

# How to Stop Existing and Start Living!

*The many benefits of building the full and authentic life you want*

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*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.*

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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 our 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 us and our families safe, sound, and comfortable. We can end up so focused on our goals, our careers 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 leave little time for connection to others and 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." This 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 find 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 one of the world's longest-running studies of 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, beginning with a cohort of over 250 students which included

President John F. Kennedy, and expanding the number of subjects over time to include their offspring and spouses, and a number of inner-city subjects from Boston, Massachusetts. What this extraordinary, ongoing 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 and maintaining an interest in life and what it offers.

## **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.

We build compassion with people beyond our family and inner circle. We open doors and discover new and exciting aspects of not only other people and the world, but of ourselves as well. Our lives become richer, 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, little time to spare, and no idea how to begin, where can we 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 build in time in your life to devote to the pursuit of interest, even if you have no idea

what that interest might be. Think about hobbies or skills that spark interest. 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 experiences. 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 or 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.

### **Factoring you 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 your 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, and 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 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?

**Think about** things that once brought you joy. Do you sometimes wish you'd kept 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 deepen your understanding, skills in any area of life, chances are that someone somewhere is offering a class and the opportunity to engage with and get to know others that will get you started.

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With Dr. Monica Vermani, C. Psych.



### **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, columnist and advocate in the field of mental health and wellness.*

*Her book, A Deeper Wellness, is currently available for pre-sale on Amazon, <https://www.book.a deeperwellness.com/> and her in-depth online self-help program, **A Deeper Wellness**, offers powerful mental health guidance, life skills, knowledge and healing, anywhere, anytime. <https://www.a deeperwellness.com/> <https://www.drmonicavermani.com/>*

