



5 STEPS TO CLARITY, CONFIDENCE AND DIRECTION

Who am I? How did I get here? Where am I going?

Early in our lives we begin to formulate our likes and dislikes and start to create some dreams and goals around them. The possibilities are often endless at that stage. Time moves forward and as we enter adulthood a certain momentum often happens. We obtain our first full time job, we venture out and live on our own, and perhaps we get married and start a family. Some of these new experiences are created with strong focus and determination, some happen by chance.

All of these changes are often exciting in the beginning but after a while something happens, we realize that this thing called “work” or “career” is not really what we imagined it would be. We may suddenly realize we are going about our days in a seemingly never ending race or rut. Nevertheless, we persevere and often flourish in this life and lifestyle we have created, even though there a sense of longing for something different underneath the surface.

Fast forward 10-20 years and that sense of longing starts to rise to the surface. We take a long look at our lives and really begin to wonder how we got here and question what’s next on our path. We may never have felt like our career (or life) was a great fit, but we were comfortable or we may have had a perfect fit that no longer seems that way based on what we want for our lives now.

Have you been in a rut lately? Maybe you are comfortable, but are realizing there has got to be more to life than this? Are you missing the passion, joy, fun, freedom and zest for life you once had (or would like to have)?

As you begin to seek answers to what may be next for your life, here are five steps you can take to help you gain some clarity, confidence and direction:

Step One: Self Awareness - Discover Who You Are

Awareness is a sense of clarity, a realization of what is going on inside you and around you. It is an awakening of curiosity full of amazing discoveries (large and small) that help bring greater richness to your life.

Once you begin the process of becoming more aware, there is no turning back. Your whole perspective about yourself and your life will begin to subtly change. You will begin to pay greater attention and notice things that have always been there. You will see things in a new light and begin to shift your perspective in certain areas of your life. You will also begin to notice your surroundings in greater detail, really begin to “see” the people around you, begin to understand what makes you “you”. It often seems as if you are opening your eyes for the first time – really seeing what is and what is also possible.

It seems rather obvious doesn’t it? Aren’t we already aware? Often not nearly as much as we think we are. There are many parts of us we want to be aware of; here are three important ones to focus on.

Your Needs and Values

A need is something that is necessary for you to lead a healthy life. Needs include the conditions in which you do your best or are your best. Perhaps you shine when you are left on your own to plan and execute a task, or maybe you do your best with support and challenge. Know what truly “works” for you.

Values are what you stand up for and make choices around, what matters most to you. A clue to awareness of yours? Notice what gets you going or gets your goat with a strong emotional link.

Your Definitions

How you define happiness, abundance and everything else that matters to you plays a critical role in your well-being. Becoming aware of your own definitions of each of your values and needs helps you to know where and how you already have these things in your life, perhaps without even realizing it.

Your Capabilities

Capabilities include a culmination of your tangible skills, the knowledge you have gained throughout your life, your areas of expertise and your natural talents and abilities. Your current capabilities are based on what you have already tried, experienced and strengthened. There is still untapped potential within you!

Step Two: Direction – Clarify What You Want

Your direction can be a place, an experience, state of being or profession. When you know where you are going it gives you a greater sense of purpose and determination. It helps you create a plan to move forward since you know where forward is. Three things to be aware of to help clarify your direction are:

Your Vision

A vision is a picture of your future life. It serves as an inspiration and foundation for your planning and goal setting. It puts a framework around where you want to go in your life, what you want your life to be like, look like and feel like. It is the big picture and big dreams far outside of comfort zone. It focuses on what you want, not how you will get there.

Your Intentions

Intentions represent your purpose or reason for taking a certain direction. It is the aim or “why” you want to move in that particular direction, what you ultimately want to achieve or are seeking. It is the thought behind, or deliberate nature of, your choices.

Your Purpose

Purpose shows up in the impact you are having and the one you would like to have in your live and work. Impact includes the type of difference you want to make in your work and life. It contributes to your sense of fulfillment.

Step Three: Exploration and Action - Getting Started On Your Path

The exploratory process allows you to take what you've learned about whom you are and where you are going and learn what further knowledge, skills or experience is needed – what it will take for you to get what you want. This includes career as well as personal, everything from learning more information to experiencing something new.

After you explore, you begin to create specific goals and from those goals you create an action plan and strategy to work through and achieve them. This is where your vision begins to become reality.

This can be one of the most exhilarating parts of the process. It can also be a part of the process many of us want to rush through or skip because it can take some time and there is always some uncertainty.

Your Goals

We've all heard of SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely). What is most important when writing goals is that they align with your vision and intentions (they serve a purpose and are not random) and that they are clear enough so you can take action around them.

Your Plan

Your plan includes the bigger picture of all your goals and how they fit together toward the realization of your vision and intentions – as well as the tangible action steps within each goal allowing you ease of execution. If your plan is too big or vague it will sit on paper. If there are too many details without a framework you may be spinning your wheels but not getting very far.

Your Strategy

Your strategy is your method of working through your goals. That may include the time you will devote to each goal, choosing which comes first, which goals may have a ripple effect on the others and more. Having a strategy helps you integrate your exploration and action into your daily life.

Step Four: Why You Stop - Working Through Challenges and Obstacles

When we get to this point, or sometimes before this point, we begin to have some roadblocks, real or perceived. We may start to doubt our progress and choices or we may feel overwhelmed and then we stop. This cycle is part of human nature. We like to stay comfortable and anything that threatens to upset that comfort stops us in our tracks. That need for comfort is what keeps us from taking risks – and perhaps what has kept you in the same place for the last 10-20 years.

To overcome these obstacles and challenges, especially those that are perceived, here are some areas to focus on:

Your Thoughts

We have thousands of thoughts every day. When we are starting to make some changes in our life, our thoughts often turn to doubt, concern, worry and “what if”. Learn to distinguish those thoughts that keep you moving forward and those that stop you in your tracks.

Your Beliefs

Beliefs are thoughts about how we (or others) “should” be. These beliefs come from our family, friends and society. They represent our version of reality. Some beliefs serve you well in your life but some prevent you from moving forward into the unknown or untested waters. Since we chose these particular beliefs to live by, we can choose new ones when some of those we currently have no longer serve us.

Your Behavior

We've all behaved in ways that are counterproductive from the direction we would like to go (like eating those donuts when your intention is to be healthy and fit). Some of our behavior feels unconscious, habits we are not even aware we are engaging in. Begin to notice which of your behaviors serve you well, keep you engaged in life and moving toward your goals – and which thwart your efforts and contradict your goals and intentions.

Step Five: Momentum and Commitment - Moving Forward

The final phase of this process is moving forward with momentum and commitment toward your vision and goals. You now have a clearer picture of where you're going, goals and a plan of how to get there and an understanding of why you sometimes stop in your tracks. As you may have experienced, our goals and vision are achieved with greater ease when we are able to incrementally work toward them in a consistent way. When we get too far off track, it is often more challenging to get back. Here are some ways to maintain that momentum, in spite of some of our thoughts and beliefs.

Your Structures and Systems

When you have a structure or system in place, you are creating the habits to keep your vision alive. Remember, most often you are on this path alongside the full time job and full life you already are living. Systems and structures allow you to integrate your goals into your life, streamlining and leveraging the limited time you may have.

Your Commitments

When we are truly committed to our vision and intentions, we move forward – often despite some real obstacles. We are not just committing to our step by step plan and strategy, as that may change if needed. What we are truly committing to is the bigger picture of what it is we want, even if it winds up looking a bit different than we thought it would. Choosing your commitment step is a great way to solidify your commitment. This is the one step, one action that really gets you in motion. Not on the fringe, but plunging in – your “I can't turn back now” step. It's the one step (large or small) that in your mind is your total commitment, your serious move. It aligns with what matters most – with your true intentions. It is always a bit out of your comfort zone.

Your Support

The type of support needed to sustain your growth and forward movement will be different for each of us. Some may need a cheerleader encouraging us to keep going, some may need someone who challenges us to do more than we think we can. Others may need someone to listen to ideas and brainstorm with, while others want a partner who is on their own journey to share progress with. Learn what support you need and seek it out.

Where are you in this process?

The process I shared here describes the steps you need to take to answer the questions, who am I, what do I want and how do I get there? To take you further, your next step is to evaluate where you are along this process. You may have already worked through some of these steps, but find yourself no longer making the progress you would like. Take a moment to see which of the following fits you best then read on to learn which resources can help you further.

1. Are you feeling unsure of what your needs, values and capabilities are?
 2. Have you been reading many self-help books and taken a variety of self-assessment tests but you are still not sure how to use what you have learned about yourself?
 3. Are you pretty clear about the direction you would like to take with your career and life but not sure how to make it a reality?
 4. Have you started the process of exploration and taken some action but are overwhelmed with all the possibilities, or getting discouraged with what you are discovering?
 5. Do you find yourself stuck and not sure how to move forward?
 6. Have you lost some of your momentum due to life getting in the way and are not sure how to get back on track?

If you have answered yes to any of the above questions, you may be ready for coaching.

Coaching:

The coaching relationship offers you personalized attention as you work through this 5 step process allowing you to focus on the areas you need the most help with. We start wherever you are in your process, filling in the gaps as we move along. If you've already completed steps 1 and 2, we begin with step 3, leveraging the work you have already completed.

Together we will create a framework and goals for your coaching, create specific action steps for you to take between sessions, and work toward helping you achieve greater clarity and confidence to make the choices that will move you forward allowing you to achieve the career and life you want.

Stefanie Zizzo is a professionally certified career and life coach and workshop facilitator with more than 25 years' experience assisting individuals and groups from all over the country in gaining clarity, confidence and direction in their career and lives. With experience in both career counseling and life coaching, she has helped hundreds of people to focus on what they want in their lives and careers, think and grow beyond their current beliefs and fears, and take purposeful action to make things happen. She holds her Professional Certified Coach (PCC) designation through the International Coach Federation.

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