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WHY WOULD YOU USE THESE CARDS?

Are you (or your clients or your staff):

- In your twenties or thirties and wanting to make sure career is kept in perspective by maintaining work-life balance?
- In your forties or fifties and wanting to take back control of your life, reprioritise, starting to think “there must be more to life than just work” or considering stepping back from work gradually over the next few years?
- In your sixties or seventies and considering retirement or wanting to develop a ‘bucket list’?

Or just:

- Seeking general well being?
- Looking for motivation after time out, illness or injury?
- Wanting fun, challenge, purpose, connections outside work?

Then these cards are for you!

BACKGROUND / DEVELOPMENT

THE STARTING POINT

I have a friend who had always worked incredibly hard, leaving little room for life outside work, and who was thinking about the future. He was wondering if he should consider retirement and start to enjoy life a little more without work, or at least with less work. "I've caught up with my friends lately for lunches and dinners, I don't need to do that again for a while - and I don't want to do it too often anyway. What else will I do if I'm not working?" he asked.

As a practitioner in the field of careers, one aspect of which is retirement planning, I knew there were few resources available in this area and there was a need for something practical for the 21st century.

What is it that people do to spend their time during retirement? Why do they choose those things? What are the benefits that people receive from work that have nothing to do with the daily tasks or the income – friendship, status, structure to the day, meaning, sense of purpose, stimulation, influence over others, feeling of accomplishment. These are the elements they then miss once the work life has gone.

What makes people happy, satisfied and contented? It appears that, contrary to popular wisdom, the pure pursuit of pleasure is not enough in itself for happiness.

Martin Seligman, an academic in Pennsylvania, USA has made positive psychology the focus of his studies since 1998. In his book *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfilment* (2002) Seligman summarized his theory that positive psychology can be delineated into three overlapping areas: the Pleasant Life, the Good Life, the Meaningful Life.

Martin Seligman has very recently updated that theory in his latest book, *Flourish*, published April, 2011. The following excerpt is edited from Chapter One of that book.

My original view was that everything we do is done in order to make us happy. When I wrote Authentic Happiness a decade ago, I thought that happiness could be analyzed into three different elements that we choose for their own sakes: positive emotion, engagement, and meaning.

Positive emotion refers to what we feel: pleasure, rapture, ecstasy, warmth, comfort etc - the "pleasant life".

Engagement is about flow: being one with the music, time stopping, loss of self-consciousness during an absorbing activity - the "engaged life".

Human beings want meaning and purpose in life, belonging to and serving something bigger than self – the "meaningful life".

I have now changed my mind. I now think that the topic of positive psychology is well-being, that the gold standard for measuring well-being is flourishing and that the goal of positive psychology is to increase flourishing.

Well-being is essentially a theory of uncoerced choice, and its five elements comprise what free people will choose for their own sake. The five elements are positive emotion, engagement, meaning and (two new elements) positive relationships and accomplishment.

Accomplishment (or achievement) is often pursued for its own sake. Some expert bridge players play to improve, to learn, to solve problems, and to be in flow. Other experts play only to win. For them, losing is devastating no matter how well they played. Winning only for winning's sake can also be seen in

the pursuit of wealth. In contrast to philanthropic millionaires, there are “accumulators” who believe that the person who dies with the most toys wins. So well-being theory requires a further element: **the “achieving life,” dedicated to accomplishment for the sake of accomplishment.**

There is an island near the Portuguese island of Madeira that is shaped like an enormous cylinder. At the top is a several-acre plateau on which are grown the most prized grapes that go into Madeira wine. On this plateau lives only one large animal: an ox whose job is to plow the field. There is only one way up to the top, a very winding and narrow path. How in the world does a new ox get up there when the old ox dies? A baby ox is carried on the back of a worker up the mountain, where it spends the next forty years plowing the field alone. If you are moved by this story, ask yourself why.

Very little that is positive is solitary. When was the last time you laughed uproariously? The last time you felt indescribable joy? The last time you sensed profound meaning and purpose? The last time you felt enormously proud of an accomplishment? Even without knowing the particulars of these high points of your life, I know their form: all of them took place around other people. Studies of the big social brain, the hive emotions, and group selection persuade me that **positive relationships—key to “the connected life”—are a basic element of well-being.**

Well-being has five measureable elements (PERMA) that count towards it:

Positive emotion (including happiness and life satisfaction)

Engagement

Relationships

Meaning

Achievement

DEVELOPING THE CARDS

I set out to develop a tool which would offer people activities or choices roughly fitting into each of Seligman’s categories; achievement, engagement, enjoyment, meaning, relationships. However, my concept had one extra category, that of earning. In the 21st century, it is my certain belief that people will not be retiring as they once did. Instead they are looking for varied ways of earning into later life, alongside their search for work life balance and the pursuit of well-being.

I am a practitioner with a practical style and a pragmatic view of the world. I started my list of activities with all of the ways of earning, all the hobbies, pleasures, relationships, absorbing activities and ways of living that keep me, my friends and my family “flourishing”. I tested and asked and re-tested a constantly expanding range of people until there were few options that I may have missed.

I developed a list of 136 options. It appears that people have different ideas in mind when they cluster preferred activities and then describe those clusters. So I took on board the language my test group used and decided to offer a wide range of words to help people clarify what they meant in their choices.

The reasons why people might find these cards useful expanded, from retirement planning to a wider range of uses, during the development phase. I personally experienced a major health crisis during that time and lost my sense of purpose and positivity for a while. Nothing seemed to help me feel motivated to re-engage in the world. I tested my cards on myself with a focus on seeking only those activities that would give me pleasure and absorb or engage me. Within a week of reminding myself of those activities and giving myself permission to spend large amounts of time on them, I somehow found myself more positive about the world in general and with a greater desire to engage in other activities.

Work life balance is the most often selected value amongst my clients in my career practice. I came to realise that, if people needed help to find a purposeful, fun, engaging and connected life outside of work, these cards also assist with that.

The most intriguing of my findings on uses for the cards was when one colleague, testing them for me with her mother, also gave them to her mother's partner to use. This couple had been spending their retirement time together on shared pursuits and had not discussed for some time whether that still suited them both. When given the opportunity to individually select options for ways they would ideally spend their time, it turned out that they actually had different interests and that it was time for a change! That didn't mean leaving the relationship, it just meant each having time and permission to pursue their own interests.

A FINAL NOTE

Did I meet my goal of providing a resource that would help my friend answer his question? Here are his comments (please note that he used the cards, still in early draft form, while based in another country and without me nearby to discuss them with):

... in the intervening time, something funny and unexpected has happened I guess there was some active but "subliminal" filtering or grouping happening in my mind because this week I have already (he lists 3 new actions)... And I feel really good about all this... somehow much less frustrated with the status quo, and energized, and realize that any effort / extra work that may result from (these actions) will be outweighed by my enthusiasm for change and, somehow also, because 'the cards told me so'.

So now the cards are yours to use. Whether you are a:

- Career practitioner
- Counsellor, psychologist, life coach or mentor
- Organisational career development or human resource manager
- Retirement & transition specialist, or
- An individual seeking clarity,

I hope you find them useful in assisting yourself or others. The purpose of the cards is to trigger ideas or to help us recall (or find out) what is important and what we love to do; to help gain clarifying insights into themes - what we enjoy and what motivates us. These will hopefully lead to identifying priorities we wish to pursue in our ideal future. These insights will, I hope, provide the stimulus to act.

I suggest the selected cards be recorded both as individual cards (for individual action) and as the clusters / themes that the individual puts them in.

And I strongly suggest the final thoughts or questions need to be: 'So how close are you to your ideal future? What would it feel like to be living that future? What small thing can you do tomorrow that will start you moving towards it?'

