

Designing Your Life

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Wayfinding

Michael was happy. A popular boy living in a small college town in central California, he played sports, hung out with his friends, and enjoyed the fairly carefree life that comes with being a popular boy who plays sports and hangs out with his friends. Michael didn't spend a whole lot of time thinking about or planning for the future. He just did whatever was in front of him, and life seemed to work out fine. His mother, however, had plans. Lots of plans. She planned for Michael to go to college, chose where he would apply, and even chose what he would major in. This resulted in Michael's attending Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo and majoring in civil engineering. Michael wasn't particularly invested in being a civil engineer; he was simply following Mom's plan.

He did fine in his major and graduated from college. Michael then fell in love with Skylar, who was finishing her degree and moving to Amsterdam to take a corporate consulting job. Michael followed Skylar and took a perfectly good civil-engineering position in Amsterdam, where he did a decent job. Michael was again happily following a path in life that had been chosen for him, and

not once having stopped to consider what he wanted to do or who he wanted to become. He had never articulated his Lifeview or Workview, and had always let other people steer his course and determine his direction. It had worked well enough so far.

After Amsterdam, Michael traveled back to California with Skylar (now his wife), who found a great job she loved; Michael took a job in a nearby civil-engineering firm. That's when the trouble began. He was doing all the things respectable civil engineers do—but he was bored, restless, and miserable. His new-found misery left him confused. He had no idea where to go or what to do. For the first time in his life, his plan wasn't working, and, without a direction, Michael felt absolutely lost.

As a result of this, Michael felt that his life was not working and that he needed to find a way to make it work.

Dysfunctional Belief: *Work is not supposed to be enjoyable; that's why they call it work.*

Reframe: *Enjoyment is a guide to finding the right work for you.*

Michael's goal was to find a way to make his life work and to find a way to make his work enjoyable.

Lots of people had advice for Michael. A few friends suggested he start his own civil-engineering practice, believing that his problem was due to his working for someone else. His father-in-law told him, "You're a smart guy. You're an engineer, so you know your math. You should be in finance. You should be a stockbroker." Michael thought about all the many suggestions and started calculating how he could quit his job and go back to school to study finance, or maybe go to business school. He considered all of these options because, frankly, he wasn't sure what the problem was. Had he failed as a civil engineer? Had civil engineering failed

him? Was he just supposed to put up with it? After all, it was only a job, right?

Wrong.

Michael's goal was to find a way to make his life work and to find a way to make his work enjoyable.

Wayfinding is the ancient art of figuring out where you are going when you don't actually know your destination. For wayfinding, you need a compass and you need a direction. Not a map—a direction. Think of the American explorers Lewis and Clark. They didn't have a map when Jefferson sent them out to travel through the land acquired in the Louisiana Purchase and make their way to the Pacific. While wayfinding to the ocean, they mapped the route (140 maps, to be exact). Wayfinding your life is similar. Since there's no *one* destination in life, you can't put your goal into your GPS and get the turn-by-turn directions for how to get there. What you can do is pay attention to the clues in front of you, and make your best way forward with the tools you have at hand. We think the first clues are *engagement* and *energy*.

Michael's goal was to find a way to make his life work and to find a way to make his work enjoyable.

Civil engineering hadn't failed Michael. He just wasn't paying attention to his life, and all he knew was that something wasn't working. At thirty-four years old, Michael didn't know what he liked and what he didn't like. When he came to us for help, he was

on the verge of upending his life and career completely, and for no good reasons. We had him spend a few weeks doing a simple logging assignment at the end of every workday. Michael wrote down when during the day he had been feeling bored, restless, or unhappy at his job, and what exactly he had been doing during those times (the times when he was *disengaged*). He also wrote down when he was excited, focused, and having a good time at work, and what exactly he was doing during those times (the times when he was *engaged*). Michael was working on what we call the Good Time Journal.

Why did we have Michael do this (and, yes, we're going to ask you to do it, too)? Because we were trying to get him to catch himself in the act of having a good time. When you learn what activities reliably engage you, you're discovering and articulating something that can be very helpful in your life design work. Remember that designers have a bias to action—which is just another way of saying that we pay a lot of attention to doing things, and not just to thinking about things. Logging when you are and aren't engaged and energized will help you pay attention to what you're doing and discover what's working.

What Is Flow Engagement?

Flow is engagement on steroids. Flow is that state of being in which time stands still, you're totally engaged in an activity, and the challenge of that particular activity matches up with your skill—so you're neither bored because it's too easy nor anxious because it's too hard. People describe this state of engagement as “euphoric,”

“in the zone,” and “freakin' awesome.” Flow was “discovered” by Professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who has been researching this phenomenon since the 1970s. When he first described the state of flow, he had studied the detailed activities of thousands of people going about their daily lives and was able to isolate this very special form of intense engagement.¹

People in flow report the experience as having these sorts of attributes:

- **Experiencing complete involvement in the activity.**
- **Feeling a sense of ecstasy or euphoria.**
- **Having great inner clarity—knowing just what to do and how to do it.**
- **Being totally calm and at peace.**
- **Feeling as if time were standing still—or disappearing in an instant.**

Flow can happen during almost any physical or mental activity, and often when both are combined. Dave goes into flow while editing minute details in a class lesson plan, or out on his sailboat, trimming the sails as it heels into a rising wind. Bill admits to being a flow junkie and finds advising students, sketching in his idea log, or chopping an onion with his favorite knife to be moments most conducive to flow. Flow is one of those “hard to describe but you know it when you feel it” qualitative experiences that you'll have to identify for yourself. As the ultimate state of personal engagement, flow experiences have a special place in designing your life, so it's important to get good at capturing them in your Good Time Journal.

Flow is play for grown-ups. In the life design dashboard, we

assessed our health, work, play, and love. The element we all find the most elusive in our busy modern lives is “play.” You might think that we all have too many responsibilities to have much time for play. Sure, we can strive to have our work and our chores engage skills we like using, but face it—it’s work, not play. Maybe. Maybe not. Flow is one key to what we call adult play, and a really rewarding and satisfying career involves a lot of flow states. The essence of play is being fully immersed and joyful in what you’re doing, without being constantly distracted by concerns about the outcomes. When we’re in flow, that’s exactly what’s going on—we are fully present to what we’re doing, so present we don’t even notice time. Seen this way, flow is something we should strive to make a regular part of our work life (and home life, and exercise life, and love life . . . you get the idea).

Energy

After engagement, the second wayfinding clue to look for is energy. Human beings, like all living things, need energy to live and to thrive. Men and women used to spend most of their daily energy on physical tasks. For most of human history, men and women were working at hunting and gathering, raising children, and raising crops, most of their time consumed with energy-intensive physical labor.

Nowadays, many of us are knowledge workers, and we use our brains to do the heavy lifting. The brain is a very energy-hungry organ. Of the roughly two thousand calories we consume a day, five hundred go to running our brains. That’s astonishing: the

brain represents only about 2 percent of our body weight, and yet it takes up 25 percent of the energy we consume every day. It’s no wonder that the way we *invest our attention* is critical to whether or not we feel high or low energy.²

We engage in physical and mental activities all day long. Some activities sustain our energy and some drain it; we want to track those energy flows as part of our Good Time Journal exercise. Once you have a good handle on where your energy goes every week, you can start redesigning your activities to maximize your vitality. Remember, life design is about getting more out of your current life—and not only about redesigning a whole new life. Even if questions about some big change in your life may be what brought you to this book, most life design work is directed at tuning up and improving the life you’re in, without having to make huge structural changes like changing jobs or moving or going back to grad school.

You may be wondering, “Isn’t tracking my energy level kind of the same thing as tracking how engaged I am?” Yes and no. Yes, high levels of engagement often coincide with high levels of energy, but not necessarily. A colleague of Dave’s, a brilliantly fast-thinking computer engineer, found arguing for his point of view an engaging activity, because it made him think on his feet. He was great at it, and often found other people at work asking him to make their arguments for them. But he noticed that getting into those arguments totally exhausted him, even when he “won.” He was not a contentious person, and though it seemed fun at the time to outwit others, he always felt terrible when it was over. Energy is also unique in that it can go negative—some activities can actually suck the life right out of us and send us drained into whatever comes next. Boredom is a big energy-suck,

but it's much easier to recover from boredom than from being de-energized, so it's important to pay specific attention to your energy levels.

It's About Joy

After working on his Good Time Journal and paying attention to when he was engaged, when he was in flow, and what was energizing for him, Michael realized that he loved his job as a civil engineer when he was working on difficult and complex engineering problems. The times that drained him and made him miserable were those when he was dealing with difficult personalities, struggling to communicate with others, and performing other administrative tasks and distractions that had nothing to do with the intricate task of engineering.

The end result was that, for the first time in his life, Michael was paying detailed attention to what really worked for him. The results were amazing. By simply discovering when he was enjoying himself at work and what caused his energies to rise and fall, Michael discovered that he actually enjoyed civil engineering. It was the people stuff, the proposal writing, and the fee negotiations that he hated. He just had to find a way to craft his job so that he was doing more of what he loved and less of what he hated. Instead of business school (which would probably have been a disaster, and an expensive one at that), Michael decided to double down on engineering. He ended up entering a Ph.D. program and is now a high-level civil and structural engineer, who spends his time, mostly alone, working on the kind of complex engineer-

ing problems that make him really happy. And he's become so technically valuable that no one asks him to do the administrative stuff anymore. On good days, he goes home with more energy than when he left for work in the morning. And that's a pretty great way to work.

Here's another key element when you're wayfinding in life: follow the joy; follow what engages and excites you, what brings you alive. Most people are taught that work is always hard and that we have to suffer through it. Well, there are parts of any job or any career that are hard and annoying—but if most of what you do at work is not bringing you alive, then it's killing you. It's your career, after all, and you are going to be spending a lot of time doing it—we calculate it at 90,000 to 125,000 hours during the course of your lifetime. If it's not fun, a lot of your life is going to suck.

Now, what makes work fun? It's not what you might think. It's not one unending office party. It's not getting paid a lot of money. It's not having multiple weeks of paid vacations. Work is fun when you are actually leaning into your strengths and are deeply engaged and energized by what you're doing.

What's Next?

At about this stage, we're often asked, "Well, this is all great, but where do purpose and mission come into it? There's more to life than just being engaged and energized. I want to be doing work I care about, work that's important to me and that matters."

We couldn't agree more. That's why we addressed building your





compass (your well-integrated Workview and Lifeview) in chapter 2. As we suggested, it's crucial for you to assess how well your work fits your values and priorities—how *coherent* your work is with who you are and what you believe. We are not suggesting a life singularly focused on engagement and energy level. We are suggesting that focused attention on engagement and energy level can provide very helpful clues to wayfinding your path forward. Life design consists of a whole set of ideas and tools that work together flexibly. We'll give you lots of suggestions, but in the end you'll decide which things to focus on and how to organize your life design project. Now let's get started on your Good Time Journal.

Good Time Journal

We're going to ask you to do a Good Time Journal, as Michael did. Just how you build yours is up to you. You can make your entries all by hand in a bound journal, or use a three-ring binder with loose sheets, or even do it on your computer (though we strongly recommend you try it by hand, so you can sketch in your journal or binder). The most important thing is that you actually do it and regularly make entries; whatever format you will most enjoy and will use most often is the way to go.

There are two elements to the Good Time Journal:

- **Activity Log (where I record where I'm engaged and energized)**
- **Reflections (where I discover what I am learning)**

The Activity Log simply lists your primary activities and how engaged  and energized  you were by those activities. We recommend that you make Activity Log entries daily, to be sure to capture lots of good information. If every few days is easier, that's fine as well, but log activities at least twice a week or you'll miss too much. If you're using a binder, you can make log sheets using the worksheet at the end of this chapter, which has little gauges for how engaged  and energized  you are by your activities (or download it at www.designingyour.life). You can also just draw gauges (or whatever engagement and energy symbols you like) into your journal book. Do what works for you—just get the information down on paper.

All of us are motivated by different kinds of work activities. Your job is to figure out which ones motivate you—with as much specificity as you can. It will take a while to get the hang of this, because, if you're like most people, you've not been paying detailed attention to this sort of thing. Sure, there are times when we all come home at the end of the day and say, "That was *great*," or "That *sucked*," but we seldom sift through the particulars of what contributed to those experiences. A day is made up of many moments, some of which are great, some of which suck, and most of which lie somewhere in between. Your job is to drill down into the particulars of your day and catch yourself in the act of having a good time.

The second element of the Good Time Journal is reflection, looking over your Activity Log and noticing trends, insights, surprises—anything that is a clue to what does and doesn't work for you. We recommend doing your Activity Log for at least three weeks, or whatever period of time you need to be sure you capture all the various kinds of activities that arise in your current situ-

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ation (some activities may only come around every few weeks). Then we recommend that you do your Good Time Journal reflection weekly, so your reflections are based on more than just a single experience of each activity.

Write your weekly reflections on blank pages in your Good Time Journal.

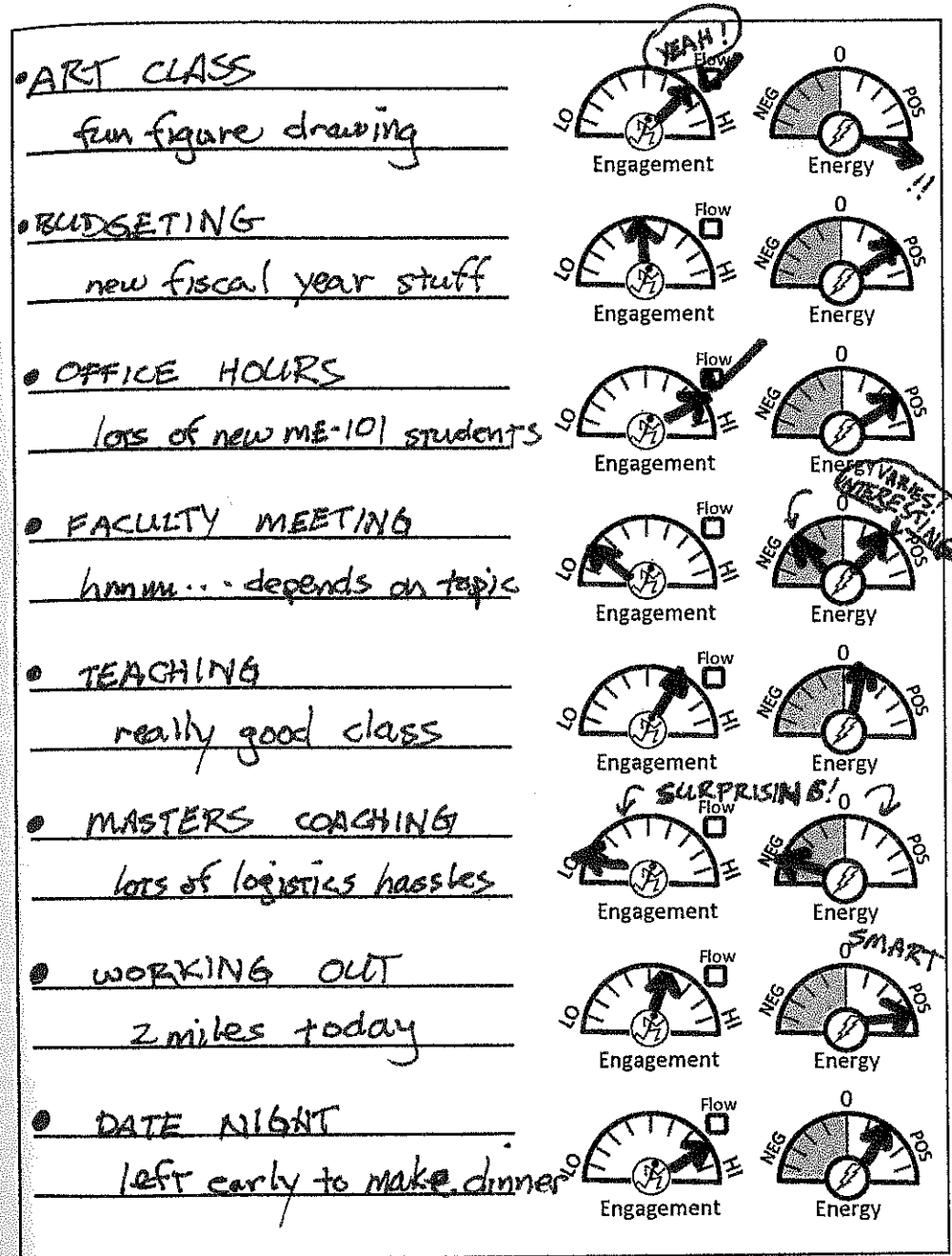
We've included a page from one of Bill's recent Good Time Journal Activity Logs.

Bill's reflection included these observations:

He noticed that his drawing class and office hours reliably created flow states, and that teaching and "date night" were the activities that returned significantly more energy than they consumed. Doubling up on those activities would certainly be one way to energize his week. His weekly faculty meeting is sometimes full of interesting conversations and sometimes not, so he drew two arrows on his energy diagram. He was not surprised that budget meetings sucked energy out of his day—he's never liked the fiscal side of things much (though he appreciates that they're crucial).

Bill adjusted his schedule to surround these less engaging activities with more engaging activities, and to give himself small rewards when he completes "energy-negative" tasks. The best way to deal with these energy-negative activities is to make sure that you are well rested and have the energy reserves needed to "do them right." Otherwise, you might find yourself doing them again—costing you more energy than they should.

Bill was surprised that coaching master's students, the students he likes and spends the most time with, was such a drain on his week. After journaling a bit on that subject, he discovered two things: (1) he was trying to coach in a bad environment (the



noisy graduate studio) and (2) his coaching interaction wasn't effective—his students weren't "getting it." Those two observations resulted in a redesign of his Tuesday-night class environment (he changed classrooms) and a shift in the coaching structure from meeting one to one with each student to coaching in small groups, so students could help one another during the interactions. These changes worked so well that a few weeks later he was regularly going into flow during coaching sessions. The budgeting still sucked, of course, but it's not that big a part of the job, and the new coaching flow moments help make it more bearable.

Bill was using his Good Time Journal primarily to improve his current life design. Michael did the exercise in search of what strategic career path to take. They had very different goals and got very different results, but both used exactly the same technique—paying detailed attention to what was engaging and energizing them.

Zooming in— Getting to the Good Stuff

After a week or two, when you've got a decent body of entries in your Good Time Journal and you're starting to notice some interesting things, it's time to zoom in and take the exercise to the next level. Typically, after you start to get the hang of paying more detailed attention to your days, you notice that some of your log entries could be more specific: you need to zoom in to see more clearly. The idea is to try to become as precise as possible; the clearer you are on what is and isn't working for you,

the better you can set your wayfinding direction. For instance . . . What you initially logged as "Staff Mtg—Enjoyed it for once today!" might, after you've looked at it again, be more accurately restated as "Staff Mtg—Felt great when I rephrased what Jon said and everyone went 'Ooooh—exactly!'" This more precise version tells a much more useful story about what specific activity or behavior engages you. And it opens the door to developing even greater self-awareness. When your entries have that kind of detail in them, your reflections can be more insightful. When journaling your reflection on the log entry about that staff meeting, you might ask yourself, "Was I more engaged by *artfully rephrasing* Jon's comment (getting the articulation dialed in just right) or by *facilitating consensus* among the staff (being the guy who made the group's 'Now we get it!' unifying moment happen)?" If you conclude that artful articulation was the real sweet spot of that staff meeting moment for you, that important insight can help you be on the lookout for content-creation opportunities over group facilitation opportunities. Take this sort of observation and reflection as far as you find helpful (and no further—you don't want to get stuck in your journal).

AEIOU

Getting great insights out of your Good Time Journal reflections isn't always easy, so here's a tool designers use to make detailed and accurate observations—part of getting good at the curiosity mind-set. It's the AEIOU method³ that provides you five sets of questions you can use when reflecting on your Activity Log.

Activities. What were you actually doing? Was this a structured or an unstructured activity? Did you have a specific role to play (team leader) or were you just a participant (at the meeting)?

Environments. Our environment has a profound effect on our emotional state. You feel one way at a football stadium, another in a cathedral. Notice where you were when you were involved in the activity. What kind of a place was it, and how did it make you feel?

Interactions. What were you interacting with—people or machines? Was it a new kind of interaction or one you are familiar with? Was it formal or informal?

Objects. Were you interacting with any objects or devices—iPads or smartphones, hockey sticks or sailboats? What were the objects that created or supported your feeling engaged?

Users. Who else was there, and what role did they play in making it either a positive or a negative experience?

Using AEIOU can really help you to zoom in effectively and discover specifically what it is that is or isn't working for you. Here are two examples:

Lydia is a contract writer. She works to help experts document their procedures in manuals. And she'd come to conclude that she hated working with people—mostly because of how awful she felt after going to meetings, and how great she felt when she got to write all day. She was wondering how she could make a living without ever going to a meeting again when she did the Good Time Journal and used the AEIOU method. When she zoomed in, she observed that she actually liked people fine—when she got to meet with

only one or two of them and either work hard on the writing or do rapid brainstorming on new project ideas (activity). She hated meetings about planning, schedules, and business strategy and any meeting with more than six people in it; she just couldn't track all the different points of view (environment). She realized that she was just an intense and focused worker, and that her intensity could be either nurtured or frustrated by other people (users), depending on the form of collaboration (interactions).

Basra simply loved higher education. It didn't matter what she was doing—if she was doing it on a university campus, she was a happy camper (environment). So she went to work at the university where she had done her undergraduate degree. For five or six years, she was very happy doing anything and everything from fund-raising to new student orientation (activity). Then it all began to fade, and she was nervous that her love affair with education was over. She did a version of the Good Time Journal and realized that she still loved the university, but had gotten into the wrong job. As she approached her thirties, environment alone was not enough; role mattered now. She'd accepted a promotion that transferred her from student affairs—and lots of interesting student interactions—to legal affairs—and lots of meetings with administrators and lawyers (users), and paperwork (objects). She figured it out and took a slight demotion to accept a position in the housing office, where she once again could have interactions of a more constructive nature and less paperwork.

As you work on your reflections in the Good Time Journal, try using this AEIOU method to get more out of your observations. It is important to record whatever comes up and not to judge yourself—there are no right or wrong feelings about your experience. The thing to focus on is that this kind of information is going to be incredibly helpful in designing your life.

What's Your Peak Experience?

Your past is waiting to be mined for insights, too—especially your mountaintop moments, or “peak experiences.” Peak experiences in our past—even our long-ago past—can be telling. Take some time to reflect on your memories of past peak work-related experiences and do a Good Time Journal Activity Log and reflection on them to see what you find. Those memories have stuck with you for good reason. You can make a list of those peak experiences, or write them out as a narrative or story. It can be very enjoyable to set to words the story of that great time when you were on the team that planned what they’re still calling the Ultimate Sales Meeting, or when you wrote the procedure manual that they still pass out to new writers as the standard for doing it right. Having the narrative of your peak experiences written down will make it easier to extract from those stories the activities that most engaged and energized you, and to discover insights that you can apply today.

Using past experience is particularly useful if you aren’t currently in a situation that lends itself to a successful Good Time Journal exercise, such as if you’re between jobs. It’s also helpful if

you’re just getting started on your professional life and don’t yet have much experience. If so, think about activities that you did in other areas of your life (perhaps even decades ago) when you felt that life was working. A historical Good Time Journal on past projects from school, summer programs, volunteer projects—anything that you were seriously engaged by—can be useful. When looking back, do beware of revisionist history—being too kind to the good days or too critical of the bad times. Just try to be honest.

How Do You Find Your Way?

This new way of noticing will help guide you in finding what’s next for you. Like Lewis and Clark, you are starting to map some of the territory you’ve already covered, and are starting to see new possibilities in the territory ahead. You are moving from one level of awareness to another, really exploring how things make you (not your mom, dad, boss, or spouse) feel. You have started to wayfind—moving from where you are to the next possible place. Armed with your compass and your Good Time Journal insights, you can do a great job of wayfinding.

Michael found his way.

Lewis and Clark found their way.

You can find your way as well.

The next step is to generate as many options as possible, so you have lots to experiment with and prototype.

For that, we’re going to need to do a little mind mapping.

Try Stuff

Good Time Journal

1. Complete a log of your daily activities, using the worksheet provided (or in your own notebook). Note when you are engaged and/or energized and what you are doing during those times. Try to do this daily, or at the very least every few days.
2. Continue this daily logging for three weeks.
3. At the end of each week, jot down your reflections—notice which activities are engaging and energizing, and which ones are not.
4. Are there any surprises in your reflections?
5. Zoom in and try to get even more specific about what does or does not engage and energize you.
6. Use the AEIOU method as needed to help you in your reflections.