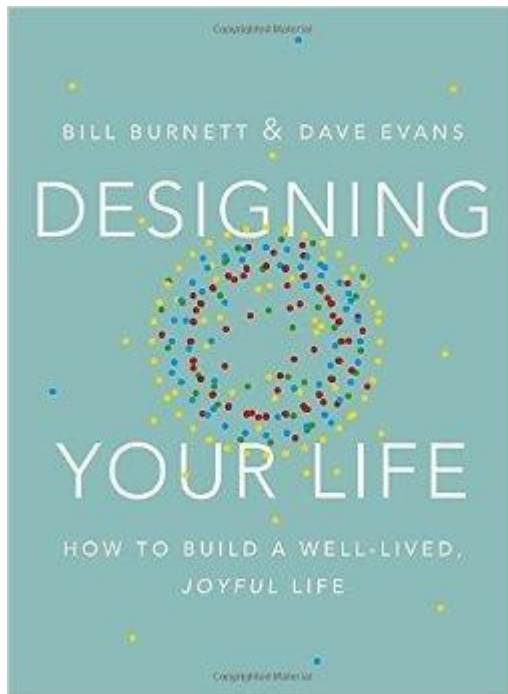


Context



Book website:
<http://designingyour.life/>



Bill Burnett

Executive Director of the Design Program at Stanford. Bill directs the undergraduate and graduate program in design at Stanford. In addition to his duties at Stanford, he is on the Board of VOZ, a social responsible high fashion startup and advises several Internet start-up companies.

Dave Evans

Adjunct Lecturer, Product Design Program at Stanford, Management Consultant, and co-founder of Electronic Arts. Dave returned to Stanford following 30+ years of executive leadership and management consulting in high technology.

[Read more](#)



What is this?

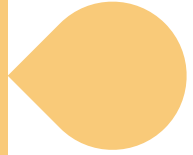
Designing Your Life shows readers how to apply the core concepts of design thinking to the pursuit of creating a meaningful life.

Why'd I read it?

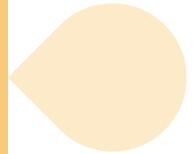
Several people I admire recommended this book as a practical, actionable approach to figuring out your life. I found it to be really helpful for me during an early point in my career and a transitional stage.

“DESIGNERS IMAGINE
THINGS THAT DON'T
YET EXIST, AND THEN
THEY BUILD THEM,
AND THEN THE
WORLD CHANGES.”

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MINDSET: Understanding the foundational mindsets of design thinking



RAW MATERIALS: Gathering the raw materials for life design



DESIGN PROCESS: Applying the design thinking approach to life design



SUPPORT STRUCTURES: Setting yourself up for a successful journey

Mindsets: Thinking like a designer

CURIOSITY	BIAS TO ACTION	REFRAMING	AWARENESS OF PROCESS	RADICAL COLLABORATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explore – dig into things that make you go “huh that’s interesting”• Question - ask tons of questions• Keep an open mind - hold off judgment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Try things – prototype and test your ideas• Fail cheaply and often – do lots of little experiments, and learn from their outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reflect – take a step back to see if you are working on the right problem• Reject – get rid of dysfunctional beliefs• Replace – replace unhelpful beliefs with more accurate, actionable ones	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand – process > outcome• Let go – be willing to let go of your initial ideas and investments and keep building forward	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Build a team – identify and bring in people to be part of your life design• Ask for help – seek mentors and other helping hands to support you

Mindset: Failure immunity

MICRO-LEVEL IMMUNITY

Learning to succeed sooner (in the big, important things) by failing more often (at the small, low-exposure learning experiences). This involves using a bias to action, failing fast, and being so clear on the learning value of a failure that the sting disappears



SCREW-UPS

DOH!

Screwups are just that—simple mistakes about things that you normally get right. It's not that you can't do better. You normally do these things right, so you don't really need to learn anything from this—you just screwed up. The best response here is to acknowledge you screwed up, apologize as needed, and move on

WEAKNESSES

Not again

Weaknesses are failures that happen because of one of your abiding failings. These are the mistakes that you make over and over. You know the source of these failures well. You've probably worked at correcting them already, and have improved as far as you think you're going to. We're not suggesting you cave in prematurely and accept mediocre performance, but we are suggesting that there isn't much upside in trying to change your stripes. It's a judgment call, of course, but some failures are just part of your makeup, and your best strategy is avoidance of the situations that prompt them instead of improvement

MACRO-LEVEL IMMUNITY

Realizing that life is a process, not an outcome. All life experiences, whether victorious or painful, can be channeled into your growth

GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

Wait what?

Growth opportunities are the failures that didn't have to happen, or at least don't have to happen the next time. The cause of these failures is identifiable, and a fix is available. We want to direct our attention here, rather than get distracted by the low return on spending too much time on the other failure types



Tool: Failure log

WHY USE IT

- The ultimate purpose of this tool is to build up a failure immunity mindset
- On a practical level, the tool allows you to channel your failures productively and turn them into learning moments



HOW TO USE IT

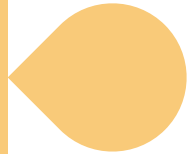
1. Log your failures
2. Categorize your failures
 - 3 categories: screw-ups, weaknesses, growth insights (see slide on failure immunity)
3. Identify growth insights / implementation actions
 - Ask: What went wrong (the critical failure factor)? What could be done differently next time (the critical success factor)?

[Link to worksheet](#)

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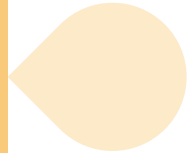
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Wayfinding – what you need to figure out the rest

Wayfinding is the ancient art of figuring out where you are going when you don't actually know your destination.

For wayfinding, you need a **compass** and you need a direction. Not a map - a direction. You can't reach your goal through a GPS. What you can do is pay attention to the **clues** in front of you, and make your best way forward with the tools you have at hand. The first clues are engagement (feeling completely involved in the activity – to the extent that you don't notice time passing by) and energy (the level of physical and mental fuel you have to give).

The next slides contain two tools that help you develop a compass and observe these clues:



Workview / lifeview compass



Good time journal

Workview + lifeview compass

WHY USE IT

- The process of defining a workview and lifeview forces you to connect the dots between your beliefs and your actions
- The compass serves as a reference to guide major decisions about your career and life



HOW TO USE IT

1. Write a page on your workview – your definition of what good work is.
The following questions are helpful prompts:
 1. Why work?
 2. What is work for?
 3. What does work mean?
 4. What defines good or worthwhile work?
 5. How does money relate to work?
 6. How does meaning relate to work?
2. Write a page on your lifeview – your definition of the things that matter the most to you.
 1. Why are we here?
 2. What is the meaning / purpose of life?
 3. What matters?
 4. What is the relationship between the individual and others?



Good time journal

WHY USE IT

- We often talk in grand statements – “I hate my job / I love my job.” But this isn’t helpful in identifying what it is that really gives you energy. The good time journal asks you to be granular and identify the elements of your work that drive you – so that you know what to look for in future engagements



HOW TO USE IT

1. Activity log - Make daily entries of your activities, and the related level of energy and engagement (e.g. on a scale of 1-5)
2. Reflections – Look over your activity log and jot down any trends / insights / surprises that help you understand what does and doesn’t work for you

The authors recommend doing the activity long for at least three weeks, and doing a reflection weekly.

Be as precise (detailed) as possible - the clearer you are on what is and isn't working for you, the better you can set your wayfinding direction. Consider elements like: activities, environments, interactions, objects, and users

[Link to worksheet](#)

“A WELL-DESIGNED
LIFE IS ONE THAT IS
GENERATIVE.”

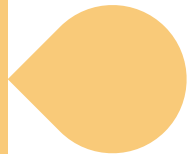
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Building your way forward

I. GENERATE OPTIONS

- **You choose better when you have lots of good ideas to choose from**
- Do not fall in love with your first idea. This relationship almost never works out. Most often, our first solutions are pretty average and not very creative. Humans have a tendency to suggest the obvious first. Learning to use great ideation tools helps you overcome this bias toward the obvious
- At this stage, quantity of ideas > quality of ideas
- **Tools:** Odyssey plans

II. TEST OPTIONS

- **Iterative prototyping > comprehensive research**
- Build prototypes to explore questions about your options, and learn from real world experience over secondhand research
- Prototypes help prevent you from overcommitting prematurely
- **Tools:** Prototype conversations / experiences

III. CHOOSE WELL

- **“There is no right choice – only good choosing”**
- After you generate and test options, narrow down your list – most minds can choose effectively between only 3 – 5 options
- Then, choose discerningly – using multiple forms of knowing. This includes cognitive knowing, and also weighing in what your gut says
- **Tools:** Grokking

IV. LOOK FORWARD

- **Let go** (of the options you didn't choose) **and grab on** (to putting your all into the option you did choose)
- Options only actually create value in your life when they are chosen and realized

Maybe make a journal entry about your decision, and reread it when you get caught up in looking back

Gut feelings are valid. The part of the brain that is working to help us make our best choices is in the basal ganglia. It's part of the ancient base brain, and as such does not have connections to our verbal centers, so it does not communicate in words. It communicates in feelings and via connections to the intestines—those good old gut feelings.



Odyssey plans

WHY USE IT

- Odyssey plans help you sketch out big picture possibilities for your life direction – they give you a more tangible vision to move towards than a compass
- If your mind starts with multiple ideas in parallel, it is not prematurely committed to one path and stays more open and able to receive and conceive more novel innovations



HOW TO USE IT

1. Write up three very different versions of the next five years of your life
 1. Life 1: The plan you already have in mind for your current / future life
 2. Life 2: The thing you do if the type of work you envisioned in Life 1 suddenly ceased to exist
 3. Life 3: The thing you'd do if money / image stopped mattering
2. Each odyssey should include:
 1. A visual / graphical timeline that lays out the work and nonwork aspects of your life
 2. A six-word title describing the essence of the option
 3. Questions that you would want to explore about this option
 4. A dashboard that assesses the Odyssey on resources (Do you have what you need to make this happen? Can you increase your resources?), likeability, coherence (Does this fit with your Workview / Lifeview?)
3. Share your Odysseys with 2-5 people you trust. Ask them to receive / reflect / amplify, rather than critique / review / advise

Be careful not to come up with three variations on a theme – you really want three alternatives

Remember that this exercise is not about designing the rest of your life – it's about designing what's next

[Link to worksheet](#)



Prototyping conversations and experiences

WHY USE IT

- You don't have a lot of data available about what will help you thrive in the future – prototypes help you generate this data through smart experiments
- Good prototypes isolate one aspect of a problem and design and experience that allow you to try out some version of a potentially interesting future
- Prototypes are real-world, meaning that they can help you build real-world relationships that may prove valuable



HOW TO USE IT

1. Life design interview – getting someone's story. The goal of this interview is *not* to get a gig. It is to learn the personal story of someone doing what you're contemplating – how did they get there and what is the work really like?
 1. Identify people who are currently doing things that you're interested in
 1. Used LinkedIn
 2. Reach out to them – ideally through a referral
 3. Have a conversation about their stories
2. Prototyping an experience - find a way to actually do stuff.
 1. Try to shadow someone – maybe develop this opportunity through life design interviews
 2. Find small / short-term ways to test components of your big picture work



“Grokking it”

WHY USE IT

- Grokking it allows you to make decisions instead of agonizing it
- The exercise allows you to access the wisdom of your emotions



HOW TO USE IT

Grokking it means to understand something deeply and completely, so much that you feel you’ve become one with it

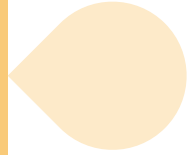
To grok a choice, you don’t think about it—you become it. Let’s say you’ve got three alternatives. Pick any one of them and stop thinking about it. Choose to think for the next one to three days that you are the person who has made the decision to pick Alternative A. Choice A is your reality right now. When you brush your teeth in the morning, you do so having chosen A. When you sit at a red light, you’re waiting to proceed toward your destination related to living in Alternative A. You may or may not actually say things to other people about this—such as “Oh yeah, I’m moving to Beijing in May!”—because such statements will cause confusion later. But you get the idea: you’ll just live in your head as the person in an Alternative A reality. You are not thinking about Alternative A from your current reality as a struggling choice maker. You are living calmly as one who has chosen A.

After one to three days of this (how long is up to you and a matter of taste), then take at least a day or two off to be your regular self and reset. Then do the same thing with Alternative B, then another reset break, then Alternative C. Then one more reset break.

Finally, conduct a thoughtful reflection on what those experiences were like and which one of those people you might most like to be

“THERE IS NO ONE
CLEAR SOLUTION.
THERE ARE MANY
DESIGNS FOR YOUR
LIFE.”

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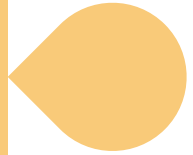
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Team – get your life design community together

WHY DO I WANT A TEAM?

Your life design isn't in you; it's in the world, where you will discover and co-create it with others. The possibilities that you will end up living do not actually exist anywhere in the universe right now. They are all waiting to be invented, and the raw material to invent them is found out in the world and, most important, lying in wait in the hearts and minds and actions of others – many of whom you've not yet met.

You need a group of people to walk alongside you as you are doing your life design. They don't have to be your best friends. They just need to be willing to show up for you, to be helpfully attentive and reflective with you, and to respect and care about the process—but not full of answers and advice.

WHAT DO I DO WITH MY TEAM?

Gather your team to share the specifics of your life design project and track with you on that project over time at regular intervals.

Seek counsel (and not advice) from your team. “Counsel” is when someone is trying to help you figure out what you think. “Advice” is when someone is telling you what he or she thinks.



Keep an **ask-for-help journal** in which you jot down the questions you want help on, and keep it handy. Each week, identify some people who can help you with some of the journal entries and reach out to them. Journal answers and results from your helpers. Find a mentor. Call your mother (she'd love it—you know she would).

3 – 5 PEOPLE.

A healthy team is ideally composed of 3-5 people. Beyond six people, there's limited airtime for each participant. Who speaks next becomes an issue. Since everyone's time is limited and we hear less from each person, roles start to form. Each person gets stuck in a persona, and the conversation shrinks. A team of 3-5 allows for the best dynamics and most innovative input

Practices – set up / solidify your habits and rituals

“In our own lives, both of us would say that our personal growth in this area—the refinement and disciplined participation in practices—has been the single most life-giving thing we’ve done. Even though appreciation of the value of such practices (yoga, meditation, poetry writing/reading, prayer, etc.) is gaining ground, this remains an area of great weakness, especially in modern society.”

“THE END RESULT OF
A WELL-DESIGNED
LIFE IS A LIFE WELL
LIVED.”

Annex: Mindset reminders

CURIOSITY	BIAS TO ACTION	REFRAMING	AWARENESS OF PROCESS	RADICAL COLLABORATION
<p>There's something interesting about everything. Endless curiosity is key to a well-designed life.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How is this nuanced?• What would someone who's interested in this want to know?• How does it work?• Why do they do it that way?• How did they used to do it?• What do experts in this field argue about and why?• What's the most interesting thing going on here?• What don't I get about what's happening here? How could I find out?	<p>With a bias to action, there is no more being stuck—no more worrying, analyzing, pondering, or solving your way through life. Just do it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How can we try this before the day is out?• What would we like to know more about?• What can I do that will answer that?• What sorts of things are actionable, and if we tried them, what might we learn?	<p>Reframing is a change in perspective, and almost any design problem can use a perspective switch.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What perspective do I actually have?• Where am I now coming from?• What other perspectives could other people have? Name them, and then describe the problem from their perspective, not yours.• Redescribe your problem using some of the following reframe lenses: Your problem is actually very small. Very easy to fix. An opportunity more than a problem. Something you can just skip entirely. Something you actually don't understand at all yet. Not your problem. And how will it look a year later?	<p>Awareness of the process means you don't get frustrated or lost, and you don't ever give up.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are all the steps behind you and in front of you that you can imagine?• Is what's on your mind actually germane to the step you're on now?• Are you on the right step, or are you ahead of or behind yourself?• What happens if you don't think more than one step ahead?• What's the worst thing that can happen? How likely is it to happen, and what would you do if it did?• What's the best thing that can happen?• Write down all the questions, worries, ideas, and hopes that you have, and then ask yourself if you know what to do next. Does it feel different now?	<p>Radical collaboration means that you aren't alone in the process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Find a supporter you can talk to about what you're in the midst of—right now. Tell this person your situation for five minutes, and ask for five minutes of feedback and discussion. How do you feel now (regardless of what your supporter said—just talking to someone other than yourself)?• Build a team• Create a community• Who are all the different groups and constituencies involved in what you're working on? Are you connected to and in conversation with all them? If not—get going.• Keep an ask-for-help journal• Find a mentor• Call your mother