

# YOUR LIFE PRIORITIES

**Your life priorities.**

It sounds so simple, but few of us know how to sort through all of our competing wishes, hopes, dreams, fears, regrets, longings, demands, and obligations to identify what truly matters in our lives.

**It can be very noisy and chaotic in our heads.**

This exercise offers you a way to sort through all of that noise and chaos to get clear about what really matters to you, i.e., to identify your life priorities.

**Knowing what truly matters to you  
is an important first step on your success path.**

**Your life priorities can guide how you  
bring your sense of meaning and purpose to life and focus your goals.**

Knowing your Life Priorities and taking the time to reflect on them regularly will significantly increase your chances of creating the success that truly matters to you.

We all know people who don't know their life priorities who have had considerable success in their lives but, sadly, it's often success as defined by their parents, spouse, friends, or colleagues rather than the success that they most deeply value.

**Starting now, you can cut through the noise and chaos in your head  
and gain clarity about what really matters to you.**

This clarity will support you in creating a satisfaction and fulfillment in your life.

# YOUR LIFE PRIORITIES\*

The Life Priorities exercise is a simple way to explore what you want in your life going forward.

Your priorities will ground you in what matters to you, support you as you start planning for your future, and guide your actions as you move forward toward your vision.

**We ask that you not turn the page until you have completed the steps listed below.**

## LIFE PRIORITIES PART I

1. Start with fifteen pieces of paper or index cards.
2. On each, write a word or phrase that describes something you truly want in your life.
  - a. It may be a goal you're 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.

At first, it may be difficult to think of 15 different things that you want in life; however, it's important that you try. So, keep at it until all 15 pieces of paper have something written on them.



**Give yourself about 30-60 minutes to do this.**

*In our experience, you could spend three days doing the exercise and not have a significantly different outcome.*

3. When you've identified the 15 things that you want in your life, arrange them in the order of their importance. This may not be the same order in which you thought of them.

In the upper right corner of each piece of paper, place a number from 1 to 15 to indicate their order of importance to you. Then lay them 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.

\* Adapted from Life Priorities by Anna Navarro at WorkTransitions

## 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. 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 items 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 ones in their order of importance to you and write the number on the cards below the original number when different.

**(COMPLETE STEP ONE BEFORE READING STEP TWO)**

**STEP TWO:** None of us has time to achieve everything that we want to do. To reflect this fact, remove 3 items of your choice from the remaining ones. In doing so, don't 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 ones in order of importance, if that seems appropriate. Write the new number on each where needed.

**(COMPLETE STEP TWO BEFORE READING STEP THREE)**

**STEP THREE:** Our values and goals change over time. To reflect this fact, remove 3 more items, this time picking those that are least likely to be important to you AT AGE 70.

Again, rearrange the remaining ones (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 it consisted of the remaining priorities?***

(Note: One full minute will seem like an eternity, but it's important to the impact of this exercise that you take time to reflect on this question in a serious and 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 now know, identify the top 10 life priorities in your life right now. To do this, you may retrieve any of the items that have been eliminated in earlier steps, or you can write up new ones to create your 10 core life priorities.

**(COMPLETE STEP FIVE BEFORE READING STEP SIX)**

**STEP SIX:** Rearrange the 10 items 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 priorities in your life. Then put new numbers on them to reflect your final priorities.

**YOUR LIFE PRIORITIES.**

You now have important information about who you are and what matters to you.

Take time to regularly review your life priorities. They're key to supporting you in creating the success that truly matters to you.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.



Now that you've got your top Life Priorities, the question to ask yourself is,

*What do I need from my work or relationships (or both) to increase the chance of getting my Life Priorities?*

## WAYS YOU CAN USE THE LIFE PRIORITIES EXERCISE

### INDIVIDUALS:

We've found that doing this exercise every year or so is a powerful reminder of what matters most. The second time you do this exercise, you can use dice or numbers written on small pieces of paper to select the items you need in Part II, Step One on page 3.

### PERSONAL OR PROFESSIONAL PARTNERS:

This is a great exercise for partners who want to consider what really matters to them in their partnership. To use it as partners:

- Have both of you complete your 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 partners.
- Then, complete the exercise a second time. This time answer the questions thinking about what you want in your life as partners.
- Once you've completed both the life priorities for you individually and for you as partners, find an hour to sit together and review them.
- Begin by sharing your individual life priorities. To support your sharing, you may want to:
  - Have one of you start by sharing your experience of doing the exercise, how it evolved through the steps, and then finally, share your life priorities.
    - **NOTE:** The other person listens closely and asks clarifying questions but doesn't comment on their partner's priorities.
    - At the end, give the other person some recognition for good work (even if you disagree with their life priorities, since they are, after all THEIR life priorities!)
  - Once one of you 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 of you have shared your 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 you as partners:
  - Use a similar approach. Have one of you start by sharing your experience of doing the exercise, how it evolved through the steps, and then share what came up as life priorities for you as partners.
    - The other person listens closely and asks clarifying questions but doesn't comment on their partner's thinking.

- At the end, give the other person some recognition for good work (even if you disagree with their life priorities for you as partners, since they are, after all THEIR life priorities for you as partners!)
- Once one of you 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 partners, 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.
- To create your shared priorities, you can:
  - Look at each of your top three priorities for you as partners.
  - Reflect on and discuss how they're similar and how they're different.
  - Ask your partner questions to understand more about what they wrote: What were they thinking about? Hoping? Longing for?
  - **Don't be judgmental.** This level of transparency in a partnership is a gift and you'll be forever better if you honor your similarities and differences and work to build that respect into your shared list of partner life priorities.
- Go through the priorities and come up with the 10 Partner 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 partners do so once a month, others every quarter, and still others as they remember to do so.

### **FAMILY:**

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

- Start with each family member doing their individual life priorities.
- Then, complete the exercise a second time. This time answer 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's wonderful about this experience. Use the directions for **Partners** to guide you as you expand the reflection and conversation to your family priorities.
- 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 ([success@carpentersmith.com](mailto:success@carpentersmith.com)) if you need assistance with the exercise or would like some coaching and support on how to use the life priorities as you move forward to create the success that truly matters to you.**