



WORKBOOK

ASSESSMENT OF CORE GOALS

C.W. Nichols

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INTRODUCTION

If you're not familiar with the *Assessment of Core Goals*, you may be wondering what's ahead and what you can expect to gain by working through this workbook. The next few paragraphs may help to answer these questions.

The *Assessment of Core Goals* (ACG) is a structured sequence of worksheets and instructions that can help you define—in your own words—your most powerful sources of motivation and satisfaction. The process is straightforward and involves four steps:

- ▶ In Step 1, you'll be asked to recall and briefly list past experiences that you found particularly satisfying or enjoyable.
- ▶ In Step 2, you'll closely examine up to 15 of these experiences, describing for each the moment of peak satisfaction and the specific event that triggered it.
- ▶ In Step 3, you'll look for common underlying reasons for the satisfactions gained from these 15 experiences.
- ▶ In Step 4, you'll translate these underlying reasons into definitions of your most important personal goals and emotional aspirations. Called *core goals* for short, these are things you

want most to experience or achieve and are among your most powerful sources of satisfaction and motivation.

In this process of self-inquiry you are the expert. You are in the best position to describe, analyze, and interpret your own experiences because you know more about them than anyone else. The instructions in this workbook will provide the structure and direction for your investigation; you provide the content. This will allow you to pinpoint and describe your primary motives with unusual precision.

People who have completed this process of self-inquiry say they have gained a fuller understanding of their actions and feelings. They understand more clearly why they are attracted to certain things or individuals—and, conversely, why they dislike other situations or find them frustrating. Many find they can now identify specific sources of dissatisfaction in current jobs or activities, and are able to change these activities to maximize their motivation and opportunities for satisfaction. (This can, for instance, make an unsatisfying job enjoyable again.) When faced with choices, they have the tools to predict more accurately which alternative will be more personally rewarding. In addition, knowing their core goals helps them to target new activities or jobs that are most

likely to generate feelings of energy, meaningfulness, and overall well-being.

The precision of your ACG motive definitions makes it much easier for you to identify potentially satisfying experiences or to troubleshoot dissatisfying ones. This accuracy comes from focusing only on your most important goals. If you are interested in measuring your investment in the full range of human goals, consider a companion instrument, the *Assessment of Personal Goals* (APG). The APG measures the importance of basic human goals, such as belongingness, creativity, and bodily sensation. Contact the publisher for more information.

The instructions that will guide you through the ACG begin on the next page. You may find it easy to work through each step by simply following these instructions. If, however, you are confused by certain steps, or find yourself getting stuck, refer to pages 30 to 37 where you will find suggestions, examples, and a more detailed explanation of some of the steps of the process. Your success in working through the workbook will depend in part on a careful reading of the directions and in part on your commitment to succeed. If you make a serious effort and allow yourself to be open to your feelings and to new insights, this should be a valuable and rewarding self-study.

To begin, turn to the next page.

STEP 1—MAKING A LIST OF SATISFYING ACTIVITIES AND EXPERIENCES

Find a quiet place where you can work undisturbed. Relax, make yourself comfortable, and let your mind wander back to times and experiences that you remember as being particularly satisfying: recent events, past experiences, even events of your childhood. As you do this, try to identify specific events or activities that stand out as the best or most satisfying.

As these come to mind, list them in the space provided on the next page. All you need to write is something like, “Walking around Denver with Jesse,” “Getting my computer to work,” or “Getting an A in math.” If you have trouble thinking of specific events, it’s okay to write down more general activities—for example, “Hiking,” “Dancing,” or “Photography.” In the next step you’ll have a chance to narrow these down further.

Try to come up with at least 20 to 25 different experiences or activities. If you need help completing your list, turn to page 30, where you’ll find hints on how to make a good list, use less effort, and have more fun. A more complete explanation of why the ACG starts with this step begins on page 31.

LIST OF SATISFYING EXPERIENCES

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

11. _____

12. _____

13. _____

14. _____

15. _____

16. _____

17. _____

18. _____

19. _____

20. _____

21. _____

22. _____

23. _____

24. _____

25. _____

Can You Make Your List More Complete?

The questions below are intended only to help you think of other satisfying experiences to add to your list by triggering or

prompting your memory. Consider each question, then make whatever additions to your list on the previous page that come to mind.

Have you had satisfying experiences that centered on the memory prompts listed below?

MEMORY PROMPTS FOR STEP 1

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| 1. Seeking excitement or thrills, taking risks? | 11. Experiencing a sense of spirituality? | 19. Providing support, advice, or resources for other people? |
| 2. Feeling relaxed or tranquil? | 12. Feeling unique? | 20. Feeling a sense of mastery or excellence? |
| 3. Experiencing particular bodily sensations? | 13. Experiencing feelings of freedom, personal control or self-determination? | 21. Solving problems in new ways? |
| 4. Participating in physical activity? | 14. Winning, feeling superior, important, or having social status? | 22. Inventing new products or procedures? |
| 5. Feeling healthy or physically fit? | 15. Getting support, help, advice, or validation from others? | 23. Managing day-to-day tasks, being productive, or organizing people or things? |
| 6. Creating or viewing art; reading or writing; listening to music? | 16. Feeling friendship, belonging, attachment, intimacy, community, or social identity? | 24. Collecting, saving, or accumulating things? |
| 7. Understanding, making sense of things, explaining, or teaching? | 17. Meeting social obligations and responsibilities, fulfilling commitments? | 25. Feeling safe and avoiding threatening or unstable circumstances? |
| 8. Thinking of new ideas or expanding intellectual boundaries? | 18. Experiencing fairness, justice, or equality with others? | 26. Feeling self-confident and good about yourself? |
| 9. Seeking unity, coherence, or oneness? | | |
| 10. Rising above ordinary experience? | | |

Choose the 15 Most Satisfying Experiences From Your List

Now that you have completed your list, look at it again and circle or check off the 15 experiences that stand out as the best or most

satisfying. Next, number them from 1 to 15, with 1 being the most satisfying. Don't spend too much time debating the order—just assign an approximate rank. If your list has

become disorganized or hard to read, you may want to transfer your top 15 to the space below.

| | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1. _____ _____ | 6. _____ _____ | 11. _____ _____ |
| 2. _____ _____ | 7. _____ _____ | 12. _____ _____ |
| 3. _____ _____ | 8. _____ _____ | 13. _____ _____ |
| 4. _____ _____ | 9. _____ _____ | 14. _____ _____ |
| 5. _____ _____ | 10. _____ _____ | 15. _____ _____ |

STEP 2—TAKING A CLOSE LOOK AT EACH SATISFYING EXPERIENCE

Now that you've made your list and selected your 15 most satisfying activities or experiences, your next step will be to examine each one more closely. For each activity or experience, you'll be trying to identify a single moment that was the most satisfying.

On the next page is a Narrowing Worksheet with a sequence of five directions. The first four will help you narrow down each experience to its most satisfying moment. The fifth instruction asks you to describe how the best moment of that experience made you feel.

The feeling you describe in the fifth box will be an end state or emotional goal that you find highly desirable. As you repeat this narrowing process with your other experiences, you'll probably find that you've described other important emotional goals. Together these descriptions will point to the more basic underlying core goals, which you will define later.

Since your list probably includes both general activities and specific one-time experiences, this process of narrowing them down to one specific satisfying moment will require different amounts of work. If you begin with a general activity like golf, photography, or travel, you'll now need to think of a particular instance that was especially satisfying—say, making a hole-in-one, developing your first picture in a darkroom, or arriving in Paris on your first trip to Europe. If you've already listed a specific experience, you're that much closer to identifying the best moment.

To begin, follow the instructions on the next page. You may want to start with one of your less emotionally charged experiences. This sometimes makes it easier for you to learn the narrowing process. If you have difficulty at any point, refer to the examples of this process on page 33 and to additional information on page 32.

Work slowly—this step takes some thought.

NARROWING WORKSHEET

Select one activity or experience from your list of 15 top experiences. If it is a *general activity* like “camping” or “working with computers,” think of a specific experience, like a particular camping trip, that you remember as being especially satisfying and write that in Box 1. If you started with a *specific experience*, just transfer that into Box 1.

To complete Boxes 3, 4, and 5, you need to have described a satisfying experience that lasted somewhere between a day and a few hours. Check Box 1. Is the experience you’ve described specific enough? If so, skip Box 2. If it is still too general, or it lasted more than a few hours, pick the most satisfying part of the experience and describe it in Box 2.

In Box 3, try to narrow your focus even further. Think back over the specific experience you’ve just described in Box 2 and list the very best parts of this experience: these are “mini-experiences” that probably lasted a few minutes or even just a few seconds.

You may find it helpful to try to recreate the experience in your mind. Think about exactly what happened—what you did, sensed, or thought about. As you do this, relax and let one thought lead to another. Don’t edit your thoughts; just jot down everything you enjoyed most about the experience as it comes to mind.

In a satisfying experience, there is usually one thing that happens—one single best moment—that means the most to you and evokes the most powerful feelings of enjoyment or satisfaction. This may be a specific thought or experience, something you did, or something someone else said or did. Use your notes in Box 3 to help you identify this single best moment and write it in Box 4.

Now change your focus from what *happened* to how it made you *feel*. Describe as fully and specifically as you can how you felt at the moment you described in Box 4 and write this in Box 5.

If you have trouble, ask yourself: What did this moment mean to me? What feeling did this experience give me that was so important or so satisfying? Did this experience prove something important about me to myself or others? If you find yourself using general terms like “peaceful” or “strong,” describe exactly what these words mean to you.

EXPERIENCE # _____

1

2

3

4

5

A Close Look, Continued...

On the next few pages are more Narrowing Worksheets with columns for narrowing your experiences like the one you just completed. There are 14 columns provided for the remaining 14 experiences on your list; three

additional columns are provided at the end if you make a mistake or decide to work on more than 15 experiences. Note that the instructions for all of the remaining columns have been abbreviated for simplicity. As you work, you may find it helpful to refer back to the more complete instructions on page 7 or to the hints on page 30.

Work carefully—it's easy to get off track if you don't attend closely to the instructions each time you narrow down an experience.

NARROWING WORKSHEET

Select one of the remaining top 15 experiences from your list and write it here.

Check Box 1. Have you described a specific, satisfying experience that lasted somewhere between a day and a few hours? If so, skip Box 2.

Think back over the experience you've just described and list the best parts of it in Box 3. These moments may have lasted a few minutes or just a few seconds.

Identify the single best moment in the experience—the moment that gave you the strongest feelings of enjoyment or satisfaction—and write it in Box 4.

Now change your focus from *what happened* to *how it made you feel*. Describe in detail how you felt at that moment. Do your best to give a clear, precise description of your feelings and write it in Box 5.

EXPERIENCE # _____

| | |
|---|--|
| 1 | |
| 2 | |
| 3 | |
| 4 | |
| 5 | |

EXPERIENCE # _____

| | |
|---|--|
| 1 | |
| 2 | |
| 3 | |
| 4 | |
| 5 | |

NARROWING WORKSHEET

Select one of the remaining top 15 experiences from your list and write it here.

Check Box 1. Have you described a specific, satisfying experience that lasted somewhere between a day and a few hours? If so, skip Box 2.

Think back over the experience you've just described and list the best parts of it in Box 3. These moments may have lasted a few minutes or just a few seconds.

Identify the single best moment in the experience—the moment that gave you the strongest feelings of enjoyment or satisfaction—and write it in Box 4.

Now change your focus from *what happened* to *how it made you feel*. Describe in detail how you felt at that moment. Do your best to give a clear, precise description of your feelings and write it in Box 5.

EXPERIENCE # _____

1

2

3

4

5

EXPERIENCE # _____

1

2

3

4

5

EXPERIENCE # _____

| | |
|---|--|
| 1 | |
| 2 | |
| 3 | |
| 4 | |
| 5 | |

EXPERIENCE # _____

| | |
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| 1 | |
| 2 | |
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| 4 | |
| 5 | |

EXPERIENCE # _____

| | |
|---|--|
| 1 | |
| 2 | |
| 3 | |
| 4 | |
| 5 | |

NARROWING WORKSHEET

EXPERIENCE # _____

EXPERIENCE # _____

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1

2

3

4

5

1

2

3

4

5

EXPERIENCE # _____

| | |
|---|--|
| 1 | |
| 2 | |
| 3 | |
| 4 | |
| 5 | |

EXPERIENCE # _____

| | |
|---|--|
| 1 | |
| 2 | |
| 3 | |
| 4 | |
| 5 | |

EXPERIENCE # _____

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|---|--|
| 1 | |
| 2 | |
| 3 | |
| 4 | |
| 5 | |

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Now change your focus from *what happened* to *how it made you feel*. Describe in detail how you felt at that moment. Do your best to give a clear, precise description of your feelings and write it in Box 5.

1

2

3

4

5

1

2

3

4

5

EXPERIENCE # _____

| | |
|---|--|
| 1 | |
| 2 | |
| 3 | |
| 4 | |
| 5 | |

EXPERIENCE # _____

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|---|--|
| 1 | |
| 2 | |
| 3 | |
| 4 | |
| 5 | |

EXPERIENCE # _____

| | |
|---|--|
| 1 | |
| 2 | |
| 3 | |
| 4 | |
| 5 | |

STEP 3—IDENTIFYING YOUR CORE GOALS

By now you may have noticed some common themes running throughout your experiences. In particular, you may have found yourself describing the same satisfying feeling in different Box 5's.

Those experiences that gave you a similar feeling or sense of satisfaction are most likely linked to a common underlying core goal. The core goal is the actual source of satisfaction in these different, but related, experiences.

A core goal is a highly desired, private, internal experience or feeling. A core goal is more than a goal in the usual sense of the word. It is not an external goal we set for ourselves, such as graduating from college or getting a promotion at work. Rather, it is an internal feeling state or self-perception we want very much to experience, such as feeling accepted, competent, or free.

We usually aren't aware of our core goals, and at this stage in the ACG process your own core goals are probably still vague or undefined. The themes you've noticed running throughout your experiences, though, are the early signs of one or more core goals.

Grouping Your Experiences

Stop now and look back over the columns you've completed, paying particular attention to the feelings you've described in each Box 5. Identify experiences that seem to have been satisfying for the same basic reason, or that gave you a similar satisfying feeling, and group these together. Use the space on the next page to keep a record of which experiences form a group. For example, using the numbers you assigned to each experience (in Step 1, and at the top of each column in Step 2), you might generate a group composed of experiences #15, #11, #7, #6, and #2. Although most people end up with between one and five groups, create any set of groups that is meaningful to you.

If you have questions about the grouping or difficulty finding underlying similarities in the experiences you described, turn to page 34 for help. There you'll find a discussion of how to solve some common problems that come up when grouping experiences.

Once you've formed your groups you're ready to focus on each core goal and define it more precisely.

On the next few pages are Core Goal Worksheets, which provide a structure to help you identify the core goal underlying each of your groups. To begin, select one of your groups and follow the instructions on page 18. If you would like to see an example of this identification process first, turn to page 35.

You may use any or all of the five columns provided on the next page. If you need more space or want to add more groups, use a separate sheet of paper.

GROUPING WORKSHEET

| Group 1 Experiences: | Group 2 Experiences: | Group 3 Experiences: | Group 4 Experiences: | Group 5 Experiences: |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| | | | | |

The Core Goal Worksheet

Use the worksheet on the right for one group of experiences. Two more worksheets are provided on subsequent pages for a second and third group, if needed. If you have more than three groups, follow the same directions using a blank sheet of paper for the additional ones.

First, select one group to work with. Since you will have to refer back to the experiences in this group, you may want to write brief notes in Boxes 2, 4, and 5 on the worksheet to help remind you of each experience and its corresponding best moment. (These are the same boxes completed in Step 2.) If you have more than five experiences in your group, select five for the worksheet.

Each of the best moments in this group of experiences satisfied the same basic desire (or core goal). Think of this as the primary reason that all of the experiences in this group were so satisfying. The descriptions of feelings you wrote in your Box 5's will approximate the core goal, but you will need to try to identify the common element in these descriptions, or take it a step further and describe a more basic underlying feeling that was the real or ultimate source of satisfaction.

Use Box 6 to try to describe the core goal underlying this group of experiences by completing the following sentence in the most specific, detailed way you can:

"The thing that made each of these experiences so satisfying is that they all made me feel..."

If you had more than five experiences in your group, go back after you finish Box 6 and see if they too satisfied your core goal. You may want to modify your core goal description to be sure it most accurately reflects the reason why each of the experiences in your group was so satisfying.

OPTIONAL BOX FOR INCREASING THE PRECISION OF YOUR CORE GOAL DESCRIPTION

If you want to use your knowledge of your core goal to change your activities, it is important to be clear, accurate, and specific in describing your core goal. To ensure that your core goal definition is as precise as it can be, consider the following:

- ▶ Does your choice of words give someone else a clear, unambiguous description of your core goal? For example, will someone else understand what you mean by "closeness," "freedom," or "peacefulness?" You may want to describe exactly what these words mean to you.
- ▶ Can you think of a situation where you achieved your core goal, as described in Box 6, but you did not feel a strong sense of satisfaction? If so, refine your description so that situations that accomplish your core goal will be very satisfying for you.

CORE GOAL WORKSHEET

Jot down *brief notes* that will help you recall the most satisfying moment of each experience in this group. Remember, in Box 2 you described a specific satisfying experience; in Box 4, the single best moment of that experience; and in Box 5, how you felt at that moment.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |

Each of these moments satisfied a basic, common desire called a *core goal*.

Try to describe your core goal in Box 6 by finishing the following sentence in your own way:

"The thing that made each of these experiences so satisfying is that they all made me feel..."

6

OPTIONAL BOX

7

OPTIONAL BOX
FOR INCREASING THE PRECISION
OF YOUR CORE GOAL DESCRIPTION

Check to be sure your description in Box 6 is specific and accurate. Rewrite it, if necessary, in Box 7. Test your description of the core goal; be sure it is an accurate and powerful criterion of satisfaction.

CORE GOAL WORKSHEET

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| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |

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OPTIONAL BOX

7

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| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |

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6

OPTIONAL BOX

7

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FOR INCREASING THE PRECISION
OF YOUR CORE GOAL DESCRIPTION

Check to be sure your description in Box 6 is specific and accurate. Rewrite it, if necessary, in Box 7. Test your description of the core goal; be sure it is an accurate and powerful criterion of satisfaction.

STEP 4—DEFINING THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE SIDES OF YOUR CORE GOAL

You've done a lot of work, and now you should have a description of one or more of your core goals. This final step will help you crystallize these insights into a fuller understanding of your core goal—one that you can remember easily and use to increase both your motivation and your opportunities for satisfaction.

Until now we've talked about core goals only in the positive sense, as things that are highly desired. But core goals have a powerful negative side as well. This negative side is the direct opposite of what you've written in Box 6 (or Box 7) of the previous Core Goal Worksheet(s). It's a feeling or self-perception that is highly *undesirable*; it is some-

thing that you want most to avoid. For example, imagine Pat, whose core goal is to "create or be a part of a perfect harmony," working in an office where there is confusion about work responsibilities and where people bicker and try to undermine each other's efforts. This is about as unharmonious as a situation can be. While some people could tolerate this or even thrive on the challenge, Pat would be extremely frustrated by this kind of environment.

For many people, experiencing the negative side of a core goal is more than frustrating, it is painful—a source of true hurt or loss. Most of us work hard to avoid this pain, and many of our fears and anxieties can be traced to a desire to avoid these negative conditions.

The positive and negative sides of core goals are closely linked. Striving toward the positive side automatically puts you at risk of ending up with the negative side instead. For example, if you strive for competence and fail, you feel incompetent. If you strive for acceptance and fail, you feel rejected. Defining both the positive and negative sides of your core goal will help you understand both sides of the motivational coin: what you're striving toward, and what you're simultaneously trying to avoid.

Use the worksheets on the next three pages to fully define your core goals. Choose one of your core goals and follow the instructions on the next page. Use one worksheet for each core goal you've identified in the previous step.

DEFINING WORKSHEET

CORE GOAL: _____

Begin with one of your core goals, and in the space marked "positive side" define the positive side of your core goal as completely as you can.

Then, in the space marked "negative side" describe what you consider to be the direct, most extreme opposite of the core goal.

Think of a one- or two-word label for each side that you can easily remember, and write them in the small boxes at right.

In the box on the left, list some things that have caused you to experience the negative side of your core goal.

In the box on the right, list some specific ways that you have achieved the positive side of your core goal.

NEGATIVE SIDE

POSITIVE SIDE

DEFINING WORKSHEET

Begin with one of your core goals, and in the space marked "positive side" define the positive side of your core goal as completely as you can.

Then, in the space marked "negative side" describe what you consider to be the direct, most extreme opposite of the core goal.

Think of a one- or two-word label for each side that you can easily remember, and write them in the small boxes at right.

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In the box on the right, list some specific ways that you have achieved the positive side of your core goal.

CORE GOAL: _____

NEGATIVE SIDE

POSITIVE SIDE

DEFINING WORKSHEET

CORE GOAL: _____

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Think of a one- or two-word label for each side that you can easily remember, and write them in the small boxes at right.

In the box on the left, list some things that have caused you to experience the negative side of your core goal.

In the box on the right, list some specific ways that you have achieved the positive side of your core goal.

NEGATIVE SIDE

POSITIVE SIDE

Now that you have defined the positive and negative aspects of your core goals, you have completed the process of identifying your core goals.

You may feel a sense of closure at this point—a recognition that you’ve identified and defined some centrally important emotional goals. Or you may feel like continuing to explore and refine your understanding of

your core goals. If you are happy with what you’ve discovered so far, take a minute to read the Summary on the next page. If you want to consider some further steps, read on.

FURTHER STEPS

There are additional steps that you can take now, depending on how you feel about your progress so far. If you are happy with the core goals you’ve identified, you can go back to your original list of satisfying experiences and examine those that you didn’t select for your top 15. If you follow the narrowing process for each, you’ll probably find that some of them satisfy core goals you have already defined; but you may find others that are linked to core goals that you haven’t yet identified. Theoretically, you could continue examining hundreds of satisfying experiences to identify the goals they satisfy. Not all the goals would be important enough

to be considered core goals, but even so, you would gain a detailed understanding of your motives by undertaking this kind of self-exploration.

Another step would be to examine the core goals you’ve defined to see if they might be interrelated in some way. For some people, it’s possible to define a single, most basic core goal that links two or more core goals together. Others find that their core goals are not related hierarchically, in order of importance, but in a sequence, with two or more core goals defining a very satisfying process.

If you feel that the core goals you’ve defined just aren’t right somehow, or seem close to identifying your real motives but still need work, you may want to think about enlisting the help of a professional or friend who can go back over your workbook and help you define your core goals. Sometimes others can see patterns that you have missed, or areas where it would help to be more specific, and so forth.

If you had trouble with this process, didn’t feel like you got as much as you wanted from it, or uncovered something that upset you, consider consulting with a trained helping professional, such as a career counselor or a psychologist to help you.

SUMMARY

The essence of the link between core goals, motivation, and satisfaction is this:

- ▶ Identifying an opportunity to pursue or achieve a core goal will release substantial motivational energy, and
- ▶ Progress toward a core goal, or the ultimate attainment of it, is extremely satisfying.

That is, if there is something we want very much, like a core goal, and we see a chance to get it, we will be excited by the opportunity and will be intrinsically motivated to go after it. Any progress made toward attaining the core goal will encourage more motivation, and will itself be satisfying because progress means that you are attaining important subgoals. Then, when the desired end is reached, we experience a great rush of satisfaction.

Conversely, when we believe that we are likely to end up with a strongly undesired outcome, which is the negative side of a core goal, we experience anxiety or fear, depending on our personal estimates of the chances of this outcome actually happening. If you think of almost any worrisome or anxiety-provoking experience, you're likely to see that there was a negative consequence looming that you wanted to avoid. When things go wrong and the outcome of your effort is negative, you're likely to feel great stress and discomfort. It's easy to underestimate the number of situations in life that require us to face the negative side of our core goals.

One reason for understanding core goals is to be able to take more control over the course of events in life—to be able to predict which situations, experiences, or jobs are most likely to be satisfying (or frustrating), and to structure or modify daily transactions to maximize opportunities for achieving core goals and minimize negative feelings and outcomes. Another reason for identifying core goals is to gain greater insight and self-understanding. With self-understanding comes the ability to recognize why it is that we feel bad in particular situations or relationships and why we enjoy and feel good in others. With this insight it is possible to step back from the immediacy and intensity of the emotion and act in a more positive, constructive way.

APPLYING YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF CORE GOALS

By working through this workbook, you have acquired a valuable tool: you have learned a process of examination and introspection that you can use to understand why any given situation was enjoyable or frustrating. If you practice it, you won't need to use paper or follow a worksheet. You'll become skilled in analyzing your experiences and in coming to understand your own motives and emotional responses.

What you've accomplished in this workbook is significant, yet it is just a beginning. Although core goals are relatively stable, they continue to evolve over time as we grow and gain new experience. As you begin to see the influence of your core goals in your day-to-day living, your understanding of them will become more precise.

Let's turn now to some specific ways you can use your core goals to increase opportunities for satisfaction and decrease the likelihood of frustration.

Modifying and Improving Current Activities

The first major way is to examine your current activities—work, play, hobbies, relationships, and sports—to see if there are ways you can make them more satisfying. This doesn't necessarily mean making major changes; think first of making small changes.

For example, one man complained that his job was frustrating. One of his core goals was "feeling appreciated for my efforts." When he analyzed his job, he realized that his boss was the only person who was currently in the position to give him this feeling, but his boss was always in a hurry and rarely took time to comment on the quality of his work. He decided to ask her if she would be willing to take five minutes at the end of each day to review his work so that he could monitor his own progress. These sessions were subsequently scheduled and most often consisted of positive, specific feedback that showed him his work was good and that his efforts to maintain high quality were appreciated. He also arranged to be more available to help new people who came into the department, for which they often expressed appreciation. Because of these minor changes, the job became more pleasurable for him and he now looked forward to coming to work. He also found that his relationship with his boss improved.

Small changes, like those in this example, can sometimes prevent the necessity of major ones—here, a job change—if they are successful. The more precise your definition of the core goal, and the more carefully you analyze a situation to determine its possibilities for satisfaction or frustration of your core goals, the more likely it is that you will see

possible changes that will increase satisfaction. Look for opportunities to make changes in any activity that frustrates the attainment of a core goal.

Discovering New Satisfying Activities

A second major way to apply your knowledge of core goals is to target new activities that could be potentially satisfying. Do this by first listing *specific* activities—concrete, external events—that can satisfy your core goals. Avoid listing activities that are too broad, since these involve many different transactions, some of which will not satisfy core goals. Then use your list to focus your search for opportunities.

Sometimes good possibilities will pop into your mind, but you should also expect to spend some time researching and talking to friends or associates as you try to come up with new ways to achieve these core goals. As you think of different possibilities, look carefully to see if they actually present opportunities to satisfy core goals. Often an experience will *seem* to have potential, but the reality will be quite different. Or an experience that doesn't appear to offer much may turn out to offer an excellent opportunity to satisfy a core goal.

Discovering new opportunities can be extremely difficult. It is unfortunate that most

jobs are conceived and described more according to the tasks they entail than according to how these activities are likely to make you feel. Talking to others who are familiar with a job or activity and asking them specific questions that will help you assess whether you could satisfy a core goal can be very helpful. Become a researcher. Develop an investigative spirit. Get help from a local reference librarian or career counselor. As you see things on television, in magazines, or in your daily life, ask yourself whether something like that might possibly satisfy a core goal.

For example, Rick was bored by his routine exercise program at his athletic club and couldn't stay motivated to work out, so he decided to design a new program that would allow him to satisfy his core goals—"feeling free and unconstrained" and "experiencing a feeling of calm and quiet peacefulness." After some investigation, he determined that rowing on a nearby lake was a perfect exercise. He would get up early in the morning and drive to a nearby lake. At sunrise when the lake was peaceful and quiet, he could row in any direction at any speed he wanted, thus feeling both free and calm. He found that keeping up this new exercise took no effort or willpower at all. In fact, he now looked forward to the morning workout.

Making More Satisfying Decisions

A third major way to use your core goal is as a criterion for making choices. When faced with several alternatives, examine each one

for opportunities it could provide to achieve your core goals. Notice also which alternatives offer *no* opportunities to achieve core goals. Look closely for parts of a job or activity that are likely to lead to the frustration of your core goal. If these are fairly important components of the job or activity, it will be very difficult for you to maintain your enthusiasm, regardless of other advantages it may have.

You may find it helpful to use a chart like the one below to systematically compare your options.

Long-Term Applications

In addition to learning about core goals, remember that you have also learned a way of thinking that can be applied to analyzing any situation where you felt good or bad so that

you can determine why you felt that way. You may be able to link it to a core goal; you may find that by doing this you discover more core goals, or goals that aren't quite as powerful but nonetheless contribute something important to your life. Thinking in these terms becomes second nature if you practice it. As time goes on, you'll expand and deepen your level of self-understanding well beyond what you've accomplished through this workbook. You can come to understand a lot about why you do the things you do, like the things you like, and feel the way you feel in different situations. You can take charge of your life with more certainty, avoid frustrating or unproductive endeavors, and find more opportunities to achieve the things that matter most to you.

| <i>Core Goals</i> | <i>Option A:</i> _____ | <i>Option B:</i> _____ | <i>Option C:</i> _____ |
|---|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Core Goal #1: _____ | | | |
| likelihood of goal attainment (high, medium, low) | | | |
| possibility of negative consequences (high, medium, low) | | | |
| Core Goal #2: _____ | | | |
| likelihood of goal attainment (high, medium, low) | | | |
| possibility of negative consequences (high, medium, low) | | | |

STEP 1—HELPFUL HINTS FOR MAKING YOUR LIST

HINT #1: Lighten up!

Working too hard on Step 1 can interfere with your ability to recall past experiences. Try to let ideas just come to mind. Let one memory trigger another and make quick notes of your thoughts. If you write too much, or stop to think too hard about the experience, you'll lose momentum. Also, don't edit as you go. If something comes to mind, jot it down no matter how silly or trivial it seems. If it was satisfying, it may turn out to be a good experience to work with; you'll have a chance to choose which ones are "keepers" later. Try to avoid ordering, ranking, or judging these as you write them down. Be playful. Write with your other hand, write sideways up the page. Or dictate to someone else, and let them write!

HINT # 2: Have fun!

The state of mind you're in while trying to think of experiences will affect your ability to remember. Research indicates that we are more likely to remember good experiences if we're in a good mood. Conversely, being frustrated or feeling negative can make it very difficult to recall happy memories. If you just can't get into the right mood for this step, take a break and find someone to cheer you up—or wait a while and come back to it when you're in a more positive frame of mind.

HINT # 3: Little experiences are good, too.

When doing a task like this, it's easy to get caught up in trying to think of big important events or major accomplishments. Few of us have 20 or 25 of these in our lives, so this strategy can become frustrating after a while. Think of great little moments: flashes of satisfaction that came and went quickly—small frozen moments of happiness, peak experiences, memorable incidents—all of these can work well for the next steps. In fact, the greater the diversity of your episodes and experiences, the better.

STEP 1—AN EXPLANATION

When we are young, our wants are simple. At a basic level, we want to feel loved, competent, and safe; we want attention; we want to explore and experience sensation; we want to be entertained. As we mature, our wants become more developed and complex, but they don't lose their emotional base. For example, as adults we may save money to feel financially secure or to feel competent we may stay up late working especially hard on a project. Regardless of the specifics of our desires or the complexity of what we do to achieve satisfaction, it is only through taking some action and then noticing the consequences that we can accomplish our emotional aspirations.

As we mature we also tend to focus less on the desired emotional consequences and more on the concrete means used to achieve them. For example, we don't typically say, "I want to experience a feeling of freedom and power." Instead we say, "I want to go waterskiing." This is a sensible way of communicating and translating our wants into action. As we begin to think and talk in these more concrete terms, the primary emotional ends fulfilled by our activities recede from day-to-day awareness. As this natural shift progresses, we begin to define what we want from work, play, and relationships in terms of specific observable consequences. Thus we lose touch with what makes waterskiing or any number of other activities so great for us, and we have more difficulty conveying to others just what it is about an activity that gives us such real pleasure. The ACG helps you to trace the connection from the actual events you've enjoyed most to the now-hidden emotional consequences that made these experiences so satisfying.

The list you generate in Step 1 is the beginning of this process. In recalling situations for your list, you have two main objectives:

- ▶ To remember the broadest range of different satisfying events, and
- ▶ To identify those experiences that were *most* satisfying.

It is important to exclude from your list experiences that were only moderately satisfying since they are either not connected to your most important core goals or are only loosely connected. Using experiences like this can make it difficult for you to trace the connection. Your most satisfying experiences are those directly connected to your most desired emotional goals. A list of these experiences will provide many clear paths for identifying the underlying core goals. The more complete your list, the more core goals you can identify, and the easier it will be to define them.

STEP 2—AN EXPLANATION

In any satisfying experience there is usually a single moment when you feel a strong rush of satisfaction. Even when most of an experience is enjoyable, there is typically a peak moment—a single thing that happens that makes you feel the best. Separating this one moment from the many others that made up the experience, identifying exactly *what happened* to make you feel so good, and describing *how this made you feel* are the objectives of Step 2.

This kind of detective work can sometimes be challenging. We normally store experiences in our memory in large chunks for efficient processing and recall. If we want to examine the details of what happened within one of those chunks, we have to go back and try to recreate the experience in our minds. The more vivid the event is in memory, the easier it will be to do this. That is why **Box 2** of the worksheet asks you to make sure you are working with an episode you can remember fairly well. Box 2 also asks you to select one specific experience. People who are still focused on too broad an activity or experience, like “gardening,” or “parent-hood” or “my first year at college” will have too much to work with and won’t be able to pinpoint the specific experience without a lot of extra work and frustration.

In Box 3 you are taking the experience apart, looking closely at the many brief

moments and mini-experiences that together made up the specific experience described in Box 2. As you do this, you want to generate a list of those parts of the experience that seemed more important or more enjoyable than others. The objective is for you to reflect on parts of the experience that might have been forgotten for some time and to select the very best parts or moments of it. The more focused you can be, the better your recall will be. Try to recall the situation as though you were back “in” it, since staying “in” the situation while making quick notes will make it easier for one thought or feeling to trigger another. Interrupting this flow with editing or critical thoughts will take you out of the experience and make it harder to remember important details.

As you jot down descriptions of the best moments, stay focused on *what happened*. It can be tempting to describe your feelings, but you’d be getting ahead of yourself—that comes in Box 5. For now, stay with descriptions of what happened during these moments that felt so good. The source of your satisfaction could be something you did, something that someone else said or did, or an inner thought or sensation. Whatever it might have been, describe it in detail. This will make the next step easier because you’ll have specific descriptions to compare and evaluate.

In Box 4 you adopt a more analytic approach in which you’re asked to critically examine the various mini-experiences described in Box 3 and to select the single event that caused the strongest feeling of satisfaction. You must contrast one event with another, imagining how the whole experience would have felt had one part or another been absent, and then determine which was the best part of the experience. As in Box 3, describe this best part as concretely as you can.

In Box 5, you make the transition from what happened in the peak moment to how it made you feel by looking at the event described in Box 4 and thinking about how you felt at that moment. It can be difficult to find words that really fit your feelings, but for them to be useful, they must be as accurate, descriptive, and direct as possible. Sometimes, the directness of a good answer can seem selfish or embarrassing. In a way, you’re cutting through the social niceties and getting down to the things you care about most. This is essential if you want a good description of your core goal that you can use to accurately predict future satisfying experiences and make them happen. If you find that you’re at all uncomfortable with this as you progress through the worksheets, it can help to adopt a playful, exaggerated approach to describing how you felt.

NARROWING WORKSHEET EXAMPLE

Select one of the remaining top 15 experiences from your list and write it here.

Check Box 1. Have you described a specific, satisfying experience that lasted somewhere between a day and a few hours? If so, skip Box 2.

Think back over the experience you've just described and list the best parts of it in Box 3. These moments may have lasted a few minutes or just a few seconds.

Identify the single best moment in the experience—the moment that gave you the strongest feelings of enjoyment or satisfaction—and write it in Box 4.

Now change your focus from *what happened* to *how it made you feel*. Describe in detail how you felt at that moment. Do your best to give a clear, precise description of your feelings and write it in Box 5.

EXPERIENCE # 3

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | The skitrip to Jackson Hole, Wyoming, in 1976 |
| 2 | This one particular run down a slope called "the Alta Chutes" |
| 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• skiing over to it and seeing it was still untouched powder• standing at the top with my friends getting psyched up• having the powder cover me up when I sank into the turns• falling through the turns• feeling the steepness• floating through the turns |
| 4 | At the top of a turn when I came out of the powder and floated, perfectly balanced, down into the next turn |
| 5 | Felt perfectly balanced and weightless |

EXPERIENCE # 11

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Making a movie for my class reunion |
| 2 | Actually showing it at the reunion party to my classmates |
| 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• people were laughing at the funny parts• they were impressed with the quality of the photography and editing• when they all clapped and cheered when it was over• they came up to me afterwards and patted me on the back and said it was the best |
| 4 | At the end when everybody said how much they liked it |
| 5 | I felt like a hero; like a winner. I felt like I was #1. |

STEP 3—COMMON PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED WHEN GROUPING EXPERIENCES

"I don't see any patterns, so I can't make the groups."

This is usually caused by one of three things:

- ▶ You may be being too strict about which episodes fit together. Two very different experiences can be in the same group as long as they make you feel roughly the same or if you feel at a gut level that they're related.
- ▶ There may be patterns or common themes across different Box 5's that you don't recognize. So, if you're stuck, ask someone else to look over your 15 experiences and their respective Box 5's. Another person may spot patterns or experiences that seem to fit together.
- ▶ You might not have described your feelings in enough detail to reveal underlying similarities with other experiences. This can result from being too general in Box 5 or from not staying focused on one specific experience in Box 3, 4, and 5.

"I have a group with only one mini-experience in it."

This is fine. Work with the other groups first. You may then see a way that it fits with one

of these. If not, think of other satisfying experiences you've had that you would guess are related to this single experience. Pick out the best parts of each of these experiences and add them to the single experience to make a bigger group. Then use that group in the next step.

"They're all related, so I can really only make one group."

This is not a problem. It's an indication that you've achieved the same core goal through many different activities. Because the worksheets in the next step only have space for 5 mini-experiences per group, you will have to do one of two things: either select five of your 15 to work with, or do all 15—five at a time—and see whether the three subgroups do, in fact, come down to the same core goal.

"I'm beginning to see patterns that I don't want to see."

Because you are moving toward a definition of some of the things that matter most to you, there will naturally be strong emotion associated with these. Usually the emotion is positive and the process enjoyable. For some people, though, focusing on core goals can be uncomfortable.

One common complaint is that the emerging patterns feel so "selfish." This is true by definition. You are trying to define the things that are important to you, and to do this you must focus on *yourself* and what *you* want.

Other people have been surprised by how many different activities were satisfying for essentially the same reason. This is sometimes uncomfortable, but it is all the more important to know. If you care so deeply about one or two goals, it is important for your happiness to have sufficient opportunities to fulfill them. If these end states or conditions are absent in your life, or if you have no real opportunities to satisfy them, you will feel a great void. A precise understanding of what you want will make it much easier for you to achieve it.

A third reaction that some people have is a feeling of sadness or pain because, although there have been moments when they have had the things they cherish, a large part of their lives may have been spent without them. As patterns emerge and what people want most begins to take shape, the realization of wanting and not having engenders feelings of loss or hurt. These feelings can be hard to work through, but remember: what lies ahead is an opportunity to define exactly what was missed or lost and to find practical ways to finally achieve it.

CORE GOAL WORKSHEET EXAMPLE

Jot down *brief notes* that will help you recall the most satisfying moment of each experience in this group. Remember, in Box 2 you described a specific satisfying experience; in Box 4, the single best moment of that experience; and in Box 5, how you felt at that moment.

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------|--|--|---|--|
| 2 100 mile bike race | 2 my first 10K race | 2 ½ marathon | 2 kayak trip | 2 building a sailboat |
| 4 crossing the 100 mile point | 4 finishing ahead of my friends | 4 seeing the finish line and knowing I'd make it | 4 finishing the run after getting injured | 4 when a big newspaper article came out about it |
| 5 felt proud that I did it! | 5 conquered something I was doubtful about | 5 did something I thought I couldn't do | 5 felt like few people could have completed the run injured | 5 felt unique felt skilled felt accomplished |

Each of these moments satisfied a basic, common desire called a *core goal*.

Try to describe your core goal in Box 6 by finishing the following sentence in your own way:

"The thing that made each of these experiences so satisfying is that they all made me feel..."

6

Felt that I'd done something I thought I couldn't do

OPTIONAL BOX

7

overcoming doubt about my abilities

OPTIONAL BOX FOR INCREASING THE PRECISION OF YOUR CORE GOAL DESCRIPTION

Check to be sure your description in Box 6 is specific and accurate. Rewrite it, if necessary, in Box 7. Test your description of the core goal; be sure it is an accurate and powerful criterion of satisfaction.

STEP 3—SAMPLE INTERVIEW

Once your groups are organized, you know that the mini-experiences in a given group all satisfied the same underlying end, but you may be unsure as to what exactly that common end is. We know that, in the abstract, it is a single consequence or feeling that you want very much. Each of the best moments in a group satisfied this same set of conditions or brought about this deeply desired consequence, which is why they were so satisfying and seemed related. Yet it may not be easy to identify that satisfying end or *core goal*. To help you better understand this process, consider the following example of Pat who, with the help of an interviewer, examines one group of related experiences and discovers the underlying common source of satisfaction.

Interviewer: Let's look at one of your groups and see if we can identify the underlying core goal.

Pat: Sounds good, but I'm not sure what it is.

Interviewer: That's okay, you're not supposed to know what it is yet. Let's start by going back over the experiences in your group. Can you briefly describe them to me?

Pat: One was dancing. I perform regularly in stage productions, and one day when we were rehearsing a dance number, there was a moment when everyone flowed perfectly together. Everyone was moving together exactly in time with the music. It was really great! Another situation happened when I was acting on stage. In one scene, I had just lost my close friend, and I had to express all this sadness and pain. During this scene, I looked out and saw the audience crying. I was watching their faces. They seemed captivated. In the next moment the scene called for me to relive a funny memory of the two of us playing with our dog, and it was amazing because the audience shifted

emotions right with me and began to laugh. It was like their emotions were in sync with mine and they were feeling what I was feeling. It was a fantastic moment. My third experience was about animals. I love animals, and I spend a lot of time going out into the wild to observe them in their natural habitats. This one time I was in the woods watching some squirrels, and there was no one else around, no distractions, and I was just sitting there watching them and being real quiet. After a while, the squirrels stopped worrying about me and went about their business, running around and collecting nuts all around me. I don't know why I put this in the group, but it just felt a lot like the other experiences, so I included it. The last one was a time when I was sitting on the beach looking out at the ocean. It was rainy and no one else was around. I just sat there thinking about how huge the ocean was and how it was connected to the land and to me, and there was this moment where I just felt totally connected with the ocean, with the strength and peace of it. It felt really special.

Interviewer: It sounds like this connectedness thing is a theme in all of these.

Pat: Yeah, that fits, sort of. I did feel connected to the audience and to the dancers, and I guess to the squirrels, too ... But there's something more to it. I can be connected to something, but not necessarily enjoy it.

Interviewer: Well, what is it about each of these that was so great? What was the thing that each of these satisfied that was so important?

Pat: I don't know exactly. They each led to this feeling of peacefulness. It's hard to explain. Like in the ocean experience, I was really feeling connected, but there was something about the balance of nature and the integration of it all.

Interviewer: Was it the same in the squirrel situation?

Pat: Yeah. I felt like I was part of the squirrels. Like I was one with the squirrels. They were in their natural habitat and I was a part of that. There was a kind of harmony about it. A natural harmony.

Interviewer: That could fit with the others, too. In the dancing experience, you were in harmony with everybody else.

Pat: Yes. And the audience example—when they were moving with me, feeling my emotions right on cue. There was a sense there of being connected. It was a kind of harmony. Actually I like the harmony idea. Each of the four experiences made me feel like I either created or was part of a perfect harmony. Nature is the most perfect harmony of all. I guess the ocean kind of represents that for me. And I felt the same sense of harmony with the squirrels. I was a part of their environment for a while.

That fits with a lot of other things, too. Like at work, everyone in my department got along great until our director was replaced by this other person who made major changes and doesn't manage very well. We're all confused about what our responsibilities are. People are arguing more and thinking about how to protect their own jobs instead of working together like we used to. It's the opposite of harmony, and I'm really hating the job right now.

Interviewer: So you think that experiencing harmony is the core goal underlying all four situations?

Pat: Yeah. Definitely. It just feels right to me. I can't think of a situation that makes me feel this way that I don't enjoy. I've always hated fighting. I'm the peacemaker in my family. Times around the house when we all were together, and feeling close, this sense of harmony would be really satisfying for me. It would mean a lot.

Interviewer: Good. That's an important way to tell if you've identified the core goal accurately. If it doesn't grab you, or if it seems too general, you need to keep working at it.

Pat: I know. I had trouble with my other group because I was picking out general ways the mini-experiences were related. I was labeling or categorizing instead of zeroing in on a more basic, specific end that was satisfied by each experience.