

## **Worksheets To Use With The Happiness Trap**

The worksheets in this compilation are designed to be used in conjunction with The Happiness Trap. If you are working with a coach or therapist, they will probably want you to fill them in and bring them into your sessions.

As a general rule, read the chapter first, and then take a look at the worksheet; it should then be self-explanatory.

Many of these worksheets you will want to use repeatedly for different issues in different areas of your life. I hope you find them helpful.

*All the best,  
Russ Harris*

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# How to Get the Most Out Of 'The Happiness Trap'

## Reading the Book

There are two ways to read the book. You can either work through it slowly and steadily, doing the exercises as you go. Or you can read it from cover to cover very rapidly, and then go back and work through it at your leisure. You can also enhance the exercises in the book by using the free online resources at

[http://www.thehappinesstrap.com/free\\_resources](http://www.thehappinesstrap.com/free_resources)

## Stuck or Confused?

If you ever get stuck or confused, I'd suggest you join the Yahoo list serve, entitled 'ACT for the Public':

[http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/ACT\\_for\\_the\\_Public/join](http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/ACT_for_the_Public/join)

There's no cost involved. You can post emails to the group if ever you are confused, or concerned, or just bogged down – and you will quickly receive supportive responses from other members of the public and/or from the many therapists (including myself) who are also on the list.

## Prioritize Your Health and Wellbeing

If you are a typical reader, then you are already a very busy person. You are juggling multiple demands and rarely have any time left over for yourself. Thus, if you want this book to make a real difference in your life, you will have to put your health and wellbeing above some of the other demands upon your time. Can you schedule in some time for reading? Can you schedule in some time for practicing the exercises? Even 30 minutes a day to read and/or practice can make a huge difference. Are you willing to give up 30 minutes of TV or other time-eating activities?

## Practice

Whoever said "Practice makes perfect" was lying. But practice does lead to improvement. Like any new skills, the exercises and strategies in this book do require practice – they do not come naturally, or magically happen simply as a result of reading. And like any new skill, the more you practice it, the easier it becomes and the more naturalistic.

## Be Patient

Be patient with yourself. As you work through the book, there are times when you will inevitably screw up, fail, and forget things. This is because you are a human being, not a saint or a guru or a superhero. So please, allow yourself permission to be human. And give yourself as much time as you need to get a good handle on your new skills.

## Consider Using a CD or MP3 Recording

The CDs and MP3 recordings available from [www.thehappinesstrap.com](http://www.thehappinesstrap.com) have been specifically designed for use with this book. They will substantially enhance the benefits of the book for you. Mindfulness skills are much easier to develop initially when you have a voice guiding you.

## Repetition

I intended The Happiness Trap to be the sort of book that you read not just once, but again and again. My hope is that after you've been through it once, you repeatedly revisit it. The small chapters make it an ideal book for dipping into.

## Working With a Coach or Therapist:

While The Happiness Trap is primarily written as a self-help book for use on your own, it is also a valuable adjunct to therapy and coaching. Indeed the book flows along, chapter by chapter, in much the same way as you might typically work with a coach or therapist. If your therapist or coach has done some training in ACT they will be familiar with many of the exercises and metaphors in the book, but probably not all of them, so it is a good idea if they read the book too.

You can use the book as an adjunct in two main ways:

1. You can read a chapter or two (or three) before each session, then discuss in session how the reading applies to you, and then practice the relevant exercises during the session.
2. You can read relevant chapters after a session, to build on what you have experienced or learned during the session.

Whichever way you do it, the worksheets from the free resources section can be very helpful; use them as you are reading the relevant chapter.

## To Find an ACT Therapist

If you want to find an ACT therapist in Australia, [click here](#)

If you want to find an ACT therapist in USA, UK and other countries, [click here](#)

*I hope you enjoy reading it and I trust you'll find it helpful  
Cheers, Russ Harris*

## Control of Thoughts and Feelings Questionnaire

This questionnaire has been adapted from similar ones developed by Steven Hayes, Frank Bond, and others. For each pair of statements, please circle the one that most accurately fits how you feel. The answer you choose doesn't have to be absolutely 100 percent true for you all the time; just pick the answer which seems to be more representative of your general attitude.

- 1a. I must have good control of my feelings in order to be successful in life.  
1b. It is unnecessary for me to control my feelings in order to be successful in life.
- 2a. Anxiety is bad.  
2b. Anxiety is neither good nor bad. It is merely an uncomfortable feeling.
- 3a. Negative thoughts and feelings will harm you if you don't control or get rid of them.  
3b. Negative thoughts and feelings won't harm you even if they feel unpleasant.
- 4a. I'm afraid of some of my strong feelings.  
4b. I'm not afraid of any feelings, no matter how strong.
- 5a. In order for me to do something important, I have to get rid of all my doubts.  
5b. I can do something important, even when doubts are present.
- 6a. When negative thoughts and feelings arise, it's important to reduce or get rid of them as quickly as possible.  
6b. Trying to reduce or get rid of negative thoughts and feelings frequently causes problems. If I simply allow them to be, then they will change as a natural part of living.
- 7a. The best method of managing negative thoughts and feelings is to analyze them; then utilize that knowledge to get rid of them.  
7b. The best method of managing negative thoughts and feelings is to acknowledge their presence and let them be, without having to analyze or judge them.
- 8a. I will become "happy" and "healthy" by improving my ability to avoid, reduce, or get rid of negative thoughts and feelings.  
8b. I will become "happy" and "healthy" by allowing negative thoughts and feelings to come and go of their own accord and learning to live effectively when they are present.
- 9a. If I can't suppress or get rid of a negative emotional reaction, it's a sign of personal failure or weakness.  
9b. The need to control or get rid of a negative emotional reaction is a problem in itself.
- 10a. Having negative thoughts and feelings is an indication that I'm psychologically unhealthy or I've got problems.  
10b. Having negative thoughts and feelings means I'm a normal human being.
- 11a. People who are in control of their lives can generally control how they feel.  
11b. People who are in control of their lives do not need to control their feelings.
- 12a. It is not okay to feel anxious and I try hard to avoid it.  
12b. I don't like anxiety, but it's okay to feel it.
- 13a. Negative thoughts and feelings are a sign that there is something wrong with my life.  
13b. Negative thoughts and feelings are an inevitable part of life for everyone.
- 14a. I have to feel good before I can do something that's important and challenging.  
14b. I can do something that's important and challenging even if I'm feeling anxious or depressed.
- 15a. I try to suppress thoughts and feelings that I don't like by just not thinking about them.  
15b. I don't try to suppress thoughts and feelings that I don't like. I just let them come and go of their own accord.

To score your test, count the number of times you selected option "a" or "b."

You may like to repeat this test and see how your ideas have changed, after you have finished reading *The Happiness Trap*, or completed several sessions of ACT.

## The Costs of Avoidance Worksheet

Complete the following sentences:

The thoughts I'd most like to get rid of are:

The feelings I'd most like to get rid of are:

The sensations I'd most like to get rid of are:

The memories I'd most like to get rid of are:

Next, take a few minutes to write a list of every single thing you've tried in order to avoid or get rid of these unpleasant thoughts or feelings. Try to remember every strategy you have ever used (whether deliberately or by default). Below is a guide to help you:

**Distraction:** list everything you have ever done to distract yourself from, or 'zone out', or take your mind off these painful thoughts, feelings, sensations or memories.

**Opting out:** list all the activities, interests, events, people, or places that you have avoided or withdrawn from, and all the opportunities you have missed out on, because you did not feel good or wanted to avoid feeling bad:

**Thinking strategies:** list all the different ways of thinking you have tried (deliberately or unintentionally) when painful thoughts and feelings started showing up. Tick any of the following that you have done, and write in any others:

- Worrying
- Dwelling on the past
- Fantasizing about the future
- Imagining escape scenarios (eg leaving your job or your partner)
- Imagining revenge scenarios
- Imagining suicide scenarios
- Thinking ‘It’s not fair ...’
- Thinking ‘If only ....’
- Thinking of killing yourself
- Blaming yourself
- Blaming others
- Blaming the world
- Talking logically to yourself
- Talking positively to yourself
- Talking negatively to yourself
- Analyzing yourself (trying to figure out why you are like this)
- Analyzing the situation (trying to figure out why this happened)
- Analyzing others (trying to figure out why they are like this)

**Substances:** list all the substances you have ever used to try and feel better, including foods, drinks, cigarettes, recreational drugs, and prescription drugs

**Anything else:** write down anything else you can think of you have ever tried to make yourself feel a bit better, or not so bad, when these painful thoughts and feelings showed up.

Once you’ve done that, go through your list and for each item, ask yourself:

1. Did this get rid of my painful thoughts and feelings *in the long term*?
2. Did it bring me closer to a rich, full, and meaningful life?
3. If the answer to question 2 is “no”, then what did this cost me in terms of time, energy, money, health, relationships, and vitality?

# AVOIDANCE & SUFFERING DIARY

Fill this in at least once a day, to increase awareness around the costs of trying to avoid or get rid of painful thoughts and feelings.

Painful Thoughts/ Feelings/ Sensations/ Memories that showed up today	What I did to escape, avoid, get rid of them, or distract myself from them	What that cost me in terms of health, vitality, relationship issues, getting stuck, increasing pain, wasted time/money/energy etc.

At the end of each day note the defusion techniques you used, in what situation, how often, whether defusion occurred, and any benefits and/or difficulties you noticed. Remember the aim of defusion is not to 'feel good' or to get rid of 'bad' thoughts; it is to help you 'be present' and reduce the influence of unhelpful thoughts and beliefs over your behavior.

<b>Defusion Practice Form</b>			
Name of technique (s) Day/Date	Practiced: yes/ no In what situation(s)? How often?	Did defusion occur? yes/ no/ a little	Benefits and/or difficulties

Expansion means opening up and making room for difficult feelings, urges and sensations – thereby allowing them to ‘flow through’ you without a struggle. You don’t have to like or want these feelings – you just make room for them and allow them to be there even though they are unpleasant. Once this skill is learned, if these feelings should resurface, you can rapidly make room for them and let them ‘flow on by’ – so you can invest your time and energy in doing meaningful life-enhancing activities, instead of struggling. Aim to practice at least once a day breathing into and making room for difficult feelings and sensations

<b>Expansion Practice Form</b>			
Day/Date/Time Feelings/sensations	How many minutes of practice? Struggle switch rating, 0 -10? 10 = switch fully on 0 = switch fully off (no struggle)	Used ‘Mindfulness Skills: Vol 1 CD’ yes/ no	Benefits and/or difficulties

## Informal Mindfulness Exercises

*We're all busy, and many of us don't have time (or are unwilling to make time) to formally practice mindfulness skills. However, we can practice informally throughout the day. Here are a couple of examples:*

### 1) Mindfulness in Your Morning Routine

Pick an activity that constitutes part of your daily morning routine, such as brushing your teeth, shaving, or having a shower. When you do it, totally focus on what you are doing: the body movements, the taste, the touch, the smell, the sight, the sound etc.

For example, when you're in the shower, notice the sounds of the water as it sprays out of the nozzle, and as it hits your body as it gurgles down the hole. Notice the temperature of the water, and the feel of it in your hair, and on your shoulders, and running down our legs. Notice the smell of the soap and shampoo, and the feel of them against your skin. Notice the sight of the water droplets on the walls or shower screen, the water dripping down your body and the steam rising upwards. Notice the movements of your arms as you wash or scrub or shampoo.

When thoughts arise, acknowledge them, let them be, and bring your attention back to the shower.

Again and again, your attention will wander. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what distracted you, and bring your attention back to the shower.

### 2) Mindfulness of Domestic Chores

Pick a chore that you normally try to rush through, or distract yourself from; or one for which you just 'grit your teeth' and try to 'get through it'. For example: ironing clothes, washing dishes, vacuuming floors, making the kids' lunches. Aim to do this chore as a mindfulness practice.

E.g., when ironing clothes: notice the color and shape of the clothing, and the pattern made by the creases, and the new pattern as the creases disappear. Notice the hiss of the steam, the creak of the ironing board, the faint sound of the iron moving over the material. Notice the grip of your hand on the iron, and the movement of your arm and your shoulder.

If boredom or frustration arises, simply acknowledge it, and bring your attention back to the task at hand.

When thoughts arise, acknowledge them, let them be, and bring your attention back to what you are doing.

Again and again, your attention will wander. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what distracted you, and bring your attention back to your current activity.

*Now write down some informal mindfulness exercises for yourself:*

During my morning routine, I will practice mindfulness of .....

During my evening routine, I will practice mindfulness of .....

During the week, I will practice mindfulness of the following chore (s) .....

*Now write down any other quick 'n' easy informal mindfulness exercises you can think of – e.g. while waiting in queues or at traffic lights you could practice mindfulness of your impatience; or when eating dinner, you could aim to eat the first two mouthfuls mindfully.*

*At the end of each week, pull this sheet out and see how well you have followed it.*



## VALUES WORKSHEET (Adapted from Kelly Wilson's Valued Living Questionnaire)

Deep down inside, what is important to you? What do you want your life to stand for? What sort of qualities do you want to cultivate as a person? How do you want to be in your relationships with others? Values are our heart's deepest desires for the way we want to interact with and relate to the world, other people, and ourselves. They are leading principles that can guide us and motivate us as we move through life.

Values are not the same as goals. Values are directions we keep moving in, whereas goals are what we want to achieve along the way. A value is like heading North; a goal is like the river or mountain or valley we aim to cross whilst traveling in that direction. Goals can be achieved or 'crossed off', whereas values are an ongoing process. For example, if you want to be a loving, caring, supportive partner, that is a value – an ongoing process. If you stop being loving, caring and supportive, then you are no longer a loving, caring, supportive partner; you are no longer living by that value. In contrast, if you want to get married, that's a goal - it can be 'crossed off' or achieved. Once you're married, you're married – even if you start treating your partner very badly. If you want a better job, that's a goal. Once you've got it - goal achieved. But if you want to fully apply yourself at work, that's a value – an ongoing process.

The following are areas of life that are valued by some people. Not everyone has the same values, and this is not a test to see whether you have the "correct" values. Think about each area in terms of general life directions, rather than in terms of specific goals. There may be certain areas that you don't value much; you may skip them if you wish. There may be areas that overlap – e.g. if you value hiking in the mountains, that may come under both physical health and recreation. It is also important that you write down what you would value if there were nothing in your way. What's important? What do you care about? And what you would like to work towards?

- 1. Family relations.** What sort of brother/sister, son/daughter, uncle/auntie do you want to be? What personal qualities would you like to bring to those relationships? What sort of relationships would you like to build? How would you interact with others if you were the ideal you in these relationships?
- 2. Marriage/couples/intimate relations.** What sort of partner would you like to be in an intimate relationship? What personal qualities would you like to develop? What sort of relationship would you like to build? How would you interact with your partner if you were the 'ideal you' in this relationship?
- 3. Parenting.** What sort of parent would you like to be? What sort of qualities would you like to have? What sort of relationships would you like to build with your children? How would you behave if you were the 'ideal you'.
- 4. Friendships/social life.** What sort of qualities would you like to bring to your friendships? If you could be the best friend possible, how would you behave towards your friends? What sort of friendships would you like to build?
- 5. Career/employment.** What do you value in your work? What would make it more meaningful? What kind of worker would you like to be? If you were living up to your own ideal standards, what personal qualities would you like to bring to your work? What sort of work relations would you like to build?
- 6. Education/personal growth and development.** What do you value about learning, education, training, or personal growth? What new skills would you like to learn? What knowledge would you like to gain? What further education appeals to you? What sort of student would you like to be? What personal qualities would you like to apply?
- 7. Recreation/fun/leisure.** What sorts of hobbies, sports, or leisure activities do you enjoy? How do you relax and unwind? How do you have fun? What sorts of activities would you like to do?
- 8. Spirituality.** Whatever spirituality means to you is fine. It may be as simple as communing with nature, or as formal as participation in an organised religious group. What is important to you in this area of life?
- 9. Citizenship/ environment/ community life.** How would you like to contribute to your community or environment, e.g. through volunteering, or recycling, or supporting a group/ charity/ political party? What sort of environments would you like to create at home, and at work? What environments would you like to spend more time in?
- 10. Health/physical well-being.** What are your values related to maintaining your physical well-being? How do you want to look after your health, with regard to sleep, diet, exercise, smoking, alcohol, etc? Why is this important?

## Values Assessment Rating Form

Read through the accompanying values sheet. For each of the ten domains, write a few words to summarise your valued direction, Eg 'To be a loving, supportive, caring, partner.' Rate how important this value is to you on a scale of 0 (low importance) to 10 (high importance). It's okay to have several values scoring the same number. Rate how successfully you have lived this value during the past month on a scale of 0 (not at all successfully) to 10 (very successfully). Finally rank these valued directions in order of the importance you place on working on them right now, with 10 as the highest rank, and 9 the next highest, and so on.

Domain	Valued direction (Write a <u>brief</u> summary, in one or two sentences, or a few key words.)	Importance	Success	Rank
Couples/ intimate relationships				
Parenting				
Family relations				
Social relations				
Employment				
Education and training				
Recreation				
Spirituality				
Citizenship/ community				
Health/ Physical well-being`				

# CLARIFYING YOUR VALUES (Adapted From Tobias Lundgren's Bull's Eye Worksheet)

Deep down inside, what is important to you? What do you want your life to stand for? What sort of qualities do you want to cultivate as a person? How do you want to be in your relationships with others? Values are our heart's deepest desires for the way we want to interact with and relate to the world, other people, and ourselves. They are leading principles that can guide us and motivate us as we move through life. Values reflect *what* you want to do, and *how* you want to do it. They are about how you want to behave towards your friends, your family, yourself, your environment, your work, etc.

Values are not the same as goals. Values involve ongoing action; they are like directions we keep moving in, whereas goals are what we want to achieve along the way. A value is like heading West; a goal is like the river or mountain or valley we aim to cross whilst traveling in that direction. Goals can be achieved or 'crossed off', whereas values are ongoing. (No matter how far West you go, you never reach it!) For example, if you want to be a loving, caring, supportive partner, that is a value: it involves ongoing action. In contrast, if you want to get married, that's a goal - it can be 'crossed off' or achieved. If you want a better job, that's a goal. Once you've got it - goal achieved. But if you want to fully apply yourself at work, contribute your best, and engage fully in what you're doing, that's a value: it involves ongoing action.

## THE BULL'S EYE

The 'Bull's Eye' is a values-clarification exercise designed by a Swedish ACT therapist called Tobias Lundgren. (I have rewritten it.) The dartboard on the next page is divided into four important domains of life: work/education, leisure, relationships and personal growth/health. To begin with, please write down your values in these 4 areas of life. Not everyone has the same values, and this is not a test to see whether you have the "correct" ones. Think in terms of general life directions, rather than in terms of specific goals. There may be values that overlap – e.g. if you value studying psychology, that may come under both Education and Personal Growth. Write down what you would value if there were nothing in your way, nothing stopping you. What's important? What do you care about? And what you would like to work towards? Your value should not be a specific goal but instead reflect a way you would like to live your life over time. For example, to accompany your son to a football game might be a goal; to be an involved and interested parent might be the underlying value. **Note!** Make sure they are *your* values, not anyone else's. It is *your* personal values that are important!

**1. Work/Education:** refers to your workplace & career, education and knowledge, skills development. (This may include volunteering and other forms of unpaid work). How do you want to be towards your clients, customers, colleagues, employees, fellow workers? What personal qualities do you want to bring to your work? What skills do you want to develop?

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**2. Relationships:** refers to intimacy, closeness, friendship and bonding in your life: it includes relationships with your partner, children, parents, relatives, friends, co-workers, and other social contacts. What sort of relationships do you want to build? How do you want to be in these relationships? What personal qualities do you want to develop?

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**3. Personal Growth/Health:** refers to your ongoing development as a human being. This may include include organized religion, personal expressions of spirituality, creativity, developing life skills, meditation, yoga, getting out into nature; exercise, nutrition, and addressing health risk factors like smoking.

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**4. Leisure:** refers to how you play, relax, stimulate, or enjoy yourself; your hobbies or other activities for rest, recreation, fun and creativity.

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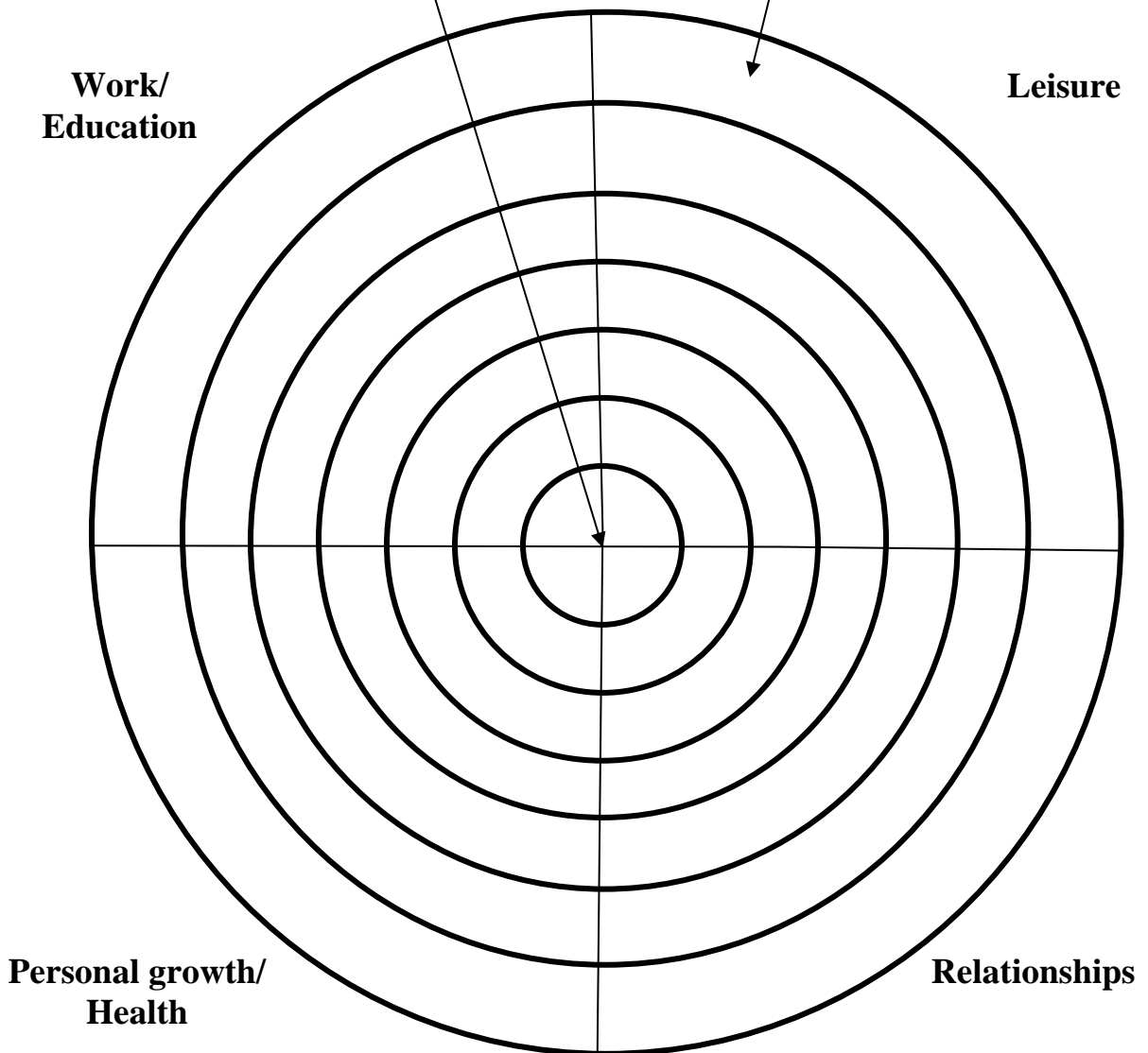
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**THE BULL'S EYE:** Read through your values, then make an X in each area of the dart board, to represent where you stand today. An X in the Bull's Eye (the centre of the board) means that you are living fully by your values in that area of life. An X far from Bull's Eye means that you are way off the mark in terms of living by your values.

Since there are four areas of valued living, you should mark **four Xs** on the dart board.

*I am living fully by my values*

*I am acting very inconsistently with my values*



**YOUR VALUES:** *What really matters to you, deep in your heart? What do you want to do with your time on this planet? What sort of person do you want to be? What personal strengths or qualities do you want to develop?*

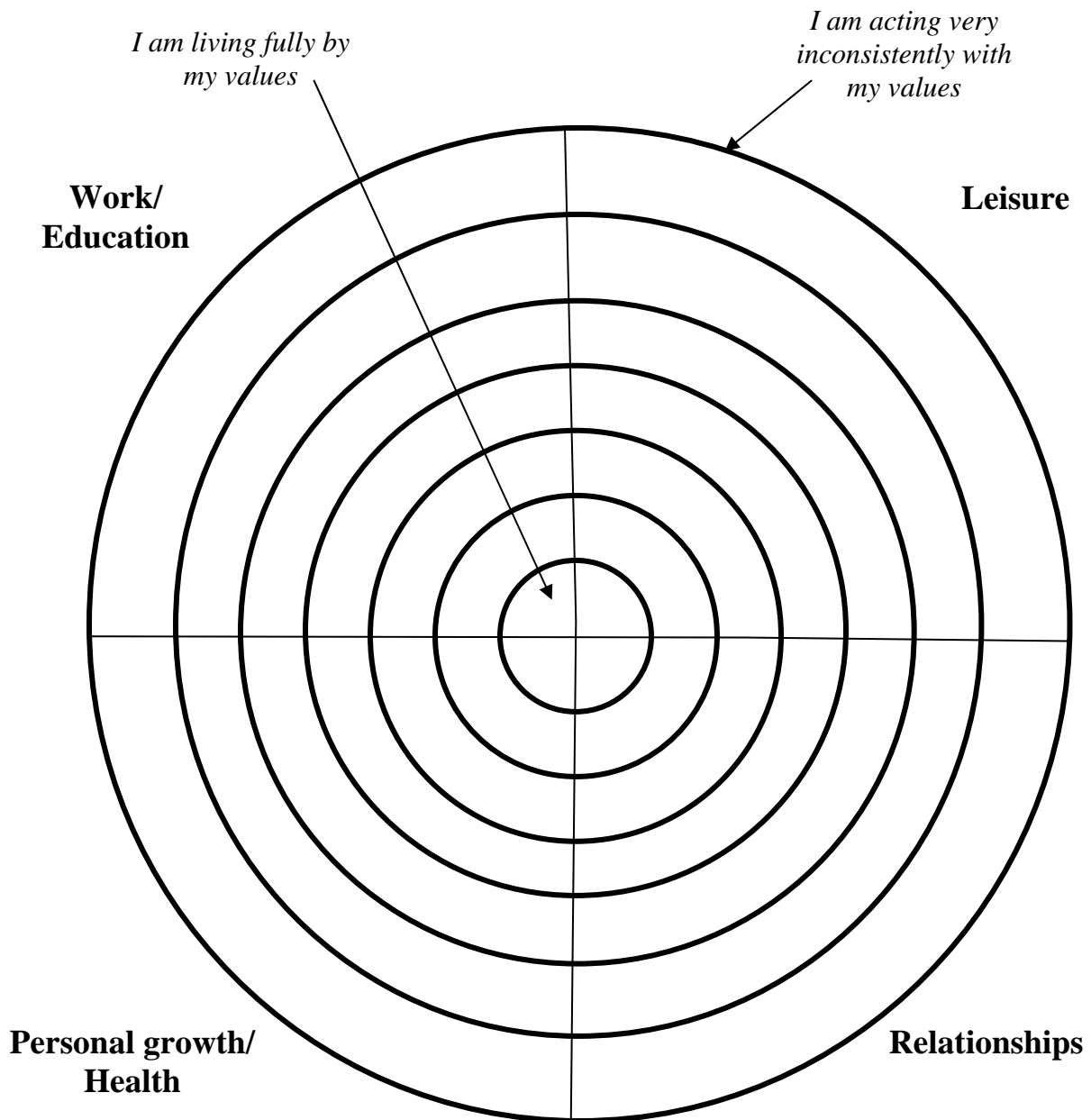
**1. Work/Education:** includes workplace, career, education, skills development, etc.

**2. Relationships:** includes your partner, children, parents, relatives, friends, co-workers, and other social contacts.

**3. Personal Growth/Health:** may include religion, spirituality, creativity, life skills, meditation, yoga, nature; exercise, nutrition, and/or addressing health risk factors like smoking, alcohol, drugs or overeating etc

**4. Leisure:** how you play, relax, stimulate, or enjoy yourself; activities for rest, recreation, fun and creativity.

**THE BULL'S EYE:** make an X in each area of the dart board, to represent where you stand today.



## Goal Setting Worksheet

*Step 1: A key focus in ACT is setting our goals guided by our values. Therefore, Step 1, before any goal setting, is to clarify what value(s) is (are) underlying your goals.*

### **Step 1: My value(s) underlying these goals are:**

*When it comes to setting goals, make sure you set a SMART goal. There are different versions of this acronym. In my version, SMART stands for:*

- ***Specific:** specify the actions you will take, when and where you will do so, and who or what is involved. Example of a vague or non-specific goal: "I will spend more time with my kids." A specific goal: "I will take the kids to the park on Saturday to play baseball." A non-specific goal: "I will be more loving towards my wife." A specific goal: "I will ring my wife at lunchtime and tell her I love her."*
- ***Meaningful:** The goal should be personally meaningful to you. If it is genuinely guided by your values, as opposed to following a rigid rule, or trying to please others, or trying to avoid some pain, then it will be meaningful. If it lacks a sense of meaning or purpose, check in and see if it is really guided by your values.*
- ***Adaptive:** Does the goal help you to take your life forwards in a direction that, as far as you can predict, is likely to improve the quality of that life?*
- ***Realistic:** The goal should be realistically achievable. Take into account your health, competing demands on your time, financial status, and whether you have the skills to achieve it.*
- ***Time-bound:** to increase the specificity of your goal, set a day, date and time for it. If this is not possible, set as accurate a time limit as you can.*

*Also, make sure it's a live person's goal, not a dead person's goal. (If you can't remember what that means, re-read Chapter 27 of *The Happiness Trap*.)*

*Step 2: Write down a graduated series of goals, starting from tiny simple goals that can be achieved right away, to long term goals that may not be achieved for months or years.*

### **Step 2: Some of My Goals Are:**

- **An Immediate Goal** (something small, simple, easy, I can do in the next 24 hours)
  
- **Short Term Goals** (things I can do over the next few days and weeks)
  
- **Medium Term Goal(s)** (things I can do over the next few weeks and months)
  
- **Long Term Goal(s)** (things I can do over the next few months and years)

## Overcoming F.E.A.R. - 1

This handout complements chapter 30 of *The Happiness Trap*, although its content differs somewhat from the book. Let's assume you have clarified your values, and set yourself a goal – but you haven't followed through on it. What stopped you? The F.E.A.R. acronym covers most of the common barriers:

- F = Fusion (stuff your mind tells you that gets in the way when you get caught up in it)
- E = Excessive goals (your goal is too big, or you lack the skills, or you lack the resources)
- A = Avoidance of discomfort (unwillingness to make room for the discomfort this challenge brings)
- R = Remoteness from values (losing touch with - or forgetting - what is important or meaningful about this)

So now, in as few words as possible, write down everything that has stopped you following through:

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

6)

7)

8)

Now go back, and label each answer with one or two of the letters F, E, A, or R – whichever best describe this barrier. In other words, was it F = Fusion with a story (e.g. I'll fail; it's too hard; I'll do it later; I'm too weak; I can't do it); was it E = Excessive goal (you lacked the time, money, health, facilities, skills, or support necessary; or it was just too big and you got overwhelmed); was it A = Avoidance of discomfort (you were unwilling to make room for the anxiety, frustration, fear of failure, or other uncomfortable thoughts and feelings); or was it R = remoteness from your values (you forgot or lost touch with the values underlying this goal)?

The antidote to F.E.A.R. is D.A.R.E.

D = Defusion

A = Acceptance of discomfort

R = Realistic goals

E = Embracing values

Go through your barriers, one by one, and work out how you can deal with them, using D.A.R.E. Below, you'll find some suggestions to help you.

## Overcoming F.E.A.R. – 2

Defusion strategies: name the story, thank your mind, acknowledge ‘Here’s reason-giving’ or ‘Here’s judging’, name the demon/monster/passenger, recognize this is Radio Doom & Gloom broadcasting, or simply let the thoughts come and go like passing cars.

Acceptance strategies: name the feeling, observe it like a curious scientist, rate it on a scale of 1 to 10, commit to allowing it, breathe into it, make room for it, give it a shape and color,

Realistic goal-setting: if you lack skills, set goals around learning them; if your goal is too big, break it down into small chunks; if you lack resources, brainstorm how you can get them; if the goal is truly impossible, e.g. due to health or financial issues, or external barriers over which you have no direct influence, then set a different one.

Embracing values: connect with what matters to you about this goal. Is it truly meaningful? Is it aligned with your values? Is it truly important? Is it moving your life forward in the direction you wish to go?

Using these ideas (and others of your own, or of your therapist/coach), write down how you can respond to the barriers you listed above.

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

6)

7)

8)

Finally, ask yourself this question: am I willing to make room for the difficult thoughts and feelings that show up, without getting caught up in them or struggling with them, and take effective action, in order to do what matters, deep in my heart?

If so: go ahead and give it a go.

If not, consider these questions:

Does this really and truly matter to you?

If it does, then what is the cost to you of avoiding it or putting it off?

Would you rather have the vitality-draining pain of staying stuck, or the life-enhancing pain of moving forward?

## **The Willingness and Action Plan**

My goal is to (be specific):

The values underlying my goal are:

The actions I will take to achieve that goal are (be specific):

The thoughts/memories, feelings, sensations, urges I'm willing to make room for (in order to achieve this goal):-

- Thoughts/memories:

- Feelings:

- Sensations:

- Urges:

- It would be useful to remind myself that:

- If necessary, I can break this goal down into smaller steps, such as:

- The smallest, easiest step I can begin with is:

- The time, day and date that I will take that first step, is:

## What To Do In A Crisis

A crisis can present in many different forms, from the death of a loved one, to loss of a job, to collapse of a marriage, to financial disaster. When you are hit by a crisis, an emotional storm is likely to whip through your mind and body, tossing painful thoughts and feelings in all directions. Here's what you can do to survive and thrive: **S.T.O.P.**

### Slow your breathing

- Take a few deep breaths, and mindfully observe the breath flowing in and flowing out. This will help to anchor you in the present.

### Take note

- Take note of your experience in this moment. Notice what you are thinking. Notice what you are feeling. Notice what you are doing. Notice how your thoughts and feelings are swirling around, and can easily carry you away if you allow them.

### Open up

- Open up around your feelings. Breathe into them and make room for them. Open up to your thoughts too: take a step back and give them some room to move, without holding onto them or trying to push them away. See them for what they are and give them space, rather than fusing with them.

### Pursue your values

- Once you've done the above three steps, you will be in a mental state of mindfulness. The next step is to respond to the crisis by pursuing a valued course of action. Connect with your values: ask yourself, 'What do I want to be about, in the face of this crisis? What do I want to stand for? How would I like to act, so that I can look back years from now and feel proud of my response?'

## Things to Consider

- 1) Do you need, or would you benefit from help/assistance/support/advice? If so, what friends, neighbors, or relatives can you contact? What professionals could you arrange to see? (If necessary, what helpline numbers could you call?)
- 2) Have you experienced anything similar before? If so, how did you respond that was useful and helpful in the long term? Is there anything you learned from that experience that you can usefully apply now?
- 3) Is there anything you can do to improve the situation in any way? Are there any TINY steps you could take immediately that could be helpful? What are the smallest, simplest, easiest, tiny steps you could take:
  - a) in the next few minutes
  - b) in the next few hours
  - c) in the next few days*Note: the first step might simply be to spend a few minutes practicing some mindful breathing – or to take out a pen and paper and write an action plan.*
- 4) If there is nothing you can do to improve the situation, then are you willing to practice acceptance, using expansion and defusion skills, while engaging fully in the present moment? And given that the situation is unchangeable, how can you spend your time and energy constructively, rather than worrying or blaming or dwelling? Again, reconnect with your values: what do you want to be about in response to this situation? What are some tiny values-driven steps you can take?
- 5) You don't get to choose the deck of cards you are dealt in life; you only get to choose how you play with them. So a useful question to ask is: 'Given this is the hand I've been dealt, what's the best way to play with it? What personal strengths can I develop or strengthen as I go through this ordeal? How can I learn and grow from this experience?' *Note: any painful experience is an opportunity to develop your mindfulness skills.*
- 6) Be compassionate to yourself. Ask yourself, 'If someone I loved was going through this experience, feeling what I am feeling – if I wanted to be kind and caring towards them, how would I treat them? How would I behave towards them? What might I say or do?' Then try treating yourself the same way.
- 7) Finally, after a crisis, there is often a period of grief. Grief is a big topic. I've written previously, in one of my newsletters, about my own terrible grief when my son was diagnosed with autism. If you'd like to read that article, and learn how you can use ACT to deal with grief, you can download the newsletter from here: [http://www.actmindfully.com.au/upimages/ACT\\_Mindfully\\_Feb\\_2008\\_Newsletter.doc](http://www.actmindfully.com.au/upimages/ACT_Mindfully_Feb_2008_Newsletter.doc)