THE BOLD LIVING GUIDE:

7 Key Ingredients for a Meaningful Life

By Barrie Davenport
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Introduction
One of the most tragic things I know about human nature is that all of us tend to put off living. We are all dreaming of some magical rose garden over the horizon—instead of enjoying the roses blooming outside our windows today.

-- Dale Carnegie

Have you ever been struck by the existential thought that life has no meaning? Have you asked yourself why you have been put on this Earth and what your purpose is?

For those with strong religious faith, there is usually an answer provided by doctrine.

For Christians life is meaningful when one seeks divine salvation through the grace of God and intercession of Christ. In the Judaic world view, the meaning of life is to serve the one true God and to prepare for the world to come. In Islam, man’s ultimate life objective is to serve Allah (God) by abiding by the divine guidelines revealed in the Qur’an and the Tradition of the Prophet.

Religion certainly can provide a framework for a meaningful life, but for the religious and non-religious alike, the larger issue is how we find meaning in our daily lives.

What are we doing every day, every hour and every moment that serves the larger context of our own religious or philosophical beliefs about a life worth living? It is those moments, hours and days that add up to a life well-spent – a meaningful life.

A meaningful life involves both creation and choice.

The vast majority of your life is in your control. You can decide what you value and love and then create your life accordingly. You still have choice, even over the areas of your life that are not in your control. You can choose to resist and struggle and bemoan your circumstances, or you can choose to find meaning in the situation in spite of the pain or discomfort.
The renowned Austrian psychiatrist, Viktor Frankl, survived the Holocaust, even though he was in four Nazi death camps, including Auschwitz from 1942-45. However, his parents and other members of his family died in the concentration camps.

During, and partly because of, his suffering in concentration camps, Frankl developed a revolutionary approach to psychotherapy known as logotherapy.

At the core of his theory is the belief that humanity’s primary motivational force is the search for meaning, and the work of the logotherapist centers on helping the patient find personal meaning in life, however dismal the circumstances may be.

“We must never forget that we may also find meaning in life even when confronted with a hopeless situation,” he insisted, a theory he gradually developed as a concentration camp survivor.

“As such, I also bear witness to the unexpected extent to which man is capable of defying and braving even the worst conditions conceivable,” he wrote. (For more on Viktor Frankl, visit http://www.viktorfrankl.org/e/indexe.html.)

A meaningful life is what you make of it. Unfortunately, many of us live reactionary lives. We respond to the circumstances life hurls at us rather than creating the life we desire.

**The first bold step toward living a meaningful life is defining what is meaningful to you.**

“For the meaning of life differs from man to man, from day to day and from hour to hour. What matters, therefore, is not the meaning of life in general but rather the specific meaning of a person’s life at a given moment.”

-- Viktor Frankl
What Matters To You?

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You probably spend time planning your work activities or your grocery list or your next vacation. But how much time have you spent really contemplating and refining what is most purposeful and important to you?

Have you ever written down what you value most, how you want to spend your time, and what you want to achieve? Do you know what brings you joy?

Proactively and creatively designing your life is the most important endeavor you will ever undertake. You have the opportunity to sculpt a vision for your life that can serve as road map for every choice and action you take.

When you think about what truly matters to you, consider the past experiences that have brought you sustained joy, meaning, and fulfillment. This is where you should focus most of your time and energy. These are the actions, choices, achievements, and relationships that you will reflect upon at the end of your life, feeling with certainty that you have enjoyed a life well-lived.

In her book *The How of Happiness*, research psychologist Sonja Lyubomirsky ([www.faculty.ucr.edu/~sonja/](http://www.faculty.ucr.edu/~sonja/)) reveals her groundbreaking research of thousands of men and women and the factors that increase and sustain our happiness and ultimately create meaning in life. Here are some of her findings:

**We have control of a big chunk of our happiness.**
Studies show that 50% of individual differences in happiness are determined by genes, 10% by life circumstances, and 40% by our intentional activities.

**Most of us aren’t flourishing.**
Nationally representative samples of U.S. adults indicate that slightly more than half of us (54%) are moderately mentally healthy yet not flourishing -- that is, we lack great enthusiasm for life and are not actively and productively engaged with the world.
**Happy people accrue more money.**
Those who are happy as college freshmen have higher salaries sixteen years later (when they are in their mid-30s) without an initial wealth advantage.

**Money brings problems to the very rich.**
In a study of 792 well-off adults, more than half reported that wealth didn’t bring them more happiness, and a third of those with assets greater than $10 million said that money bought more problems than it solved.

**Over thinking or worry has a host of adverse consequences.**
It sustains or worsens sadness, fosters negatively-biased thinking, impairs a person’s ability to solve problems, saps motivation, and interferes with concentration and initiative.

**Happy people care less about others’ successes.**
Happy people are less affected by unfavorable social comparisons (e.g., observing a peer who is worse off) than unhappy ones.

**The key to a happy marriage is how we respond to our partner’s successes.**
What distinguishes good and poor relationships is not how the partners respond to each other’s disappointments and reversals but how they respond to good news.

**Happy people focus on happy events.**
The practice of repetitively replaying your happiest life events serves to prolong and reinforce positive emotions and make you happier, whereas systematically analyzing your happiest life events has the reverse effect.

**Mindfulness fosters happiness.**
People high in mindfulness - that is, those who are prone to be mindfully attentive to the here and now and keenly aware of their surroundings - are models of flourishing and positive mental health.

**Religious people are happier.**
They also are healthier and cope better with trauma.
Here is how Dr. Lyubomirsky summarizes her discoveries about sustained happiness:

“If we observe genuinely happy people, we shall find that they do not just sit around being contented. They make things happen. They pursue new understandings, seek new achievements, and control their thoughts and feelings. In sum, our intentional, effortful activities have a powerful effect on how happy we are, over and above the effects of our set points and the circumstances in which we find ourselves. If an unhappy person wants to experience interest, enthusiasm, contentment, peace, and joy, he or she can make it happen by learning the habits of a happy person.”

You have control over the level of happiness in your life, but you must take continued action to sustain it. These actions should be focused on endeavors that provide sustained happiness rather than fleeting delight.

As Dr. Lyubomirsky suggests, life circumstances (our financial status, appearance, material possessions, etc.) account for only 10% of our overall happiness. Sustained happiness is developed through meaningful and purposeful endeavors and relationships.

Let’s take a look at some of the areas of life that support a meaningful life and that provide the fertile ground for sustained happiness.
Security and Comfort

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According to Dictionary.com, two definitions for “security” are: 1) freedom from danger, risk, etc.; safety; and 2) freedom from care, anxiety, or doubt; well-founded confidence.

The definition for the word “comfort” is “a state of ease and satisfaction of bodily wants, with freedom from pain and anxiety.”

We all need and desire security and comfort. We want the freedom from danger, pain, and anxiety, and we want a state of ease and satisfaction of bodily wants. At a minimum, we want a decent home in a safe environment, plentiful food, clothing, transportation, health care, and a job that pays us enough to afford these things.

Beyond those minimum necessities for security and comfort, we have varying degrees of desire for additional comforts and amenities.

However, at some level of creating more security and comfort for ourselves, there comes a point of diminishing return. The time and energy it takes to earn the money for these additional comforts, as well as the time and energy expended to maintain, insure, and utilize them, becomes more burdensome than any possible enjoyment one might receive.

Think about this. You spend nearly a third of your life sleeping and another good chunk of time working. So in reality you have a few hours a week to enjoy comforts and pleasures beyond the minimum required for adequate survival.

Between weekends, holidays and vacation (let’s say two weeks a year), you have a total of 124 free days. But half of your weekend days are spent with errands and chores.

So that leaves 72 free days a year. If you are making just enough money to get by, you don’t have many options for discretionary spending on material things and entertainment.

If you do make a substantial salary, you have more choices about where to spend your discretionary income and how to spend those 72 days.
Ironically, it is often more detrimental to our potential happiness to have a lot of purchasing choices. Here’s why:

Dr. Lyubomirsky suggests that 50% of our happiness is fixed by genetics, and only 10% of happiness comes from outside circumstances and material things. But 40% of happiness is derived from what we control inside of ourselves – most specifically gratitude, positive thinking, and acts of altruism.

So how do you spend most of your time – in the 10% category or the 40% category?

Most of us spend most of our time seeking fulfillment through our jobs, money, power, beauty, sex, entertainment, and stuff. Our repeated efforts in these areas are reinforced by advertising, peer pressure, and perhaps our own insecurities.

Yet haven’t you noticed that though these things offer some delight and fulfillment, for the most part these feelings are short-lived. We become bored or disenchanted with the job we worked so hard to get, the big new house, the shiny BMW, or whatever it is that we absolutely have to have.

We are spending 90% of our time and energy pursuing things that provide only 10% of our happiness and fulfillment.

No wonder life feels meaningless sometimes. With so many choices drawing our attention and desire, we could remain on an endless cycle of seeking meaning where there is little meaning to be found.

“It takes a lot of courage to release the familiar and seemingly secure, to embrace the new. But there is no real security in what is no longer meaningful. There is more security in the adventurous and exciting, for in movement there is life, and in change there is power.”

-- Alan Cohen

What if you got off of this cycle and created more balance with your happiness percentages? What if you spent more time doing what brings
you the most fulfillment and meaning?

You have about 72 “free” days a year or about 6 days a month. How do you really want to spend them? And how do you really want to spend the other 293 days. Here are some important questions to ask yourself:

- What do you really need in your life to feel comfort and security? What kind of house? How many things? How much money? What kind of relationships?

- Do you have those things? If not, what is preventing you from getting those needs for comfort and security met?

- How much time do you spend doing things that you hate or just tolerate? Do you feel like you are wasting your time?

- Look around you. What do you own that you no longer use or enjoy? Why are you holding on to those things?

- What brings you sustained happiness and meaning? How much time do you spend on those things?

- How can you incorporate more gratitude, positive thinking and acts of kindness into your life?

- What changes or shifts could you make in your life to have the minimum comfort and security you need while spending more time on meaningful, joyful pursuits?

- What can you appreciate and enjoy about your life right now that you have been taking for granted?

As you answer these questions, make notes about how you might recalculate your awareness and lifestyle to sustain a realistic and meaningful level of security and comfort for yourself and your family.
Balance and Moderation

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Americans work more hours and take fewer vacations than workers in other advanced economies. Businesses in the U.S. typically provide five to ten days in vacation for new employees and an average of eight paid holidays.

Government data indicate it takes about ten years with the same employer to earn three weeks of vacation. These data also show that about ten percent of full-time workers do not get any paid vacation days at all. What’s more, a quarter or more of American workers don’t use all of the leave time they have coming.

The World Tourism Organization says that average vacation time is 42 days a year in Italy, 37 days in France and 35 in Germany, and 25 days in Japan and South Korea.

Even when Americans do vacation, twenty percent of us still do some work during this time, according to the Families and Work Institute. With the proliferation of mobile phones and e-mail devices, we are never detached from communication with the office.

Not surprisingly, heavy workloads and long working hours increase stress levels, burnout and health care costs.

These stressful work styles also lower employee productivity and motivation, and leave less time for family, friends, exercise, entertainment, and volunteer activities. Ironically, these are the same activities that replenish energy and reduce symptoms associated with stress.

Why do we do this? What is it that makes us feel so bound to our work that we allow ourselves so little down time?

If you reflect on your life, will you be happy to say that you spent twelve

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“Happiness is not a matter of intensity but of balance, order, rhythm and harmony.”

-- Thomas Merton
hours a day working and skipped vacations and family time? How much more quality of life are those long hours buying you?

It is a bold and courageous move to step back from that daily grind and unhook from the adrenaline rush created by overwork. America’s driven work ethic is reinforced subtly and overtly in the messages we receive from our peers, employers, and the media. If you break with this expectation, you might be perceived as lazy, unprofessional, or unproductive.

Even if you receive great pleasure and fulfillment from your job, you still must create balance in all areas of your life to feel whole and mentally and emotionally healthy.

Men and women who work outside of the home are not the only ones to suffer from this over-scheduled pace. Parents who stay home with children often have similar difficulties with balance. Between driving to children’s activities, tending to the home and family, volunteering, and many other self-imposed duties, parents at home often have less time than their work-away counterparts.

Curiously, many people see it as a badge of honor to cram as many activities and hours of productivity into a day as possible. But is that really living?

Becoming clear about your priorities is the first step toward achieving a well-balanced life. Life tugs in a million different directions. People demand your time and attention. It is completely up to you to decide where and how you want to expend your time and energy. To begin this process, try this exercise:

• If you could focus on one thing in your life and just one thing, what would that be? Work? Children? Spouse? Relationships? A hobby?

• Write down this one area of focus. Then repeat this exercise four more times so that you have a list of five priorities.

• These are the areas where you want to spend the vast majority of
your time.

- Now examine how you are actually spending your time.

- Are you spending a lot of time in areas that are not even on your list of priorities?

- Is the balance of time you are spending on each priority divided appropriately for you?

If you want to live a meaningful life, you need to spend most of your time on the things that are most important to you.

Doggedly protect your time and drop any activities or commitments that don’t support your list of five priorities. Life will continue to tug at you from many different directions, but that doesn’t mean you have to comply.

Get comfortable saying no to most everything, and embrace the fact that saying no to many things means saying yes to your valued priorities.

“Be aware of wonder. Live a balanced life - learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some.”

-- Robert Fulgham

Creating balance also means protecting your home and personal life from disruptions.

- Make your home a sanctuary where intrusions from work are the exception rather than the rule.

- Turn off your cell phone and computer.

- Cut back on the amount of television you watch and spend more time with those you love, doing things that bring you pleasure and enjoyment.
Focus your time on yourself and your family and leave thoughts and worries about your job at the door.

As you define your list of life priorities, examine whether your list reflects a well-balanced life. If most of your priorities are related to just to work or to a hobby, then you are defeating the purpose of creating a balanced and meaningful life. Let’s take a look at other areas of a meaningful life.

“The best and safest thing is to keep a balance in your life, acknowledge the great powers around us and in us. If you can do that, and live that way, you are really a wise man.”

-- Euripides
Contribution

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You’ve heard the question before – “What do you want people to say about you at your funeral?” It’s an uncomfortable question but one that forces you to pause and consider how you are living your life.

Everyone wants to feel as though they’ve left a mark on the world. They want to be remembered for making a positive contribution in some way.

The human life span is such a tiny blip in the vast expanse of eternity. If we have not left some vestige of positive change, love, compassion or kindness, then the purpose of our very existence comes into question. Randy Pausch, the author of *The Last Lecture*, was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in September of 2006 and knew he had a very short time to live (he died in July 2008).

As a husband, father of three young children, and professor of Engineering at Carnegie Mellon University, he had already made a significant contribution to his family, his students, his community and the world. But he saw an even greater opportunity for contribution where most would see a reason to despair. He decided to view his cancer diagnosis as an opportunity to leave a legacy about how to live your life with dignity, honor and truth.

His goal was to use this “last lecture” (which he first presented at Carnegie Mellon and later put in a book) to pass on his knowledge and life lessons to his children when he is no longer around to do it in person. In the Lecture, Pausch offers a step by step path to achieving one’s dreams using his own experiences as a son, educator, husband and father. His legacy extends beyond his children and has touched millions of people worldwide. (For more information on Randy Pausch, visit [http://download.srv.cs.cmu.edu/~pausch/news/](http://download.srv.cs.cmu.edu/~pausch/news/) )

You don’t have to be diagnosed with a terminal illness to decide you want

“It is not what we get. But who we become, what we contribute... that gives meaning to our lives.”

-- Anthony Robbins
to leave a legacy. And your contribution doesn’t have to be written in a book or featured on Oprah. Our contributions can be an accumulation of small acts and choices we make daily – helping out our friends, volunteering, being a loving spouse.

In a recent survey of 100 Americans turning 100-years-old, eighty nine percent say they most want to be remembered as a good parent. After living so long and achieving many things, these centenarians don’t want to be remembered for their work or life accomplishments. They want to leave a legacy through the day-to-day efforts, sacrifices, love and joys of parenting, and raising decent citizens for the next generation. How simple.

Why does contribution make one’s life more meaningful? Here are a few reasons:

- **Our contributions can impact future generations for the better.** Those who come after us will have only what we leave them. We are stewards of this world, and as such we are called to leave it better than we found it, even if it’s a seemingly small contribution.

- **Our lives have the power to create good or evil.** Choosing good has a ripple effect on everyone we encounter. There are parents who have blessed their children with love and support and other’s who have ruined their children’s fragile minds and hearts. There are people who have changed the world for good and people who left a wake of pain and destruction behind them wherever they went.

- **It is an act of responsibility to contribute.** All good men and women should take responsibility to create legacies that will take the next generation to a higher level. Purposefully making a contribution for others breaks the grip of selfishness that can be inherent in us. It keeps us focused on the big picture and on the long-term impact of our actions.

Think about the ways you can make a contribution in your life, whether it’s at home, in your community, or at work. Do you have something to offer the world? Here are some different approaches to contribution:
1. **Contribution of Excellence** -
   Strive to be your best every day in all that you do. As you work toward excellence for yourself, you inspire excellence in others. Serve as a role model for your children, your friends and your colleagues. You can leave your mark by raising the standards and actions of everyone around you.

2. **Contribution of Encouragement** –
   Adopt a voice and attitude that offers hope and encouragement. Lift people up by your very presence and your interest in others. Do you have a teacher or mentor who encouraged and motivated you? Become that person for others. Be a positive voice in a world of negativity, and you will be remembered for it.

3. **Contribution of Purpose** –
   What are your strengths and skills? You may have some that you take for granted but that others see as quite valuable. Use your strengths and talents for a higher purpose. If you cook, prepare a meal for someone else. If you write, create something useful or inspirational. If you are a good listener, invite someone to talk. Make your life about something bigger than you.

4. **A Contribution of Love** –
   Think about those you love and the people who love you. What kind of impact have they made on your life? Perhaps this is the most valuable and memorable contribution you will ever make. Express and receive love openly, abundantly and joyfully. Let those you love know how you feel through your words and actions. These are the people who are most deeply touched and inspired by your contributions.

Every word you speak and action you take can be a contribution for a higher purpose. Bring your awareness to this concept and begin to see your life as platform for touching the world in a positive way. Proactively find ways to apply your talents and skills in ways that serve others and bring joy, humor, beauty, and love into this world.
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Relationships
A loving relationship is one in which the loved one is free to be himself -- to laugh with me, but never at me; to cry with me, but never because of me; to love life, to love himself, to love being loved. Such a relationship is based upon freedom and can never grow in a jealous heart.

-- Leo Buscaglia

If you look at your list of top five life priorities, have you listed certain people in your life as one or more of those priorities? Our close relationships are probably the most important and meaningful facets of our lives. Our spouses, children and extended family and friends are vital to our sense of well-being and satisfaction in life.

Research even suggests that relationships are as vital to our health as good nutrition and regular exercise, perhaps more so. In one study which followed 10,317 people from birth over thirty six years, data on social relationships was collected along with biological markers important for indicating wear and tear on the body.

Measures included systolic blood pressure, urinary cortisol levels and epinephrine levels. The data supported the idea that negative relational experiences are associated with greater wear and tear on the body (Hauser et al., 1993).

Medical studies show that:

- People who have a strong social network tend to live longer (Berkman, 1995).
- The heart and blood pressure of people with healthy relationships respond better to stress (Broadwell, 1999).
- Strong social networks are associated with a healthier endocrine system and healthier cardiovascular functioning (Seeman, 1994; Úchico, 1996).
- Healthy social networks enhance the immune system’s ability to fight off infectious diseases (Cohen, 1997).
The bottom line on relationships is this:

- People in supportive, loving relationships are more likely to feel healthier, happier and satisfied with their lives and less likely to have mental or physical health problems or to do things that are bad for their health.
- People in supportive, loving relationships help each other practically as well as emotionally.
- Supportive partners share the good times and help each other through the tough ones.

But here’s the challenging question about relationships. If they are so valuable and beneficial for us, why do we so often take them for granted or just plain abuse them? Why do we save our most hurtful words for those closest to us?

Why do we often spend more time on our jobs, our tasks, our hobbies, or just watching television than we do nurturing our valuable relationships? We want a partner, we want children, friends and family. But do we tend to them properly?

Perhaps our inattention to our relationships stems from laziness or inertia or boredom. Or maybe it stems from fear – fear of intimacy, fear you aren’t deserving of closeness, fear of letting down your guard or feeling uncomfortable. Sometimes it takes a jolt of awareness to realize how precious these relationships are. When you do, you will want to take them to a higher plane.

In his book, *Reinventing the Body, Resurrecting the Soul*, Deepak Chopra says the following about marriage (which applies to all relationships):

> What keeps a marriage alive is that you see more to love in your partner; the possibilities grow over time. Intimacy with another person is an incredible discovery, for which there is no substitute. When you find such intimacy, you naturally want more – you want it to grow closer. On the other hand, desire that doesn’t go
When we put up walls around ourselves or allow distance to develop between us and our beloved, our child or our friend, we deny ourselves the deep fulfillment and meaning that is possible in our relationships. Developing intimacy, closeness, trust and depth in your relationships requires your time and attention. You cannot plant the seeds of a relationship and then forget to water it, pull the weeds or spend time in the garden.

Tending to your relationships properly involves desire, self-examination, behavior change, forgiveness, and creativity.

**Desire.**
You must truly want the relationship and see the inherent value in the person. This requires more work for some relationships than others. You can choose your friends. Your spouse, your children and your family require a higher level of awareness and compassion. The desire to have a loving relationship must be larger than the difficulties, hurtful behaviors and idiosyncrasies of the other person.

**Self-examination.**
Be willing to look at yourself and see what is holding you back from real intimacy. If it is just inertia, that’s easy to correct. But more often than not, there are fears to be addressed, wounds to heal, and judgments to abandon. You must address these to reach a higher, more mature relational level with anyone. Ask yourself these questions:

- Do you put up defenses or keep yourself at a distance from the people in your life?
- Do you have past hurts or self doubts that make you fearful of getting too close?
- Do you have the need to be right all the time?
- Do you fear being judged?
- Do you harbor guilt or shame?
- Do you create dramas or anger to push people away?
It can be very scary to face the answers to some of these questions or to even admit they apply to you. Sometimes the best way to see yourself is through the eyes of those who love you. It is hard to ask people to appraise your level of intimacy or relational skills, but it’s often the best reflection of areas of growth for you.

Growth rarely comes without some discomfort, but it is always worth going through the discomfort to get to the other side. A trained counselor or coach can help you safely address the areas that are limiting your relationship growth. (Start by letting go of the belief that therapy is for weak people, if you hold that one!)

**Behavior change.**
If you have the desire for meaningful relationships and have looked at yourself deeply and listened to those around you, the next step is changing the beliefs and behaviors. Addressing fears and wounds with a counselor is a huge step that fosters growth and change. Other changes take sustained awareness and practice, and perhaps gentle and loving reminders from a caring person. The most profound factor in changing your behavior is your own desire to do so, then repeatedly taking action to reinforce new behaviors.

**Forgiveness.**
This is the cornerstone of an enlightened relationship. Forgiveness begins with compassion. You have compassion and love for the other person. You recognize and relate to their humanness. You acknowledge the inherent value in releasing the negative forces of anger and resentment. You desire healing and growth.

Forgiveness must be offered for yourself alone and unconditionally, whether or not it is requested or offered in return. Most people are good at their core and are doing the best they know how at any given moment. Everyone is at their own stage of personal growth.

**Creativity.**
It’s not enough to want change and heal wounds. Use the power of love as a creative force. Continue to look at the many extraordinary layers of uniqueness and beauty in your beloved, your child or friend. Actively
explore those layers and enjoy the abundance and variety the world lays at your feet.

Seek change, adventure, beauty, wonder, fun, learning, understanding, new ideas and companionship. You don’t need much money or material things to be creative. The universe has so much to offer. You could spend your life soaking it all in.

Take a look at the relationships you have now, the ones that are most important to you. Don’t let them languish. Go tend to them lovingly today.

“Piglet sidled up to Pooh from behind. ‘Pooh!’ he whispered. ‘Yes, Piglet?’ ‘Nothing,’ said Piglet, taking Pooh’s paw. ‘I just wanted to be sure of you.’

-- A.A. Milne
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Beauty
Perhaps you don’t think of beauty as necessary to a meaningful and fulfilled life. Many people live every day of their lives without experiencing much beauty at all. They have it around them, but they simply don’t take time to appreciate it.

Beauty is the quality that thrills the soul and makes life vibrant. But you don’t know that until you invite beauty in to your life.

Beauty elevates us beyond the mundane or even the extraordinary. It exists as an expression of something divine – whether in nature or human inspiration. Like love, beauty isn’t fleeting, and its effects are cumulative. It stirs your heart, your spirit and your intellect. The more you seek and absorb it, the more profound and essential it becomes to you.

To incorporate beauty into your life, recognize and embrace the fulfillment and connectedness it provides, and slow down long enough to savor it. That’s hard to do in a fast-paced world complete with near instant gratification. Like a fine wine or a great meal, beauty can’t be rushed.

You may have read this story about the violin player at a Washington, DC Metro Station on a cold January morning in 2007.

A man with a violin played six Bach pieces for about 45 minutes. During that time approximately two thousand people went through the station, most of them on their way to work. After three minutes, a middle aged man noticed there was a musician playing. He slowed his pace and stopped for a few seconds and then hurried to meet his schedule.

4 minutes later
The violinist received his first dollar: a woman threw the money in the hat and, without stopping, continued to walk.
6 minutes later
A young man leaned against the wall to listen to him, then looked at his watch and started to walk again.

10 minutes later
A 3-year old boy stopped but his mother tugged him along hurriedly. He stopped to look at the violinist again, but the mother pushed hard and the child continued to walk, turning his head all the time. This action was repeated by several other children. Every parent, without exception, forced their children to move on quickly.

45 minutes later
The musician played continuously. Only six people stopped and listened for a short while. About twenty gave money but continued to walk at their normal pace. The man collected a total of $32.

1 hour later
He finished playing and silence took over. No one noticed. No one applauded, nor was there any recognition.

No one knew this, but the violinist was Joshua Bell, one of the greatest musicians in the world. He played one of the most intricate pieces ever written, with a violin worth $3.5 million dollars. Two days before, Joshua Bell sold out a theater in Boston where the seats averaged $100.

This is a true story. Joshua Bell playing incognito in the metro station was organized by the Washington Post as part of a social experiment about perception, taste and people’s priorities. The larger question is this: why do we not value beauty enough to stop and enjoy it? Think of what we might be missing.

“A morning-glory at my window satisfies me more than the metaphysics of books.”

-- Walt Whitman
Consider inviting beauty into your life more regularly. There are many simple ways to savor beauty.

- When you wake in the morning, step outside for a few minutes. Look at the trees, the sky, and the clouds. Listen to the sounds of natural things – birds, water, wind.
- If you live in the city, stand at your window and look outside at the sky, the architecture of the buildings, the way a shadow is formed on the ground below.
- Bring flowers or a rock or water garden into your home.
- Turn off the television and play beautiful and stirring music instead.
- When you drive to work or carpool, get off the highway or main roads and take a scenic route.
- Stare at an individual flower and study the intricate and delicate elements of it.
- Take a blanket into your yard, lie down and stare at the stars.
- Study the grace in the movement of a cat.
- Keep a book of poetry or beautiful photographs by your bed or in your office.
- Prepare a meal creatively, paying attention to the joy of the preparation, the smells, the simplicity of chopping and stirring. Arrange the food artfully on the plate. Set a beautiful table. Light candles. Play soothing music. Savor the meal.
- Collect material things for yourself or your home artfully. Don’t buy just to fill a space. Have less that means more and that captures your eye for beauty.
- Remove ugly, dirty or cluttered things from your living environment.
- For exercise, try something that involves beautiful movement like dance or tai chi.
- Keep your camera with you and photograph beauty things.
- Look deeply into the eyes of your child or your beloved.
- Rather than typing a quick e-mail thank you, buy some artful note cards and write a beautiful, thoughtful personal note.
- Try to find beauty in the smallest places or the most mundane environments.
With more time, try these things:

- Visit a gallery or art exhibition.
- Go to a dance performance or classical or jazz music concert.
- Take a long walk or hike in a beautiful setting.
- Plan a vacation to a new place known for its beauty, in the mountains or at the ocean – or anywhere inspiring.
- Plant a flower garden or a tree.
- Watch the sun rise or set.
- Take a weekend trip to see the fall leaves or snow.
- Visit a beautiful building or structure and admire the architecture and design.
- Watch a spider build a web.
- Go to an athletic event and watch the grace of a great athlete.
- Take an art class or learn to play a musical instrument.
- Read a book by an author known for exquisite language. (You can find a list here: www.amazon.com/Books-with-beautiful-language/lm/1LO1Q9HDVO9MS.)
- Go to an observatory and look through a giant telescope at the cosmos.
- Go to an upscale jewelry, clothing, furniture, or luxury car store (or whatever you find exquisite) and without making a purchase, simply appreciate the beauty of something finely made.
- Visit a butterfly garden.

“The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and all science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead: his eyes are closed.”

-- Albert Einstein
Creativity
When you were a child, up until kindergarten or first grade, you were unabashedly creative. You sang and danced without fear or embarrassment. You painted and colored and made crazy little clay and play dough things. You made up stories, built forts, and day dreamed.

By about second grade, our education system began to curb your natural creativity. The focus was on math and language, with the end goal of developing students who could test well. Art, music, drama and dance were relegated as supplementary subjects which were the first to be cut back or cut out when funding was low.

Thinking outside of the box was often discouraged in an effort to have children conform to the structure of the school system. Experimentation and failure generally were frowned upon. We became fearful of fostering creativity because we didn’t want to take the risk of failure. Success was defined by doing well enough in school to get into a good college.

Sir Ken Robinson, PhD is an internationally recognized leader in the development of creativity, innovation and human resources. He spoke at the annual TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) Conference in Long Beach, California, about children and creativity and the vital need for school systems to incorporate creative disciplines and learning styles into the curriculum.

Here’s a link to his amazing and very humorous talk on the importance of creativity: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iG9CE55wbtY

Why is creativity so important?

Rabindranath Tagore, the greatest writer in Indian literature, sought to answer this question, through his essays, plays, poetry, and stories. For Tagore, creativity is a deep soul-connecting process, through which we strive to relate our souls to the wholeness of life – to different cultures, to
nature, and to the divine.

Engaging in creative endeavors is critical to the meaningful development of both personality and human relationships. “When humanity lacks this music of soul, then society becomes a mechanical arrangement of compartments, of political and social classifications,” suggests Tagore.

There is much research to support the benefits of creativity as a key component of creating successful outcomes for youth.

- Programs that teach children creative problem-solving skills help them to become successful adults who can question the accuracy of information and put information to constructive use (Todd & Shinzato, 1999).
- Student involvement in creative activities (such as performing arts and group activities) has been found to reduce drop out rates and to improve student motivation (Sautter, 1994).
- Mental health practitioners have also discovered that creative activities can serve to safeguard children from stress (Honig, 2000).
- Creative thinking allows both young people and adults to “avoid boredom, resolve personal conflict, cope with increasing consumer choice, accept complexity and ambiguity, make independent judgments, use leisure time constructively, and adjust to the rapid development of new knowledge” (Strom, 2000, p. 59).

So what about you? Do you see yourself as creative or even wish to be? If you compare yourself to creative types you know who excel in art, music, writing, dance, or acting, you may not consider yourself creative. However, creativity is not only the domain of the arts. Nor is it available just to those who were born with natural artistic gifts and abilities.

“Even if we don’t have the good fortune to discover a new chemical element or write a great story, the love of the creative process for its own sake is available to all,” says Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in Creativity: Flow and Psychology of Discovery and Invention. “Each person has, potentially, all the psychic energy he or she needs to live a creative life.”
After studying 91 well-known creative and influential people, Csikszentmihalyi determined that creativity for anyone in any discipline requires the same skill set: dedication, hard work, actively seeking new challenges, boldness, and the willingness to follow a creative endeavor to the very end.

These are certainly skills everyone can master.

“What allows certain individuals to make memorable contributions to the culture is a personal resolution to shape their lives to suit their own goals instead of letting external rules force their destiny,” Csikszentmihalyi reminds. “Indeed, it could be said that the most obvious achievement of [creative] people is that they created their own lives.”

What happens during the creative process?
- There is a balance between challenges and skills.
- Action and awareness are merged.
- Distractions are excluded from consciousness.
- There is no worry of failure.
- Self-consciousness disappears.
- The activity becomes an end in itself.

“Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes. Art is knowing which ones to keep.”

-- Scott Adams

Here are some of the traits of creativity:
- Creative people take risks.
- Creative people break rules.
- Creative people work without a fear of failure.
- Creative people are comfortable with solitude.
- Creative people are curious about the world.
- Creative people don’t view their creations as work.

In *The Creative Habit: Learn It and Use It for Life*, award winning choreographer Twyla Tharp suggests, “The routine is as much a part of the
creative process as the lightening bolt of inspiration, maybe more.” She suggests that highly creative people are able to create because they are disciplined and stick to routines that nurture and inspire their original ideas. “In order to be creative you have to know how to prepare to be creative,” Tharp says.

There are many simple ways to prepare to be creative and nurture it in your day to day life.

- Try to be surprised by something every day.
- When something strikes a spark of interest, follow it.
- Recognize that if you do anything well it becomes enjoyable.
- To keep enjoying something, increase its complexity.
- Make time for reflection and relaxation – daydream.
- Look at problems from as many viewpoints as possible.
- Produce as many unlikely ideas as possible.
- Capture ideas by writing them down immediately. (Keep a journal by your bed and in your car.)
- Challenge yourself to do or try new things even if you might fail.
- Broaden your repertoire of knowledge in new areas that aren’t natural for you.
- Surround yourself with diverse stimuli – new environments and new people.


Fostering creativity is an exercise in developing your soul and your intellect. It allows you to experience life more profoundly and vibrantly. A life soaked with the elixir of creativity is a life spent in the eternal now. Through creative living, every moment is meaningful.
Personal Growth

The BOLD Living Guide: 7 Ingredients for a Meaningful Life
If you are reading this E-book, you are clearly interested in self-development. Introspection, seeking enlightenment, deepening spiritual connections, understanding relationships, striving for emotional maturity, and defining our values and integrity, are the very tools that assist us in the creation of a meaningful life.

You likely have encountered people who are not the least bit introspective or curious about the deeper elements of human existence. They live their lives like water bugs, skimming the pond and darting from one superficial activity to another, but never taking the time to submerge and discover the treasures under the surface.

Without this deeper level of awareness and learning, life cannot be intensely meaningful. If we are at the mercy of outside circumstances which randomly affect our delight or despair, with no spiritual or philosophical anchor, what then is the purpose of our short lives?

Everything in the physical world will die or decay. That includes our families, our homes, our material possessions, and our own bodies. But what about our consciousness, our awareness of existence? You may believe that consciousness dies right along with us. Even if that’s true, your conscious awareness is a tremendous gift while you are alive.

The physical world offers the opportunity for development and expansion of our consciousness, enabling us to experience growth and change. We all experience growth, but few of us experience it mindfully. As we learn enough lessons unconsciously, we begin to have a glimmer of understanding that conscious growth is our raison d'etre – the reason we are here.

Our physical lives provide the fertile ground for discovering areas of growth we most need. We have fears to overcome, beliefs to let go, wounds to heal, relationships to develop, truths to discover and lessons to be

“When you center your life around conscious growth, life reveals a truly magical beauty.” -- Steve Pavlina
learned. Once we see that this growth is our real purpose for living, then seeking it out becomes paramount.

To further the process of personal growth, ask yourself these questions:

- Where do I have fear?
- What or who makes me angry?
- What makes me insecure?
- What issues, comments or situations make me defensive?
- Where do I feel stuck?
- What beliefs am I holding on to that no longer serve me?
- What parts of my life feel empty or flat?
- What do other people say about me?
- What negative influences do I have in my life?
- What are you clinging to?
- Where are you judgmental?
- How are you critical?
- In what ways are you selfish?
- Who are you dependent on?
- Why are you competitive?
- What makes you feel shame?
- How are you frustrated?
- Why do you feel sadness or depression?

As you answer these questions, dig deeper by asking yourself “why?” Why do I fear making mistakes? (I’m embarrassed.) Why do mistakes embarrass me? (Because I feel stupid.) Why do I feel stupid? (Because I don’t think I’m smart enough.) Why don’t I think I’m smart enough? (Because I was never good at math.)

You see where this goes. Ask questions until you run out of answers. Then challenge your belief with facts or other ideas and work to change your beliefs and feelings. Sometimes this can be done on your own. Often it takes the help of a therapist or coach.

However, once you have awareness around the areas of your life that are limiting your personal growth, you are already growing. Awareness is the key. As you begin see and understand what is holding you back, you have
opened the door to move forward. To support you as you continue your journey of personal development, here are some ideas to consider.


- **Stay humble and teachable.** Admit that you don’t know everything. Listen to new ideas and beliefs. Challenge your own beliefs and open your mind to the possibility that you may be wrong or don’t have the best answer. Even about religion or politics.

- **Choose supportive friends.** Hang around people who also are interested in learning and growing. Be with people who support you and are loving and kind and want the best for you.

- **Join a personal development, religious or support group.** Sharing your journey with others and listening to their stories provides a sense of connectedness and compassion. You can learn so much through hearing and understanding another person’s experience.

- **Find a mentor.** Seek out a person whose philosophy, demeanor, values and style reflect the person you want to be. Ask them to mentor you or silently observe and emulate the qualities of this person.

- **Take a class or go to a seminar.** There are some many interesting classes and programs online -- you would never have to leave home. Here’s a good list of programs: [http://www.worldwidelearn.com/online-courses/personal-development.htm](http://www.worldwidelearn.com/online-courses/personal-development.htm) Also, here’s a list of personal growth seminars held in person in various cities: [http://www.findaseminar.com/gsearchresults.asp](http://www.findaseminar.com/gsearchresults.asp)
Meditate or pray. This is on every personal development list you read, and there’s a good reason for it. Connecting daily with your higher awareness or God (or whatever you believe in) provides you with peace and balance. It opens your mind to divine or inner guidance which gives you direction and insights on your journey.

Work with a counselor or coach (check out http://liveboldandbloom.com/coaching) when you feel stuck or in pain. A good counselor can help you uncover and heal the source of difficulties and wounds in your life. A good coach will facilitate your continued positive self-discovery and achievement of your goals.

You can locate a licensed therapist in your city by visiting this site: http://www.therapistlocator.net/

If you would like to know more about coaching, follow this link: http://liveboldandbloom.com/coaching

“The only journey is the journey within.”

-- Rainer Maria Rilke
The BOLD Living Guide:
7 Ingredients for a Meaningful Life

A Meaningful Life
A meaningful life is a process of creation. Like Michelangelo, you must first see the angel in the marble, then begin to carve away to set him free. Decide what is meaningful for you. Who do you want to be? How do you want to live your life? What kind of relationships do you want? Have a vision of your perfect life.

Then begin carving to create that life. Carve away the excesses that pull you away from what matters most to you. Carve away the limitations, behaviors and beliefs that prevent you from fully enjoying the beauty and creativity of life. As you carve, keep your vision in mind and watch with wonder and discovery as you reveal the angel inside of you.

A meaningful life is an evolution. It is both the practice of carving and creating. It is the daily awareness and work you do to reveal and refine your authentic self -- through relationships, balance, beauty, creativity and personal growth. Today, go create your own meaningful life.

“How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives.”

-- Annie Dillard

**For Continued Reading**

If you would like to learn more about creating a meaningful life and about fearless personal growth, I hope you will visit my blog, Live Bold and Bloom ([www.liveboldandbloom.com](http://www.liveboldandbloom.com)). Several times a week, you will find new articles to inspire and inform you, as well as valuable links, downloads and resources to support you on your personal journey toward a bold and meaningful life.

I would love to hear from you and invite you to comment on my blog or to contact me personally at [mybloomlife@gmail.com](mailto:mybloomlife@gmail.com).

Here’s to living boldly!

Barrie Davenport
About the Author

Barrie Davenport is the creator of the top-ranked personal development blogs, LiveBoldandBloom.com and BarrieDavenport.com, followed by thousands of readers daily. She is a certified professional coach, helping others build self-confidence, find and live their inner passions, and enjoy fuller, happier, and more purpose-filled lives.

Barrie is the author of The 52-Week Life Passion Project. Her writing has been featured in national media and top-ranked blogs and podcast programs.

She’s the creator of The Bold Academy of personal development courses including Simple Self-Confidence, The Path to Passion, and Sticky Habits.

Barrie lives in Roswell, Georgia (a suburb of Atlanta) and has three nearly-grown children.

Free Life Passion Quiz
Find Out Your Personal Score

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