

Strategies for Living the Life You Want

You may have a profession at which you excel and a nice house in a good neighborhood. But it's time for some serious reevaluation if you still wonder when the fun starts or what you'll be when you grow up.

"Success doesn't necessarily lead to fulfillment," says David A. Shapiro, coauthor of several books, including "Repacking Your Bags: Lighten Your Load for the Rest of Your Life." "Unless you take time to formulate your definition of success, you can reap many rewards in life but still have a sense of hollowness associated with them."

Here are some suggestions on how you can develop your vision of "the good life" and find ways to balance life's demands with your personal goals and interests.

Take a daily timeout

"It's easy to forget about yourself when you're busy each day concentrating on the business at hand," says Mr. Shapiro.

To learn more about yourself and develop a personal mission statement, take 15 minutes each day to write in a journal about things you care about.

Among the questions you should ask and answer: Am I living in a place I belong? Am I doing the right work? Do I know why I do the work I do? Does all this make me happy?

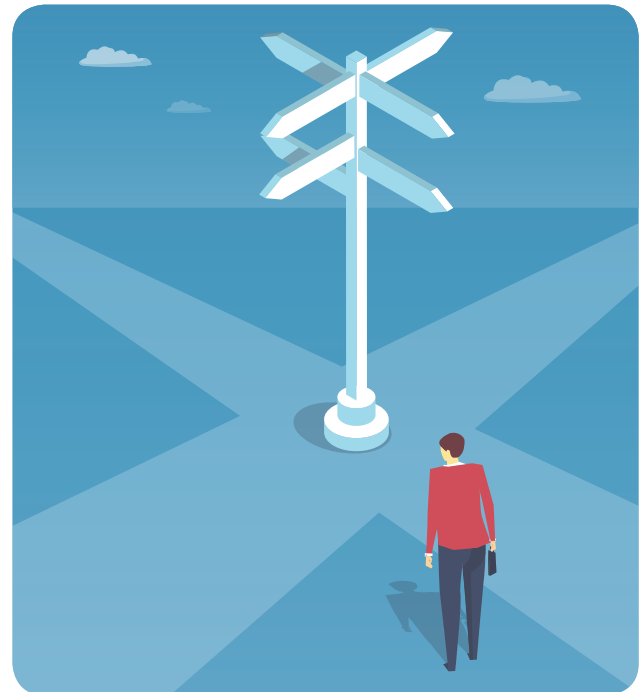
"To develop a sense of who you really are, it's important that you explore where you live, who you love, your work and your purpose," Mr. Shapiro says.

You don't have to work on your whole life at the same time. "The important part is to start looking at your life in detail," Mr. Shapiro says.

Talk to others

While you're reevaluating your life's purpose, talk to your spouse, other family members, close friends and co-workers who can provide valuable insight.

Ask them questions you're also asking yourself, such as: What do you think my purpose in life is? Where do you think is the right place for me?



"Use your friends and family as sounding boards and engage in courageous conversations," says Mr. Shapiro. "People tend not to recognize their own talents and liabilities."

Study the options

Of course, you probably have responsibilities that may prevent you from acting on the changes you want to make. But don't assume you don't have options.

"There may be the opportunity to do something different if you simply explore it with whoever else in your life is depending on you," Mr. Shapiro says.

Take your time

Don't make the mistake of making modifications immediately after you've gained a clearer sense of purpose. Mr. Shapiro doesn't recommend making drastic knee-jerk changes, such as moving to a new city.

Also, keep in mind that the changes you make don't have to be sizable. "Incremental changes can have a profound impact," Mr. Shapiro says. And so can the act of self-exploration. "When you know why you're doing what you're doing, you tend to be more effective, more energized and more excited to get up in the morning," Mr. Shapiro says.

Plan for Unexpected Emergencies at Home

Planning for unexpected emergencies is critical to the safety of your family. By planning ahead for emergencies and other unexpected happenings, you and your family are better able to handle any situation appropriately, significantly reducing the risk of harm. As you prepare, think about key people that you can rely on and possible backup systems for surprise events, like when a sitter or childcare provider is suddenly unavailable. Train your children so they will know what to do when an emergency catches them by surprise, and organize your household so your family can find what they need when they need it.

Keep an Emergency Contact List

Keep a list of important names, phone numbers, and addresses. Review it with your children, spouse, and older adults. Write it in clear, legible, large print so it is easy to read for everyone. Have the list include friends, neighbors, and relatives that can help if something goes awry, and write down which ones are home during the day and which ones are home during the evening. Place the list by the phone and make sure sitters and family members know where it is located and how to use it.

Make sure the list has information for:

- parents' workplaces
- extended family members
- neighbors
- friends
- doctors
- veterinarians
- the fire department
- the police department
- poison control

Back-Up Child Care

Babysitters may cancel at a moment's notice, and childcare providers may not be able to take care of your child on certain

days. Plan for this by keeping a list of backup sitters and childcare centers that can watch your child if needed. Ask friends and neighbors if you can include them on this list.

Train Older Children

If children are old enough to be home without you, train them to solve problems on their own. When it's appropriate, show them how to work important appliances, make snacks, and care for family pets. Think of potential problems they could have while you are at work or running an errand. For example, consider if your child gets into a disagreement with a sibling and you aren't there. Instruct your child on what is to be done in your absence, and when it is appropriate to call you with a problem. If a child does call you with an emergency, stay calm. Get the information you need, and then direct your child on what to do and who to call.

Stock Essential Supplies

Keep food supplies at home for children to use while you're at work or away from home. Stock up on your kids' favorite snacks and easy-to-prepare meals.

You can also keep a petty cash fund in a drawer for children to use when needed.

Make sure you have the following medical supplies in a first aid kit or medical cabinet:

- cotton
- adhesive tape
- bandages
- sunscreen
- a thermometer
- hydrogen peroxide for children
- pain relievers
- burn ointment
- a heating pad
- antibacterial ointment

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