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Keys to Success: Meaning and Motivation



Author's Introduction

“Whatever we are, whatever we make of ourselves, is all we will ever have—and that, in its profound simplicity, is the meaning of life.”

—Philip Appleman, American poet

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Envision, Pursue, and Persist: Ang Lee

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Envision, Pursue, and Persist | Ang Lee



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Ang Lee was born in a village in Taiwan. His parents emphasized the importance of receiving a good education, and his father was the principal of Lee's high school. Lee failed the Joint University Entrance Examination twice and was forced to enter a three-year program at the National Taiwan University of Arts, studying drama and the arts. Lee reported that seeing the Ingmar Bergan film *The Virgin Spring* was a significant turning point in his life.

After completing his mandatory military service in China, he moved to the United States and enrolled at the University of Illinois, where he received a degree in theater. He then enrolled at the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University and completed a master's degree in film production. While in graduate school, Ang Lee won awards for his abilities as a film director.

After graduation, Lee had difficulty getting a start in the movie business. He was unemployed for six years and stayed at home as a full-time house husband. This was a difficult time for Lee, but he continued to foster his dream of directing motion pictures. Lee was invited to return to Taiwan, and there he gained significant experience directing the film *Eat Drink Man Woman*. Ang Lee's award-winning direction provided him many new opportunities.

Over his career, Lee directed several films that received Academy Award nominations and wins, including *The Wedding Banquet*; *Sense and Sensibility*; *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*; and *The Life of Pi*. In total, Lee's films have received thirty-eight Academy Award nominations (with twelve wins), forty-eight British Academy Film Award nominations (with fourteen wins), and twenty-three Golden Globe Award nominations (with nine wins).

Ang Lee discovered his passion in life and continuously worked to improve his skills and proficiency as a director. Even during challenging periods when he could not find work in the film industry, he persisted in developing ideas and concepts that were later incorporated into his films.

Module 1.1

Exploring Our Meaning in Life

LO 1.1.1 To reflect on what constitutes a “good life”

LO 1.1.2 To identify personal practices related to a cognitive, motivational, or affective approach to define meaning in life

Think of people you know who you would describe as having lived a “good life”. What types of criteria might be used to make those selections? Could a good life be based on specific accomplishments, the nature of your relationship with that person, or their consistently good life choices and demonstrations of good character? Or are there other things you might consider? Second, what would those people say about themselves or the idea that you think of them as people who demonstrate a high-quality life?

What Is a Good Life?



The dimensions of what constitutes a good life have been part of an ongoing discussion by philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, and theologians for the past 2,000 years. Those conversations have often been centered around a series of questions:

- Why am I here?
- What is the purpose of my life?
- What should I be accomplishing in the time that I have available?
- Am I making good choices?
- What is meaningful and valuable in life?

Our search for answers to these questions often continues across the entire span of our lives. It is interesting and intellectually challenging, yes, but usually not that helpful, as we often infuse meaning into the choices that we make and the goals that we pursue. Positive

psychologist Michael Steger and his colleagues have suggested that there is a significant difference between discussions about the meaning of life as opposed to meaning *in* life. They argue that the **meaning of life** tends to focus on larger, more abstract questions like those listed above. Contrast that, however, with **meaning in life**. This phrase is more personal and relates to how each of us experiences and defines the purpose of what we do each day and what we hope to accomplish throughout our lives. We all want to feel and believe that our lives count for something. That “something” could be measured in accomplishments, our influence in the lives of others, the nature of our relationships, and countless other personal ways. Ultimately, we each have an opportunity to shape and define the dimensions of meaning in our lives.



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Perspectives on Life's Meaning



In researching this topic, Steger and his colleagues have also proposed that there are three primary lenses through which each of us might examine the role of meaning in our lives:

1. **A cognitive perspective**—A process through which we try to analyze and make sense of our lives. Beyond the trivial or momentary times of challenge, we might ask, “How am I doing overall?” In a sense, we are taking an inventory of what we do every day and the level at which these activities contribute to the big picture of what we have defined as meaningful. This is a valuable process as it provides a kind of accountability check on how we achieve the goals we have set for ourselves.
2. **A motivational perspective**—This involves the degree to which we pursue and achieve worthwhile goals by asking, “What are the internal and external factors that are spurring me forward to accomplish those things that are important to me?” In other words, “What gets me going and keeps me pursuing the things that I think are most important?” (We will examine the role of motivation later in this chapter.)
3. **An affective perspective**—This vantage point focuses on our sense (or lack) of satisfaction and fulfillment in life by asking, “How do the overall events of my life make me feel?” All of us, of course, experience ongoing ups and downs throughout our lives. This feature is more related to our overall feelings about the path and focus of what we are doing and where we are going (e.g., satisfaction, fulfillment, enjoyment).

Think Deeper | What is Your Pattern of Thinking?

When you think about the future, do you do the following?

- Inventory what you do daily and how those actions contribute to your goals (cognitive).
- Reflect on what it will take to be motivated enough to accomplish your goals (motivational).
- Think about how you feel about your progress toward achieving your goals (affective).
- Use a combination of these approaches.



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Being a college student requires a heavy commitment of time, energy, and financial resources. The goal is to graduate, but you are likely to have specific goals, outcomes, and dreams you wish to pursue and achieve. These could include a career in your chosen field, a promotion at a current job, increased opportunities, and setting an example for family members, among others. Whatever these reasons may be, they are personal and essential to you. Steger and his

colleagues created the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) based on their research on life questions and their meaning. The questionnaire provides insights into two related areas:

- 1. The degree to which you might have already defined what you believe to be your meaning in life. This is your “presence” score or the current level of meaning in your life.
- 2. The degree to which you may be in the process of searching for your true meaning in life. This is your “search” score and it corresponds to the level at which you still search for meaning in life.

Test Yourself | What Is Meaning in Life to You?



Use this adaptation of the Meaning in Life Questionnaire by Steger and his colleagues to assess the extent to which you may have already defined your meaning in life and the extent to which you are still working on it. As you take the survey below, pay particular attention to the language used around defining meaning in life (e.g., mission, purpose, meaningful, significant, satisfying).

Respond to each of the following statements as truthfully and accurately as you can using the following scale:

Absolutely Untrue 1	Mostly Untrue 2	Somewhat Untrue 3	Can't Say True/False 4	Somewhat True 5	Mostly True 6	Absolutely True 7
Remember that these are very subjective questions and that there are no right or wrong answers!						
	1. I understand my life's meaning.					
	2. I am looking for something that makes my life feel meaningful.					
	3. I am always looking to find my life's purpose.					
	4. My life has a clear sense of purpose.					
	5. I have a good sense of what makes my life meaningful.					
	6. I have discovered a satisfying life purpose.					
	7. I am always searching for something that makes my life feel significant.					
	8. I am seeking a purpose or mission for my life.					
	9. My life has no clear purpose.					
	10. I am searching for meaning in my life.					

Your *presence* score is determined by subtracting item 9 from item 8 and adding your ratings for items 1, 4, 5, and 6. Your *search* score is determined by adding your scores for items 2, 3, 7, 8, and 10.

Steger, M. F., Frazier, P., Oishi, S., & Kaler, M. (2006). The meaning in life questionnaire: Assessing the presence of and search for meaning in life. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 53, 80–93.

To interpret these results, Steger (2006) provided the following explanation:

- If you scored above 24 on presence and above 24 on search**, you feel your life has a valued meaning and purpose, yet you are still openly exploring that meaning or purpose. Life’s meaning is an ever-unfolding and ever-deepening process for you. You are more drawn to the question, “What can my life mean?” than to any single answer.
- If you scored above 24 on presence and below 24 on search**, you feel your life has a valued meaning and purpose and you are not actively exploring that meaning or seeking meaning in your life. One might say that you are satisfied that you’ve grasped what makes your life meaningful, why you’re here, and what you want to do with your life.
- If you scored below 24 on presence and above 24 on search**, you probably do not feel your life has a valued meaning and purpose, and you are actively searching for something or someone that will give your life meaning or purpose. You may feel lost in life, and this idea may cause you distress.
- If you scored below 24 on presence and below 24 on search**, you probably do not feel your life has a valued meaning and purpose and are not actively exploring or seeking meaning in your life. Overall, you probably don’t find the idea of thinking about your life’s meaning very interesting or important.

Think Deeper | Your Meaning in LifeDOWNLOAD
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Reflect on your results from the Meaning in Life Questionnaire by considering the following questions:

1. Are the results of this survey compatible with what you know about yourself? In other words, is the designation of “presence” or “search” descriptive of your current status in relation to meaning in life?
2. What steps could you take to strengthen or identify your meaning in life?
3. Who are the people in your life with whom you could have a conversation about the questionnaire and its results?

Review, Discuss, and ApplyINTERACTIVE
SELF-SCORING QUIZZES**Discussion Questions**

1. Who are people you know who are living what you would define as a “good life”?
2. What characteristics of their lives lead you to choose them for this designation?
3. Looking forward, what criteria will you use to assess the overall quality of your life?

Module 1.2

Ikigai: A Way to Visualize Meaning in Life

LO 1.2.1 To understand the elements of ikigai: passion, mission, profession, and vocation

LO 1.2.2 To reflect on ikigai from a personal perspective

As we have described, researchers and theorists have, for many years, worked tirelessly to create an understanding of meaning in life. Looking back in history, however, one of the more understandable and valuable ways of thinking about this topic comes from the eighth century in Japan, where the concept of **ikigai** (生き甲斐) was created. Ikigai combines two Japanese words that can be translated to mean “the thing that you live for” or “a reason to enjoy life.” It is, in many ways, a state of mind that reflects a positive and happy approach to living. In the book *Ikigai: The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life* (2017), Héctor García and Francesc Miralles observed: “Our ikigai is different for all of us, but one thing we have in common is that we are all searching for meaning.”

The Elements of Ikigai

VIDEO
CONTENT

CNN reported that the island of Okinawa is often referred to as the “village of longevity” because residents there have the highest life expectancy rate in the world. This fact can be linked to several factors, but a common adherence to the principles of ikigai as a way of viewing one’s passion, mission, profession, and vocation are included. The elements of ikigai, and their interrelationships, are illustrated in **Figure 1.1**.



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FIGURE 1.1 The four overlapping circles of ikigai.

INTERACTIVE
FIGURES, CHARTS, & TABLES

As you can see, *ikigai* includes four main aspects of our lives that interact with one another in various ways. These include the following:

1. Things you love to do
2. Things you can do that the world needs
3. Things for which you can be paid
4. Things you are good at doing

These four elements interact and help define several aspects of our lives, including mission, passion, profession, and vocation. The core of *ikigai* is the place where all of these elements intersect. The goal is to reach a place in our lives where we are doing things we love to do that meet a need of the world, for which we can be paid, and that we are good at doing. In the blog *Better Humans*, Melody Wilding made the following observations about the journey toward *ikigai*:

- **It's challenging.** Your *ikigai* should lead to mastery and growth.
- **It's your choice.** You feel a certain degree of autonomy and freedom in pursuing your *ikigai*.
- **It involves a commitment of time and belief**, perhaps to a particular cause, skill, trade, or group of people.
- **It boosts your well-being.** *Ikigai* is associated with positive relationships and good health. It gives you more energy than it takes away.

Ikigai and the Future You



As we examine the intersectional elements of *ikigai* in further detail, think about what defines—or how you want to define—*your* mission and passions and how your mission and passions align with the profession you envision for yourself.

Passion *Ikigai* conceptualizes **passion** as the intersection of the things that we love to do, which, coincidentally, we are also very good at doing. Examples of passion-related activities could include the following:

- Someone who enjoys and is skilled at sports and participates in various community recreation leagues
- Someone who loves to read and voraciously goes through one or two books per week
- An individual who is a skilled mechanic and spends weekends restoring an antique car

Passion is taking what you love to do and seeking places to engage in that activity. That will often also involve connecting with like-minded people who share your passions and interests.

When engaging in an activity that we love and are good at, we often lose track of time and block out everything around us because we are so involved. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi articulated these experiences as being in a state of **flow**. In his book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, he summarized the level at which we can pursue these experiences:

Contrary to what we usually believe, moments like these, the best moments in our lives, are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times—although such experiences can also be enjoyable, if we have worked hard to attain them. The best moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile. Optimal experience is thus something that we make happen. (p. 3)

This description demonstrates that vision, and the state of flow, are things to be pursued, so they do not occur accidentally. They require intentional action. Hopefully, you can identify activities like these to include as regular events in your life schedule. Even now, while you are

in college, you can intentionally find ways to seek out activities that you enjoy and are also good at. These activities often provide a break from the focus and energy needed to complete your assigned schoolwork.

Mission According to ikigai, **mission** is evident in our lives when we are doing those things that we love while, at the same time, meeting a need of the world. The concept of a “need of the world” can include a variety of initiatives ranging from those in your local community to other countries and from mentoring an individual to leading an organization or initiative and many actions between and beyond these needs. The primary focus is on serving others. An old Chinese proverb captures the spirit of mission: “If you want happiness for an hour, take a nap. If you want happiness for a day, go fishing. If you want happiness for a year, inherit a fortune. If you want happiness for a lifetime, help somebody.” Think about the things you love to do (outside of what you do for work) that may also serve others. Examples of mission-related activity could include the following:

- A man who loves to cook and volunteers to prepare meals at a local rescue mission
- A woman who enjoys singing and spends time at a nursing home sharing songs with the residents
- A parent who loves to spend time playing with children and provides babysitting for a single mom while she is at work

Proclaiming a personal mission, or even putting those words in writing as a mission statement, is one thing. Living out that mission, day by day, and taking on the inconvenient choice of meeting a need of the world is an entirely different matter. The exciting thing, however, is that if we genuinely do something we love (e.g., cooking, singing, playing with children) and meet a need of the world, it’s a win-win!

As you think about your current academic program and the career you envision after you graduate, it is also worthwhile to consider how you might invest your skills and knowledge to benefit others.

Profession According to ikigai, our **profession** is doing something we are good at and getting paid for it. This element of ikigai is a little different to think about. Hopefully, the career you choose will allow you to do what you are good at daily (and get paid for it). That’s what we all hope and strive for. At the same time, we can all think of people we know who are miserable during the work week and dread the beginning of every work week. Some of the data follow:

- *Forbes* magazine reported in 2013 that work is a source of frustration for approximately 90 percent of the workforce.
- Gallup reports that 87 percent of employees are emotionally disconnected from their jobs.
- Just as important as either of these two statistics are the reasons people hate their jobs. Commonly stated reasons include dissatisfaction, complicated relationships, boredom, and bosses who do not appreciate their value. These reasons are mainly personal (i.e., how I feel about things and what I need) and interpersonal (i.e., how I get along with coworkers and supervisors).

Consider this caveat. What if you find a job where you get to do things that align with your knowledge and skills but you also are miserable every day? The reasons for being miserable could be a lack of challenge, limited opportunities for growth and advancement, or a supervisor who makes the workplace uncomfortable. Notice that we have not mentioned salary as a variable in this discussion about job dissatisfaction. There are certainly people who are underpaid for the work they do and find it challenging to earn what they need to survive. Concerning job satisfaction, however, although people often point to being underpaid as their primary complaint, their real concerns are more likely related to interpersonal relationships or the details of their work situation.

How do these factors relate to our conversation about profession? The answer is straightforward. We all spend a significant portion of our adult lives working. Estimates are that we will spend roughly 90,000 hours working throughout our lives. It is critically important, therefore, to find ways to secure employment that matches our unique skill sets (or the things we are good at) and a work environment that includes the other variables important to our well-being in the workplace. Now is an excellent time to begin thinking about the factors that you believe are most important in defining an optimal work environment. This list can serve as a tool for evaluating employment opportunities coming your way soon.

Vocation Finally, our **vocation**, as differentiated from our profession, consists of those things we do that can meet a need of the world and for which we are also being paid. This element requires some unpacking. Your first response may be, “The career I am considering doesn’t fit into the category of meeting a need of the world.” Typical vocations that we might think of in this category could include a teacher, nurse, pastor, or social worker. These, of course, would easily qualify as roles that meet a need of the world. As with our earlier conversation about the world’s needs, however, it is essential to expand our thinking. Regardless of the career you choose, with a limited number of exceptions, you will interact with a wide variety of people daily, including coworkers, supervisors, and customers. Consider that all these people have needs, challenges, and concerns in their daily lives. Regardless of the role, career, or job description that you carry, you can play a role in supporting and encouraging others in your workplace. Even in the narrowest sense, that is meeting a need of the world.

Think Deeper | Ikigai

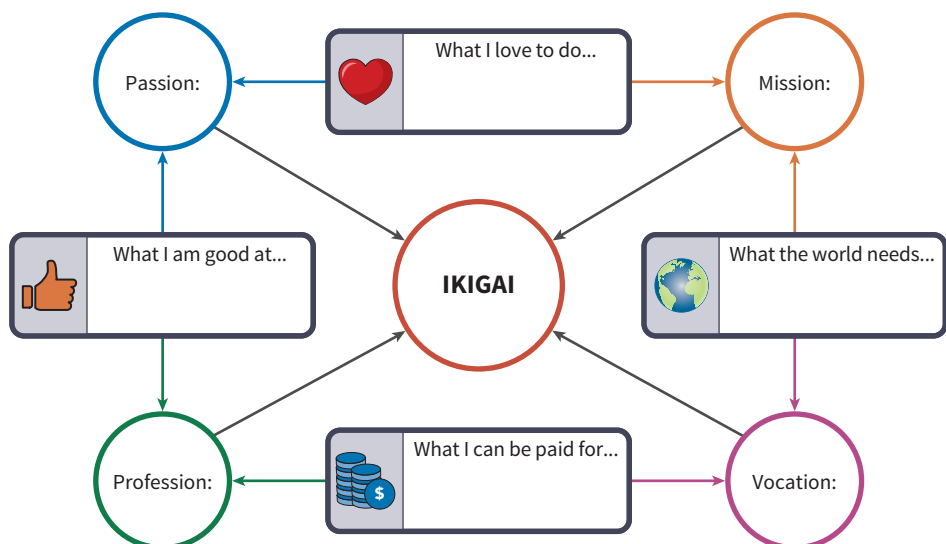
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Perhaps you began thinking about ikigai concerning your future as you read about it. Was pinpointing a particular mission, passion, profession, or vocation difficult? The good news is that you don’t have to! This exercise will help you identify various good possibilities.

As you look ahead, what are some possibilities for pursuing ikigai? Using a graphic like the one here, identify the following:

- What you love to do
- What the world needs
- What you are good at doing
- What you (could) get paid for doing

Now, fill in the intersections between the various pairs of elements to identify possible options for your passion, mission, profession, and vocation. Share and discuss your results with a friend when you have filled in the spaces in this diagram.



Make It Personal | Alignments with Your MajorDOWNLOAD
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Given the results of your ikigai, consider how your academic major relates to the components of this process.

My academic major: _____

How does this choice connect with each of the following?

- What you love to do: _____
- What the world needs: _____
- What you are good at doing: _____
- What you (could) get paid for doing: _____

What conclusions have you drawn from this analysis?

Did you identify things you love to do or are very good at doing and for which you might be paid or meet a need in the world? Take a moment to celebrate that discovery!

Review, Discuss, and ApplyINTERACTIVE
SELF-SCORING QUIZZES**Discussion Questions**

1. When you think about your future and where you are headed, do you reflect more on pursuing a mission, a passion, a vocation, or a profession?
2. Which of these aspects of ikigai is most important to you?
 - a. What you love to do
 - b. What you are good at doing
 - c. What you get paid for doing
 - d. What the world needs

Module 1.3**Motivation: Leveraging Belief and Desire**

LO 1.3.1 To reflect on the level at which you believe that you have the skills and abilities to accomplish your goals

LO 1.3.2 To identify evidence that you are motivated to succeed in college

How would you respond if asked whether you were motivated to succeed and do well in pursuit of your meaning in life? Knowing the destination is one (critically important) thing. However, traveling to your chosen destination and sustaining that effort are equally important endeavors. Let's look at some of the elements and thought processes that impact achieving those outcomes that contribute to our meaning in life. We will do this by examining two key elements: self-efficacy and motivation.

Self-Efficacy: Believing in YourselfVIDEO
CONTENT

The origin of **self-efficacy** is attributed to psychologist Albert Bandura from Stanford University. As part of social learning theory, he defined self-efficacy as “how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations.” More basically, it is the level

at which someone believes they can accomplish the tasks before them. This can be evidenced in several ways:

- A woman who graduates from college and takes a high-level job with tremendous demands. Amid this challenging opportunity, she believes in her ability to be successful.
- Because of an injury, an athlete who is told that she will not be able to compete for one year doubles her efforts and workout schedule.
- A person who has been in a series of unsuccessful relationships continues seeking new ones with a positive and hopeful attitude.
- Presented with a requirement to pass a professional licensure examination that has been reported to be extremely difficult to pass on the first attempt, a man doubles his efforts to be successful. He believes in his ability to master this content!

You can probably think of people you know who exemplify self-efficacy based on their belief in themselves, their choices, and their commitment to overcoming any challenges they may face. This may also be a pattern of behavior that you observe in yourself. It is easy to see the value of self-efficacy as a tool that contributes to accomplishing personal goals and dreams. Indeed, we all would choose to be up to life's challenges and move forward, find solutions, and persist even in the most difficult situations. Or maybe you think, "I would like to have more self-efficacy as I face life's challenges."

Positive psychology trainer Miriam Akhtar quoted the advice of Mahatma Gandhi that captures the importance of self-efficacy in our lives: "Your beliefs become your thoughts. Your thoughts become your words. Your words become your actions. Your actions become your habits. Your habits become your values. Your values become your destiny." As a person with an extraordinary level of self-efficacy, Gandhi observed that it all begins with our beliefs. Akhtar summarized the four sources of efficacious ideas as initially identified by Albert Bandura, and a fifth source was added by psychologist James Maddux:

1. **Mastery experiences**—As we learn and grow, there are times when we demonstrate mastery in performing specific tasks. The old expression "Success breeds success" applies here. When we are successful, particularly in studies that we find challenging, our self-efficacy is enhanced by performing those tasks. Related to this process is resilience—the ability to bounce back and continue moving forward when we face challenges.
2. **Vicarious experiences**—These are times when we observe people and the behavior of the people around us. If we observe people we consider to be like us succeeding in their pursuit of accomplishment and success, we are more likely to believe we can achieve success. This dimension speaks to the value of engaging with role models who exemplify the kinds of things that we value and would like to accomplish.
3. **Social persuasion**—Some individuals are influential in our lives, including parents, coaches, mentors, teachers, pastors, or others with whom we interact regularly. A word of encouragement from someone in these influential roles can tremendously influence the levels at which we sustain our efforts in pursuit of our goals.
4. **Emotional and physiological states**—How we feel at various times may impact our level of self-efficacy. If we are depressed, anxious, or tense, it may be challenging to muster feelings of self-efficacy. On the other hand, if we are energized, enthusiastic, and hopeful, we are more likely to take risks and attempt challenging tasks.
5. **Imaginal experiences**—James Maddux added to Albert Bandura's original list of elements that can impact self-efficacy by describing imaginal experiences. These are times when we visualize the possibilities of success in an upcoming activity. In a sense, we are imagining the steps necessary to realize a positive outcome. Although taking the next step and putting those visions into action is essential, positive imaginal experiences are a factor in enhancing expectations for success and actual performance levels.

There will undoubtedly be moments when you, as a college student, doubt your ability to conquer the academic challenges you face. At these moments, believing in yourself and being aware of what you have accomplished in the past and your capabilities for success are vital. The following *Test Yourself* personal assessment will help you evaluate your self-efficacy.

People with high levels of self-efficacy manage to solve complex problems, find the means and ways, stick to their aims, accomplish their goals, deal efficiently with unexpected events, handle unforeseen situations, invest the necessary effort, remain calm when facing difficulties, and rely on their coping abilities. They also can usually think of and find several solutions to problems, and they handle whatever comes their way.



Brian Jackson/Adobe Stock

Test Yourself | What Is Your Level of Self-Efficacy?



Ralf Schwarzer and Matthias Jerusalem have created a self-efficacy scale to help individuals examine the level at which this mindset is present. As you read through the list, observe the words chosen to describe patterns of high self-efficacy (e.g., manage to solve difficult problems, find the means, stick to my aims).

Review each statement below using the scale given. Then add up your ratings for the ten statements. Scores can range from 10–40. Higher scores indicate higher levels of self-efficacy.

Not at All True 1	Hardly True 2	Moderately True 3	Exactly True 4
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			

Schwarzer, R., & Jerusalem, M. (1995). General Self-Efficacy Scale. In J. Weinman, S. Wright, & M. Johnston (Eds.), *Measures in health psychology: A user's portfolio. Causal and control beliefs* (35–37). Windsor: NFER-NELSON.

Think Deeper | Self-Efficacy: How Are You Doing?



How well did your survey results in *Test Yourself: What Is Your Level of Self-Efficacy?* align with what you know about yourself? As an extension of your survey results, have a conversation with someone who knows you well and ask them to share how they view your level of self-efficacy and to provide specific examples.

What were the biggest surprises from that conversation? Believing in yourself and what you might be able to accomplish will be an important factor in shaping your future. Below you will find some strategies for expanding your self-efficacy.



For all of us, there are probably areas of our lives where we experience a high degree of self-efficacy and others where we might struggle. On the website Thrive Global, Kayla Matthews recommended six activities to consider:

1. **Accomplish small tasks**—There is sometimes a tendency to focus only on the *big* accomplishments of life (e.g., getting a raise, winning an award, becoming a valedictorian). In each of these examples, there are much smaller, necessary, incremental components like working hard, focusing on daily outcomes and achievements, and studying consistently that must come first. It is rarely possible to achieve *big* accomplishments without daily attention to the small details. Your path to earning your college degree will be paved with small achievements like completing a difficult assignment, learning a new skill, and passing a challenging examination—small tasks leading to a significant accomplishment.
2. **Learn from the successes of others**—How have others been successful in achieving their goals? Looking to others in similar pursuits and situations helps us identify the practices that lead to success. They can provide tips about how they reached their achievements.
3. **Shape your goals**—It is crucial to have long-range goals. At the same time, intermediate steps contribute to reaching those goals (e.g., finishing my degree, getting the necessary certifications, internships, and finding employment in my field). Without achieving those short-term outcomes, the path to our long-range goals is more difficult or impossible.
4. **Create a positive physical space**—Find a place and take the time to reflect on your progress, habits that may need to be changed or created, and the types of resources that will contribute to success. This time of reflection focuses on things done well that are worthy of celebration as well as those things that need modification.
5. **Clear out negative thoughts**—No one is perfect and neither is the path to success.
6. **Look for role models**—They are out there! These people have been on the same path that you are traveling. Learn from their successes and challenges.

People with self-efficacy are not successful all of the time. What makes them different is the ability to face challenges, quickly learn from their successes and failures, maintain faith in their abilities, upgrade their skills when needed, and, most important, maintain their focus on the goals and outcomes they have defined for themselves while overcoming the obstacles they may find in their path.

A Desire to Achieve



It is essential to have definite goals related to defining your meaning in life and a belief system that confirms your capability to be successful. Along with these critical ingredients for success, however, is the level at which we have the desire and passion to achieve our stated

goals. Leadership guru John C. Maxwell observed, “Words might tell a story, but actions tell the truth.”

Motivation has been defined in a variety of ways. According to psychologist Jeffrey Nevid, motivation refers to

...factors that activate, direct, and sustain goal-directed behavior....Motives are the ‘whys’ of behavior—the needs or wants that drive behavior and explain what we do. We don’t actually observe a motive; rather, we infer that one exists based on the behavior we observe. (2013, p. 288)

This definition acknowledges three essential elements of motivation that have a direct connection to you as a college student:

1. **The presence of a goal**—By taking this course and reading this textbook, you have declared that one of your key goals is to earn a college degree. That is an achievable goal.
2. **Factors influencing movement toward the goal**—Events and circumstances that challenge your progress. Focus your energy on those circumstances and resources that move you past any obstacles.
3. **The fact that motivation is inferred by the progress shown in striving to reach the goal**—This progress includes attending class, reading your textbooks, studying for and passing examinations, and completing your courses individually. These actions demonstrate your motivation.

Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation There are two primary categories of motivation: extrinsic and intrinsic. **Extrinsic motivation** is rewards-driven and relies on incentives like praise, fame, recognition, salary increases, or promotions. In relying on extrinsic motivators, we become dependent on the judgments and evaluations of others. In some ways, relying on extrinsic motivations gives away the level at which we maintain accountability and responsibility for our actions. We depend on others to determine whether we have succeeded. Granted, we always keep an eye on the expectations of teachers, employers, and others who are important to us in some way, and we enjoy their kind words and affirmations. At the same time, we cannot always rely on those who are available to reinforce us at the level we need to sustain our efforts.

Intrinsic motivation relies on internal rewards. Choices are made based on personal goals, assessments of one’s performance, and an inner drive to do better, improve performance, and succeed. People who have intrinsic motivation are not immune to the influence of extrinsic motivators like rewards and incentives but primarily rely on their own internally established rewards to keep them moving forward. These include a sense of accomplishment, personal satisfaction, curiosity and intellectual stimulation, enjoyment, and a sense of passion toward issues of concern. See [Figure 1.2](#) for a summary of extrinsic versus intrinsic motivation.

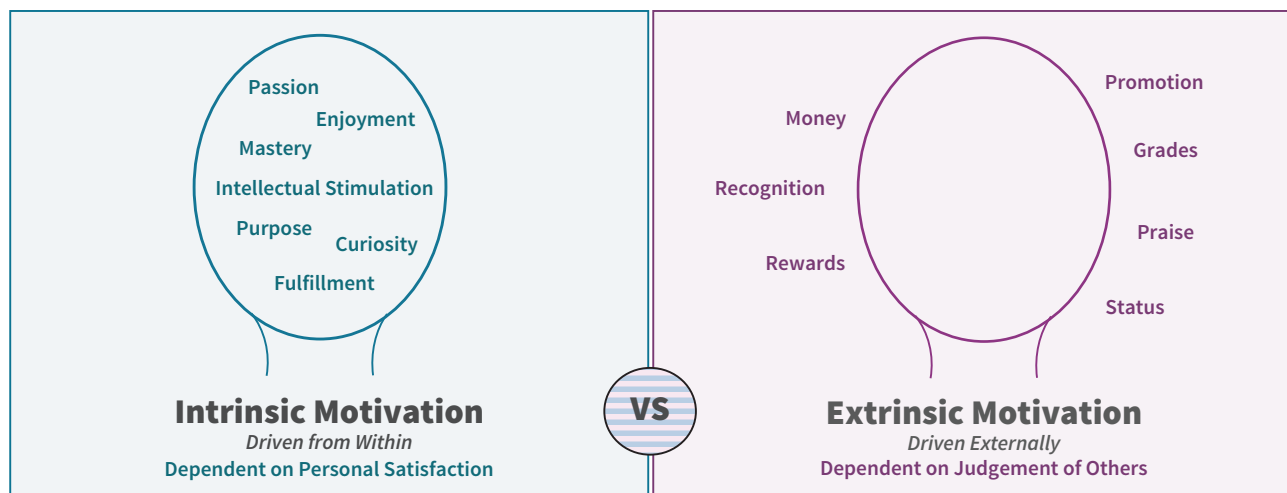


FIGURE 1.2 The differences between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.



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Make It Personal | What Moves You Forward?

Think back to some of the most memorable accomplishments of your life (so far, as there will be many great accomplishments to come). What was your primary motivation? Was it something inside that moved you to compete and achieve? Or was it because others in your life were encouraging and praising you for what you were doing? Of course, it could also be a combination of both sources of motivation.

Now think about your decision to attend college. What will be your sources of motivation to excel and accomplish what you have set out to do?



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Think Deeper | Where Do You Look for Encouragement?

Think briefly about your life's sources of encouragement and rewards and reflect on the following questions:

1. How do you respond when you do not receive the level of external affirmation (e.g., praise, commendations, words of encouragement) that you might need at any given time?
2. Does this situation tend to discourage you from trying harder, or do you just move on using your internal motivations?
3. What do you routinely do to celebrate your accomplishments and success?

Module 1.4

Focus and Balance

LO 1.4.1 To reflect on where you focus your energy—the past, the present, or the future

LO 1.4.2 To examine the level at which you are living with a balance of time and energy among academic studies, current employment, clubs and other activities, and time with friends and family

Are there events from the past that you just keep thinking about? Do you find yourself thinking often about what's next after college? How will you balance being a college student with being a member of a family? With being a friend? Perhaps with being an employee? Now that we have examined meaning in life and motivation, let's take a look at *focus* and *balance*.

Where Do You Focus?



As we will reinforce throughout this text, life is a journey. Along the way, there are points in our lives where we know exactly where we are headed and how to get there. Sometimes, however, the destination may seem unclear, and we must decide which path to take. Think for a minute about a typical day in your life. Where do you focus your energy?

- **Do you focus on the past?**—Like those words we find in a rearview mirror, “Objects in Mirror Are Closer Than They Appear,” our history can sometimes impact the present. Opportunities missed, lost relationships, personal pain and circumstances, and bad decisions can haunt and distract us. Do you find yourself thinking about those events from the past that could have turned out differently?
- **Do you focus on the future?**—It will be so great when I get “there,” wherever there might be: a new job, that dream home, an upcoming vacation trip, a new and exciting relationship, or finishing college and walking across that stage to receive your diploma. Do you often daydream about how great your planned future will be when you get there?
- **Do you live in the moment?**—I’ve got it right now and will make the best of it! Spur-of-the-moment decisions, going with the flow, and taking the good with the bad: Are these

the types of thoughts that you regularly have, not being held back by the past, not looking to the future, but living for now?

Which of these options is most like you? It is proposed that the best approach may be one that takes advantage of lessons that can be learned from all three vantage points:

- Things happen throughout our lives—some good, some bad, and some ugly. All these experiences help make us the person we are right now.
- Looking to the past, we can learn from our experiences (e.g., “I will never do that again”). These lessons can be valuable as we move forward.
- It is good to be aware of those objects in the rearview mirror, but not to the extent that they become a burden that slows us down as we move through life.
- Looking to the future, it is good to have goals, dreams, and aspirations about what we want to accomplish throughout our lifetime.
- Finally, we can spend so much time thinking about the past or focusing on what might happen in the future that we become oblivious to daily life experiences.

The best-case scenario is one where we learn from the past, have plans for the future, and still have time to focus on the events of our lives.

Test Yourself | Past, Present, Future: Where Do You Focus?

Here is a fun little activity to help examine where you focus—on the past, present, or future. Psychologist Frederick Koenig (1979) created the Three Circles test to determine where people focus—on their past, in the present, or to the future.

Directions

On a blank sheet of paper, draw three circles. The circles represent the past, the present, and the future. You can organize them any way that you wish. When you have finished drawing the circles, label them Past, Present, and Future.

Interpretation

The relative size of the circles and their placement/interrelationships are a guide to how you view the past, present, and future. Here are some of the possible conclusions that can be made from your drawing of the three circles (from Corry, 2018; and Dworken, 1985):

- If your circles are separated (i.e., not overlapping), then you might tend to view the past, present, and future as unrelated.
- If your circles are overlapping, then you might tend to view the past, present, and future as a continuous, interrelated process. So, what was done in the past impacts the present and the future.

- If the circles are roughly the same size, this suggests a flexible approach to the future.
- On the other hand, if the circles are varying in size, the largest (or smallest) are representative of a greater or lesser emphasis on that time frame.
- If the past is the largest, your family and background are important to you.
- If the present is the largest, you tend to lead a busy life.
- If the future is the largest, you tend to be optimistic
- If the past is the smallest, there is a tendency to think of yourself as a self-made person.
- If the present is the smallest, you tend to be an inquisitive and thought-oriented person.

As an additional step, share your circles with a friend or classmate, describing your circles and what they signify to you. Where do you focus?

Koenig, F. (1979). Future orientation and external locus of control. *Psychological Reports*, 44(3), 957–958. <https://doi.org/10.2466/pr0.1979.44.3.957>

Think Deeper | Focus



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Given the information above, where do you focus? Consider the following questions to guide your reflection in this area:

1. When you focus on the past, are your thoughts mostly about positive or negative events?
2. When you focus on the future, how optimistic are you about what you can accomplish?
3. You may want to discuss this topic with people who know you well. Ask them for some feedback on where they see you focusing your time, energy, and resources.



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Seeking Balance



Don't doubt it: your decision to pursue a college degree will be a life changer. Your priorities may be temporarily rearranged as you seek to maintain current responsibilities like a job, family, and as a parent, church member, or softball coach with your new responsibilities as a student. David Brooks describes one way of thinking about this dilemma in the book *The Road to Character*. He suggests we have two types of virtues, **résumé virtues**, and **eulogy virtues**.

Résumé virtues are related to the skills, training, and experience you bring to your employment. These may include degrees, certifications, publications, and other job-related accomplishments. Eulogy virtues are things you would like people to say about you at your funeral. These might include reflections on your character, your virtues as a friend, or anecdotes about your kindness and empathy for others. Brooks argued that we all spend a great deal of time polishing up our résumé virtues as we strive to get ahead and be successful on the job. Conversely, he suggested we spend less time than we should or could working on enhancing our eulogy virtues.

An example of seeking a balance can be observed in the 1993 film *My Life*, starring Michael Keaton and Nicole Kidman. In this film, Michael Keaton portrays a career-driven public relations executive named Robert Jones. He has directed all his time and energy toward becoming the world's best, most successful public relations executive. This path forced Jones to neglect other aspects of his life, like his relationships with friends and family. In one part of the film, Jones commissions the creation of a documentary about himself. He has an opportunity to see firsthand what his employees think of him. The conclusion is that they don't know him as a natural person but rather as a task-oriented, driven-to-succeed employer. This lesson becomes even more stark when Jones discovers that he has terminal cancer. This news arrives about the same time he and his wife find out she is pregnant with their first child, a son. Given the reality of his mortality and the news that he has only months to live, Jones creates a different video that he can leave for his unborn son after his death. This video features a variety of conversations that he will never be able to have with his son as he grows up: things like how to change a tire, stories about his boyhood home, and reading a story together. This poignant film reminds us that we are all mortal beings and never know how much time we have to accomplish our goals and dreams. It also calls us to consider how we might continually evaluate how well we balance our energies about work, leisure, friends, and family.

Think Deeper | Résumé and Eulogy Virtues



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Think of someone you know who exemplifies pursuing résumé virtues by striving to enhance their accomplishments. With that as a focus, consider the following:

1. What are some of the common patterns of behavior that you can observe in that individual?
2. How well are they balancing their relationships with friends and family?
3. How would you assess their level of happiness with their life in general?

Now think of someone you know who exemplifies the pursuit of eulogy virtues through their interest in others, empathy, character, and kindness. With that as a focus, consider the following:

1. What are some common patterns of behavior that you can observe in that individual?
2. How well are they balancing their relationships with friends and family?
3. How would you assess their level of happiness with their life in general?

What would you say about your tendencies to pursue and value résumé virtues and eulogy virtues?

Review, Discuss, and Apply



Discussion Questions

1. How does focusing on past events impact what you are doing now or will do in the future?
2. How does a total focus on the future contribute or detract from what needs to be done in the short term to reach your desired destination?
3. When things don't go as well as you would like, what strategies do you use to motivate yourself to get up and move forward?
4. How much should we rely on the positive comments and praise of others as a source of motivation? What is the downside of relying too heavily on extrinsic motivation?

We all have a personal story. We would like to introduce you to some of our friends, who, much like you, are on the journey of crafting their lives. At the end of each chapter, you will be asked to think ahead to career and lifelong applications of what you have learned. Then, two of these people will share personal dilemmas with you and ask for your advice. Let's get to know them first.



ANG

- Studied Journalism
- Working as a Writer and Activist

Watch Ang's video.

IMANI

- Studied Black History
- Working and Exploring Careers

Watch Imani's video.

AIDEN

- Studied Business
- Works at Family's Hardware Store

Watch Aiden's video.

OLIVIA

- Studied Marketing Communication
- Works in Website Development

Watch Olivia's video.

DEWAYNE

- Studied Music Production
- Working at a Small Record Label

Watch Dewayne's video.

ISABELA

- Studied Child Development
- Runs her own preschool

Watch Isabella's video.

WILLIAM

- Studied Computer Science
- Considering Graduate School

Watch William's video.

JULIA

- Studied Nursing
- Working and Considering Further Education

Watch Julia's video.

Think Ahead | Career and Lifelong Applications

Your most immediate goal could be to earn a college degree. Subsequently, you will have a purpose of seeking employment in a field aligned with your skills, passions, and interests. It does not

stop there. You will have many opportunities throughout your life to create new goals that describe your plans. As you think ahead about this reality, consider the following:

Meaning in life can be a tricky concept. We all want to accomplish things and create evidence that our lives matter. Sometimes this leads to comparing our accomplishments to those of others in our lives (e.g., friends, family, members of our graduating class). We are all different. Remember that your path through life will be different from all others.



emiliegerard/Adobe Stock



D. J. Eaves et al.

1. What are your strengths concerning meaning and motivation?
How will you put those strengths to work for you toward a successful college experience?

2. What aspects of meaning and motivation do you want to use to improve your strengths?
3. Review the suggested action steps in that area and choose two or three of those to commit to here and now, and for each, say how taking that step will help you succeed in college and beyond.

Share your responses to these questions with a friend, classmate, or family member.

Chapter Summary



Chapter 1 Practice Quiz

Module 1.1 Exploring Our Meaning in Life

- The phrase *meaning in life* relates to how we experience and define the purpose of what we do each day and what we hope to accomplish throughout our lives. We perceive meaning in our lives through cognitive (what we think), motivational (what drives us), and affective (how we feel) lenses, and we each have an opportunity to shape the dimensions of meaning in our lives.
- You have the goal of graduating and earning your college degree in common with your fellow students. At the same time, you have specific goals, wishes, and dreams that are personal and essential to you.

Module 1.2 Ikigai: A Way to Visualize Meaning in Life

- The concept of Ikigai combines two Japanese words equivalent in meaning to “that which you live for” or “a reason to enjoy life” and offers a way of thinking about meaning in our lives. It conceptualizes *passion* as the intersection of what we love, or love to do, with what we are good at doing; *mission* as the intersection of what we love, or love to do and what the world needs; *profession* as the intersection of what we are good at doing and what we can be paid for doing; and *vocation* as the intersection of what we can be paid for doing and what the world needs.
- The core of ikigai is the place where all of these elements intersect and achieving it is your choice. It is challenging and it involves a commitment of time and belief, but it is also rewarding and leads to positive relationships and better health and well-being.

Module 1.3 Motivation: Leveraging Belief and Desire

- Psychologist Albert Bandura described *self-efficacy* as “how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations.” It refers to belief in one’s self and one’s ability to accomplish that tasks one is faced with and achieve one’s goals.
- We develop self-efficacy through *mastery experiences* (times when we demonstrate success in completing specific tasks), *vicarious experiences* (times when we see people we think are like us demonstrate success in completing specific tasks), *social persuasion* (encouragement from influential people in our lives),

emotional and physiological states, which may have negative or positive effects on our sense of self-efficacy, and *imaginal experiences* (visualizing success and the steps required to achieve it).

- Along with self-efficacy, we must have motivation to pursue our goals and take specific actions toward achieving them. Motivation can be *extrinsic*, based on incentives and rewards, or *intrinsic*, based on our own internal desire and drive and internal rewards like enjoyment and intellectual fulfillment.

Module 1.4 Where Do You Focus?

- Our past, our present, and our future can each be a helpful lens through which to focus on examining our sense of meaning in life. Our past, with both its successes and its failures, makes us who we are in the now and offers valuable lessons learned. Focusing on the present gives us an opportunity to take stock of how we’re going and what is giving meaning to our lives. And having goals, dreams, and aspirations for the future gives us direction and motivation to achieve success and fulfillment.
- In his book, *The Road to Character*, author David Brooks describes *résumé virtues*, related to the skills, training, and experience you bring to your employment, and *eulogy virtues*, or things you would want people to say about you at your funeral. You might think of résumé virtues as what you can do as measured in degrees, certifications, promotions, and other job-related accomplishments, and eulogy virtues as who you are as measured in reflections on your character, your virtues as a friend, or anecdotes about your kindness and empathy for others. Too often we are focused on developing our résumé virtues. It is important to balance that focus with a focus on developing our eulogy virtues.
- You are now moving toward the completion of your college degree. That will be a great accomplishment. Remember, however, that this achievement does not mark the end of your learning. This will necessarily need to continue throughout the remainder of your life. Embrace the need to be a lifelong learner.

Key Terms

Eulogy virtues Things that we would like people to say about us at our funeral. These might include reflections on our character, the kind of friend that we were, and our kindness and empathy.

Extrinsic motivation Rewards-driven motivation that relies on incentives like praise, fame, recognition, salary increases, or promotions

Flow According to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a state in which we are so involved in an activity that we lose track of time and block out everything around us

Ikigai A Japanese term that can be translated to mean “the thing that you live for” or

“a reason to enjoy life.” Ikigai is, in many ways, a state of mind that reflects a positive and happy approach to living.

Intrinsic motivation Motivation based on internal rewards. Choices are made based on personal goals, assessments of one’s performance, and an inner drive to do better, improve performance, and succeed.

Mastery experiences Experiences in which we demonstrate mastery in performing specific tasks

Meaning in life Meaning focusing on how we experience and define the purpose of what we do each day and what we hope

to accomplish throughout our lives; a more personal measure than *meaning of life*

Meaning of life An exploration of essential questions about life, such as “Why are we here?” and “What is meaningful and valuable in life?”

Mission The element of ikigai that involves doing the things we love to do while meeting a need of the world

Passion The element of ikigai that involves doing the things we love to do and are also very good at doing

Profession The element of ikigai that involves doing something we are good at and that we also get paid for doing

Résumé virtues The skills, training, and experience we bring to our employment

Self-efficacy The level at which we believe we can accomplish the tasks before us

Vicarious experiences Experiences in which we observe the people around us and their behavior

Vocation The element of ikigai that involves things we do that meet a need of the world and for which we are also being paid

Resources

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