

find YOUR purpose

FEEL LIKE YOU'VE TAKEN A DETOUR FROM THE LIFE PATH YOU ONCE DREAMED OF? HERE'S HOW TO GET BACK ON TRACK.

Dorothy from *The Wizard Of Oz* was lucky. Her path was a bright yellow brick road and, while skipping along it, she had a little jingle to sing in case she forgot where she was headed. For the rest of us, we often need a little more assistance for discovering – and sticking to – our path.

The mysterious life path

'Life path' is a term that can sound daunting, implying some kind of lofty calling that makes your existence truly meaningful. "Many people think their life path has to change the world," explains Melbourne-based psychologist Dr Elizabeth Celi. "But it doesn't." She suggests looking at it like a passion or purpose. "Everyone has a life path – no matter how big or small. It just has to be meaningful to you," she explains. It

could be raising a healthy, happy family, living more sustainably, writing a novel or travelling the world – the key is that you feel inspired and energised by it.

Choosing your own adventure

Not sure what your path is? Start with your values, advises Dr Jeremy Adams, psychologist and owner of Eclectic Consulting. Dr Adams uses a free online tool (www.mindbloom.com) to help his clients identify and chart their values. By looking at different elements of your life, such as health, career, relationships, creativity, spirituality, finances and lifestyle, you can grow your 'values tree.' The site then prompts you to take action – the first step to getting on your path.

If you're a more tactile type of person, Dr Celi suggests using a vision board. "Collect a range of pictures that resonate with you and pin them to a board." Once

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True calling

"I got good marks in my HSC and was told that if I didn't further my education, I'd be wasting my marks," recalls Emily Cadwell, 32.

"So I started a social science degree focusing on psychology. I hated it, and weeks into my first semester

I wanted to quit university. The only thing that kept me there was one little elective subject, creative writing. I'd always loved writing, but no-one ever encouraged me to pursue it," she says. "The next semester, I transferred to an arts degree and majored in creative writing." Emily has worked as a writer ever since, graduating over a decade ago.

you've created a collage, investigate what path the images are pointing to, when you'd like to get there by and whose help you'll need. Start a journal dedicated to the cause and write down plans of how you're going to achieve your aims. "Writing it down helps bring it into reality," says Dr Celi.

Where is my map?

It's inevitable that we sometimes stray from our intended path. Psychologist and author Meredith Fuller explains common ways this can happen.

1 We don't listen to ourselves. "This occurs when we don't monitor what we want in life. Keep asking yourself, 'What is my purpose?'," advises Fuller.

2 We don't trust or back ourselves, and let others make decisions for us instead. "Lacking confidence results in

inaction. Give yourself a reality check to ensure that what you want is reasonable, viable and meaningful to you, then identify the patterns that have worked for you before and get cracking," urges Fuller. "People doubt their abilities or let others choose their path. By all means, ask for opinions, but only follow advice if it aligns with your path." Remember, you know yourself better than they do.

3 We sabotage ourselves by not being healthy or looking after ourselves. "We need quality sleep! We do our best work when we're dreaming, letting our subconscious go to work," says Fuller.

4 We're too lazy to pursue our dreams. "If our life path requires hard work, further study or changing our behaviour, we often can't be bothered," observes Fuller. If this is your case, you might need to break down your goal or mission into smaller, achievable steps, or reassess it altogether – ask yourself if it is

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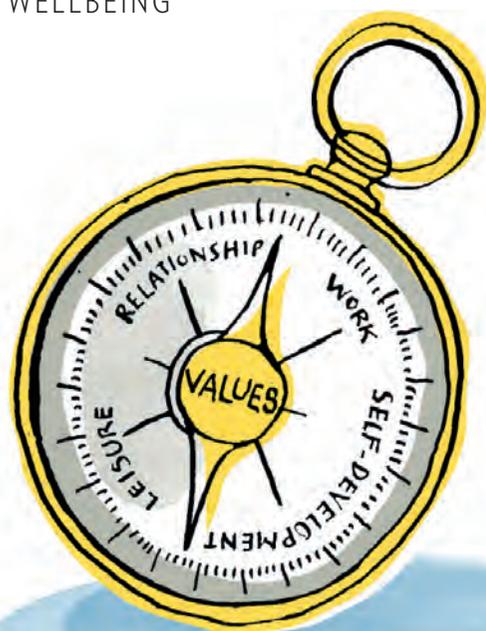
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Seeing the signs

“There were signs our relationship wasn’t great from the very beginning,” says Angelique Gough, 33, teacher. She had been with her partner since she was 20. “We often argued and our values were different.” Yet they stayed together for eight years and even bought a house. “The last six months of our relationship, I was preparing for the break-up,” says Angelique. “I realised that it wasn’t the life I wanted.” Five years on, Angelique is now happily married to a man who shares the same values and outlook as her. They have a house, a puppy and their first child is due next April. “Don’t compromise on what is important to you,” she reflects.

something you truly want to do. Or are you procrastinating for a deeper reason?

A bump in the road

While they’re frustrating if you’re the type who likes to plan in advance, unexpected detours from your life path aren’t necessarily a bad thing. Often, detours help us grow and develop. Sometimes, they can even lead to something better than what you had originally planned. “Detours alert you to new opportunities,” says Fuller. “You might not realise it at the time, but looking back you can see how the detour was perfect for your path.”

Additionally, hurdles along the way can point you in the right direction. “Detours can alert you as to what flows more easily,” explains Fuller. If you keep coming up against obstacles, chances are you’re going the wrong way.

One step at a time

If you feel you’ve stumbled off the path you envisaged for yourself or that you’ve lost direction, Fuller advises stopping and reflecting. “Ask yourself, ‘Am I being myself? Or am I faking it?’ If you’re acting, forcing yourself or unhappy, assess where you are and how you got there. You might need to backtrack to get back onto your original path.”

Dr Adams agrees that if you’ve veered off track, it’s time to start asking

yourself some questions. “Think about your values and what’s important to you, for example, relationships, work, leisure and self-development. Within each area, identify the things that are essential to you, then compare your current situation to that list.” If you’re not living by your values, it can be like going through life without a compass, explains Dr Adams.

Stop, revive, survive

Dr Adams, Dr Celi and Fuller all affirm that reflecting on your goals, dreams and values frequently is the key to creating a fulfilling, purposeful life. Whether you keep a diary, write a list of pros and cons, draw diagrams or check in with a psychologist, reflection will help ensure you’re on track to achieving your goals and dreams. However, there are a few more things psychologists recommend you add to your tool kit:

- ➔ Keep a sense of humour.
- ➔ Don’t compare yourself to others.
- ➔ Prepare for things to go wrong.

Things can get in the way, so you’ll need to think about what they might be in advance, and plan a way to get around them when they arise.

- ➔ Trust your intuition.
- ➔ Learn from past experiences.

“Also, remind yourself that a lifetime is a long time. You can have many paths throughout your life,” advises Fuller. “It’s always better to have lived a life where you can say, ‘I’m glad I tried that’, and not ‘I wish I tried that.’” WW

Baking dreams

“I was a chef for 16 years,” says Lyn Raleigh, 42. “It’s a young person’s industry and I felt like I was getting too old for it. I wasn’t enjoying it anymore and the work environment was quite negative,” she says. Coincidentally, Lyn was working through a self-help book called *The Artist’s Way* by Julia Cameron with a group of friends. Each week they’d meet up to discuss their progress and challenges. At their meetings, Lyn brought along homemade cupcakes. “The group loved them and commented that perhaps I should go into business making cakes. I thought about it and realised that, growing up, I really enjoyed baking and that, even throughout my cheffing career, I always preferred the baking side of cooking.” Deciding that she had nothing to lose, the following week Lyn made a selection of cupcakes and took them to 12 different cafes to sample. “They all ordered a batch on the spot!”

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