

USING THE LIFE PRIORITIES* EXERCISE

INDIVIDUALS:

The Life Priorities exercise is a simple way for individuals to explore what they want in their lives going forward. It can be used as a way to ground yourself in what matters to you, to start to plan for your future, or to help you pause and determine how what matters to you can influence key decisions you have to make.

Many people, even some of us, do the Life Priorities yearly to reflect on what matters in our lives going forward.

- The first time you do the life priorities, do them as they are written.
- The second time you do them, you can use dice or numbers written on small pieces of paper to select the items you need in Part II, Step One. (We don't want to spoil the impact of this exercise so if you haven't done it for the first time, yet, trust us when we say you will understand what we are talking about here.)

COUPLES:

We have found that this is a great exercise for couples who want to consider what really matters to them as a couple. To use it as a couple:

- Have both individuals complete their personal life priorities? It's powerfully helpful to know what matters in your own life as you're considering what matters in your life as a couple.
- Then, complete the exercise a second time, only this time answer the questions thinking about what you want in your life as a couple.
- Once you've completed both the life priorities for you individually and for you as a couple, then find an hour to sit together to review.
- Begin by sharing your individual life priorities. To support your sharing you may want to:
 - Have one person start by talking about the experience of doing the exercise, how it evolved through the steps and then sharing their life priorities.
 - **NOTE:** The other person listens closely and asks clarifying questions but otherwise, doesn't comment on their partner's priorities.
 - At the end, give your partner some recognition for good work (even if you disagree with their life priorities, since they are, after all THEIR life priorities!)
 - Once one partner has shared, have the other do the same in the same way (see above). Deep listening and respect for the other is central to using this exercise well.
 - If you feel comfortable, once both partners have shared their individual life priorities, spend some time discussing the following:
 - What did you learn as you listened to your partner? What surprised you?
 - What was exciting to see? What made you anxious or scared? You don't need to solve this right now but naming it can be powerful.

- Once you've shared your individual life priorities and listened deeply to one another, share what each of you wrote as your life priorities for your relationship:
 - Use a similar approach - have one person start by talking about the experience of doing the exercise focusing on their life priorities for the two of you as a couple, how it evolved through the steps and then sharing what they came up with as life priorities for you as a couple.
 - The other person listens closely and asks clarifying questions but otherwise, doesn't comment on their partner's thinking.
 - At the end, give your partner some recognition for good work (even if you disagree with their life priorities for you as a couple, since they are, after all THEIR life priorities for you as a couple!)
 - Once one partner has shared, have the other do the same in the same way (see above). Deep listening and respect for the other is central to using this exercise well!
 - Once you've both shared your thinking about your life priorities as a couple, you have an opportunity to work together to create a shared list of life priorities that combine your two lists and identify new priorities that have emerged as you shared.
 - To create your share priorities you can:
 - Look at each of your top three priorities for you as a couple.
 - Reflect on and discuss how they're similar and how they're different.
 - Ask your partner questions to understand more about what made them write what they wrote: what were they thinking about? Hoping? Longing for?
 - Do not be judgmental – this level of transparency in a couple is a gift and you will be forever better if you honor your similarities and differences and work to build that respect into your shared list of couple life priorities.
 - Go through the priorities and come up with the 10 Couple Life Priorities you want to use to guide you in your choices in the upcoming year or two.
 - Review them together throughout the year. Some couples do so once a month, others every quarter, and still others as they remember to do so.

FAMILY

Much like the couples exercise, you can do this as a family.

Starting with each member of the family doing their individual life priorities and then completing the exercise by answering the questions thinking about what you want in your life as a family.

As above, the goal is to be honoring and nonjudgmental. Each person will think about and word their priorities in their own way, that's part of what is wonderful about this experience. Use the directions for **Couples** to guide you as you expand the reflection and conversation to your family.

If you have children who are too young to read the question and write the answers, consider reading the question in a way that's easy for them to understand and let them draw their responses. You'll likely be amazed at what they have to say!

Please don't hesitate to contact us (contact@carpentersmith.com) if you need assistance with the exercise or would like some coaching on how to use the life priorities to create opportunities to live what is on your list.

* Adapted from Life Priorities by Anna Navarro at WorkTransitions

LIFE PRIORITIES EXERCISE

This is an exercise to help you identify the things you value or want most in life so that you maximize consistency between your work life and the other things that are important to you.

The exercise is done in two parts and has more of an impact if you complete the first part of the exercise *before* reading about the second part. Therefore, we ask that you not turn the page until you have completed the steps listed below.

LIFE PRIORITIES PART I

1. Start with fifteen index cards.
2. On each card write a word or phrase that describes something you truly want in your life.
 - a. It may be a goal you are striving for, such as financial security.
 - b. It may be some quality of life that you value highly, such as achieving peace of mind.
 - c. It may be something specific like a house or a kind of vacation.
 - d. It may be something you already have in your life and want to keep, such as a good relationship.

Give yourself roughly 20 minutes to do this. In our experience, you could spend three days doing the exercise and not have a significantly better outcome.

At first it may be difficult to think of 15 different items; however, it is important that you try, so keep at it until all of your cards have something written on them.

3. When you've identified your items, arrange the cards in the order of their importance. This may not be the same order in which you thought of the items.

In the upper right corner of each card, place a number from 1 to 15. Then lay the cards on a flat surface in such a way that you can see each one clearly.

4. Turn the page and continue with the second part of the exercise.

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LIFE PRIORITIES PART II

It's one thing to come up with your life priorities; it's quite another to live them. To really understand what these priorities might mean in your life, it's important to explore them from a number of different vantage points to try to replicate the real pressures that you may encounter in life. Follow the steps below to create scenarios that are somewhat like real life.

For the best results, please complete each step before you begin the next one.

Step one:

Life is arbitrary; sometimes fate intervenes in a way that is really unexpected and alters the course of things. To reflect this fact, remove cards 3, 8, and 11 and set them aside.

Sometimes when fate intervenes and removes some possibilities, it alters the relative value of things that are left in our lives, so rearrange the remaining cards to compensate for the losses, if that seems appropriate.

(COMPLETE STEP ONE BEFORE READING STEP TWO)

Step two:

None of us has time to achieve everything that we set out to do. To reflect this fact, remove 3 cards of your choice from the 12 remaining. In doing so, do not simply remove those that you think will take the most time; instead, remove items on the basis of their relative value in your life.

Again, rearrange the remaining cards if that seems appropriate.

(COMPLETE STEP TWO BEFORE READING STEP THREE)

Step three:

Our values and goals change over time. To reflect this fact, remove 3 more cards, this time picking those that are least likely to be important to you AT AGE 60.

Again, rearrange the remaining cards if that seems necessary to reflect your priorities.

(COMPLETE STEP THREE BEFORE READING STEP FOUR)

Step four:

Now, spend one full minute to consider the following question:

When you die, how satisfying would your life have been if your life consisted of the items written on the six remaining cards?

(Note: One full minute will seem like an eternity, but it is important to the impact of this exercise that you take time to reflect on this question in a serious, focused manner.)

(COMPLETE STEP FOUR BEFORE READING STEP FIVE)

Step five:

Since this is just an exercise, you still have time to change your life! With what you know now, identify the top 10 life priorities in your life right now. To do this, you may retrieve any of the cards that have been eliminated in earlier steps, or write up to 4 new cards to add to the ones on display before you.

(COMPLETE STEP FIVE BEFORE READING STEP SIX)

Step six:

Rearrange the 10 cards you've identified in the order of their priority. This order may be different than your original one. Check them over to be sure they reflect the most important values in your life. Then put new numbers on them to reflect your final priorities.