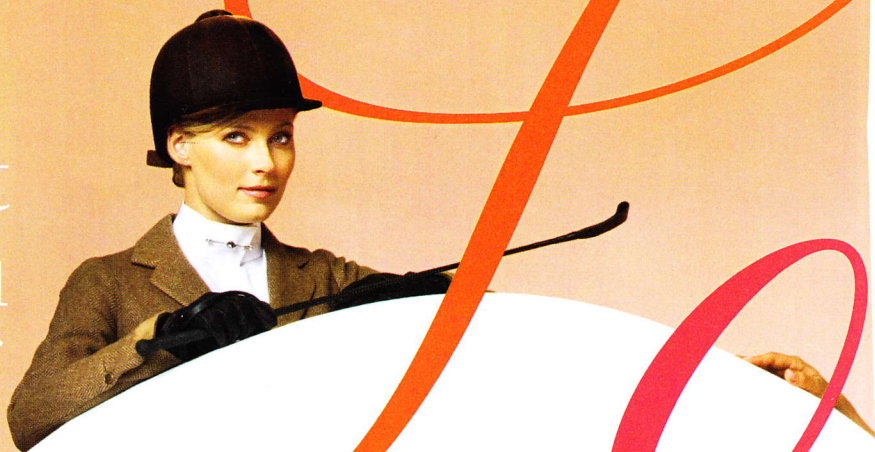


What  
Would You





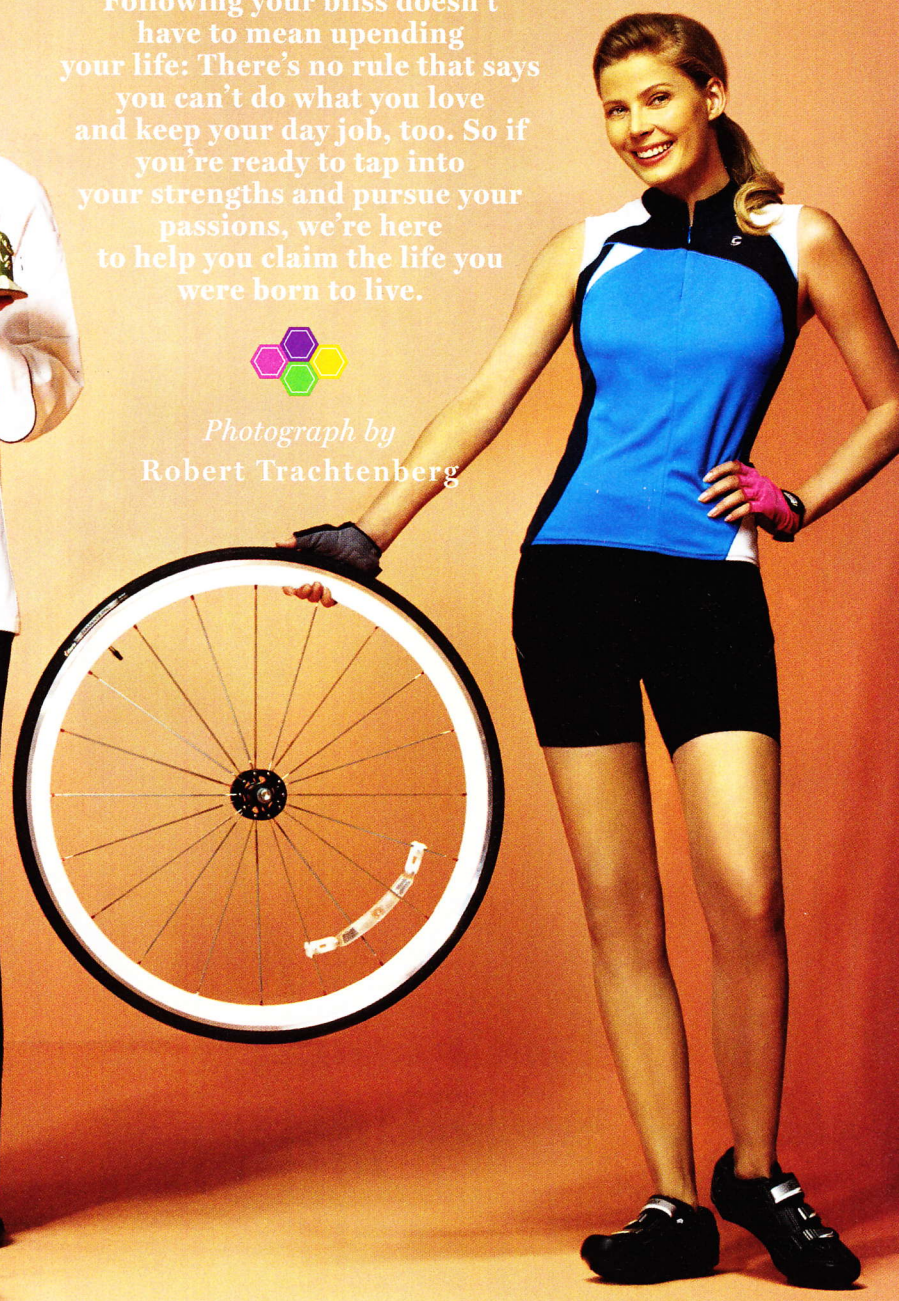
We

# to Be Doing Right Now?

Following your bliss doesn't have to mean upending your life: There's no rule that says you can't do what you love and keep your day job, too. So if you're ready to tap into your strengths and pursue your passions, we're here to help you claim the life you were born to live.



*Photograph by*  
Robert Trachtenberg





*“When you’re honoring  
your calling,  
there’s an undeniable  
sense of stimulation and  
exhilaration.  
It just feels so right.”  
— Oprah*





# Take the Oprah Challenge!

Three little questions to help you find your true calling.

**I THINK OF THEM AS SWEET SPOTS.** They're the moments when we're immersed in the things we were put on Earth to do, the things that tap into our strongest strengths and deepest loves, the things that let us be the most "us" we possibly can, the things we are called to do. Over the years, after talking to countless people who have found their calling, I've come to realize there are three things you can ask yourself to begin to figure out if you're being true to yours.

**1** *How does what you're doing make you feel?* When you're honoring your calling, there's an undeniable sense of stimulation and exhilaration. It feels like you're giving and getting "juice" from the experience. It just feels so right.

What stands out for me when I consider this question are all the years I spent as an anxious news reporter/anchorwoman. And then came the day I cohosted my first show on *People Are Talking* in Baltimore, and it instantly felt like I'd come home to myself. Not

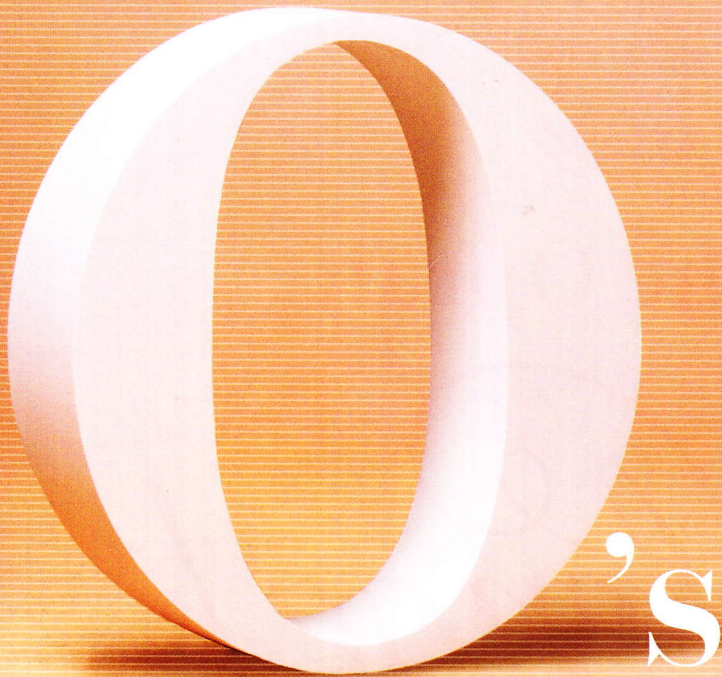
because the conversation was especially earth-shattering or enlightening—the first guest was the Carvel ice cream man, discoursing on his flavors—but because of the feeling that at last I was where I was meant to be.

**2** *Does it have a positive impact on others?* Anything that makes you feel strong, connected, and aligned with your truth does the same when shared—whether it's making pie or choreographing a dance or counseling a friend.

Nothing that really calls you is ever for you alone.

**3** *Does it turn up the volume and increase the vibration of your life?* Whenever you're engaged in the business of who you're meant to be, you're more awake, alive, and ready to play a vital part in your world. When others see your light shining, they'll be inspired to shine theirs, too.

Whatever you're doing right now, stop and ask yourself these three questions. And don't worry if you can't yet answer yes. The next 12 pages will help you get there—which, if you ask me, is pretty sweet!



# *4-Step* Fulfillment Workbook

It starts with a desire to chase what moves you most—and after that, it's about figuring out what you're great at, what it takes to keep you moving forward, and exactly what you need to succeed. Grab a pen and get ready to rediscover yourself...

Step

1

9

The closest I come to a runner's high is when I'm \_\_\_\_\_

8

I've tried it only once or twice, but I really enjoy \_\_\_\_\_

7

If I were to make a homemade gift, it would involve \_\_\_\_\_

**10**  
If I won first prize in a talent show, it would be for \_\_\_\_\_

**1**  
When I was a kid, I dreamed of \_\_\_\_\_

**Start Here**

**Brainstorm your list.**

In each hexagon at left, complete the sentence with a different activity. You may find that your answers range widely (from, say, apple picking to burlesque dancing to meditating)—which is fine. Try not to censor yourself or respond in ways you think you “should.” Be as honest as possible.

**Now whittle it down.**

Ask yourself, *If I had to choose between the first activity and the second, which is more appealing to me?* If you get stuck, close your eyes and envision a life in which the first activity plays a major role and the second doesn’t exist. Now envision a life in which the second activity plays a major role and the first doesn’t exist. Which image feels better? Once you have your answer, put your finger on the winner and compare that choice with the third activity.

Repeat this exercise all the way around the loop, moving your finger to the winning activity after each comparison; when you complete the loop, your finger will be on your number one passion. Write that activity at the top of the list below, and draw an X over the activity in the loop. Now repeat this process four more times (always starting from the top), and each time, skip the X-ed out activities.

You’ve just found your top five passions.

*This exercise was created by Janet Bray Attwood and Chris Attwood, coauthors of The Passion Test: The Effortless Path to Discovering Your Life Purpose (Plume).*

# Find Your Passion

*The first part of figuring out how you want to spend your one and only life: identifying the activities that make you light up—the things you love to do more than anything else. Use this exercise to zero in on them.*

**2**  
I can't pass up a book or movie about \_\_\_\_\_


**3**  
If I played hooky from work for a week, I'd spend the time \_\_\_\_\_

**4**  
Most people don't know this about me, but I really enjoy \_\_\_\_\_

**6**  
If I could star in my own how-to TV show, it would be about \_\_\_\_\_

**5**  
I am the go-to person when my friends need help with \_\_\_\_\_

**MY TOP 5 PASSIONS ARE...**

 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_



THE  
*Quilter*



*Kyra Hicks*

**TWENTY YEARS AGO**, a friend and I were visiting the Taft Museum of Art in Cincinnati and saw an exhibit of African-American quilts. I'll never forget one particular piece by the artist Faith Ringgold—a family sitting at a Thanksgiving table, with their thoughts sewn into the fabric. I just knew right away: I wanted to tell stories with cotton.

It's exciting to start on a quilt. I tape paper to my wall and sketch patterns and notes. Going to the fabric store for the right colors or prints feels as important as the actual sewing. And then I clear out a huge empty space in my family room, and I get busy. I don't know how to draw, so it amazes me that this magical, creative part of me comes out.

Here's an example: A few years ago, when I was yearning for a date on a Friday night, I asked myself, *How can I capture this feeling in fabric?* So I made a quilt that reads **SBF PRAYING FOR A SBM TO SHARE MY QUILT**. The image is of a black woman, and if you look really closely, the background pattern is filled with couples. I love layering the story like that.

I probably couldn't make a living quilting, and I'm glad of that. My 9-to-5 job as a product manager means I don't have to make quilts to sell. There's a freedom to being pure to the art, to not being motivated to pay the mortgage with it. My quilts are motivated only by my need to tell my story.

—As told to Margaret Rhodes

Step

# 2

## Take Stock of Your Strengths

*Identifying your true talents isn't always easy.  
The trick: Let someone else do it for you.*

**HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU** gotten a compliment on your creativity or your patience or your resilience, only to wave it off, assuming that these strengths must come easily to everyone? In my 30 years as a lifestyle/career coach and author, the mistake I see people make time and again is failing to recognize their talents. An honest inventory may be difficult—even impossible—for you to do yourself. So sit with a friend and try this exercise. It's a new twist on something I call the Self-Correcting Life Scenario, and it's one of my favorites. —Barbara Sher

- 1 Ask your friend to name three of your strengths. (The words on the following page may provide some inspiration.)
- 2 Read aloud your top passion from the previous page. Then have your friend tell an imaginary story of your life, based on this passion and your strengths. For instance, "You're organized, creative, and friendly, and your passion is baking. So, you run a bakery where customers can buy cupcakes with little icing portraits of themselves."
- 3 Take a minute to imagine this fantasy as your real life. Tell your friend what appeals to you ("Making cupcakes with artistic frosting would be awesome!") and what makes you cringe ("I'd never start my own business—the thought of bookkeeping gives me hives").
- 4 Now your friend revises the story based on your feedback. ("Okay, you organize monthly bake sales at the local Boys & Girls Club. Kids buy the cupcakes and paint their own portraits.")
- 5 Keep going back and forth until the story feels right. This may take three or 13 rounds—there's no need to rush. Your friend will likely suggest unexpected scenarios. Don't let knee-jerk objections ("That would cost too much!" "When would I have time?") shape your feedback. This is about crafting a scenario tailored to your strengths.
- 6 Stop when the story feels completely satisfying. You've just shaped your passion into a goal and defined what you do and don't want from your calling.



THE  
*Coach*



*Jennifer Smith*

**AS A KID**, I was a horse nut, a real barn rat. I would spend every Saturday at the stables, grooming horses, mucking stalls—anything for extra rides. But when I went to college, my obsession fizzled out. I got a job in book publishing and started spending my days in front of a computer, stuck in my head. I like what I do, but as time passed, I just began to crave something wildly different.

Then, three years ago, I came across a video about horses helping children with disabilities. I felt like it was speaking directly to me. On my first day as a volunteer, I was paired with a 9-year-old girl who had severe developmental and physical disabilities. My job was to walk alongside her for support. When she got in the saddle of a big brown swayback, her face lit up. She couldn't stop laughing! I saw other kids in wheelchairs—kids who spend all day looking up at people—sitting in the saddle and grinning like they were on top of the world. It felt magical. There's no office equivalent, no matter how much you enjoy your day job.

I've since become a certified riding instructor. For six months a year, I'm at the stable on Saturdays from 7 A.M. to 1 P.M. It's something I don't technically have time for—I've missed weekends away with friends, and I schedule "summer" vacations for March because the program starts in April—but you make time for things that matter.

—As told to Rachel Bertsche



Step

3

# Tap Your Motivation

*Having a goal is great. But as Martha Beck can tell you, making sure you have the incentive to stick with it is even better.*

**NOW THAT YOU'VE FRAMED** your passion as a goal, it's time to think about what you'll need to *stay* passionate as you pursue it. Everyone has innate preferences for certain kinds of experience. Some people live to connect socially, others crave moments of personal insight, while still others thrive on the feeling of being the best. Whatever drives you, if you act in accordance with that drive as you move toward your goals, you'll tend to stay on track. If there's a disconnect, you're far more likely to find reasons to lose interest.

This part of our workbook will help you figure out, motivation-wise, what makes you tick. That insight will, in turn, help you reassess the feasibility of your goal. Think of it as a reality check for your dreams.

## Identify Your Motivation Style

*The following quiz is designed to identify the type of incentive you most respond to. For each question, choose the answer that best reflects your true feelings. The only way to fail this assignment is to give less than honest answers.*



### 1. To feel sufficiently loved, I need...

- A** hundreds of dear friends and random admirers tweeting their devotion to me several times hourly.
- B** daily "How ya doin'?" calls or e-mails from my family and several friends.
- C** a warm circle of four to eight intimate loved ones, who connect every few days or weeks.
- D** a couple of buddies I talk to once a month.
- E** a pet snake.

### 2. I'd feel frustrated if other people didn't...

- A** give me whatever I want and agree with everything I say.
- B** rearrange their schedules to accommodate my desires.
- C** listen respectfully to my opinions and ideas.
- D** consider my needs when allocating money, time, or energy.
- E** stop their cars before running me over.

### 3. To attain my fitness goals, I'd have to...

- A** take home an Olympic gold medal.
- B** turn my body into the leanest, strongest machine possible.
- C** eat healthy food and exercise regularly.
- D** exercise moderately a couple of times a week.
- E** open the fridge by myself.

### 4. I'll feel I've achieved enough in this life when...

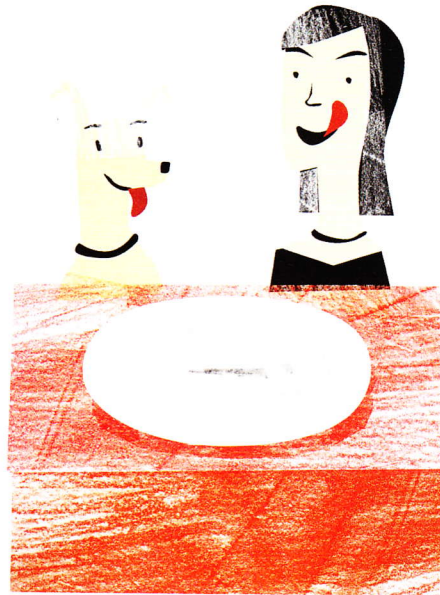
- A** I win the Nobel Prize while orbiting the Earth in a space pod I designed myself.

- B** I'm well known by others in my field, and/or my children are very successful.
- C** I receive recognition from my peers or family, thanking me for my work.
- D** I know I've done a really good job on a project at work or home.
- E** my pants match my shirt.

- C** organize a group of friends or neighbors to work for a good purpose.
- D** set the schedule of activities for my family or close friends.
- E** win at Angry Birds.

**5. To attain inner peace, I'd be willing to...**

- A** live in a cave and meditate forever.
- B** quit my stressful job and sever ties with negative people.
- C** set aside half an hour each day to quiet my thoughts.
- D** read inspiring books or articles.
- E** floss.



**8. To earn the love of my desired partner, I would...**

- A** have my face and body surgically altered to match his/her ideals.
- B** pretend to share all of his/her tastes and preferences.
- C** go outside my comfort zone to try new activities he/she enjoys.
- D** accept the differences between us.
- E** bathe.

**9. For me, "dressing well" means wearing...**

- A** a pearl-encrusted gown originally created for Elizabeth I.
- B** this season's fashions from top designers.
- C** classic clothes that fit me well.
- D** a few favorite outfits I've had for years.
- E** the bib they gave me last time I ate at Red Lobster.

**10. The quest to find absolute truth is more important to me than...**

- A** life itself.
- B** physical comfort.
- C** my favorite TV show.
- D** shopping.
- E** some flavors of ice cream.



**6. I know I'm living well as long as I have...**

- A** my own private island fully staffed with servants.
- B** occasional getaways to nice spas or hotels.
- C** good healthcare, a comfortable home, and education for my children.
- D** running water and electricity.
- E** the freedom to scratch an itch.

**7. I'd feel sufficiently powerful if I could...**

- A** deploy nuclear weapons.
- B** lead a large organization, a charitable cause, or a political movement.



**THE**  
*Cheese-*  
*maker*



*Elena Santogade*

**MY FAMILY** is from Wisconsin, so I've always liked cheese, but my interest didn't get intense until a few years ago. I felt antsy at my desk job, so I started a club: Each week a coworker would bring in a few cheeses to share. For my turn, I visited a cheesemonger in a specialty shop. We shared a piece of Appenzeller—sort of like a Gruyère—and I could taste hay and onion. He said, "Oh, the cow must've gotten into an onion patch." I was standing in this busy, fancy shop in New York City and tasting a connection to a cow in Switzerland—it blew my mind.

I started talking to other cheesemongers. They can be a grumpy group, but I'd visit again and again and ask for offbeat offerings. The more I learned, the more I wanted to try crafting simple ingredients into amazing flavors. Making cheese turned out to feel like a big brain stretch. You focus on basic things, like watching milk change, and your mind gets quiet.

My apartment is tiny, but it has become something of a workshop. A kitchen hook drains soft cheeses into the sink. Two small fridges age my wheels of Cheddar and Manchego. I make cheese every week, and I've been teaching mozzarella classes as well, so huge pots and bowls are perched on shelves. Anyone who walks in can tell who I am: I'm a cheesemaker.

—As told to Nicole Frehsee



## THE Pianist



Ria Dawn Carlo

**THE FIRST TIME** I saw a piano, I was in first grade. My teacher played “When the Saints Go Marching In,” and that was it: I wanted to play. When the others ran to recess, I would practice scales. My parents didn’t go to church, but I went with my art teacher, to play piano there. I begged for lessons and finally began at age 9. At 11, I told my teachers that I wanted to be a concert pianist. They said the odds were slim, and that I’d have to win the Tchaikovsky Competition—a one-in-a-million shot.

That was pretty discouraging, and as time passed, I grew away from music and instead pursued mathematics. For years I worked as an astrophysicist and had time for little else. But three years ago, when I switched jobs, I found myself thinking of the piano. At age 34, I decided to begin again.

As soon as I sat at the keys, I felt as if I’d entered a room made just for me. In the beginning, I used an electric keyboard and pretended I was on a grand piano. Buying a used Yamaha last year was a real commitment. It makes such a booming sound, my husband and I moved to a bigger apartment so I can play for an hour or two every day. Since I started practicing on my concert grand, I’ve won an international competition and performed at a fund-raiser at Carnegie Hall. Onstage, I could feel myself filling with light. These are the best moments of my life.

—As told to Diane Herbst

### SCORING

Each **A** answer is worth 4 points; each **B** answer, 3 points; each **C** answer, 2 points; each **D** answer, 1 point; each **E** answer, 0 points.

**Total score for questions 1 and 8:** \_\_\_\_\_

If your score is 6–8, your need for Connection is high.

If your score is 3–5, your need for Connection is moderate.

If your score is 0–2, your need for Connection is low.

**Total score for questions 6 and 9:** \_\_\_\_\_

If your score is 6–8, your need for Security is high.

If your score is 3–5, your need for Security is moderate.

If your score is 0–2, your need for Security is low.

**Total score for questions 2 and 7:** \_\_\_\_\_

If your score is 6–8, your need for Influence is high.

If your score is 3–5, your need for Influence is moderate.

If your score is 0–2, your need for Influence is low.

**Total score for questions 3 and 4:** \_\_\_\_\_

If your score is 6–8, your need for Accomplishment is high.

If your score is 3–5, your need for Accomplishment is moderate.

If your score is 0–2, your need for Accomplishment is low.

**Total score for questions 5 and 10:** \_\_\_\_\_

If your score is 6–8, your need for Enlightenment is high.

If your score is 3–5, your need for Enlightenment is moderate.

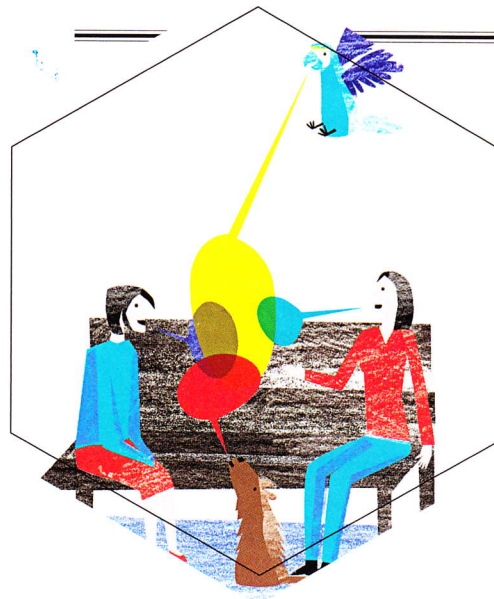
If your score is 0–2, your need for Enlightenment is low.

Write your highest-scoring motivation style below. If you had equal high scores for two or more styles, list them all:



## What Does This Mean?

*Motivation styles aren't mutually exclusive; all of us share all of them to some extent. But understanding your primary motivation style can take you a long way toward setting the right goal—and reaching it.*

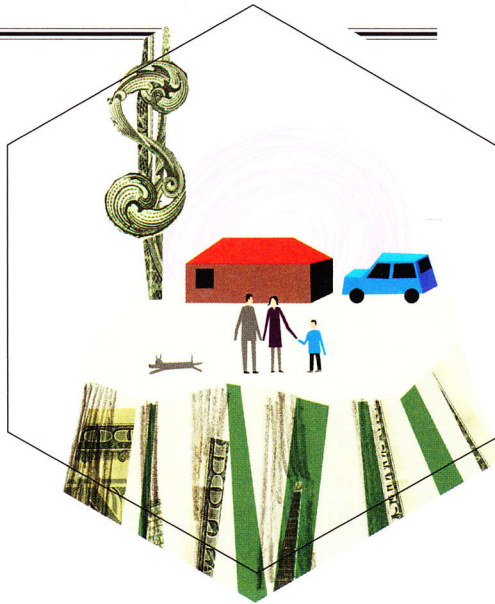


### If you're highly motivated by Connection

You thrive on being part of a group, whether it's an intimate gathering or a massive social movement. You love celebrations and spending time with loved ones. On a plane, you find it impossible not to get to know your seatmate; at the gym, you're the one who musters the aerobic capacity to make friends while Spinning. You're happiest working collaboratively and on team projects, rather than solitary pursuits, and you love to love.

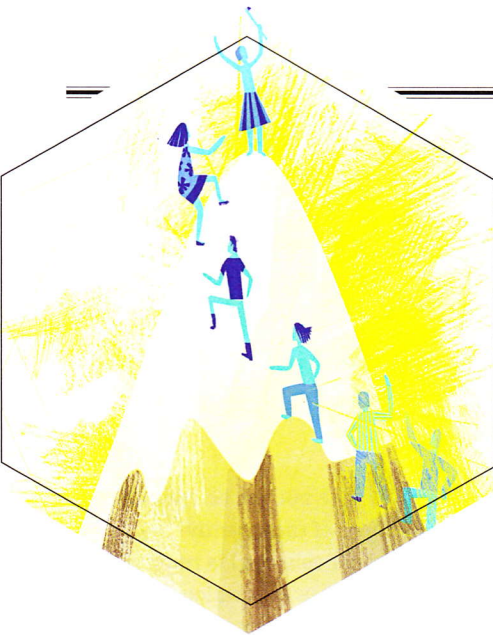
*If you're highly motivated by*  
**Security**

You need to feel financially stable and have the backing of an organization or group. You'd cringe at the thought of going out on your own as an entrepreneur, or traveling the world solo; you gain strength from structure, whether it comes from your job, family, or community. You need to know where your next meal is coming from—not to mention the money for your next mortgage check, car payment, and dog grooming bill.



*If you're highly motivated by*  
**Influence**

You crave the chance to lead people, and spend a lot of time imagining the amazing things you'd like to bring into being—a fabulous new restaurant, a program for saving pound puppies, world peace. People follow you because you're a born leader who loves to inspire. What really motivates you is the process of getting others to act in positive ways. In your case, power doesn't corrupt; it creates.



*If you're highly motivated by*  
**Accomplishment**

Recognition is the fuel that keeps you going. You love activities that involve a clear, measurable "win"—whether it's summiting Kilimanjaro, being the top salesperson in your company, or raising more money for charity than any bake sale in your town's history. You can turn anything into a competition; sometimes you actually care less about what you're doing than the fact that you do it best. For you, life is one big contest.



**THE**  
*Farmer*



*Pattie Baker*

**THE DAY AFTER** 9/11, I found myself at my Atlanta supermarket, staring at peanut butter and bottled water. History has taught that in times of crisis, you have to be able to feed yourself, and I was shocked to see how incapable I was of doing that. I felt overwhelmed and helpless—dependent on that store for getting food to my family's table.

I hoped growing my own food would give me some sense of self-determination in a chaotic world. I started by planting onions outside my kitchen door in three little beds that weren't much of anything. Initially, I was just digging into the dirt, but I wound up digging into my community. A neighbor gave me mint to plant. My family began going to local markets and meeting farmers. When we'd sit down to dinner, the children would say, "Whose beans are these?" or "Whose potatoes are these?" They knew the effort that went into their food. In 2009 I started a community garden that's now 11,600 square feet and 71 members strong.

My garden has grown to a sizable bit of my backyard. I've planted heirloom seeds for vegetables you can't find in the supermarket, like purple beans and lemon cucumber. I work as a writer by day, but now I know I'm a farmer at heart. I feel secure working in my garden. I wake up so excited to get my hands into my little patch of earth.

—As told to Margaret Rhodes



## THE *Dancer*



*Liana Munro*

I CAN SEE myself as a little girl, standing on my father's two-tone shoes, clutching his guayabera as he led us in a salsa. He danced with so much love. In those days, I longed to be a ballerina. But this was Cuba in the mid-1950s—the revolution was under way. Weeks before I was to dance in *Cinderella*, the theater was bombed.

When I was 13, my parents sent me to school in Jamaica and I stopped ballet. I graduated, got married, and moved to Florida. We had two daughters and they both danced. For years I coordinated recitals and helped with costumes. When my daughters performed, I felt so much joy, as if I were dancing through them. Then they left home, and life revolved around my work in exports. But shortly after I turned 64, two friends happened to ask, "If you could pursue any dream, what would it be?" The answer was dance, of course. I had never stopped loving it. With their encouragement, I started lessons in salsa, rumba, and bolero—Latin dances from my childhood.

Dancing transported me: I couldn't think or worry while my mind was focused on the steps, and my spirit was moved by the rhythms. I'd go to the studio after a stressful day and leave relaxed and happy. Now I dance at least four days a week. My goal isn't to be the best dancer. I just want to dance with passion, the way my father did so many years ago.

—As told to Jeryl Brunner



*If you're highly motivated by*

## Enlightenment

Because the things that drive other people—wealth, fame, social ties—leave you feeling incomplete, you sometimes feel like an odd duck. You spend lots of time contemplating what it is that calls you. You may be pulled toward yoga, meditation, religion, or nature. To you, a "fun" trip to Vegas would be a nightmare; a good time is lying under the stars discussing the meaning of life with a friend, your spouse, or your cat.

## Reality-Check Your Goal

*Write down the goal you created with your friend in Step 2:*



Now, in light of your primary motivation style(s), reconsider this goal. How well does it correspond to the type of rewards and incentives you need?

You may find that your goal doesn't match your inner drive: You'd love to row across the Atlantic solo, say, but you're driven by Connection. Maybe in choosing, you were unconsciously influenced by other people's opinions, or by your own sense of what constitutes a "worthwhile" way to spend your time.

**Whatever the reason, if your goal simply doesn't match your heart's desires, now is the time to choose again.** Go back and look at the second and third passions you identified in Step 1, and revisit your strengths in Step 2. Aligning your ambitions with your true personality is an important part of staying healthy, resilient, and enthusiastic.

Of course, there are also goals that seem an unlikely fit for a given

motivation style but can be tweaked to give you more of the incentive you need. For example, if your goal is running a marathon but your motivation preference is Enlightenment, you could turn your training into "running meditation." If you're an Accomplishment junkie and you want to help victims of domestic violence, you could propose a specific goal-oriented project at a local shelter, or have two teams of volunteers compete to collect the most donations.

**Even if your goal is well aligned with your motivation style, you can probably amp it up.** For example, if you value Connection and your goal involves saving oily seabirds from tanker accidents, can you bring your loved ones together to bond with you on a mercy mission? If you thrive on Influence and your goal involves working for civil rights, can you initiate a social-media outreach plan as part of the project?

If you're a **Connection** lover, ask yourself: *How could I add more social interaction to my goal?*

If you're a **Security** lover, ask yourself: *How could I add more financial rewards to my goal?*

If you're an **Influence** lover, ask yourself: *How could I add more leadership to my goal?*

If you're an **Accomplishment** lover, ask yourself: *How could I add more competition to my goal?*

If you're an **Enlightenment** lover, ask yourself: *How could I add more freedom to my goal?*

Restate your goal here, modifying it to increase the reward that motivates you most:



## Forging Ahead

*As you move toward your goal, make sure to fill every possible step with the rewards that motivate you best.*



If you crave **Connection**, look for mentors who can guide you, a group that can support you, and ways to get your family involved in your activities. Say your goal is learning to knit: Find out if there's a knitting circle at your local yarn store; join ravelry.com, a social network for needlework aficionados; try to get your mother or daughter to learn alongside you.

If **Security** is what drives you, avoid risks and embrace structure so you can relax and enjoy what you're doing, feeling safe and worry-free. If your goal is doing yoga but the cost of classes stresses you out, offer to assist the teacher before class in exchange for free lessons. If you long to travel, start with all-inclusive packages that take care of the details for you.

If you're motivated by a need for **Accomplishment**, try to make everything a game in which you can shoot for a clear goal and compete, even if you're only competing with yourself. If your goal is writing poetry, start taking part in poetry slams. If your goal is becoming fluent in Chinese, enlist a like-minded buddy and see who can get through language-learning software with the highest score.

If you're an **Influence** lover, don't hesitate to set group goals and galvanize others to help you achieve them. Why just volunteer to help famine victims in Somalia when you can organize a fundraiser yourself? Why just master a new skill—whether it's composting or woodcarving—when you can launch a blog that tells others how they can do it, too? Waiting for other people to set the agenda will only frustrate you. Leadership will fulfill you.

If you're most engaged by the quest for **Enlightenment**, don't put yourself in situations that compromise your sense of freedom: getting in shape by joining a fierce "boot camp" class at your gym, plowing through a book you don't like because everyone else in your club is reading it. Instead, devote yourself to meaningful pursuits—taking self-guided nature hikes, perhaps, or cooking mindfully with plants you've grown yourself. Everything you do can fuel your sense of inner awakening, and when it does, you'll be up and running.



## THE Puzzler



Angela Halsted

**I'M NOT** the type of person who likes to try new things: If there's a new restaurant, I'll usually pass. If I get invited to a party of unfamiliar faces, I'd rather stay home. But at my first crossword tournament, the minute I walked in, I felt a calm I'd never felt before—like I had found my people. It's the way I imagine some feel entering church: *This is right*, pure and clear.

About six months before, I had started puzzling, and one day I got stuck and took to the Internet for help. I found a bunch of smart and snarky people, and when I learned of the tournaments I thought, *I have to see this for myself*.

There were about 700 people at that first one: academics, musicians, elite solvers who had been on *Jeopardy!* I knew I could walk up to any of them and have a natural conversation—and that's what I did. A group of us riffed on and on about an obscure opera reference because we all at least knew the composer, the most famous aria, and the characters.

I'm not a recluse—I work as a legal secretary—but I never felt like I fit in with, say, my neighbors. But puzzling is so totally me, and for the people I meet at the few events I fly to each year, it's so totally them. The *New York Times* crossword comes out online at 10 the night before, and ardent solvers start doing it then. By the time I'm done, I'll have an e-mail, like, "What the hell was 41 across about?" Bliss.

—As told to Margaret Rhodes



## THE *Jammer*



*Kevin West*

**WHEN I WAS** a boy, I spent summers on my grandparents' farm outside Knoxville, Tennessee. Those were Tom Sawyer summers—running around barefoot, picking fruit from the garden. I loved looking in Gran's pantry, at the jars of homemade jams and pickled beets she'd "put up." After my grandfather died, a developer turned the farmland into housing. It still pains me to think about that.

But a few years ago at a farmers' market in Santa Monica, I got carried away and bought a whole flat of strawberries. I had some notion of making strawberry shortcake for a dinner party. Then I remembered Gran's strawberry jam. I had never put up preserves before but thought, *Why not?* So I made my first batch—and it was disgusting. I hated the flavor and pectin texture, and I threw it away. Then I tried again; the memory of Gran's perfect, pristine jam goaded me on.

Making batch after batch of jam opened a connection to my past that had been dormant for years. What started as a hobby became an obsession. I've made jam every week and sometimes every day for the past two years. I give jars for birthdays, Christmas, thank-yous—any excuse to share it with friends.

A lot of kitchen work is lonely. But when I'm putting stuff up, it's the opposite of lonely. I sense I'm in the company of family memories. Those strawberries I bought on a lark feel like my destiny now.

—As told to Margaret Rhodes

Step

4

*Go!*

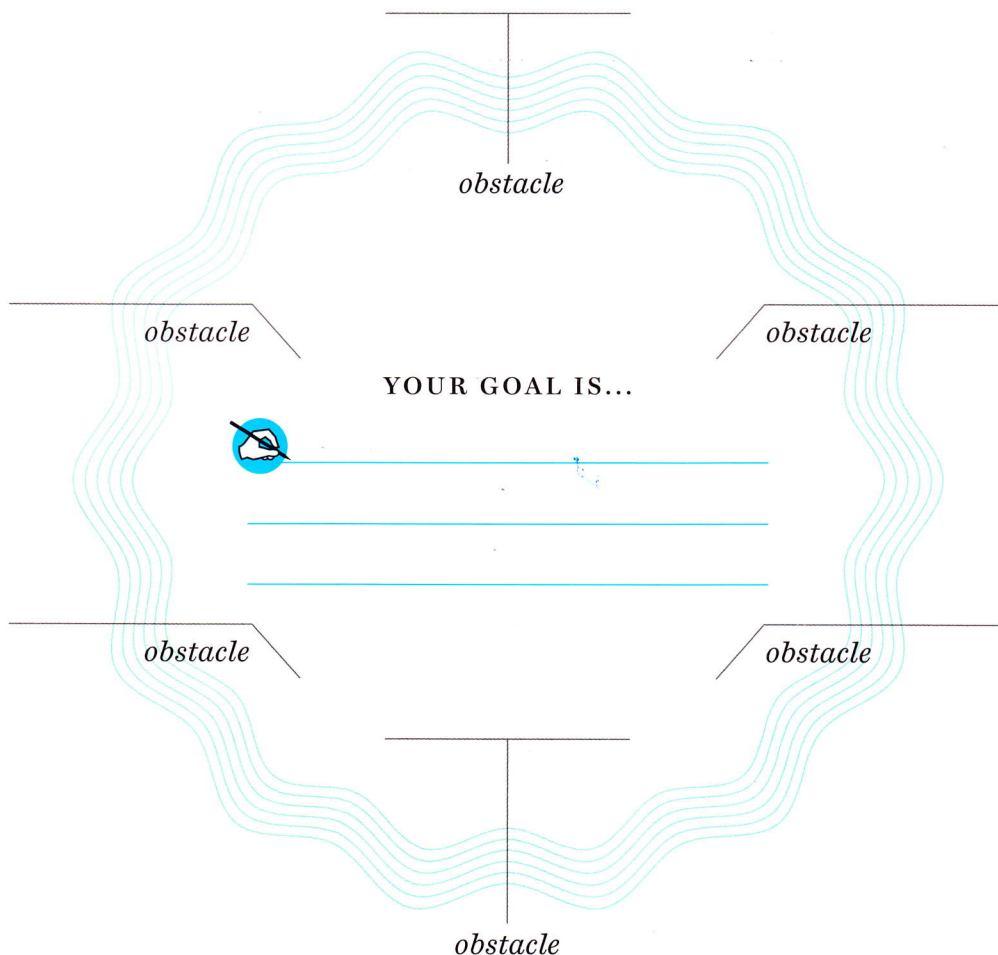
*Your passion—bolstered by strengths,  
fueled by motivation—is crystallizing into a plan.  
Now what? Barbara Sher explains why it's time  
to throw an idea party.*



● **ISOLATION IS A DREAM KILLER.** Sitting alone for too long with an idea is more likely to breed self-doubt than spark an action plan. So before your goal succumbs to inertia, I suggest inviting some friends to what I call an idea party. When you gather people at a party where the goal is making your dream a reality, something amazing happens: A friend of a friend has a contact who can help, your neighbor knows a workaround for what's tripping you up—and suddenly, you're in action.

I've seen so many fantastic plans get traction at idea parties. A woman interested in fashion got instructions on how to work backstage at Fashion Week—and an introduction to a local designer. Someone who couldn't afford to quit her corporate job but dreamed of working with primates met a zoo liaison who invited her to volunteer with spider monkeys on the weekends. A woodcarver who designed harps out of rare wood was upset that her usual supplier in England had run out—until another woman at the party exclaimed that her brother had a stand of the same trees in Australia.

To get started with your own idea party, you first need to know exactly what's holding you back. Write your goal in the center of the circle below. Maybe it's "Train guide dogs for the blind." Or "Set up an art studio in the garage." Or "Study yoga in India." Now consider your goal and listen to all the "but" excuses your brain frantically lobs in your path. *But I have no idea where to train dogs! But the garage gets terrible light! But I don't know anyone who's ever been to India!* Write these excuses outside the circle. These are the obstacles standing between you and your dream—and an idea party will help you knock them down, one by one. Here's how:



## 1 Go broad.

Ideas flow from unexpected places, so don't worry about crafting a perfectly calibrated guest list or balancing out the lawyers and artists. Invite four or five friends and ask each of them to bring someone. Keep it simple: "I'm having an idea party next week. Want to come?" They'll press for an explanation, but resist. Intrigue is part of the fun.

## 2 Start by lying.

I know ice-breaking games aren't everyone's cup of tea, but don't skip this step. It's important that your guests feel loose and comfortable before they start brainstorming—you don't want anyone holding back. I use an exercise called the Lying Game to help people think creatively. It's simple: Each person, in 15 seconds or less, tells the biggest lie they can conjure about themselves ("I'm an alligator psychologist"; "I'm the prima diva of the Metropolitan Opera"; "I eat pixie dust for dinner") and then explains what they like most about the lie they've told ("Alligators are suspicious, and it warms my heart when they trust me").

Your guests might not realize it, but they'll be revealing something through the lies they share. This will help others feel more trusting around them, even if they can't articulate why. And as the game continues, people will build on one another's suggestions—exactly the interaction you're trying to cultivate.

## 3 Let the ideas fly.

When you're ready to get down to business, have everyone sit in a circle. Explain your goal and the obstacles. For instance, "I want to go to India, but I'd like to talk to someone who's been there first; I don't speak the language; I don't know a good travel agent." Then pick up a pen and get ready to write—you're about to be flooded with ideas.

It's important that you not filter responses or discount suggestions—write everything down, to process later. If you think you'll have a hard time with this, ask a friend to be the note-taker. Don't be surprised if guests ping-pong ideas at one another—or call or e-mail days later with new insights. All of it becomes ammunition for you to break down barriers and start living your life to its fullest. ①