

Quality of Life as a Driving Force

The Eight Life Domains

After identifying the “why” and “where” (core purpose) and the “how” (core values), it’s time to examine the eight domains that, together, lead to a high quality of life.

When most of our life domains are going well, quality of life feels easier to grasp; when a majority of them are in bad shape, quality of life feels out of reach. In this way, the subjective *and* objective evaluations of quality of life work together.

There are objectively good and objectively bad conditions that do influence our quality of life. When we know what those are, we can start building a life and a world that prioritizes those conditions.

So—what are our essential life domains? And what does it look like to experience real wellbeing in each of them?

1. Learning and Personal Growth

Thriving means *growing*. Having opportunities to learn, develop, discover your abilities, grow in your talents, and put your skills into practice is one of the first ingredients for quality of life. There are a number of different areas in our life that warrant growth: intellectual, emotional, physical, relational, cultural, and spiritual.

Here are some key considerations to evaluate where you are in this first domain:

- Am I regularly exposed to new ideas and concepts (intellectual growth)? Describe in what way and to what extent?

- Am I building more self-awareness about my emotions (emotional growth)? Describe in what way and to what extent?



- Do I have regular opportunities to grow physically and try out new forms of movement (physical growth)? Describe in what way and to what extent?
- Am I growing relationally, learning more about the people I care about and how I interact with them (relational growth)? Describe in what way and to what extent?
- Am I learning more about other cultures and my own culture (cultural growth)? Describe in what way and to what extent?
- Do I have opportunities to develop my beliefs and values (spiritual growth)? Describe in what way and to what extent?

It's likely that you're experiencing growth in some areas, more so than others. Consider where you could pursue more growth and learning. If you're in a season where certain areas of growth simply aren't possible, accept that current limitation and trust that your current season won't last forever.

However, if most of us get really honest with ourselves, we can recognize that we have far more agency than we realize in pursuing learning and personal growth.



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2. **Self-Determination, Meaning, and Basic Rights**

People long for the ability to direct their own life and to be able to shape their own values, norms, and routines. Doing so offers reassurance and a sense of competence. It's also through self-determination that people are able to live a life they consider to be meaningful.

Within this domain, consider evaluating how and to what extent you engage in self-determination, meaning and basic rights:

- Describe in what way and to what extent you try to strengthen your autonomy? In other words, do you typically rely on others for direction and provision, or do you try to make your own way?

- Describe in what way and to what extent you try to live purposefully?

- Describe in what way and to what extent you feel respected in your basic rights?



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3. Productivity and Activity

Related to self-determination is self-realization—the productive action of creating the life you want. When people are able to realize themselves in an activity— performing work, or practicing a craft, art, or other discipline that feels meaningful and fun— there’s an experience of pleasure and competence that helps lead to quality of life.

Describe in what way and to what extent you experience productivity and activity:

- What do I love to do most?

- What work feels meaningful to me?

- How much time do I spend doing either or both of the above activities?

Your answers to the questions above can shed light on where you experience productivity and activity, but they can also help reveal your core purpose. Take note: *these* are the areas where you experience a sense of real meaning in your work.



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4. Leisure and Social Interactions

Relationships are enormously important for any fulfilling, meaningful life. This domain is all about finding your place in society and your relational connections within. This involves participating in society, investing in friendships, and engaging in roles where you bear some responsibility and also experience joy, belonging, or meaning (like parenthood, leading a volunteer group, or participating in a sports team). Leisure activities—in other words, activities we choose to participate in with others during our spare time—create a significant boost for our subjective quality of life. It means we're doing things we enjoy, with people we like, and improving our skills. That's good for us!

Describe in what way and to what extent you create or experience opportunities for integration and participation or to build relationships with others.

- What do I do in my leisure time? Do I seek out activities with other people or stay isolated?

- What are some of the most meaningful relationships in my life? How am I investing in those relationships?



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5. Emotional and Physical Wellbeing

Our health and physical wellness impacts everything we do. Robust wellbeing in this domain means you are actively working to optimize your health. You have the tools, opportunities, and will power to improve or maintain your physical capabilities, and you are actively working to prevent physical deterioration.

Emotional wellbeing refers to a person's ability to weather bad times alongside the good, with hope and optimism. The way you perceive yourself and your life determines how you deal with it. When you perceive life with a self-compassionate attitude, you will more readily experience self-acceptance, consciously take care of your emotions and desires, and deal with the obstacles you face on a daily basis.

Physical and emotional wellbeing are interrelated. Your physical conditions have an impact on your emotional wellbeing, and your emotional wellbeing has an impact on your body.

Describe how and to what extent you invest in emotional and physical well-being:

- How regularly do I invest time into my physical health and do I make efforts to take care of my body in a positive way? (For example, getting physical exercise, sufficient sleep, eating a nutritional diet, practicing personal hygiene, avoiding habits of self-medicating etc.)
- Do I have the tools and opportunities I need to work on my physical health?
- What is my internal dialogue like, particularly when things get hard?
- Do I allow myself to work through negative feelings with an attitude of self-compassion? How do I do that?



6. Economic and Material Wellbeing

It's synonymous with financial wellbeing, economic wellbeing, and consumer wellbeing: essentially, this domain encompasses the physical comforts and safety afforded by wealth. In order to feel safe, we need a secure living situation and material conditions that allow us to maintain our human dignity and function in a healthy way—that all requires some measure of financial stability. Material wellbeing is not so much produced by the amount of money a person has in the bank, but by a person's *attitude* about the money that they have. Research has shown that the more someone is materialistic, the higher and more unrealistic their expectations for their standard of living, which leads to dissatisfaction.

Evaluate how and to what extent you experience material wellbeing or are progressing toward achieving a qualitatively-sound living situation:

- Describe how and to what degree you feel safe, comfortable, and stable in your living situation?

- Evaluate if you're consistently able to cover your expenses? Or is money often a point of stress for you?

- Evaluate the degree to which you understand and practice wise strategies of personal finance.



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7. Natural Living Environment

Nature connectedness is associated with life satisfaction, vitality, and happiness. However “natural living environment” doesn’t refer exclusively to nature—it simply refers to the environment in which you feel most natural. Many people feel most at home in a busy, urban center, whereas other people prefer suburban life. Some people prefer to live alone, and others prefer a packed, lively household. Put simply, your environment has a significant impact on your experience of quality of life; ideally, your environment should help you feel rested, at home, and re-energized.

Evaluate how your environment impacts you and how you would like to invest in improving your natural living environment:

- How often are you around growing things, like plants, trees, parks, sunshine, etc.? And how does this impact you?

- Does your living and/or working environment promote a feeling of calm and focus, or does it cause you to feel stress? If anything, what would you like to do about it?



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8. General Life Satisfaction

General life satisfaction is improved by pursuing activities which feel meaningful, in accordance with your core purpose and core values. It's also impacted by efforts to govern your thought-life: by improving your affective wellbeing (moderating the frequency and intensity of positive and negative emotions and moods), emotional wellbeing and cognitive wellbeing (how people evaluate their lives overall, in terms of life satisfaction). Finally, it's informed by your experience in the specific life domains—for instance, your job satisfaction, marital happiness, and so on.

Evaluate in what way and to what extent you invest in increasing your self-awareness, your self-acceptance and give meaning to your life?

- Identify your different emotions and explain why you're feeling them, or how they came about?
- Self-reflect on your thought life, and ask yourself if you tend to be hard on yourself or accept yourself, for all your strengths and weaknesses?
- Do you spend time in activities that feel meaningful?



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Building Self-Awareness about Tensions

As you worked through the eight life domains, it's possible you were able to see that in some areas, you're experiencing robust quality of life. In other areas, you might see deficiencies. If you were able to recognize those differences, then you've gathered profoundly important information. We call these deficiencies "points of tension" and they describe any area of life which is not yet where you'd like it to be.

By building awareness about these points of tension, you can be more successful wielding agency in moving toward improved quality of life in your own context. Points of tension can help us recognize where growth or change is needed. Try to translate the dissatisfactions, shortages, or tensions into desired changes that would better reflect your purpose and can contribute to its realization. Describe the future change opportunities you'd like to see, and then break them down into specific steps that you want to realize, moving toward that desired future.

Think about where you might be experiencing points of tension in your own life, and consider how they might have useful information for you:

- What tensions can I register within myself? How can these points of tension give me information about the changes I'd like to make? How might they inform my purpose of where I want to go?

- What desired changes would I like to experience within myself and/or my circumstances?



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