

UNIT -3

As you practice consciousness engineering, something beautiful starts to happen. As you gain a new sense of power and freedom from Brules that no longer hold you back, your growth starts to accelerate.

At this point a great yearning often starts building in you. You want to do more, be more, contribute more. This part of the book will give you the means to do so. In previous chapters, you focused on the world around you and learned to shed models from the past. Now we'll look at your present and your future, and we'll focus on a new world—your inner world with all its conflicting habits, beliefs, emotions, desires, and ambitions. We'll be bringing a beautiful order and balance to this world. You'll be asking yourself two questions: What exactly is happiness, and how can I be happy in the present? What are my goals and visions for the future?

BEND REALITY

Where We Identify the Ultimate State of Human Existence

Have big goals—but don't tie your happiness to your goals. You must be happy before you attain them. I've since formulated this model into the philosophy I call bending reality. Bending reality is so named because when you're operating in this state, you tend to have a feeling that everything in life is bending in your direction, that you are effortlessly making things happen—and that anything is possible. And so it's a subtle balance: 1. You have a bold vision for the future pulling you forward. 2. Yet . . . you're happy in the NOW. But here's the key: BOTH of these stem from the present. As Paulo Coelho said in *The Alchemist*: Because I don't live in either my past or my future. I'm interested only in the present. If you can concentrate always on the present, you'll be a happy man. There's no point dwelling in the past and letting it define you, nor in getting lost in anxiety about the future. In the present moment, you're in the field of possibility. How you engage with the present moment will direct your life. When you're bending reality, your vision is continuously pulling you forward—but it doesn't feel like work. It feels like a game, a game you love to play. But at the same time, your happiness does not seem to be tied to that future vision. You're feeling elated and happy right now, in this moment. You're happy as you pursue your vision, not only when you attain it. You're thus grounded in the present. Are you ready to try out this new model? Here's what I now understand about how it works.

THE FOUR STATES OF HUMAN LIVING

Think of happiness in the now and vision for the future as two ingredients that can be combined, but that have to be in balance. Too much of one or the other creates imbalance and limitation. Depending on how they're combined, at any moment in life, we can be in one of four different states of mind. This napkin drawing will help you see it.

1. **THE NEGATIVE SPIRAL.** In this state, you're not happy in the now, nor do you have a vision of your future. With little to enjoy or look forward to, this is a painful place to be, and certainly not one where you want to spend any significant amount of time. Often when in this state you're feeling depressed.

2. **THE CURRENT REALITY TRAP.** This state feels great because example, when you're having an amazing experience or are on vacation. But remember, happiness alone can be fleeting. You can get happy from smoking a joint. But long-term happiness and fulfillment come from something more—the need to contribute, grow, and do meaningful things. While this state may bring you temporary happiness, it won't bring you long-term fulfillment.

3. **STRESS AND ANXIETY.** This is the state I was in during the years I struggled to build my business. A lot of entrepreneurs are in this state, as are a lot of career-driven people. In this state, you may have big goals, but you've tied your happiness to those goals. You're waiting to sign the next big deal, move into that new office, hit that next revenue milestone—before you celebrate. It's great to think big and to want to accomplish amazing things, but it's not an optimal state if you're postponing your happiness along the way. If you're working hard but aren't making progress or if you feel you have a lot to offer but aren't getting where you want to go, you may be stuck in this state.

4. **BENDING REALITY.** This is the ideal state where you're happy in the now, and you have a vision for the future that drives you. Your vision pulls you forward, but you're happy now—despite not having yet attained that vision. When you're in this state, there's a feeling of growth and enjoyment. It's about the journey as well as the destination. An interesting observation about this state is that it often seems as if the universe “has your back.” Call it what you want—but it starts to feel as if you're lucky. The right opportunities, ideas, and people seem to gravitate to you. It's as if your happiness is rocket fuel moving you toward your vision.

THE TWO ELEMENTS OF BENDING REALITY

1. **Be happy in the now.** A key ingredient of this state is that your happiness is not tied to attaining your vision. It comes from the pursuit of your vision, combined with a sense of gratitude for what you already have. That way, you don't have to wait for happiness. It's just the natural byproduct of pursuing your vision. You feel a deep sense of fulfillment. And you feel insanely motivated to keep moving forward. Your work becomes like a craving. You can work twelve hours straight, and you might feel tired, but you won't burn out. All the truly great people I know have this beautiful happiness associated with pursuing their goals. Indeed, I think it's the only way to truly attain your goals—to be happy as you make the long, sometimes difficult climb toward great visions.

2. **Develop an exciting vision for your future**

I've observed that almost all of the extraordinary people I've met or read about have one thing in common: They have a vision for their future. It may be a new piece of art to create, a service or product to bring to the world, a mountain to climb, or a family to raise. These people live in the future in some way. Conventional spiritual growth advocates talk about the need to be "present." I believe that being present is only part of the story. Happiness in the now grounds you in the present. But you need bold dreams pulling you forward, too. Extraordinary people intend to leave a mark on the world. Now, a word of warning. You need to make sure that your goals aren't Brulebased, or you might end up chasing something that feels meaningless once you acquire it—as happened to me when I got my first big gig at Microsoft—or as happens to countless entrepreneurs when they build a business with the goal of earning a living, only to feel trapped in the usual nine-to-five when they achieve their goal. Instead, you want a vision for the future that speaks to your soul. This vision is typically what we call an end goal—which you'll learn how to set for yourself in Chapter 8 using a process called the Three Most Important Questions

HOW BENDING REALITY FEELS

Bending reality feels almost magical. Everything seems to "click." You're working, but it doesn't feel like work because you love what you're doing. When I'm in this state, I almost feel as if work doesn't exist. Plus, intuition and insights seem to come easily, out of the blue. Maybe this is because your mind is focused so intensely on your vision that you're alert to everything that will

help achieve it and you're in a happy, joyous state that opens you up to creativity

If you can choose any model of reality you want and accept it as true—why not choose a model that suggests that you can literally bend reality to your wishes?

For all of these reasons, I call this the ultimate state of human existence. From a purely practical standpoint, I also believe it's the ultimate productivity hack. When you're in this state, it feels as if you're bending reality to accelerate yourself toward the visions you have in your mind, visions that come to you easily and without anxiety. Almost everyone has experienced this sensation at one time or another, but the trick is staying in this ultimate state for longer and longer periods. The most extraordinary people know how to do this. It's actually a discipline you can learn and practice. I call it Blissipline. And it's coming up next.

LIVE IN BLISSIPLINE

Where We Learn about the Important Discipline of Maintaining Daily Bliss

Why Happiness Matters

HAPPINESS CAN IMPROVE PERFORMANCE AT YOUR JOB. In the brilliant book *The Happiness Advantage*, HAPPINESS CAN IMPROVE PERFORMANCE AT YOUR JOB. In the brilliant book *The Happiness Advantage*, Shawn Achor describes a common med school exercise in which doctors in training make a diagnosis based on a rundown of a patient's symptoms and history. It's a test of the doc's knowledge and ability to think outside the box, not getting wedded to one diagnosis (known as anchoring). In one study three groups of doctors were asked to do this kind of analysis. One group was "primed to feel happy" before the exercise, another group was asked to read "neutral" medical material beforehand, and the "control" group wasn't given anything prior to the exercise. The happiness-primed docs were almost twice as speedy at making the right diagnosis compared to those in the control group—and beat them soundly at avoiding anchoring, too. What was this mysterious priming? The doctors in the happiness group were given a little candy. And they weren't even allowed to eat it to avoid possibly skewing the study results by performing with elevated blood sugar! Which leads to the amusing question that Achor asks in his book: "Perhaps patients should start offering their doctors lollipops, instead of the other way around."

How Happiness Happens Before we dive into the practice of Blissipline, it's important to first define the idea of happiness. I believe that there are three distinct types of happiness.

1. Happiness from Special and Unique Experiences

This is the happiness that comes from unique human experiences. The fist-pumping elation of winning a sports game. The chest-thumping excitement of closing a major deal. The mindbending bliss of ecstatic experiences, chemically induced or otherwise. This bliss is powerful—present moment and short-lived. Sometimes there's a crash or letdown afterward as your brain chemistry descends from this high. In small doses, it's fantastic, but it can be distracting, addictive, and potentially destructive. If we were hooked up to instant bliss machines that pumped this chemistry through us 24/7, civilization would cease to progress (and we'd be too blissed-out to care). Happiness from unique experiences is a kind of short-term happiness—but it can't be the only kind

2. Happiness from Growth and Awakening While bliss from experiences is wonderful, there's a second type of happiness. It's more rare but seems to be more enduring. It's the happiness advocated by spiritual practitioners and transcendent practices. I call it happiness from growth and awakening. This type of happiness comes from reaching higher states of consciousness. People seek awakening in many different ways—from mindfulness practices to spiritual paths and practices of all kinds. The millions who pursue some type of spiritual path show how important this level of happiness is to human being

3. Happiness from Meaning I adore my kids, but let's be honest: There are times when parenting is no fun. I've had nights of no sleep, dealt with icky diapers, and walked the floor for hours at a time with a wailing baby. So, I wouldn't say I'm always happy as a parent. And studies bear this out: Having kids tends to lessen happiness. But even on the difficult days, I wouldn't trade it for anything. The overwhelming majority of parents say the same thing. Social psychologist Roy Baumeister, PhD, has found that this "parenthood paradox" is explained when the search for meaning is added into the equation. Parenting is highly meaningful, even though it's also highly demanding and requires personal sacrifices that go against

short-term happiness. What's interesting about the parenthood paradox is that it seems to indicate that we humans find meaning so important that we'll sacrifice a certain amount of happiness for it. Meaning is what we get from having a healthy vision for the future, as we discussed in Chapter 6. It's a critical component of happiness. In the chapters that follow, we'll take a deeper dive into how to find the meaning and mission that will put you on your personal path to extraordinary living. These three types of happiness tiptoe with us through life. Opportunities to find unique experiences, growth and awakening, and meaning are always around us. Most of us just don't look as hard as we could. And the reason for this is that we get tuned to function at a particular preset happiness level.

Your Happiness Gauge

Think back to a time of supreme happiness in your life. Maybe it was the day you fell in love, got married, had a baby, achieved a dream goal, had a spiritual epiphany, or just felt glad to be alive. Spend a few moments feeling those feelings. Incredible, right? Now, sense how you're feeling right now. Chances are, you're neither at your highest high nor your lowest low right now. You're likely somewhere in between. We don't generally spend too long at the very top or the very bottom of our emotional spectrum.

research has found that our happiness is hackable. You've already learned how to raise your set points for the Twelve Areas of Balance in your life. Happiness is no different. It's all part of optimizing your systems for living. It turns out that you can actually raise your happiness level to experience higher levels of happiness every day of your life, too, no matter what is going on around you. There are three specific systems for living that can be especially helpful for this

THE PATH TO BLISSIPLINE: THREE SYSTEMS FOR ADVANCING YOUR HAPPINESS LEVELS

The three Blissipline systems below will help you upgrade your quality of life every day. They're called transcendent practices: conscious practices that you internalize or embody. You'll know if they're working because you'll experience higher levels of satisfaction in daily life—and the boost in happiness usually comes instantly. Does this mean that bad things won't happen or that you'll never be unhappy? Of course not. But it does mean that you'll have the Blissipline to deal with adversity from a positive place and the capacity to recover to a higher happiness set point than before.

Blissipline System 1: The Power of Gratitude

Perhaps no single exercise leads to as big a happiness boost as the practice of gratitude—so much so that gratitude is getting significant notice in research and scientific circles. The list of scientifically proven benefits for the practice of gratitude now includes: More energy More forgiving attitudes Less depression Less anxiousness More feelings of being socially connected Better sleep

Dr. Emmons did another study in which people wrote down positive things each day. Not only did they report an even greater gratitude boost, but they also said they helped other people more. Apparently gratitude leads to giving, which in turn boosts the happiness and gratitude of others. That's the kind of social contagion I can get behind.

Appreciating the Reverse Gap

So, how can you make the experience of gratitude a daily occurrence in your life? Switch your “gap.” This idea comes from entrepreneurial coach Dan Sullivan. As shown in the diagram below, most of us are trained to watch the forward gap—the gap between where you are now and where you want to be. The problem is that we tell ourselves we'll be happy when we reach that new revenue target at work . . . finally get married . . . have a baby . . . have X amount of money in the bank, and so on: But there's a problem here. If you're chasing the forward gap, the chase will never end. No matter how good life gets, you'll always be chasing the next idea on the horizon. And just like the actual horizon, you can't catch it. It will always remain ahead of you. Tying happiness to the attainment of some future goal is like trying to catch up to the horizon. It's always going to be one step beyond your reach. Instead, Dan suggests we look backward—to the past—and appreciate how far we've come. Dan calls this the reverse gap:

Even in tough times, you can look back and see how far you've come, how much you've learned, and the support you've received along the way. Paying attention to the “reverse gap” is a perfect exercise in gratitude and is far more likely to give you a boost of happiness than striving for happiness in the future. That's why gratitude is such a powerful system for Blissipline. I believe every day should begin and end with gratitude. I practice it every day in my morning meditation. Each morning, focusing on the reverse gap, I think of five things I'm grateful for in my personal life. Then I think of five things I'm grateful for in my work and career.

Blissipline System 2: Forgiveness

Preparation

In a notebook or on your computer, make a list of people you feel have wronged you or situations where you've been hurt. They could be recent or from the distant past. This may not be easy to do, especially if you're dealing with a very hurtful or long-standing situation. Be patient with yourself and remember that forgiveness, like happiness, is a trainable skill. In my own life, I have found it well worth the time and effort needed to release anger and hurt from my heart. When you're ready, pick one of the people on the list and start the exercise

Step 1: Set the Scene First, with your eyes closed, for about two minutes or so, feel yourself in that very moment when it happened. Picture the environment. (In one of my sessions, for example, I imagined my bullying school headmaster in the basketball court where he had made me stand for hours in the hot sun as punishment.)

Step 2: Feel the Anger and Pain As you see the person who wronged you in front of you, get emotional. Relive the anger and pain. Feel it burn. But don't do this for more than a few minutes. Once you bring up these emotions, move on to the next step.

Step 3: Forgive into Love See that same person in front of you, but instead, feel compassion for him or her. Ask yourself: What did I learn from this? How did this situation make my life better? As I was doing this process, I remembered a quote from one of my favorite authors, Neale Donald Walsch: "[The universe] sent you nothing but angels." It implies adopting a model of reality that everyone who has ever entered our lives, even those who have hurt us, are nothing more than messengers to teach us an important lesson. Think about what lessons you could derive from this situation, as painful as it might have been. How did these lessons help you grow? Next, focus on the person who wronged you. What pain or anguish could they have gone through in their life that made them do what they did? Remember that hurt people, hurt people. Those who hurt others are doing it because at some level, at some time, they were hurt, too. Think about how they may have been hurt in their childhood or in recent years

When you're truly at peace and in touch with yourself. Nothing anyone says or does bothers you and no negativity can touch you. When you learn to truly forgive, you become unfuckwithable. Someone could be mean to you, and, yes, you'll take defensive action and protect yourself if necessary. But you're able to go on with your life without having to waste your energy on them

Blissipline System 3: The Practice of Giving

The Dalai Lama once said: To be happy, make others happy. Giving is the path for doing this. Giving is a natural segue from gratitude. Gratitude fills us with positive feelings and energy for life. When our cup is full, we have the capacity to give to others. Dr. Emmons's study found that people who practiced gratitude were more caring. Dr. Baumeister's research found that being a self-described "giver" was linked with a greater sense of meaning in life. He also found that meaning in life was connected with doing good things for other people. Giving happiness to others is hugely powerful, lifts up both giver and receiver, and it's easy, because happiness is contagious. It can be anything from smiling and saying good morning with gusto to leaving little notes in briefcases or lunchboxes; from going the extra mile on a project to doing an extra house chore without being asked; from leaving a thoughtful note of appreciation on a coworker's desk to meeting your sweetheart at work with surprise tickets to an evening concert "just because." Giving is the path for doing this. I believe that the only currency that truly matters in an uncertain world is the kindness and generosity passed from one human being to another.

Exercise:

Ways of Giving

Step 1. List all the things you could give to others. Ideas include: time, love, understanding, compassion, skills, ideas, wisdom, energy, physical help, and what else?

Step 2. Drill down and get specific. What skills (accounting, tech support, tutoring, legal assistance, writing, office skills, art skills)? What kinds of wisdom (career counseling; working with kids; helping others deal with an experience you've had, such as going through an illness or being the victim of a crime)? What types of physical help (fixing things, assisting the elderly, cooking, reading to the blind)

Step 3. Think about where you could give help. within your family or extended family? At work? In your neighborhood? Your city? Local businesses? Spiritual community? Local library? Youth organizations? Hospitals or nursing homes? Political or nonprofit organizations? What about starting a group or raising awareness about an under-served cause?

Step 4. Follow your intuition. Review your lists and mark the items where you feel a surge of excitement.

Step 5. Take action. Put out feelers, watch for coincidences that bring opportunity your way, and explore the possibilities.

CREATE A VISION FOR YOUR FUTURE

Where We Learn How to Make Sure That the Goals We're Chasing Will Really Lead to Long-Term Happiness

FORWARD MOMENTUM

Dreams, visions, aspirations, goals—call them what you will—these are essential to an extraordinary life. I call them forward momentum. When life doesn't hold meaning for us, it's like living in the desert, parched for water

THE DANGERS OF GOAL SETTING

See, modern goal setting, as it's explained in countless college courses or to high-school kids, is really not about teaching you how to pursue what will really help you lead an extraordinary life. Rather, it's about teaching you to pursue common Brules of the culturescape—Brules that often lead to your chasing things that you'll ultimately find do not really matter. It's about safety rather than about truly living.

CHOOSE END GOALS; SKIP MEANS GOALS

You've probably heard the expression "it was a means to an end." It applies to goals, too. Often people confuse means goals with end goals. We choose college majors, career paths, life paths as if they were ends in themselves, when in reality they're a means to an end. We may invest years of toil and money for means goals masquerading as end goals. This can get us into trouble. The difference between a means goal and an end goal is one of the lessons that I wish more people could learn earlier in life. End goals are the beautiful, exciting rewards of being human on planet Earth. End goals are about experiencing love, traveling around the world being truly happy, contributing to the planet because doing so gives you meaning, and learning a new skill for the pure joy of it. End goals speak to your soul.

Something interesting happens when you give your mind a clear vision. Whether the goal is a means goal or an end goal—your mind will find a way to bring it to you. This is why I say that to the untrained mind, goal setting can be dangerous. You could end up somewhere you don't want to be. But when you learn about end goals and their significance and do the exercise I'll share in this chapter, you're more likely to end up with what your heart and soul really crave

THE IMPORTANT DISTINCTION: MEANS GOALS VERSUS END GOALS

It's a simple distinction, really, with four hallmarks to watch for.

HOW TO IDENTIFY MEANS GOALS 1. MEANS GOALS USUALLY HAVE A "SO" IN THEM. Means goals don't stand alone but are stepping-stones to something else. They're part of a sequence. For example: Get a good GPA so you can get into a good college. This often means that goals get strung together into (life) long sequences, like this one: Get a good GPA so you can get into a good college, so you can get a good job, so you can make lots of money, so you can afford a nice house, car, etc., so you'll have money saved to do all the stuff you really want to do after you retire. Does your goal have a "so" attached?

- 3. MEANS GOALS ARE OFTEN ABOUT MEETING OR CONFORMING TO BRULES.** Is your goal one you think you "should" meet as part of achieving your ultimate goal—for example, thinking that you should get a college degree in order to have a fulfilling job or that you should get married in order to have love in your life? Many means goals are cleverly concealed Brules. You do not have to get married. Or get a college degree. Or be an entrepreneur. Or join the family business. What you really want is to be in beautiful loving relationships, to have consistent opportunities to learn and grow, and to have freedom. These can come in many different forms. See the difference?

HOW TO IDENTIFY END GOALS

END GOALS ARE ABOUT FOLLOWING YOUR HEART. Time flies when you're pursuing them. You may work hard toward these goals, but you feel it's worth it. They remind you of how fantastic it is to be human. When you're working on an end goal, it doesn't feel like "work." You could be doing it for hours on end, but it genuinely makes you happy or gives you meaning. You don't need to step away to get "recharged." Working on the end goal itself recharges you—it doesn't drain you. For example, for me, writing this book is an end goal. It's so much fun that I'd do it even if I never got paid.

2. END GOALS ARE OFTEN FEELINGS.

To be happy, to be in love, to consistently feel loving, to consistently feel joyous are all very good end goals. A diploma, an award, a big business deal, or other achievements can certainly bring good feelings, but they are not end goals UNLESS you're happy AS you're pursuing them—in other words, unless the act of studying for your diploma or closing the business deal itself brings you happiness. End goals have happiness baked into the pursuit.

THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

How do we avoid the means goals trap?

Three Most Important Questions.

When these questions are asked in the correct order, this exercise can help you jump straight to the end goals that really matter in your life.

The first is experiences. No matter what you believe about humanity's origins, one thing is clear. We're here to experience all the world has to offer—not objects, not money, but experiences. Money and objects only generate experiences.

Experiences also give us happiness in the now, a key component of the extraordinary life. We need to feel that daily life holds wonder and excitement to sustain our happiness—which fuels our movement toward our goals.

The second is growth. Growth deepens our wisdom and awareness. It may be growth we choose or growth that chooses us. Growth makes life an endless journey of discovery.

The third is contribution. It is what we give back from the wealth of our experiences and growth. What we give is the special mark we can make on the world. Giving moves us toward awakening, the highest level of happiness, by providing meaning in our lives, and it is a key component of the extraordinary life. Think about these three essentials framed as questions.

THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

1. What experiences do you want to have in this lifetime?

If time and money were no object and I did not have to seek anyone's permission, what kinds of experiences would my soul crave? Let's apply this to the first four items in the Twelve Areas of Balance. Each of these four items relates to experiences:

1. **YOUR LOVE RELATIONSHIP.** What does your ideal love relationship look like? Imagine it in all its facets: how you communicate, what you have in common, the activities you do together, what a day in your life together looks like, what holidays are like, what moral and ethical beliefs you share, what type of wild passionate sex you are having.

2. **YOUR FRIENDSHIPS.** What experiences would you like to share with friends? Who are the friends you'd share these experiences with? What are your ideal friends like? Picture your social life in a perfect world—the people, the places, the conversation, the activities. What does the perfect weekend with your friends look like?

3. **YOUR ADVENTURES.** Spend a few minutes thinking about people who've had what you consider to be amazing adventures. What did they do? Where did they go? How do you define adventure? What places have you always wanted to see? What adventurous things have you always wanted to do? What kinds of adventures would make your soul sing?

4. **YOUR ENVIRONMENT.** In this amazing life of yours, what would your home look like? What would it feel like to come back to this place? Describe your favorite room—what would be in this wonderful space? What would be the most heavenly bed you can imagine sleeping in? What kind of car would you drive if you could have any car you wanted? Now imagine the perfect workspace: Describe where you could do your best work. When you go out, what kinds of restaurants and hotels would you love to visit?

2. How do you want to grow?

In order to have the experiences above, how do I have to grow? What sort of man or woman do I need to evolve into? Notice how this question ties to the previous one? Now, consider these four categories from the Twelve Areas of Balance:

5. **YOUR HEALTH AND FITNESS.** Describe how you want to feel and look every day. What about five, ten, or twenty years from now? What eating and fitness systems would you like to have? What health or fitness systems would you like to explore, not because you think you ought to but because you're curious and want to? Are there fitness goals you'd like to achieve purely for the thrill of knowing you accomplished them (whether it's hiking a mountain, learning to tap dance, or getting in a routine of going to the gym)?

6. **YOUR INTELLECTUAL LIFE.** What do you need to learn in order to have the experiences you listed above? What would you love to learn? What books and movies would stretch your mind and tastes? What kinds of art, music, or theater would you like to know more about? Are there languages you want to master? Remember to focus on end goals—choosing learning opportunities

where the joy is in the learning itself, and the learning is not merely a means to an end, such as a diploma

. 7. YOUR SKILLS. What skills would help you thrive at your job and would you enjoy mastering? If you'd love to switch gears professionally, what skills would it take to do that? What are some skills you want to learn just for fun? What would make you happy and proud to know how to do? If you could go back to school to learn anything you wanted just for the joy of it, what would that be?

8. YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE. Where are you now spiritually, and where would you like to be? Would you like to move deeper into the spiritual practice you already have or try out others? What is your highest aspiration for your spiritual practice? Would you like to learn things like lucid dreaming, deep states of meditation, or ways to overcome fear, worry, or stress?

2. How do you want to contribute?

If I have the experiences above and have grown in these remarkable ways, then how can I give back to the world? Again, notice how this question connects to the previous two. Imagine what you can give in these areas of the Twelve Areas of Balance:

9. YOUR CAREER. What are your visions for your career? What level of competence do you want to achieve and why? How would you like to improve your workplace or company? What contribution to your field would you like to make? If your career does not currently seem to contribute anything meaningful to the world, take a closer look—is that because the work is truly meaningless or does it just not have meaning to you? What career would you like to get into?

10. YOUR CREATIVE LIFE. What creative activities do you love to do or what would you like to learn? It could be anything from cooking to singing to photography (my own passion) to painting to writing poetry to developing software. What are some ways you can share your creative self with the world?

11. YOUR FAMILY LIFE. Picture yourself being with your family not as you think you "should" be but in ways that fill you with happiness. What are you doing and saying? What wonderful experiences are you having together? What values do you want to embody and pass along? What can you contribute to your family that is unique to you? Keep in mind that your family doesn't have to be a traditional family—ideas along those lines are often Brules. "Family" may be cohabiting partners, a same-sex partner, a marriage where you decided not to have children, or a single life where you consider a few close friends as family. Don't fall into society's definition of family. Instead, create a new model of

reality and think of family as those whom you truly love and want to spend time with.

12. YOUR COMMUNITY LIFE. This could be your friends, your neighborhood, your city, state, nation, religious community, or the world community. How would you like to contribute to your community? Looking at all of your abilities, all of your ideas, all of the unique experiences you've had that make you the person you are, what is the mark you want to leave on the world that excites and deeply satisfies you? For me, it's reforming

As you do the Three Most Important Questions exercise later in this chapter, you'll see how the Twelve Areas of Balance that you've been exploring and developing match perfectly with the Three Most Important Questions. In fact, I derived the Twelve Areas of Balance from these questions. The graphic below shows how and where they fit. global education for our children. What is it for you?

Blueprints for the Soul

On a piece of letter-size paper, they draw three columns marked Experiences, Growth, and Contribution. Within the columns, they write down their visions and aspirations for each of the three areas. These are more than just sheets of paper to me. Each represents the dreams, ambitions, and motivations of someone who has joined our company. And so we lovingly call these sheets "blueprints for the soul."

Exercise: Ask Yourself the Three Most Important Questions **BEGIN BY KEEPING IT SIMPLE**. All you need is a place to write down your responses—it could be your journal, your computer, a smartphone, or anything else. For each category, set a timer or your watch for three minutes or so. Setting a timer helps shut down your logical mind so your intuitive and creative mind can come out to play before hairy old Brules or outdated models of reality can rear up and rain on your parade. With the timer, you can complete the entire exercise in ten minutes. **DON'T OVERTHINK IT**. Trust your intuition to know the answers to these questions. Don't spend too long, and don't worry about being grammatical. Just let your words flow. Draw pictures if that helps. This is why the three-minute timer works. It forces your logical mind to shut up so your intuitive mind can be allowed a free-flowing expression of what you truly want. You can always go back after the three minutes are up and spend time analyzing and sorting out your list. But start with the three-minute rule.

REMEMBER THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A MEANS GOAL AND AN END GOAL.

The quickest way is to focus on feelings. What feelings will a goal bring? For example, a feeling-focused end goal about your environment might be: “I want a house I’m blissfully happy to wake up in every morning” or “At least twice a month, I get to go out for a delicious meal with friends or family I love to be with.” FOLLOW THESE FIVE STEPS TO STAY ON TRACK. Use this quick guide to doublecheck your goals to see if they’re in full alignment with what you really want. Mia Koning, our chief facilitator at A-Fest, designed these five steps, which added further clarity to the process:

1. Identify a goal.
2. Answer this question exhaustively until you have no more answers: When I achieve this goal, I will be able to __, __, __, [etc.].
3. Answer this question exhaustively, until you have no more answers: When I achieve all this, I will feel __, __, __ [etc.]
4. Identify the true underlying objectives of your goal, based on your answers to questions 2 and 3.
 4. Compare these objectives with the original goal and ask: Is this original goal the only way/best way to achieve these objectives?
 5. Is this original goal enough to achieve them?
 6. Can I achieve them in a more effective way? When you do this, you will often find that what you think is an end goal is really a means goal. You will also get clarity on what the actual end goal might be. This will free you to ensure that you’re really pursuing the right end goal. WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR LIST.
 7. Stick it up on a wall where you can see it and keep consciously and subconsciously working toward your goals.
 8. Share it with others for all the reasons I mentioned. You’ll be empowering others to grow and giving yourself new opportunities to grow as well.

THE GOOD NEWS

The good news is that you’re already on your way. Something amazing happens when you set big, beautiful end goals. Your brain latches on to what you’re seeing and feeling. It goes to work, hacking its way toward your goals. Steve Jobs said it wisely: You can’t connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backward. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something—your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. Because believing that the dots will connect down the road will give you the confidence to follow

your heart even when it leads you off the well-worn path; and that will make all the difference.