

The 5-Minute Guide to Developing a Positive Mindset

- SPECIAL REPORT -

What is it that you want to achieve in life?

Do you want to be happier? Do you want to go further in your career?

Do you want to write a great novel, or perhaps travel the world? Now ask yourself another question: why aren't you there yet?

For many people the answer is that they have limiting beliefs that are preventing them from reaching that point. Very often, we have the skills and we have the opportunity, but our limiting beliefs prevent us from taking chances or investing in our own skills and abilities.

Then there's the pessimism that prevents us from wanting to take action and take meaningful steps.

In this five-minute guide, we're going to take a look at the steps you can take in order to break through those barriers and start becoming the best version of yourself. By changing your beliefs, you'll find you can drastically alter what is possible.

How to Discover Your Life Purpose

The first thing we're going to do, is to take a long hard look at what we want out of life and what our "life purpose" might be. This is important for a couple of key reasons.

First: finding our life purpose will make us FAR more positive. When you know what you want to achieve, life makes sense, and you feel much more positive. You have a goal and a mission.

When you feel like you do something worthwhile, and like you know what you need to do to move towards your goal, then life is rewarding, fulfilling and somewhat less of a mystery.

Second: having a life purpose and a goal will show us what we need to change about our beliefs. Which limiting beliefs are holding us back, and where would we be if we could simply *remove* all those limitations.

But how do you go about understanding your life purpose when you don't really know what it is you want to achieve? It's fine for the wannabe astronauts out there and the philanthropists - they have a 'mission' that they can aim for and even if they don't accomplish it they at least know where they're heading and can get fulfilment from the journey. But what if you don't know what you want from life? Or where you fit into it all? Well that's where it becomes necessary to start thinking about who you are, what makes you tick and what it is you want to achieve.

For that all you need is complete honesty and the right framework of questions to help guide your thought. Following is that framework in the form of a series of questions you can ask yourself. At the end of this process, you might just understand a bit more about who you are and what you want.

When was the last time you remember being completely happy?

Try to remember the last time you felt completely content, and not just content but *alive*. Perhaps it was last night (lucky you!), perhaps it was the last time you were on holiday, maybe it was when you last met new people, maybe it was when you last did something kind for a friend, or perhaps it was when you were last in danger even.

Try to find what it is that makes you excited and that really gets you in the moment, and then think about a career or a strategy that would help you experience more of that.

If you could be anywhere right now... where would it be?

If you could be anywhere right now and if you could be doing anything right now, where would you find yourself? Would you be back on holiday sitting by a pool? Would you be on holiday trekking through the ruins of an old castle? Would you be in a nightclub? Or would you be sitting behind a computer working on a project that thrilled you with a mug of tea steaming next to you? Now once again, think about what changes in your life would help to make this a reality or at least more often.

What skills do you have to offer the world?

Now ask yourself what skills you have to offer and how you provide value. Be honest again here - don't pick the skills you enjoy the most but rather the ones you're best in. This is the value that you can provide to the world this is how you'll be able to make a living. Now think about how you can take those skills and abilities and use them to accomplish the life you would like above.

How can you help other people?

When trying to find a life goal, it's important not to focus too much on the things that make you happy, but rather to think as well about what you can do for other people - again that's how you will provide value and it's what will give you that sense of fulfilment. So, ask yourself, what can you do for others using your skills? And that you would enjoy and find rewarding? And ask yourself as well - who is it that you would like to help? Who do you feel the most kinship with?

If you could change one thing... what would it be?

Sometimes you shouldn't just think about the things that you would make happen and the things you would add, but also the things you would get rid of and take away. All of us have drawbacks in our lives and things that we would sooner do without.

Where do you see yourself in ten years' time? In an ideal world?

Again, being completely honest with yourself, think about where you would like to be in ten years' time. Don't think about reality or commitments, but rather just the ideal situation you'd be in if you could be. It's important not to be motivated by obligation here or guilt, but rather just the place you find yourself *wanting* to be. Is money involved? Is being in another country?

All of these things will help you to find the lifestyle and the activities that will make you happiest. From there you can then start assessing how you can make that into a career. For instance, you might imagine yourself in a nice big family home, you might wish that you didn't have so much stress in your life, you might have last been happiest and most 'alive' when you completed a project at work that you were really proud of, and your best skill might be writing. Where does this leave you?

Or perhaps if you could be anywhere, you would be sipping margaritas in a hot sunny country. Perhaps you want to help people who have been afflicted by injury, and the skill that you have to offer the world is art. Again, where does this leave you?

What is Metacognition?

What we just did there was to look at the beliefs and unconscious desires we hold. We took some time to think about our own thinking, and how this might be shaping us.

This is an example of “metacognition.” And its metacognition we’re also going to use to fix our thought process and become more positive.

Simply put, metacognition can be designed as 'thinking about thinking', or 'cognition about cognition'. Essentially this describes any form of thinking that reflects on the way you think, and is a crucial part of true self-awareness.

Loosely this concept can fall into three categories: knowledge about cognition, experience of cognition, and regulation of cognition. Let's look at what these entails, and at why they might prove useful for you and your psychological health.

The Importance of Thought

The first thing to recognise is the importance of thought, which is practically central to our existence and our experience. Some psychologists and philosophers have even equated thought and language to be the basis for consciousness - and suggested that without them we would essentially be operating on instinct alone. Our thought is crucial of course because it dictates our behaviour - our actions tend to stem from our beliefs and from our plans,

which in turn tend to be the result of our mulling over of various topics and ideas.

Thus, it follows that if we want to improve our behaviour and our emotions, one of the best places to start is with our thought. That way we can alter the way we behave and alter the way that we feel about different situations.

Furthermore, our thought is a tool, and something that we use to achieve certain ends. If we have a problem then one of the best ways to address that is usually to 'think of a plan'. Likewise, we use thought when we're calculating maths problems, trying to remember lists and generally using our brains. If we can improve our thought, we can become more effective at uses our heads.

Types of Metacognition

Metacognition of knowledge can be split into three types of awareness: declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge and conditional knowledge. The first refers to knowing about yourself 'as a learner' and about the factors that influence your ability to think. The second refers to knowledge about how to do things and generally involves heuristics and strategies. The last refers to knowledge of the two previous types and knowing which one applies in the situation (this could almost be considered metametacognition...).

Likewise, metacognitive regulation can be split into three skills which are monitoring (the ability to monitor your own thoughts and cognitive tools), planning (the ability to select strategies to affect your thought for the better) and evaluating (the ability to assess your performance).

Metacognitive experiences meanwhile are the internal experiences you might have in relation to the on-going endeavour, and the aspects that are required for evaluation.

Uses

According to studies, the existence of metacognitive skills in students is correlated with high performance and satisfactory grades, and some 'metacognologists' (there's a mouthful... and a dubious title at best) believe that the ability is unique to sapiens. Some evidence for metacognition has been found in rhesus monkeys while apes have been shown in studies to be able to accurately judge their own cognitive abilities (such as memory span). Studies on birds have thus far been inconclusive, and it can be difficult in some cases to distinguish true metacognition from simple 'operant conditioning' (the learning of adaptive behaviours through reward).

Meanwhile, maladaptive attempts at 'meta-cognition' have been shown to potentially lead to a number of psychological conditions and even health problems. For instance, attempts to 'self-medicate' for depression could be considered poor attempts at metacognition based on the belief that thoughts can be controlled and improved with the use of substances.

A more correct way to apply metacognition to a problem like depression would be to use CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy). Though the two are seldom discussed in the same sentence, CBT is essentially a form of metacognitive therapy in that it provides a framework for changing what people think to make their thoughts more adaptive. This involves using 'mindfulness' to reflect on your own thoughts and spot the maladaptive ones (monitoring), trying to replace these thoughts quickly when they crop up with more positive statements (regulating) and writing a diary to keep track of your success (monitoring).

Metacognitive therapy is actually also a term in its own right, and is also a form of therapy - but is less widely used and accepted. The mild distinction is that CBT aims to change *what* patients think, whereas metacognitive therapy attempts to change *how* they think it. Ultimately though, CBT is just metacognitive therapy before it became popular.

How to Use Metacognition in Your Own Life

If you want to improve your life and your disposition then, using metacognition might just be how you can start at the *root* of the problem. But how can you use this concept in your everyday life? Well perhaps the most basic and obvious place to start is by improving your knowledge. By reading as much as you can about different aspects of the human brain and about different techniques for improving your cognitive abilities, you will be arming yourself with declarative and procedural knowledge which you can use to improve the way you approach tasks. By reading this guide you are doing just that so good start! In fact this is once again a case of 'metametacognition'. Get your head around that...

Likewise, you can also aim to improve your cognition by using cognitive behavioural therapy in order to remove negative thoughts and maladaptive patterns. You can do this on your own with guidance from instructions or online, or of course by seeing an actual therapist.

The aim then? To look at where you want to be in life and your life's purpose. Then you will look at why you aren't there, which will often involve addressing limiting beliefs and ideas. This is what CBT is all about.

Why aren't you richer? More famous? Why don't you have a beautiful home?

What beliefs do you have about those questions? That's just what they are: beliefs. And once you can change that, you can change your mindset AND your outcomes.