succumbing to logical fallacies and conformity biases is important. You should be sufficiently well-informed in various aspects of general knowledge like science, technology, history, geography, culture, religion, philosophy, mythology, art, literature, music, economics, politics, etc. You should be able to think logically based on this information to guide your life's decisions.
7. **Skills/Talents** – You should have some skills and talents like sports, music, drawing, painting, dancing, gardening, cooking, cycling, swimming, programming, using technology, different languages, etc. You need not be an expert everything. But you should be familiar with a few and should have a minimum level of expertise to appreciate excellence in others. You should also have your own personal box of tools to think clearly, come up with creative ideas, make logical decisions, etc.
8. **Spiritual** – You should have a clear sense of yourself beyond the body and mind. You should have your own philosophy of life, morality, purpose, success, role in the world, etc. You should have your own box of tools like meditation techniques, relaxation techniques, etc. to manage your emotions when they are shaken. You should have the resilience not to be carried away by success or knocked down by failure.
9. **Career** – You must contribute to the world constructively in some way or the other. At any point of time, you should have one area in which you spend most of your time studying and preparing for a future contribution or working towards applying your knowledge and skill for the benefit of the society. You should have a clear idea of what you are good at, what you like doing, what the world needs and what the world is ready to pay for. You should build your constructive life around these.
10. **Wealth** – Beyond a certain stage of your life, you need to stand on your own feet financially. You should be able to take care of the basic needs of yourself and the people who depend on you. It is not necessary to roll in riches. It is

Managing Yourself

necessary to create as much wealth as possible. It is by your prosperity that the society is prosperous. You need to invest your wealth into yourself and others for further development. Managing your wealth is your responsibility.

11. **Creativity** – It is by new ideas and pursuits that humanity develops. You should come out of your comfort zone, take risks and push your limits to try something new. Being creative is a way of serving the progress of mankind. Only a small percentage of creative ventures will have a lasting impact on society. But for that small percentage to come, a voluminous ecosystem of new and bold attempts is needed. Pushing the limits of human knowledge, skill, achievements, ideas, etc. is a responsibility of every human being. Everyone has the capacity to be creative. You just must come out of your comfort zone and be ready to fail. You cannot put one step forward without taking the risk of falling.
12. **Community Giveback** – Living an honest, compassionate and productive life itself is a great service to society. Beyond that, you need to give to people who are less fortunate than you. You need to serve people who need help and who cannot pay you back. You need to do your bit to create a better environment and society for the future generations.

For each of these areas, based on your current feeling, assign a weightage of importance from 0 (least important) to 10 (most important). There is no right or wrong here. You need to come up with what you feel currently. Each person will have a different relative weightage. Your numbers also will change from time to time. It is OK.

For each of these areas, assign a number to indicate the amount of time and effort you are currently spending on each from 0 (least attention) to 10 (most attention).

Compare the attention numbers with the importance numbers. This will give you an idea of where you need to pay more attention and where you need to pay less attention.

Identify top three important areas where you want to give more attention to. For these areas, write down what success looks like. Write

Life Skills Workshop

down the list of characteristics of what you mean by success in those fields. These should align with the core values that you have identified earlier.

Define a one or two Specific, Measurable, Action-oriented, Realistic, Time-bound (SMART) goals in each of these areas. An example of a SMART goal is “I will do six surya-namaskars at least four days a week during the next one month.” Don’t be too ambitious in your goal. Be more realistic. There are other aspects of a good goal that you can consider also: Positively stated, Understood, Relevant, Ethical (PURE), Challenging, Legal, Environmentally sound, Agreed and Recorded (CLEAR). These specifications of SMART, PURE and CLEAR for a good goal is called John Whitmore Model.

For each goal, write down the internal and external factors that will aid or prevent you from attaining your goals. Write down under these four heads:

- Strengths – Internal aids
- Weaknesses – Internal obstacles
- Opportunities – External aids
- Threats – External obstacles

For each of the Weaknesses and Threats, come up with mitigation plans.

For each goal, write down the next actions to be done. An action can be of the form “Start doing ...”, “Stop doing ...” or “Keep doing ...”. You can start small and build up to your goal. What you want to start doing should be trivial. Anything which is not trivial may face resistance from your mind. Start small with a definite plan to slowly increase.

Review your SMART goals periodically and change the actions if needed. Typically, you should review the progress of a goal at least 5 to 10 times during its time period. Prepare a review plan. Eg. Every Monday 9pm to 9:30pm. Mark your review plan in your calendar.

Managing Yourself

Be careful that your goals do not constrict you. The purpose of the goals is to enable you to grow. The goal itself is not the ultimate purpose. If you find that your goal is obstructing your growth, feel free to give up the goal and switch to a different one. It is not necessary to achieve every goal you set. Often, after setting a goal working half-way through it, you may find that the goal is a wrong one. So, do not be too much attached to your goal or your achieving the goal. Your personal growth is the ultimate goal. Everything else are only means.

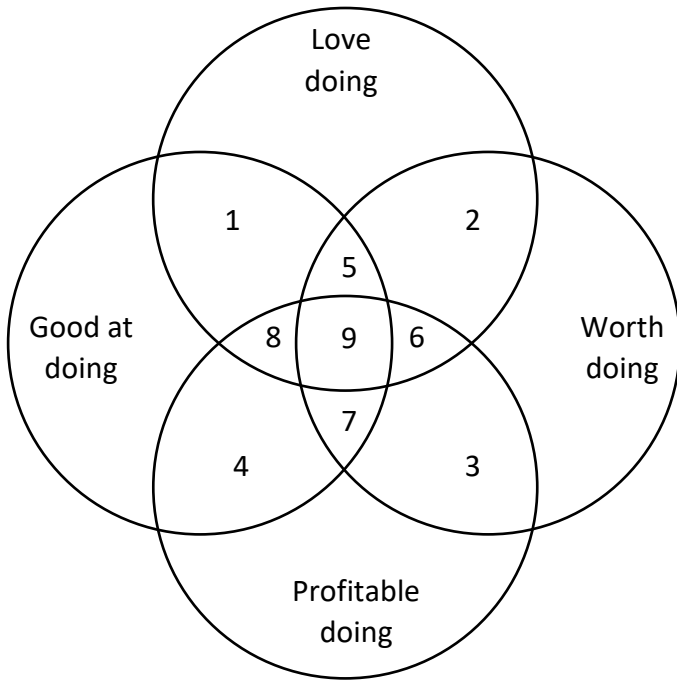
More About Goal Setting

Another model that you can use to gain clarity about your pursuits is Ikigai. It is a concept that originated in Japan. There are four questions you ask yourself:

1. What do I love doing?
2. What am I good at doing?
3. What is the world ready to pay for?
4. What does the world need?

Based on what overlaps, you can decide if that is what you want to pursue.

Another way to use Ikigai is to list your current activities like career, hobby, etc. In the picture below, see where those activities fall. The section 9 is the ideal place where you want to take them to. You can understand which factor is missing and you can develop it. For example, if your career is something that is in the section 6, then you need to develop more knowledge and skill to get to 9. If your career is in section 7, then you need to work on loving it to get to 9.



Exercise 3: Manage Time

Time is what life is made of. How you spend your time decides how you live life. Everyone, including great achievers, has the same amount of time. The more efficiently you can manage time, the more you can achieve in life. Here are some guidelines.

There is very less time at your disposal. If you are 25 years old and the life expectancy is 95, you have only $(95-25)*365=25,550$ days to live. This is not a very big number. If you start working at 25 and retirement is at 55, removing the weekends, festivals and holidays, you would have $(55-25)*(365-100-25)=7,200$ days of work during your entire career. This is also not a very big number.

Use a calendar and a TODO list to plan your work and time. Throughout the day, whenever you remember or get some task that needs

Managing Yourself

to be done, if it can be done immediately within two minutes, do it then and there. If it must be done later at a different place based on some other input, then note it down in a TODO list. Don't try to remember dates, appointments, meetings and deadlines. Put them all in the calendar. Schedule the preparatory tasks also in the calendar. Split big tasks into several small tasks and schedule in the calendar.

You can get a lot done in bursts of undistracted time. Plan slots of about 20 minutes. Plan in advance about what you want to get done during each slot. Have a short break of 5 or 10 minutes between slots. Take a walk during the breaks. Walk around, drink water, use the restroom, play with some toy, etc. It should be some physical activity. During the slots, don't get distracted by people, phone calls, emails, etc. Attend to them only during the breaks, or schedule slots for them.

Don't work continuously on the same topic. Planning and spreading work will result in a more creative output. For example, if you are working on an essay, collect information in one slot, write it up in another slot, edit it in another slot. Let the slots be a day or two apart.

Your energy keeps depleting over the day. So, schedule the most important tasks to the slots in the beginning of the day. The first task in the day should be to manage the calendar:

- review previous day's calendar
 - mark completed tasks
 - reschedule incomplete tasks
- review the new TODO list items from the previous day
 - schedule entries in the calendar for those
- review today's calendar
 - identify and mark important tasks which must be completed
 - push away tasks which are not important

You can schedule a series of small tasks in a slot.

Life Skills Workshop

You can find the format of a simple calendar on page 61.

If there is something that is long pending and you are reluctant to start, schedule just 5 or 10 minutes, or even 2 minutes to get started on it. A small slot will have less resistance from the mind and once started, it is easy to carry on and finish it.

According to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, the most efficient work can be done when a person gets into a condition of “Flow”. This is a state of joyous work which is created when these conditions are met:

- intensely focused on an activity
- of your own choosing, that is
- neither under-challenging (causing bore-out) nor over-challenging (causing burnout), that has
- a clear objective, and that receives
- immediate feedback.

In this state, the person completely forgets space and time, hunger and sleep. When in such a situation, it is better to continue to work as long as possible, with short breaks of about 5 minutes, so that the “Flow” is not broken. High energy snacks like nuts and water are the best way to keep up the energy during such time.

Here is an activity that you can do right now. Use the worksheet on page 60. Form a list of all pending tasks that you have in mind. Identify each of them as (1) Important and urgent, (2) Important and not urgent, (3) Unimportant and urgent, and (4) Unimportant and not urgent. Based on this, prioritize them. Split big tasks into smaller ones that can be done in less than 30 minutes. Now, schedule the (1) and (2) tasks into different days. You can take up (3) at your leisure or delegate it. Eliminate the tasks in (4) if possible. These are called Franklin’s Quadrants or Eisenhower’s Quadrants.

Exercise 4: Make Difficult Decisions

Often you will have to make some important decision, whose options are very confusing. To evaluate the merits of each option, you can use the weighted sum method.

Make a list of all the factors that contribute to your decision. For example, if you are trying to choose between various job offers, your factors list can include “growth opportunities”, “interesting work”, “convenience of commute”, “brand of the company”, “pay”, etc. Then give a weightage to each factor on a scale of 1 to 10. Then give points to each option for each factor on a scale of 1 to 10. Then calculate the score for each option for a factor by multiplying the points and weightage. Add the score of each option together to get the total score. This will give you an idea based on which you can make the decision.

Here is an activity that you can try now. Take one of the decisions that you want to evaluate the options now. Try the steps given above to compare the options. Use the worksheet on page 63.

Exercise 5: Overcome Obstacles

Any work will face obstacles. Some obstacles will be from within. Some obstacles will be from outside. The only way to cross any obstacle is by “your” action. If there is an obstacle, you can analyze it as a series of “What is the problem?” questions till you get to an answer that involves you. Then you ask, “What can you do now about it?” When you get the answer, do it.

For example, here is a sequence:

A: “I am not getting a good job.”

Q: “What is the problem?”

A: “Everywhere they are asking for knowledge of Java.”

Q: “What is the problem?”

A: “I don’t know Java.”

Life Skills Workshop

Q: "What can you do now about it?"

A: "I should learn Java."

Q: "What is the problem?"

A: "I don't know which the best institute is."

Q: "What can you do now about it?"

A: "I can ask Mahesh, who works on Java."

Q: "What is the problem?"

A: "I don't have his number."

Q: "What can you do now about it?"

A: "I can ask Ramesh, a common friend."

Thus, by asking a series of only these two questions, "What is the problem?" and "What can you do now about it?", you can overcome most of the obstacles. Any problem can be broken down into some "action" that can be done "now". By working on the "action", new options or obstacles will come, which also can be broken down using the same technique.

Now, take a problem that you are facing currently and use this technique to come up with an action that you can do now to put one step towards solving it.

Exercise 6: Be Positive

You are lucky to be where you are. So many people, starting from your parents, teachers, friends, etc. have contributed to you and have held trust in you. Every day, so many good things are happening to you. Every person whom you meet have so many good qualities and great potential. Ignore the inconveniences and distractions. Ignore the shortcomings of people. Remember your blessings. You will find what you are looking for. And you will get more of that you are looking for. Seek the good in people. Highlight the good in people. Appreciate the good in people. Be grateful for all the good things in your life.

When talking to people, follow the Appreciative Inquiry method. Every person, method, thing, etc. have both positive and negative qualities.

Managing Yourself

Instead of highlighting the negative, highlight the positive and provide how it can be expanded, so that the negatives will get diminished by themselves. You articulate it like, "... are very good. And, ... can also be done to make it better." Be careful to use "And" instead of "But".

Do one random act of kindness to someone every day. It can be to your family member, friend, colleague, stranger, society or just to Nature.

Keep a journal and every day write at least one good thing that happened to you. Every day write at least one random act of kindness that you did.

You can do this activity now.

- Make a list of five things that you are grateful for in your life.
- Make a list of five people in your life to whom you are grateful. Write a few sentences about each of them on how they made a positive change in your life.
- Make a list of two failures in your life. For each of them, write a list of benefits of the failure in the form of:
 - lessons learnt
 - new directions taken
 - good things that you have now, which would not have been possible if that had succeeded
 - bad things that would have followed if that had succeeded
 - etc.

Exercise 7: Think Creatively

Coming up with new ideas is important to solve problems and to add significant value. Everyone can be creative. Creativity is only being able to connect two seemingly disconnected ideas. It is that simple. To be able to come up with creative ideas and solutions, there are some time-tested techniques. The subconscious mind is better at coming with creative

Life Skills Workshop

solutions than the conscious mind. So, the process of creative thinking has four steps:

1. Understand the problem as thoroughly as you can
2. Work on something else that engages your conscious thinking, like anagrams or sudoku
3. Get back and start listing as many ideas as possible, without judging them
4. Analyze the ideas on their practicality, cost and other factors

To understand the problem, deconstruct the problem into its various parts. Understand all the roles of people who are involved in the problem. For example, if the problem is about a bus, the people involved will be driver, ticket issuer, passengers, service men, other commuters on the road, etc. Understand what the expectation from each of these people is. Bring in factors like cost, environmental effects, benefit, ease of use, etc. Do not try to solve the problem. Put in all the effort to understand the problem by asking various questions and seeking their answers. The more thoroughly you understand the problem, the better solutions you can come up with.

To do this, you can use a “Fish Bone Diagram”. It is also called “Ishikawa Diagram”. Write the problem at the head of the fish. Keep branching the causes as you deconstruct the problem. This gives a graphical representation of the deconstruction process.

The “5 Ms” can be a good starting point for deconstruction:

1. Man (human factors like roles, knowledge, skill, emotional, social, training, etc.)
2. Machine (equipment, technology, etc.)
3. Method (process, regulations, etc.)
4. Money (input cost, profitability, commercial value, market, etc.)
5. Measurement (metrics, reviews, audits, etc.)

Managing Yourself

To come up with the list of ideas, you can use the SCAMPER method. Any existing solution or product can be modified in seven ways into a different one.

- Substitute – Replace people, components, materials, processes, concepts
- Combine – Combine different things, processes, concepts
- Adapt – Adapt a thing, process, function or concept to solve the current problem
- Modify – Modify size, texture, appearance, process, function
- Put to other use – Put a thing, process or concept to a different use or context
- Eliminate – Think of reducing, simplifying or eliminating the thing, function or concept
- Rearrange/Reverse – Rearrange or reverse the usual sequence of things or concepts

Focusing on each of the above seven ways one after the other can give new ideas. This method was developed by Alex Osborn.

After coming up with a list of ideas, then you can evaluate each solution. To do that, you can use the method that was used to “Make Difficult Decisions” section or the “SWOT” method that was discussed in the “Set SMART Goals” section.

You can do this activity now. Take one problem that the society is facing. This can be problems like traffic congestion, pollution in cities, water shortage, lack of quality primary education, lack of awareness on cleanliness and hygiene, corruption in government offices, lack of interest in studies among students in tier-2 Engineering colleges, lack of enough knowledge about Hinduism among Hindus, etc. You can follow the steps given above to come up with creative solutions to the problem. If you are doing this activity in a Workshop, you can form pairs of people to work on each problem.

Exercise 8: Think Critically

Try to read several opinions about any topic. Being exposed to only one side of the story will make your understanding incomplete and can also make you fanatical. You should be exposed to different viewpoints and you should form your own original opinion. Always be open to additional data and ideas that may even change your opinion.

Superficially, we see only the position that a person has taken. We need to dig into the interests and data that led to the position. Understanding the interests correctly often reconciles apparently conflicting positions.

Two people can come up with diametrically opposite logical conclusions based on different sets of data about a subject. To understand why a person has an opinion, the first thing to analyze is the data based on which the opinion was formed. Usually the logic part is correct. The data is the culprit. This is called the “Ladder of Inference”.

There are different fallacies that you should ensure that you do not fall into:

1. Anchor Effect – The first impression is often not the right or best one. So, ensure that there is enough data before making analysis.
2. Confirmation Bias – You tend to read more or collect more data which agrees with your existing biases. So, assume that what you like or what you believe is wrong. Ensure there is enough diversity in the data.
3. Availability Bias – Easily available anecdotal evidences are often not the representative data. So, ensure that you put enough effort to collect data that is difficult to get.
4. Fast/Slow Error – Don’t depend on intuition and common sense. Often the reality is different from common sense. Don’t jump into

Managing Yourself

conclusions. Review your opinions periodically and revise them if needed.

Ensure that you take care of the above biases before forming an opinion.

To ensure that all aspects of an idea have been considered, Edward De Bono suggests the Six Thinking Hats method. There are six angles that can be considered from:

- White Hat – Analytical and objective thinking from the point of view of facts and feasibility
- Red Hat – Emotional thinking, subjective feelings, perceptions and opinions
- Black Hat – Critical thinking, risk assessment, identifying problems, skepticism, critique
- Yellow Hat – Optimistic thinking, speculative best-case thinking
- Green Hat – Creative, associative thinking, new ideas, brainstorming, constructive
- Blue Hat – Structured thinking, process overview, the big picture

Do this activity now. Make a list of your strong beliefs and opinions. Pick one of them to analyze for this activity. Make a list of facts or data that your belief or opinion is based on. Search for contrary data and facts. Make a list of them. Ensure that there is more contrary data than what you originally believed in. Now analyze both the sets of data and try to come up with arguments for and against your original belief.

Exercise 9: Manage Your Emotions

Emotions is what life is about. Intellect only shows the way. It is the emotions that tread the path. Science and technology only give the means in the form of a radio or MP3 player. It is only music that fulfils the gadget. Similarly, emotions like joy, sorrow, peace, anger, hope, disappointment,

Life Skills Workshop

confidence, fear, etc. give meaning to life. Life will be full of ups and downs, successes and failures. They cannot be avoided. In fact, they are needed for your all-round development.

A well-balanced person knows how to indulge in the emotions and knows how to detach from them also. It is like watching a movie. If you do not emotionally involve yourself in the emotional rollercoaster ride, you have lost the price you paid for the ticket. You should be able to laugh and cry, feel fear and anxiety as depicted in the movie. But when the movie is over, you should come out a wiser person, without any emotional hangover. You should be able to go through life also in a similar manner. You should laugh when needed and cry when needed. But the emotions should not stick to you. You should be in control over the emotions. The emotions should not carry you away.

Also, you should be able to articulate your emotions instead of expressing them in harmful ways. If you are unhappy about the behavior of a person, you should be able to articulate it to the person in clear but polite ways, without violence in words or action.

Any emotion of joy or sorrow, however big, should not stay continuously for more than a day or two. If you are not able to get out of an emotion for more than two days, you should talk to someone and take help to overcome it. If any emotion derails you from doing your everyday activities like sleeping, eating, bathing, reading, talking, etc. and obstructs you from playing the social roles that you need to play like as a parent, sibling, friend, employee, businessman, etc. for more than two days, you need to take help.

Do this activity now. Think of a situation in the recent past when you expressed your joy, anger, fear or sorrow in a way that you regretted it later, or a situation where you suppressed it within yourself without expression. What could have been healthier ways through which you could have

expressed your emotion? Suppose if your friend got into the same situation that you were in and did the same thing that you did, what advice would you give him or her?

Exercise 10: Manage Stress

Stress is a situation when you do not have enough resources to do a task that you want to accomplish. Resources can be time, money, knowledge, skill, contacts, courage, health, strength, etc.

The human body has evolved from animals. Though we live mostly a social, intellectual and emotional life, the body is that of an animal. Whenever we get into a tough situation, the body prepares for fight or flight, just like how the ancient cave-dweller's body prepared him or her in the face of danger from a wild animal. To fight or run away, the body needed more energy, higher heartbeat rate, higher blood pressure, sharper vision, etc. When the cave-dweller did the physical activity of fight or flight, the preparations were spent. Modern challenges are not physical. There is no physical necessity of fight or flight. So, the after some time, the biological preparations must be reversed. When this happens again and again, the body deteriorates. This leads to most of the chronic lifestyle diseases like diabetes, high pressure, cholesterol, kidney problems, liver problems, ulcer, acidity, etc.

Stress must be managed at various levels.

Whenever there is a stressful situation, take slow deep breaths. Think about something else. Listen to slow classical music. Solve Rubik's cube. Juggle three balls. Go for a walk outdoors to get some fresh air. Be closer to trees, fishes, birds and nature. Drink some cool water. Take a shower. Doing one or more of these sends a message to the body that everything is fine and gets your body back to normal condition. When the body is back to normal, you will be able to think more clearly and come up

Life Skills Workshop

with a better response to the situation. You will find creative ways to manage the situation.

You should develop a healthy lifestyle, which includes enough healthy raw fruits, nuts and vegetables. You should drink enough water, have enough sleep, exercise, exposure to open outdoor areas with trees, plants, flowers and fruits, exposure to sunshine, small talk with friends and family, etc. Practice yoga to train the mind to be calm and balanced.

You should develop a philosophy of life by which you can face the challenges of life with poise. A good posture gives you confidence. Be aware of your strengths. Be realistic about your goals. Learn to work with people to fill the gaps where you lack in knowledge and skill. Do some social service. Volunteer for some community work. Donate some money to charity regularly. Have a sense of self-worth and purpose in life. Have constructive hobbies which are activity oriented. Play some team games. With these, you will be able to prepare your mind to face challenges and failure. You will not win every battle. You should learn to accept failures and learn from them. That is the way to win the war.

Do this activity now. Think of a situation which was stressful to you. What was the cause of the stress? Recollect how you behaved. Recollect what happened to you after some time. Recollect how you recovered from the situation. If the same situation happens again, how will you behave now? Are you better prepared?

Exercise 11: Take Risks

The difference between ordinary people and great achievers is that the latter are willing to take risks in life and get out of their comfort zone. You should do something new and different now and then. Travel to a new place. Read a book different from what you usually read. Meet someone new. Go to a book club, movie club, self-help talk, popular science lecture,

Managing Yourself

etc. where you can get to know new things and meet new people. Learn a new hobby.

You can do this activity now. When was the last time that you did something for the first time? What was that? How did you feel? What different things do you want to do? Suppose you have only 3 months more to live, what are the different things that you want to do before you die? What are a few things that you are postponing doing for a long time for various reasons? There are a lot of lists on the internet on “things to do before you die”, “places to see before you die”, “bucket list”, etc. Browse through some of them. Here are a few:

- Go parasailing or paragliding
- Go rappelling
- Take a shower in a water fall or in the rain
- Go whitewater rafting
- Travel alone to some place at least 1000 km away
- Travel to some place and stay there doing nothing for three days
- Donate blood
- Volunteer at an orphanage or old age home
- Go on a tree planting drive
- Camp in wilderness
- Ride on a horse/camel/elephant
- Play lasertag or paintball
- Ride a roller coaster or any thrilling ride
- Write a book or create a blog or website
- Learn a new musical instrument
- Learn a new language
- Act in a skit or play
- Run a full/half/quarter marathon
- Learn to play a new sport
- Learn dance or karate/taekwondo/judo or skating

When you get used to doing things like the above, you will be willing to take more risks in life in general. Your life will become much richer. Make a plan to do a few of them.

Exercise 12: Keep Learning

Knowledge is power. However, knowledge has a shelf-life. Many of the knowledge gained in school or college may not be valid anymore. As mankind progresses, there are new facts discovered, more effective methods invented, advanced technology developed, etc. You need to constantly be acquiring new knowledge and skills. Learning does not stop with school. It is a lifelong process. Without constantly learning, your old knowledge will stop being useful.

There are a lot of avenues to learn. You can read books, listen to lectures online or attend face to face training. To structure your learning and make it more formal, you can attend a Certificate Course or a Degree Programme. Many workshops give the first session free of cost. You can attend them to gain a variety of knowledge and also make new friends.

There are three reasons to read a book or article, listen to a lecture, or watch a video - (1) to gather information, (2) to assimilate an idea or behavior and effect a transformation in yourself and (3) for entertainment. Before you start, you should decide the objective of your reading.

When you read a book to acquire knowledge, remember this. The objective is not to read every word of the book. The objective is to acquire the knowledge from the book. Before reading the book, go through some videos and synopsis about the contents of the book. Read the table of contents. The book is only a tool for you to understand what the author is trying to convey. Make your own notes when you read. Try to acquire the knowledge as efficiently as possible. Same applies to other forms of learning for knowledge. Also, you are not studying for a test where you need to know everything in memory. If you know where to find the details of the

Managing Yourself

knowledge whenever you need, it is enough. With advanced internet search technologies and readily available text and books, what you need to know is this:

- how to access the vast store of knowledge
- how to locate what you are looking for
- how to pick the most authentic knowledge
- how to quickly get a gist of the knowledge
- how to honor the intellectual property rights

If you are reading for imbibing, you need to read slowly to absorb the contents into your subconscious. Superficial reading will give you information, but it will not result in transformation. You will have to read deeply, reread parts that you do not understand, pause and think deeply about some ideas before proceeding, plod through boring parts looking for some new ideas, etc. You should study as if you are going to write an examination on it or you are going to teach the contents to someone else. Deep reading selected books results in transformation. You may want to reread the book after a few months or years to get a new perspective about it.

If you are reading for entertainment, you can choose how you want to read. You may want to savor every word of a part that you like and skip boring parts.

The minimum that you should read is at least one book (of about 200 pages) every month. Three books a month is a good rate. You should read at least one hour every day. It is not necessary to complete every book that you read. Become familiar with the table of contents. If chapter summaries are available, know them. Read further which interests you or is different from what you believe in.

Pick a couple of genres and read deeply in them. They can be like sports, fantasy, classics, biographies, business, self-help, etc. Occasionally

Life Skills Workshop

read from a different genre to get a different exposure and also to see if there is something else also which interests you.

You should not accept everything that you come across. You need to understand different points of view thoroughly. If you think that is reasonable, then you can accept it. Understanding is mandatory. Acceptance is optional. If you have accepted something intellectually, you need to imbibe it into your life for it to be useful. You need to put it into action. Initially you will have to do it deliberately. Then it will become a part of you. These assimilated habits make you a better person.

It is said that anything you do for more than 21 days sticks to you. Also, it is better to do something regularly than to overdo in some days. For example, it is better to read for one hour everyday than to read for four hours twice a week. To change deep rooted habits, you can use the double loop thinking method. You observe your actions and think deeply to find out why you act so. Try to understand your thought process. Analyze what is it that you want, what are you afraid of, what do you care about and what do you not care about. By understanding your motivations, convictions and oversight, and fixing them where needed, will create the ground for long lasting changes in habits with a very little use of will power.

You can do this activity now. How many books have you read till now from the beginning of the year? Have you been reading at least one book a month? Have you been reading at least 20 pages a day? Prepare a list of books that you want to read next. If you do not have anything in mind, you can look into the reference section at the end of this book. You can look up the books listed and pick at least three books from that list that you can read. If you are still not able to decide, you can read these two books:

- Seven Habits of Highly Effective People – Stephen Covey
- Sapiens – Yuval Noah Harari

Managing Yourself

You can also plan to read and think deeply about the points in the section titled “Some Basic Wisdom” in this book.

Fix a time when you will read every day. It should be at least two sessions, each of 30 minutes of undistracted time.

Working with People

No one is an isolated island. We work with family, friends, colleagues, classmates, seniors, juniors, etc. We learn a lot by working with others. We can also help others to develop. As a team we can get much more done than as individuals. Working with people is a lot of fun too. You will learn a lot more about life by listening to the stories of others, apart from work.

Exercise 13: Work as a Team

A team is a

- group of people
- who know each other personally
- who work closely with each other
- who are accountable to each other
- who support each other
- working towards a common purpose.

In life, we are a part of several teams at any point of time. A family is a team. Husband and wife are a team. Siblings are a team. A group of volunteers is a team. A neighborhood is a team. People working on a project is a team.

Every individual is unique. People have different knowledge, skills, attitude and approach to problems. Working together as a team is a great learning experience. Even the most experienced expert will have something to learn from the most inexperienced novice. This learning will happen only if you are open minded and humble.

Belbin has identified nine roles in a team. Different people will be suitable for different roles. Having the right person for the right role will greatly enhance the effectiveness of the team.

Working with People

- **Plants** are creative, unorthodox and generators of ideas. If an innovative solution to a problem is needed, a Plant is a good person to ask.
- The **Resource Investigator** gives a team a rush of enthusiasm at the start of the project by vigorously pursuing contacts and opportunities.
- A **Co-ordinator** is a likely candidate for the chairperson of a team, since they have a talent for stepping back to see the big picture.
- The **Shaper** is a task-focused individual who pursues objectives with vigour and who is driven by tremendous energy and the need to achieve.
- **Monitor Evaluators** are fair and logical observers and judges of what is going on in the team.
- A **Teamworker** acts as the "oil" between the cogs that keep the machine that is the team running smoothly.
- The **Implementer** takes their colleagues' suggestions and ideas and turns them into positive action.
- The **Completer Finisher** is a perfectionist and will often go the extra mile to make sure everything is "just right".
- **Specialists** are passionate about learning in their own particular field. As a result, they are likely to be a fountain of knowledge and will enjoy imparting this knowledge to others.

Identify the team members who naturally are suited for these roles and ensure that none of the roles is missed out.

When working as a team, each member of the team is answerable to the other members of the team. The whole team succeeds together or fails together. There should be a common goal, which is well understood by all the members of the team. All the members should also know and feel why the goal is important. Each team member would be assigned a part of the work towards the goal. Each team member should commit to what is to

Life Skills Workshop

be done and keep the commitment. If for some reason, the commitment cannot be kept, it should be conveyed to the team as soon as possible. Every team member should be aware of the progress of other team members on the various activities.

According to Gaur Gopal Das, there are three things that build personal relationships. (1) Sharing each other's time and possessions without expectation of anything in return, (2) Having food together and (3) Sharing personal stories with each other. A team which does these will stick to each other and work well with each other.

Here is an activity that you can do to enhance each of your teams.

Form a list of all the teams that you are a part of.

For each team, do the following:

- Enumerate the common purposes and goals. Do all the team members agree with the common purposes and goals that you have listed? Talk to the team members and come up with the refined list that everyone understands, agrees and commits to.
- Do you know each member sufficiently well? If you don't know any member, fix a time and talk to the person with empathy.
- Do all the team members know each other well? In the next meeting of all the team members, get each person to talk about himself or herself. Ensure that everyone else listens with empathy.
- Are the team members accountable each other? Can you think of instances where they did? Can you think of instances where they should have, but did not? Recognize these instances and discuss with the team.
- Do the team members support each other? Can you think of instances where they did? Can you think of instances where they should have, but did not? Recognize these instances and discuss with the team.

Working with People

- Do the team members meet for tea/coffee, lunch, dinner, etc.? Eating together forms deep emotional bonds. Sharing personal stories over food develops deeper emotional bonds. If not, arrange for these.
- Do the team members meet regularly? Do they review their commitments? Do they discuss the problems they have in sticking to their commitments? If not, arrange for these meetings.

Exercise 14: Become a Leader

The role of the leader is to maintain and coordinate the competence, morale, relationships and activities within the team. The credit of success of the team goes to every member of the team. The blame of failure goes to the leader alone. The leader need not know how to execute the various activities needed to achieve the goal. The leader should know:

- what the goals are
- the time before when the goals should be achieved
- the capabilities and interests of each team member
- how to measure progress
- what the risks are and the means to mitigate them
- how to identify and remove obstacles blocking the work or causing inefficiencies
- the actions to be done when to achieve the goal
- the dependencies within and outside the team to move towards the goal
- when and where to ask for external help

The role of the leader is to gather all the right resources available from anywhere to get the task done. The leader is the external face to the team. The team members should help the leader represent the team well. The leader should ensure that due credit is given to the team members and any external help for their work.

Form a list of contexts for which you are a leader. It can be family, neighborhood, etc. Even if others do not recognize you as a leader, you can take the responsibility and start working as a leader. Leadership is about taking ownership and responsibility first. Recognition may or may not come later. Identify what the goals, purposes, challenges, team members, etc. for each context and enumerate how you can contribute.

Exercise 15: Know Your Team Members

The relationship between team members is at three levels: intellectual, emotional and operational. For smooth working of the team, each team member should know the competence, attitude and skill of other team members. Each team member brings in complementary traits in all these. If the team members are all identical (which rarely is), there is not much value in being a team. It is the complementary traits that multiply the performance of the team.

Know the technical competence of the team members. Know what each one is good at and where each one needs improvement. Know the core values of each team member. Knowing which personality type each team member belongs to will help understanding the people better.

It also helps to play games, travel together, discuss interests, get to know their personal life, etc. to get more insights into their thought process.

For the teams you had listed earlier, for each team member, write what the person is good at. List down technical, managerial, social, intellectual, etc. strengths of the person. List down what the person likes and dislikes. If you do not know the person sufficiently, you can plan to talk to the person.

There are a lot of ice-breaker activities available, which can be used to know each other better. Here are a few:

Working with People

- The team members can say the story behind their name. Their parents would have chosen their first name based on some interesting idea or incident. Their last name might have a story too. There might have been some significant person with the same last name.
- The team members can say which all places they grew up in their past and say something interesting about those places.
- The team members can show something that they carry in their purse, wallet or on their person (like a chain, ring or tattoo) and say the significance of it.
- The team members can say something that they know or believe that most other people in the team would not know or believe in.
- The team members can talk about the weirdest place they have visited, weirdest thing they have done or the weirdest thing they have eaten.

Exercise 16: Communicate Effectively

It is unfortunate that we cannot read each other's minds. We need to use verbal and non-verbal means to communicate. Communication is very important to work with others. Insufficient or poor communication leads to misunderstandings, which leads to friction and inefficiency.

The most important skill in communication is to be able to listen attentively when someone is saying something. It is important to understand exactly what the person is thinking and feeling. Words are only tools for this understanding. When listening, you should also acknowledge by non-verbal gestures (like nodding) and sounds (like "Ok"), paraphrasing back for confirmation and by asking open ended questions. Don't interrupt when someone is speaking.

When speaking, ensure that you speak to the people in a language and idiom that they can understand. If people don't understand or

Life Skills Workshop

appreciate what you are saying, there is no point in saying it. Avoid long monologues. Tell something and ask some questions to ensure that they have understood before proceeding further. Maintain eye contact with everyone to whom you are speaking to. The people in front of you are the most important people at the moment. So, pay full attention to them.

It is important for the listener to understand what the speaker is thinking and feeling. It is not necessary for the listener to accept what the speaker is saying.

For effective conversation on controversial or complicated topics, you can practice the 5-step process. If person A wants to tell something to person B, here are the steps to be followed.

1. Person A speaks. No interruption is allowed. Person B listens with full attention with non-verbal acknowledgements. Person B can take notes on points he wants to remember or get clarified.
2. If Person B feels that he has not understood something specific of what person A has said, he asks specific questions.
3. Person A replies to the questions to clarify.
4. Person B paraphrases back what he has understood what Person A is thinking and feeling.
5. Person A corrects or fine tunes the understanding of Person B.

With this, both people can be sure that Person B has understood Person A correctly.

After some deliberate practice in this, you will start following it automatically.

You can try this activity now.

- Form pairs of people.

Working with People

- Independently, each person, prepare to talk about one incident that caused great peace, joy and sense of purpose to the other person. Spend 3 minutes for this.
- Now, one person from each pair take the role of person A in the 5-step process. The other person takes the role of person B. Run through the 5-step process to ensure person B that develops a good understanding of what Person A thought and felt about the incident that he or she went through.
- Now, switch the roles and let the other person explain his incident. Go through the 5-step process.

Now that you are familiar with the process, try to consciously use it in everyday interactions.

Exercise 17: Deal with Conflicts

No two people think and feel alike. This is the beauty of human beings. So, naturally, there will arise conflicts when people work together. Conflicts can be easily resolved if there is an underlying trust between the people, despite the difference in opinions. So, you should always try to understand each other better, so that you start developing an emotional bond and trust with the other person. This is always possible, because there are certain fundamental ideas common to everyone.

- Everyone wants peace to everyone else
- Everyone wants to be logical
- Everyone wants everyone to be free from misery

Differences come because people differ in the details.

Often people differ in their “positions” and feel conflict because of that. For example, a person may feel very strongly about “capital punishment should be banned.” Another person may feel totally against it. These are positions. If you lead both to dig deeper into their “interests”

Life Skills Workshop

based on which they have derived their positions, you will find that both have the same interests, like “people should feel safe.” From the same “interests”, using different logic, different people can arrive at different “positions”.

Our thought process goes like this. You gather some information from the world. Based on the collection of information, you make some generalizations. Then, based on the generalizations, you judge another situation. Based on this judgement, you take positions and feel various emotions. Based on the emotions, you propose some actions. A different person may take a different set of information and do a different kind of generalization and come up eventually with a totally opposite position and propose a contradictory action. You should calmly dig deeper and understand each step of this “ladder of inference”. When you understand it, you will soon find that given the collection of information that the person started with, rest of it flows logically. Of the huge amount of information that is available today, most of the information is biased, exaggerated, half-truths. You should be very careful not to take strong positions based on them and get into hasty judgement and action. You should always take news reports and social media forwards with a bag of salt. You should be ready to change your position based on additional information.

Thus, these are the ways to deal with conflicts between people.

- (1) Build mutual trust as human beings beyond the areas of conflict. There will always be a lot of common points on which everyone agrees on.
- (2) Be polite, but honest in expressing views and opinions, even if you know that the other person does not agree to it.
- (3) Dig deeper into the interests, assumptions, generalizations, etc. to understand where the positions and judgements come from.
- (4) Understanding each other is mandatory. Accepting each other is left to the individuals. No one can force another person to accept or

acknowledge acceptance. Don't push. Only strive to understand genuinely and try to make the other person understand.

- (5) Conflicts cannot be avoided completely. You should learn to live together knowing fully well the points of conflict. You should learn to love each other, wish good for each other and help each other despite the conflicts.

Thus, look at conflicts positively. They show the diversity of people and thoughts. Conflicts is a sign of life. When there is an underlying trust beyond the conflicts, they do not hurt.

Form pairs of people. Choose one topic that is controversial and where each person had the opposite opinions. Think deeply and prepare to talk about why you have the opinion. Follow the five-step process described in the previous section to discuss the topic and understand the other person's point of view.

Exercise 18: Delegate

You have limited time and energy. The way to multiply your capacity is by delegation. When you delegate, you are still fully responsible for the right execution of the task in a timely manner. But you can take the help of other people, technology and systems. For example, delegate your reminders to a good calendar software. Delegate party arrangements to a professional company. Delegate digital artwork to some freelancer. Delegate some work that you want to get done to your juniors or volunteers. In your personal life too, using washing machines, ironing professionals, servants and maids, etc. will save you time and give employment to people. With the time that you saved, you can read some good books or do work for which you have special knowledge and skills. If you waste the saved time, then it beats the purpose of delegation.

To be able to delegate, you should have enough trust in the person or system. You should expect the person or system to fall short. It will not

be automatically the same as you doing it yourself. To get what you want, you will have to review and get some corrections done. Also, it may sometimes take more time than if you do it yourself. You must factor all these in when you commit for a deadline to someone else. Make sure to have enough buffers to cover up unexpected delays.

Here is an activity that you can do now.

- Enumerate all the activities that you are currently doing, which can be done by machines, outsourced to professionals or done by other people.
- Write down, how you are going to ensure that the quality of the work will be the same or better than if you do it yourself.
- Enumerate the risks that will prevent completing the work on time and quality. Write down how you can address each risk.

Exercise 19: Serve People

Everyone has problems. Your problems will look huge and overwhelming to you if you do not simultaneously work on bigger problems of the society and other people. When you are not overwhelmed by your problems, you can easily address them. Most of the problems will get dissolved with a simple solution. To figure out that simple solution, you need a certain level of detachment. This detachment can be easily got by working on bigger social problems and helping others overcoming their problems.

You have been taking a lot from the world. When you were born, you did not have the capacity even to roll over. You are alive today because several people have taken care of you. You depend on other people for your food, clothes, house, gadgets, roads, books, etc. You consume a lot from Nature and from other people. You owe a lot to Nature, parents, other humans, teachers, etc. Unless you give back more than what you have taken, you are a burden to the Earth. If you quickly clear off your debt to everything outside you, you will be blessed with abundance and good luck.

Working with People

To be empathetic is the sign of a good human being. You serve people because you have the capacity to do so. Even the poorest person has some capacity to give. You should give to your capacity. There will always be people who are well off than you and people who are not so well off as you in various fields. Don't wait for having more before you give. Wherever you are, give to your capacity. You can give in whichever form you want – money, physical help, education, culture, kind words, etc. There is no one in this world who has nothing to give. Empathy in action defines your maturity as a human being.

Engage in random acts of kindness throughout your day within the family and towards strangers. Also, allocate a certain percentage (like 5 or 10 percent) of your time and income towards charity and social service.

You can do this activity now. Prepare a list of service activities that you can involve in. For example, you can teach underprivileged school children on some evenings, you can go for tree plantation, you can write exam for blind or disabled people, you can manage a local public library, you can go on a cleaning drive, etc.

Worksheets

When I hear, I forget.

When I see, I remember.

When I do, I understand.

- Confucius.

Worksheet 1: Know your Core Values

Core Value 1: _____

Description:

Importance:

Core Value 2: _____

Description:

Importance:

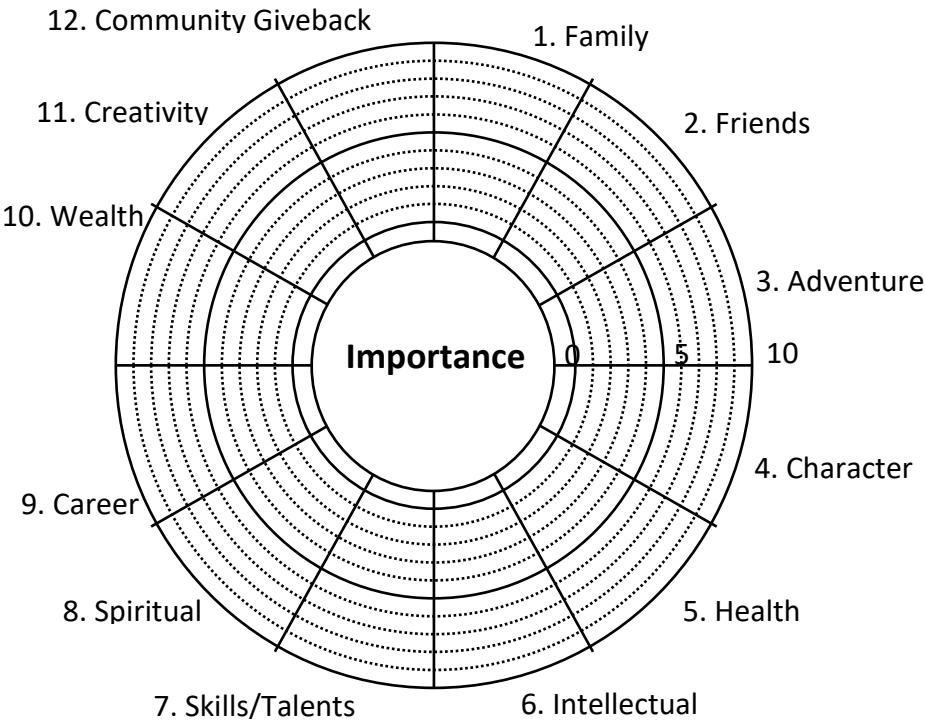
Core Value 3: _____

Description:

Importance:

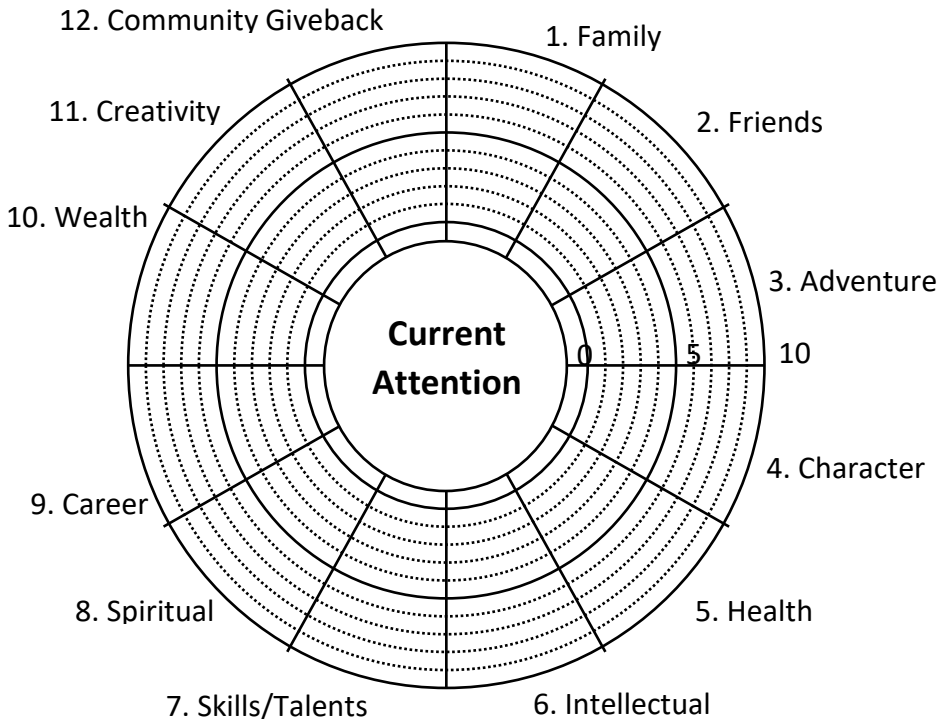
Worksheet 2: Wheel of Life

In the first chart, give a score from 0 to 10 on how important each of the areas of life is. Shade that piece of the pie till the score.



Worksheets

In the second, do the same for the attention you are giving currently.



From the above charts, fill the scores of importance and attention in their columns in the table below. Subtract attention from importance and write in the fourth column. A big positive number indicates as area where you need to put more attention into. A negative number indicates something from which you can defocus a bit. Based on these values, pick three areas where you want to work upon and prioritize them. 1 indicates highest priority. Define what success looks like in each of them. For example, success for health can be “Within the desirable weight, energetic, good stamina and agility”.

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Area	Importance	Current Attention	Importance minus Attention	Priority to Work Upon
Family				
Friends				
Adventure				
Character				
Health				
Intellectual				
Skills/Talents				
Spiritual				
Career				
Wealth				
Creativity				
Community Giveback				

Area 1: _____

Success looks like:

Worksheets

Area 2: _____

Success looks like:

Area 3: _____

Success looks like:

Worksheet 3: Set SMART Goals and Do SWOT Analysis

Define one or two Specific, Measurable, Action-oriented, Realistic and Timebound goals for each of the above areas. Eg. "I will do six surya namaskars at least four days a week for the next one month." You can use the below area for rough work.

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Goal 1:

SWOT Analysis:

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Opportunities:

Threats:

Action Plan:

Start doing:

Stop doing:

Keep doing:

Review plan:

Worksheets

Goal 2:

SWOT Analysis:

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Opportunities:

Threats:

Action Plan:

Start doing:

Stop doing:

Keep doing:

Review plan:

Life Skills Workshop

Goal 3:

SWOT Analysis:

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Opportunities:

Threats:

Action Plan:

Start doing:

Stop doing:

Keep doing:

Review plan:

Worksheets

Goal 4:

SWOT Analysis:

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Opportunities:

Threats:

Action Plan:

Start doing:

Stop doing:

Keep doing:

Review plan:

Worksheet 4: Time Quadrants

Write down everything that you have in mind now that you must do in the near or far future.

Important and Urgent Eg. Important deadlines, Meetings, Emergencies	Important and Not urgent Eg. Personal development, Reading, Training, Health, Family time
Not important and Urgent Eg. Emails, Phone calls, Some meetings	Not important and Not urgent Eg: Trivia, TV, Social media, Fun

Worksheet 5: Calendar

Date:

Time	Task Details and Description	Status
08:00		
08:30		
09:00		
09:30		
10:00		
10:30		
11:00		
11:30		
12:00		
12:30		
13:00		
13:30		
14:00		
14:30		
15:00		
15:30		
16:00		

Life Skills Workshop

16:30		
17:00		
17:30		
18:00		
18:30		
19:00		
19:30		
20:00		
20:30		
21:00		
21:30		

TODO:

Worksheet 6: Make Difficult Decisions

Decision to be made:

Option 1:

Option 2:

Factor	Weightage	Option 1		Option 2	
		Points	Score	Points	Score
Total Score					

References

Here are some books, video channels and websites which will give you more details of the ideas given in this section. There are a lot of videos and TED Talks that give the core message from various books. You can watch a few of them. You can also read a synopsis of books on Wikipedia or other such source. If you want to dive deeper and go to the source, you can read the books.

Books:

- The Holy Geeta – Swami Chinmayananda
- The Universal Message of the Bhagavad Gita (3 Vols) - Swami Ranganathananda
- Lectures from Colombo to Almora – Swami Vivekananda
- The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda (9 Vols)
- The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna
- 7 Habits of Highly Effective People – Stephen Covey
- Enlightenment Now – Steven Pinker
- The Road Less Travelled – Scott M. Peck
- Sapiens – Yuval Noah Harari
- 21 Lessons for the 21st Century – Yuval Noah Harari
- Fistful of Love – Om Swami
- Fistful of Wisdom – Om Swami
- First 20 Hours – Josh Kaufman
- Outliers – Malcolm Gladwell
- How to Become a Straight A Student – Cal Newport
- 59 Seconds – Richard Wiseman
- Five Dysfunctions of a Team – Patrick Lencioni
- SCRUM: The Art of Doing Twice The Work in Half The Time – Jeff Sutherland

References

- Life's Amazing Secrets – Gaur Gopal Das
- Thinker Toys – Michael Michalko
- 5 Steps to Finding Your Workflow – Nathan Lozeron
- 12 Rules for Life – Jordan Peterson
- The Leader In You – Dale Carnegie
- How to Win Friends and Influence People – Dale Carnegie

YouTube channels

- Clark Kegley
- Productivity Game
- Isha Yoga

Blogs and websites

- Wait but Why
- Productivity Game
- Lifehack
- James Clear
- Mindtools
- Donald Robertson
- Practical Philosophy and Rational Religion

About the Author

Gokulmuthu Narayanaswamy has been seeking answers to fundamental questions of life through the pursuit of science, religion, philosophy and psychology. He has been associated with Ramakrishna Math and the teachings of Swami Vivekananda for more than 25 years. He was instrumental in starting the Vivekananda Study Circle at IIT Madras and IISc Bangalore. He is a mentor of the Vivekananda Yuvak Sangha at Ramakrishna Math, Ulsoor. He regularly conducts classes and workshops on the teachings of Vivekananda, Leadership Development, Hinduism, Vedanta, etc. for children and youth. He is a Trustee and trainer of Vivekananda Janoththana Trust, which conducts Lifeskill Development Workshops in schools and colleges.

He is a regular contributor of articles and reviews to Vedanta Kesari, the monthly magazine of Ramakrishna Math, published from Chennai. He has authored a few books like Tenets of Hinduism, Message of Swami Vivekananda for Youth, Essence of Gita, Death – What to do about it, Message of Gita, etc

He is a Software Engineer by profession. He holds B.Tech from IIT Madras and M.S from IISc Bangalore. He also holds M.A in Philosophy, Religion and Culture.

He works as Senior Principal Software Engineer at Itron, Bangalore. He lives in B.T.M Layout in Bangalore with his wife and two children.

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