



Creating a Vision for Your Life

“Create the world you want and fill it with the
opportunities that matter to you.”

~ Alicia Keys

In this first section of the book, we will talk about creating a vision for your life. The reason being that the central themes around adulting are: living an independent life that makes you happy, thriving in your personal life, developing the talents you offer the world, your holistic health, and positive connectedness to others.

For this to be genuinely satisfying, you must be able to define a plan for your life according to your personality and values, and successfully navigate any changes to that plan whenever you face obstacles. The topics we will cover are:

What's Your Vision? Independently of what you've been trained to chase at school or by your parents, what do you want for yourself? This will be your most sustainable motivator.

Career Conversations with Parents: You will need to negotiate with your parents on the educational and career path you wish to take as you pursue your vision. Together, we will create a plan for you to steer this conversation towards a set of outcomes that make you happy and your parents comfortable.

Mitigating Low Grades: Some of you will not have high enough grades for acceptance into your desired academic program. Should you just give up and pick something else? No! Let's look at how to adapt to this curve ball.

Imposter Syndrome: Feelings of inadequacy can bring out toxic traits in our relationships and undermine our peak performance. Understanding how this presents in our lives ensures we don't self-sabotage and continue to take up all the space we imagine on the path to fulfilling our vision.

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What's Your Vision?

When I was in my final year of high school, I didn't have a vision for my life. All I knew was that I was looking forward to studying abroad and exploring something to do with business and mathematics. I picked actuarial science as my first degree choice at Wits University without knowing what an actuary really does for a living or what the curriculum entailed. I just knew it involved being good at mathematics, which I was, and it was a sensible plan that my parents didn't object to. I was only solving for a career path. I soon learnt what a big mistake that was!

I struggled in my first semester of actuarial science. I just didn't understand it! I wanted to avoid a transcript filled with C's and D's as this wouldn't look great on future job applications. Most companies that run graduate programs, request a full academic transcript for each year of enrolment in addition to a degree certificate which confirms completion. Within six months, I dropped actuarial science and switched to finance and economics.

My initial failures forced me to confront what I genuinely wanted, and it certainly was



not being an actuary! The vision for my life was beginning to take shape. As a student, I knew what I wanted to achieve in the next 5 years:

- Graduate with A's in finance and economics
- Be a top 15 student in my finance class—at the time, only the best students would be invited to the fourth-year honours programme
- Work in the South African financial sector after graduation (having initially entertained thoughts on living in America)
- Travel around the world
- Be financially independent

I expected the other parts about what would make life meaningful (family and social), would fall into place around these main desires.

I came close to achieving most of these goals and will talk about them in later chapters. Staying committed and knowing why I was committed, saw me through the challenges that could have sabotaged my progress. These early goals put me on a solid path towards defining my vision

By now, you have some experience with setting goals and planning your future, but have you thought about what it means to set a vision for your life?

A vision combines your purpose and your talents to describe how you want to show up in the world.

It's the big picture view of what you want your life to be about, and you can work back from that to identify which achievements and experiences will give you the most meaning.

Knowing what you want, being committed to it and being willing to sacrifice to get it are the three pillars on which your vision rests. Vision is cognizant of your current circumstance but is fixed on your destination. This type of clarity helps you withstand the distraction, demotivation and disruptions which inevitably threaten your progress over time. It gives meaning to every action in pursuit of your goals. Most importantly, it gives reason to believe you can breathe life into any seemingly hopeless circumstance that is connected to your destiny. Your vision may take time to conceptualise and you will refine it as you immerse yourself in its pursuit.



There is no such thing as a small or plain vision.

Your vision is not in competition with anyone else's.

One person's vision is not more important than the next person's vision.

We each have our roles to play in building happy families, vibrant communities, successful economies, and progressive countries.

Adulting is your call to action. Your vision is your response as to how you will make your vital contribution in a manner that is personally fulfilling. Let's set about doing so in a way that brings this concept to life in vivid colour for you.

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It's not what you look at that matters, it's what you see.

Henry David Thoreau

Describing Your Vision

If you have ever used a navigation tool like Google Maps or Waze, you'll recall you have to enter your desired destination in order for the app to generate detailed instructions on how to reach your target. Describing your vision is the same as programming your mind to understand where you want to go. Without this, you can't decide the appropriate set of actions that suit your objectives.

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If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there.

Lewis Carroll

There are many ways to get creative with this exercise of describing your vision. Although I have provided three examples below, you can use one or more in combination, or you can use other techniques that you discover from additional research. How you capture your vision is not as important as doing the exercise in the first place.

How to do it?

Some people do this through a **vision statement**. For example, in my work life, my vision is *to harness financial services and technology for positive impact in Africa*. In my philanthropic work, my vision is *to empower and mentor African students to excel as professionals, entrepreneurs, and well-balanced individuals*.

You can try something similar about your current stage in life: make it a wallpaper on your phone or your social media status update. Exposing it to the universe will encourage you to live up to your words.

Others create **vision boards** which show images or word clips of all the important things that together represent where you want to be. Visualisation is a powerful tool. Seeing examples of what you want to achieve makes it seem possible. Your success happens in your mind before it's made tangible in the real world and that gives you the confidence to believe big and act boldly. Always remember to follow through with action if you want to manifest what's on your board!



I prefer to paint with words so, instead of a vision board, I write a **vision letter**. With pen and paper, I write down in detail what I imagine my life to be on New Year's Day and again on my birthday. The manual process of writing, instead of typing, makes me really think about what I am saying and if I mean it.

Once you know where you want to go, it becomes easier to identify goals and choices that support your vision. No more doing things just for

the sake of it! Act and speak in ways that feed your vision. It sounds intense but the deeper you get into it, the more you experience how having a vision is a powerful principle for organising your life.

This is not to say that having a vision makes you blind to the harsh realities you will encounter along the way. Not at all! However, fixing your focus on your vision helps you bounce back from any setbacks because commitment restores your purpose, and extends your endurance beyond any short-term discomfort.

As you fill in all the details of what your vision is and what it means to you, remember that your vision is personal. While you may ask for help to achieve certain aspects of it, you cannot delegate responsibility for its fulfilment to others. Your gifts and talents were uniquely given to you to bring out your vision for purposeful impact. Something so critical should not be put to public vote for acceptance or approval. This is why I will continuously remind you to seek counsel from people who possess both true concern for you and the ability to support you. When we share our dreams with people who lack either one of these, we risk receiving the wrong advice which could make us insecure and disempowered - this holds true even when the people we love advise us from a place of fear or inexperience.

Detours En Route to Your Vision



You might be wondering what you should do when a problem threatens to derail your vision. Detours arise from unexpected change in circumstances beyond our control or our own decisions which breed unintended consequences. Each of us has to come up with a process that is both effective and healthy (emotionally and psychologically.) Speaking for myself, by nature, I'm a fixer. When an obstacle presents itself, I almost immediately switch to how I'll fix it. The problem is that emotions become suppressed along the way because the busy-ness of fixing takes over. I might find solutions that work but would occasionally be left feeling low-key passive-aggressive from unresolved feelings.

Now that I'm older and wiser, the way I bounce back is to look at what I did to contribute to the problem so I can check (or forgive) myself. Then I look at the situation to see:

- Can I fix it to stay on course?
- Should I let it slide so that I don't give energy to things that can't be redeemed? or
- Can I use it as a set-up for something I hadn't thought of but was made possible by the challenge?

Bouncing back from a challenge comes down to doing the next right thing possible under the circumstances. As I do so, I also regularly remind myself that believing in my vision doesn't speed up its manifestation, but it keeps me committed because there is something to bounce back for.

A true vision anchors you, rather than letting you be a leaf blown in any direction the challenges of life may blow you.

Dealing with Grief as You Pursue Your Vision

It's a tough reality to face but some of you are walking into adulthood and pursuing your vision without your parents' support due to bereavement.

Parents ought to be the foundation that affirms your place in the world. They gave you life in the literal sense and they speak life into you by offering guidance, support, and love. They prepare you to face the world with confidence and direction.

When a loved one passes away, our African culture gives us time to mourn initially but pretty quickly, we're expected to 'move on'. Except we don't really move on. We suppress emotions, we try to forget, we fail to acknowledge the gravity of what's happened. Healing takes time, possibly years!



Losing a parent can blur your vision. How do you see your potential without your parent(s) teaching you where to look, and clearing the path for you? Doing this on your own requires you to truly process your grief so that it doesn't block you from being all you were called to be.

I'm not an expert on grief but I have experienced it. I believe that talking about the parent(s) you've lost with your friends and relatives is an important part of healing.

As you do that, you will discover new information that helps you appreciate your parent(s) from different perspectives which you were not exposed to whilst they were alive. You will gain an understanding of what they meant

to you, how this loss impacts you and what aspects of their memory you will move forward with. I believe this will bring you comfort.

Dealing with grief is about healing and honouring your parent's life because YOU are their legacy. It's okay to look at old photos and share stories about the good and bad times. The impact of their loss is real to you emotionally and spiritually— you can't run away from things that are harboured within.

When you are ready, here are some questions you can discuss with older relatives and your parents' close friends whom you believe care enough to help you work through your grief. You might find that your bravery to talk about these issues helps them process their feelings—grown-ups struggle with grief just as much as you do.

1. What was your relationship like with my parent(s)?
2. What was the happiest moment you shared with them?
3. In what ways did they influence you? What are your favourite lessons that he/she taught you?
4. Who do you think showed my mom/dad the most kindness?
5. What are the most important lessons you've learned about grieving? How did you cope when your parent(s) passed away?
6. What is your earliest memory of you and my parent(s)?
7. What is your favourite memory that includes you and my parent(s)?
8. Are there any funny stories your friends or family tell about my parent(s) that come to mind?
9. Are there any sad stories as well?

10. What are you proudest of when you think of my mom/dad?
11. When in life do you think he/she felt most alone?
12. If you could hold on to one memory about my mom/dad forever, what would that be?
13. How was his/her life different than what he/she told you they imagined?
14. How do you like to remember him/her?
15. Do you have any regrets about your relationship with my parent(s)?
16. What do you think were my mom/dad's hopes for my future?
17. What hopes do you have for me?
18. If this was to be your very last conversation about my mom/dad, what would you want me to know?
19. I've been struggling to deal with the grief I feel. What are some of the daily habits or affirmations I should try?
20. Is there anything that you've never told me about my parent(s) or me but want to tell me now?

We need new conversations about how to deal with grief, and these prompts will help you and your family address these topics that need to be aired, not suppressed. You will all learn new things that bring you comfort and closure, as well as identify areas where you can better support each other. Your parent(s) would want you to achieve your best and find happiness despite the loss. Grief might blur your vision temporarily, but I encourage you to do the work (for as long as you need to) to regain clarity.

Pursue Your Vision, Passion Can Follow

Having a vision for your life is not only about having a clear passion that will form the basis of your career. To emphasize what I shared earlier: your vision sums up the big picture of what you want your life to be about. It sets the tone for how you thrive in your personal life, the talents you bring to bear, your holistic health, and positive connectedness to others.

Waiting to identify a passion to inform your career choice before you steer your life in a particular direction, can leave you in a holding pattern for a long time!

What happens if you don't get that random inspiration which shows you what should be doing in your career?

For many of us, it takes effort, discipline, and curiosity to discover what we'd enjoy doing.

Pursuing your vision and allowing passion to follow could look like some of these scenarios:

- Knowing you desire to live in a certain country, take a gap year to work there. This could start with entry-level jobs such as waitering, teaching English, tutoring, child-minding, data processing or office reception work, amongst others. Ideally pick a job that positions you to meet diverse people who might be able to guide you. Being a barista at a coffee shop in a district full of innovative companies is an example of what I mean here.



During this phase, attend workshops and conferences hosted by companies and tertiary education institutions that interest you. You'll emerge with a realistic understanding of whether you like that country enough to stay, as well as whether you want to study further and the most relevant options for the industry you want to work in.

- You have a dream to attend a specific tertiary institution but you're unsure of what to study. Attend their open days in-person or online. Engage with the different departments and talk to their advisors if they have a Student Resource Centre. Knowing your talents and interests, enrol for a generalist program for the first year that positions you to narrow your focus in later years once you've had a basic introduction to core principles.



- You feel strongly about staying in your home community to be close to your family. While this might limit your options, you decide to frame your career strategy in terms of the choices that would be successful locally and how that intersects with your skills and interests.

Passions are found by experimenting and exploring long enough to shake out insights. Don't wait for passion to come and find you—it's time to go out and find it!

Not sure where to look? Do a three step self-review.

1. Create a table of (i) activities and habits that increase your energy versus those that drain your energy; (ii) issues you care enough about to get involved somehow.

Go into as much detail as possible as you create these two tables.

When reviewing your energy patterns, pay attention to the time of day when your energy is at its highest and lowest. You may find that doing more creative and focus-intensive work during peak energy periods will change your perception of the experience and effort involved.

Example: you may find that you get excited about doing practical science labs but are quite bored with subjects that are learnt only through reading.

Using the insights from your review will spark ideas on how to connect the dots to the other activities that are energy boosters. This is how you create flow in your life.

A love for practical experimenting + computers + social media = a potential career as a social media audience analyst.

There are so many options, this is just one!

However, you can't control everything. For the activities which you find draining but cannot be avoided, discuss with parents or teachers how to manage these such as revising your subject choices and extra-curricular commitments to minimise time spent on sub-optimal areas.

As you work on the second table, consider the various ways you may wish to participate in each field. This could include advocacy, research, policymaking, or creating a business to address identified challenges, amongst other options.

Example: you observe that your city streets and its rivers are polluted from rubbish that is not collected by the city council, forcing citizens to dump it in unauthorized areas. For this particular problem, you might be interested in starting a waste management company that both collects rubbish and recycles the glass, plastics, and fabrics found. You also care about the shockingly high rates of violence against women and believe you could make a positive difference by leading fundraising campaigns for organisations that support victims and work with men to reduce the incidence rates.

It's possible to desire participating in different ways for each situation. Creating this list helps you identify which area is most urgent to you, where there is most opportunity based on the local environment and most importantly, what motivates you enough to act.

2. What 5-10 accomplishments are you proud of?

As you write this list, think about what skills, habits and teamwork were involved. Which areas would you like to re-visit if given the chance?

Example: you were captain of a team a while ago and although you're not interested in that sport anymore, you realise you enjoyed being in a leadership position. Use that to brainstorm what sort of opportunities you currently have to serve as a leader that you would find exciting and motivating.

3. Ask up to 10 people to give feedback on your three biggest strengths.

When you make this request, don't put limitations on how people respond.

Simply ask: what do you think are my three biggest strengths?

They may choose to highlight personal traits like your patience, loyalty and honesty.

They might highlight specific skills such as your creative or sporting talent or intelligence.

Does anything keep coming up repeatedly? Which of these stand out as areas you are at least curious and energetic enough about to explore further?

Try out some online tests as you go deeper. I like this creative profiling test as a starting point because creativity is an energizing outlet for all of us. It's the Adobe Creative Type test available at <https://mycreativetype.com/>

Taking all three exercises together, what clues popped up about how you can channel your personality and strengths towards discovering a potential passion that you want to include in your visualization tools (vision board/ letter/ statement/ others)? This process should reveal what you are interested in (you'll do it as long as it's easy) versus what you're invested in (you'll do it even when it's hard.) A compelling long-term vision is rooted in passions you're willing to invest in over time. In the meanwhile, frame your short-term vision around the processes and actions you can take to experiment and discover your passions.

I know from experience that it can be disheartening when you're in a dry spell regarding a lack of passion. It can appear to be a blocker preventing your ability to make progress towards your vision or to set one.

However, it's also a big opportunity! Treat it like a blank slate that means you're not stuck in any particular box linked to past experiences; you're free to create a new path altogether.

Be brave enough to continue exploring what lights you up from the inside out.

Final Thoughts

As you finish this chapter, the hard part begins: adulting requires you to define the vision you want for your life, **and work towards it!** If you are spiritually inclined, prayer and meditation during the preparation phase of articulating your vision will help you align your desires with God's will.

It's not a sprint.

Take your time so that you identify motivators that feel authentic to you, and not what you've been conditioned to desire by societal or parental pressure. The vision you set today will evolve as your current decisions lead to a series of outcomes that influence all your future actions, and as you respond to the changing real-world conditions around you. Take note of how your vision boards / letters / statements transition over time, with an eye on whether your vision is expanding, or if you are shrinking from your true potential.

We will talk about setting realistic timeframes in Chapter 11: Time Management 101 and 201 to avoid becoming overwhelmed or giving up on your vision before investing adequate effort.

It's not a straight road either!

Growing, learning, and developing are fulfilling and difficult at the same time. Don't expect easy or quick results if you want to achieve something meaningful. The bumps and zig zags might challenge you, but they will not block you. There is growth on these roads—embrace the journey!

Review

1. Which visualisation technique appeals to you the most and why?
2. Describe in detail what your ideal year would be like. Include what you are hoping for in your academics, extra-curricular activities, family and social matters, as well as your mental, emotional, and physical well-being. Depending on your life stage (e.g. if you are starting your tertiary education), you can imagine this over two to five years.
3. Capture these details in a vision statement / board / letter and place it somewhere you can review regularly.
4. What do you need to add to your life to make this future possible? Who can help you?
5. What must you stop doing or do differently to make this future possible?
6. Take a few days to re-read and edit this future you have described on paper. Do you find yourself increasingly attached to it? If yes, then goal-setting tools will help you. If not, keep thinking and exposing yourself to information and opportunities until you find a good fit.
7. Identify an accountability partner with whom you can discuss your vision (it can be a relative, classmate or friend). Let them know if you need their encouragement or help if they have the capacity to support in some practical way.
8. What must you do to get into the right headspace for your vision?