



Chapter 1: Discover Your Dream

“There are some people who live in a dream world, and there are some who face reality; and then there are those who turn one into the other.”

— Douglas H. Everett

The Mile High Bar & Grill at Terminal B in Denver International Airport is not the most romantic setting for a date. Rumpled business travelers nurse their drinks slowly so they don't have to give up their cherished seats before their flights are called. An overhead speaker crackles every few minutes with an unintelligible announcement. The aroma of exhaustion and fried food hangs in the air.

This is where Warren and I met one weeknight as we were flying in opposite directions across the country. We had each left home from Boston a week before, and it would be a few days more before we would be home together. We considered it lucky that we were able to coordinate our flights to meet for a meal. It was the least romantic time in our lives.

Warren arrived first and snagged us a table. I clickety-clacked across the terminal with my high heels and trolley bag to meet him, wishing for just five minutes in a pair of slippers to relieve my aching feet.

We ordered our food and began catching up. We talked about clients, projects, coworkers, and hotels. Not only were these things keeping us apart on a regular basis, they were even the topics of our conversation when we were together. We were those annoying sound bite chatterers, talking in biz-

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speak, abbreviations, and lingo that only another cubicle dweller could understand.

At the end of our dinner we both sat staring numbly at each other. We were so damn tired, and we were tired of being tired all the time.

We gathered our things, gave each other a chaste kiss and a hug, and set off in different directions to catch flights to our next destinations for still more meetings. Anyone looking at us would have considered us coworkers, and through circumstances that is exactly what we were becoming.

We're not marriage counselors, but since we had each been previously married and divorced, we knew the signs of impending doom. We were heading down that path.

This wasn't one of those "he doesn't understand me" or "I have to read her mind" kinds of situations. Even scarier, we both knew exactly what was going on and how far away we were from happiness either individually or as a couple.

A few days later we were both back home again. After awkwardly joking about the need to make a date 2000 miles away, we started the uncomfortable conversation about why this lifestyle just wasn't working. Something had to give, and if we didn't want it to be our marriage we had to do something about it immediately.

This is when we began taking our first steps toward a dream, even though we would not have called it that at the time. That conversation was perhaps the hardest of our relationship because we had to admit we were failing, set aside the idea of blame, and work on a solution.

We asked ourselves the question: "Is this how we want to live?"

The only other option was to wait for the steady decline to turn into a conversation about an exit strategy, an option neither of us wanted.

The dream we are living now – exploring the world – started forming from this very desire to not work so much and have more time together as a couple.

Reconnect with Your Joy

The lesson in that story is simple but powerful. When you become disconnected from the joy that feeds your soul, you become disconnected with life, and you're just going through the motions. Nothing is really bad, but nothing is really great either.

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Maybe you have become disconnected from your joy, and right now you're trying to find a way back.

Your joy may lie in decreasing the things you *don't* want to do, and that's a great starting point. Being fed up with something is a great motivator for change, and as you move away from what you don't like about your life you'll see new opportunities open up all around you. We'll cover this in detail next.

No matter what your dream is – fully-fledged idea or fuzzy notion or just the conviction that what you're doing now is not working – you'll need money and resources to get from where you are now to where you want to be. We're going to show you how to get it all.

Fitting your lifestyle to your dream

Let's meet Akiyo, a recent PhD graduate in England. She is a smart woman with a bright future, but instead of feeling excited at the prospect of starting her career, she felt stifled. You see, Akiyo has bipolar disorder and has battled it all her life. Besides her everyday management of the illness, she knows to expect a super-manic phase every 4 years or so. When she goes through this, it turns her life upside down. This craving for stimulation encourages her to ignore everything mundane, including her job, education, relationships, and home. These phases typically last about 3 months, or, as she likes to say, long enough to mess up her life. In fact, she typically just leaves them all and starts over fresh. She says the pain, guilt and shame following these episodes is incredible.

With her PhD in hand, the thought of tying herself down to a lecturer's job terrified her. How could she recover after a manic phase in such a conservative environment? How would she maintain her relationships and her home mortgage?

"My boyfriend and I met when I was going through the last bout of this super-manic phase and he watched me go through an enormous amount of guilt," says Akiyo. "He said 'if there's nothing you can do about going through these changes periodically, why don't you set up your life to suit that?' So if I need to move to a new city every 4 years [I should] make that transition easy: own less stuff, rent a house rather than buy (I had bought a house at the time), find a location-independent career, do stuff every day that keeps me stimulated so that I don't get bored of life (and thus want to leave it again)."

We'll return to Akiyo's story later, but we wanted to bring it up now for those of you who aren't quite sure what you want to do but know your current lifestyle is not working for your overall physical, emotional, or social health.

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If You Don't Know Where to Start

Some people are just born knowing what they want to do with their lives. They have never *not* wanted to be an astronaut or a veterinarian or an artist, and they begin working toward this dream at a very early age.

Good for them.

But if you are like most people, you didn't inhale your life's purpose with your first breath of air. You feel as if you're drifting, just waiting for something to happen.

You wonder how some people can be so certain about the life they want and wonder if you'll ever feel that way about yours.

The good news is you can.

Why things get in the way of your happiness

There was a powerful Superbowl commercial a few years ago for job search site Monster.com. Small kids were filmed saying things like,

"When I grow up³:

- *I want to file all day."*
- *I want to climb my way up to middle management."*
- *I want sunshine blown up my skirt."*
- *I want to be under-appreciated."*
- *I want to be a yes-man."*

For people not working in an ideal job or living the life they wanted, it was a wake-up call to connect with their earlier dreams. No one wants to be any of those things in the ad, but when you don't know what you do want you have a harder time saying no to the wrong things. How can you know they're wrong if you don't know what's right? Mediocrity drifts in because you have nothing with which to combat it.

Before you know it, this limbo leads to getting sunshine blown up your skirt or working full-time as a yes-man. You get caught up in the status quo, following trends and accepting things as they come to you with minimal complaint. You tolerate things a younger you never thought you would: poor health, debt, unfulfilling work, and unhealthy relationships.

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It's not all doom and gloom, of course. People can usually manage to live pretty good lives despite a lack of focus. But if you have the nagging feeling things are not as good as they could be – that you are missing out on something, even if you don't know what that is – today is the day you start to find it.

Our date at the Denver International Airport was the sign we needed to start making some changes in our lives. We didn't know then it would end up with a trip around the world, but it was a very necessary step to clear the path to discovering our dream of world travel.

Speaking of paths, it's hard to see the one in front of you if it's covered up. Next we'll focus on the 2-step action plan for clearing the way. This will help you clarify your life down to the essentials so you can see your options more clearly. This is the sweet spot when your dreams have a fighting chance of making themselves known to you and you have the space and energy to bring them to life.

Step 1: Chipping Away the Negatives

At a time when most artists planned out their pieces, Michelangelo worked freehand on a block of marble. He believed he was divinely inspired and simply revealed what was already underneath. When the inspiration struck, he worked into the night with a candle on his hat for light, and was known to shout, "Speak!" to the stone as he worked. He was pulling out the perfect image, chipping away at the excess stone blocking the masterpiece within.

The things that drain your energy, cause you distress, or add extra work without extra benefit are the blocks of stone holding you back from identifying your dreams and making them real. Like Michelangelo, you must also chip away what is not ideal. When you shout, "Speak!" to your life, you have to be prepared to listen, to pay attention (with a candle on your hat if necessary).

What would you NOT miss in your life if it magically went away tomorrow?

- Job
- Commute
- Home maintenance
- Soul-sucking relationships
- Debt
- Poor health

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- Fatigue

Take a piece of paper and list every single thing without guilt. No one else will see the paper but you, and it doesn't matter if you have 1 thing on the list or 100. There is no judgment here, just a simple exercise to determine the size of the block containing your masterpiece. You have to give your chisel some direction.

What bothers you about each thing specifically?

Because we are creatures of habit, we have a tendency to replay things in our lives. You may hate your job and your relationships and your duties at home because all make you feel subordinate to other people's needs or like people are not listening to you. The irritant might be cleaning house for your entire family every weekend while they relax, but the root problem is feeling unappreciated and not speaking up about your needs.

An insightful exercise on finding the root cause of your dissatisfaction is called The 5 Whys¹. You continue to ask yourself why something bothers you (5 or more times) until you get to the real problem, one you may not have even realized in your surface complaint.

"I'm broke."

Why?

"Because I spend too much money."

Why?

"Because I want to treat myself."

Why?

"Because I want to feel special."

Why?

"Because at work and at home I get overlooked a lot."

Why?

"Because I never speak up."

Why?

"Because I'm scared of embarrassing myself."

In this case, the exercise reveals someone is broke because she's buying her confidence – or so she thinks. To bolster her attempts at saving more money, she could also work on speaking up at work and home and see how this affects her desire to overspend.

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The reason we advocate getting to the root is to understand what is really draining your energy and causing you distress so you won't repeat it with new activities and relationships going forward. It's like your friend who keeps dating losers. Until he/she figures out why, it will be the same type of mate and the same type of turbulent breakup time after time. You don't understand how she can't see it when it is so clear to everyone else. The hard truth is, however, you have the same problem – a 'dive bar full of losers' in some area of your life. Your dive bar could be unfulfilling work, unhealthy relationships, poor health choices, or careless financial habits. You just have to figure out where it is and why you keep going back there for satisfaction when there is none to be had. (You're not alone; we all have a 'dive bar of losers' in some area of our lives.)

In Akiyo's case, she knew her super-manic phases could undo all the hard work she had done in her education, work, and relationships. Rather than fight against it, she made a list of all the things in her life that worked against her management of the disorder: tying herself down with the purchase of a home, owning too many possessions to easily move, and having a job with too much routine to aggravate her bipolar condition. In short, she needed to craft a life of frequent stimulation and change to stay on an even keel.

What irritants can you change, reduce or eliminate from your life?

This is where you start chipping away. You have a list in front of you along with the real reason each item is slowly driving you mad.

Now you see your irritants in black and white, and now you can do something about them.

Brainstorm at least 3 ways you can change, reduce or eliminate each irritant/root cause in your life. List one action you can do right now, one that would take time but is realistic, and one that is totally off the wall. Don't think about how others will react or what is realistic. Just brainstorm the options without thought or judgment. You might be surprised at how many realistic options you have in front of you (and how reasonable those first two options look when you get to the third one).

Some things you can do right away, like reducing the irritation of your commute by finding a carpool or listening to soothing music, podcasts or books on tape. Others are first steps toward bigger plans, like halting your credit card spending immediately to stop increasing your debt as you begin work to pay it down, leaving the junk food at the store to begin your path back to health, or rebalancing your relationships² as you learn to speak up for yourself.

In the instance of the weekend housework, you may discover you are doing more than expected by your family, or that they think you enjoy housework or that their efforts won't live up to your expectations. A conversation with them about the problem may be all it takes to rebalance the workload, saving you from vacuuming around them with resentment on Saturday afternoon as they surf the Internet and watch movies.

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In Akiyo's case, she decided to get rid of the possessions she felt were holding her down. She began by living in just one room of her house. She moved her bed into the living room along with her clothes and books. Whatever didn't fit got sold or donated. She lived like this for a few months before she decided it would work, and then she sold her house to move into a rental with far more long-term flexibility.

She said no to the lecturer's job waiting for her at graduation, and she began looking for location-independent work she could do from her laptop anywhere in the world. She saved a lot of money in anticipation of her new life.

Akiyo's chipping away of the negatives took about a year. As you start chipping away, remember you don't have to change everything at once. Focus on one thing at a time, appreciating the space that opens up when you do and how your overall energy level and outlook changes in response.

Step 2: Adding In the Possibilities

Once you've started chipping away at the negatives, you'll have more space and energy in your life. It's a good feeling, one that will give you better rest at night, more fulfilling relationships, and more energy to pursue the things you enjoy. You won't feel the need to crash out on the couch every evening just to recover from your day. So let's find a place for you to utilize this newfound energy for happiness.

What would you like to add to your life?

Much like you imagined your life without its irritants before, now you are going to imagine the possibilities. This list is sometimes harder than the negatives list because we so easily identify what is not working. Possibilities are often more subtle³, and it takes some time to draw them out.

What existing things would you like more of in your life? Exercise, friendship, free time, alone time, parties, travel, writing, culture, cooking, gardening, yoga, meditation, etc.

What new things⁴ interest you? Learn a language, fly on a trapeze, dance the tango, make a movie, start a business, etc. For inspiration, check out other people's lists at 43 Things⁵ or see what kind of meetups⁶ or classes are going on in your area if you need inspiration. Write down anything that sparks your interest as a possibility.

How would you like to share your gifts with the world? Volunteer for a cause you support through your time, talents, and connections.

What inspires you about each possibility?

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Just like we analyzed the negatives, we're going to find out what energizes you about these possibilities and what needs they fill.

When you know exactly what feeds your soul, you can easily find more of it for your life.

Your interests may all feed into one overall interest, like helping other people, feeding your creativity, discovering new things, or deepening your relationships. You can use The 5 Whys for this exercise, too, getting down to the root of why you really like to do certain types of things more than others. Perhaps you like diverse things like scrapbooking events, your running group, and book club all for the same reason – you get to do these normally 'solo' hobbies with other people. This is the magic, knowing what energizes you and looking for more of it to add to your life.

After downsizing and saving money, Akiyo was ready to start thinking about the possibilities. Because she craved change and new experiences, she and her boyfriend decided to move from England to Edinburgh, Scotland, a place familiar enough to find work but exotic enough to feed their curiosity. They rented a small apartment and she began taking classes in everything from jewelry making to trapeze lessons, and she volunteered in her spare time. She began writing a book. As she indulged her need for stimulation and change, she found herself happier than she had ever been.

Try new experiences on for size

This is where you start adding experiences to your life. Your list gives you a starting point to try things on and see what fits in the newly opened space in your life. Put a check mark next to a few you want to try first.

Some you can 'test drive' almost immediately, like signing up for a class or buying season tickets to your local playhouse. Others you can begin in small ways, like walking around the block after dinner every evening as you work up to more heart pounding exercise.

Your bigger goals will take some time, like learning a complex skill, starting a business, or writing a book, but you can start taking steps now to make them happen. The important thing is to be open to new opportunities and to look for the types of relationships and activities that feed your spirit.

If you are looking for direction, an effective strategy is to imagine what an ideal day in your life would look like.

- How would you feel when you woke up?
- What would eat for breakfast?

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- How would you spend your day?
- What kind of people would you know?
- Where would you live?

When you have this idea firmly visualized, start thinking of the components that make up this ideal day. For instance, if you imagine yourself hanging out with artists or creative people, you can start by looking for those kinds of friends⁷ now at art classes, art school, or even the funky coffee shop filled with local artists' work. If you want to be healthier, you'll have to start exercising and eating better now⁸. If you want to eventually live in a farmhouse, it's time to stop buying things for your city apartment.⁹

Whatever you visualize as your perfect day can begin to take shape with your actions now.

Creating Your Dream Lifestyle

More than likely, you will be stronger at one of these actions than the other. I am more of a "strip away the negatives" kinda gal and Warren is more of an "add up the possibilities" kind of guy. But we each employ the two strategies to create the lives we want, and when we can work together toward those goals it is even more powerful.

The beauty of this process is that it works for everyone on every type of goal. It is fully customizable to you. You can create a life with more of what energizes you and less of what drains you.

And that, friend, is the recipe for happily ever after. As you start honing in on your dream lifestyle by streamlining your life to what really works for you, you can follow our plan to start banking the cash you'll need to make it happen.

Chapter Summary

It's okay if you don't know what your big dream is right now. In fact, many people don't. But you can start evaluating what isn't working in your life – the relationships, activities, and situations that drain your energy – and reduce or eliminate them. Afterward, you have a clean slate from which to add experiences and relationships that appeal to you, trying them on for size and evaluating what makes you happy.

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Sneak peek of Chapter 1 of *Dream Save Do: An Action Plan for Dreamers*, by Betsy and Warren Talbot

The key to making these improvements stick long-term is to evaluate the root of your dissatisfaction or joy in each. When you know why you like or dislike something, you can better understand the consequences of allowing similar changes in the future. Living your dream is a lifelong process, one that changes over time, and cultivating a habit of eliminating the negatives and adding in the positives will serve you well as you continue to refine your life.

In the next chapter you'll learn how to define the dream you have taking shape, visualizing it so well you can put a price tag on it and begin the action necessary to make it real.

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