

HOW TO CONSCIOUSLY DESIGN YOUR IDEAL LIFE

Say Yes to the Life of Your Dreams



BY NIKKI CHAPLIN

How to Consciously Design Your Ideal Life

I somehow knew that the life I was living was a lot harder than it needed to be, and way different from the one I had envisioned growing up. In fact, I'd known for quite some time but had managed to occupy my time with diversions and so refused to face facts. It was clear though that I could no longer go on this way. I knew some things needed to change, starting with my career, because it has a major impact on all aspects of life. For sure there were areas of my life that were humming along nicely, but deep down I wanted more, I wanted the satisfaction of having accomplished the things I felt I was capable of accomplishing. Deeply aware that if left up to chance and random luck I would end up feeling even more unfulfilled, I went in search of answers.

Having come to the end of my excuses, I was ready to ask myself questions that would put me on a more intentional path, one that would lead to a truly ideal life. What if living my ideal life wasn't as improbable as I thought? What if the obstacles that seemed to be blocking me, some real, others imagined, could be used to my advantage? What if my impossible dreams were still attainable in some way, shape or form?

As it turned out around the same time that I was feeling this angst, a number of my friends were struggling with a similar dilemma, seeking to find clarity with what should be their next best moves. They didn't seem to realize that I was in a similar fuzzy predicament, and some even turned to me for advice. Thankfully, the mentoring I had received and given

over the years came in handy and I carefully pieced together much of it and gladly passed it along. The irony of dispensing to others what I myself needed most was not lost on me for one minute. My goal in this essay, is to share with you lessons learned along the way on how to design your ideal life, and furthermore, how a dream delayed can be revived.

The following exercise will not only help you consciously assess where you are at present, but will help you correctly view gap(s) which may need to be filled in. In it you will find three power tools to help you design the life you desire, in a meaningful and intentional way.

Awareness. This is the first piece of the puzzle we must come to grips with for finding our way out of the quagmire. Awareness means taking stock of where you are and getting a clear idea of where you are headed. Oftentimes, at this point we defeat ourselves by getting stuck focusing on how wide the gap is between where we are and where we desire to go. I urge you to avoid this trap and really spend time assessing where you are right now, what you did or didn't do to get here, whether random or on purpose.

The second piece of the awareness puzzle is to carefully assess what tools you have at your disposal that can help propel you into your next move. The tools can be anything from the experiences you have garnered, skillsets that you possess, as well as your network of friends and colleagues. Some opportunities may be hiding right under your nose such as learning new skills through volunteering on a project or brushing up on a foreign language. Jot down as many ideas as you can, without editing your thoughts. And while it may seem that you are missing key ingredients necessary to move forward, the reality is you will have to start building your bridge with what you currently have. The experiences you've gained so

far, the networks you've nurtured, resources inside or outside your company will all play a part in getting you to your next level. Caution: don't quite your day job just yet. There's much work to be done before we arrive at that decision. The following questions are designed to help you get a clear picture of your current status and the future you desire.

Before you begin, get away from the noise and distractions no matter how tempting, then seriously ponder, honestly and carefully answer the following questions.

1. What is your level of expertise in the job you now hold?
2. Do you plan to continue your present career path?
3. If yes, for how many more years?
4. What position will you hold at the end of those years?
5. What is the ideal position you would like to hold within your industry, your company?
6. Why?
7. Do you have necessary skill set to achieve your desired position?
8. What is your plan to obtain the necessary skill set? Be specific
9. What resources (mentors, training, cross-training opportunities) do you have available to you?
10. What is your plan for personal development? Again, be very specific

With the clarity that answers to the above questions have given you, it is time to move to the second design phase, that is looking at the bigger picture.

Widen Your Lens. Let's face it, whether we're fresh out of college or have been in the workforce for a while, there are times when we're simply just thankful to have a job, with

little thought to where's it's leading. Don't rock the boat, just be content. But for those of us who want more, contentment is not a game changer, it is a recipe for obsolescence. Don't we owe it to ourselves to give and get the highest and best life has to offer? Instead of viewing your life and career through a peephole, why not open the door and look at many the possibilities that lie ahead? After all, we are in control of the limits we set on ourselves and they can just as easily be expanded, should we decide to do so. The more we broaden the perspective from which we view our lives and career, the more options seem to open up. The second aspect to widening your lens is to take the longest possible view of your career in terms of how you view your future. In other words, envision where you want to be fifteen, twenty or twenty-five years down the road, and start earnestly making a plan to follow it, even if some of it now seems impossible. One of my favorite quotes is from Helen Keller who said, "Life is nothing but a daring adventure." I urge you to dare yourself, widen your lenses and let life take you to higher heights.

Focus and determination. In today's world, distractions from all sides have never been more rampant. Try as you will, it's hard to escape. From social media, to news cycles, to changes in technology, our heads seem to be spinning, getting nowhere fast. But there is indeed a cure for these distractions and myriad of other attention grabbers. The cure is simple, focus on your personal goals with single-minded determination. However, in order to focus, you must first have clearly defined goals, or as Napoleon Hill puts it in *Think and Grow Rich*, you must have "a definite chief aim." This may be your long-term goal, made up of several shorter-term goals.

Once you've established a definite chief aim, you can keep yourself on task by refusing to give time and energy to things which do not lead you to attaining your definite chief aim. With each new distraction, ask yourself the simple question: "Is this particular activity listed as one of my goals?" With this in mind, make a decision to stick with the activity that will lead to achieving your definite chief aim. Switching off your brain from momentary distractions will require all the discipline and determination you can muster, but you must persist, you must not give in.

In this phase, keep yourself accountable by regularly checking your progress, making adjustments where possible, and celebrating your successes to help keep you motivated.

With your newfound awareness of where you stand, widening the perspective from which you view the obstacles or opportunities that surround you, you now have a picture of what your ideal life looks like. All that remains is for you to become fully committed to living it. You owe it to yourself.

Nikki Chaplin

For more information about the full version of this book, coaching programs, and online courses, visit www.nikkichaplin.com.

