

Stop Settling, Live Your Best Life Now

Do you notice how often people settle for what they think they can get instead of going for the gold in those important areas of their life? How often do you see people plodding along in their jobs, relationships, or places to live so that it's obvious they don't enjoy what they have, or how often do you see people stop short of the little pleasures they really want by settling for things that are "good enough?"

There are a couple of reasons we find that people settle for less. Usually it's either out of fear or because they are disconnected from their values.

When it's fear it can be: fear of failure, fear of loss of acceptance, fear of the unknown, or the big one: fear being disappointed. Fear often leaves people cynical and resigned that things could ever be better, and doubtful that they can have what they truly want. But recognizing that you've become cynical can be a good thing.

"A cynical person is just a very passionate person who is trying to avoid being disappointed again."* ~ Benjamin Zander, *The Art of Possibility

If you think about it, you would have to care very deeply in the first place in order to become cynical. Apathy simply wouldn't generate the kind of energy that truly cynical people seem to have.

These weeds of fears and disconnection from our values take root in the garden of our lives at a very young age. They are fertilized by a life of being told what to think, what's right and what's wrong, what's good and bad, and what's appropriate and inappropriate. Before long these weeds start to choke out our hopes and expectations as we are rewarded for obeying and punished for disobeying and we learn to settle for less and less.

Authority figures tell us what is THE TRUTH and we learn to believe what they say - OR ELSE. And somewhere along the line we take these truths on as our own.

We aren't arguing against the value of cultural wisdom or tradition in this article. We are simply pointing out some of the negative effects of not being taught to think critically and to determine what is important to us for ourselves.

Since we aren't taught how to determine what's most important to us, we easily become disconnected from an internal sense of our own values. This prevents us from discovering what is truly important to us, moment by moment in our daily lives - how to live our best life now.

And though we become experts at griping about our situations, we never become skilled at examining our underlying beliefs that keep us in these situations. We didn't learn to stop and ask, "*What is important to me in this particular situation?*" or, "*What do I value here and what do I really want?*"

But as young children we learned why we shouldn't ask for what we wanted. The looks and actions of those in authority clearly gave us the message that we were selfish for asking. Or we were openly told that asking was bad, wrong, or inappropriate in some way.

We've all heard these messages: *money doesn't grow on trees, don't rock the boat, don't be selfish, there's not enough to go around, or you should just be thankful for what you have.* There were any number of these messages that taught us we live in a world of scarcity, we can never get what we really want, and we better just be happy with what we can get. And we learned it can be risky to ask for more than you have.

The problem with settling for less than what we really want is that it can lead to a sense of confusion, frustration, and dissatisfaction, not only for the people who limit themselves, but also for the people in their life who live with their dissatisfaction, which brings us to the first practice.

~~ Connecting With Your Undiscovered Values ~~

We will make a rather bold assertion here: most of the internal distress people feel results from being disconnected from their most deeply held personal values, and then behaving in ways that are out of harmony with these values.

To see how this plays out we're going to use a fictional example. But to make it real for you, we ask that you use an area of your life, about which you are less than completely satisfied, and follow along.

You can pick any area: your relationship with your significant other, a child, boss, employee, or even the man at the shoe repair shop. Or it can be a

situation such as your job, living arrangements, vehicle, or finances. As long as you are somewhat dissatisfied, anything like this will work.

How will you know if the area you pick will work? Because you'll remember saying something like, *"It's not so bad," "It's more work to fix it than it is worth," "It's not perfect but it's good enough," "It wouldn't make a difference if I tried to fix it anyway," "If I tried to change this, it might get worse,"* or any other settle-for-less statement.

Okay, have you picked an area? As we go through our example, imagine how each piece of our example applies to your situation.

We've said that settling for what we think we can get, rather than going for what we really want, can lead to a sense of confusion, frustration, and dissatisfaction, both for us and for others. To illustrate this, imagine a woman who has never been satisfied with her job. We'll call her Pat.

Pat's been going to work day after day, week after week, dreading every minute. The only options she sees are either to quit or suffer. You can easily see how settling for this job could leave her feeling frustrated.

But how she feels about her job affects more than just her own sense of well being. How do you imagine she acts with the people at work, and how might it impact the way she is with her family and friends?

Do you imagine her frustration and irritation might cause her to complain about her situation? Has anyone ever complained to you about their dissatisfaction and hopelessness? How did this affect you? When someone settles for less it affects everyone and not just the person doing the settling.

But what prevents Pat from looking for a solution instead of just grinding along in the same old routine?

As we said before, one reason we end up settling for things we don't enjoy is fear: Fear of failure, loss of acceptance, fear of the unknown, or fear of being disappointed. We also implied that Pat's distress be caused by her disconnection from her most deeply held personal values, and then behaving in ways that were out of harmony with those values.

If this is true, how might getting clear about her personal values help her break out of this pattern of settling for less and propel her into action to go for what she really wants? This brings us to the second practice.

~~ Constant Awareness of Your Personal Values ~~

Awareness of our personal values gives us an internal landmark or reference point that we can use to guide our actions. With this internal landmark we can guide our actions so they are in harmony with what is most deeply important to us -- who we really are.

For our life and relationships to work smoothly it's important that we create alignment between our values and our actions, first with ourselves and then with others.

The process of aligning your values and actions with yourself starts with learning how to identify what you most deeply value in any situation. Only then can you create a clear vision of what you want to experience that is aligned with your values.

Once you have this clear mental image, you are able to identify specific, step-by-step actions that will create those results most likely to lead you toward your vision.

But what do we mean when we talk about values? We mean any principle or quality that is intrinsically valuable or desirable to you. Using this definition a person couldn't value "getting to work on time" or "making a lot of money" because these are actions or results, not the underlying principle or quality of life that would generate these actions and results.

So let's examine what Pat might value that is missing in her current job situation and generating her complaints. Well, she might deeply value connection and community, but she doesn't really know her co-workers very well because no one talks about anything other than work.

She might also value contribution, but she never hears from her boss that her work is contributing to the organization or the people it serves. She may also be missing a sense of creativity and freedom that would contribute to her own growth.

Just by identifying how much she values connection, community, contribution, creativity, freedom, and growth, she has already gained enough clarity to see her job and herself a little differently. This change in perspective provides some distance from her dissatisfaction and shifts her focus of attention from her complaints. And what you focus your attention on grows.

It's now possible for her to realize that there are simply things she values that are missing at her job. With this clarity she can now try to come up with ideas that might help her have what she values at her present job.

Were not implying that she will be able to create everything she values in her current situation, but until she knows what she values, and how these values are missing in this unsatisfying situation, she will never know what to ask for to get what she wants.

But identifying what she values is just the first step. In order to make a difference she needs to translate these values into concrete actions that will result in the experience of what she values in her situation. So starting with this in mind, what actions might she take that would result in her experiencing what she values?

To create more connection and community she might organize some weekly activities with her coworkers, such as a discussion group during lunch or regular recreational activities after work.

To meet her need for contribution she might ask her boss to tell her how what she is doing is contributing to the organization and the people it serves. And to meet her need for growth she can also ask for support in identifying ways that she could contribute more successfully.

To meet her need for creativity she could ask her boss and coworkers if they were interested in hearing creative ideas for the growth of the company.

In short, when she is clear about what she values she can begin to take responsibility for creating the kind of life she wants, and taking this kind of responsibility could contribute to her own sense of freedom. And so we find ourselves at the third practice.

~~ Consistent Alignment With Your Personal Values ~~

Clarity about our deeply held personal values creates the possibility of consistent, internal alignment. With this internal alignment we can then share the vision of what we want with others, and begin the process of creating alignment with them about that vision. We can explore whether they share these same values and are interested in experiencing them more fully.

The process of creating an initial alignment with others about our values and vision makes reaching agreements with them, and achieving results together, happen much more quickly and easily. When you create power with other people in your life this way it opens up the possibility for greater success and satisfaction for everyone.

In our example Pat now has the key to release herself from a future of confusion, complaining, and hopelessness. Now she can open the door to the possibility of true freedom from fear so she can begin to create her best life now.

So don't give up. Just remember that what you focus your attention on grows. The surest way to keep settling for less is to focus attention on your dissatisfaction and fear of taking action.

But once you're able to focus on what you truly value in any situation, and how to identify the actions and results that will give you what you value, creating exactly what you want most is all down hill.

Source: <http://www.articlecircle.com>

About the Author

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