

The Philosophy
of Intentional
Living:
A Proven
Approach to
Holistic Success

**By Michael C. Daconta and
Joseph C. Daconta**

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ISBN: 9781097860005

THE PHILOSOPHY OF INTENTIONAL LIVING

DEDICATION

Our late Grandmother's mother was Olympia Matisse. She told us that we are related to the great French Artist Henri Matisse and that she met him. He recognized her talent and wanted her to study at his art school in France. Unfortunately, her mother would not let her go. We love the fact that Henri Matisse was both a great painter and a teacher. This book is dedicated to those who educate the next generations... we have attempted here to carry that torch forward.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

~ Michael's ~

This book was a labor of love and took more than five years to write. Its writing was intertwined with our daily living of these principles. In terms of our people skills, this book pushed us to work on our relationships, sociability and communication. I would like to thank the following people who helped make this possible:

Family is always first. To Lynne, my wife of thirty years, thank you for being by my side every step of the way. We have lived these principles together and enjoyed every step of the journey! To my brother Joseph, my co-author, thank you for taking this journey with me. This has been both fun and rewarding! I am grateful to you for putting up with my critiques and always rising to the occasion! To my children, Samantha, Gregory and CJ, who are now all grown adults and moving on with lives of their own – thank you for being great kids and I look forward to watching you shine as adults. Special congratulations to Gregory and Erin for getting married and committing to spend their lives together! To my Dad and step mom, Theresa, thank you for your advice on discipline (“pay now, play later”), enthusiastic support (and amazing Thanksgiving dinners)! To my Mom, thank you for your love of reading and confetti-laden gifts! To my Aunts and Uncles who always lend an ear and their wisdom: Paul and Cookie Rotondi (special thanks to Aunt Cookie for her encouragement and early reading of the book!), Gil and Francis McCabe, and Marie Armato. To my siblings, thank you for your love and support: Frank Daconta, Kristine Hayden, Lori Desmond (and her husband Rob), John Daconta, and Christian Daconta (and his wife Beth). Special kudos to my sister Kristine who is an elementary school teacher in Mesa, Arizona. To all the cousins and family at the cousin’s dinner: thank you for making Thanksgiving truly mean giving thanks! Specifically, I’d like to thank Nicole Rotondi, Rob Rotondi, Lianna Moore, Brock Moore (and their children Hailey, Sadie, and Dillon), Karrie Vecchio, Joseph Vecchio, Jo Ann LaDue, Ritch Katsock, Ryan LaDue, Jenna Katsock and Julia Katsock, Sarah and Dakota Myers, Jesse and Lisa Daconta. Special thanks to Karrie and Nicole for helping me plan the cousins dinners! Very special thanks to Rob Rotondi for allowing

Joseph and I to use his awesome collaboration website, briefcasecloud.com, for collaborating on this book!

To those who reviewed the book in its early stages we are grateful for your effort, comments and advice! Thanks to Matt DeFazio, Nick Rotter, Jon Perry, Nida Siddiqui, Ericka Shirley, and Salonika Bose. I really enjoyed our lunches together discussing the topics in this book and especially hearing how you applied some of the hard-won lessons learned! Special thanks to those with detailed written comments like Jon Perry and Nick Rotter. Extra special thanks to Christian Daconta for his detailed comments, debates and Sunday night discussions.

Thanks to my colleagues and mentors who encourage, guide and help me. To my wonderful colleagues and friends at InCadence with whom I work to build great software solutions and a great company: Vanessa Davidson, Derek Clemenzi, Sandy Corbett, Anthony Iasso, Al Danis, Dave Boyd, Don Acker, John McIntyre, Heather Poirier, Kimberly Rogers, Jesse Fullerton, Shane Mills, Danielle Mancini and all the other employees that make InCadence a great place to work! To my development team: Matt DeFazio, Nick Rotter, Sanju Jacob, Mike MacKenzie, Michael Bullock, Marcus Queen, Chris Coppock, Shiva Ramadoss, Oilides Rodrigues, Peter Lee, Bob Haskins, and Gary Taylor. To those superb managers and engineers I work with daily at Lockheed Martin to include Dan Bray, Jim Trettel, Carolyn Orzechowski, Andre Williams, Jackson Cowger, Matt Mace, Scott Hellenbach, Shawn Vettom, Terry Thai, Claire Gauthier, Raymond Chian, Tony Hong, Jamel Bearyman, Gerry Behnken, Brian Selmer, Glenn Conway, Sam Tryon, Jim Gillespie, Ryan Fike, Matt Parker, Derek Cox, Gary Friedman, Brittany White, Rob Udicious and all the other Lockheed managers and employees that make building great software an amazing experience!

To our current and future readers to whom we are very grateful for your effort, time and support! We very much look forward to hearing from you via our website! Finally, I apologize to anyone I have unintentionally left out who has helped us along the way. Thank you!

¹ <http://intentionallivingcommunity.com>

~ Joseph's ~

The following people deserve special thanks and recognition for contributing to our success at finishing this book.

To my best friend and most amazing big brother Mike, who with such an abundance of patience painstakingly taught me how to write in such a way so as to be worthy of contributing to this book. He withstood my hundreds of version re-writes over the years of writing. I will always remember to keep my verbal diarrhea to a minimum (but still struggle with the over use of “and”).

To Jasmine Eghbal, my Christian sister and work companion who was one of the first people to read and comment on our book chapters. It was your application of the concepts that contributed to motivating and taking our progress of the book to the next level. I owe you a debt of gratitude and from the bottom of my heart, thank you.

To my brother Christian, one of the few family members who took the time to read our book and contribute valuable worthy comments, thank you. We may never see eye to eye about our spiritual beliefs but I will always value and respect your opinion. I consider you one of my dearest friends; I am so thankful that you are my brother. To Aunt Cookie, who also was one of the first people to read our chapters and provided inspirational responses that helped us drive forward with fervor, thank you.

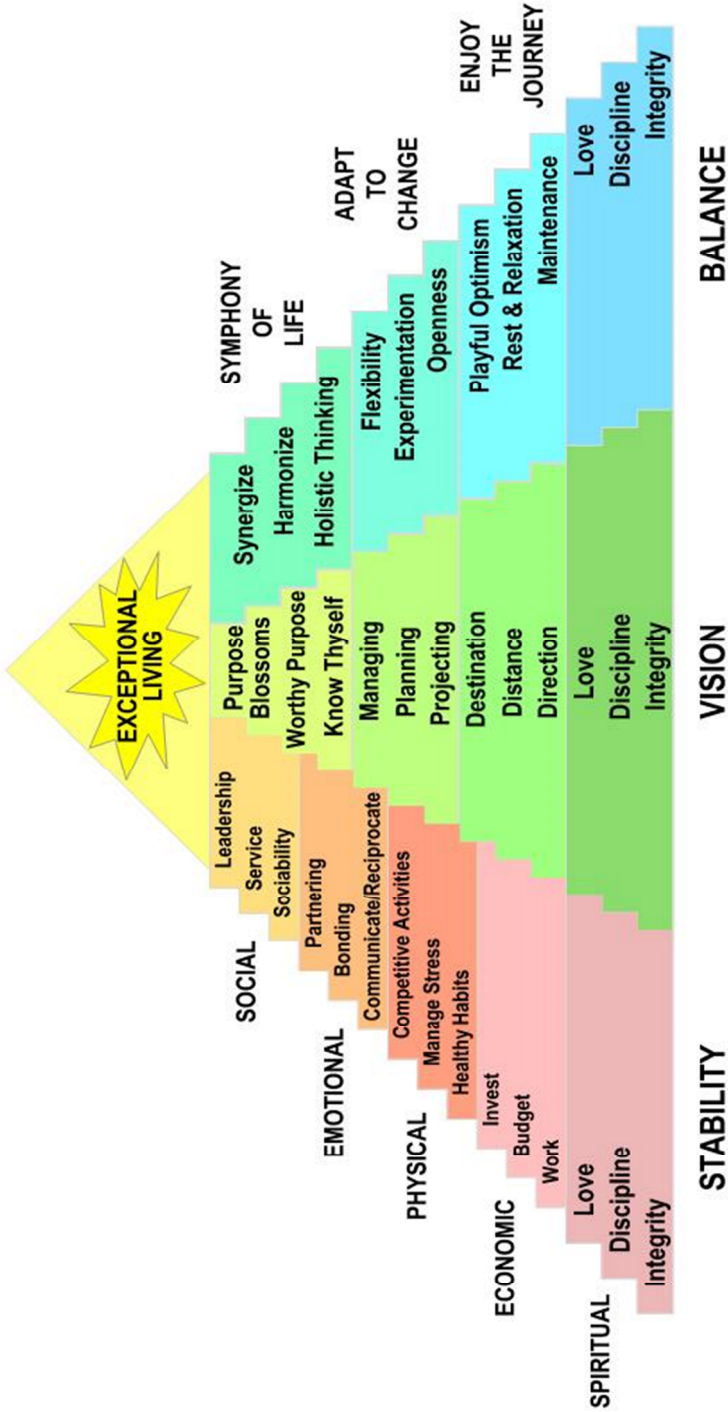
Special thanks to Ryan Hall, who always attentively listened when I spoke about our book's concepts and realizations over the years. To Preston Hibbard, a new friend that I made on this journey who was always there to lend a helping hand with my house projects, thank you. To Darrel Wood and Ash Patel, two people who took me into, and allowed me to return, to their work family during the hardest years of my professional career and who helped mentor me to become one of the best drainage engineers in Arizona, thank you. To Eric Neal, a longtime friend who has always been there to listen and give sound advice during my many trials and tribulations of life, thank you.

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To Paul Brower, a long time Christian brother who has been a spiritual advisor and friend for so many years, thank you; and my Christian family Sherman, Sharen and Robert Craig, whom I hope to reconnect with in the near future, thank you. To my bible study group: Jim Campbell, Craig Bolze, James Taillon, Ethan Boyle, Sheri Ellard, Jasmine and Ryan for putting up with my personal anecdotes and shortcomings during our monthly gatherings, thank you. It was such a blessing to be able to speak to friends that actually cared and would give enlightening criticism about my spiritual walk with God. Special thanks to Pastor Chuck Swindoll, a man I have never met personally but feel like I know from the decades of lessons and teachings that have provided me with such tremendous spiritual growth, thank you. If I have missed anyone, which I am sure I have, please forgive me and thank you.

Finally, I want to thank God for all He has done to make this book a reality; for it is my sincere hope that He shall bless this endeavor and enable it to glorify His name.

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1 - WHY INTENTIONAL LIVING?

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.”

- Theodore Roosevelt

In my senior year of college at NYU², I was talking to a friend about our plans for the future. I told him that since I was on an ROTC scholarship that I would be going into the military for four years and then get out and join the private sector. Years later when I was actually out of the military, we were talking on the phone and after updating him on what I had been up to he stopped me and said, “it is amazing to me that you did exactly what you told me you were going to do in College.” I was shocked to hear this because I was thinking, “Of course I did, I *told* you that I was going to do it.” In other words, my intentions were clear and I acted on them. What was shocking to him, which he then stated, was that so many people don’t follow through on their plans. As if plans are just throw-away things. Or plans are too vague to execute, or plans are just wishes. Sadly, that is a very common trap that many people fall into. Another variant of that is to think intentions are easy or trivial things, which is again, a trap. In this book, our goal is for you to learn how to envision, design and execute intentions to achieve an exceptional life. In short, we want to show you how to live intentionally. So, what is Intentional Living? Intentional Living (IL) is a state of living where you have intention towards every activity in your life. More simply stated, you know *why* you act in every moment of every day. That also means that you undertake an activity with a clear foreknowledge of the results you seek to achieve. This is the very antithesis of acting haphazardly or aimlessly, which seems to affect so many people nowadays. On the contrary, Intentional Living is a serious, action-oriented and aggressive philosophy on living. In relation to our quote at the start of this chapter, Intentional Living is an “in the arena” approach to living. You should be excited about life. You should be excited by its endless

² Michael C. Daconta experienced this anecdote.

possibilities, its endless wonder. Why is this important? Every day on a Q&A website called Quora³, we see numerous questions like:

- What direction should I follow in life?
- Which career path should I choose?
- I am lost and hate my life! What do I do now?
- What should I do on a daily basis to improve my life?
- I have no motivation and still live with my parents, how can I become successful?

As you will see throughout this book, Intentional Living has the answers to each of these questions. If you ever asked yourself, “How can that person be so driven? How can they be so passionate about what they do? Or, how can she be so in to that project?” Remembering back to the anecdote, you should notice that the intentions in that case spanned several years; that demonstrates how Intentional living is not just about micro-intentions but also includes macro-intentions. Micro-intentions drive the small, daily activities you undertake every day whereas macro-intentions drive the larger, mid and long-term plans that drive your life. While micro-intentions require good daily practices, macro-intentions require strong principles that create a framework for sustaining long-term intentional actions. So, delving deeper, what is an intention?

Wikipedia defines intention as, “Intention is a mental state that represents a commitment to carrying out an action or actions in the future.”⁴ At its smallest, most atomic level, an intention is a “mini-goal”. Of course, the verb “intend” is often used to state one’s intentions; for example, “I intend to join a health club” or “I intend to travel to Japan some day.” Now, it should be clear how intention is connected to intentional living as stated in the very first paragraph of the book: Intentional Living (IL) is a state of living where you have intention towards every activity in your life. If you read that statement casually or even flippantly, you do injustice to the concept because most people only use intention occasionally or poorly. That is *not* what we are talking about here... It requires a significant change in your thinking to use intention continuously. Intention focuses both the conscious and subconscious mind. Intention imbues subordinate activities with larger purpose. Small, continuous intentions tend to lead to larger intentions. Finally, you will find that intentional people are more successful because of the practices we will cover in this book.

³ <http://www.quora.com>

⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intention>

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Now, that we understand intention, let's examine the process of executing an intention as depicted in Figure 1. The cycle presented in figure one begins with a "condition" or state of the world that you want to change. For example, on New Year's Day your condition may be either out of shape or overweight due to overeating during the holidays. Given that condition or state of your world, you decide to make an intention to change that. An intention is a future commitment like "I will join a gym in the New Year." Typically, you may not be able to execute the intention immediately (in the case of the gym it may be closed on New Year's day). The next step is the development and explicit statement of the intention. Intentions have the highest probability of success when they are clearly stated (verbally and at times in writing), placed in the "open" (not hidden), and serious (as they represent a commitment). Once the intention is declared, the next step is to prepare to execute the intention. In our gym example, you would research health clubs in your area and compare services, price and distance. Further preparation may even involve visiting a few health clubs to examine their offerings and facility in person.

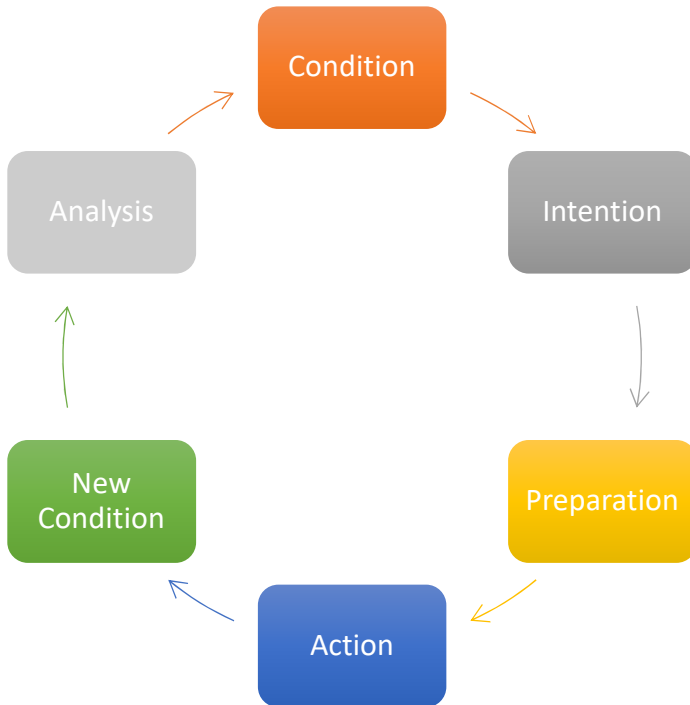


Figure 1 The Intention Cycle

Unfortunately, by not understanding the power of intention or taking

them seriously, many people fail to prepare properly. Drill Sergeants in the military (not known for their tact) shout out an expression called the “7 Ps” to exhort young soldiers to prepare properly: “**P**oor **P**rior **P**lanning **P**roduces **P**iss **P**oor **P**erformance”. After preparation, we act on our intentions. Again, this is where many people stumble by not following through on their intentions. We cannot understate our bias towards Action. Another military expression is “Ready! Fire! Aim! Fire!” Which expresses a bias towards action. It differs from the traditional expression, “ready, aim, fire!” by implying that you don’t need to over-prepare to take action. You prepare as best as you can but you don’t allow your preparation to stifle action. This is important because some people will spend all their time in the “ready and aim” phase or “ready, aim, aim, aim, aim...” until they miss the target or miss the opportunity. So, we have a strong bias towards action - even imperfect action. So, ACT! When taking action, you must be aggressive, determined, full of grit and willing to overcome obstacles. No action is without friction. No action is seamless or without difficulty. This is why so many people become paralyzed and afraid to act. They are afraid of failing or afraid of what others will think or say. Your action changes the state of your world and forms a new condition. Your world has changed. Finally, you must analyze whether that change has achieved the intended result. The new condition of your world should match the intended condition of the world. This is where design and envisioning enter into your ability to form right intentions and large, long-term intentions. We will discuss Vision further in Chapter 8. Now, you know what intentions are and how they work. Before we delve any further into “what” intentional living is, let’s discuss “how” intentional living is different than other philosophies and worth following.

How is Intentional Living different than other Philosophies?

Intention is the fountainhead of both meaning and purpose. Once initiated, intention becomes a motive force that attracts energy to its purpose, drives action to accomplish it and seeks the most effective path to do so. In other words, don’t just go through life “swinging in the dark”, know what you are trying to accomplish by learning how to harness intention, and you will begin hitting what you swing at. Intention does not just want you to act, it wants you to succeed in your action and thus embodies a clear vision of the objective within the intention at all times to guide you like a North Star. Thus, simply stated, the philosophy of intentional living provides a practical guide on how to develop and use the force of intention to empower, change and succeed in life! This philosophy is different because it embodies the three traits depicted in Figure 2.

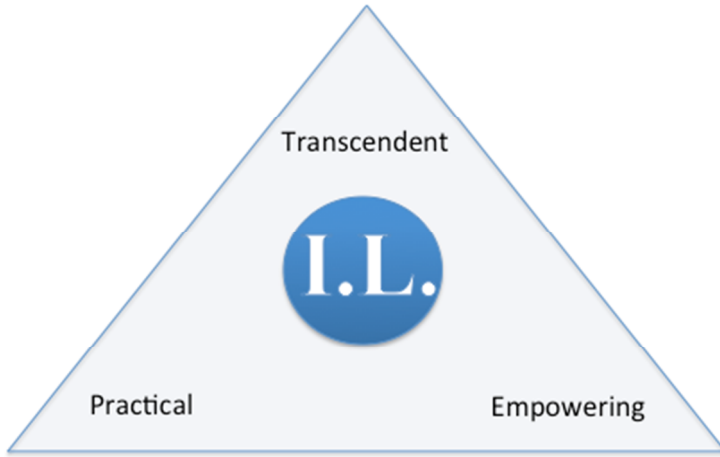


Figure 2 How Intentional Living Transforms Lives

Let's examine each trait of Intentional Living:

- Intentional Living is Practical. The philosophy of intentional living is a practical roadmap for success that works. Simply stated, if you want to be successful⁵, then follow the Intentional Living framework. Every principle and technique discussed in this book has been tried, tested and sometimes perfected by the authors. Unlike many philosophies that stop at providing inspiration, Intentional Living delves deep into practical examples and demonstrates how to apply these philosophical concepts to your life. By applying the principles and practices expressed in this book, you will be following a proven roadmap to success!

A Word on Religion

The Philosophy of Intentional Living is not a religion. Though we will occasionally use quotes from religious texts to bolster an argument, this philosophy is not exclusive to any particular religion. Having said that, this philosophy *is* based upon a spiritual foundation and does discuss many spiritual concepts. For those who are not spiritual, the authors include secular references to all major concepts discussed in the book. We believe these principles are universal and applicable to everyone.

⁵ In Intentional Living, the definition of success is “To make regular, measurable progress on a worthwhile goal”. Chapter 8, Vision, will explore this process in great detail. Furthermore, the authors have experienced success in every sense of the word including the popular definition of financial success.

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- Intentional Living is Empowering. Intentional living is an aggressive, action-oriented philosophy that empowers you to achieve more than you thought possible. Intentional Living strongly motivates you to take action. Intentional Living embodies the spirit of striving that is at the core of being human. Humanity is hardwired to strive and struggle to evolve towards greater heights of survival, community and civilization against the backdrop of inertia, decay and chaos. Striving is driven by intention. It is a motive force. Intention is the voltage that moves individuals, groups and whole societies. Intentional Living puts you squarely in the arena and ready to face the challenges of life!
- Intentional Living is Transcendent. Right Intention is universal and can transcend both the individual and an individual life. Right macro-Intentions seek synergy with the universe because they cannot be accomplished immediately and therefore have an element of faith in them. As expressed in numerous, popular self-help books like “Think and Grow Rich”, “The Power of Positive Thinking” and “The Secret”, verbalizing and visualizing your intentions is a powerful tool to help you achieve them. What these books all have in common is the notion that expressing good intentions to the universe spurs the universe to respond in kind. What the authors have personally experienced numerous times is that intentions can take on a life of their own. Intentions can become bigger than the individual that initiated them. Intentions can become a force in and of themselves. Famously, Jim Carrey talked about this when, as a broke actor, he wrote himself a check for 10 million dollars⁶. Intention spurs Intention and builds momentum. Harmonious Intention, which are intentions that are in harmony with all your other intentions (and thereby exclude the notion of evil intentions), is aligned with Universal Intention. Biblically, Jesus alluded to this when he said, “Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you.”⁷

These three traits of the Philosophy of Intentional Living: Practical, Empowering and Transcendent make it a necessity. These traits make Intentional Living necessary for you to follow and establish as a core element that drives your life. So, are you ready to take control of your life? If so, let's enter the arena!

⁶ <http://www.oprah.com/oprahs-life/What-Oprah-Learned-from-Jim-Carrey-Video>

⁷ New King James Version; Book of Matthew Chapter 7 verse 7 (Matthew 7:7)

Welcome to the Arena

“You need nothing else but to maintain a pure mind and stay vigilant as you execute your duties. Just live each moment with single-minded purpose.”
- Hagakure, The Secret Wisdom of the Samurai

With Intentional Living as your armor, you will be ready to enter the arena of your life, compete and win. In this section, we will step back and look at this arena to put it in perspective and see it through the lens of Intentional Living.



Figure 3 Welcome to the Arena!⁸

Of course, the arena is a metaphor for your life, where obstacles are the mythical lions and beasts that try and take you down. While the metaphor is not perfect, it is important to understand that you must choose to enter the arena instead of being a spectator towards your life. And that is where Intentional Living proves valuable by giving you a complete framework and roadmap to succeed in that competitive arena! The Intentional Living Framework and all of its components are depicted in Figure 4. That framework has 3 building blocks composed of 11 components that knit together to form a cohesive and practical guide for living intentionally and answers the big questions of your life like “Who am I?” “Where am I going?” “When will I get there?”

⁸ Image is used with permission by paweesit (<https://flic.kr/p/pqE7qG>).

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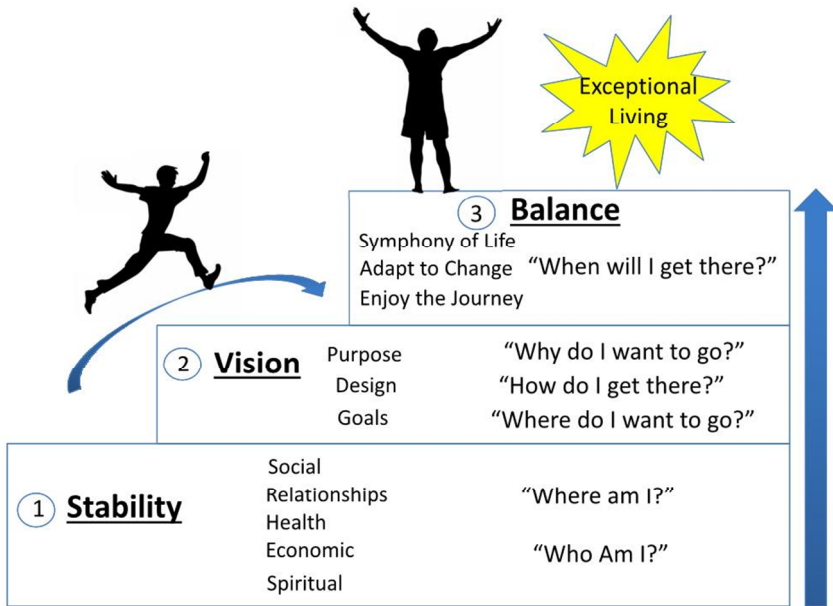


Figure 4 The Intentional Living Framework⁹

The Intentional Living Framework lays out a detailed blueprint of *how* you leverage intention to craft a rewarding life. In order to demonstrate the framework, we will illustrate its application with a specific example. Let’s say you are a 25 year old male who is literally and figuratively “floundering” in life. This young man, let’s call him “Tom”, never did well in school and scoffed at going to college. Tom currently works a minimum wage job in a retail chain as a stock boy. Tom still lives with his parents though rarely talks to them. Tom goes out occasionally with friends and “hooks up” with girls but is not really interested in a long-term relationship. Tom also occasionally experiments with drugs. Deep down, Tom is scared that he is on a “dead-end” path and worries as he sees the age of 30 fast approaching with little to show for it. Tom wants change but does not know how to go about it. A metaphor for Tom’s life right now is that he is like a rudderless ship, drifting wherever the currents take him. So, what would change this situation? A catalyst occurs in Tom’s life where he decides his life must change. Sometimes this catalyst takes the form of a death of a friend or

⁹ It is very important to understand that although Figure 4 depicts these as building blocks, you will be executing all of the blocks before any one is “complete”; however, the sequence is there because you must at least start the lower blocks before attempting the upper blocks. The reason you start the lower blocks before the upper ones is because execution of the lower blocks increases your probability of success on the higher ones.

family member, other times it is your parents expecting more, or an unexpected pregnancy, or the success of a sibling, or the reading of a great book (like this one!) - and sometimes the catalyst is that small voice of conscience within. Whatever the catalyst, Tom comes to the realization that he really does not know who he is, what he should be doing or why any of it is worthwhile. These questions haunt him. Fortunately, a good friend who is successful, points him to the philosophy of Intentional Living. Tom is shocked to learn that pop culture's bias and ridicule of stability is a harmful myth. Tom learns about building a successful foundation for his life - a figurative launch pad for his dreams. In this process, Tom learns that big dreams are still possible through the power of intention. He starts to become eager to learn how to harness intention. He becomes motivated and excited about his future. He understands there are dues to pay and those dues are reflected in the stability layers. He then begins, brick by brick, to lay a solid foundation - starting with that first wobbly step. He begins with his character and works to develop a reputation of honesty, frugality and discipline. He lands a solid job and begins saving for the future. This spurs him to plan for bigger things. He then begins to focus on improving relationships with his family. He sees joy and excitement filter back into every aspect of his life. Things are still hard but he finally sees a purpose for what he is going through. The journey is becoming exciting. Tom continues climbing the ladder of stability - spiritual, economic, health, relationships and social. These changes are not immediate... they take years of dedication but he is willing to pay the price and does so by developing the habits of discipline. He goes back to school, this time with renewed focus and vigor. He finds a young lady to share his life with. Suddenly they, as a team, begin to plan for even greater things. He now wants a family; and he and his bride begin planning anew. Tom moves from stability to vision and begins designing his future. He understands the power of intention in goal setting and how to leverage it. He understands that he balances his design of the future with enjoyment of the present. He is happy to undertake his life as a bold adventure and sees infinite opportunities all around him. He even begins to think about his community and how he can make a difference... while Tom's journey is just beginning, by being on the right path he is considered a success by his parents, his siblings, his colleagues and most importantly - by himself. This illustration of a young man could equally apply to a person of any age, either gender, or any station in life. Floundering is floundering no matter what the age and in contrast; success and meaning are just as universal. This illustration (though hypothetical and condensed for brevity) demonstrated how the three core building blocks: stability, vision and balance, provide a solid roadmap to use intention to change your life. Let's examine each building block in more detail.

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- The *Stability* stage is the development of a firm foundation in the various spheres of your life that provides the environment for you to project outward into the future. It both enables success through prudent preparation AND provides a crucial baseline of solidity and contentment from which joy springs forth. Chapter 3 through Chapter 7 will cover the stability stage in great detail and go through each stability sub-layer as another set of building blocks to achieve your foundation for a successful life. Upon completing the chapters, you will know who you are (in terms of character) and where you are (in terms of success) in each area of your life. The key reason stability is so important is that it provides a solid platform to launch your intentions and to support larger intentions of greater magnitude. The larger the intention, the more they require envisioning and design which leads us to the next stage.
- The *Vision* stage is where you steer the ship of your life in a specific direction for a specific purpose. As you progress in *envisioning* you will be able to design portions of your life in the same way a great architect designs a living space to achieve certain ends or even a parent designs a safe environment for which their children can grow and thrive. At the completion of this chapter, you will know how to envision outcomes, set a course to reach the destination and travel successfully to that destination. This will become second nature to you as you thrive.
- The *Balance* stage is the practice of keeping harmony in your life through the mix of drive and relaxation, work and play, critique and encouragement. This balancing act enables serendipity, mystery and a natural flow of life to assist you in your journey. At the completion of this chapter you will understand how to enjoy the journey while you achieve greatness at whatever level of mastery you reach. Furthermore, the balance stage includes introspection on the results of the previous stages and that reflection helps to improve the next cycle. In essence, this is where you step back, breathe and survey the landscape. Thus, balance becomes a part of a continuous process to prepare, execute and then analyze. This is a virtuous and self-reinforcing cycle, as depicted in Figure 5, which makes your intentions come to fruition! This is the culmination of your effort and the reaping of the harvest!

Now that we understand “What” Intentional Living is and “Why” you should follow it, let’s directly address the problem of “Getting started” or finding the motivation to enter the arena.

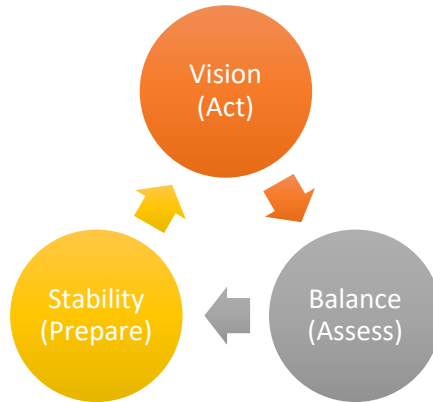


Figure 5 The Virtuous Cycle of Intentional Living

How do you get the motivation and passion to live intentionally?

A common saying is that “there is no free lunch”; which is generally interpreted as meaning that nothing is easy and everything requires work (analogous to payment for the benefit). So, in regards to Intentional Living, it does require effort, decisiveness and action. So, for someone just starting out and maybe even struggling just to get by; how do you get motivated to begin living intentionally? Before we can answer that question, we need to explain motivation and how it differs from passion.

What is motivation? Motivation propels you to action. Motivation is excitement to achieve a particular objective. Excitement is a high energy emotion, or more specifically, it is an emotion that produces energy. Motivation focuses the excitement at a particular objective. Physiologically there is a link between motivation and powerful body chemicals like adrenaline, dopamine, serotonin, and endorphins.

What is passion? Passion is the subject or target of motivation. Or more simply stated, a passion is what you get motivated about. For example, Harry is passionate about golf. A passion is something that people invest themselves in time and time again; sometimes for many years. Sometimes your passion is about people; for example, being passionate about your children or a romantic relationship. The test of a passion is whether it conjures up feelings of motivation to take action. So in this framework we just described, motivation is the short-term push for things that you are passionate about. A good analogy for passion is a fire that burns within you and constantly drives the engine of action. Keeping with that analogy, motivation would be analogous to throwing gas on the fire to get it to burn hotter.

Let's expand on these descriptions with a specific example: Michael's wife, Lynne, is passionate about quilting. A good percentage of her time is spent learning about quilting, sewing quilts, attending quilt guild meetings, attending quilting conferences, attending quilting retreats, working part-time at a quilt store, and many other activities involving quilting, sewing and home crafts. Her passion has become part of her lifestyle and part of her character. This same story can be said for those who are passionate about cars, or sports, or music, or reading. It is important to stress that passion does not just involve entertainment type activities and can include your career or profession. Both authors of this book are passionate about their work (software engineer and drainage engineer). Figure 6 depicts a complete metaphor of how passion is developed and maintained.

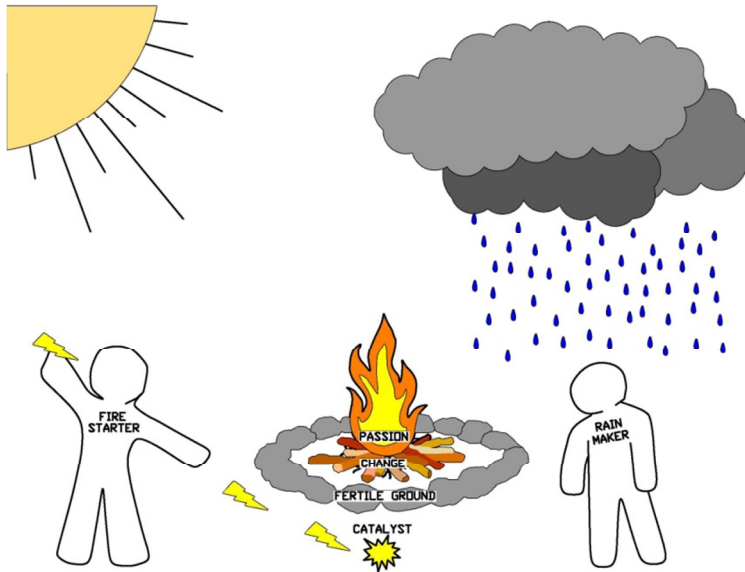


Figure 6 How to Start a Fire

Figure 6 is a metaphor that depicts passion as a physical thing – specifically, a fire. Let's examine this detailed analogy of passion being equivalent to a physical fire that burns within you and moves you to action. A physical fire requires fuel, like wood, to burn. The fuel of passion is continual desire for positive change (also known as growth). In addition to wood, and critical to starting a fire, is tinder. Tinder is the material that represents a fertile ground for change – something that is ready to take a spark. The spark that ignites the tinder, which burns the wood, and fuels your passion is the catalyst. More simply stated, the spark is the catalyst. So, it should be obvious that the catalyst is the linchpin to starting the entire process of creating passion (igniting the tinder which burns the wood of

desire which, in turn, generates the heat (aka motivation) to act). To the left of the fire is a figure that is throwing lightning bolts to create sparks. This type of person we call a “fire starter” and they are natural-born catalysts. These are the type of people that make things happen and positively influence those around them. On the opposite end of the spectrum and thus on the opposite side of the diagram are the “rain makers” who are a group of toxic people that suck energy away from a group and cause passion to be extinguished. Overall, Figure 6 is a powerful metaphor depicting the complete set of ingredients for passion and how they work together to produce a burning desire for continual growth. So, to summarize how you achieve motivation for Intentional Living is to use this book as a catalyst to ignite your tinder (which is your desire for change), which burns the wood (which are the intentions you create) which, finally, is the fuel for passion (a vital, successful life).

So let’s review what we have learned so far: Intentional Living (IL) is a state of living where you have intention towards every activity in your life. We now understand how it is different from other philosophies, what intentions are and why we should want to live intentionally. We detailed how you execute an intention via the Intention Cycle and how IL is different from other philosophies because it is practical, empowering and transcendent. We view the practicality of this philosophy as its most significant differentiator to most other philosophy books out there! With these practical guidelines in hand, you are ready to “Enter the arena!” The arena of your life is a metaphor for the competitive world we all live in. But going into that fight we give you a powerful tool to take on the struggle of living: The Intentional Living Framework. The Intentional Living Framework is another way of looking at the IL Pyramid because it acts as a framework, which in turn “frames” and organizes the complexity of modern living. Having such a “frame” of reference is a very powerful tool because you can use this pattern (prepare, act, assess; or stability, vision and balance) in every endeavor you undertake no matter what career, family or service path you follow. Simply put – the authors know the pattern works because we have used it successfully throughout our lives. We end this chapter by answering, “How do you get started?” by examining motivation and passion and provide a detailed analogy of how you get passion in your life! Passion is what you get motivated about. Motivation is that short term push or excitement to do something. We warn you to stay away from Rain makers (toxic people that steal joy and enthusiasm) and instead surround yourself with Fire starters (energetic and ambitious people). You now should understand how intentions and intentional living can be a powerful change agent in your life! So let’s move on to the next chapter by answering another important question: Why do we need stability in our life?

2 - WHY STABILITY?

“The loftiest edifices need the deepest foundations.”
- George Santayana

Popular culture feeds a myth of a life totally based upon instant gratification as depicted in Figure 7 and the infamous saying, “live fast and die young.” Another popular variant of this saying is “It’s better to burn out than to fade away.”¹⁰



Figure 7 1958 Movie Poster fueling the Fantasy¹¹

Hollywood and teenagers have fueled this fantasy for years by idolizing the likes of James Dean, Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison, Marilyn Monroe, Kurt Cobain, John Belushi, and many other star-crossed youngsters who’s stars briefly burned bright and then were tragically gone. The fantasy aspect of the myth glorifies their brief existence while disregarding the consequences and wreckage left in their wake. The fantasy glorifies youth and “fast” living by means of the ever-present “sex, drugs and rock and roll.” These

¹⁰ Neil Young, “My, My, Hey, Hey”; from the 1979 Album Rust Never Sleeps.

¹¹ Image is in the public domain with attribution. Image is by Hannes Engelbrecht and available at: <https://flic.kr/p/o6Tdou>

people are seen as “cool”, “hip” and “carefree” while the “squares” follow the safe path of a boring job, mundane life and cookie-cutter existence. We consider this myth to be an ever-present anti-stability message. This myth has destroyed countless teenagers via Hollywood’s siren song of thrill-seeking, adventure and spontaneity. This myth’s siren song leads these teenagers away from the path of stability to crash upon the rocky shoals of life. The second half of “live fast, die young” asserts that life “in the fast lane”¹² is so much better than living a “normal life” that it is better to die instead of betraying your “live fast” mantra. Besides the “live fast, die young” meme, Hollywood also promotes numerous other anti-stability memes like drama-filled relationships (in reality television), edgy and dangerous personalities (bad boys/bad girls) and even “manic, pixie dream girls”¹³ that all serve to glorify a quirky, wild and vacillating existence. So, how do we answer such propaganda? How do we answer that smirking, drug-addled teen that asks, “But isn’t your life of stability boring?” The answer to that is “No, stability is not boring”, and let’s prove it to you in three ways. The first principle to understand about stability is:

**Stability is thrilling as it provides a tall,
stable platform to see your future!**

You need proof? Ok, let’s say you seek excitement out on the open seas so you head down to the marina. On one pier is a state of the art large research vessel that can sail anywhere in the world, can weather any storm and has numerous safety features in case of emergency. On the other pier is a hastily slung together raft. Which of these offers more excitement? Clearly, the boat that can take you more places ... this is exactly what stability offers you! It is your platform for success, it is your platform to opportunity and excitement. Such a platform is a form of preparation to execute your intentions. Intentional living is not just about knowing what you want to do and why you do it – it is about *wanting* those intentions to be successful. Intentional people don’t just try things half-heartedly; intentional people understand that preparation is key to success and launching their intentions from a stable foundation is one of the best ways to do that! Those who live intentionally are serious about their intentions and get excited about executing them to the absolute best of their ability – and that best includes “being prepared”.

The second reason that stability is exciting is because it enables motivation to be sustainable. Unlike that teenager, successful people have a more complex understanding of excitement. They do not look at it simply

¹² “Life in the Fast Lane”, from the 1977 album Hotel California by the Eagles

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manic_Pixie_Dream_Girl

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through the lens of “peak experience” – we call this “intensity”. The intensity of an experience is a measure of how powerful the feelings are that it elicits. Mature people add one additional dimension to what motivates them, which is “sustainment” as depicted in Figure 8. And this fits into intentional living because intention requires you know the “why” for your actions.

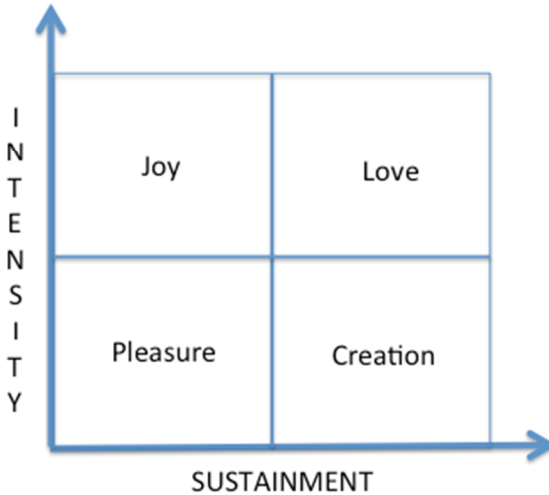


Figure 8 The Successful Person's Motivation Matrix

Figure 8 depicts the successful person's motivation matrix. The matrix is similar to the famous Gartner "magic quadrant" that it uses to evaluate software products. Each quadrant is a position along two axes. In our case, motivation is measured along the axes of sustainment *and* intensity. By sustainment we mean how long does the motivation sustain effort or how long do you remain motivated to act. And by intensity we mean the power or magnitude of the feelings involved. Thus, the highest form of motivation is love in terms of both sustainment and intensity. The lowest form of motivation is pleasure, which of course is a powerful motivation but is transient and provides diminishing returns. It should be obvious that though pleasure is intense, it is also fleeting. The act of creating or expressing yourself creatively is another motivation that sustains many people for entire careers. Joy is a byproduct of effort often derived from the building of strong, healthy relationships. And now back to Love, which is by far the most powerful and longest sustaining motivation of all. It is these "higher motivations" that drive us to easily and willingly work to achieve stable lives for ourselves and our loved ones. So, while teenagers often crave those intense feelings of pleasure, successful people are motivated to achieve intense feelings that last! “Intense feelings that last”

are often associated with a deep, driving passion that goes way beyond the fleeting highs of the teenager. In summary, boring is an attitude that views stability from the narrow, impatient perspective of now; whereas, a deeper motivation is that which sustains us over the long haul.

The third reason that stability is not boring is because it allows you to avoid many of life's pitfalls. It is undeniable that evil and "being bad" has an allure. An eighties movie called "The Breakfast Club" summed up this sentiment when the high school kids are violating the strict orders of their school monitor and the protagonist juvenile delinquent says, "Being Bad feels pretty good, huh?"¹⁴ Temptation and vices are ever-present and real; and therefore we must address these anti-stability factors. Drugs have an undeniable, physical effect or "high" that people crave and many become addicted to. Other feelings from the drug culture include euphoria, mellowness, reduced inhibition and camaraderie within the counter-culture. Additionally, there is another entire subculture around hedonism, which is the pursuit of sensual pleasure as the highest good. As a case study in this, a middle-aged friend of the authors recently fell victim to his temptations after achieving an envious position. He had a multi-million dollar business, a wife, two kids, a large house and several cars. As he approached his mid-40's, suddenly all that he had achieved became "not enough" and he longed for his wild and crazy "youth". Thus, he began taking testosterone replacement and increased his weight lifting and exercise. He became obsessed with looking younger. That drive to look younger continued with the desire to feel younger and drove him towards the drugs of his youth. The euphoria of drug-use and his "wild side" led towards promiscuity with other women and infidelity. This lasted for a short while until his wife grew suspicious and quarreling ended in him threatening his wife. His wife filed charges against him and he was arrested. His drug use grew worse and his business suffered. Another incident occurred and he was sent to prison. In the span of six months, this successful business and family man destroyed both his family and a multi-million dollar business. What does this show us? The allure and titillation of evil ("being bad") – via drugs, infidelity, and other vices – always have a severe cost as depicted in Figure 9¹⁵. And for those that see the cost beforehand, the allure is significantly diminished. It is not that the allure does not exist, but the allure is amplified a thousand fold for those that pretend there is no cost. That is what immature young people see – they only see the benefits of those drugs and refuse to see the costs (many people joke that teenagers see themselves as "invincible"). So, for the immature, the benefits are amplified and the costs minimized (with

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Breakfast_Club

¹⁵ Image by Don Hankings is in the public domain at: <https://flic.kr/p/Ewhcq>

sayings like “it won’t happen to me”). For those that clearly see both the benefit and the costs – those severe costs significantly diminish the allure. Thus, in the end, maturity changes your perspective and that is why many precocious teenagers are protected from this siren song of drugs. How do some people clearly see the cost while many others fall into this trap? Yes, there is a method to maturity and in seeing things clearly, it follows three steps:

1. Look before you leap. Acknowledge there are costs to the vice and pause to count them.
2. Don’t be naïve. Don’t give yourself the excuse of “I’ve never been in this situation.” Think about (or even role play) the scenarios in your mind ahead of time so you can be prepared. Read books on courage, grit and fortitude. Learn from other people’s experience.
3. Don’t be a sheep. Stand firmly against the crowd that asks you to “fit in”. Be your own self and follow your dreams instead of being sidetracked by these temptations. Be your own person and not a member of the herd.

One Woman – 120 months of Methamphetamine Use.....Any Questions?



Figure 9 The costs of Methamphetamine addiction

Figure 9¹⁶ clearly shows the cost of one woman’s addiction to

¹⁶ Image by Don Hankins; <https://flic.kr/p/Ewhcq> , text area changed to make legible.

methamphetamine and her untimely death because of it. How do you avoid the siren song of drugs and vice? The answer is that you never rely exclusively on your emotions. You never separate the emotion of allure from the other elements of your mind, like integrity and love. Those in the hedonism camp will pressure you to come down to “their level” and not to think you are above them. Another personal example of this is a time when a family member was having a party (when our parents were away) and he desperately attempted to convince his younger brother to try cocaine. The younger brother was not interested because he could only see the costs while the older brother was applying “peer pressure” to get the acceptance of his younger brother to “join the crowd”. Finally, another common example, of not counting the costs is when teenagers engage in unprotected sex because they are too embarrassed to stop their sexual play or too embarrassed to buy contraceptives (thankfully, the stigma of buying contraceptives is diminishing).

There are two final significant benefits of stability beyond it not being “boring”. The first involves responsibility and the second involves quality. The path of stability is the responsible approach. In other words, stability is a mechanism that lets you shoulder more responsibility because you have built a stable platform. Without stability, life is analogous to carrying a backpack of bricks across a tight-rope that spans a raging river. With stability, you carry those same bricks across a concrete bridge. Same bricks, same person, and the same river: different approach to life. So, stability and responsibility go hand and hand. Another side of this coin is that stability is a “go-slow” approach to preparation. Stability asks that you first prepare and then execute. Stability is akin to “think before you act”. As a parent, Michael has told his children numerous times to “slow down so you don’t make a mistake”; and to, “take your time and do it right.” This is the exact opposite of the “live fast” mantra. Here again, we see another fantasy of immaturity where doing things “fast” is somehow more exciting than taking your time. The haste of youth is a harbinger of disaster. The fantasy of speed is just a rephrasing of the desire for immediate gratification, a desperate impatience to succeed and to reap the harvest without sowing the field.

Let’s conclude this section with one final benefit of stability: without stability you cannot build anything of quality. If you are interested in building anything of significance – lasting relationships, a strong marriage, a loving family, a nice home, security in retirement, a thriving business, and any expertise... most rewarding things in life are not instantaneous and thus require that you “build” them up from nothing; otherwise, it is constantly in the risk of collapsing and making a mockery out of your efforts. So, if you

want to build successfully, consistently and reliably (and gain a reputation as a master builder) then you start with stability! The bottom line is that stability works! And *that* is exciting!!!

What is Stability?

“When stability becomes a habit, maturity and clarity follow.”
- B.K.S. Iyengar

To live intentionally requires a firm foundation of stability. In this section, we will examine how we build such a foundation using a layered approach. In building a home, a foundation is a solid and stable base layer, usually made of concrete, which supports additional layers of structure above it, like the frame, the electrical wiring, the plumbing, etc. Fully understanding this principle and its ramifications is critical to your success, fulfillment and self-actualization. A good analogy for this principle is Jesus’ parable of the “House built on a rock” where he says, “Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.”¹⁷ A secular analogy to the same principle is the phrase, “house of cards” which is defined as, “(idiomatic) a structure or argument built on a shaky foundation.”¹⁸ Your foundation must be built upon the rock of five stability layers as depicted in Figure 10.

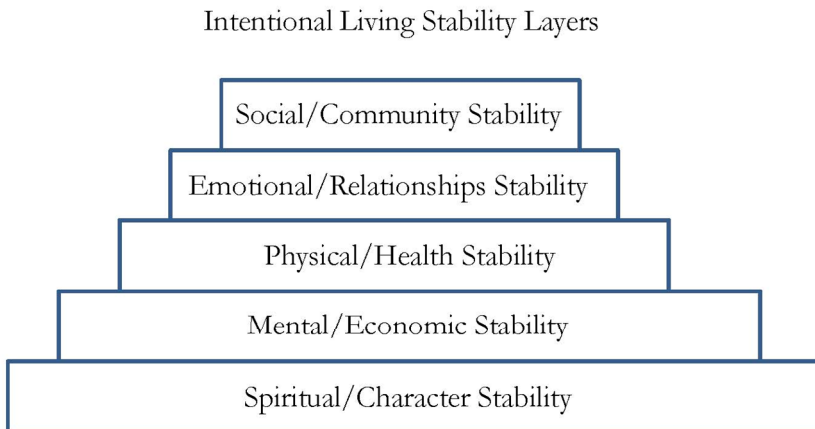


Figure 10 Intentional Living Stability Layers

¹⁷ Matthew 7:24-27; The King James Bible.

¹⁸ https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/house_of_cards

Before we go over the individual stability layers, it is important to stress that the order of each stability layer (from the bottom layer up) is important and not arbitrary. The spiritual base gives you a reason, purpose and meaning to achieve economic stability (and even all the rest of the layers). Your spiritual basis provides the “why” to your life and fuels your discipline to achieve success in the other layers. The economic stability layer provides your financial means to support the layers on top of it. Your physical health influences your attitude and general well-being to support healthy relationships. Healthy relationships provide both a support layer and emotional bonds outside of yourself. All the layers draw from and rely upon the layers beneath them. For example, meaningful relationships require the spiritual principles formed in the spiritual layer. This is not to say that you do not work on developing other layers before the earlier layers are completely finished. The key idea in respect to the proper order of these layers is that achieving success in the higher layers is most probable if you execute first on the lower layers. I cannot stress this enough for achieving success:

**The *sequence* of steps matters for your Success;
shortcuts are fantasy or luck.**

Let’s examine some examples to demonstrate that order *is* important to achieving stability if you want the latter layers to be successful. Our first example is how economic stability affects relationship stability: there is a significant amount of empirical evidence¹⁹ that financial problems cause relationship problems as expressed in numerous articles like “Should you dump the guy with money problems?”²⁰ There are many other anecdotal examples where the order of the stability layers influences your probability of success: integrity (spiritual layer) improves economic stability (trust, reputation); discipline (spiritual layer) improves economics, health and relationships; health stability improves relationships by having the vigor and energy to love. The authors have seen many acquaintances, family members, and friends try to take shortcuts to success, which almost always end in yo-yo, roller coaster rides of fleeting success followed by a crash. We urge you to understand how the sequence of these layers influences your probability for success and avoids the roller coaster lifestyle. Now, we are ready for an overview of all the stability layers, followed by detailed coverage of each as individual chapters.

¹⁹ At the time of this writing there are 496 hits for “finance money problems +relationship”

²⁰ <http://business.financialpost.com/personal-finance/young-money/should-you-dump-the-guy-with-money-problems>

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The five stability layers (in the order of execution) are:

- Spiritual/Character Stability – your road to stability begins with your inner self. Your character is the holistic expression of your beliefs, principles and values that determine how you act in any situation. To consistently act intentionally and to build your stable platform for growth, you must base it upon a bedrock of integrity, discipline and love. While these are not the only components of a strong character, they are the cornerstones. Upon those stones, all other layers of the stability structure rest. Why? Because the only thing more important than executing intentions is executing the *right* intentions.
- Mental/Economic Stability – Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, as depicted below in Figure 11, teaches us that people do not focus on higher objectives (like social belonging) until they have satisfied their physiological needs (food, shelter, clothing, etc.). Given that, it should be obvious that we need to create a stable economic foundation to support our health, relationships and ambitions. Without such financial stability, every other aspect of our lives hangs on a thread and is filled with drama, chaos and successive failures. Building our economic stability is based upon climbing three steps: work, budget and investment. Achieving these steps, in order, will provide the financial resources for you to pursue all of your higher ambitions.

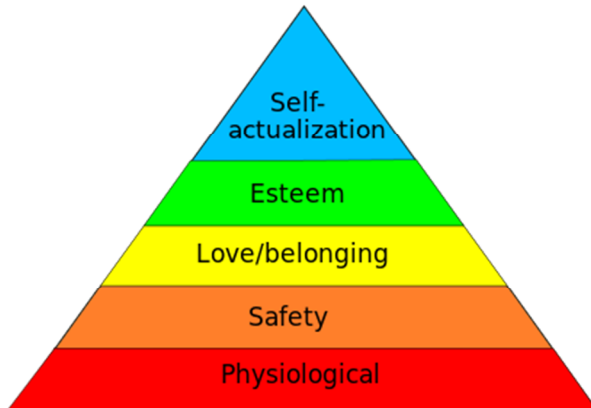


Figure 11 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs²¹

²¹ Image is in the public domain at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow%27s_hierarchy_of_needs#/media/File:MaslowsHierarchyOfNeeds.svg

- Physical/Health Stability – when you have achieved a solid economic path (steady income that exceeds your expenses), you can afford the necessities to remain physically healthy: food, clothing and shelter. Once you have the necessities, you progress to master intentions in four areas of healthy living: healthy diet, daily exercise, avoiding vices and finally R&R (rest and relaxation). Furthermore, this chapter will include a special section on the challenges that aging brings to maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Achieving health stability will give you the energy, vitality and drive you need to achieve your dreams.
- Emotional/Relationships Stability – relationships are the ultimate testing ground of every other aspect of your life progress: spiritual, economic and physical. Relationships begin at birth (family relationships), are unavoidable to successfully function in society and, most importantly, if mastered, become a wellspring of joy in your life. The peak expression of all relationships is Love and this essential point is what both attracts many and scares some. Real relationships open us up to raw emotion and sometimes even hurt. Yet, they are blessed things that as we approach old age we cherish like rare, precious stones. To build strong, stable relationships require the development of four characteristics: communication, reciprocity, bonding and trust. This chapter will delve into each of these in detail. Mastering your relationships stretches your being beyond yourself by extending it outwards towards others. The culmination of that experience is realized in the fifth stability layer, which we discuss next.
- Social/Community Stability – Marcus Aurelius in his famous book, Meditations, exhorts the reader time and again to focus on his status as a social being. The social aspect of your being is your membership in a community of rational beings and the highest expression of yourself is to be a functioning, productive member of that community. Many other psychologists²², sociologists and leaders have equated ultimate self-actualization as making significant contributions to your community, nation and world. On a personal level, social stability extends your relationship building to your social groups to change and transform the lives of others. Social stability is a powerful expression of hope that stretches across geography and even outward in time towards future generations. The principles of social stability are: sociability, service and leadership. Mastering these principles elevates you to a self-actualized state of fulfillment. Applying these principles

²² Dr. M. Scott Peck; The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace; Simon & Schuster.

effectively to enact social change requires the next building block of intentional living, which is Vision (and that we will explore in Chapter 8 of this book).

In summary, stability as a platform for your life encompasses all the spheres of your being: spiritual, mental, physical, emotional and social. Addressing stability in each area is a holistic approach to answering the questions – “who am I” and “where am I”? The answers to these questions are pre-requisites to intentional living. How can you live intentionally without knowing, with confidence, who you are? How can you live intentionally without knowing, with confidence, where you are spiritually, economically, physically, emotionally and socially? So, now that you have an overview of what the layers are and why they are important, you are ready to begin building your foundation of intentional living! A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step!²³

²³ Lao Tzu.