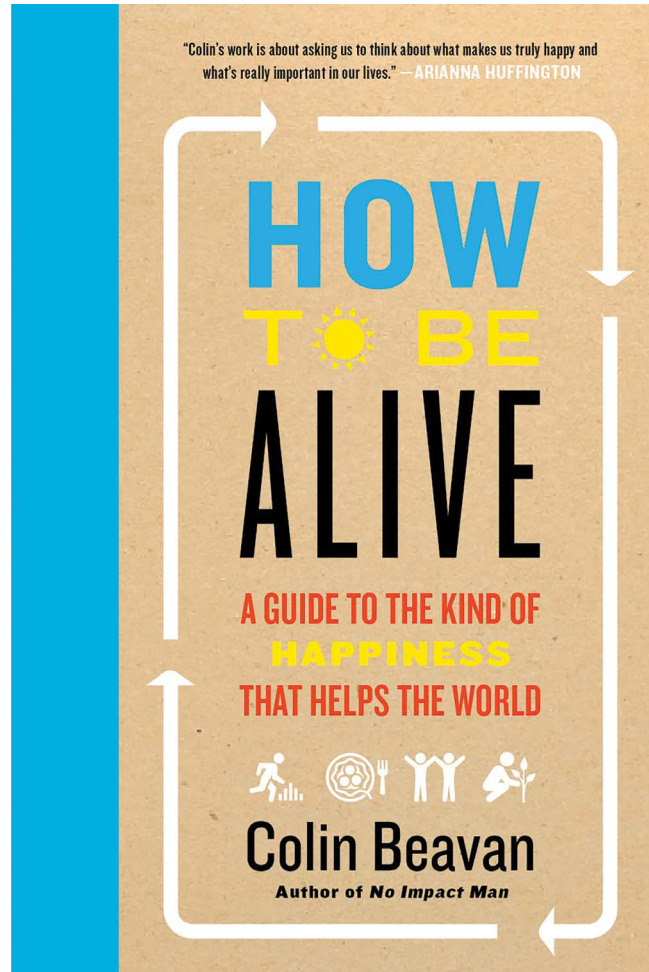


THE *HOW TO BE ALIVE* WORKBOOK

A COMPANION TO



THIS WORKBOOK IS A COMPANION TO ***HOW TO BE ALIVE: A GUIDE TO THE KIND OF HAPPINESS THAT HELPS THE WORLD***. ALTHOUGH IT CAN BE USED ON ITS OWN, USING IT ALONGSIDE THE BOOK PROVIDES A RICHER AND MORE VALUABLE EXPERIENCE.

TO GET YOUR COPY OF *HOW TO BE ALIVE*, GO TO [HTTP://COLINBEAVAN.COM/HOWTOBEALIVE](http://colinbeavan.com/howtobealive)

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Praise for **HOW TO BE ALIVE**

“One of our most thoughtful role models is back with a deep, detailed, and generous Baedeker for how to live a better life.”

—SETH GODIN, AUTHOR OF *WHAT TO DO WHEN IT'S YOUR TURN*

“*How to Be Alive* is rich in wisdom. Read it, reflect on it, and choose how you will live the rest of your life. It might turn out to be the most important book you have ever read.”

—PETER SINGER, AUTHOR OF *ANIMAL LIBERATION* AND *THE MOST GOOD YOU CAN DO*

“Bold, loving, and wise . . . could be considered an essential piece of the map for living in the twenty-first century. Most inspiring is the way Colin Beavan revitalizes an ancient understanding—that our happiness and the happiness of others are interdependent.”

—SHARON SALZBERG, AUTHOR OF *LOVINGKINDNESS* AND *REAL HAPPINESS*

“Colin Beavan’s book will help you inflict untold goodness upon the world—all the while making you a happier person. Highly recommended for any human with a conscience.”

—A. J. JACOBS, AUTHOR OF *THE YEAR OF LIVING BIBLICALLY* AND *DROP DEAD HEALTHY*

“For too long, being happy and doing good in the world have been presented as divergent life paths . . . Beavan convincingly upends this false choice. It turns out that doing good actually makes us happier and healthier. *How to Be Alive* is for anyone who wants both a better life and a healthier planet.”

—ANNIE LEONARD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF GREENPEACE USA AND AUTHOR OF *THE STORY OF STUFF*

“This book is for those who are brave enough to step away from fear, guilt, and self-centeredness and travel the hero’s path. To dare to care about the happiness of others, including other animals, is to ensure your own happiness. In *How to Be Alive*, Colin Beavan reveals his secrets and shows us by his own living example that it is not so difficult to be a happy hero.”

—SHARON GANNON, COFOUNDER OF JIVAMUKTI YOGA

“At a time when the conventional definition of success is material wealth without limits, *How to Be Alive* offers a needed corrective. Colin Beavan starts local with his neighborhood and expands outward to the entire world, showing how we can all live better. When two-thirds of college students believe they’d rather make a killing than a difference, Beavan warns that such a course will kill their spirits and dampen their joy. When the market is flooded with self-help “happiness” books that are both vacuous and self-indulgent, Beavan makes clear that only by helping others can we truly help ourselves and live better. With dozens of imaginative ideas, he offers readers ways to heal themselves that can heal our planet and a divided humanity as well.”

—JOHN DE GRAAF, COAUTHOR OF *AFFLUENZA*, PRESIDENT OF TAKE BACK YOUR TIME,
AND COFOUNDER OF THE HAPPINESS ALLIANCE

“Colin Beavan is a wonderful human and wonderful writer—and therein lies the genius of this book, where he circles in on answers to the unquiet so many of us have: how can I be real and be good and be right and be happy in a world unhinged from its moorings?”

—VICKI ROBIN, COAUTHOR OF *YOUR MONEY OR YOUR LIFE* AND AUTHOR OF *BLESSING THE HANDS THAT FEED US*



INTRODUCTION

Welcome! This workbook will function independently and as a companion to my book, [*How to Be Alive: A Guide to the Kind of Happiness that Helps the World*](#). While I hope readers will gain value from the more thorough discussion contained in [*How to Be Alive*](#), the *How to Be Alive Workbook* delves deeper into the topic as it:

1. Offers a short but complete, self-contained introduction to the concepts discussed in the book *How to Be Alive*.
2. Provides readers of *How to Be Alive* an orderly way to work through and apply the concepts in the book.
3. Further stimulates the conversation about how we can all meaningfully participate in the quest for a way of life that is both safer and happier for us as individuals, and better for the communities and world we live in.

[*How to Be Alive*](#) begins with the epigraph:
Likewise, helping oneself and helping others are like the two wings of a bird.
—Zen Master Won Hyo

One wing will not work without the other. You cannot truly help yourself without helping others and the world. You cannot truly help others and the world without helping yourself. Most of us know this to be true and many of us want to live according to this truth.

Yet it is hugely confusing, in this complicated world, to figure out how to lead a life in line with one's values when the causes of, say, climate change, institutional racism, poverty, war and so many other injustices seem so far away from our own lives.

How are you actually supposed to live a life that is good for you and good for your world? That is what this workbook and the book [*How to Be Alive*](#) are designed to help you figure out. I hope they do!

About Me and How I Came to Write *How to Be Alive*

[*How to Be Alive*](#) is the first book to lay down the experience of a growing national and international movement of people breaking away from the broken paths that seem to be wrecking our world and finding new ones that help it—and make people happier. Members of this movement are questing for and finding new ways of making life choices—in their careers, in what they do with their money, in their living situations and lifestyles, in how they eat and travel, and in all the many other ways we relate to each other.

I became a well-known figure in this movement of seekers back in 2007 when I launched a one-year lifestyle experiment in environmental living. It was in many ways the climax of my lifelong quest to find a fulfilling, meaningful, happy life that helped others and reflected my values. This yearlong project became the subject of an autobiographical book and a documentary film, both titled *No Impact Man*.

The book has been translated into thirteen languages and is required reading on hundreds of college campuses. The Sundance-selected film has been screened in cinemas and broadcast by television networks around the world. Most important, this project, book, film, and the work that has evolved from my experience have put me in touch with literally tens of thousands of seekers who are on seeking a better way of life.

I've met and given talks to thousands of people who are creating their own new ways of relating to the society we live in. They are making lives that are better for themselves, better for their communities, and better for the world. [*How to Be Alive*](#) contains some of their stories and much of their wisdom.

How to Use This Workbook

This workbook can be used either on your own or with a group. In either case, you will need a notebook and pen (or an electronic way of taking notes). If you are working alone, read through the material, take notes, and do the exercises. If you are working in a group, assign a section of the workbook before each meeting, do the readings and the exercises, and then come together to discuss them.

Working alone or in a group, you will find that this workbook follows the same structure as [*How to Be Alive*](#). If you have the book, you can switch between it and this workbook to do the exercises here that correspond with the text. But even if you don't have the book, you will be able to follow along. (I wanted to offer a free resource available for everyone, but I couldn't include all the wisdom you will find in the full book).

In This Workbook You Will Work On:

- Redefining success for ourselves in ways that both make us happy and help the world.
- Understanding the truth of our relationship to the world so we see that we actually *can* help it.
- Examining what truly makes us happy so that we can build lives based on a good foundation instead of the standard materialist assumptions.
- Taking gentle first steps to begin making changes in our relationship to the world and seeing how this can lead to deeper change.
- Learning to build a personal community of people who support you and your desire to live your values.
- Choosing consciously your inalienable role as “parent” to everyone and asking if that includes having your own biological kids.
- Building a Good Life based on our callings and fitting our careers to that rather than trying to fit a Good Life around our careers.
- Creating the psychological and spiritual strength to stay on our paths, even if they are unconventional.





STEP ONE: REDEFINE SUCCESS

In the introduction to the book *How to Be Alive*, I talk in depth about standard definitions of success and how they have become hard to believe in. Get a degree. Get a job. Get a relationship. Get a retirement account. Rub shoulders with the right people. Get a house.

Increasingly, these so-called markers of success don't really bring us the safety, happiness, and meaning we once thought we were promised. Plus, even if we manage to accomplish them, many of us can't escape the feeling that we have won them at the cost of the world.

So let's start by throwing out the ideas society tells us makes for success and ask: What really makes for a successful life?

Read: Read pages 1 to 15. Takes notes and (if you are working with a group) discuss the following questions:

1. What are our society's "standard life approaches"?
2. In what ways do they work and not work to make our lives secure and meaningful and let us feel we address ourselves to the problems we see in the world?
3. What have you noticed in your life—large and small—that brings security and meaning that are outside the nearly exclusive societal goals of "career" and "romance"?
4. What do you need more of and what do you need less of to bring meaning and purpose and the feeling that you help the world into your life?

Imagine Your Own Successful Life: Review pages 11 to 15 about the truth of success with particular references to what I mention as the elements of a successful life on pages 14 and 15. Ask yourself, what would there be in my life for me to feel as though it was as truly successful as I wanted it to be?

Because it is sometimes hard to break away from standard societal definitions of success, begin by taking a moment to imagine you have achieved all of the standard successes: you have enough money, you live in home that makes you safe and comfortable, you have freedom of movement, and your romantic life and retirement is secure.

Now what? What would you need on top of those things to be truly successful? Who would you love? Who would love you? Who would you help? How would you help? What would people say about you? What accomplishments would you reflect upon most warmly towards the end of your life? How would you leave the world a different place?

Write your answers down. These are the beginnings of your definition of a successful life. Here is the cool thing: Chances are, if you have thought deeply, you don't actually need money or a great career or house or relationship to achieve these things. You can begin having your own particular version of a successful life at any time.



STEP TWO: UNDERSTANDING THE TRUTH OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE WORLD

But how do we attain the success we just defined? How do we help ourselves and our world? Once we understand the Truth of our relationships to the world, instead of the false societal stories we are told, the path to the Good Life begins to become clear, all by itself. So what is that Truth of our relationship to the world?

To give you some background, the first section of [How to Be Alive](#), “The New Facts of Life,” examines the false societal stories we are told about how we are “supposed” to live, yet which leave us believing that we really can’t make that big of a difference to the world or in our own lives. That tell us we should just follow directions.

On the other hand, if we can do the work to break away from those false stories—those old facts of life—then we can enjoy the new facts of life and become “lifequesters” who want to define and live according to the new facts of life.

From the [book](#):

life·quest·er
/lif kwestər/
noun

1. Someone who tries to understand her True Nature and uses that understanding to make a better life for herself and others.
2. A person who attempts to live his own values rather than what society dictates and is excited by what he might discover.
3. Someone who has faith that letting go of limiting stories about herself and the world will allow something wonderful to open up.
4. A fun-loving, wicked cool person.

How Stories Make The Matrix We Live In

To gain a deeper understanding of how we both create and inherit from society’s limiting stories:

- Read pages 35 to 43. Ask yourself, what limiting stories have I ingested that make me believe that I can’t help myself, the people around me, and the world? Take notes and discuss.
- Do the exercise “Paint a Bull’s Eye on Your Limiting Stories” on page 44. (If you don’t have the book, write down the names of some of your heroes. Write down what obstacles you believe stand in the way of helping your own life and the world. Now, write out sentences in the form “I stop myself from being like [hero’s name] by telling myself a story about [one of the obstacles you just wrote down]. Repeat for all your hero’s and obstacles.)
- In the future, when your inner voice tells you a limiting story, repeat it to yourself a second time, adding “I have a story about . . .” at the beginning of the thought. You don’t have to decide whether or not the story is true. Just realizing that it is a story is a big step forward and paints a bull’s-eye on your stories for our later work.

Examining 3 Often-Repeated Limiting Beliefs

As I've traveled the United States and the world, and talked to thousands and thousands of people, I have most often helped people identify three particular groups of paralyzing stories. Nobody wants these types of stories to be true. They don't make anyone happy. They block our light and make us feel powerless, but because so many people believe them, it is hard to trust ourselves enough to acknowledge that they're false.

In the [book](#), I use these three archetypal stories to demonstrate a technique for breaking our false stories down. Here is a short description of the three types of stories:

- People are too selfish/dumb/unevolved/flawed and there is nothing anyone can do to change human nature, so trying to help the world is pointless.
- Government/corporations/the wealthy/the political parties are too strong. There is nothing anyone can do to change them, and if there is going to be change they have to initiate it, so all of our individual efforts are irrelevant.
- Technology/God/evolving consciousness/the planet's systems/the government/the free market/the perfect Oneness of the universe will save us. Since that power for good will take care of things, all of our individual efforts are not just irrelevant, but unnecessary.

Read: Pages 45-57 and take notes or discuss with your group the methods used for breaking down the three archetypal stories. How can the techniques work in your own life?

Ask yourself: Do you use these stories to any degree in your own life in order to limit your ability to respond (response-ability)? Make notes and discuss.

Do the Exercise: "Getting Rid of the Stories that Block Your Lifequest" on page 58. Discuss with your group. If you don't have the book—and even if you do!—read this free [workbook](#) by Byron Katie on her techniques for breaking down limit-

ing stories. I adapted the exercise in this part of the book from her work. Apply her technique to your limiting stories.

The Truth of Your Relationship to the World

Once you have broken down some of your limiting stories, you can begin to understand these Truths:

Your life = All your relationships added together
All your relationships added together = Your relationship to the world

∴ Your life = Your relationship to the world
which means

- a. What you do in your life affects the world*
- b. What happens in the world affects your life*
- c. You are important to the world and the world is important to you*

Read: Pages 60-65 for a discussion of the Truth of our relationship to the world. Take notes and discuss.

Ask yourself: How is my life connected in ways large and small to all the problems in the world that concern me?

Do this exercise: "How Do You Relate?" on page 65.

If you don't have the book, here is an abridged version: Take ten minutes to write down the relationship to the world through which you get your clothing, shelter, money, friendships, sex, and meaning. Also think about the relationships through which you assert influence on government and institutions. Consider, too, the relationships through which you give what you want to give to the world. Do any others that come to mind?

Now look at this list and ask yourself: What about each of those relationships gives you security and what gives you meaning? Which of the relationships gives you both? Which gives you neither? Are there any relationships you could combine?

Choose one relationship that is most in need for improvement. What is the easy, immediate thing you can do today? If you did one easy thing about that relationship each day for the next week, what would those easy things be? Do them.

Maintaining the Lifestealer's Mindset

As I have traveled the world talking to lifestealers, I have discovered a number of attitudes or perspectives they maintain which give the energy and confidence to change their relationships to the world. In the book [How to Be Alive](#), I call these the "lifestealer's mind hacks."

Read about the mind hacks: Pages 67-83. Take notes and discuss in your group.

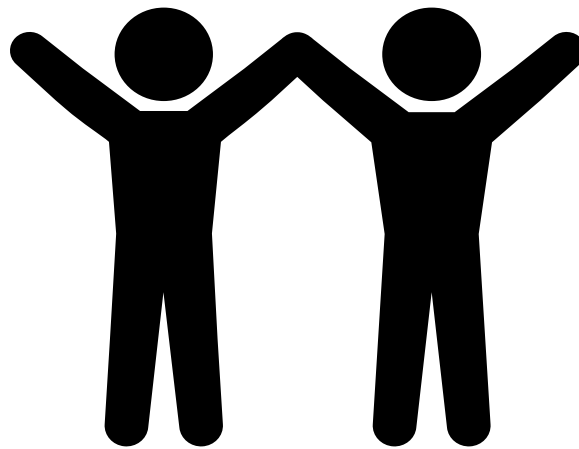
Adopt these attitudes: Whether you have the book or not, think of life situations you are grappling with or goals you have and ask how you might apply the following mind hacks I discuss more thoroughly in the [book](#): look away from the obstacles; don't waste energy on finger pointing; limit your concern to grow your influence; be too stupid to know your limitations and take the first step; celebrate your inconsistency; keep your eye on life's real prize; trust your vision; develop your optimism muscle.

Understand the Central Principle

There is one central principle in [How to Be Alive](#) that makes changing our relationship to the world less daunting and more serene. It is simply this: *each day, give more energy to what is True for you; give less energy to what is not True for you.*

Read more: Read pages 84-85. Take notes and discuss.

Ask yourself: Write down some ways that giving more energy to what is True and less energy to what is not True might help transform some of your relationships to the world in ways that are meaningful to you. Discuss.





STEP THREE: EXAMINING WHAT TRULY MAKES US HAPPY

Now that we understand how we are connected to the world and the many relationships we have to it, the question is, what elements must all those relationships contain to make us feel both secure and happy while helping the world. We need to learn how to want what we really want. This section shows us that what we really want is to be our authentic selves in ways that make us safe and help the world.

Take notes and discuss: Read pages 89 to 103. The fundamental principle of this section is: *when you become more, I become more. When I become more, you become more.* This is why becoming your authentic self helps the world—and helping the world helps you become your authentic self. Take some time to reflect on how you have witnessed this principle in your life. Reflect, too, on how you would like to see it work in the future. Write your thoughts down and, if you are in a group, discuss. How does helping the world help you become yourself and how does becoming yourself help the world?

How Each of Us Becomes More

Psychologists in the humanist movement believe that people have a natural drive to manifest all their inner capacities (become themselves) in ways that help their local and world communities. This drive is represented over and over again in stories and myths about “heroes.”

Experiments conducted by self-determination theorists have proven that this drive to “become” actually exists and is our fundamental motivator. The drive to become can be broken down into three needs:

1. To be “autonomous”: To feel that we are the authors of our own actions;
2. To be “competent”: That we are using our own particular skills so that we feel our actions are effective;
3. To be “related”: That what we do matters to others.

Take notes and discuss: Read pages 104 to 146, which cover what makes people feel purposeful and meaningful—being autonomous, effective, and related. At what times have you felt that you have been the author of your own actions? When have you felt competent? When have you felt truly related? How important were these feelings to you? And how important are they in relation to the goals we are told we are supposed to accomplish, like acquiring more and fancier possessions? How does this knowledge inform how you want to move forward in your life?

How the Materialism Trap Stunts You and How to Get Out of It

Research shows that most human behavior attempts to achieve one of approximately eleven different goals (see page 127). Some of these goals—such as community-mindedness and self-acceptance—are called intrinsic, meaning they intrinsically meet our needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (ACR).

The other of these goals are extrinsic, meaning they are outside those ACR needs and so do not help meet them (like the goals of financial success and popularity). Extrinsic goals are also sometimes materialistic goals.

The research shows that:

1. We are happiest when we pursue intrinsic and non-materialistic goals; and
2. That we are most generous and helpful to the world when pursuing non-materialistic goals.

Thus, emphasizing materialism makes us feel less happy and less helpful. Emphasizing becoming our full selves makes us more happy and more helpful. Isn't it amazing that what makes us happy also makes us helpful?

Do this exercise: On pages 105 to 109, you will find an exercise that will help you understand how much of your energy is spent on materialistic pursuits. Do you need to reduce that misspent energy? Is what you expend energy on aligned with the successful life you defined at the beginning of this workbook?

Which of your materialistic pursuits are getting more attention than they should? Which of your growth activities are getting less? Can you find fifteen minutes tomorrow to shift from one of your materialistic pursuits to one of your growth activities?

Some Exercises that Will Help You Become Your True Self

- Take a media fast: TV, cinema, computer and even cell phone screens bombard us with images that promote materialistic values. Turn everything off for a while. See page 101 for tips on how.
- Question how material things would impact your life: When you find yourself lusting after fame and fortune, write down what you imagine it would actually bring you. Can you get those things more directly? See page 109 for more directions on this exercise.
- Give yourself time to do whatever: Take an hour a day or a day each week or a week each month to do exactly as you choose in the moment. Keep records of what you find yourself doing. This will help you understand what you do when you are truly in yourself. See page 114 for more directions.
- Hang with the right people: It is hard to try to practice new habits and follow new goals when people don't support you. Find friends and groups who share your values. See page 120 for more directions.

- Cultivate a happy attitude: Instead of constantly seeking to obtain things outside yourself to make you happy, find ways to maintain happiness from within. Then you will be free to pursue what is really important to your true self. See page 134 for more directions.
- Talk to someone who will give you unconditional approval: Exploring who we really are is easiest when we have someone to listen to our changing ideas without judgment. This could be a therapist or friend. For more directions, see page 145.

A Last Word on Why Becoming Yourself Helps The World

Something to remember from page 148 of [*How to Be Alive*](#):

“The most amazing news is that when you become yourself, you respond with the utmost appropriateness to the world around you. You stop fighting what is inside of you and start trusting your real needs and ways of doing things.

“When you want what you really want, you know that your needs cannot be met by things that can be bought for cash or molded from petroleum or shipped from China. What you want are things that can be achieved only when we strive to use our most prized capacities in service of our most fervent community concerns.

“In other words, if we all wanted what we really wanted, then we would not be making ourselves unhappy while our desires destroyed the world through consumption and the constant fight for resources. We would be living the Good Life as our aspirations helped the world—following the principle of becoming yourself to help the world and helping the world to become yourself.”



STEP FOUR: TAKING SOME GENTLE FIRST STEPS

It is an inspiring idea to follow your Truth, but it doesn't change the realities of having to earn a living and pay the rent. In the face of the realities of life, becoming your True Self sounds like a lovely fantasy at first, but it can overwhelm you. That's because we always think in terms of changing the big stuff—career, where you live, etc. But in Step Four, we think about taking gentle first steps that aren't so huge and are more manageable. It's a training-wheel approach to changing your life. The big things can come later.

For a great introduction to the gentle path: Read pages 151 to 173. Take notes and discuss. What are some easy first steps you could introduce into your life today? How does taking easy first steps help improve your life? How do they help the world?

Do the exercises: Do the three "Identifying the Easy Parts" exercises on pages 159, 160 and 163.

Ask yourself: What are the relationships I have with the world that I would like to change in ways that are better for me and better for the world? Write down all of your relationships with the world that you can think of. For instance, through the water you use, the things you own, the food you eat, the energy you use, the money you earn and spend, your civic engagement, and your job. What is one small thing you can change in these relationships that might make you feel happier while also being better for the world. Repeat and repeat.

Examining Some Relationships to the World

Chapters 13, 14, 15, and 16 examine our relationships with food, material possessions, transportation, and civic engagement. In each case, the discussion is about how the standard life approach to these relationships neither maximizes our own quality of life nor results in a better world. Paths towards ways of relating that are better for us and better for the world are laid down.

Read: Read those chapters (pages 174 to 251). Discuss. Ask yourself which of these relationships you might want to work on in your own life. Which relationship could you change that would not be too hard? Which change would provide the biggest gratification?

Make a commitment: Choose one of these relationships to the world that you would like to improve both for you and the world. Don't worry about the whole relationship. Just figure out your first step. If it is food, say, then e-mail friends and invite them for dinner, as suggested on page 178. If it is civic engagement, then figure out what you want to work on and call a meeting of some friends who share your concern as suggested on page 251. Just concern yourself with that first action. When it is done decide on your next action.

Choose other relationships to change: Once you have completed a change in one world relationship, then move onto the next. In this way, little by little, you can bring your whole life in line with your values. For an example of how this slow and gentle process transformed a person's life, read about Annie who began her transformation by buying fair trade coffee (pages 165 to 168) and ended up as a climate activist.



STEP FIVE: BUILDING A MUTUALLY SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY

So what do you need to continue on your lifequest, to keep making changes that bring you in line with your values and help the world? Our culture and media have very strong prescriptions about what will bring you a successful life—career and romantic relationships. Yet the research shows that among the best predictors of a happy life is neither of these but a good, strong, interconnected personal community.

From *How to Be Alive*, page 270:

“The unexpected reward of the lifequest is connection to new groups of people who share and celebrate your values.

“The unexpected result of connection to groups of people who share and celebrate your values is support on your lifequest.

“When you embark on your lifequest and join with others, you automatically form a group that supports others, too.

“Most important, there really is no lifequest without community, because the lifequest is about becoming yourself in relation to the world.”

Read, take notes, and discuss: Read pages 255 to 300. What do we mean by interconnection in personal community? Where have you experienced this before? How did it feel? Do you have it now? Do you know others that have it?

How does building connection help those around you through the process of generalized reciprocity and social capital? How can having a strong personal community help you to live the life you want to live?

Exercise: Where do people who are already like the person you want to be hang out? Go there. Go regularly. Go until you meet someone.

Create a Vision for Your Tribe: Write down what form you want your community to have. Take some time to brainstorm. What role in your life do you want your community to fill? Security? Excitement? Challenge?

What days or nights do you want to be social? Do you want your group to be mostly reliable or mostly crazy and fun? How many really close friends do you want to have? How many pals to go out with? Who would you like hanging out at your house for Sunday brunch?

Maybe you have lots of confidants but now need someone to party with. Maybe you have lots of people to party with but no confidants. Maybe you want support. Maybe you want to talk about the world’s problems more. Maybe you want to play badminton.

Take some time over a few days to jot down thoughts of what you would like.

Build it!: Read the directions on pages 294 to 300 for building a personal community. Start doing it! If you don’t have the book, then follow these abridged directions: choose a low value night like a Monday or Tuesday and begin having regular small gatherings of the types of people who fit your vision for your group. Do it until it coalesces.

Making Bigger Life Changes

By this stage in the process, we have developed an understanding of our power to change our own lives and the world. We have looked at what truly makes us happy and satisfied. We have begun to make small changes in our relationships with the world. And we are building a community that supports our choices. We are finally in the position to begin looking at some of the bigger life decisions if we want to, including: step one, parenting, and step seven, career.



STEP SIX: DECIDING WHO TO PARENT

Until recently, our society has defined three standard life approaches to parenting: having biological kids, adopting kids, or not having kids. Lifequesters, however, find all manner of other combinations. They broaden the definition of what it means to “parent”—to nurture and care for. They “parent” elderly people who need help. They “parent” youth in detention centers or adults in prisons. They “parent” children who want to learn music, or immigrants who want to learn English. These are all valuable parenting choices.

We are told that the biggest decision we make is whether to have a child, and that there is no going back. But when you realize that the choice is really not whether to have a biological child but whether and how to embrace your inalienable role as parent, in the larger and wider sense, the pressure subsides. Because you can hedge. In a way, you actually *can* be a little bit pregnant.

Also, if the parenting of kids and youth is not defined by us each having our own biological children, then suddenly:

You can decide not to have kids and still a little bit have them by participating in the lives of other people’s kids. You can decide to have kids and still a little bit not have them by sharing them with childless people. In other words, you can have kids in ways that support people who don’t have kids. You can also not have kids in a way that supports people who do. We would all be happier if child-free adults and adults with children helped each other.

How to make the choice about who to parent and how to let other adults be involved in the lives of your kids, and how to get involved in the lives of other people’s kids is what Part V: Who to Parent in the book *How to Be Alive* is about.

For further directions and other exercises, see pages 338 to 344 of the book.

Take notes and discuss: If you have the book, read pages 303 to 344. What are the biological and psychological reasons people choose to parent? What are the various ways you could meet those needs for yourself, both through having (or adopting?) bio-kids and not having bio-kids? In what ways these two choices each allow you to contribute to the things you care about in the world?

If you didn’t have bio-kids, what other groups of people might you choose to nurture? Elderly people? At-risk youth? Other people’s toddlers? Animals? Kids who need mentoring? Or would you choose to be more involved in some sort of community service?

If you have kids, would it help you and your children to let other adults be involved in the lives of your kids? Where have you seen the model of social parenting work? What did you like about it? What bothered you? How could you adapt the experience to your own circumstances?

Experiment: Because humans are bad at predicting what will make them happy, the best way to determine what set of circumstances will work best in your life is to try to temporarily create those circumstances and see how they feel. If you are thinking of having kids, get really close to another parent and help take on those responsibilities. If you are thinking of not having kids, find someone older who has made that choice and check out their lives.

Read: If you are interested in helping to parent other people’s kids or in having other people help parent yours, read 324 to 337.

Do the gravestone test: Imagine you are at your own funeral and that you never had kids. What are people saying about you and your life? Who is there? What have you accomplished? Take notes. Now do the same thing again, but imagining that you had kids. What do you like and not like about both scenarios?



STEP SEVEN: BUILD YOUR LIFE BASED ON YOUR CALLING (NOT YOUR CAREER)

A quick introduction to Part VI: Walk Your Path—The way to find your calling is to let yourself wander through life, trying things out and not initially making commitments that keep you tied. Then, as you wander, when you find yourself naturally returning to an activity, place, group of people, set of talents, and way you most enjoy helping the world, that is the place to commit in your life. Don't try to fit who you are and the life you want around your career. Fit your career around who and how you are called to be.

Read, take notes, and discuss: Read pages 347 to 371. Following your calling is to answer the question “How can I help?” in the ways that appeal to you and make you happiest. When in your life have you felt as though you were doing, as Zen Master Seung Sahn puts it, your “inside job”? Over the course of the next few days, take note of those times when even for a few moments you feel as though you were doing your inside job. What does this reveal about how you are called to be?

Do the exercise: First, do the exercise “When You Went Where You Were Called—and When You Didn't” on page 355.

Next, spend a few mornings writing about 1. What concerns in the world most move you; 2. The skills and activities you most enjoy; 3. The circumstances you need to make you feel safe to pursue the use of those skills in service of your concerns. This won't identify a job. It may help identify a way of being that you are called to. For further directions, see pages 362-364.

How Are You Called to Spend Your Time?

As discussed on page 372, each of us have about 84 hours each week when we are not sleeping, eating, washing or otherwise maintaining our bodies' needs. If you didn't have existing commitments, how would you be called to spend that time? Make a list of the various activities and write down the number of hours you would spend on each. To help you with your list, look at the sample activities on pages 375 to 376.

Now, during the course of a week, make a list of how you actually spend your time. On what activities, both at work and at home, does your time actually get spent (see pages 385 to 389 for more thorough directions for this exercise). How closely does your list of how you want to spend your time resemble how you actually spend your time? What are the things you can easily fix?

How to Bring Your Actual Time Use In Line With Your Ideal Time Use

Read pages 390 to 404 for directions on how to “bootstrap” your way into using your time in ways where you get to use your prized skills to help the world and to have fun doing it. You will read how to do it:

1. By “crafting” your present job into something more in line with your calling;
2. By changing jobs into something more in line with your calling;
3. Building your life in your own way from the bottom up so that it is completely in line with your calling.

STEP EIGHT: BUILDING THE STRENGTH TO STAY ON YOUR PATH

From the first page of Part VII: Rise Above the Noise:

Without the guidance of the standard life approaches, how do I know I'm making the right decisions?

As hard as I try to do right by the world, other people don't seem to care. How do I deal with my grief, despair, and anger?

Now that I have my own version of the Good Life, I find that I am perhaps more rather than less sensitive to all of life's big questions. How do I cope with that?

Even though I am building the life I want, I still wonder, how do I deal with, well, being human?

Read, Take Notes, and Discuss: Read pages 407 to 414 about getting caught up in the noise and distractions of life. How do you find yourself getting distracted from what truly matters to you? When you pursue what matters to you, when do you lose confidence in your path and choices? What could you do to keep yourself centered and not give into the fears (find suggestions on pages 412 to 414).

Forgiving Yourself for Being Human

Read pages 414 to 425 about how all humans always have fears and desires, and how there is no escaping our own humanity. Knowing this, we can accept a certain amount of discomfort and not struggle against it.

There are even physiological reasons involving the brain itself that make this the case. But it is possible to remain centered in your calling, purpose, and values even when strong fears and desires arise, through spiritual practices such as contemplative prayer and meditation.

Take notes and discuss: Do you share your fears and desires with other people? Or are you really that different? Can you experience them as just a part of human existence? Can you imagine watching your distracting fears and desires arise and neither acting on them nor fighting them? What would help you to do that?

Do this: Read the directions for secular meditation on pages 425 to 426. Give it a try regularly for a month. Ask yourself a question: are you finding it easier to stay centered in what is important to you?



HOW TO JOIN THE ONGOING CONVERSATION

This workbook is just the beginning. You can get more support in building a life that is good for you and good for the world. You can also give support to others who are trying to build the Good Life by joining the conversation and supporting the work. I hope to talk to you soon!

Get the Book

I hope you have gotten a lot of insight from the workbook. But I think you can get even more from the book. I am so proud that Seth Godin called the book “generous” and Sharon Salzberg called it “loving.” Peter Singer said, “it might even be the most important book you have ever read.” To order *How to Be Alive*, go to:

<http://www.ColinBeavan/HowToBeAlive>.

Join the Conversation

This workbook is not the end of the conversation about the quest for happy lives that help the world. There is more to say and explore and think about. To get the *How to Be Alive* newsletter and receive notices about blog posts, podcasts, and other resources that can help you and others on your quest, go to: <http://www.ColinBeavan.com/join>.

Support the Work

Expanding the conversation about how to be alive in a way that can fix our world problems is crucial. Our entire society needs to revamp itself in a way that facilitates a happy, safe, fair way of life that keeps our habitat healthy. There are many ways to support my continuing contributions to this conversation—from volunteering to offering financial help. Please go to: <http://www.ColinBeavan.com/Support>.