

Your values & priorities

What particular parts of life are meaningful for you? What makes it worth living? What could be your specific mission? You have to search for these yourself. The better your answers, the better your quality of life.

The United States Declaration of Independence reads: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

Some people thrive on rapid change and near havoc, others thrive on calm and steady progress. Know which of these you are, for the moment at least.

Life should be enjoyable; too often we think its about achievement. The truth is that making life enjoyable is an achievement in itself.

Fulfilment not only means doing the things that you want to do and exploring your aspirations. It's also finding profound pleasure in things that you *didn't know* you wanted to do, and had never even dreamt of.

Principles are simply rules of thumb for how you are trying to live your life. They make every day decision-making easier because you just check whether one course of action or another is in line with your principles.

Make sure your behaviour, your decisions, and your goals on an everyday basis are in line with your considered priorities and beliefs about what's important, rather than a response to impulses and cravings.

Success for me is simply doing something that I've always wanted to do. That in itself is quite an achievement.

Don't confuse success with popularity or fame. Success is personal.

Some people flounder when the signposts that have directed them to success are removed, and they realise that they have not understood the principles by which they were living. They have merely adopted the principles of their training institution, mimicking rather than understanding. You need an *internal* compass.

Beware the promotion that might come too fast, and that demands more time and ends up bullying aside key aspects of your life. Higher status and salary aren't necessarily better if they can only be acquired in return for your time usually reserved for friends and loved ones and the things you love to do. If you are offered a promotion, be sure to negotiate a new work schedule that isn't just taking on more responsibility, but is also shedding some duties.

Success has got nothing to do with getting rich. Getting rich isn't a good way of keeping score. In the end, achieving the esteem of one's peers, of people who know you, is much more satisfying.

Chose your battles carefully, because they reflect your values. Is it just vanity or anger prompting your ambitions, or is some genuine heartfelt belief that you cannot ignore?

It helps to have a hierarchy of principles to live by. For example, by all means be brave and take calculated risks as often as possible, but never gamble what you can't afford to lose.

Strive for *integrity* - that means knowing your values in life, and behaving in a way that is consistent with those values.

The most treasured learning experiences are the out-of-the-ordinary ones, most often characterised by spending an extended but intense chunk of time in the close company of a small group of friends.

All the best evidence suggests that to reach a national or possibly international standard in any particular physical or intellectual discipline, you will need to invest no less than 10 hours per day, 6 days per week, for about 10 years. This is assuming that you are properly trained throughout that time, and it will help if you can be mentored by a well-respected person in your field, or at least that you are part of a well-respected institution. Before you embark on such an Odyssey, ask yourself this: *will the benefits outweigh the lost opportunities? How else could I be investing all of that time and commitment, and for what rewards in terms of satisfaction and pleasure?*

It's *never* a question of win at any cost. The cost is always important. What it costs you and what it costs those around you.

What we want from life is good, pleasurable and profoundly satisfying feelings. These may come from owning and consuming items, but they can also come very readily from doing and experiencing activities. There is a danger that we confuse the means with the ends, and start focusing too much attention on things and activities for their own sake, rather than appreciating the end-feelings that are our real goal.

A great sense of self-worth comes from sharing important experiences with good friends.

How many friends I have, how deep my friendship is with each of them, and even the variety of lives they lead, is probably a very good indication of my quality of life.

Success is the achievement of happiness.

Intimacy - knowing something or someone very well indeed - is the most rewarding feeling.

The most important thing is to surround yourself with people you love.

If you enjoyed the above section, you might like to take a look at these:

- **Deciding what to do for a living**
- **Like yourself or change yourself**
- **Love and friendship**

Finding a balance in life

Learning to live well is a skill, just like swimming. And like swimming, it can go from being about sheer survival, to being highly pleasurable, all depending on your level of competence.

Life can seem like a treadmill: taking exams, then a degree and maybe a professional qualification after that. It never stops. The trick is, don't focus on the end result, focus on the doing itself. Real satisfaction comes from what you do on the way, not just ticking the boxes at the end of it.

If you can't find an environment you can thrive in, you should set about creating an environment in which you can thrive whether for study, for work or for social activities.

Balance isn't about moderation, it's about admitting what's really important to you. Someone might reach 16 years of age with a terrible thirst to play music, or soccer, or earn money, and their idea of balance is to spend 90% of their time doing just that. For someone else, that might seem like madness.

You can achieve excellence through many different routes. For instance, it may not serve you best to be one-dimensional in your focus, but instead to draw from many quarters; then it is the mixture of elements that produces excellence.

The challenge is to pursue excellence, but to do so without destroying the rest of your life.

Excellence is often born of a good balance. To excel, we must harmoniously orchestrate many parts of our life, so that the product of those parts working in unison far exceeds their sum.

Do you really need an advanced certificate in piano playing, or do you just want to be able to play and sing and write a few songs? Do you really need to be a first team player, or just someone who's a pleasure to have on a social team? Put together a portfolio of skills of a sufficient level but no more; 'breadth not depth' is perfectly acceptable for most things.

Be careful that your success doesn't lead you immediately to yet more striving for even greater success. Give yourself time to consolidate, months, maybe years, so as to reap the pleasures and the lessons.

Perfectionism is very often born of a too great a need for recognition and approval from others, rather than doing something for the pleasure it brings you for its own sake. Workaholism and eating disorders, such as bulimia and anorexia nervosa, are sometimes rooted in this bad habit of paying too much attention to what other people expect of you.

Being a workaholic is a very inefficient use of your time, and very destructive of yourself and those around you. Cure it with the help of loving friends and by asking yourself and others how else you can achieve the feelings that you so desperately seek, other than by working madly.

Take regular vacations - weekends away, weeks and whole fortnights. Take a month or three months off when you feel the need. This time away will recoup itself three-fold when you return to your endeavours. It is a false economy to think that ploughing on through fatigue and staleness will pay off. What would you do with a year off, and what would the benefits be?

It is a very rare person who can find happiness in dedicating themselves exclusively to just one aspect of life. Take up extra-curricular activities and reap the pleasure and the companionship that they will bring.

You haven't got to perform great feats. It is enough to do good things in a great way.

The likelihood of happiness is greatly increased if you can do three things: 1) find a job that brings you satisfaction; 2) put effort into keeping your personal relationships in good shape; 3) have a third dimension in your life such as a sport, an interest, a hobby, or a charitable pursuit - just as long as it's something in which you can often spend a good deal of enjoyable time. You'll be very lucky to find happiness if you have only one of these ingredients in place; you'll probably be alright if you can achieve two; and it would be rare indeed not to find happiness if you've managed all three.

Have a passion for something, but don't stake your whole life and your whole happiness on it. That wouldn't be passion, that would be obsession.

In many parts of many countries, working 9am 'till 6pm five days per week, is regarded as the very optimal working blueprint even for the most career-minded individual, and pushing these boundaries is seen as inefficient and counter-productive. If your working world is demanding more of you, and you'd rather it didn't, seriously consider moving to another firm, another region, even another country.

It's a short-sited mistake to equate high-achievement with salary size. Try considering what you are achieving holistically, and that could include your sense of job satisfaction, the physical environments within which you live, travel and work, and your range of relationships.

Don't live for the moment, live the moment. If you live for the moment you are in danger of jeopardising your future; but if you live the moment, you are fully involved and sensitised to exactly what you are engaged in there and then. That's really living.

At what ever stage in life you're at, school, college or beyond, keep a breadth of interests, and invest heavily in your extra-curricular pleasures because at the very least they will compliment and support your professional life, and it is not unlikely that they may one day develop into your major direction.

Connecting with the countryside by getting out and walking, gliding, sailing or such like, brings us a reassuring awareness of something greater than ourselves, and this sense of perspective is a wonderful tonic.

You have to continuously work out when to postpone taking rewards so as invest still further in something, and when to cash in your chips and take the pleasure. Only you can decide the cost and benefit of postponement or gratification.

There is a strong feeling that the pleasure you take in life is simply the accumulation of the pleasure you take from all aspects of your life. To place too much reliance on just one aspect, probably means your total accumulation of pleasure won't be as great as you could achieve were you to spread yourself around. It also seems that your sum of pleasure in life can be reduced by negative feelings such as worry or exhaustion. Reducing these negatives can contribute to greater happiness just as much as increasing the positives.

No one is going to have nearly as much to gain by your quality of life and well-being as you do. Absolutely no one, no matter how much they care for you.

Happiness can sometimes be the regular and comforting repetition of simple pleasures, rather than achieving something grand.

Having several aspects of your life that bring you large amounts of positive feelings is much safer than just having the one, such as your work or your partner. Having just one dimension increases the likelihood of unhappiness by putting all your eggs in the one basket, whereas spreading the load in life is a good safeguard.

Achieving in your professional life can help your personal life, and vice versa. That's an example of what gets called transferable life-skills, which you can take from one situation to another.

A wide variety of friends in terms of their background, interests, values and styles of life, is probably a very healthy thing. Too much uniformity is invariably a problem in any area of life; it can weaken us without us realising.

Take an appropriate risk every day to keep feeling alive. Do the things you have to do well, and the things you want to do even better.

It is not helpful to make changes in one area of your life without considering how it would effect, for better and for worse, other areas of your life. Life is holistic, however much we mistakenly pretend that work and home and personal life are all separate.

I think you're best to judge things on the sum of the general level you've achieved over several years, not high-points or brief moments of perfection. They can be very misleading. Consistency is much more useful and satisfying to yourself and everyone else around you.

One should not confine oneself to any one thing too deeply - enjoy them all: the arts, teaching, writing, research. Don't confine your life into a narrow channel.

You may have the ability to be very successful in something, but don't be seduced into some single-minded pursuit just because you're good at it.

The word 'health' literally means '*wholeness*'; and the verb '*to heal*' literally means '*to make whole*'.

You can achieve the highest levels in your chosen field and still have a balanced and happy life that lives for the moment.

If you enjoyed the above section, you might like to take a look at these:

- **Changing direction**
- **Setting your goals**
- **Renewing your energy and enthusiasm**