

Learn the proven steps to goal selection so you can live a life filled with meaning and satisfaction. Filled with practical, step-by-step exercises and real life examples, this book makes goal clarification an exciting and fulfilling process.

From Confusion to Clarity: 5 Steps to Add Direction, Satisfaction, and Meaning to Your Life

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# FROM CONFUSION TO CLARITY

*5 Steps to Add Direction, Satisfaction,  
and Meaning to Your Life*

**Katalin Halom**

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## Contents

Introduction: The Preliminaries.....	1
<i>Get the Basics for Your Journey</i>	
Chapter One: Acknowledge – The Past and the Present .....	11
<i>Gain a Clear Picture of Your Present Situation</i>	
Chapter Two: Assemble – Bold, Bizarre, and Brilliant Ideas .....	35
<i>Collect as Many Ideas for a Goal as You Can</i>	
Chapter Three: Analyze & Assign – Basketful of Ideas....	69
<i>Categorize Your Ideas According to Five Groups</i>	
Chapter Four: Abandon & Accept – Flawed and Perfect Ideas.....	97
<i>Discard the Useless, Then Define the Best Goal for You</i>	
Chapter Five: Avoid – Friends, Relatives, and Other Booby- Traps.....	117
<i>Meet the Major Obstacles in Your Way</i>	
Bruce: Breaking the Rule.....	147
<i>From the Outback to the World of Luxury</i>	
Wolfgang: The Missing Link.....	151
<i>In Search of Another Kind of Goal</i>	
Epilogue.....	155
<i>Where to Go from Here and What to Expect</i>	

*KATALIN HALOM*

About the Author.....157

Do You Need Help with Your Goal Finding Quest?.....159  
*Workshops, Seminars, and Counseling*

Declaration of Intent.....161  
*Commit Yourself to Stay the Course*

## Introduction: The Preliminaries

*“He not busy being born is busy dying.”*

Bob Dylan

Many years ago, on our way home from swim training, my girlfriend and I were musing about the course of our lives. “You know,” I said, “if I only *knew* what I *really wanted* to do in my life, I could be the best at whatever it was.”

But I didn’t know it then, and not for a long time after.

During the following decades, I had tried every goal setting method on the market, every “secret revealed only to a select few,” every “ultimate goal setting solution,” and every success guru’s “seven steps to ultimate success.” They all had one thing in common: They didn’t work, at least not for me.

After much frustration—interspersed with short periods of excitement about a new project—I finally found the *Ultimate Secret* of discovering what I most wanted in my life and how I could get it. And now I want to let you into this secret. Here it is:

There is NO SECRET.

*There are only good and faulty methods of approach to goal clarification and goal achievement.*

The method you are about to use is a good one, naturally. It is time tested and effective. It is so simple that sometimes I wonder how it could have evaded me for so long. But it evaded me exactly because it was so simple. We tend to think that the more complicated, the more “scientific” a strategy sounds, the better it will work. Usually, it is the exact opposite: The simpler the tool, the clearer the information, the easier it is to apply.

KATALIN HALOM

How do I know that the method laid out in this book is a good one? I know it because scores of attendees at my workshops have applied it to their great success. I know it because I tested it on myself. In fact, developing each step of it is my life's story.

I grew up with the certainty that, first, I will attend a university, and second, I wouldn't be admitted to one. The first conviction was implanted into me by my parents, who wanted their three children to have a higher education, just like them. The second was the political reality of a Soviet occupied country. Though, to be quite honest, besides wanting to become an opera singer, an archeologist, a lawyer, a discoverer, a ballet dancer, and rich, I didn't really know what I wanted to be "when I grew up."

Well, this is not quite true. There was one thing I was absolutely clear about: I wanted to live in a free country, in a true democracy. Which of my fantasies do you think materialized?

The last one, of course. Because I wanted it with every fiber of my being. I knew what I wanted, and everything else fell in line.

To be honest, it wasn't as easy as that but *knowing what I wanted set off a chain reaction of voluntary and involuntary steps* that finally took me to the free world.

I got what I wanted: There I was in a free country and I got my higher education too, but I must disappoint you if you think I was passionate about the line of study I had chosen. I chose to become a translator because it left me enough time to make a living. (For a while, I even worked as a fashion model—probably the shortest, most dissatisfied and at the end, the fattest one. I still wince whenever I think of this brief period of my life.)

For decades, while earning my living in a well-paid but increasingly frustrating job, I tried many wildly different things. I excelled at some and failed at others miserably. Throughout that time, I kept asking myself why I can't feel passionate for anything I do after the initial surge of enthusiastic energy—

FROM CONFUSION TO CLARITY

anything that has to do with a main line of work, that is. Being enthusiastic for leisure time activities was easy; reading, jogging, swimming, and good conversations never failed to please me.

The **VIA—Values in Action**—test (see Chapter Three, Step 6) helped me figure out what I was missing from whatever I tried: None of my endeavors reflected my personality—the character strengths I had. (See Chapter Three for how to find your Character Strengths.)

After understanding this it was just a question of time to systematically eliminate every false assumption of what I was supposed to be and do.

Over the years, I tested an assortment of tips and tricks for goal setting—discarded the worthless and polished up the good ones. Finally, I developed and added some exercises I found most effective. The end product is the method you hold now in your hands.

If you apply its steps as they are set out in this practical book, sooner than later you will have the desired result: You will be able to define the *one goal* that will fill your life with satisfaction. You can finally end your search and start with the steps necessary for achieving your chosen goal.

*“The road to happiness lies in two simple principles: Find what it is that interests you and that you can do well, and when you find it, put your whole soul into it – every bit of energy and ambition and natural ability you have.”*

John D. Rockefeller III

In the following chapters I will lead you through **Five Stages**. Your task is to complete *every Step at each Stage*—one after the other—as comprehensively as possible.



Do not interchange the *Stages* or skip one or the other step. Do them all in succession.

Before you start, however, first you have to prepare thoroughly for the journey with the **Preliminaries**. These are fundamental requirements—your basic gear—for the trip. Don't neglect any of them. Even the seemingly trivial ones add to your resolve to walk the full length of the road to discovery.

Beginning with the last two of the *Preliminaries*, do each exercise in writing. Writing is significant to your success. (See "*The Importance of Writing*" on page 7.)

Only through writing them down will your fantasies have a chance to become reality.

Are you eager to start? Then let's warm up for our adventure together with the Preliminaries.

## The Preliminaries

What you need:

- 1. A notebook or a journal**, thick enough to hold all your thoughts. It should be pleasing to the senses, an appealing color, and a texture that is pleasant to touch.
- 2. Writing Equipment**, a ball point pen, felt pen, whatever you like most. Choose one that enables you to write smoothly and continuously. Don't use pencils; they can easily entice you into changing what you've written. This you should *never* do. Spontaneous, unedited thoughts are extremely important. (See "*The Importance of Writing*" on page 7.)

3. **Quiet time.** This prerequisite is paramount to your success. You can always find some free time if you set your mind to it. Take your day planner and decide on half an hour each day—more if you can spare—for the exercises. Highlight the time in the planner with a color of your choice.
4. **Declaration of Intent.** A Declaration of Intent is a moral commitment to take all the steps as described in this book until you clarified the one goal you want to pursue. You can choose one of two equally effective ways to express your intent; to choose both is even better. You can either create a
  - **Solemn Declaration of Intent** set up as a document. You can use the template on page 161. If you are artistically inclined, design one of your own. Or write a
  - **Personal Mantra.** A mantra is a powerful word or phrase that, when frequently repeated, will reinforce your intent. You can use the examples below or create your own:

*“I commit to going the distance,”*  
or in a more poetic vein,  
*“Half an hour a day blows indecision away.”*

You can choose one or the other, but either one should be short and easy to remember. Use every opportunity to reinforce your intent by every conceivable way—by speaking, writing, or visualizing the words.

5. **An Intense Desire** to give your life a new and meaningful direction. The answers to the following questions will throw some light on your degree of motivation for change. Thoughtfully reflect upon each ques-

tion before answering with “YES” or “NO.” Do this in writing.

- **Do you feel a restless longing for something not yet defined?**
- 

- **Do you feel you’re wasting your precious life-time in senseless or boring activities?**
- 

- **Are you confused by the many possible directions you could take?**
- 

- **Have you repeatedly tried to achieve poorly defined targets and as a result have an arsenal of half-completed and abandoned projects?**
- 

Even with one “Yes” answer you will greatly profit from the task-based guidance in this manual. Don’t let negative sensations and purported shortcomings gnaw away at your life energy. Let your desire for a worthwhile goal motivate you to act. Do the steps as described in the next chapters. If you complete each exercise thoroughly and attentively, you will undoubtedly find what you really want.

## The Importance of Writing

*“The palest ink is better than the best memory.”*  
Chinese Proverb

Most people don't like to write; in our hectic world, writing isn't fast enough for them.

Good writing, like everything else of value, takes time, effort, and concentration. Some say they don't have the time to write. Others find the intense concentration that writing requires tiresome—they are not used to mentally demanding work.

Regrettably, many of us are unwilling to leave our mental comfort zone, even if an extra bit of effort is likely to result in big gains. Just think of all the amenities of modern life! None of them would exist without the people who had a close affinity to pen and paper.

As inventors and researchers, philosophers and discoverers—all imaginative thinkers—they first put their thoughts to paper (or someone else did it for them) before their ideas became common property.

Few of them had been literary geniuses. In terms of doing the exercises in this book, you do not need to be a wizard with words either.

You don't have to write sophisticated essays—nothing of the sort. The writing I ask of you is rather a quick, instant type of writing: You write as you think without paying attention to structure and style.

KATALIN HALOM

*"And by the way, everything in life is writable about  
if you have the outgoing guts to do it,  
and the imagination to improvise.  
The worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt."  
Sylvia Plath*

This uninhibited writing is called "*Stream of Consciousness Writing*." It is a writing technique that *does not require*

- Good grammar
- Elaborate sentences
- Refined style

"Stream of Consciousness Writing" is writing without lifting the pen from the paper, *without pausing to evaluate your thoughts*.

- Just write the words that occur and as they occur to you.
- Don't judge; don't censor your writing.
- Don't pause to ruminate about anything.
- Don't go back and correct your grammar.
- Don't look for the "right" word; just write.
- Don't ignore anything that crosses your mind.
- Don't try to be "wise, intellectual, or crafty." Don't try to be anything. Just write the thoughts shooting across your mind.
- Don't edit what you've written.

### **What are the rewards you get from Stream of Consciousness Writing?**

- It gives glimpses into your subconscious dump for undesirable characteristics of your personality—undesirable, that is, for the image you've created for yourself.
- It helps you gain some deep insights into your desires and dislikes, dreams and aversions. It helps your suppressed emotions resurface so that you can deal with them one by one.

*FROM CONFUSION TO CLARITY*

- It gives you spontaneous tips for problem solving.

At first, you might not like what you wrote, because what you write doesn't necessarily match your self-image. If you have the patience, let the writing sit for an hour, a day, or more before you read it; after a while, you can better interpret the subtler messages of your thoughts.

With time, provided you use this technique throughout your goal clarification process,

- You will feel lighter and become hooked. Then,
- You can go on using Stream of Consciousness Writing as a brainstorming technique to solve all your problems.

Paraphrasing the wise saying "I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand,"

*I think and I am confused,  
I write and I understand.*

**A warning:** Keep your thoughts and answers to yourself and the notebook in a place where no one can pry into it; at this stage of the journey you're still vulnerable to unsolicited advice. Protect the "fledglings," and don't confront them with the harsh outside world yet.

Equipped with the basic tools and a clear picture of your motivation to change, you can now start on the road to discovery.

## ◇Chapter One◇

### **Acknowledge – The Past and the Present**

*“Where I was born and where and how  
I have lived is unimportant.  
It is what I have done with where  
I have been that should be of interest.”*  
Georgia O’Keeffe

Life is not fair; it never has been, and most likely it never will be. Over a billion of our planet’s population is born into families whose lives are a moment-by-moment struggle for survival. All their energy is used up for securing sustenance for themselves and their families—there is not much left for dreaming big and going after their dreams.

Then there are those—you and I—who have a myriad opportunities to live a life of our own design. Why is it then that we don’t use this chance more often? Why do so many of us just wait for life to happen? We would rather live in some degree of frustration than get off our fannies and end this stalemate.

Why is that?

One of the most obvious reasons why we lead less than perfect lives is our lack of purpose—*we don’t have a clear vision of what we really want.* (The lucky minority who always seems to know what they want and single-mindedly pursue the chosen goal is not the topic of this book.) “Just to be alive is a grand thing,” Agatha Christie said, but what if just to be alive isn’t enough for you? What if you want to fill this living with joy and

KATALIN HALOM

meaning? Then you have to consciously and meticulously plan your life—now and for the years to come.

Life is also a promise, and Mother Teresa urges us to fulfill this promise. But what if you haven't the slightest idea what the promise of *your* life is supposed to be?

Then, obviously, you have to find that promise.

“Oh, yes, easy to say, but how can I *do* this? I *can't even figure out what I want to do next year*, let alone find the promise of my life. If only someone would tell me what to do!” might be your understandable reaction.

I want to make something quite clear: *First*, it is in *your power alone* to set a direction for your future. If others tell you what to do with your life, be very careful—it might not be in your best interest.

*Second*, it's no use wasting your precious time with random activities, unfulfilling jobs, or listless diversions while waiting for a fairy godmother to show you the way out of your frustration. *You have to actively seek a way out.*

You can *consciously choose* a valuable task that makes you enduringly content. Don't wait for others to clear the fog of confusion for you; do it yourself and *go the full way* until you find your vocation. Like a pearl fisher whose life can forever be changed by the one perfect pearl, finding the one perfect goal can indeed change your life for the better. Don't stop at half-way. Don't just do a superficial search because repeated half-hearted efforts can easily become a habit. And you know from personal experience how hard it is to change a bad habit, don't you?

Like with precious pearls, you too can choose between two approaches to find the magic jewel—the best goal for your life: Either you spend a lifetime looking for the oyster that contains



FROM CONFUSION TO CLARITY

the one perfect pearl. After years, maybe decades, by stroke of sheer luck you might find one. Or you can deliberately cultivate your own pearl, much like a pearl *farmer* does, by collecting several oysters—promising ideas for a worthwhile goal. After implanting these “oyster-ideas” with kernels of your dreams, values, and character strengths, you have to tend to them on a daily basis while they grow their valuable content.

The second option takes time and effort but it will invariably result in a good harvest.

Don't waste your time waiting for luck to strike. Make the effort to cultivate your one-of-a-kind jewel. Become the pearl farmer.

Previous unsuccessful attempts at finding a valuable goal for your life should never discourage you. Keep in mind *that no matter how often you've failed, no matter how often you've lost interest in something, no matter how little self-confidence you have, you can overcome all these handicaps. You too can define and achieve any interesting and rewarding goal if you set your mind to it*, just like I did, despite hurdles similar to yours. You can do it if you know the steps you must take.

Let me show you those steps. Come and join me, and together we will discover *what you really want*.

The method for goal clarification is easy. What might seem at first glance difficult—recording your thoughts and observations—will become quite easy with practice. Candid descriptions of your physical, emotional, and professional situation, and unadorned answers to questions however painful or embarrassing, are essential for success. Remember that no one but you will read what you write.

*To find and get what you want, you will have to go through five stages. These Five Stages are your formula for success. Make sure you complete each exercise—the Steps—at each stage. They are your stepping stones toward ultimate goal clarification*

and goal achievement. Leaving out even one of the stages—or steps—will result, at best, in an unsatisfactory goal. At worst, you will become completely confused.

**THE FIVE STAGES in a Nutshell:**

STAGE 1: **Gain a clear picture of your present**  
(Chapter One)

STAGE 2: **Collect as many ideas for a goal as you can**  
(Chapter Two)

STAGE 3: **Categorize the ideas according to five groups**  
(Chapter Three)

STAGE 4: **Discard the useless, then define the best Goal for you**  
(Chapter Four)

STAGE 5: **Meet the major obstacles in your way**  
(Chapter Five)

Before you can realistically estimate the distance you must cover until the desired destination, first you have to define precisely your home base—the point in life where your journey of exploration begins—your *present situation*.

Assessing your life clearly as it is now enables you to decide which aspects of it are pleasant and should, therefore, be enhanced. Equally important is the clear picture you'll gain of the less pleasant features of your life. Writing about the negatives can lead to their dissolution.

Learn the proven steps to goal selection so you can live a life filled with meaning and satisfaction. Filled with practical, step-by-step exercises and real life examples, this book makes goal clarification an exciting and fulfilling process.

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