

BUILD

your own

CASTLE

build your own castle

Table of Contents

Introduction: About Me & This Manifesto

page 1

The First 2/3: Take the Driver's Seat

page 4

Resources: Part One

page 9

Action Steps: Part One

page 10

Worksheet One: Past Decisions

page 11

Worksheet Two: Freewriting

page 13

Worksheet Three: Start Setting Goals

page 15

The Last 1/3: Living a Cohesive Life

page 16

Resources: Part Two

page 18

Action Steps: Part Two

page 19

Worksheet Four: Problems and Patterns

page 20

Worksheet Five: See the Spiderweb

page 24

Closing Notes

page 26



build your own castle

Introduction: About Me & This Manifesto

You're most likely downloading this because you've seen my work at Wicked Whimsy. If that's the case, as you'll know, I write about a wide variety of subjects at WW - creativity, spirituality, productivity, personal development, and even occasionally fashion & style posts.

Wicked Whimsy started as a fashion & style blog. However, fashion isn't really one of my long-term, consistent interests (I'm quite the [polymath](#), or a scanner if you read Barbara Sher) - and thus it was a really bad thing for me to choose to start a blog on. Plus, the things I wanted to write about in regards to fashion weren't what (almost) everyone else was writing about - I've never cared about most haute couture or the latest trends.

So, I started to widen my horizons. I found that there were specific things I liked to write about (the aforementioned subjects), but for the life of me, couldn't figure out the thread that tied them all together. What did these things have in common? Why were they what I was interested in writing about?

I've been thinking about this for the last two months or more. It was driving me absolutely batty. And then, the lightbulb went off.



build your own castle

One of my big things is control. Control over your own life, specifically. I don't think anyone's family or spouse or culture or especially place of employment should have control over *all aspects* of their life. I think it's beyond messed up how today dyeing your hair blue or getting prominent tattoos can pretty much make you unemployable - I know a lot of people will tell you that's what being a grown up is about, but I say fuck that noise. I should be able to do what I want with **my own body** without having to worry about being able to find means of employment as a result. And so should you. (Not just with your body - but with all aspects of your life.)

And, with control over your own life, comes the ability to treat your life as one cohesive whole (which it is), instead of lots of little separate parts. That's what I'm interested in - how to actively create the various aspects of your life, treating them as a whole, not asking for permission from anyone else.

I should be able to craft my own life as a whole force in a way that pleases me, not separating it out into little boxes of "work" and "play" and "relationship" and so on. It should be one big castle of awesomeness, where I'm free to wander around from room to room as I see fit, without asking anyone else's permission. Which is where the title of this manifesto comes from, combined with one of my favorite quotes - "If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them." So says Thoreau.

It makes sense. When I wanted to write about style all the time, I didn't want to write about this season's best colors - I wanted to write about why people wear what they wear, and how expressing yourself through your personal style can be an empowering experience.



build your own castle

So. That's what this manifesto is about. If you:

1. Want to be in control of your own life
2. Want to treat your life as a whole, instead of as unrelated compartments

Then this is for you. If you're not interested in either of those things, you probably won't be too hot for this.

Unless you just love to read my writing (which is totally understandable!) - in which case, read on! (And thanks. ;))

PS: I titled the sections "the first $\frac{2}{3}$ " and "the last $\frac{1}{3}$ " not because I think one is more important than the other, but because one section is longer despite them being equally important. My idea of a joke.



build your own castle

The First $\frac{2}{3}$: Take the Driver's Seat

The Problem

Most people don't build their own castle. Most people are serfs, with their lives controlled by our dominant paradigms and cultural norms, instead of some evil, cackling lord in a castle, all dressed in black & scheming to steal a helpless princess. That guy would probably make an easier enemy to fight, in fact.

Our entire society is set up to emphasize the fact that, no, you don't have control over your life, no, you shouldn't have control over your life, and yes, you do have to ask permission.

Here's one example most people don't even realize:

You have to ask to go to the bathroom.

All throughout elementary school, middle school, and high school, you have to *ask permission* from someone else to perform a basic bodily function. The teacher can say no, if they want to. And that is considered acceptable.

What?!



build your own castle

I can see the excuse that students need to be kept track of. Okay, have a sign in and out sheet, and a ten minute limit. Simple, and much less degrading. But for a student, for a seventeen or eighteen year old especially, to have to *ask permission* to use the restroom is beyond ridiculous.

It's training for the rest of your life. Things like that are everywhere, if you'll just take the time to look.

As a result of several factors, most of our education system is geared towards turning people into interchangeable parts to fit into a larger economic machine, instead of happy, healthy adults in control of their own lives. And that's how most workplaces treat their employees - interchangeable parts.

I won't talk about this at length, because you've probably already read plenty about it somewhere else. If you haven't, I strongly recommend reading [Linchpin](#) by Seth Godin, & watching [this video](#) narrated by Sir Ken Robinson.

You're not taught in school to think for yourself and be in control of your own life. You're taught, in a variety of ways (one already shown), to follow orders and be compliant.

“The problem is, they’re trying to meet the future by doing what they did in the past.” - Sir Ken Robinson



build your own castle

The Control Paradigm

What's a paradigm?

A paradigm is the set of assumptions that you hold and do not question. It's the dominant way of thinking and doing things. Our current paradigm is a control paradigm, which you might think would fit in well with what I'm talking about, but is actually a different idea entirely. It's about controlling (or trying to control) other peoples' lives.

Pace, of Connection Revolution, talks more about the control paradigm [here](#). (That post is actually about the connection paradigm, but she talks a bit about the control paradigm since it's the default in our society.) She's dead on. And the sad thing is, I think one reason our society is so focused on control because it's something so few people actually have. When you have very little control over your own life, it's a somewhat natural reaction to immediately attempt to control someone else's life instead. With, as you may have noticed, disastrous results.

You Don't Have to Be An Entrepreneur

No, you really don't. That's not what I'm saying at all - I'm not here to tell you what you *have* to do, gods know you get enough of that everywhere else. You can be the ruler of your own castle without working for yourself or starting a business. However, if that's what you want to do, put some serious thought into how you can make it happen & then follow through. It's a great option for a lot of people - much easier now than ever before & it lets you have a huge amount of control over nearly aspect of your life.



build your own castle

Honestly, I think the most important thing I'm trying to say is to live actively - don't be a passive bystander in your own life. If you honestly want to work for someone else, and relinquish a little bit of control over your life in return for that job, then cool. Seriously. Go do it! But make the *choice* to do it - don't do it just because it's the default. "Default" is the enemy.

The default setting in our society is to have almost no control over your own life, and to never even realize that fact.

“Do whatever the hell you want, but know what it is that you’re doing and why you’re doing it — and do it through the force of your own volition instead of by default.” - Johnny B. Truant



build your own castle

The Solution

By having control over your own life - building your own castle - you can express yourself in all areas of it. By actively making choices & decisions instead of passively going by the default, you're creating a life you actually want to live, instead of just taking what was handed to you and going through the motions.

There's not a rulebook for this. Sure, it'd be easier if there was, but that would kind of defy the point. You just need to dig down deep and see where you really want to take your life, what you really want to do with it. And then take steps to doing it. You'll learn to question your assumptions and thoughts and motivations, to make sure that they're "you" things and not "default" things. (Or, alternatively, "I don't want to do the default and this is what most other people not doing the default are doing so I'll do it" things. Not as bad, but still not a "you" thing.)

If you want to sell all your worldly possessions and travel the world, go for it. If you want to sell iPod apps that make peoples' days easier, have fun! If you want to do something to make money that takes the least amount of your time possible, so that you can spend the rest of your time doing your passion projects, then party on, dude.



build your own castle

Resources: Part One

[Linchpin](#) by Seth Godin - Also mentioned above, this is the inimitable Seth Godin's book on how our current system is broken, how it's changing, and the importance of being an artist.

[Steering by Starlight](#) by Martha Beck - To help you find out what it is you really want to do.

[I Could Do Anything If Only I Knew What It Was](#) by Barbara Sher - I actually haven't read this book, but Barbara Sher is one of my favorite authors & this would probably be good for those looking for an alternative that's slightly lighter on "woo" than [Steering by Starlight](#).

Art of Nonconformity: [the book](#) & [the blog](#) - by Chris Guillebeau - Chris is a great guy, down to earth, and a wonderful writer. The topic is fairly self explanatory. Good stuff.

[Connection Revolution](#) - Pace and Kyeli are on a mission to change the world by changing the dominant paradigm.

[Sir Ken Robinson at TED](#) - Sir Robinson has some generally kickass things to say about our current education system & how it needs to change. Aside from the video I linked to above, there's two more for you to watch.



build your own castle

Action Steps: Part One

•**Think about your current decision making process.** List your last five decisions and break each decision down into the factors that helped you reach that decision. Was anyone pressuring you to do something a specific way, in an outright or more subtle manner? Did you do anything because “that’s just the way it’s done”? Did the decision sit right with you and your conscience? And, lastly, how did the aftermath of that decision work out for you? One or two out of five decisions made because of someone else’s influence (or because “that’s the way it’s done”) isn’t optimal, but you’re getting there. More than two, and you need to have a talk with yourself.

•**Do a freewriting session** on the topic of “things I want to do” or “life goals” - something along those lines. Freewriting is writing constantly for a certain amount of time, never stopping (even if you have to write nonsense to keep from stopping). It helps get past your conscious into your subconscious and lets you unearth feelings you might not have even realized you have. Here’s a few starter questions: What did you enjoy doing as a child? Was there anything you wanted to do but were told that your dream was unrealistic or wouldn’t work out? What would you do if you had no financial or personal obligations?

•After getting a better idea of what you’d like to do, **start setting goals.** Realizing that you want to be an artist instead of an office drone can seem incredibly intimidating, but starting on your dream doesn’t have to be difficult. Take an art class in person or even online, if your schedule changes from week to week and you might have trouble fitting in a regular commitment. Start small and build up - taking control of your life in any way, however seemingly tiny, will make you feel so much more empowered & build up momentum for bigger changes.



build your own castle

Worksheet One: Past Decisions

Below, list your five most recent decisions (big or small or a mix of the two, your choice) and your reasons for making them:

Decision 1:

Reasoning behind decision:

Decision 2:

Reasoning behind decision:

Decision 3:

Reasoning behind decision:



build your own castle

Decision 4:

Reasoning behind decision:

Decision 5:

Reasoning behind decision:

Take a look over your reasons, and tally up whether the decisions were made because of internal reasoning (something you decided) or external reasoning (pressure from others).

Internal:

External:

What was the total? Are you happy with it? If not, how are you going to change it?



build your own castle

Worksheet Two: Freewriting

Do some freewriting to help you figure out what you want to do and where you want to go from here. Write constantly without stopping, even if you find yourself writing “I don’t know what to write” over and over again.

Starter questions: What did you enjoy doing as a child? Was there anything you wanted to do but were told that your dream was unrealistic or wouldn’t work out? What would you do if you had no financial or personal obligations?

Use this page & the next – flip the pages over if you have to, or grab extra scratch paper if you think you’ll need it. Whatever you do, don’t stop writing until you feel completely finished.



build your own castle



build your own castle

Worksheet Three: Start Setting Goals

After you've done some work figuring out what exactly it is you need to do, you've got to figure out how to get there. Work backwards and think of small steps you can do to get to the finish line.

Example: If you want to be a published author, you need to write your book, which would be your first milestone, and you can break down further into outlining, writing every day, and so on, find an agent, and...do other things which I'm not entirely sure of. In fact, your first step would probably be to research the other steps you'll need to take!

Goal:

First milestone of goal:

Step 1 to reach milestone:

Step 2 to reach milestone:

Step 3 to reach milestone:

What I'm going to do *today* to get started:



build your own castle

The Last 1/3 : Living A Cohesive Life

What Is It?

Let's look at the definition of cohesive:

co·he·sive [koh-hee-siv]

–adjective

1. characterized by or causing cohesion: *a cohesive agent.*
2. cohering or tending to cohere; well-integrated; unified: *a cohesive organization.*

I chose “cohesive” instead of another word, like “unity”, that has many of the same meanings & is a little simpler, because I feel it fits better. When you acknowledge that all of your activities and thoughts and actions create an interconnected whole, and that your life isn't an unconnected series of boxes like “work” and “play” and “relationship”, that's a strong thought. It's a sticky thought. It doesn't go away.

For example:

What you wear affects how you feel affects how you act, which affects how other people see you, which in turn affects how they treat you. Which goes back to affecting the way you feel.



build your own castle

Another example:

How much or how little you value your inherent gifts will show outwardly to other people, who might then go on to devalue gifts similar to your's in others, if you don't accord the proper value to your gifts. This can then affect their ability to make a living from their gifts.

Everything & everyone is connected. Which is why you, *not* anyone else, should be in control of your life. Then, you can make a concentrated effort to affect yourself & other people positively.

Why?

Why treat your life as a whole? It's easier that way. It's simpler that way. It lets you spot recurring patterns that show up over and over again in different facets of your life, even though they have the same underlying root.

It can seem intimidating - "You mean I should try to make everything better instead of fixing this one niggling area?" - but when you make sure that all areas of your life are aligned instead of conflicting, the change will reverberate in everything you do.

The end goal is to have a life that reflects the singular beauty that is you in every shape & every way. To have one life where you recognize that every part affects a different part, reclaiming & owning all the bits of that life, deciding what *you* want to do with them, and working to make that a lovely whole.



build your own castle

Resources: Part Two

Actually, the only real resource you've got here is...*you*. Nobody else will be able to do the introspection required to figure out how the areas of your life affect each other and how that results in the sum total of your life, or where you want to take your life and thus what changes you should make to get your life aligned with your goals.

That said, having a trusted, outside opinion can be invaluable - sometimes there are connections in our lives that go over our heads but are obvious to others. If you don't have someone close to you that's good at noticing that sort of thing, you can try hiring a life coach. I don't have anyone in particular to recommend, to be honest, since I've never used anyone myself. (That said, [Sandi](#) is pretty freakin' awesome, and I have no doubt she's a great coach.) It is something to think about though.



build your own castle

Action Steps: Part Two

•**Write down any chronic problems you seem to be having.** The best examples of these are based on actions you take, not on environmental factors (though if you're repeatedly putting yourself in certain environments, that's something to think about another time). Think about any possible root causes of your repeated actions - the reason you come up with might seem totally unrelated, but be the right reason anyways. One example that Danielle uses in the Fire Starter Sessions ([affiliate link there](#)) is a client who realized that they'd been trying to forgive their father for years for cutting them out of his will, and that that was related to their chronic tendency to take out loans instead of working harder.

•**Draw a diagram that represents the different areas of your life and how they interact.** (Alternately, fill in the worksheet on page 22.) Start out with the areas you view as completely separate written down in their individual bubbles, for example: work, school, home life, significant other, creative practice, wellness practice. If you've started paying attention and noticed that when you're stressed out at work, you wind up with a messy house and a strained relationship with your S.O., then draw a line from "work" to both of those bubbles. If you notice that when you're feeling stifled creatively, you tend to eat junk food and slack off exercising, draw a line between the creative practice bubble & the wellness practice bubble. It'll probably wind up looking like a spiderweb - but that's good, it means you're seeing all the connections!



build your own castle

Worksheet Four: Problems & Patterns

We're going to figure out what your repeating problems are, and if there's any common root between them. Below, write down all the problems you have that seem to show up over and over again – this can be anything from dating people who turn out to be jerks, to finding yourself broke & not knowing where the money went, to injuring yourself over and over again by being clumsy. Go ahead and write down how you feel when this problem occurs, as well.

Problem 1:

How it makes me feel:

Problem 2:

How it makes you feel:

Problem 3:

How it makes you feel:

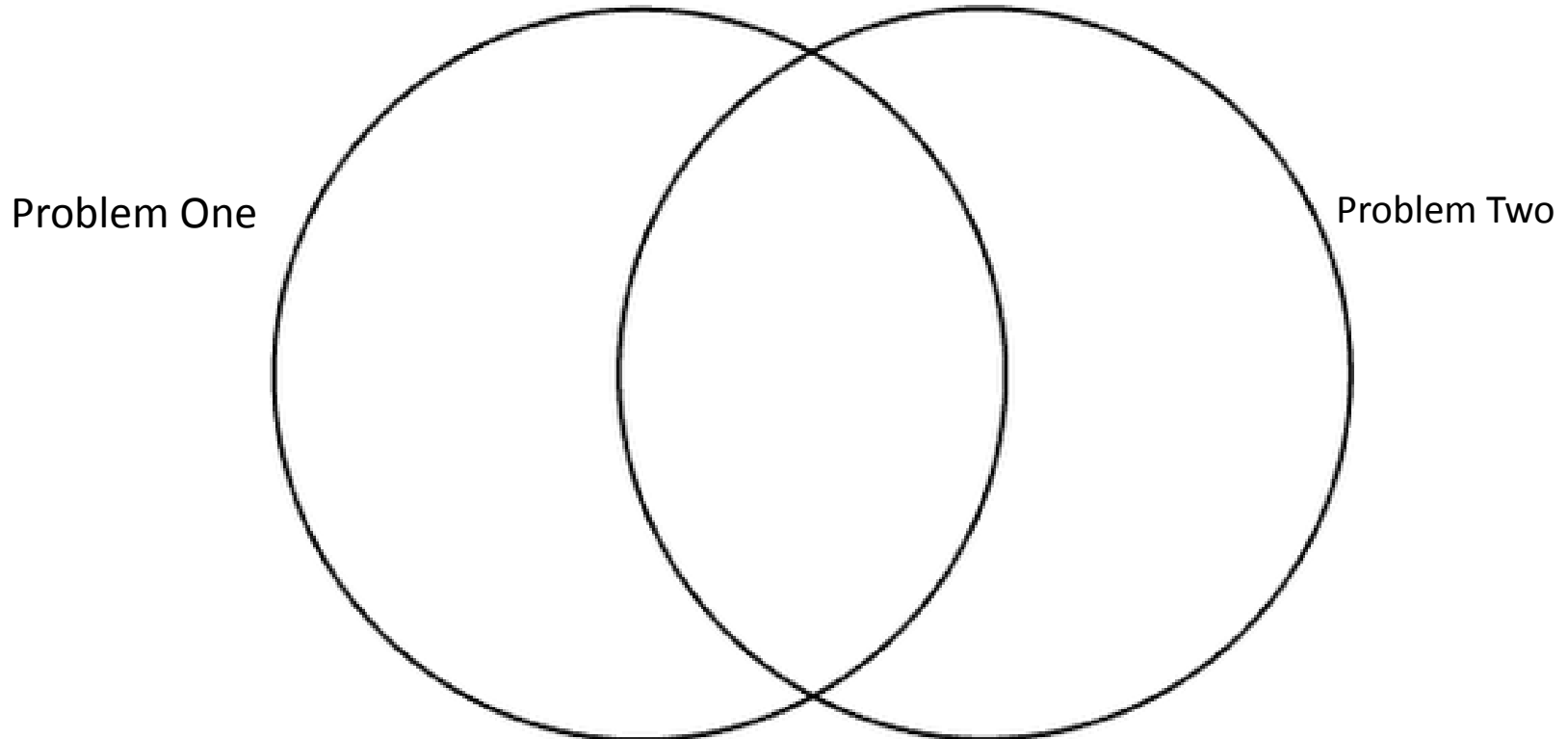
Problem 4:

How it makes you feel:

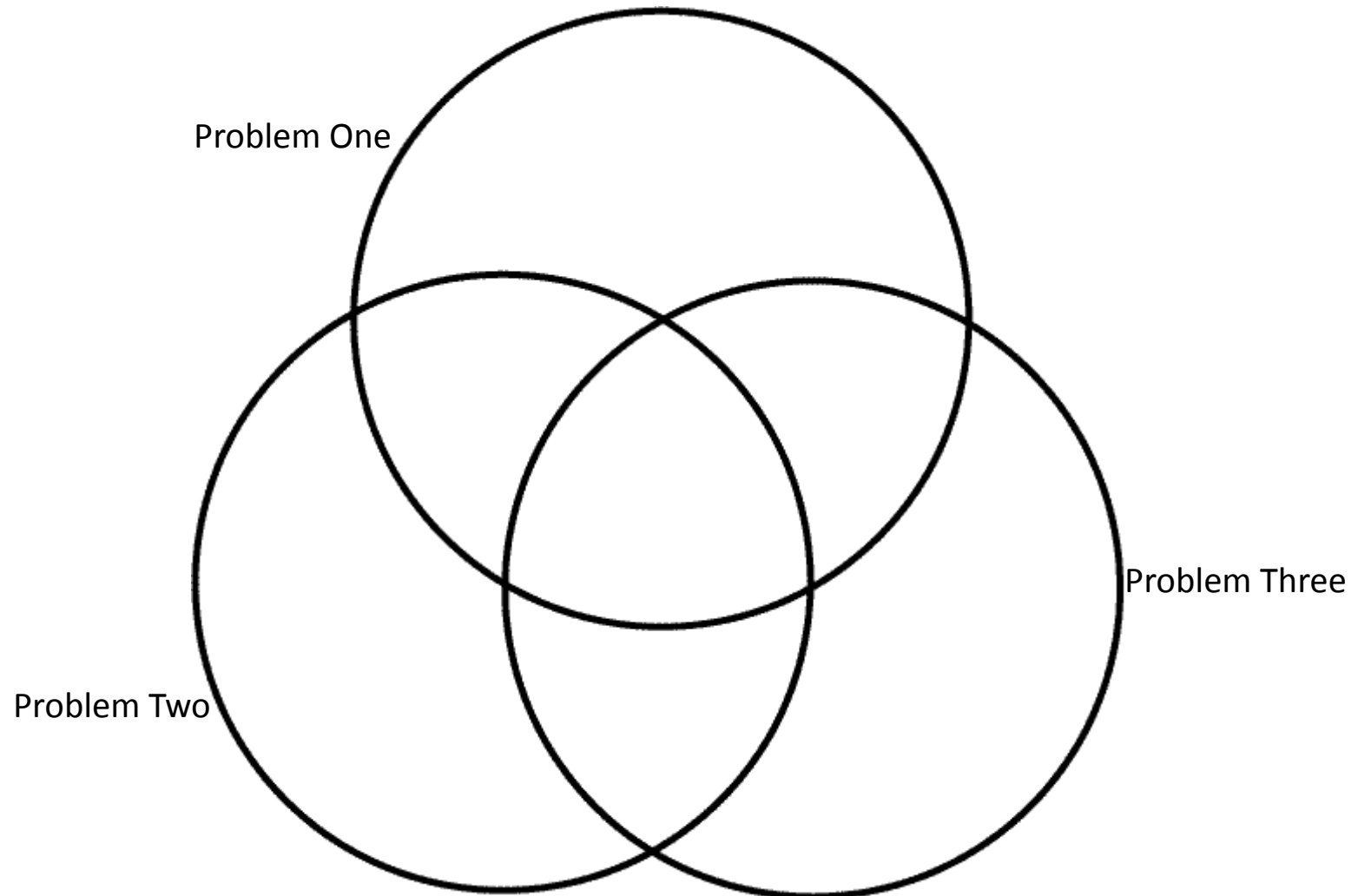


build your own castle

Now, pick two of your problems and fill in the Venn diagram below with descriptions of how they made you feel and any other important factors (what led up to it happening, if any strong feelings made you decide something that caused the problem, etc.) Descriptors related to Problem One & only Problem One go on the left side, descriptors related to Problem Two & only Problem two go on the right side, and any common factors go in the middle. The next page will have a three circle Venn Diagram so that you can chart out the overlap between more problems, if you wish.



build your own castle



build your own castle

What did you learn from this exercise? Were you surprised at the overlap between problems?

Let's figure out what that overlap means. Do these problems arise because you react to certain stimuli (say, stress, or lack of sleep) a certain way? (Start figuring out how to avoid whatever sets you off.) Are they both part of a larger, overarching problem that affects several areas of your life? Could they perhaps be reminiscent of a problem that occurred at a particularly stressful or vulnerable part of your life, and now you're reenacting it? Freewrite on it & see if you come up with anything.



build your own castle

Worksheet Five: See the Spiderweb

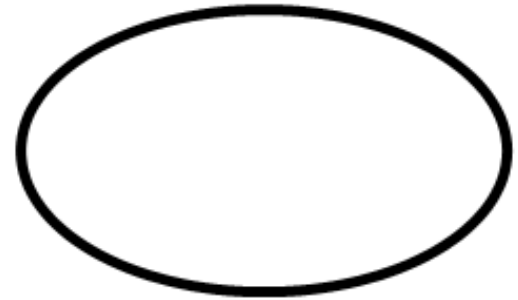
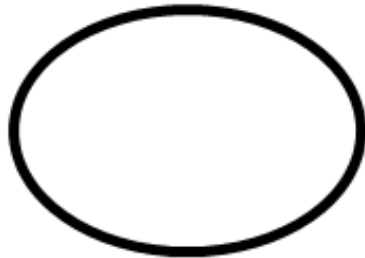
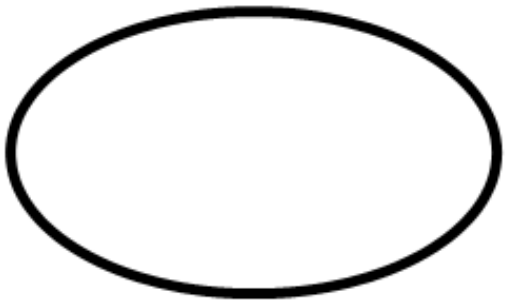
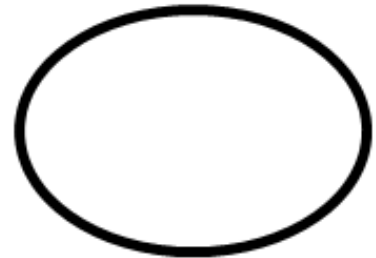
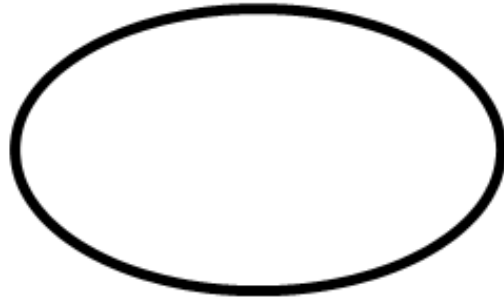
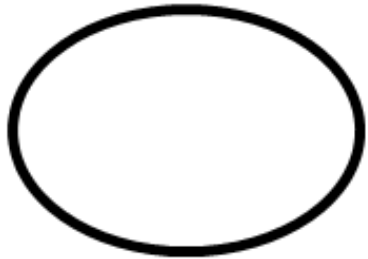
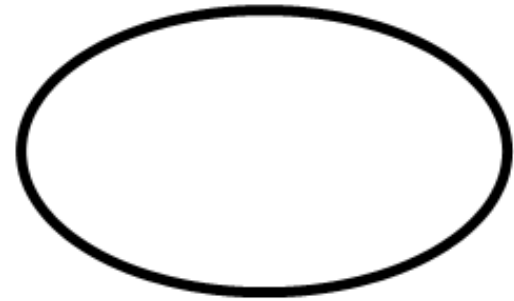
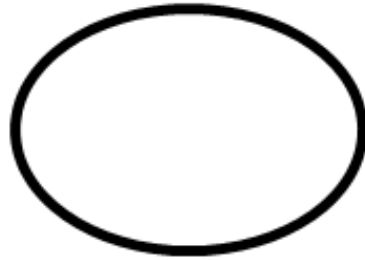
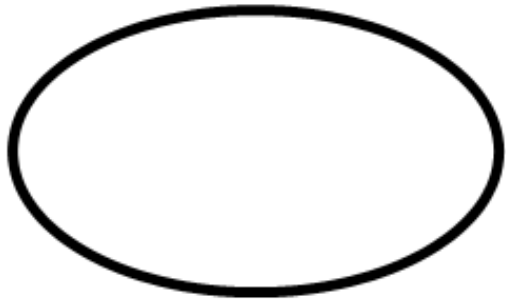
This exercise will help you spot the patterns that occur in your life. Even if you agree with me that all areas of our life are interconnected & reverberate with each other, you'll be surprised at the number of connections you draw, once you get down to it!

On the next page, there's a blank diagram for you to fill in. In the larger bubbles, write the areas of your life that are most important to you – whether that's work, home life, your relationship, school, creative practice, exercise, whatever. You can fill in the smaller bubbles with things you view as slightly less important. You can immediately start drawing lines right now, or set this aside for a week or so while watching for patterns, and then draw the lines as you note the patterns. Examples I mentioned before: if you notice that when you're stressed out at work, you wind up with a messy house and a strained relationship with your S.O., then draw a line from "work" to both of those bubbles. If you notice that when you're feeling stifled creatively, you tend to eat junk food and slack off exercising, draw a line between the creative practice bubble & the wellness practice bubble.

That should get your wheels turning! You'll be amazed to see just how many connections there actually are in your life.



build your own castle



build your own castle

Closing Notes

I hope you've found Build Your Own Castle an entertaining and inspiring read! Thank you *so much* for taking the time out of your day to read it - it means the world to me.

If you have any questions or feedback, feel free to email me at michelle@wicked-whimsy.com. I look forward to hearing from you. And of course, you can always follow my exploits at [Wicked Whimsy](http://WickedWhimsy.com).

Remember - build your own castle, live a cohesive life, and stay amazing.

