

Two



Wishing

Stylesearch

I'd like you to begin making your life come true by taking a loving look at your own style: how you dress, how you decorate your apartment or house, what colors and foods and movies and music and books you like, all the thousand little details of choice and preference by which you please yourself.

We ordinarily think of personal style as something that “doesn't matter”—fun, but rather trivial and optional; a private game we play in our leisure time after we've dealt with the serious business of life. Style seems like the last place you'd be likely to find the key to success. And yet, after your memories of what you loved best as a child and your fantasies about what you'd have loved to be, your style is your most precious clue to your genius.

Just because it isn't considered “important,” style is the biggest field of free play and free choice left to you. Your deepest resources—your talent, your imagination, your identity—cannot be completely suppressed. They *must* declare themselves. And they do—in the one “safe” area society has left free from expectations or consequences. Your style only needs to be noticed and taken seriously to start furnishing rich clues for the direction and design of your life.

If this sounds a little exaggerated, you can demonstrate its truth for yourself. Here's a simple exercise that will reveal the unsuspected importance of your style. It was originated by Jack Canfield, Director of the Institute for Holistic Studies in Amherst, Massachusetts, and it's one of my favorites.

EXERCISE 4: Pick a Color (“I am blue”)

Choose a color that appeals to you. It doesn't have to be your all-time favorite, or a color you especially like to wear—though it may be. The best way to pick one is to look at a selection of colors, and I'd also like you to have your color in front of you while you do this exercise. So you might glance through a brightly colored magazine . . . or look around for a color that catches your eye in a painting or print, a chair or a rug, in the room where you're sitting right now . . . or if you have a child's box of crayons, or a set of chalks or paints, that will give you an excellent range to choose from. (Remember the delicious feeling of choice you got when you opened a brand-new box of forty-eight sharp-pointed crayons and decided which one to draw with first: silver? flesh? forest green?)

Now I would like you to role-play that color. That means you are going to pretend you *are* that color and speak for it, since it cannot speak for itself. It can't tell us what it's like to be royal purple, or buttercup, or black. You will have to tell what it's like to be your color.

Take a sheet of paper, and start by writing, “I am red”... or “I am yellow”... or “I am cerulean blue”—whatever color you've chosen. Do *not* say “I like blue because . . .” or “I think blue is . . .” From this moment on you *are* that color.

Now, in a few words to a few sentences, tell what qualities you have *as that color*—not as yourself. For instance, “I am dark blue. I'm quiet and deep like the ocean.” Or, “I am yellow. I'm cheerful, intelligent, efficient but warm.” (Don't let these responses influence *your* response. There are no right answers to this exercise. If you happen to find black a cozy color, or you think white is depressing and blue is cheerful, great!)

This is a deceptively simple little exercise, and it has so much to tell that I'm going to break its revelations down into three parts, each of which will lead to questions and exercises of its own—choice and identity, uniqueness vs. competition, and assets and “objectivity.”

I. CHOICE AND IDENTITY

The first thing you may have noticed is that it took you a while to pick your favorite color. You found yourself being very particular and choosy, and it was hard to make up your mind. That happens to a lot of people, and there's a very good reason for it: you didn't want to pick a color that wasn't right.

Somewhere down deep, not much is left to you on which to take a stand—so you'll take it on preferences. You'll fight for your tastes. When it comes to color, or whether you want to eat Chinese or fried chicken, or how you want your house to look, or how you wear your hair, or whether you prefer Elvis Presley or opera, you will take a life and death stand—because that's where your integrity is.

You choose your color so carefully because subconsciously, half-consciously, you know that style is anything but trivial. When you pick your color, or your records, or your necktie, or the print for your curtains, you are doing far more than just pleasing or indulging yourself. You are declaring yourself. You are saying, "This is who I am." That's why those "little" choices are so important to you.

With this in mind, let's take a closer look at your style.

EXERCISE 5: The Private-Eye Game

Play detective. Snoop around your own house or room as if you were a private eye trying to find out who lived here just from the style revealed in the house. After all, in a way you *are* learning about a stranger. You are following the tracks and examining the fingerprints of a unique individual you do not know who happens to be you.

Look in the clothes closets, the kitchen cabinets, the book and record shelves. Look at the furniture, the rugs, the curtains, the picture on the walls, the food in the refrigerator, the colors, the state of clutter or order, the arrangement of space. Make an inventory of as many characteristics and interests as you can find.

For instance, would you say that the person who lives here is organized or scatterbrained? Sociable or solitary? Sensual or intellectual? Or some of both? Would she rather read fiction or history? Does he prefer Bach or Eric Clapton? Or both? Do the furnishings this person chose show a preference for rough, natural materials or for finished, classy ones? Does the house or apartment have a striking central feature, or a favorite lived-in place: the kitchen, a writing desk, a fireplace, the stereo? What are the clothes in the closet saying about the person who chose them? (I have never met a person who wasn't carefully costumed!) And so on.

When you've gathered all the clues you can, sit down and read through the detective's profile you've compiled. It is a portrait of yourself.

Are you surprised?

Ruth, a 38-year-old English teacher, was. She had never thought of herself as a visual person. If you'd asked her, she would have said she was primarily interested in literature and music and didn't know anything about painting. And yet she had covered one whole wall of her apartment with cork board, and pinned up an arrangement of postcards that revealed an instinctive sense of color and design. She'd done it simply because she liked them—because they looked pretty and made her feel good! She'd never given it a second thought. Only when she played the Private-Eye Game did it dawn on her that she was, in fact, a highly visual person who needed to—and knew how to—please her own eye.

Margaret, 26, works as a computer programmer in an office that requires her to dress neatly and conservatively. She thinks of herself as efficient and tidy. When she goes out on weekends, she likes to wear splashy, glamorous clothes—big hats, plunging necklines, capes, and spangles. When she looked at all her evening dresses hanging together in her closet, she felt like Clark Kent looking at Superman's cape. Those clothes added up to a second secret identity: an actress or adventuress, reckless and dramatic, with a love of costume and gesture.

Bill, an accountant who does a lot of his work at home, had devised his own color-coded, fast-access filing system, which he thought of as nothing more than a convenience. When he looked at it with the eye of a detective, he realized that it showed real logic and ingenuity—a talent for organization and design.

Jacob, a 45-year-old bachelor poet-in-residence at a New England college, recorded the fact that his house had not one center, but two: the library and the kitchen! His spice racks were as carefully stocked as his bookshelves, his copper pots were as lovingly polished as his sonnets, and he had to admit that the man who lived here was considerably more sociable and sensual than the melancholy recluse he'd thought he was.

The Private-Eye Game may give that kind of pleasant shock to your self-image. In any case, it is bound to enrich it. Your tastes and choices often reveal aspects of you that you aren't very conscious of, or have never taken seriously. If you've been thinking of yourself as an indistinct person with no special talents or interests, this exercise will lay that idea to rest! You may be puzzled at how you can parlay the discoveries you've made into a goal, activity, or profession, but don't worry about that now. In the next chapter I'll be showing you how to shape a goal—one that is possible in the real world—out of all these characteristics of yourself. Right now, your job is just to have fun discovering them. You're getting to know your multitalented self.

The same goes for you if—at the other extreme—you are already a very goal-directed, even single-minded person. Your style may serve as a safety-deposit box for all the other talents you're not using right now—like Ruth's visual ability. You need to be aware that those talents are there. You don't have to become a dilettante or “spread yourself thin,” but you should know that your life will be richer, your energy more abundant, the more of your inborn gifts you can bring into play. In the pages ahead you'll find out how to make room in your life for all of them.

Your style is the place where you still exercise the creative power to shape your world and design yourself. *It is proof that you haven't lost that power at all.* All you need is permission, encouragement, and guidance to expand it into a wider domain: your whole life.

II. UNIQUENESS VS. COMPETITION

Now I'm going to go back to the color exercise and show you another very interesting facet of it. Just take a look at some of the responses other people gave.

“I am red. I am intense, hungry, and angry, like fire.”

“I am red. I’m lively and giving.”

“I am red. I am a firelit living room with a red velvet couch—I am fiery and passionate, but also cozy and warm.”

“I am red like blood—very deep and very vital.”

“I am blue. I’m cold, distant, but intelligent.”

“I am blue, I’m soothing and serene.”

“I am blue—electric blue—crackling with energy.”

“I am yellow. I am a new kitchen with lots of sun and flower pots. I am cheerful and like company, order, and comfort.”

“I am yellow. I’m quiet, simple, straightforward, sincere.”

“I am yellow. I’m heavy, rich and valuable, like gold, like cream.”

One thing you can’t help noticing right away is the striking variety of answers. But even more important, look how completely different the same color appears through different people’s eyes! This can be true right down to the physical level. I have seen two people look at the same color and heard one say “I am rust” and the other say “I am rose.”

Do you remember when we were talking about early childhood, and I said that each one of us sees a different world? There it is—in this simple-minded little exercise on color. Your style is a style of perception, a way of seeing and feeling the world, that is unique—as unique as your fingerprints. You are born with it, and it develops as you grow, and it is not like anyone else’s in the world. It is literally incomparable.

There is only one way you can compare people with each other, and that is to select one single feature that can be measured quantitatively. Take height. Obviously, some people are taller and some shorter. That doesn’t tell you much about them as individuals, but as far as it goes, it is a valid basis for comparison. Unfortunately, in our society comparison, in turn, often becomes the basis for *ranking*. We have an obsessive need to know who is “better,” so we take a single quantitative yardstick—like grades in school, or income—and we evaluate a whole individual by his or her performance on that one scale. When you really think about it, this is as absurd as declaring that tall people are superior to short people, or that an orange is better than a rose because it weighs more! And yet we’ve all been trained to think this way, to compare ourselves to others and worry about whether we “measure up.”

Think about it. When you walk into a room full of strangers, don't you immediately, half-consciously "case" it according to your own favorite standard—smart/dumb, rich/poor, pretty/ugly, accomplished/not accomplished, or whatever—and then rank yourself? For instance, if pretty/ugly is your private yardstick, you may think, "Let's see . . . I've got more taste than she does, but that one over there has prettier eyes than I do, and . . ." It's embarrassing to admit, but very few of us are completely immune to this game.

But what would happen to this ranking system if you met people—and they met you—in terms of individual style? Suppose, for instance, you were going to meet the people who "spoke for their color" in the examples above. How would you rank their answers? Where would you rank your own? Which one do you think is "best"?

Of course. You couldn't even compare them, much less rank them. Because the truth is that human beings are not comparable. You can't compare us any more than you can compare roses and oranges, or mountains and the sea, or France and England. You might prefer living by the sea to living in the mountains. You might rather take your vacation in England than in France. And you certainly like some people better than you like others. Preferences are perfectly valid . . . they're just your style asserting itself again. But you'd feel pretty silly saying, "England is a better country than France," or "The sea is better than the mountains." And it's every bit as silly to go around saying, "I'm better than Mary, but Joe is better than me."

The notion of competition—the idea that there is someone out there just like you, only better—is untrue. What's more, it keeps your attention focused away from yourself, on the struggle to meet the ill-fitting standards of other people, instead of looking inside and discovering your own. The things that are unique and incomparable about you are the only basis on which you can design a life that will truly satisfy you. And it is you who must be satisfied. There is no authority outside you who can tell you what's right for you.

When you become aware of your own uniqueness, that's when you really begin to cherish and respect yourself—and to respect others! If you met people on the basis of their style, you would respect each one instinctively, and they would respect you. And there would be genuine mutual interest and curiosity. If we're not in competition with each other—if we're not threatened by our differences or busy trying to rank them—then our

differences become resources. I'm not like you, and I don't want to be like you, because then I wouldn't have anyone around me who could tell me anything I didn't know, show me anything I couldn't see. I'd only have me. I want you, too, because you're different.

III. ASSETS AND “OBJECTIVITY”

When you were speaking for your color, did it strike you that you felt free to say *anything*? “I am red; I'm intense and angry. Well, of course it's OK to say I'm angry! I'm red, aren't I?”

Or did you find that you had some difficulty saying things like “I am intelligent, I am passionate, I am sad, I am giving?” Did you feel at all shy about it?

That was a pretty thinly veiled exercise, wasn't it? I'm sure you realized rather quickly that you were talking about yourself—or at least a facet of yourself. If you had been asked to pick your favorite color on a different day, it might have been a different color. But certainly this color represented a part of you . . . and it revealed some pretty intimate things about you, too. That's why it may have been hard for you to talk about it. You were breaking a rule of our culture, the rule against saying, “I am the kind of person who . . .”

How many of us walk through life saying to ourselves and everyone else within earshot, “I'm a passionate person! I may not be organized, but I've got fire and drive”? No, we say, “Lord, I'm fat.” That's because we learned very early that to speak honestly about ourselves—and especially to say anything good about ourselves—was taboo. If you're like me, more than once in your life you've walked up to a prospective lover or employer and, convinced that you were being honest and “objective” said, “I want to know everything that's wrong with me in advance!”

Luckily, there are a few loopholes in the taboo—a few places where you *are* allowed, just as a game, to say “I am the kind of person who.” Magazine quizzes are one such place. Astrology is another. That's why magazine quizzes and astrology are so popular! Notice that your sign of the zodiac doesn't say you're perfect. It says you're good at this, you're bad at that, these are your wonderful qualities, these are your awful qualities. And you

love them all. I'm a Leo. That gives me an excuse to say, "I'm a showoff, I'm a ham, I'm an amateur at everything, I need a lot of affection"—and all without the slightest bit of embarrassment.

That's real objectivity—the kind of loving objectivity that says you're fine and fascinating just the way you are. But take off the mask of your astrological sign, and all of a sudden you're not allowed to say those things any more. *A direct statement about yourself is considered objective only if it is negative.* If it's positive, it is considered *subjective*. And "objective" means it is accurate, and "subjective" means it is conceited self-delusion.

We all have negative tapes running constantly in our heads, reciting our shortcomings, until we know what's wrong with us backwards, forwards, and upside down. Very few of us have positive tapes to tell us all the things that are right with us! And yet, *only when you have a clear, unembarrassed view of your own assets do you have a truly objective picture of yourself*—one you can draw on to design a creative and satisfying life. And so you sorely need some positive tapes that you can play whenever the negative ones get too insistent.

Positive information about yourself isn't as hard to come by as you may think. If you were asked to sit down and give a thoughtful, accurate inventory of your best friend's good qualities, could you do it? Sure—in about two minutes. Well, your best friend can do the same for you. The truth is, you're not hiding your good qualities from anybody except yourself. They're as plain as the nose on your face to anybody who knows you—or even just met you. You would be surprised and delighted if you could really see yourself through other people's eyes. And so that's exactly what I'm going to invite you to do in this exercise.

EXERCISE 6: Seeing Yourself as Others See You

This exercise comes in two versions—one for extroverts and one for introverts (there's another fun classification for you). If you've got even a little nerve, try Version No. 1. If you're shy but imaginative, you may feel more comfortable with Version No. 2.

VERSION NO. 1: PRAISE BE!

Pick somebody you love and trust—a good friend, or your mate, lover, or child. Sit down with a pen and a piece of paper (no erasing!) and ask him or her to spend about three minutes telling you precisely what’s good about you. And you write it down, word for word. This is going to be your positive tape, so get it right.

Don’t let your partner get away with saying something vague, like “You’re nice,” or even “You’re wonderful.” That’s the only kind of praise most of us have ever gotten, and it doesn’t help. You need to hear things like “You have a delightful imagination, you’re articulate, your energy is contagious, and you help everyone around you to see the world in fresh, new ways.” Or: “Do you know that you move beautifully? You’re really graceful—and really giving and kind. You touch people a lot, and you mean it. Anybody in trouble can come to you and feel soothed.” This isn’t flattery, it’s information.

Accurate, perceptive praise is a rarity in our society. It shouldn’t be. We all need it, and we’d all love to give it—it’s just that nobody ever told us it was OK. Well, I’m telling you now. Everybody needs practice at being both the praiser and the praisee, so after your partner has told you what’s right about you, switch roles. There are just a couple of simple rules to follow.

For the praiser: Don’t let any criticism sneak in, even if it’s “constructive” or compassionate. (This rule is especially important for husbands, wives, and lovers; friends are less likely to want to improve each other.) That means you may not say, “If you just took your glasses off and let your hair down, you’d be really beautiful,” or “Some people might say you’re opinionated and stubborn, but I think you’re definite and strong.” The person being praised already knows all that negative stuff by heart and doesn’t need to hear it again. Be honestly positive. You’ll be amazed how it enhances your appreciation of someone you love to put your perceptions of him or her into words.

For the praisee: As difficult—and delicious—as you will find it, for three minutes you are allowed to do nothing but sit and listen and take dictation like a very conscientious secretary. Don’t interrupt. Don’t argue. And don’t inwardly discount every word your partner says. You’re always ready and waiting for criticism, but praise will sneak right up and sock you in your

tummy. If you just sit and take it, it can give you gooseflesh, it can even make you cry. So you may try to wiggle out of it. If your partner says, “You’re very sensitive,” you’ll think, “Ah hah. Weepy, weak, hysterical.” If s/he says “Sensuous,” you’ll go, “Fat.” Don’t do that. Take your partner at his or her word—and get those words down on paper, so you can’t revise, edit, and qualify them in memory.

There are a couple of variations on this theme if you find it hard to take your praise right between the eyes. One is to have your partner put it in writing. Another, even better, is to get together with two friends, turn your back on them, and listen while they discuss your good qualities with each other. Then switch around and put somebody else in the “warm seat.”

But if you’d really rather not have to ask someone else to tell you the good news, there’s a way that you can find out for yourself.

VERSION NO. 2: CREATING YOUR CHEERING SECTION

The truth is, you already know what your own assets are. Whenever you get the chance to talk about yourself in a safe disguise—like astrology—that knowledge pops out. It’s there. The color exercise was one of those disguises. When you spoke for your color, I’ll bet you declared all its powerful and beautiful and tender qualities. You didn’t choose that color in the first place for being ugly or drab, did you? And that color is *you*—a vital part of you.

It’s time to come out of all the disguises and start admitting that your positive qualities really do belong to you. But that’s hard to do without help. Like every human being, you need *positive feedback* from someone who’s on your side before it becomes safe to feel openly good about yourself. Your own family may not have known how to give you that kind of feedback when you were growing up, but now that you are grown up, you can get it for yourself. You can create an imaginary ideal family to be your private cheering section. They will tell you all the good things about you that you really know—but aren’t allowed to tell yourself!

The imagination is a very powerful tool, and we’ll be using it a lot in this book. We think that only novelists and storytellers have the ability to create characters and give them life. It’s not true. That’s a human power, and

everybody has it—we use it in our dreams! I’m going to show you how to use it consciously, to help you realize your life dreams.

The imaginative technique we’re going to use in this exercise is called role-playing. If you pretend that you’re someone else—your mother, your father, a famous baseball player, an Eskimo, a beagle—you tap into a deeper source of knowledge, and you’ll discover that you know all kinds of things you didn’t know you knew. In this case, you’re going to pretend you are some very special people who are taking a loving look at you and saying what they see.

Take a few minutes now to think of the four or five people you would choose if you could have anyone in the world—anyone in all history and literature—as your family. I mean your *ideal* family, the kind I described as “the environment that creates winners”: a group of people who cherish what’s special about you, encourage you to explore all your own talents, and help you keep going when you’re down. Give this some thought and care, because you will be meeting these people again as we go along. When you start working toward an actual goal they’ll be there to help you feel that you’re not alone—that you have the best and most select company in the world.

Choose people you feel a special kinship with: people whose ideas or activities strongly appeal to you, people whose life experience or temperament would make them sympathetic to you (Katharine Hepburn might say, “I know how it is to have a hot temper”), people whose faces you love. Choosing your “family” is like choosing your color: you’re asserting your style to select and shape the world around you. You will pick each of your “family” members for a very good reason.

I chose Albert Einstein because he looked as kind as my grandfather, and because he had done badly in math and had a trivial job as a patent clerk, but was so wrapped up in his interests that it never stopped him. And I chose Bette Davis because she is both tough and vulnerable, self-sufficient, witty and smart, and I’d like to have her on my side in a fight! Other favorites of mine are Margaret Mead and Alice’s waitress friend in the movie, “Alice Doesn’t Live Here Any More.”

A writer I know chose the great Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke because he’d traveled disconsolately all over Europe bumming off his aristocratic

friends, worrying about money, waiting for inspiration, and deploring his own lack of self-discipline. The other members of her family are John Keats, Glenda Jackson, Colette, and Pelé—because she likes his smile!

Write the names of your “family” members down on one or two sheets of paper, with a good paragraph’s worth of space under each one. Now close your eyes and imagine that you are one of those people, *and you are watching yourself come through the door*. From the point of view of your “family” member, notice how you move, how you talk to people, the way you use words, the expressions on your face. Watch kindly, with curiosity, interest, and fondness, as if you were watching your favorite child. Write down all the positive qualities you see. *Only the positive ones! (Same rule as in Version No. 1, and for the same reason: you don’t need to hear all the negative stuff for the umpteenth time.)*

For example:

Einstein: “I can see that Barbara has a good mind—quick, eager, varied. She has a lot of original ideas, and she knows how to make herself understood. She speaks clearly and chooses words well. She’s warm and interested in other people. I like the way she responds to everything that is going on around her. She’s involved. And she has a lot of energy.

When your first family member has said all she or he has to say, move on and become the next. Each one has a very different point of view and will notice different positive qualities about you. Like this:

Bette Davis: “She’s tough, she’s got a sense of humor and a great belly laugh. She’s not afraid of life. And she sings well, too, with a wistful quality that contradicts the toughness.” (Describing myself as myself, I’d be likely to say, “I’m disorganized, impulsive, and probably talk too much.” It was a shock to me the first time I saw myself through others’ eyes!)

I’ve told you about my past record, so if *I* can do this, believe me, *you* can.

When you have role-played each member of your “family” in turn, go back and read through their answers. You will have a comprehensive portrait of what’s right with you.

Surprised?

There's just one more exercise in your Stylesearch proper—one more useful thing to know about yourself before you take the next step: designing a whole life for yourself in imagination.

YOUR PERSONAL STYLE IN ACTION

Remember that one of the things I asked you to have your “family” members notice about you was *how you move*? Your style is not only a way of seeing the world, but also a unique way of moving through it. If the colors and belongings you surround yourself with reveal your style of *vision*, the activities you enjoy reveal your style of *action*. Sid Simon, author of *Values Clarification* (Hart Publishers) has developed a way of classifying your favorite activities to come up with a *life quality profile*: a concise portrait of *how you like to live*. Fast or slow-paced? More physical or mental activity? With constant company or more by yourself? With what unique balance of these and other factors?

If someone asked you these questions directly, you might be able to give an approximate answer. But after doing this exercise you'll even be able to put it into percentages if you're mathematically inclined (“60–40 in favor of physical”). And again, you may find some surprises, because you'll be looking at your actual performance pattern rather than the often inaccurate image of yourself you've been carrying around in your head.

EXERCISE 7: Twenty Things You Like to Do

Twenty?? Yes. You have to come up with twenty. That's the only rule. I don't care how trivial some of them seem to you—like “eating ice cream”—and I don't care why you like to do them. If you get down to nineteen and you're really desperate and can't think of one more, put “Scratching when it itches.” Anything.

Make a simple chart. In the “down” column on the left-hand side, write the things you like to do, one through twenty, in whatever order they come into your head. Don't bother trying to rank them in order of preference, because that's impossible—it's roses and oranges again.

In the “across” column along the top, write the following questions (if you turn the paper sideways and write them vertically, you’ll have room):

How long since last done?
Costs money or free?
Alone or with someone?
Planned or spontaneous?
Job related?
Physical risk?
Fast or slow-paced?
Mind, body or spiritual?

You can add any other intriguing categories that occur to you. (For instance: On my list five years ago? Mother/Father likes also? City or country? At home/out in the world?) Everything we’ve done in this section has been to show you that you have the power and the right to reshape the world to fit you. And that includes the exercises in this book! If you can improve on them, or tailor them to your own needs and insights, do it!

When you have filled out your chart, see what pattern you can find. What did you learn about yourself . . . the kind of life you’re living now . . . and the kind of life you’d love to live?

Here’s how some other people answered:

Marianne, 32, wife and mother: “I was surprised to find out that there really are easily twenty things I like to do!”

Doris, 45, nurse: “First I got depressed. I said, ‘There’s no way I could ever do them all,’ And then I thought, ‘Why not?’ ”

Ellen, 28, medical student: “I was surprised by the variety. My life has become so single-minded . . . there are a lot of dimensions of me that aren’t getting much expression right now.”

Jim, 43, lawyer: “It’s been altogether too long since I’ve felt I had time to do about 90 percent of the things I enjoy!”

Lucille, 25, secretary: “It’s more important to me than I realized to be physically active and spontaneous. I really shouldn’t be spending eight hours a day at a desk.”

Allen, 19, student: “Most of the activities I love best really require very little money. This was a revelation to me, because my father had convinced me that I should go into a profession or business where I could earn a six-figure salary. After doing this exercise, I thought ‘What for?’ ”

Judy, 35, writer: “I’m going to need to earn more to live the kind of life I really want. Travel, skiing, going to concerts and theater and restaurants are all important to me, and they all cost money. Maybe I’d better give some serious thought to trying for a bestseller.”

Maurice, 68, retired restaurateur: “I like to be surrounded by lots of busy, noisy people! What am I doing in this goddamned Golden Age condominium?”

Dolores, 24, bookstore cashier: “I’m happiest when I can spend more of my time by myself or with the person I love.”

A good look at your own style can tell you many things you never realized about who you really are and what you want. And it can give you a new confidence in yourself. Once you see that every move and choice you make puts your unique stamp on the world, you realize that *you already have the power to shape your life*. Now you’re ready for some fantasy practice at expanding that power into wider realms.

LIFE DESIGN REHEARSAL

Using the information you’ve gained about yourself through your Style-search, you’re going to play at shaping space and time to fit your needs. First you’re going to design an environment so perfectly tailored to *you* that in it all your best qualities would emerge. And then you are going to imagine your ideal day.

Your total environment is often shaped less by your needs and preferences than by whom you live with and what you can afford. How you spend your days is largely determined by your responsibilities. We assume that these

factors are pretty much unchangeable—“hard realities.” Sure, we could live exactly as we pleased—if we won the lottery, or deserted our families! And the first is improbable and the second is unthinkable. So we may sometimes daydream about a life cut and measured to our desires, but we know those dreams are “self-indulgent” and “unrealistic.” Life’s just not like that.

And yet that kind of daydreaming is extremely important. You should be doing more of it—and taking it seriously—because it’s trying to tell you something. It’s your genius itching to get its hands on some of that big-time, space-time clay and start making worlds. All right, let’s turn it loose and find out what kind of world it wants to make!

There’s only one rule for the kind of imaging you’ll be doing in these next two exercises, and that is *no reality considerations!* In the world of play, like the world of dreams, there is no law of gravity, no death or taxes—and no irreconcilable conflicts. So if you want two things that seem to contradict each other, don’t worry about it. Put them both in. If you love two people, you get to have two lovers. If you want to be in the country *and* in the city, or you need to be alone *and* live with people, or you want to have two beautiful children *and* a full-time career, say so. In these fantasies you don’t have to do what you were told to do at age 5: “Make up your mind.” You get everything.

EXERCISE 8: Your Ideal Environment

In one paragraph—or more, if you like—answer this question:

In what imaginary environment would your best self emerge?

Most of us have never asked ourselves that question because it’s not considered askable. What we’ve been trained to ask is, “How can I fit into some preexisting environment? How can I change myself to fit the world?” When we go to the store, we hope we’ll fit into the clothes on the racks. If the jeans are too long or too narrow, it’s we who are too short or too fat. If we happened to have three arms, we’d cut one off rather than politely but firmly insist on a jacket with three sleeves!

Just in fantasy, I’d like you to try shaping the world to your needs for a change. Imagine an environment that is perfect for someone with all your

present characteristics—a world so tailored to your nature that you'd be at your best in it without changing yourself one bit. Let the environment do all the work for you.

I'm going to stop right here and define my terms a little bit. By "environment," I don't just mean your physical surroundings. Sure, it would be nice to have a house with a patio and a swimming pool and a huge fireplace, and it might be even nicer to be in the Bahamas under a palm tree. But I don't want you to spend too much time on the color of your walls or the climate and the vegetation, unless that is vital to your best state of mind. It may be. But "environment" is also, very importantly, your *human* environment: the kinds of people you'd like to be surrounded by; how much privacy you need, and how much interaction; what kinds of help you'd like; what kinds of responses you'd want to your ideas.

You might need to be challenged . . . or just really listened to. (You will certainly need to be respected.) You might want to be a teacher, with the opportunity to inspire your students; or you might like to be a learner, surrounded by people who could teach you all kinds of fascinating things. You might want to be in charge of a large operation staffed by totally cooperative, efficient, loyal people who are dying to do whatever you tell them to. Or you might prefer to be a member of an egalitarian group effort. It's entirely up to you.

And "Let the environment do the work for you" means *don't change yourself* in this fantasy. Above all, don't improve yourself. Improve the world, so that your characteristics stop being problems. If you hate doing the housework, don't imagine *you* being more self-disciplined or patient. Imagine eight little gremlins following you around cleaning up after you! (Be as whimsical as you like—this is fantasy, so anything goes.) If you're disorganized, or you need a lot of love, or you're shy, or you tend to procrastinate, don't think of those characteristics as "weaknesses" that need changing. Think of them as *design problems*—challenges to your ingenuity as a world-maker. Create an environment that fits and supports you as you are, so that you are comfortable, secure, and free to turn in your best performance.

Gerry, a 38-year-old accountant, said, "One feature of my ideal environment is that everyone around me would be clumsy—because I'm clumsy, and I'm sick of being noticed for it!" Soft-spoken Miriam said, "No one can ever

hear me. I'm always struggling to speak up. In my ideal environment, I'd live in a big, spacious house in the middle of a forest with my family and my best friends, and no one would speak above a whisper. I'd be the loudest one there!" Personally, as an old pro at procrastination, I'd like my ideal environment to include a total boss who knew exactly what I wanted to do and would make me do it! A real tyrant who would make me toe the line of my own path.

After you've imagined your ideal environment, I'd like you to do one more thing: list a few adjectives telling what *positive* qualities in you—intellectual, emotional, creative—would emerge if you were in that environment. ("Loving," "assertive," "playful," "productive," "serene," "independent," "sexy," etc.) In EXERCISE 6: *Seeing Yourself as Others See You*, you discovered the good qualities you have right now. This time I'm inviting you to do something a little different, and even more daring: *imagine yourself in full bloom*. (If you still catch yourself feeling naughty or spoiled, or saying "Who do I think I am," just give a Bronx cheer for the incredible tenacity of those negative tapes. Give them a big hand for trying. And then go ahead and dream.)

Here's how some other people described their ideal environments—and their blossoming selves. Notice especially how specific they've been in describing the kind of human environment they'd flourish in.

Julia, a 32-year-old free-lance writer: "I'd like to live by myself, in the country, and near a wide variety of friends who are doing all different kinds of things. And I'd like to have a terrific lover who has work of his own he loves, and who lets me know that he loves me, but leaves me alone to work all day without making me feel either guilty or anxious. And I'd like never to quite know when he's coming over, but I'd like to be able to call him if I'm lonely, too. In short, secure, but not too secure—a little drama and suspense. The qualities that would emerge in me would be independence, lovingness, intensity, energy, sensuality, and creativity. I'd get a lot done."

Betsy, 38, mother of three: "I'd like a combination of Mary Poppins, Mister Rogers, Phil Donahue, and Marlo Thomas to take care of my children; a housekeeper to do that mundane pain-in-the-ass cleaning and cooking and shopping; a secretary to take care of the bills and the phone; and I'd go out and work! Qualities that would emerge: delight in being with people, sense of humor, creativity."

Tom, 55, divorced and job-hunting: “The single thing that stood out for me was how much I need love and emotional support—more than anything else. I also need an uncluttered environment where things are well-organized, because I get distracted easily. Qualities that would emerge: I’d be resourceful, kind, serene, playful, warm, and wise.”

George, 43: “A cabin by a lake in the High Sierras, a small, excellent library, several good trout rods, a kerosene lantern, a bar, no telephone, the Wall Street Journal delivered to my doorstep, and my best fishing buddy on weekends. Qualities that would emerge: I’d write and think a lot. I might be the next Thoreau, instead of an investment counselor. But maybe every third month or so I’d come down into the city and work, and see a lot of movies, and be persuasive, witty, and urban—and then go back to the mountains.”

I knew George was married, and yet in his fantasy he didn’t mention his wife. When I asked him about her, he said, “Of course she’d be there! I took that so for granted, I just assumed . . .” On further questioning, I learned that she’d also obligingly *not* be there on the occasions when he needed to be alone, or with his friends. George liked to cook, but he “just sort of assumed” that his wife would keep the cabin tidy for him, just as she takes responsibility for keeping their city apartment clean.

In other words, George already has—and takes for granted—a kind of emotional and practical support many of us can only write into our wildest fantasies! Another human being, a woman, provides it for him—at what cost to herself and for what real rewards, I can only guess, because I didn’t meet George’s wife. The changes that are taking place between men and women right now are painful and creative precisely because men like George are being forced to become conscious of how much their comfort, freedom, and productivity depend on a human support base. That there might also be a genuine pleasure in nurturing—in providing some aspects of a support base—is a discovery the Georges of this world are just beginning to make.

Arthur, a 28-year-old educational-test designer: “I have to punch in and punch out at work, and that really goes against my nature. I like being creative, but not on order. I’d like to have a fluid situation with no fixed schedule at all—a balance of discipline and freedom. I need the support and acceptance of people who really like my work and say so; I also need occasional solitude. In that environment I’d be self-confident, abundant,

creative, happy, electric, fun. I'd be good at what I do; my ideas would never end.”

Vickie, 48, a novice theatrical agent: “I need energetic, supportive people around me who love and are excited about the theater. I was really surprised when I realized that I had written ‘I need to be *allowed* to create and develop my own ideas.’ Evidently I’m still waiting for permission! Anyway, the qualities that would emerge are: high creativity (I’m blushing!), enthusiasm, energy, drive, tenacity, leadership, communications skills, ability to organize and implement my own ideas.”

Jo Ann, 36, single mother and graduate student: “Constant stimulation—learning, conversation, working on projects with other people, all kinds of physical audible tangible input and excitement. In that kind environment my mind would be very active and alive. I’d shoot off sparks.”

I think I could characterize most women accurately by saying that they are understimulated and underchallenged. Their emotions may be overused, but their minds and talents are underused. Notice that most of the environments described here include challenge and stimulation as well as comfort and support. Note also that among the qualities that would emerge, almost everyone listed “creativity.” Placed in a lively, nourishing environment, the human animal is creative.

Bill, 39, artist and draftsman: “The most important thing I need in my environment is CONTINUITY—everything I’m doing relating to everything else, so that it all ties together. Right now I’ve got a few pieces of what I want, but they have nothing to do with anything else I’m doing, I also need ECONOMY—my life pared down to the most essential activities, not cluttered with a lot of options and distractions. Qualities that would emerge: originality, productivity, and steadiness.”

What did you learn about yourself and what you would need to become all you could be?

This exercise is an important rehearsal for real-world life design. Because even at its most playful and fantastic, it is very revealing of what you really do need to function at your best. The optimum environment for you will be one that provides real equivalents for all the major features of your fantasy.

And this book is going to help you create that environment—because you have a right to it.

Of course the actual process of creating that environment will be a little different from just shutting your eyes and dreaming. It's going to involve dealing with stubborn, resistant substances like time and money, habit and fear—and stubbornest of all, other people! But believe it or not, all these inner and outer obstacles can be overcome. That's purely a matter of strategy. And *fantasy comes before strategy*.

Unless you can dream, how do you know where you want to go? And until you know where you want to go, how can you sit down and plan how to get there? I'm going to show you how to get there; the whole second half of this book is packed with practical strategies for tackling “hard reality.” But *you* have to imagine the “where.”

SHAPING TIME

Suppose you lived in a real-life version of your ideal environment, and all your best qualities were in full bloom. How would you spend your time? What activities and people would fill your day? (EXERCISE 7: *Twenty Things You Like to Do* should give you plenty of material!)

In this next exercise, you're going to do a very special kind of imagining. I call it *real daydreaming*. It is one of the most important techniques you'll be using in this book.

If someone asked you what it would be like if you had a million dollars, you'd probably answer something like, “It would be terrific. I'd have a home by the sea, and a sailboat, and an airplane, and I would . . .”

Stop right there! *Any response with the word “would” in it is not real daydreaming.*

When you have a dream at night, do you lie there thinking in your sleep, “Wouldn't it be interesting if this were really happening?” No. It *is* happening. It's *real*. You are experiencing it. When you were a child, your daydreams were just as vivid and present as your night dreams, simply because

you hadn't been taught to label them "unreal." What you're going to do now is deliberately revive that power of visualization and belief.

"Real daydreaming" is *present-tense, first-person, visual, and sequential*. In other words, it's *happening*. You see, feel, and experience everything that's going on around you; time passes just as it does in real life, only faster. Like this: "This is fantastic! I'm sitting here with a million dollars. Let's see. What shall I do first? . . . OK. I'm in a mansion on a hill above the sea in Maine. My airplane is in a little hangar behind the house. I can see my sailboat rocking down at the dock. It's a cool, sunny morning, and the whole day stretches ahead of me. . . ."

EXERCISE 9: Your Ideal Day

With pen in hand and as much paper as you need (or a tape recorder if you prefer to dream out loud), take a leisurely walk through a day that would be perfect if it represented your usual days—not a vacation day, not a compromise day, but the very substance of your life as you'd love it to be. Live through that day *in the present tense and in detail*, from getting up in the morning to going to sleep at night. What's the first thing you do when you wake up? What do you have for breakfast? Do you make it yourself—or is it brought to you in bed, with a single rose and the morning paper? Do you take a long, hot bath? a bracing cold shower? What kinds of clothes do you put on? How do you spend the morning? the afternoon? At each time of day, are you indoors or outdoors, quiet or active, alone or with people?

As you go through the hours of your fantasy day, there are three helpful categories to keep in mind: *what, where, and who*.

What are you doing—what kind of work, what kind of play? Imagine yourself at the full stretch of your capacities. If you'd like to sing or sail, and you don't know how, in this fantasy you do know how.

Where—in what kind of place, space, situation? A London flat, an Oregon farm, a fully quipped workshop, an elegant hotel room, a houseboat?

Who do you work with, eat with, laugh and talk with, sleep with? You will undoubtedly want to write some of your favorite real people into your fantasy; you might also want to include some types of people you'd like to

be surrounded by—writers, musicians, children, people your own age, people of all different ages, athletes, Frenchmen, financiers, simple country people, celebrities.

Just as you did with your ideal environment, turn your imagination loose. Don't put down what you think is possible—put down the kind of day you'd live if you had absolute freedom, unlimited means, and all the powers and skills you've ever wished for.

Most people put a lot of loving care into this exercise. It's one of my favorites, and I enjoy finding out about other people's ideal days almost as much as I like making up my own. As you read the following responses, notice the kinds of details each of these very different people has found important in each of the three categories: what, where, and who.

Julia, 32, the free-lance writer we've already heard about: "I wake up at 6 A.M. I'm living in a cool, spacious adobe house in New Mexico, with Navajo rugs on the floor and red peppers strung from the rafters. I get out of bed without disturbing my husband or the three cats who are still asleep on and around him. I go out to the stable, with the two beautiful salukis bounding beside me, feed the Arabian mare, and let her out to pasture. Then I do a little jogging in the cool morning air.

"I go back in and have coffee and a light breakfast with my husband. By 7 A.M. I go into my study, which has a big window looking out over the mesas and a big wooden desk with a broad top and lots of drawers. I write at least until noon, and two or three hours longer if I feel like it. I write whatever I please—no deadlines, no space limits, no editors' requirements. That's all over for me. I've made my reputation—and a very modest fortune that's producing interest in the bank. I've got land and a vegetable garden. I can write for myself and my friends, and if somebody wants to publish it too, fine.

"It's very important that I get lots of mail from friends all over the country and even the world!

"I meet a friend for a late lunch in town, and browse for an hour in the bookstore. In the afternoon I practice guitar and write songs; or I set type on my old hand press for a friend's book, while bread bakes in the oven and

Bach plays on the stereo. Before sunset I go for a ride on the mare—gently, because I’m pregnant!

“Friends—writers, carpenters, teachers, potters, farmers, and their kids—come over for dinner, which my husband cooks. After dinner, I play guitar, and we sing, laugh, and talk around the fire. When the guests have left, we read for an hour or two, take a walk with the dogs in the starlight, and then go to bed.”

Aline, 45, executive secretary to a Chicago magazine publisher and mother of three teenagers: “I wake up, slowly, at about 7:30. That’s important. I don’t have to worry about getting everybody’s breakfast because John and the kids not only make their own—they bring me mine on a tray. After all, I am an important executive with weightier matters on my mind than who likes his or her eggs over easy!

“The kids wash the dishes and get ready for school while I put on my makeup and dress in the gray Chanel suit I selected the night before. (I’m twenty pounds thinner, of course.) We live in a high-rise coop with a picture window overlooking Lake Michigan, and there’s time for us all to have a cup of coffee by the window and discuss what each of us is going to do today.

“Unless the weather’s really miserable, I walk the ten blocks to work. It clears my head and gives me a chance to organize my thoughts for the day. When I walk into my big corner office, with the blue rug that matches the lake, I’m greeted by my secretary, who hands me a sheaf of urgent memos and letters awaiting my signature. The working day is a lot like my present boss’s—phone calls to both coasts, difficult decisions, lunch with Muhammad Ali and his agent to negotiate for his memoirs, a boardroom meeting on a possible merger, the private screening of a film by our production affiliate—except that I’m the boss. I’m the general. And it takes every bit of my intelligence, courage, and charm!

"I take a taxi home at 7:30. Whoever’s had time has made dinner—or if the kids were all too involved in their own activities, they’ve ordered a pizza! I take off stockings, earrings, all the lady-executive trappings, and get into jeans. After dinner, I sit on the rug and play a ferocious game of Scrabble with my son, or help the twins with their homework. Before bed, I look over

the next day's schedule in the office and decide what I'm going to wear. And then John and I share a precious half hour of jazz and brandy."

Peter, 25, a truck driver for an oil company: "I wake up late—around 9—because I've been up all night helping one of my cows deliver a calf. It's OK because I have a staff that got the milking machines out at 6 this morning. They've gone away and won't be back until this evening. I walk downstairs into the kitchen. It's a big room with a table in the middle, and my wife is sitting there feeding our baby. The coffee is on and smells great. They both give me a big smile, and the baby stops eating and insists I pick him up. I have him on one arm, the coffee in my hand, and my wife is standing beside me with her arm around my waist, and we're all looking out the window at the beautiful farm we own, with a three-story red barn and the cows grazing up on the hills. It's a sunny, beautiful day.

"I have to go out to the other building and work on one of our trucks. They're big trucks, for transporting cattle, but they're in beautiful condition and I keep the motors in perfect shape. I'm so good at that that the neighbors are often coming over to have me help them with their engine work, and we sit around and drink beer, and work on the trucks sometimes. I arrange with my wife that I'll come down and get her and the baby at lunchtime and we'll go up to the pond and have lunch there.

"All morning I check the trucks out, tuning up a little here, adjusting there. I have a perfectly equipped garage, which is clean and organized, and every tool is in place. I do a little painting on one of the trucks—bright red—and neaten things up, and then I go outside.

"I go for a walk up on the hill to cut down a stand of briar that's getting into the coats of my cattle, and into their mouths too. Oh yes, I have a dog running after me. A nice big one, who likes to play, but can be very quiet too, when I feel like being quiet. We get to the briar patch and hack it down. It's good, hard work. Then we bum it while he keeps the cows away.

"The whole day is great. The work is steady and sometimes hard, but it's outdoors and I love it. I go to the barn when it starts to get dark, and pull the hay down for the cows, and the staff gets the milkers hooked up. The baby's asleep or something, because my wife is up in the loft with me, helping me throw the hay down. She's small, but she's strong, and funny. Makes me laugh all the time, because I can get too serious. Finally she starts tripping

me so I fall down in the hay and she gives me a big hug and we're laughing a lot.

“Dinner is good and big, and some friends come over to eat. Afterwards we sit around and talk for a couple of hours, and then they go home. I go around, tighten things up. Check out the doors, and the boiler, and the barn. Listen to everything, and everything is quiet and all right. We go up to bed early—maybe 10 or 11 o'clock because we're getting up early tomorrow and going into town to do some shopping. We fall asleep with our arms around each other.”

Now let's take a closer look at your ideal day. By asking seven simple questions about it, you can learn a great deal about what you really need to be happy . . . how much of it you've already got . . . and what's preventing you from getting the rest of it.

FANTASY ANALYSIS: GETTING DOWN TO BASICS

I invited you to embellish your fantasy day with everything you could think of that would make that day perfect for you. But some of the things you put in may be much more important to you than others. Let's find out what they are.

Question No. 1: In each of the three categories—what, where, who—*what elements of your ideal day are absolutely indispensable to your happiness?* That is, if you never had them, you'd always be dissatisfied and long for them?

Question No. 2: What elements are *optional, but still very desirable?*

Question No. 3: What elements are *pure frills*—they'd be nice, but you could do without them and never really be unhappy?

You may find it helpful to make a little chart, like Julia did:

INDISPENSABLE

- What:* writing
music to listen to
physical exercise
animals
- Where:* a private study with a big desk
A fairly spacious place to live
- Who:* my husband
lots of friends near and far

OPTIONAL BUT DESIRABLE

- What:* learn to play guitar
- Where:* live in beautiful country near a culturally lively town
- Who:* a baby (strange as it may sound, I could be content without having a child—but I'd rather have one!)

FRILLS

- What:* the horse
the printing press
- Where:* my own adobe house in New Mexico
(I'd be thrilled if I had these things, but I wouldn't pine away if I didn't.)

That doesn't mean you shouldn't get them! I don't want you to think for a minute that this breakdown to basics is the first step toward a craven compromise with "reality." It is not. I firmly believe that you are entitled to *everything* you want—including all the frills. All we're doing here is zeroing in on your *priorities*: the things you really can't live without, the things you must therefore concentrate on getting into your life first and soonest, so that you will have the abundant energy to go for the rest.

Julia, for instance, has identified writing as the center of her life. If she doesn't have adequate space and time to write, learning to play the guitar won't be much of a consolation. In fact, she won't feel like doing it. But if her writing and living are in order, her energy and confidence will overflow naturally into the "optional but desirable" category. Her horizons will expand outward in widening circles from a happy center.

And so will yours.

Not every fantasy day can be broken down as neatly as Julia's. Aline said her only indispensable element (apart from her family in the "who" category) was a "what": the executive job. And yet the high-rise apartment and designer clothes, which could be classified as "optional but desirable," would follow naturally from the kind of position and salary she wanted. Peter insisted that virtually all the elements of his fantasy day—having a dairy farm—were indispensable. Nothing less than the full scenario would satisfy him. Fine—more power to him! However your fantasy breaks down, our next task is to *measure the distance* between your life as you now live it and the minimum ideal day that would make you happy.

Question No. 4: What happens when you walk through an adjusted fantasy day with only the indispensable elements in it?

Obviously if you feel the way Peter does, your adjusted ideal day isn't going to look much different from your full-fledged fantasy. Julia, on the other hand, was able to describe a day like this:

"I'm living in New York City, where I live now—but in a bigger apartment. I get up early, have coffee with my husband, feed the cats, and walk to my study a few blocks away. It's a top floor room I've rented in a brownstone that overlooks a pretty courtyard. I write until noon, or longer if I feel like it. Then I pick up the mail, go to a health club, work out and swim.

"The rest of the day is basically the same: lunch with a friend . . . browsing in a bookstore . . . baking bread . . . listening to music . . . dinner with friends. Just take out the house, the horse, the printing press, and the guitar—for now."

Once you've got your adjusted ideal day clearly in your sights, there are three more important questions to ask about it.

Question No. 5: What—if any—elements of that day do you already have?

Very few of us are totally discontented with the status quo. Some of our wishes and choices have managed to find their way into reality. This question shows you what's right with your life; it makes you aware of the sources of satisfaction you already have. Those will be your base and your energy source as you start moving and adding more of what you want to your life. Knowing what you've got also helps you to localize and focus your discontent—the subject of the next question.

Question No. 6: What elements of the adjusted ideal day are conspicuously absent from your life right now? Use the three categories—what, where, who—to help you pinpoint what's missing.

These two questions really work together—and the results may surprise you. Julia realized that her adjusted ideal day really isn't all that different from the way she's living now. She has all the “what” and “who” elements—her work, four cats, a husband and friends, music and exercise. The big hole in her life is “where.” Her apartment is small and cramped, and she hasn't got proper space to work. Aline already has the basic pattern of the life she wants—family she loves, a responsible paying job—but she wants them on a grander scale, in brighter, bolder colors. She wants to be an executive, not an executive secretary. She wants to go all the way. And at home, she'd like more cooperation from her family.

Peter, on the other hand, said, “I really don't have any of the elements of my ideal day—what, where, or who. I'm driving a truck and living in a damn small apartment. But wait a minute, I am a good mechanic, and I keep the trucks in top shape, when I can. If I had some money, or could save some, I could probably buy one of the trucks from my boss. But it's not for cattle, really. Anyway, the farm is the point. How could I ever get my hands on a farm? I am lucky, though. I know that lady already, and I know she'd like living on a farm.”

Now you've got fantasy and reality matched up so you can compare them. You may have learned that your present life isn't as far off the mark as you thought it was; or, like Peter, you may have confirmed that you really are

light years from where you want to be. But in either case, you now know more precisely what's missing . . . and you know what you've got to work with. Dream and reality are in focus. *Now let's try focusing in on the gap—or the barrier—between them.* For the first time since we began, I'm going to ask you to take a good look at “hard reality.”

Question No. 7: What stands between you and having your adjusted ideal day tomorrow? That is, what would it take to get all the missing elements? What problems or obstacles are presently stopping you from getting them?

For Julia, it's money. A bigger apartment would cost her twice the rent she's paying now, and she'd have to pay at least \$100 a month more for a separate study.

Aline realized that all she's really lacking is self-confidence, or a belief in herself. She said, “I think I have the experience and the knowledge for an executive job in magazine publishing. In fact, I know I do! But I'm scared to stand up and make my move. Same thing with my family. I could ask for—or demand—more help, but I don't want them to be mad at me!”

Peter said he needed so many things—a farm, money, some experience with cows and the business of running a dairy farm—that he tended to get overwhelmed and give up before he started. He was able to sum up his feelings of futility in two major obstacles. “One: I don't really believe it's possible to save the money to buy a farm from a workingman's salary. Two: even if it is possible, I wouldn't know where to start with all the details.”

What stands between you and your modified dream day—the minimum “what,” “where,” and “who” that would make you happy?

I want you to know that you are certainly going to need what Aline needs. Not courage . . . not self-confidence . . . but *support*. You'll find it in the last section of this book. And you are certainly going to need what Peter needs. Not a pep talk (You can do it, kid!) . . . not an inheritance from an obscure rich uncle . . . but a *game plan* that tells you what to do first, and then what to do next after that, and so on, all the way to the goal. You'll find that in Section III. As you saw in Chapter 2, everybody needs structure, and everybody needs support. The ones who don't need 'em have already got 'em! So those are universal problems.

But then come all the specific, personal, circumstantial obstacles that keep us from having what we want. For you, it may be money . . . or a school degree that's required to do the kind of work you want to do . . . or a new job . . . or the contacts to get one . . . or a skill you don't have . . . or the time to learn it . . . or twenty extra pounds that are cramping your style with the opposite sex . . . or several of the above . . . or something else I haven't even mentioned.

I'd like you to do a very simple thing—so simple that you won't believe it's the first step to overcoming those obstacles. But it is. Take a sheet of paper. Write the word “Problems” across the top. And then just list them—all the real-world reasons why you can't have your dream.

You have now begun to see “hard reality” for what it really is: not an all-pervasive nerve gas that poisons hope and paralyzes will, just a couple of concrete and clearly-defined problems. At this point, I know those barriers to your dream may look insurmountable. Don't worry about it. Just write them down. As we work on clearly defining your goals in the next chapter, more problems, obstacles, and objections will probably occur to you. Add them to the list. I want you to keep that Problems List with care—because a little later on it's going to turn out to be a gold mine.

When you're choosing a concrete goal to go for—and that's going to be your next task—it's more important than ever to get reality considerations out of the way, so that they don't dim or diminish your vision. I want your goal to be larger than life (our lives are too small!) and in living color, so that it's worthy of the real you—and something you can fall totally in love with. But that doesn't mean we're not going to come back and deal with reality. On the contrary! We're going to tackle it with relish—and technique. When I show you how to convert insurmountable obstacles into solvable problems, and how to liberate the inborn problem-solving capacity of your mind, your Problems List will yield all the raw materials you need to build a good, solid road to your goal. But first, let's get a good sharp fix on where you're going.

You've discovered that you know how you want your days to be, just as clearly as you know what clothes you want in your closet. Now it's time to start shaping fantasy and style into something you can actually get your hands on.