

Personal vision and preparedness: Prompts for thinking and action



LITERARY INSPIRATION?

Adapt or perish, now as ever, is nature's inexorable imperative.
HG Wells

We expect the future to be like a huge wave, carrying us forward. Instead it leaks in around our feet and rises above our heads unnoticed.
Terry Pratchett

Half an hour's think time each day is essential - except when you are very busy. Then a full hour is needed.
Ben Renshaw

*The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men
Gang aft agley,
An'leae us nougnt but grief an' pain,
For promis'd joy!*
Robbie Burns, To a mouse

Planning is an unnatural process. It is much more fun just to do something. That way failure comes as a complete surprise, rather than being preceded by a period of worry and depression.
John Harvey-Jones

*To laugh often and much;
To win the respect of intelligent people
and the affection of children;
To earn the appreciation of honest
critics and endure the betrayal of false friends;
To appreciate beauty;
To find the best in others;
To leave the world a bit better
whether a healthy child or a garden patch,
a redeemed social condition or a job well done;
To know even one other life has
breathed easier because you have lived;
This is to have succeeded.*
Ralph Waldo Emerson

In these matters the only certainty is that nothing is certain.
Pliny the Elder

*You can choose a ready guide
In some celestial voice
If you choose not to decide
You still have made a choice
You can choose from phantom fears
and kindness that can kill
I will choose a path that's clear
I will choose free will.*

Rush, Free Will

The hardest thing to see is what is in front of your own eyes.
Goethe

There must be more to life than simply increasing its speed.
Gandhi

The definition of insanity is doing the same thing again and again and hoping for a different result.
Einstein

Life is short, science is long; opportunity is elusive, experiment is dangerous, judgement is difficult. It is not enough for the physicians to do what is necessary, but the patient and the attendants must do their part as well and the circumstances must be favourable.
Hippocrates

Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough; Give the world the best you've got anyway.
Mother Theresa

*Yesterday is history
Tomorrow is a mystery
Today is a gift
That is why it is called the present*
Babatunde Olatunji

*Ever tried?
Ever failed?
No matter
Try again
Fail again
Fail better.*
Beckett

It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.
Dumbledore, Chamber of Secrets

There is nothing really difficult if you only begin - some people contemplate a task till it looms so big it seems impossible, but I just begin and it gets done somehow. There would be no coral islands if the first bug sat down and began to wonder how the job was to be done.
John Shaw Billings

The best way to predict the future is to invent it.
Alan Kay

My Beautiful career
=
Clear vision and goals
+
planned development of self awareness, skills and knowledge
+
sensitivity and awareness to wider changes that may bring challenges and opportunities

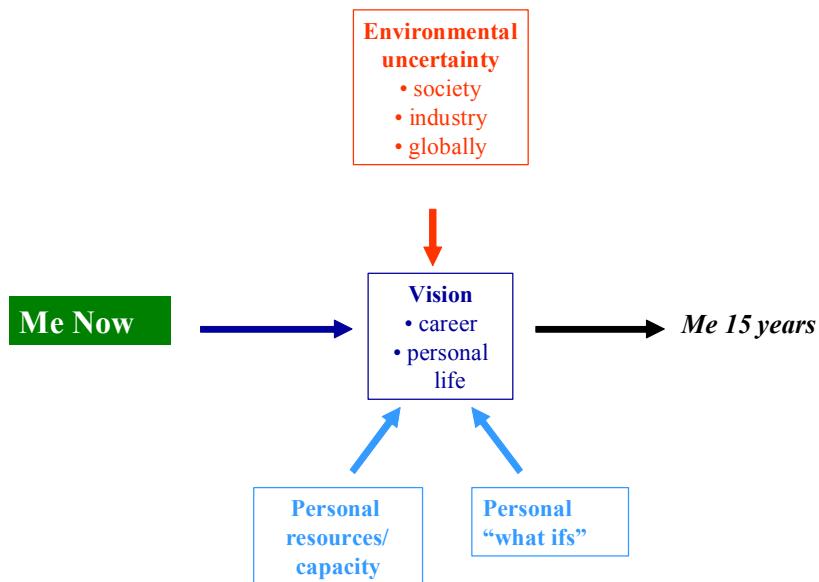
WHERE AM I?

What am I proud of in my personal life and job? What can I celebrate?	What would I like to be different?
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What personal skills that you have do you value and wish to maintain or use more?

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-
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My Beautiful Career



VISION FOR CAREER AND PERSONAL LIFE

Consider the questions below (ideally with someone else who can listen, probe and reflect back to you what they are hearing):

1. What role do I see myself doing in 15 years time?

2. What will be my accomplishments and achievements by this time?

3. What types of tasks/projects will I be involved in?

4. What types of organisations and people will I be working with? Their values, quality of relationships, etc.?

5. How will I manage myself and others?

6. What aspects of work do I value?

7. How is the balance between my work and other aspects of my life?

8. What qualities do others see in me?

9. Expand on your vision by considering the following questions:
 - a) If I had it now would I take it?

 - b) Assume I have it now. What does that bring me?

Another, more visual, way of clarifying your vision is to draw your lifeline connecting the key events you hope you will experience or achieve over the next 10 or 15 years, building on your sense of what has happened so far:

Draw in box

My lifeline:

Today

*Highs and lows so far /
[plot as peaks and troughs]*

Key events I hope for/expect

If you are struggling with either of these exercises, some other ways of approaching this task of identifying where you are now and what is important to you include:

- Selecting some images [post cards, illustrations from magazines] that “speak” to you of the things you would like to achieve in your life.
- Making a “treasure map:” Tear out pictures which appeal to you from magazines etc. Enjoy the process and when you have finished, stand back and look at what you have created and what messages your collage gives you
- Considering the values and skills you appreciate in your life and the creative ideas you can imagine for harnessing these in your future.

Reflection:

How far are you able to consider both your professional and personal life? How far do you feel constrained by the usual paths open to medics?

So...

1. How happy are you with what you see?
2. Are you pleased with choice of career?
3. Do you have a clear idea of what you want?
4. If you are working with others, what are the patterns you see when looking at each other's aspirations?

Further Reading

The series in BMJ careers by Susan Kersley:

- How to change your life in seven steps. BMJ careers 2002;324:S4 (5 January)
- What would you do if you had the time. BMJ careers 2002;324:S53 (16 February)
- Looking after number one. BMJ careers 2002;324:S85 (16 March)
- Do your colleagues understand you? BMJ Careers BMJ 2002;324:S117 (13 April)
- Do you procrastinate? BMJ careers.2002;324:S164 (25 May)
- What's draining you? BMJ careers 2002;324:S197 (22 June)
- How will you respond to your wake up call? BMJ careers 2002;325:S27 (27 July)
- Relationship :what relationship? BMJ careers 2002;325:S60 (24 August)
- Are you a square peg in a round hole? BMJ careers 2002;325:S109 (5 October)
- Living an abundant life. BMJ careers 2002;325:S141 (2 November)

PERSONAL CAPACITY

The first test provides a way identifying your individual capabilities and behaviour. This section focuses on the important issue of resilience. It is designed to raise further questions and to promote future reflection. The following test will help promote inquiry and personal development.

Thinking about your life and situations you find yourself in, please answer the following questions as honestly, with as much self awareness, as you can. Please choose the answer that you think most accurately describes your feelings in situations. There is no right answer. The purpose of this test is to increase self-awareness and promote coping strategies.

1) *When I could feel worried I tend to be:*

- a. Relaxed, calm, seldom worried
- b. Usually calm, sometimes worried
- c. A worrier, and often anxious

2) *When I could feel angry I tend to be:*

- a. Composed, slow to anger
- b. Seldom angry, but can be provoked
- c. Quick to feel anger

3) *When I could feel discouraged I tend to be:*

- a. Rarely discouraged
- b. Dislike losing, but usually recover well
- c. Easily discouraged

4) *When I could feel self-consciousness I tend to be:*

- a. Hard to embarrass
- b. Gets embarrassed, then gets over it
- c. Not easily embarrassed

5) *When I could feel impulsive I tend to:*

- a. Rarely follow urges, not excitable
- b. Sometimes indulge urges, but rarely to excess
- c. Usually follow urges, excitable

6) *When I could feel vulnerable I tend to:*

- a. Handle stress and crises well
- b. Experience stress, but copes effectively
- c. Sensitive to pressure

Now the scoring. Give your self 1 point for each a, 2 for each b, and 3 for each c. Total your score, then read the relevant parts of the table on the next page (that is, the row with your score and the one you are tending to)

Score	What it means	Upsides	Downsides	What can be done, some examples
6-9	Resilient Tend to handle stressful work situations in a calm, steady, serious manner. Usually copes easily, managing with few difficulties, even when stress occurs.	Moves into problem solving mode rapidly and proceeds in a rational, analytical way.	May underestimate serious problems. May sometimes appear to others as too relaxed, uncaring, insensitive or unaware.	Work on ways to identify and communicate feelings. Eg describe body reactions (eg heart rate, sweat) and thoughts to another/ journal/diary. Practice observing body language for cues to the emotions of others. Minimise eating and drinking at events when expression of feelings is important. Read novels, poetry etc that express negative emotion. Join a drama group or other activities that emphasise expression (eg sports, music, landscaping, painting)
10-15	Responsive Normally calm, secure and steady. Surprises, pressures, emergencies, difficult situations and stressful circumstances can lead to some worry, anger, discouragement or other stressful responses.	Has a moderate threshold for handling work stress.	May need a moment to get over a crisis before resuming regular activities or moving into problem-solving mode.	[See ideas above and below] Consider having a 360° feedback session [where a range of people give their views on you though a questionnaire that is summarised so feedback is anonymous]. Develop self-awareness in therapy. Read pop-psychology books, such as Goleman on Emotional Intelligence. Read about forms of psychology such as Transactional Analysis and those based on CG Jung's work. Search and study key words [such as Emotional Intelligence, Resilience, psychology] on Google
16-18	Reactive Tends to respond in an alert, concerned, attentive or excitable way. May experience workplace stress more than others or serve as the group's conscience. Under stress, could be perceived as anxious, tense, angry, discouraged or worried.	More likely to be empathetic to others and sensitive to the situation. This is the cost of the skill/gift of being able to sensitively "vibe" what is going on in situations.	May accept responsibility for problems caused by others. May need to vent frustrations or recover before resuming work or problem-solving.	Put energy into things you can control, rather than focusing on the things that arouse fear and anxiety. Take exercise before event where calmness important. And afterwards. Ensure well rested - getting a good night sleep. Reduce caffeine intake. Plan to consume daily allowance of fats, carbohydrates, alcohol after anticipated stressful episodes. Take 10min walks as antidote to various kinds of stress. Read about stress/ anger management. If necessary, Choose less stressful roles and working environment. Reflect on outbursts with significant other/ co-worker. Negotiate with others so that criticism is seen as constructive and legitimate, as any outburst are just "you" and should not be taken personally. Reduce attention to news media that stir feelings or anxiety, rage and helplessness.

For more information about the various personality tests available, or to take one, please contact Ian Welbourn at change.matters@dial.pipex.com.

To reiterate, there is no right answer. Nor is it possible to be totally self-aware. Rather, this questionnaire, and the questions below, are designed to encourage a journey of greater self discovery you are all, hopefully, on. With more insight, you get more control (for example, by changing environment or changing yourself)

Other ways to increase self awareness include increasing opportunities for feedback from co-workers, taking other psychometric tests (for example, Myers Briggs Type Indicators) and 360° feedback.

A few other areas that are worth reflecting on when considering personal capacity and resources are:

1. How much energy do I have? Where do I get it from; myself or others? When I am fatigued, how best do I recover?
2. How do I think about power? Do I want power from a particular position or role to make a difference or am I happy with using my personal authority? Do I get power from myself or others? Do I wish to use it for myself or others?
3. How do I approach risk in my life? If a purchase/contract goes wrong who should bear the risk?
4. How interested am I in learning? Especially, the deeper, sometimes called “second order learning”, where I question my assumptions that shape the way I see the world?

Further reading

- *How Resilience Works*, Harvard Business Review featured an article titled. May 2002
- <http://www.adaptivlearning.com>
- Goleman, Daniel. *Emotional Intelligence*, Bantam Books, 1997

You may find the following real life examples of resilience helpful:

- Profile on Daniel Strother. BMJ careers 2002;325:S78 (7 September)
- Profile on Stewart Mercer. BMJ careers 2002;324:S134 (27 April)
- Profile on Sarah Walters. BMJ careers 2002;324:S118 (13 April)