

## Building Your Compass

You need two things to build your compass—a Workview and a Lifeview. To start out, we need to discover what work means to you. What is work for? Why do you do it? What makes good work good? If you discover and are able to articulate your philosophy of work (what it's for and why you do it), you will be less likely to let others design your life for you. Developing your own Workview is one component of the compass you are building; a Lifeview is second.

Now, Lifeview may sound a bit lofty, but it's really not—everyone has a Lifeview. You may not have articulated it before, but if you are alive, you have a Lifeview. A Lifeview is simply your ideas about the world and how it works. What gives life meaning? What makes your life worthwhile or valuable? How does your life relate to others in your family, your community, and the world? What do money, fame, and personal accomplishment have to do with a satisfying life? How important are experience, growth, and fulfillment in your life?

Once you've written your Workview and your Lifeview, and completed the simple exercise that follows, you'll have your compass and be on the path toward a well-designed life. Don't worry—we know that your Workview and Lifeview will change. It's obvious that the Workview and Lifeview you have as a teenager, as a young college grad, and as an empty nester will all be substantially different. The point is, you don't have to have it all figured out for the rest of your life; you just have to create the compass for what life is about for you right now.

Parker Palmer, a renowned educational reformer and author of

*Let Your Life Speak*, says that at one point he suddenly realized he was doing a noble job of living someone else's life. Parker was emulating his great heroes—Martin Luther King, Jr., Gandhi—both great social justice leaders of the 1950s and '60s. Because he valued their sentiments and goals, he set his path in the world by their compass, not his own, and worked hard to change the educational system from within. He earned a Ph.D. at UC Berkeley and was on track to reach his goal of becoming a respected university president. That was all well and good, but Parker hated it. He came to the realization that he could be inspired by people like Martin Luther King and Gandhi, but that didn't mean he had to walk their same path. He ended up redesigning his life as a thought leader and writer—still working for the same goals, but in a way that was less about imitation and more about authenticity.

The point is, there are lots of powerful voices in the world, and lots of powerful voices in our heads, all telling us what to do or who to be. And because there are many models for how life is supposed to be lived, we all run the risk, like Parker, of accidentally using someone else's compass and living someone else's life. The best way to avoid this is to articulate clearly our own Workview and Lifeview, so we can build our own unique compass.

Our goal for your life is rather simple: *coherency*. A coherent life is one lived in such a way that you can clearly connect the dots between three things:

- **Who you are**
- **What you believe**
- **What you are doing**

For example, if in your Lifeview you believe in leaving the planet a better place for the next generation, and you work for a giant corporation that is polluting the planet (but for a really great salary), there is going to be a lack of coherency between what you believe and what you do—and as a result a lot of disappointment and discontent. Most of us have to make some trade-offs and compromises along the way, including some we may not like. If your Lifeview is that art is the only thing worth pursuing, and your Workview tells you that it's critical to make enough money so your kids have everything they need, you are going to make a compromise in your Lifeview while your children are dependent and at home. But that will be okay, because it's a conscious decision, which allows you to stay "on course" and coherent. Living coherently doesn't mean everything is in perfect order all the time. It simply means you are living in alignment with your values and have not sacrificed your integrity along the way. When you have a good compass guiding you, you have the power to cut these kinds of deals with yourself. If you can see the connections between who you are, what you believe, and what you are doing, you will know when you are on course, when there is tension, when there might need to be some careful compromises, and when you are in need of a major course correction. Our experience with our students has shown that the ability to connect these three dots increases your sense of self, and that helps you create more meaning in your life and have greater satisfaction.

So now it's time to build your compass and set out on your quest. Right now your quest is simple (and it's not to find the Holy Grail). Your quest is to design your life. We may all want the same things in life—a healthy and long life, work we enjoy

and that matters, loving and meaningful relationships, and a hell of a lot of fun along the way—but how we think we'll get them is very different.

## Workview Reflection

Write a short reflection about your Workview. We're not looking for a term paper here (and we're still not grading you), but we do want you really to write this down. Don't do it in your head. This should take about thirty minutes. Try to shoot for 250 words—less than a page of typed writing.

A Workview should address the critical issues related to what work is and what it means to you. It is not just a list of what you want from or out of work, but a general statement of your view of work. It's your definition for what good work deserves to be. A Workview may address such questions as:

- **Why work?**
- **What's work for?**
- **What does work mean?**
- **How does it relate to the individual, others, society?**
- **What defines good or worthwhile work?**
- **What does money have to do with it?**
- **What do experience, growth, and fulfillment have to do with it?**

In the years during which we've been helping people with this exercise, we've noticed that a Workview is a pretty new idea for

most people. And we've noticed that when people get stuck on this exercise it is because they are just writing down what they're looking for in a job or an employment situation, which is a "job description." For this exercise, we're not interested in *what* work you want to do, but *why* you work.

What we're after is your philosophy of work—what it's for, what it means. This will essentially be your work manifesto. When using the term "work," we mean the broadest definition—not just what you do to make money or for "a job." Work is often the largest single component of most people's waking lives, and over a lifetime it occupies more of our attention and energy than anything else we do. Accordingly, we're suggesting you take the time to reflect and articulate what work and vocation mean to you (and perhaps what you hope work means for others as well).

Workviews can and do range widely in what they address and how they incorporate different issues, such as service to others and the world, money and standard of living, and growth, learning, skills, and talents. All of these can be part of the equation. We want you to address what you think is important. You do not have to address the question of service to others or any explicit connection to social issues. However, the positive psychologist Martin Seligman<sup>1</sup> found that the people who can make an explicit connection between their work and something socially meaningful to them are more likely to find satisfaction, and are better able to adapt to the inevitable stresses and compromises that come with working in the world. Since most people tell us they long for satisfying and meaningful work, we encourage you to explore the questions above and write down your Workview. Your compass won't be complete without it.

## Liferview Reflection

Just as you did with the Workview, please write a reflection on your Liferview. This should also take no more than thirty minutes and be 250 words or so. Below are some questions often addressed in a Liferview, just to get you started. The key thing is to write down whatever critical defining values and perspectives provide the basis for your understanding of life. Your Liferview is what provides your definition of what have been called “matters of ultimate concern.” It’s what matters most to you.

- **Why are we here?**
- **What is the meaning or purpose of life?**
- **What is the relationship between the individual and others?**
- **Where do family, country, and the rest of the world fit in?**
- **What is good, and what is evil?**
- **Is there a higher power, God, or something transcendent, and if so, what impact does this have on your life?**
- **What is the role of joy, sorrow, justice, injustice, love, peace, and strife in life?**

We realize that these are somewhat philosophical questions, and we did just mention the “G” word. Some readers will see God as unimportant; others may have wanted us to address this up front as the most important issue. You’ve probably figured out by now that design is values-neutral, and we don’t take sides. The

questions, including the ones about God or spirituality, are given to provoke your thinking, and it's up to you to see which ones you want to try to answer. They are not talking points for religious or political debates, and there are no wrong answers—no wrong Lifeviews. The only way to do this incorrectly is not to do it at all. Besides that, be curious and think like a designer. Ask the questions that work for you, make up your own, and see what you discover.

Write down your answers.

Ready. Begin.

## Coherency and Workview- Lifeview Integration

Read over your Workview and Lifeview, and write down a few thoughts on the following questions (please try to answer each of the questions):

- **Where do your views on work and life complement one another?**
- **Where do they clash?**
- **Does one drive the other? How?**

Please take some time to write up your thoughts on the integration of your two views. Our students tell us that this is where they often get the biggest “aha” moments, so please take this part of the exercise seriously and give the integration some thought. In most cases, this reflection will result in some editing of one or both of

your views. By having your Workview and your Lifeview in harmony with each other, you increase your own clarity and ability to live a consciously coherent, meaningful life—one in which who you are, what you believe, and what you do are aligned. When you've got an accurate compass, you'll never stray off course for long.

## True North

So now you have an articulated and integrated Lifeview and Workview. Ultimately, what these two views do is give you your "True North." They create your compass. They will help you know if you're on course or off course. At any moment you can assess where you are in relation to your True North. It's rare that people sail beautifully straight through their beautiful lives, always looking beautiful. In fact, as all sailors know, you can't chart a course of one straight line—you tack according to what the winds and the conditions allow. Heading True North, you may sail one way, then another direction, and then back the other way. Sometimes you sail close to the shoreline to avoid rough seas, adapting as needed. And sometimes storms hit and you get completely lost, or the entire sailboat tips over.

These are the times when it's best to have your Workview and your Lifeview handy to reorient yourself. Anytime you start to feel your life is not working, or you're going through a major transition, it's good to do a compass calibration. We do them at least once a year.

Rotate your tires.

Change the battery in your smoke detector.

Double-check your Workview and Lifeview and make sure they align.

Anytime you're changing your situation, or pursuing a new thing, or wondering what you're doing at a particular job—stop. Before you start, it's a good idea to check your compass and orient yourself. Now that you have your compass, it's time to "find your way."

This is a quest, after all.

---

**Dysfunctional Belief:** *I should know where I'm going!*

**Reframe:** *I won't always know where I'm going—but I can always know whether I'm going in the right direction.*

---

---

## **Try Stuff**

### **Workview and Lifeview**

- 1. Write a short reflection about your Workview.**  
This should take about thirty minutes. Shoot for about 250 words—less than a page of typed writing.
  - 2. Write a short reflection about your Lifeview.**  
This should also take no more than thirty minutes and be 250 words or so.
  - 3. Read over your Lifeview and Workview, and answer each of these questions:**
    - a. Where do your views on work and life complement one another?**
    - b. Where do they clash?**
    - c. Does one drive the other? How?**
-