

FINDING A SENSE OF DIRECTION

In Your Life And Within Yourself

By The American Institute of Health Care Professionals, Inc.



Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
How to Find Your Sense of Direction	2
Let Go of Overthinking	2
The “Disappointment Test”	2
Keep Your Focus on the Destination, Not the Journey	3
Meditation Can Bring Clarity	3
Take the Focus Off Yourself	3
Begin.....	4
Your Instincts Are Good. Trust Them.	4
Consider Your Legacy	5
Pay Attention to Your Happiness.....	5
Alternatively, Pay Attention to What You Hate	5
Know Your Strengths	6
Use Intervals for Goal Setting.....	6
Don’t Focus on How Long You Waited to Change	6
Try Writing.....	7
Gain Some Perspective	7
Talk to People In the Know	8
Be Clear About Your Values	8
Have Faith in You	8
Be Around Supportive People	9
Be Ruthless.....	9

Focus.....	10
The Reunion Test.....	10
Stop Running Away From Fear	10
Be Sure to Take Care of Yourself.....	11
Take Small Steps.....	11
Be Accountable to Yourself With the Support of Others	11
Banish Negative Self-Talk	12
Be Open To Possibility	12
Let It Go	12
It's Never Too Late to Begin	13
Final Thoughts	14

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Introduction

Regardless of your age or experience, circumstances can sometimes leave you feeling adrift in life, unsure of your purpose or where you are headed. It is not unusual to be seeking meaning or direction in life at some point, usually after a major life change or around significant milestones. For some, finding a sense of direction can be a lifelong journey, one that shifts frequently.

Regardless of where or when you are in life, finding your life's direction should always lead you forward. How you choose to move forward is a larger question, and we offer many ideas for how to find your sense of direction in life below but taking action and moving ahead is an important and essential step to making changes for the better.

Changing your life is a scary proposition. Making major life changes means confronting your fears, gaining clarity about yourself, and sometimes even asking for help, which can be challenging for some. Questions that you may be asking yourself right now might be, "What if I can't do this?" Or, "Am I crazy to try this now?" As you consider all the things that could go wrong, first stop to consider all the things that could go right if you changed your life now.

Instead of focusing on the negative, remember what got you to this point to begin with. You are unhappy in your life. Things are not going like you want, and you need to change. So, looking back or staying in place is not a positive choice. Moving forward, despite your worries, is the best path through and onto your next, better life.

Below are our favorite strategies for finding your sense of direction, which can help you make the necessary changes in your life to bring happiness and fulfillment. With so many to choose from, there are sure to be several that can help you find the next path forward and make new changes in your life. Start living the life you want by finding your direction and taking action now.

How to Find Your Sense of Direction

Let Go of Overthinking

Most of the time, our thinking about what could happen creates unnecessary stress and anxiety. Over-analysis can be the death of making a change, and it can definitely make it harder to find your sense of direction. You will never be able to predict the future, so laying awake at night and trying to guess about what might happen is not helping you move forward and, in fact, may be the reason you are still stuck.

When you allow your fear of the future to affect your decisions about where you are headed next, it can lead to self-doubt,

delayed decisions, and even inaction. While considering your choices and weighing options is important, allowing your fears to become an excuse to remain stagnant is not a healthy option.

None of us can predict where life will lead us in the next five or ten years. If you think about it, that's actually a good thing, because it means life is interesting and full of surprises. Instead, you need to focus on basing your choices and direction on what grounds you today, what is important to you right now. Don't worry about tomorrow, because who knows what is going to happen. Instead, focus on the here and now.

The “Disappointment Test”

You can use this simple test to help you narrow your choices and find your sense of direction in life. Sit down and visualize your life. Think about everything you have accomplished up to this point, then begin to look ahead. Look all the way to the end of your life, where you sit as an old person. What are the things in your life you will truly regret if you get to that stage? What will



you be disappointed you didn't accomplish? What will you regret never trying, even if you failed? Imagining your biggest disappointments in life can help you identify what is truly important now.

Keep Your Focus on the Destination, Not the Journey

Sometimes, what holds us back from making changes is getting bogged down in the details of how we are going to make it happen. Big changes, like a new direction in life, can require lots of effort, but instead of thinking of *all* the things that need to happen, start with a focus on what you want from life. Don't worry yet about how you'll make that goal a reality, simply focus on the goal itself.

Focusing on the journey, or how to make a goal happen, can create stress and fear, most of it based on speculation or uncertainty. This can prevent you from taking a single action, much less reaching your destination. With a focus on what you want, you can begin to make individual steps toward your dreams, and before you know it, the path is clear, and you are moving forward.

Meditation Can Bring Clarity

Learning to meditate can help you find clarity and learn to listen to your inner voice. Meditation promotes calm, which can help you solve problems and see new options. Daily meditation actually changes the way your brain functions, which can help you not only find purpose but also to maintain a self of well-being throughout your life. Meditation can be an excellent strategy to silence the inner voices of doubt and worry long enough to discover your true passion and purpose.

Take the Focus Off Yourself

When you remove the focus from yourself and instead focus on how your life can help others, you may be able to find a direction or purpose in life. Volunteering is a great way to share your talents and passions with others and shift focus from you to those who are in need. When you give to others, you often can see a direction for yourself that brings you purpose and passion. If

you are looking for a new direction in work or life in general, shifting the focus to how you can benefit others could strengthen your resolve.

Begin

Because the lead up to action is often filled with worry and angst, sometimes it is just better to start somewhere. Anywhere. Taking action gets you moving forward, and once you have momentum, you often feel better quickly. And just because you start in one direction does not mean you can't change your mind later but getting going is often the hardest part. In fact, realizing your actions are leading you astray means you are one step closer to figuring out what you truly want.

The only thing that can ensure your ability to change your life, though, is action. Thinking, planning, and worrying will not lead to change. If you are looking for a new sense of direction, you need to try new things and learn from mistakes along the way. The only thing you truly can control in life is your actions right now, so stop thinking and worrying, and begin.

Your Instincts Are Good. Trust Them.

While research, information-gathering, and analysis are good tools when making an important decision, they can also lead you down a path of indecision. You start thinking, "If only I understood *this* more, I would be able to choose." Too much information can actually be crippling when trying to make a decision, so listen to your instincts. Y

our gut knows where your heart wants to go, and while that path may not be easy, and you may make mistakes (or a lot of mistakes), at least you will be doing what you need and want to do. The more you trust your instincts, the better they are at guiding you, too. So, practice listening to that inner voice, and it will learn to lead you where you need to be.

Consider Your Legacy

No one likes to think about their own mortality, but thinking about your death, and the legacy you will leave behind, is one way to help discover your true direction in life. Imagine what others will say about you at your funeral, in your obituary, or put on your headstone.

What do you want your legacy to be? In what ways do you want to be remembered for our family, community, work, and personal accomplishments?

By considering the legacy you will leave behind, you can identify what is important to you in all aspects of your life and make better choices to make those goals become a reality.

Contemplating death does not have to be a morbid exercise. Instead, it provides us with parameters to help us consider how to live the biggest life we can possibly live.

Pay Attention to Your Happiness

When you are struggling to find direction, it is helpful to pay attention to what brings you joy. Invest in some self-research to better determine what makes you enthusiastic. Start paying attention to when you feel alive and excited, when you are adding value to your life.

These are the activities that are most likely to fit well into a true purpose or sense of direction. Sometimes, it is not the activities themselves but other factors. What are the common elements of the activities you find more joyful? This is an excellent starting point for finding your purpose.

Alternatively, Pay Attention to What You Hate

Instead of focusing on what brings you happiness, instead work deductively to eliminate those things you do not like. What do you truly hate to do? What are the activities you abhor and avoid at all costs? Are there common traits to these, as well? This is a good way to help you eliminate possible choices and narrow your focus, as you can't be happy if part of your path is making you miserable.

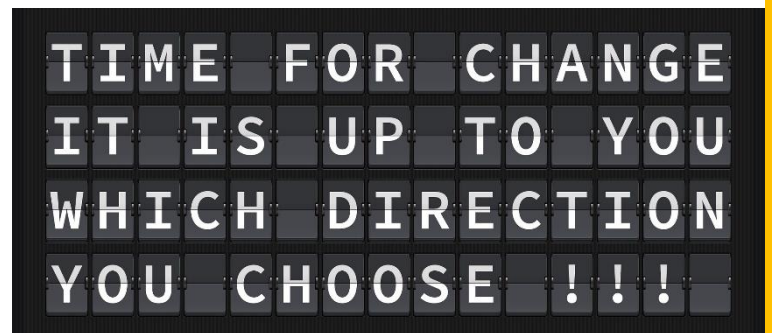
Know Your Strengths

If you are not familiar yet with your strengths in all aspects of life, it may be time to get better acquainted with those. Take a strengths test (available in many formats online) and spend time contemplating your traits and skills. Think outside the box, because some skills may be more transferable than you think.

For example, if you are a musician, you are also likely highly analytical. Taking a variety of self-assessments can clue you into hidden strengths or possible areas of focus, and it can also help eliminate areas where maybe you have interest but not the aptitude.

Use Intervals for Goal Setting

There are some who recommend using one year to one and a half years to set a goal and work toward it. This allows you time to focus, make a plan, and get feedback on your performance. But, if you are not totally sure of your path, that can be a long time to wait to determine if you're moving in the right direction. Instead, focus on a few months. Work hard on something for three months, then evaluate your progress and see how you feel. Three months is enough time to explore without feeling like you've wasted time on a wrong path.



Don't Focus on How Long You Waited to Change

When you start to think about how long you waited to make a change, it can cause you pain and frustration. It may have taken you three months, three years, or thirty years to decide to make the change. It doesn't matter how long it took you to change, or why you finally decided to change direction.

The important thing is you are ready and willing to make the change now. Today is the start of something new, and that's all that is important. Commitment and action are all you need today,

and you can repeat that again tomorrow. Thinking about past hesitations won't help you move forward, and it can derail your progress easily, so focus on what you can control now.

Try Writing

Several different writing exercises can help you gain clarity about your direction in life. The first is to create a worldview statement. It utilizes your perception and perspective about the world and life to help guide your direction. It is a simple statement that follows the pattern, "All ___ should ____."

While many use worldview statements to explain their life through the lens of religious beliefs, you can do this for other purposes, as well. For example, if your world statement is "All people should help their fellow neighbors," you may be looking for opportunities to serve others in meaningful ways or to share your gifts and talents with those in need. Worldview statements should guide your decisions because they represent your understanding of what is important.

The second activity is to write a mission statement. A personal mission statement sets clear boundaries about what you think is and is not important and acceptable in life, and it can be used to guide all your critical decisions.

In a sentence or two, your personal mission statement should encompass what you find essential, where you want to go, how you define success, how you want others to describe you, and what you want to be remembered for. Writing this takes time but can provide valuable guidance to you when making difficult choices.

Gain Some Perspective

When you start to worry incessantly about making the wrong choices, get some perspective on what that decision (or any that you've ever made) really means in the grand scheme of things. When you stare up at the stars at night and see the vastness of the universe, is it really important? When you consider the need of so many in the world at this very moment, are your

choices all that relevant? Yes, this is all important to you, but think about the lasting impact and remember that, in the big picture, it doesn't really matter, so stop worrying so much.

Talk To People In The Know

If you want to know how to do a job, accomplish a goal, or learn a skill, go to those who know. Talk with people who've already accomplished what you want to do. Ask them about how they got to where they are, what struggles they had to undergo to achieve their dreams finally, and how they knew they'd made the right choice. If you're not entirely sure about your destination, talk with all the happy, successful people you know.

Once you start talking to others, you may notice trends or everyday actions. You may also see that you aren't interested in whatever those people went through. Getting advice from others can inform your choices in many ways, so don't be afraid to talk to people about their goals and dreams.

Be Clear About Your Values

Just as knowing your strengths can help you determine your direction, understanding your values is essential, as well. Your core values should not be compromised, no matter what path you choose. Your happiness will be greatest when your daily actions are aligned with your beliefs and values.

If you're not sure about these, spend some time documenting and analyzing what you believe about fundamental issues and life choices. Identify the most important values in your life, which ones resonate the most. This will help you make better decisions that will bring you more joy in the future.

Have Faith in You

If you want to change your life, only you can make that happen. That means you have to believe in yourself, have faith that you will be able to overcome any obstacles, and that you are worthy of

this journey. Believing in yourself and your path to self-discovery is an important component when searching for a new life direction. Without it, you will be continually faced with doubt and fear, and while others can be encouraging, it's only your faith in yourself that really matters. Build yourself up and believe that you can accomplish whatever you set forth.

Be Around Supportive People

Throughout your journey toward finding your sense of purpose, you will encounter many ups and downs. Surrounding yourself with others who are positive, who believe in your mission, and who are supportive of you will be helpful.

Befriend others who are also on a search for purpose and direction, too, as they may learn things from their journey that can benefit you, too. Make sure the naysayers and negative people in your life have no voice in your decisions and focus instead on those who understand you need support and positive energy. When you surround yourself with positive people, you will have the support you need while you struggle with the necessary trial and error of finding your next path.



Be Ruthless

Many of us have an unfounded belief in some of our strengths and talents, which can be harmful when considering a new path. During this process, you have to be ruthless with yourself about what you are and are not suited for. While you may have done something in the past, were you necessarily good at it?

Have others given you responsibility for which you were unsuited? Are you leaning in a direction that is wholly unsuited to your real strengths and gifts? Take a hard, deep look at yourself to evaluate your true talents. If you can't be honest with yourself, who can?

Focus

To find your true sense of direction, you need dedicated time to think and focus. While it may not be possible to get away from it all to an extended retreat, try carving out time each day to dedicate to this task. Without time that is free of distractions, it can be difficult to think clearly and make the serious discoveries needed when contemplated your sense of direction. Give yourself the time and space necessary to focus on what's important to you.

The Reunion Test

Here is another strategy to help you identify where you want to go in life. Think five years into the future. Imagine you run into a friend you haven't seen in the last five years. You used to be close, but you've lost touch. Your friend asks what you've been up to. Since you have spent five years finding and committing to your new sense of purpose, what would you say? What would you want to have accomplished in the next five years that you would share with your friend?

Stop Running Away From Fear

Fear isn't necessarily a bad thing, and avoiding it means you never take risks in life. If you are on a path in life that doesn't scare you at least a little, it may not be worth pursuing. In fact, if you are afraid, it's a good sign you are on the right track. Instead of moving in the opposite direction of what you fear, boldly move toward it and face it head-on. Facing and conquering your fears means you have resilience, and that will allow you to overcome obstacles in all aspects of life. When you face your fears instead of shying away, you realize you had less to worry about than you thought, and the next scary thing won't seem so bad.

Comfortable and certain are not always good things in life, especially when talking about your passion and purpose. So, instead, boldly move in the direction of your fear, and happiness could be waiting on the other side.

Be Sure to Take Care of Yourself

When you are making big changes or trying to figure out important decisions, it is important not to neglect yourself and your well-being. Taking care of yourself will give you the energy, mental stamina, and positivity you need to make momentous decisions. Don't neglect your sleep, nutrition, or exercise while trying to find your purpose. Without your health and wellness, nothing else matters.

Take Small Steps

When everything is changing, and there is a lot of newness on the horizon, it can feel overwhelming. This is especially true when you start to gain clarity about what you want in life. But, if you change everything all at once, you can quickly become overloaded and exhausted. Instead, pick one or two things to focus on, and make small steps toward your new future. Changing everything all at once sets you up for failure, so start with small actions you can take today, and do that one thing. Tomorrow, do another. Small steps lead to significant changes.

Be Accountable to Yourself With the Support of Others

When things get tough along your journey toward self-discovery, you will want to quit. When you decide that finding your sense of direction is important to you, tell others. Let your friends and loved ones know you are engaging in this critical work.

Not only can they lend a supportive voice when you are frustrated, but once you've told people what you are doing, it makes it easier to hold yourself accountable for your choices and actions. Once others know, it's harder to quit or revert to old decisions. Letting others be a part of your journey is a great way to get the support you will need but also remind yourself of why you chose to do this work in the first place.

Banish Negative Self-Talk

We all have that negative, inner voice that loves to tell us what is going wrong in life. That negative self-talk can keep you from taking action in your life, though. The judgment you hear internally robs you of your power for action. Stop listening to that inner voice. Shut down its influence over you by turning it off the second you hear it rear its ugly head. Take away its power by refusing to listen to its doubt and negativity.

Retrain your brain to focus on the positive work you are trying to accomplish. Repeat affirmations, re-read your mission statement, or focus on other actions you have taken to change your life, but do not give into the negative self-talk. Its influence is not permanent if you choose to take away its control.

Be Open To Possibility

Cultivating an attitude of “yes” rather than “no” can help you be open to the world and all its possibilities. When you close yourself off, you miss a lot of amazing experiences and people. The process of self-discovery and finding your true purpose in life should be about embracing new things to find your passion, so focus on how often you say “yes” in life. New experiences, people, and opportunities can expose you to things you never considered and help you find your direction.

Let It Go

Whether it is physical possessions or old thought habits, the process of finding your direction in life should be one of letting go of all the old things that are weighing you down. Start with the physical clutter in your life, which can make it hard to concentrate. Get rid of the things you are carrying around that have no meaning or serve no purpose.

Once your space is free of clutter, you can work on freeing your mind and heart of unnecessary things, as well. When you think about your commitments, obligations, and daily activities, get rid

of anything that doesn't bring you joy or serve a meaningful purpose in your life. Unshackling yourself from those things that are no longer important leaves you free to explore all the new things that are meaningful to you.

It's Never Too Late to Begin

No matter your age, you decide to change your direction in life, it's never too late. Deciding to take control of your life and do what makes you happy is good for you at any age. Working on self-discovery is a great way to feel younger and gain a new lease on life. In fact, finding purpose can actually help you live longer, no matter your age, so whether you are 20 or 70, discovering your path is good for your health.

Final Thoughts

Deciding to find or change your direction in life is a big step. Many consider this option and immediately run away in fear. But those that choose to embrace the challenge and embark on the journey discover the life they always wanted.

While there are many reasons you may tell yourself that you don't need to make a big change, there are even more reasons why you should, including finally finding something that brings you joy and satisfaction.

Your road to self-discovery may not always be easy, and you may sometimes feel like you don't have any of the right answers, but don't let that stop you. Finding your direction in life is really about learning all about yourself, and that process takes time and commitment.

Finding the life you want to live is an important step that will have profound consequences for you, so don't rush to quit or hold back on something so meaningful and important.