

GET EVERYTHING YOU WANT IN JUST 5 YEARS

Promotion – check. £10K* pay rise – check. Holiday home in France – check. Whatever your goals, writing a five-year plan could be the best thing you do, says Sharon Wright

How did you ever live without to-do lists? Nowadays, they're seemingly the only way to impose a scintilla of order on your work, family and social life. If things such as your boss's birthday card, paying that parking fine or digging out tins for the school fair are on The List, they get done. If not, they're doomed to the outer darkness that lies beyond your crammed diary.

Well, the same goes for the big stuff. By simply writing down the things you *want* to happen, you make them a whole lot more likely to happen, according to a long-term study of Yale graduates in the US. The 3% of graduates who wrote down their goals went on to be worth more financially than all the remaining 97% put together.

Focussing on what you want by writing it down pays dividends, say the experts. And if 'buy eggs' on the back of your hand works, just think how effective a detailed 'be happy'

plan could be. So what are you waiting for? Get making that to-do list of all to-do lists.

TAP INTO THE TRUE YOU

Before you pick up a pen, you need a serious think about what makes you happy. It seems obvious, but it isn't, because what you *think* you want and what you actually want may be poles apart, according to a new wave of thinking called Positive Psychology. So while the first things that pop into your head are likely to be £10K pay rise, live-in au pair, Porsche 911 Cabriolet and hips like Nicole Kidman, they may not bring the bliss you think.

New research from Professor Daniel Gilbert, author of *Stumbling On Happiness* (HarperPerennial, £8.99), shows that we're not very good at working out what will make us happy. He asked a group of people to predict how they'd feel if they got the things they thought would make them happy. Then

when they later got the car, house, holiday or whatever, they rated their happiness. Guess what? No one was as content as they thought they'd be. It could be because most of us take our cues from other people and society as a whole. 'One of the problems with the world we inhabit is an awful lot of it is about what you don't have,' says Dr Carol Craig of the Centre for Confidence and Well-being. 'We assume that by getting things, we will become happier. Research such as Gilbert's shows money isn't as important as people think. Much of happiness is about relationships, meaning and purpose.'

What you should be doing is seeking out 'authentic' happiness with big choices such as your job, relationship, motherhood and lifestyle, says psychologist Dr Alex Linley, author of *Average To A+: Realising Strengths In Yourself And Others* (CAPP Press, £14.99). 'Authenticity is about being self-directed and doing things for your own reasons,' he says.



By drawing up a plan, you can make happiness happen

'Everyone has an inner voice. It can be very difficult to hear, but it's always there.'

To work out how to be honest about what you want, Dr Linley suggests making use of your new pals, pen and paper, and keeping a mood diary for two weeks. Write down how you are feeling at different times and you'll start to see a pattern emerging. It's a guide to what makes you feel happy and fulfilled and what makes you feel stressed and miserable. After that, it's plan time.

SKETCH YOUR IDEAL SELF

Drawing up a five-year plan should feel like fun, not homework, says Lucinda Harlow, career coach at uevolve (www.uevolve.co.uk). Pour a glass of wine and get comfy, she says.

'With a plan like this, you can't just look at one area such as your career,' says Harlow. 'You have to think about your whole life. Consider the mental, social, financial,

emotional and spiritual dimensions of what you want. People think, if I write down my goals, they'll just happen by magic. But it doesn't work like that because you're only using the left, analytical, side of your brain. You need to use your right side, which deals with emotions and is the gateway to your subconscious. If you're going to set a goal and achieve it, the subconscious is crucial.'

1 CLOSE YOUR EYES

'Allow yourself to dream,' says Harlow. 'Think about what you would want to be, have and do if there wasn't anything to stop you.' This is called unlimited thinking, no "buts" allowed. Imagine your dream life as a movie. Fill in as much detail as you can, including the colours and what you are seeing, doing and feeling.

2 WRITE DOWN THE BIG 5

Now you get out your felt-tip pens, along with a sheet of A4 paper. Write down the five most >

FIND YOUR STRENGTHS

Are you a great listener? Good at making people laugh? Develop your USP and use it to get what you want

Too often we dwell on what we can't do instead of what we can. Identifying your strengths can make achieving what you want a lot easier, according to Dr Ilona Boniwell, author of the best-selling *Positive Psychology In A Nutshell* (PVPBC, £7.99). So start by looking at the list below and ticking your five main strengths. Think about how you are using these at the moment, then how you could use them in a new way.

'So if you choose kindness, you may use that at home with your family and friends, but not at work because you feel you have to be strict. Try showing your gentle side at work. Use what you're good at in more areas of your life.'

For more on Goal Mapping, visit www.liftinternational.com.

- ☐ CREATIVITY
- ☐ HUMOUR
- ☐ SENSITIVITY
- ☐ OPTIMISM
- ☐ OPEN-MINDEDNESS
- ☐ BRAVERY
- ☐ PERSEVERANCE
- ☐ RELIABILITY
- ☐ HONESTY
- ☐ ENTHUSIASM
- ☐ CAPACITY TO LOVE AND BE LOVED
- ☐ KINDNESS AND GENEROSITY
- ☐ EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE
- ☐ TEAM PLAYER
- ☐ LEADERSHIP
- ☐ LOYALTY
- ☐ MODESTY
- ☐ FORGIVING
- ☐ SPIRITUALITY
- ☐ EMPATHY

important things from that dream of your ideal life. For example, it may be being your own boss; having more free time; having improved fitness; or perhaps better family networks, or even increased confidence.

3 FIND YOUR LINCHPIN

'From that list,' says Harlow, 'you have to work out the linchpin. What do you need to have to make all the others possible? For example, if you secretly dream of starting your own business, perhaps what you need to make it happen is "self-belief". In the centre of the page, draw a person (you) doing whatever your linchpin is, ie, you may like to draw yourself outside your own flower-shop with a big confident smile on your face. 'Use a bright, look-at-me colour that you wouldn't usually have the nerve to wear,' adds Harlow. 'And stick figures are fine!'

4 JUMP IN THE DRIVING SEAT

Once you have your Mini Me in, say, Barbie pink, draw a circle around it and draw lines radiating to other circled drawings representing the four other things on your list. Leave a third of the page below blank for what comes later. Also, leave a space at the top. This is where your 'higher value' will go.

Next you look at your five 'wants' and keep asking why. So, if you wish you had a better work/life balance, ask why. Is it because you want more time to relax or the chance to build a better relationship with your partner? Why? And so on, until you get to your higher purpose. This will be emotional, such as 'feeling more secure' or 'knowing I'm loved'. You have identified what you really need and want. This is the 'driver' of your plan, so write it in at the top of your plan.

5 GET INTO YOUR HEAD

So you have a drawing of yourself as you would like to be, surrounded by the things you want to happen, driven by your key emotional desire. Now you get a happy half hour colouring the whole thing in. This type of plan is called Goal Mapping and draws on what we now know about how the brain works. Mental movies, drawing and bright colours all engage the subconscious, making you more likely to stick to your plan.

6 GIVE YOURSELF A DEADLINE

Now put the date in five years' time, so September 2012, at the feet of the central figure and today's date at the bottom of the page. Then draw a line to connect the two, giving you a simple timeline. On the left of the timeline, write the names of all the people you need to help you. 'This is often the bit people miss,' Harlow says.



Map your goals and visualise what you really want

7 WRITE A STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

The next bit takes a bit of thinking over. Maybe a Merlot top-up. On the right-hand side, draw a series of steps you'll take towards your goals, each with a date. Plot the steps in one-year chunks that you can add to later. So you might start with, 'Do an evening class in business skills'; then later 'Approach investors with idea'. And so on, building towards your goals. You may even want to consult a life coach or friend for help plotting the steps.

8 MAKE A CONTRACT

Finally, sign your plan as a commitment to it.

LIVE YOUR DREAM

'Stick your plan somewhere you'll see it, because it's a working document,' says

Lucinda Harlow. It gives you a daily prod, and ticking off steps is a satisfying way of seeing progress. It's not set in stone, though, so don't be afraid to make changes. Involving other people is important. Show them your plan and explain how you need their help.

Don't get disheartened if it doesn't all go like clockwork, either. 'If you haven't achieved one of your steps, don't just slump and think, "I've failed",' advises Harlow. 'Chances are it's because you need to do something else first. You may need more support from the people on the left, or a new skill, or a few smaller steps before you can move on. Remember, your plan is not a stick to beat yourself up with, it's a tool to help you get where you want to be. So keep it under review.' □

GET HIM ON BOARD

So how do you get your other half to join in the plan?

Leaving aside how long it'll take to explain that there's another kind of goal to the one that ruined his Saturday, the key to success is how you sell it, says Dr Alex Linley. Don't get all heavy and scare him off. Just ask him to think

about where you both want to be in five years. Ask him:

- **When are you at your best and most contented?**
- **What do you do that you want to do more of?**
- **And how are you going to make that happen?**
- **Does that have implications for the way you live now, and how we relate to each other?**

● What can we do as a couple to move towards our goals together?

This should be an eye-opener for both of you, but in a good way. 'Don't panic if your goals aren't identical. You can want different things,' says Dr Linley. 'It's far more important your goals are compatible, so that you're able to achieve them together.'