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Letter from the Editors

Welcome to ITD World Vietnam's December 2023 issue – in which we explore the profound theme of **"Self-actualization"**!

- **Overview of Self-Actualization**

Within the first section, we delve into the path to realizing one's full potential and achieving personal fulfillment. Beyond the daily hustle, understanding oneself and striving for self-actualization can lead to a life that aligns with your deepest passions and aspirations.

- **What Keeps You Locked in Place**

Acknowledging the hurdles on the road to self-actualization is crucial. We explore the barriers that may hinder your progress toward becoming the best version of yourself – so that you may be better equipped to chart a clearer course toward personal growth and fulfillment.

- **Finding Your Reason for Being**

Inspired by the Japanese concept of Ikigai, we delve into the intersection of passion, vocation, profession, and mission. Finding your Ikigai is a transformative process, guiding you to discover your reason for being and aligning your life with what truly matters to you. It's a compass that points the way to a more purposeful and meaningful existence.

As we close the chapters of 2023, let this edition be your guide to unlocking your full potential, breaking free from limitations, and embracing the journey toward self-actualization. May you find inspiration and practical insights to navigate the complexities of life with authenticity and purpose!

★ To your boundless abundance,

ITD World Vietnam Team

Overview of Self Actualization





• Overview of Self-actualization •


Self-actualization, often deemed as the pinnacle of personal fulfillment, encompasses a journey towards understanding oneself profoundly and achieving one's utmost potential.

What is Self-Actualization?




The pinnacle of personal growth and fulfillment, self-actualization is the visualization of one's potential in their pursuit of personal growth, creativity, and fulfillment. It represents the process of becoming the best version of oneself- by gaining a deep understanding of one's values, strengths, and aspirations, and consciously aligning their actions with these inner truths.

At its core, self-actualization involves the realization of one's unique talents, interests, and capabilities, leading to a sense of purpose and meaning in life. It goes beyond achieving basic needs and transcends societal expectations, focusing on individual growth and authenticity.




The concept of self-actualization is often used interchangeably with self-realization; however, it carries a slightly different connotation. Self-realization emphasizes the understanding of one's true nature or essence - including aspects such as identity, consciousness, and existence. While self-realization lays the foundation for self-actualization, the latter involves actively striving to fulfill one's potential and live by one's deepest values and aspirations.

Self Actualization Theory



The self-actualization theory was introduced by psychologist Abraham Maslow through his famous hierarchy of needs, which he proposed in the mid-20th century. The hierarchy, often depicted as a pyramid, outlines human needs arranged in a hierarchical order, with basic physiological needs at the base and self-actualization at the pinnacle.






• Overview of Self-actualization •

Maslow's theory suggests that individuals seek to fulfill their basic physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and ultimately self-actualization, sequentially. Once the lower-level needs are met, one is prompted to strive for higher-level fulfillment.

However, Maslow acknowledged that self-actualization isn't a strict ladder – but rather, a continuous process influenced by various factors. He highlighted that only a small percentage of people achieve this state, estimating it at around 2% of the population.

Over time, Maslow's theory has influenced numerous studies and research in psychology. It laid the groundwork for exploring human potential, personal growth, and the pursuit of meaning and fulfillment beyond basic survival needs.

In terms of historical figures who are often cited as having achieved self-actualization, individuals like Mahatma Gandhi, Eleanor Roosevelt, Albert Einstein, and Mother Teresa are commonly mentioned. These people



displayed traits associated with self-actualization: a deep sense of purpose, unwavering commitment to their values, creative endeavors, and a profound impact on society driven by intrinsic motivations.



Characteristics of Self-Actualization



Self-actualized individuals exhibit a unique set of characteristics that distinguish them in their approach to life and interactions with the world.

One key trait is a profound sense of authenticity and autonomy. These people are remarkably genuine, comfortable in their skin, and true to their values and beliefs. They don't feel the need to conform to societal expectations or seek external validation, instead embracing their uniqueness and individuality.

They also demonstrate a remarkable degree of self-awareness – specifically, a deep understanding of their strengths, weaknesses, and motivations.





• Overview of Self-actualization •

This enables them to navigate life's complexities with clarity and make decisions aligned with their inner truths.

A strong sense of direction in life is another key characteristic. They have a clear vision of their goals and aspirations, which they pursue with passion and dedication. This sense of purpose drives them beyond mere success or material gains; they strive for meaning and fulfillment in their endeavors.

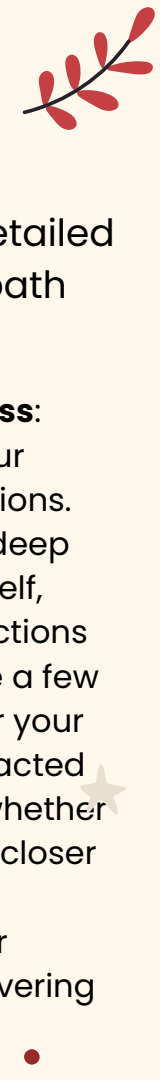
Another notable trait is open-mindedness and acceptance of others. They display tolerance and empathy, embracing diversity and different perspectives. This openness allows them to form meaningful connections and contribute positively to the lives of those around them.

In terms of personality, self-actualized individuals tend to be independent thinkers. They are not swayed by external influences or societal pressures, preferring to rely on their judgments and convictions. This independence of thought often leads to creativity and innovative problem-solving approaches.

Moreover, they exhibit a high degree of emotional intelligence. They are in tune with their emotions and adept at understanding and managing their feelings. This emotional maturity enables them to handle challenging situations with composure and empathy.

How to Achieve Self-Actualization

Achieving self-actualization involves a deliberate and introspective approach to personal growth. Here are detailed strategies to help pave the path toward this fulfilling state:

- **Self-Reflection and Awareness:** Consider journaling about your values, strengths, and aspirations. This practice helps solidify a deep understanding of your inner self, guiding your decisions and actions toward authenticity. Set aside a few minutes each week to ponder your past experiences, how you reacted to the latest life events, and whether you have accomplished/ got closer to any goals. Use prompts or questions to stimulate deeper introspection, gradually uncovering layers of your authentic self.
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- **Setting Meaningful Goals:** Define specific and purposeful goals that resonate deeply with your values and passions. These objectives act as guiding lights, offering direction and fueling motivation along your self-actualization journey. If personal growth in a particular area, say learning a new language or mastering a musical instrument, aligns with your values, outline specific milestones and a plan to achieve them. Regularly review and adjust these goals to stay aligned with your evolving aspirations.
- **Embracing a Growth Mindset:** Setbacks should be viewed as stepping stones rather than stumbling blocks. In facing adversity or failure, remind yourself to stop and analyze the experience. Consider what went well, what could be improved, and how this setback can propel you forward.
- **Live Authentically:** Being authentic means embracing your uniqueness – and opting to pursue what genuinely aligns with your interests, even if they are unconventional. This might involve making choices that differ from societal expectations but resonate deeply with your inner values.
- **Cultivate Positive Relationships:** Surround yourself with those who uplift and inspire personal growth. Engage in meaningful conversations with friends or mentors who share your interests or beliefs, and are willing to offer support on your journey.
- **Practice Mindfulness:** Dedicate a few minutes each day to mindfulness practices. These might involve focused breathing, body scan exercises, or simply being fully present during routine activities like walking or eating.
- **Continuous Self-Improvement:** Develop a habit of ongoing self-improvement. Explore new skills, hobbies, or knowledge areas that contribute to personal growth and development. Enroll in courses or workshops related to your interests or areas you wish to explore further.
- **Contribute to the Community:** Acts of kindness and service have been proven to provide a profound sense of fulfillment beyond personal achievements – volunteer for a cause that resonates with your values or lend a helping hand to someone in need.

By integrating these strategies into your life consciously and consistently, you pave the way for self-actualization—a state where you authentically express your fullest potential and find profound fulfillment in your journey.

What Keeps You Locked in Place from Self-Actualizing

Credit: Dr. Marshall Goldsmith

What Keeps You Locked in Place from Self-Actualizing

The Dangers of Framing

Limiting beliefs can hold us back from making the changes that will lead to fulfillment.

Sometimes the things that keep us from creating our own life are the way we were taught or the way we were raised. We default to those learned characteristics, which can lead us to assume we're not capable of change.

In a way, what we've been taught about ourselves may limit our self-awareness. This is a form of limiting belief that can hold us back from making the changes that will lead to fulfillment. We all need encouragement, and many times we seek it — but sometimes we also need to realize that we are more than we believe we are.

When she was 101, Julia Hawkins set a running record: She finished the 100-meter dash in 39.62 seconds. Two years later, she competed in the 50- and 100-meter dash races at the National Senior Games in Albuquerque. She is believed to be the oldest woman to formally compete on an American track. She took up

running at the age of 100 after finding that cycling was becoming too strenuous for her at her age.

At the age of 105, Ms. Hawkins set the first World Masters Athletics record in the women's 105+ age category in the 100 meters, when she ran in the Louisiana Senior Games, completing her race in 1 minute 2.95 seconds.

So, who are we to think we're too old or too set in our ways to change?

It's not only age that might hold us back in our minds — it's attitude.

Here's something Dr. Goldsmith has found in his years of coaching, and through his own life experiences: **Our programming locks us in place.**

I grew up in Valley Station, Kentucky, thirty miles south of Louisville, along the section of the Ohio River that forms the Indiana border. I was my mother's only child, and she devoted herself to shaping my childhood persona and self-image.

What Keeps You Locked in Place from Self-Actualizing

She was an elementary school teacher who valued brains over brawn. She programmed me to believe that I was the sharpest kid in town. In addition, perhaps to prevent me from becoming an auto mechanic electrician, or any other kind of skilled craftsman, she regularly reminded me that I had no eye-hand coordination or mechanical skills. Thus, by middle school, I had a talent for math and for taking standardized tests, but I was terrible at anything mechanical or athletic. I couldn't change a lightbulb, and the one time in Little League that I made contact between ball and bat—it was a foul ball—I received a standing ovation.

Fortunately, I responded to my mother's programming with an unshakable faith in my intelligence. Unfortunately, I also developed an unpardonable self-assurance that I didn't need to try very hard at school. I learned that I could coast and still pull down decent grades.

This lucky streak continued through college at Rose Hulman Institute of Technology and the

MBA program at Indiana University—and emboldened me (despite my years of suboptimal effort for academic studies) to seek a Ph.D. at UCLA. However, I could not articulate why I needed a doctorate in organizational behavior or what I would do with it. Coasting had gotten me this far, I reasoned. Why not see where continued coasting could take me?

At UCLA, I was blessed with classmates who were my intellectual superiors and professors who were not only light-years smarter but also intimidating presences who were not shy about humiliating me for my vanities and hypocrisies. It was a necessary comeuppance. I was twenty-six years old and finally learning that I was at UCLA to earn a Ph.D., not merely receive it. I needed that many years to overcome the unintended consequences of my mother's programming.

All of us are programmed in some way by our parents. Mom and Dad can't help it (and it's usually well-meaning).

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They shape our beliefs, our social values, how we treat other people, how we behave in relationships, and even which sports teams we cheer for. More than anything else, they program our self-image.

From our early days in the crib—before we can crawl, walk, or speak—they're forensically studying our behavior for clues about our talents and potential. This is most obvious when siblings are involved. Over time, with enough "evidence," our parents subdivide us into distinct personalities: the smart one, the pretty one, the strong one, the nice one, the responsible one—whichever of the many descriptors seems to apply at the time.

It's as if they're unwittingly trying to turn us into an archetype of a human being, erasing all the nuance. If we're not careful, we not only accept the programming but also adapt our behavior to it. The smart one falls back on cleverness rather than expertise, the pretty one relies on her looks, the strong one prefers raw power to persuasion, the nice one acquiesces too quickly, and the

responsible one sacrifices too much in the name of duty. Whose life are we living when decisive parts of it, imprinted during our formative years by people we love, have already been created for us?

The good news is that we have the right to deprogram ourselves whenever we want.

Our programming is only a problem when it becomes a lifeblocker. We consider trying something new—a U-turn in our career, a new haircut—then reject it with excuses such as "I've never been good at _____" or "It's not me."

Until we (or someone else) challenge the validity of our excuses ("Says who?"), we cannot imagine imposing our will upon beliefs that we've come to accept as pure gospel.

Our programming's biggest impact is how proficiently it blinds us to our need to reject it.

"What we've been taught about ourselves may limit our self-awareness."

Marshall Goldsmith

What Keeps You Locked in Place from Self-Actualizing

The Motivation Behind an Earned Life

There are steps you can take toward creating an earned life. It's a matter of being aware of certain qualities. People who are fulfilled do what they love. They enjoy life. But how do they get there? Do they wake up all of a sudden and realize that the next step they take will lead them toward fulfillment, toward an earned life?

Most of us are not that aware of our inclinations, of how we act in the present. We concentrate on the future but often in a vague way, along the lines of, "Someday I'll have a better job," or something like that.

As Dr. Goldsmith has shared as follows:

I've been studying this for many years. I wrote my doctoral thesis on motivation, ability, understanding, and confidence, isolating them as the four cognitive and emotional qualities that people need to be successful:

- *I defined motivation as the force that drives us to get up each morning and pursue a*

specific objective and also maintain that drive in the face of setbacks and reversals.

- *For me, the ability was having the aptitude and skills required to achieve a goal.*
- *I defined understanding as knowing what to do how to do it, and what not to do.*
- *I defined confidence as the belief that you can accomplish what you set out to do, whether you've done it before or are attempting it for the first time.*

Those four attributes are essential success factors. Take away even one, and you significantly increase your odds of failing.

These are task-specific attributes — they're not universal. For example, there is no such thing as a motivated person, because none of us is motivated to do everything. We are selectively motivated, and driven to do one thing, but not another.

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The same is true of ability, understanding, and confidence. Each is task-specific—because none of us can do everything, understand everything, or be confident in every situation.

But forty years in the business world as an executive coach have taught me that these four attributes don't provide a full picture.

My thesis was incomplete.

Success isn't simply desire, talent, intellect, and self-belief. You need support, as well as a receptive market for each of your specific tasks or goals.

Many personal assets improve your chances for success, such as creativity, discipline, resilience, empathy, humor, gratitude, education, timing, likability, and so on. I've identified six considerations for success:

- *motivation*
- *ability*
- *understanding*
- *confidence*
- *support*
- *the marketplace*

Without good answers for each of them, there is no next step.

First, is **motivation**.

Motivation is the reason you try to succeed at a chosen task. It's "why" you do anything. In August 1979, Ted Kennedy challenged President Jimmy Carter in his bid for reelection. Kennedy at the time was a favorite to defeat the unpopular Carter. He announced his bid in a widely seen TV interview with CBS's Roger Mudd, who started with the obvious softball question: "Why do you want to be president?" Kennedy, infamously, flubbed the answer, offering a meandering, incoherent response that didn't give people a reason to vote for him and essentially ended his campaign before it began.

Like millions of Americans who watched the interview, Dr. Goldsmith remembers thinking, "It's not enough that being president satisfies some personal ambition to reach the top rung of the political ladder."

What Keeps You Locked in Place from Self-Actualizing

In telling me why you want to be president, you must also reveal the specific things you want to do in the job, whether it's building roads, feeding hungry children, or lowering interest rates".

Motivation cannot be divorced from actually doing specific tasks to achieve goals. That's what makes motivation a misunderstood word regarding goals. We often hear people describe themselves, or someone they admire, as "motivated to succeed" or "motivated to be a good boss" (or teacher or father or partner or some other broadly defined role). Used in that context, "motivated" has no meaning—because I don't know anyone who's "motivated not to succeed" or "motivated to be a bad boss." Motivation is being confused with desire. They may as well be saying "I want to succeed" or "I want to be a good boss." Who doesn't?

Being motivated is that heightened emotional state coupled with a supercharged impulse to do each of the specific tasks required to achieve that goal. The true test of our

motivation is grounded in evidence. If we want to run a marathon in under three hours, are we motivated to do each of the necessary tasks that such an arduous physical achievement requires: wake up early in the morning six times a week to accumulate our mileage goals; reconfigure our diet so that it is in the service of maximum performance; put in the hours at the gym to build our strength and flexibility to lessen the chance of injury; and summon the common sense to take a day off when our body tells us we need to rest and recover?

Anything less and we're kidding ourselves about being "motivated."



What Keeps You Locked in Place from Self-Actualizing

Dr. Goldsmith remarks:

As a coach helping successful people change for the better, it's not my job to judge people's stated motivations. My job is to establish their resolve. Our lives can be filled with ambiguous motivations. Rewards such as money, fame, advancement, awards, and prestige have the power either to make us try harder or to leave us asking, "Is that all there is?"

Misunderstanding your motivation and overestimating your willingness to fulfill it may be the two defining errors you'll face as you create your own life. But you need to anticipate a few other avoidable errors as you find your true motivation.

Motivation is a strategy, not a tactic. Motive is the reason we act in a certain way. Motivation is the reason we continue acting that way. In identifying your motivation, be sure to grade it on its long-term sustainability—and be realistic about your ability to sustain in the face of risk, insecurity, rejection, and difficulty.

Two questions: How have you responded to adversity in the past? Why will it be different this time?

So how do you zero in on a specific motivation?

Experience has taught me that there is at least one universal baseline motivation guaranteed to clarify your desire to live an earned life, and it is this:

I want to live a life that will increase my fulfillment and minimize my regret.

"We possess offsetting attributes that enable us to find our way."

Marshall Goldsmith



What Keeps You Locked in Place from Self-Actualizing

Make Peace and Change Your Life!

Every decision in the world is made by the person who has the power to make the decision. **Make peace with that.**

Have you ever tried to change your boss? Your partner? The guy on the road who cut you off? How'd that work out for you? Did that person hear, understand, and magically start doing things your way and suddenly all was right with the world again? Or did you become frustrated, irritable, and angry at their lack of attention to your plan for how people, more specifically, should behave?

Here's an even harder question: have you ever tried to change something about yourself that was out of your control?

As shared by Dr. Goldsmith:

*I have. It was a fruitless and vain attempt, which I'll tell you now had a happy ending not because I changed what I couldn't change, but **because I made peace with it.***

At 26, I was married to my first and only wife, Lyda. I was pursuing a doctorate in organizational

behavior at the University of California, Los Angeles. Since high school, I had been a follically challenged man, but back then I was loath to admit it. Each morning I would spend several minutes in front of the bathroom mirror carefully arranging the wispy blond stands of hair remaining on the top of my head. I'd smooth the hairs forward from back to front, then curve them to a point in the middle of my forehead, forming a pattern that looked vaguely like a laurel wreath. Then I'd walk out into the world with my ridiculous comb-over, convinced I looked normal like everyone else.

When I visited my barber, I'd give specific instructions on how to cut my hair. One morning I dozed off in the chair, so he trimmed my hair too short, leaving insufficient foliage on the sides to execute my comb-over regimen. I could have panicked and put on a hat for a few weeks, waiting for the strands to grow back.

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But as I stood in front of the mirror later that day, staring at my reflected image, I said to myself, "Face it, you're bald. It's time you accepted it."

That's the moment when I decided to shave the few remaining hairs on the top of my head and live my life as a bald man. It wasn't a complicated decision and it didn't take great effort to accomplish. A short trim at the barber from then on. But in many ways, it is still the most liberating change I've made as an adult. It made me happy, and at peace with my appearance.

*I'm not sure what triggered my acceptance of a new way of self-grooming. Perhaps I was horrified at the prospect of starting every day with this routine forever. Or maybe it was the realization that I wasn't fooling anyone. The reason doesn't matter. The real achievement is that I decided to make peace with what is. **And it instantly made my life better!***

"If we are satisfied with our life, we CAN yield to inertia. We continue doing what

we've always done."

Marshall Goldsmith

Here are several main themes that require acceptance. These are just facts of life, and we cannot change them. Here are just a few, so you can get the idea:

1. Our physical body – height, hair growth, body type (there's always plastic surgery, but you get the idea)
2. The weather
3. Traffic
4. Other people
5. The fact that decision-makers have the power to make decisions – and we are not always the decision-makers!
6. The fact that change requires consistent effort; is a process, not an overnight event. If we don't put in the effort, we won't change.
7. Those misfortunes are often the result of fate or bad luck, they are not because we are bad people or because someone is trying to "get us".

What Keeps You Locked in Place from Self-Actualizing

There are many, many more things about life that we need to accept if we're going to be happy. Take a moment to think about it. Can you name some for yourself? What are they? Make a list, take a breath, and let them go. And remember, change requires

consistent effort, so don't be surprised if you have to do this again tomorrow!

Make it a habit to earn it every day.

The Most Important Thing You Can Do if You Want to Change

Regret – The price we pay when we don't pay the price.

Isn't what you might think.

It's not deciding what to change or apologizing to those you've wronged for past grievous errors. And, it's not listening to ideas or thanking those who suggest changes you can make to become better.

What is the most important thing you can do if you want to change? It's a **follow-up**. Follow-up is the #1 difference maker in the whole change process. Here's why.

- Follow-up is how you measure your progress.
- Follow-up is how you remind people that you're making an effort to change and that they

are helping you.

- Follow-up is how your efforts eventually get imprinted on your colleagues' minds.
- Follow-up is how you erase your coworkers' skepticism that you can change.
- Follow-up is how you acknowledge to yourself and others that getting better is an ongoing process, not a temporary religious conversion.
- And, more than anything else, follow-up makes you change. It gives you the momentum, even the courage, to go beyond understanding what you need to do to change and do it because in engaging in the follow-up process, we are changing.

What Keeps You Locked in Place from Self-Actualizing

Dr. Goldsmith used to confess as follows:

I didn't start out knowing the importance of follow-up. Many years ago, a VP participant in a training session I facilitated asked me the perfectly reasonable question, "Does anyone who goes to one of these leadership development programs ever really change?"

I thought about it. Then answered sheepishly, "I don't know." I had worked with some of the best companies in the world and no one had ever asked me this question. Worse still, until that moment, this question had never crossed my mind!

From that moment, I set out to discover the answer to the question: "Does anyone ever really change?" I'm excited to report that many years later I outlined the complete methodology, statistical results, companies involved, and my conclusions about follow-up in an article entitled, "Leadership Is a Contact Sport" written with Howard Morgan and published in Strategy+Business, Fall 2004. Ten

*years later, we expanded this study to 248,000 respondents from 31 different companies from around the world. And the conclusion is the same: **follow-up is the key to successful behavioral change.***

From this study, its participants, and their teams, I've drawn three important conclusions:

Not everyone responds to executive development, at least not in the way the organization desires or intends. In other words, some people are trainable, and some people are not. I ask participants at the end of each session if they intend to go back to their jobs and apply what they've learned. Almost 100 percent say yes! A year later, when I ask their direct reports if their bosses have applied the lessons learned on the job, about 70% say yes and 30% say no. Why would people go through training, promise to implement what he/she had learned, and then not do it? Simply because they were too busy! This realization led to my second conclusion.

What Keeps You Locked in Place from Self-Actualizing

There is an enormous disconnect between understanding and doing. Most leadership development revolves around the false assumption that if people understand they will do. In truth, most of us understand, we just don't do. But this didn't answer my question. So, I rewired my objectives and began measuring people to see not only if they got better but why. My hunch about follow-up being the difference-maker paid off. The results were astonishingly consistent. Those who do little or no follow-up with people have little or no perceived change in effectiveness. The perception of the effectiveness of those who do follow-up jumps dramatically. This led to a swift and unequivocal third conclusion.

People don't get better without follow-up! If nothing else, this study shows that leaders who ask for input regularly are seen as increasing in effectiveness. Leaders who don't follow up are not necessarily bad. They are just not perceived as getting better. The reasons for this are: that follow-up shows that you care about getting better, that you value people's opinions, that you

are taking the change process seriously, and that you are not ignoring your coworkers' input. That's an important part of follow-up. After all, a leader who sought input from her coworkers but ignored it or did not follow up on it would be perceived as someone who did not care very much about becoming a better leader.

All of this led me to a fourth and final conclusion. **Becoming a better leader (or a better person) is a process, not an event.**

Nobody ever changed just by going to a training session. They got better by doing what they learned in the program. And that "doing," by definition, involves follow-up. Follow-up turns changing for the better into an ongoing process—not only for you but for everyone involved. When you involve others in your continuing progress, you are virtually guaranteeing your continued success!

The most reliable predictor of what you will be doing five minutes from now is **what you are doing NOW.**

What Keeps You Locked in Place from Self-Actualizing

Ability is an Essential Factor in Success and Fulfillment

Just about everyone can succeed at something. Sometimes people naturally know what they're good at, and they find a way to make this ability serve them in a career. Some other people may not feel that their abilities align with what they want to achieve in life as if there are differences between ability and success. Ability is an aspect of what can make you successful.

Your ability is the level of skill you need to succeed at your chosen task. Ideally, you know what you're good at and what you're bad at, and sometimes you take on tasks beyond your abilities because you want to stretch. Otherwise, you stay within your wheelhouse of superior skills. If you have a superior skill, something that sets you apart, it should go hand in glove with motivation. Staying motivated to do something you excel at should not be a problem. And yet it can be.

Ability is an aspect of what can make you successful.

Below is a story shared by Dr. Goldsmith:

My friend Sanyin Siang, the co-founder and director of the Coach K Center on Leadership & Ethics at Duke University, believes that each of us has at least one skill that we take for granted and are perplexed when we discover that it's out of reach for everyone else. She calls this the "liability of expertise." Synch skills might include perfect pitch, supernatural eye-hand coordination, and blazing foot speed. Such talents may be a liability, according to Sanyin, because they come so easily to us. They don't feel fully earned, and we discount the many ways they make us special. It's like having a superpower and never using it.

But if we can't embrace an ability that comes easily to us, what's the alternative? Creating a career in areas where our abilities are less than optimal, where we're in the middle of the pack, and not so special? I wouldn't recommend that.

What Keeps You Locked in Place from Self-Actualizing

But ability isn't merely being preternaturally gifted at one extreme and possessing the bare minimum skill to do the job at the other. Think of a supremely talented athlete like Serena Williams. She doesn't just possess strength and focus. She also has determination, as well as a host of other qualities that have made her a world-class champion athlete. Ability alone wouldn't have gotten her so far.

Emotional and psychological elements—temperament, doggedness, persuasiveness, equanimity—play an equally crucial role in establishing ability. Dealing with rejection, for example, is an essential skill for salespeople and actors. Oncologists spend decades in a lab testing and waiting for a cancer treatment protocol to prove effective, with no guarantee that their efforts will ever deliver a breakthrough. Their heroic defiance of failure again and again, not their biochemistry expertise, is what defines their ability to find a cure. If you want to write novels for a living, a

willingness to be alone at your desk day after day is as necessary as your facility with plot, character, and dialogue. Being comfortable with solitude draws you to your desk each morning.

My mother was an elementary school teacher from the 1950s through the 1970s in rural Kentucky. When she filled in her students' report cards, she gave them a letter grade in three categories: Achievement, Effort, and Conduct. There was also a side box for Attendance. Educators back then, it seems, knew that a student's ability was more than knowing the right answers on a test. Trying, behaving well, and showing up counted too.

Not much has changed for us in adulthood.

Our ability is not one isolated talent — it's a portfolio of skills and personality traits that have to match up with the life we want to lead.

What Keeps You Locked in Place from Self-Actualizing

“Motivation cannot be divorced from actually doing specific tasks to achieve goals.”

Marshall Goldsmith



Finding Your Reason for Being (Ikigai)



Source: <https://vncmd.com/en/insights/ikigai/>

Finding Your Reason for Being (Ikigai)

Rooted in ancient wisdom, the Japanese philosophy of Ikigai offers a profound blueprint for a life filled with fulfillment. The concept goes beyond the conventional notion of life purpose – it weaves together the threads of numerous elements into a harmonious tapestry.

What is Ikigai?

Ikigai (生き甲斐) is a Japanese concept typically translated in simple words as your 'reason for being'. Derived from two Japanese words, 'iki' (生き – meaning life) and 'kai' (甲斐 – pronounced as 'gai', meaning effect, result, value, benefit, or worth), the term embodies the synthesis of a reason to live, a purpose that transcends the mundane routine of day-to-day living. It is something that drives us to get out of bed in the morning, keeps us going no matter what, and makes us feel like we're making a difference.

Ikigai encapsulates the intricate interplay of one's talents,

passions, and profession, interwoven with a sense of connection with the broader community. It is about discovering the nexus where personal fulfillment converges with societal impact.

Ikigai is often attributed to be the source of happiness and longevity for many Japanese people, especially in Okinawa, where it originated. Within recent decades, the concept has become popular worldwide – and is often mentioned when it comes to topics such as finding one's passion and meaning in life. ★

"A concise definition of ikigai could be 'the value one finds in day to day living.'"


Nicholas Kemp

Why is Ikigai So Popular?

In an era marked by relentless speed and mounting stress, Ikigai has been attracting the attention of numerous people – for a variety of reasons.




Finding Your Reason for Being (Ikigai)



First and foremost, the concept addresses a **widespread yearning for meaning and purpose**. In the current fast-paced world, people often find themselves adrift – they crave seeking connection with something truly significant. Ikigai offers a pathway to rediscovering life's essence, fostering fulfillment by aligning one's actions with values and passions.

Moreover, the growing dissatisfaction with existing jobs, careers, or lifestyles has propelled many towards the allure of Ikigai. As individuals yearn for **fulfillment and satisfaction**, Ikigai becomes a guiding philosophy, enabling the pursuit of dream careers or uncovering joy and value in existing vocations. It acts as a catalyst for harmonizing personal and professional spheres, ultimately contributing to a sustainable and gratifying existence.



One more reason has to do with the **contemporary emphasis on mental and physical well-being**.

As awareness of stress, anxiety, and mental health concerns grows, people seek methods to cope and overcome these challenges. Ikigai emerges as a holistic approach, diminishing negative emotions and enhancing positive ones by providing a compelling reason to greet each day – and encouraging engagement in activities that bring joy and benefit others. ★

Additionally, the observed **correlation between Ikigai and longevity** also contributes to amplifying the concept's popularity. Japan is ranked second globally in life expectancy (e.g. the average life span in Tokyo is about 88 for women/ 81 for men) – and Ikigai is often linked to the country's impressive health statistics. The island of Okinawa, renowned for its centenarians, attributes its longevity not only to diet but also to a well-defined sense of Ikigai. ★

Finding Your Reason for Being (Ikigai)

Various studies – conducted by the Japanese government as well as international researchers – have affirmed that those working for their Ikigai generally report a significantly lower risk of functional decline compared to those driven solely by financial motives.

Another appealing factor is the philosophy's focus on **adopting a simple, balanced lifestyle** – which provides an appealing contrast to the prevailing relentless pursuit of success and material wealth. In a world consumed by the desire for more,

Ikigai advocates for a life centered on what truly matters—a refreshing departure from societal norms.

Finally, Ikigai aligns with the growing interest in **mindfulness and self-discovery**. It emphasizes present-moment awareness, inner connection, and living authentically in line with one's values. As people seek a deeper understanding of themselves, the philosophy offers a roadmap to self-discovery, resonating with the broader cultural shift towards mindfulness.

Ikigai Framework – 4 Major Pillars

Your Ikigai lies where your talents and the needs of the world intersect.

How does Ikigai work? Most contemporary studies on the topic are based on the Venn diagram of Andres Zuzunaga – according to which the Ikigai formula is comprised of 4 major spheres:

What you love (Passion/Values)


The first pillar delves into your innermost desires and joys – what you love. It encapsulates your passions, interests, and hobbies, the activities that ignite a sense of happiness and excitement within you.



Finding Your Reason for Being (Ikigai)

To unravel this dimension, self-introspection is key. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What activities bring you joy?
- What subjects spark your curiosity and enthusiasm?
- What pursuits evoke a deep sense of satisfaction, even if there are no external rewards?



What you are good at (Skills/Talent)

The second component explores what you excel at – the skills and talents that define your unique capabilities. It is an

- acknowledgment of your proficiency and confidence, an area where improvement and learning are perpetual. Discovering what you are good at requires you to reflect on your strengths:

- What are the skills and talents that you possess?
- What areas showcase your experience and knowledge?
- What can you teach or share with others confidently?

What the World Needs (Mission)

The third pillar extends beyond personal boundaries, delving into the realm of societal contribution and positive impact. It embodies your mission – problems you aspire to solve, needs you aim to fulfill, and opportunities to create positive change.

Here are some questions to help you identify this component of Ikigai:

- What issues or needs do you feel compelled to address?
- What opportunities can you create or leverage for the benefit of others?
- What causes or missions resonate with your values and sense of purpose?

What you can be paid for (Profession/Vocation)

Completing the quartet is the pillar of sustainability – what you can be paid for.



Finding Your Reason for Being (Ikigai)

It encompasses your profession and vocation; as such, it requires reflection on the market demand for your skills and the monetization potential of your endeavors. Ask yourself:

- What can you earn money or rewards from?
- What aligns with market demands or has a viable audience?
- What aspects of your passion and talent can be monetized or sold, ensuring sustainability?

The crux of the Ikigai framework lies in discovering the harmonious intersection of the above-mentioned four pillars. It is at this juncture that your Ikigai emerges – the nucleus of your attention and energy, guiding your journey towards a purposeful and fulfilling life.

Challenges of Finding Ikigai

Siloed thinking

One of the primary pitfalls is falling prey to siloed thinking – perceiving elements of life such as work, family, and passions as isolated fragments. The essence of Ikigai lies in recognizing the interconnectedness of these aspects. Everything is intertwined; as such, realizing this interconnected tapestry is fundamental to unlocking the true meaning of Ikigai.

For example, if you are passionate about painting, you could find a job as a graphic designer or art teacher. That way, you incorporate your passions into your work – transforming it into something more than just a means to an end (paying bills, supporting family).

Overemphasis on profession

Equating Ikigai solely with one's profession is another common misstep. While work is a component of the Ikigai framework, it's vital to expand the scope beyond career boundaries.

Finding Your Reason for Being (Ikigai)

Ikigai is not confined to what one does for a living but encompasses the broader spectrum of what lends life meaning and purpose.

For instance, outside of work, you may spend time on activities that spark joy and ignite curiosity. Whether it's painting, playing music, or exploring nature, immersing yourself in pursuits that bring you genuine pleasure – to unveil hidden talents and foster a sense of purpose.

In fact, according to a survey conducted by Japan's Central Research Services, only 31% of respondents considered work as their Ikigai. Instead, they found value in other things – family, dreams, spiritual practices, etc.

Belief in money as the key to fulfillment

Economic status does not essentially correlate with Ikigai. Ikigai is an intrinsic sense of a life worth living, not contingent on financial standing. Genuine behaviors that evoke Ikigai are born out of spontaneous activities, driven by personal

passion and fulfillment rather than financial gain.

Instead of seeking happiness through material possessions or external validation, cultivate a sense of gratitude for the simple pleasures that enrich your life. Appreciating the beauty of nature, savoring a delicious meal, or experiencing a moment of connection with loved ones may all spark your Ikigai.

Attempting to fulfill all categories simultaneously

Striving to fulfill all four spheres of Ikigai (as mentioned above) at once is not always a realistic approach. Many times, the four pillars may not always perfectly intersect. As such, pursuing all of them simultaneously may prove to be overwhelming and time-consuming – leading to burnout and frustration.


In such cases, it may be better that you start with a selective stance – e.g. focusing on what you love to do and what you are good at first.



Finding Your Reason for Being (Ikigai)

Once you have a good foundation in these areas, you can move on to exploring ways to make a positive impact on the world and finding a career that aligns with your values.

Pressures for grandiose goals



The societal pressure to pursue grand and ambitious goals as the epitome of success is what leaves many of us disillusioned. Rather, Ikigai can manifest in very modest pursuits – in the most straightforward and everyday aspects of life (e.g. having a loving family, enjoying a hobby, etc.).

You don't have to be a celebrity or make any major achievements. As long as you can derive pleasure from what you do, you are already living up to your Ikigai.

"Ikigai can be something small or something big. In a nutshell, Ikigai is a spectrum. The complexity of Ikigai reflects the complexity of life itself."

Ken Mogi

Goal obsession

The Western mindset "I'll be happy when..." is a pervasive challenge for those seeking to attain long-lasting fulfillment. Ikigai is not a destination; it is a continuous journey. It's about emphasizing the importance of being present, appreciating the most trivial things in daily life, and enjoying happiness in the current moment.

So-called time constraints

Many of us believe that we don't have enough time to embark on the journey to discover Ikigai. Dedicating just one hour daily can make a significant difference over time!



Finding Your Reason for Being (Ikigai)

Distractions and greed

We are living in a world where a lot of things are distracting us from what matters in life. Many waste their time on activities such as playing games and surfing social media – which consume a lot of time and energy, leaving little room for exploring their passions and talents.

Lack of mindfulness

Neglecting mindfulness and self-reflection inhibits the Ikigai discovery process. Allocating time for introspection and being present at the moment is vital for uncovering the layers of one's purpose.

Fear of uncertainty

Fear of the unknown can paralyze one's progress in discovering their Ikigai. We may be afraid to step outside of our comfort zone and try something that we've never done before, despite our hunch that it aligns with our inner values. Additionally, many are worried

about what others will think if they pursue a career or path that is unconventional or doesn't fit into the traditional mold.

Assumption of singular ikigai

Many of us fall prey to the belief that we can only have one singular, ultimate Ikigai. Your Ikigai can evolve, and multiple ones can coexist throughout life.

For example, in your 20s, your Ikigai may be able to travel the world and experience new cultures. In your 40s, it may be to raise a family and build a strong community. And yet, in your 60s, you may be passionate about mentoring others and sharing your wisdom.

Age-related assumptions

The assumption that only elderly individuals can experience Ikigai is erroneous. Ikigai is not bound by age – rather, it can be discovered at any stage of life.

Finding Your Reason for Being (Ikigai)

Inertia

Procrastination, driven by the reluctance to embrace change, is what hinders one's progress. Experimenting with new experiences and shedding old, bad habits is essential for personal growth and Ikigai discovery.

How to Find Your Ikigai

Discovering your Ikigai is a profound journey of self-discovery, requiring reflection, awareness, and a willingness to explore. Follow these steps to embark on the quest for your unique purpose and fulfillment.

Reflect on your current life

Start by gaining awareness of your present circumstances. Reflect on past experiences and compile a list of the top activities you've engaged in recently. Evaluate whether these activities contribute to a sense of purpose in life – whether they bring real joy and satisfaction (make sure to be honest with yourself).

Example:

Sarah, a 35-year-old accountant, had been feeling increasingly dissatisfied with her work. She found the daily tasks repetitive and uninspiring, and she had a nagging feeling that she was meant for something more. Sarah decided to embark on a journey to discover her Ikigai.


She started by reflecting on her current situation. She realized that she spent most of her time sitting at a desk, staring at a computer screen. As such, she felt disconnected from her colleagues and her work didn't seem to make a real difference in the world.

Sarah then took a trip down memory lane, recalling moments when she felt a sense of purpose and joy. She remembered how much she enjoyed volunteering at her local animal shelter and helping to find homes for abandoned animals. She also cherished the memories of spending time in nature, hiking, camping, and simply appreciating the beauty of the world around her.



Finding Your Reason for Being (Ikigai)

Sarah made a list of activities she had engaged in recently. This included her work as an accountant, her volunteer work at the animal shelter, her hobbies of hiking and camping, and her involvement in a local environmental conservation group.



Sarah then evaluated each activity based on the criteria of joy, purpose, and skill utilization. She realized that her work as an accountant brought her little joy or satisfaction, and she didn't feel like she was making a positive impact on the world. On the other hand, her volunteer work at the animal shelter, her hobbies of hiking and camping, and her involvement in the environmental conservation group all brought her a sense of joy, purpose, and fulfillment.

Sarah was honest with herself about her feelings and realized that her Ikigai lay in helping others and connecting with nature. She decided to start making changes in her life that would align her actions with her

passions and values.

Sarah's journey to discover her Ikigai is still ongoing. She has started exploring options for transitioning out of her accounting career and into a field where she can make a more direct impact on the lives of animals and the environment. She has also joined a local hiking group and is planning a backpacking trip through a national park.



Embrace self-acceptance



Understanding and accepting who you are is imperative in the journey to finding your Ikigai. Embrace your strengths, acknowledge your limitations, and cultivate self-compassion. This foundation of self-awareness sets the stage for aligning your actions with your authentic self.

Identify your four elements of ikigai

Define the components of your Ikigai by answering crucial questions:



Finding Your Reason for Being (Ikigai)

- What do you love?
Do you love spending time in nature? Do you enjoy creative pursuits like writing, painting, or music? Do you find satisfaction in helping others? Reflect on activities that bring you joy and excitement – what makes you lose track of time and fully engages your enthusiasm.
- What are you good at?
What did you excel in at school or university? Are there any certifications or qualifications you hold that indicate your expertise?
What have you learned through your work, hobbies, or volunteer experiences? Are there any particular skills that you consistently receive praise or recognition for?
What have you pursued out of sheer curiosity or passion? Are there any skills or talents you've acquired through self-directed learning or exploration?
Recognize your skills and talents developed through education,

experience, or personal interest. Aligning with your capabilities is key to discovering your Ikigai.

- What does the world need?
What do you believe in? What are the causes you care about? Examine your values and principles – as well as the problems/ needs you are passionate about solving. This provides a moral compass for your Ikigai. Explore organizations, initiatives, or communities that align with your values and where you can utilize your skills to make a meaningful contribution.
- What can you be paid for?
Explore areas where your skills and passions can meet market demand. Research industries, occupations, or freelance opportunities that align with your expertise and interests. In addition, connect with individuals who share your interests and passions and seek their advice on career paths or business opportunities.

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Finding Your Reason for Being (Ikigai)

Visualize the intersection

Create a mental or physical representation of the intersection of your four elements of Ikigai. Visualization offers clarity and serves as a constant reminder of your purpose. Whether through diagrams, vision boards, or written statements, visually articulate the convergence of what you love, what you are good at, what the world needs, and what you can be paid for.

Example:

Emily, a 28-year-old graphic designer, had always felt a strong connection to nature and a passion for art. However, she felt unfulfilled in her current job, which involved designing corporate logos and marketing materials that didn't align with her values or interests.

Step 1: Identifying Passions

Emily decided to embark on a journey to discover her Ikigai. First, she reflected on the activities that brought her joy and excitement. She realized that she spent her

happiest moments outdoors, whether hiking in the mountains, camping under the stars, or simply enjoying a walk in the park. She also found immense satisfaction in creating art, particularly painting and drawing, which allowed her to express her creativity and emotions.

Step 2: Recognizing Skills and Talents

Emily considered her education, experience, and personal interests. She had always excelled in art classes throughout her school years and had won several awards for her paintings and drawings. She also had a strong foundation in graphic design, which allowed her to combine her artistic talents with technical skills.

Step 3: Understanding the World's Needs

Emily examined her values and principles. She was deeply concerned about environmental conservation and believed in the power of art to educate and inspire.

Finding Your Reason for Being (Ikigai)

She wanted to use her skills and passions to make a positive impact on the world and connect people with nature through art.

Step 4: Exploring Market Opportunities

Emily researched industries and freelancing opportunities that aligned with her interests and expertise. She discovered a growing demand for sustainable design and eco-friendly branding, as well as opportunities to create art for environmental organizations and nature-themed publications.

- *After careful introspection, Emily created a visual representation of her Ikigai using a vision board. She started to transition into a more fulfilling career path, combining her graphic design skills with her passion for environmental conservation. She is also actively involved in creating art for local environmental organizations and has even started her own small business selling nature-inspired*

prints and designs.

Seek inspiration from others

Draw inspiration from those who have successfully pursued their passions. Read books, watch documentaries, or attend events/talks related to your interests. Learning from others' journeys can illuminate possibilities and provide valuable insights into your own Ikigai.

Experiment with new possibilities






Step out of your comfort zone and experiment with new activities, hobbies, or volunteer opportunities. Embrace the exploration process without fearing failure. Trying diverse experiences can uncover unexpected connections and lead to the discovery of your true passions. If at first, you don't succeed, try, try again.



Finding Your Reason for Being (Ikigai)

Seek support and guidance

Surround yourself with a supportive community that encourages your exploration. Seek guidance from mentors, coaches, or like-minded individuals who can provide constructive feedback and support. Collaborative efforts enhance the journey and foster personal growth.





Merry Christmas & Happy New Year!

As we approach the festive season, our team at ITD World Vietnam would like to extend the warmest wishes of joy, peace, and fulfillment to all of our readers.

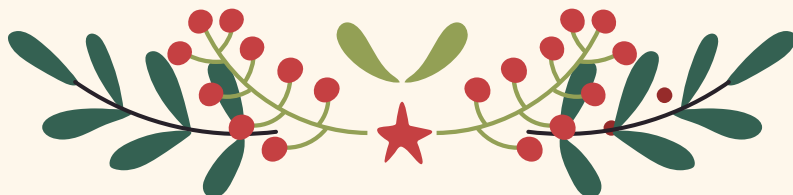
May this Christmas be filled with the warmth of family, the joy of shared moments, and the spirit of giving. In the tapestry of celebrations, may you find moments of reflection and gratitude for the year gone by.

As the New Year dawns, may it bring with it a fresh canvas for new beginnings, opportunities for growth, and the courage to pursue your dreams. Let the coming year be a chapter of prosperity, resilience, and personal triumphs!

May the holiday season and the approaching New Year be a time of rejuvenation, surrounded by the love of those dear to you. May your days be merry and bright, and your journey into 2024 be filled with success and fulfillment!

Warmest regards,

ITD World Vietnam Team



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