

How to Stop Existing and Start Living!

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The many benefits of building a full and enriched life.

Life is, as they say, what you make it. And what we make of our lives can be the very making of us. One of the tenets of Buddhism speaks of the necessity to create interest in life. In other words, we are responsible for creating purpose in our lives, at every age. We all have life tasks and responsibilities that demand much of our time and energy. Often, we fall into routines that leave us little or no time to explore life beyond our to-do list.

What's more, many of us are told from the time we are young children to find a lucrative career path, work hard, stick to it and build a life that is safe and secure. We end up thinking that life is all about acquiring material goods and creating financial security to keep our families safe, sound, and comfortable. We can end up so focused on our goals, and our work that we miss out on much of what makes life enjoyable and meaningful. We end up postponing enjoyment in life until we have the perfect job, house, spouse, family, retirement plan... The list goes on. We are left with little time for making genuine connections with others. In doing so, we postpone the joy of creating interest in our life.

Nineteenth-century American author John A. Shedd wrote: "A ship is safe in harbor, but that's not what a ship is for." His metaphor profoundly illustrates the concept of a life spent merely existing, rather than living. Life is about more than work and material wealth and possessions. If we don't create interest in life, we are missing the fun of being alive. And when we miss out on the fun, we're not really living, we're just existing.

What makes us happy and healthy

In 1938, Harvard University began what has become one of the world's most ambitious

and longest-running studies examining what makes us happy and healthy. For over 80 years, researchers in the Harvard Study of Adult Development have followed hundreds of people throughout their lives. The study began with a cohort of over 250 students (including President John F. Kennedy), and has since expanded to include offspring and spouses, and a number of inner-city subjects from Boston, Massachusetts.

What this extraordinary research shows is that the key to health and happiness does not lie in wealth or possessions, but in maintaining quality relationships with family, friends, community, and the world.

Creating a full, enriched life

That's right. It is the quality of our connections with family and friends that matter most in life and keeps us happy and healthy. When we develop connections with other people through shared interests, we open the door to life-long friendships. To create a full and enriched life, we need to look beyond our work and career, expand our social network, engage and enjoy learning, exploring, and experiencing new things.

When we strive to create interest in life, we build meaningful connections with people beyond our family and inner circle. We open doors and discover new and exciting aspects of other people, the world, and ourselves. Our lives become richer, and more fulfilled, and we grow in ways we could not otherwise have imagined. We become interested in life and interesting to others! In short, we stop existing and start living.

Where and how to begin

These days, with so much on our plates, and

little time to spare, we often have no idea where to begin, or how to start.

As anyone with a busy life can attest to, what gets scheduled gets done. A great way to start is to set an intention and schedule time in your life to devote to the pursuit of new interests, even if you have no idea what your interests might be. We need to try new things in order to even know what may be enjoyable. If you don't try it, you cannot surely say you won't possibly enjoy it. Think about hobbies or skills that spark your sense of curiosity. If you would like to know how to paint landscapes or portraits, take yourself to an art gallery or an exhibit. Chances are, no matter what you're interested in exploring, someone somewhere is offering a class, group, or event that will help get you started. Sports, travel, food, the arts, helping others, storytelling, crafts, gardening... whatever sparks your interest, you will find a way to become engaged and connected. When we make time and give ourselves permission to create interest in life, we open ourselves and our lives up to the possibility of broader horizons, new and fulfilling relationships, and joyful experiences.

Factoring yourself into the equation of your life

When you begin to factor what interests you into the equation of your life, you expand your horizons. By investing time and energy in yourself you enrich not only your own life but the lives of everyone around you. You become more dynamic, passionate about life, engaged, and connected to others. You stop merely existing. You start living!

How to Start Living!

There's life beyond our life tasks and responsibilities, and it's up to us to find and develop our passions and build meaningful connections with people who share our interests. Here are five easy steps to help you move beyond your daily routines and ignite interest in life:

Commit to the intention of creating more interest in life. Prioritizing something is the first step in kick-starting interest in life.

Schedule time for yourself to explore what might interest you. As every busy person knows, what gets scheduled gets done. Even if you have just one hour a week, make time for yourself to think, imagine, explore and dream about where your new interests might lie.

Change up familiar routines. Take a different way home, and pay attention to what you might see or find. Does a riding stable, a hiking trail, a bookstore, or a restaurant you've never seen before spark your curiosity or interest? You need to try new things to see if you enjoy them.

Think about things that once brought you joy. Do you sometimes wish you'd kept the hobby of sketching or drawing you once enjoyed? Might you like to revisit your lost love of making music by taking piano or drum lessons, or reignite an abandoned passion of photography, cooking, restoring classic cars, or world cinema?

Join a club, group, or class, or volunteer your time to help those in need. If you have an interest in something you know nothing about, or you would like to enhance your understanding or skills in any area of life, chances are that someone somewhere is offering an opportunity to engage with and get to know others that will help you get started. Let's try!

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About the author

Dr. Monica Vermani is a Clinical Psychologist specializing in treating trauma, stress and mood & anxiety disorders, and the founder of Start Living Corporate Wellness. She is a well-known speaker and author on mental health and wellness. Her upcoming book, A Deeper Wellness, is scheduled for publication in 2021.

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Dr. Vermani has recently launched an exciting online self-help program, A Deeper Wellness, delivering powerful mental-health guidance, life skills, and knowledge that employees can access anywhere, anytime. <https://www.adeeperwellness.com/>

