



Best Possible Future Selves

A self-help tool

Introduction

Best Possible Future Selves asks you to imagine your life in a future where you have worked hard and done well. The idea is to paint a picture in rich detail of your life in the future. The exercise has shown to help people feel more motivated and optimistic about the future and better in touch with their values. It can also help identify things that may guide your future career choice.

This exercise was developed 20 years ago by Prof. Laura King at the University of Missouri-Columbia (Lyubomirsky, 2014, p. 102) and has grown in popularity ever since (Nlemlec, 2013).

This tool is designed to...

- Help you imagine your future life in the round; not just your work.
- Help you get in touch with what your intuition might be telling you.
- Help you think about what really matters to you in your future planning.

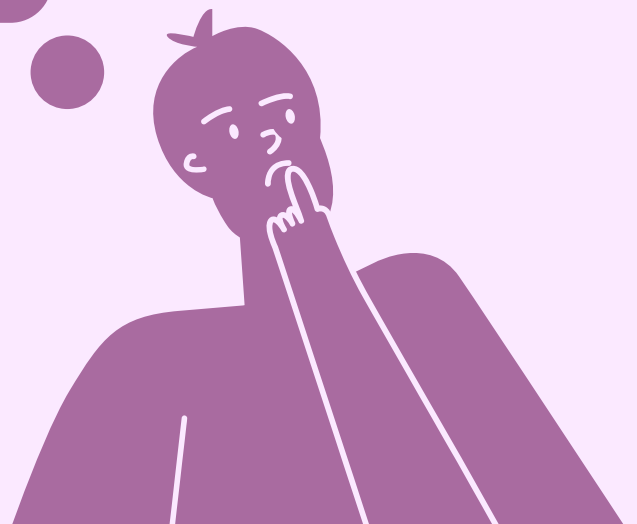
Consider using this tool if you...

- Use your life situation as a starting point for your career thinking.
- Need to become more motivated and optimistic about your future.
- Want to use a creative approach that enables you to 'try out' more than one possible scenario for size.

How to use this tool

First, begin by imagining yourself in the future where you have worked hard, done well and succeeded in fulfilling your dreams.

It's up to you how far in the future you project forward. It could be anything from a few years to a few decades. It's whatever works for you.



Second, imagine what your successful, fulfilled self will be like. Start to fill in the picture in as much detail as possible.

- Where do you live? What sort of place and accommodation do you live in?
- What is your family situation? What does your social situation feel like?
- What leisure activities do you do? How often do you do these things?
- What is good about this self? How does this future speak to your sense of meaning? How does it express your values?
- Where do you work? What sort of setting is it (in an office, city, remote, working from home etc). What tasks are you doing? What skills and strengths are you using? What satisfactions do you get from your role? What does it feel like to do undertake these tasks?
- If you can see yourself doing a specific job that great, add this in, but don't feel you have to know what the job is. It's the tasks that are more revealing. After all, many of the jobs of the future haven't even been invented yet!


As you write down your thoughts, remember that this isn't an academic writing exercise. No one is going to mark what you've written. So, don't get hung up with how you put things down on paper.

Third, review and revisit.

It is recommended that you come back to this several times over a few weeks, adding to, editing and elaborating the picture. As you do so you may address additional points such as:

- Which of your strengths did you have to draw on?
- What obstacles did you have to overcome?
- Who or what helped you to do this?
- What did you have to tell yourself to maintain your motivation?
- What does this tell you about your life purpose?

If you're not sure what scenario to imagine, you can try out different types of futures using different careers and see which you feel most comfortable with. For instance, you could imagine:

- A future where I follow the career I'd do if money were no object.
 - A future where I do the safe thing.
 - A future where I follow my dreams.
 - A future where I meet my family's expectations.
 - A future shaped around specific values / interests / skills.
 - A future where my lifestyle is more important than my job.
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Pause, Reflect, Act

- Which parts of your future life were easier to imagine?
- Which aspects felt most energising and hopeful?
- What can you learn from this?
- If you tried out different versions of yourself, which felt easiest and most natural to write about?
- Which gave you the greatest sense of optimism?
- Which felt truest to your authentic self?
- What might that tell you about which future may be best for you?
- What practically do you want to do next to take forward the insights from this exercise?
- Who could help you with this?
- Which other self-help tools would you like to look at now?

NB: Because everyone is different and no one solution on its own is necessarily a magic bullet, please look at our other self-help tools as well and use the ones that work best for you.

References and Resources

- Lyubomirsky, S. (2014). *The how of happiness*. Piatkus.
- Nlemlec, R. M. (2013, March 29). What is Your Best Possible Self? *Psychology Today*.
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/what-matters-most/201303/what-is-your-best-possible-self>
- If this exercise appeals, you might like to use the guided mediation available here from Clarity Psychological Services: [Best Possible Future Self visualization exercise 4 minutes - YouTube](#)



If you are a member of staff from another educational organisation and want to use a limited number of our self-help tools with your students, we'd love to hear from you and share good practice. We'd ask that you retain references to University of Huddersfield as a matter of courtesy and acknowledge the other sources we've used. Thank you.