A Simple Exercise To Improve 12 Areas Of Your Life

We all want to be happy with our life. We all want to build meaningful relationships with people around us and achieve goals that are important to us.

But too many times, life happens tremendously fast and it's way too easy to be swept up in the constant stream of its events. We might lose our course without even noticing it and cannot help but wonder what happened with our goals, our ambitions, and dreams.

To prevent those course losses, I came up with a small exercise that regularly helps me to reflect where I am and where I want to go in life. Today, I would like to share it with you.

So how does it work?

At the end of every quarter of the year, I take a few hours to sum up my life, its status quo, and my goals. It enables me to consciously protect myself from going in the wrong direction for too long and make sure I take the time to make course adjustments should I realize I'm not on the right path.

To make it easier, I broke my life down in 12 core areas that are important to me:

Family, Relationship, Friends

Experiences, Passions, Growth

Business, Money, Emotion

Nutrition, Fitness, Health

The way I keep myself in check is by asking myself about my improvements and goals in those core areas – within the past 90 days and the next 90 days. I email my thoughts and answers to my future self to remind myself at that point in the future of what my previous thoughts were and to remind myself to repeat this exercise.

What an email to my future self looks like

Subject: 90 Day Review & Preview

To: july1@sendtask.io (this reminds me at the end of the next cycle with a task. Works without an account!)

Body:

Where am I and what am I up to? How do I feel?

[…]

 # The 12 areas of my life

Family, Relationship, Friends

Experiences, Passions, Growth

Business, Money, Emotion

Nutrition, Fitness, Health

 # Review

[For each of the following 12 areas of my life, I write about the past 90 days]

 # Preview

[I write about my goals and changes I want to make in those twelve areas]

The process

Step 1: Block out your calendar

On the day that another quarter is up, the last email I sent appears on my task list on Sendtask. I get a reminder email in the morning that reminds me that '90 Day Review & Preview' is due today. I block out at least three hours on my calendar to reflect. Typically, this would either be three hours on a flight or three hours of uninterrupted time outside the office.

Step 2: Read your notes from the last email

I take the time to carefully read my notes from the last email. This is where the first line of the email comes in handy – knowing where I was and what I was up to back then helps me connect to my past self who wrote the notes I'm about to read.

Step 3: Read the review

I then read the Review part of the email and I ask myself if my perspective on certain events in the past has shifted. Both positive and negative events sometimes look different 90 days later.

Step 4: Read the preview

Then I read the Preview section of the email and I take notes on whether or not I was able to follow through with the changes and corrections I wanted to make. I write down those elements where I was not able to make a change and jot down a few words on why I think I wasn't able to make those corrections. Maybe it was a lack of presence? Priority? Discipline? Or have my priorities shifted and the change became unnecessary or even unwanted?

Step 5: Start writing the new email

Then I start to write the new email. I start with a few sentences about where I currently am, what I'm up to and how I currently feel.

A past example reads like this: "I'm sending this from a flight to Nice where I'm travelling together with Walter to drive F1 cars. I'm excited about that experience and about the chance to spend time with him and to bounce some of my ideas off of him within the next couple days. I feel well rested, relaxed and ready."

Step 6: Evaluate each area in your life

Then I look at the twelve areas of my life and ask myself if I'm missing any important areas and should add them or if some areas are less important and should be removed. I found this list to be fairly stable for me and have not added or removed anything within the last year. Nevertheless, I feel it's important to question this set and adapt whenever I feel there's a need to.

Step 7: Write the new review

Then I write a review for the past quarter in each area. I ask myself a variety of questions for each area. Some of these questions stay for a long time, some of them come and go. To give an example, these are the questions I ask myself about the area of 'Friends':

Friends

How do I feel about this area of my life?

Who are the five people in my life I spend the most time with?

What do I learn from them?

Who have I not spent enough time with?

Who have I been there for? Who have I not been there for when they needed me?

Who has positively surprised me? Who has disappointed me?

My goal is to be very honest with myself and give spontaneous answers. I allow myself about an hour to complete this section (~5 minutes for each area).

Step 8: Write the new preview

At this point, I've reviewed my past email, took notes on what changes I was able to make and which changes I wasn't able to make and I've captured my status quo. Now, I write about what I think the next 90 days will look like and – even more importantly – what I want the next 90 days to look like.

In the Preview section, I go through the same 12 areas and I write down if I want to change something, why that's the case and how I want to change it.

The questions look very similar for all areas. Here's an example for 'Friends':

What will happen in the next 90 days?

My answer will contain my expectations, my fears and what I'm looking forward to.

What do I want to change?

Is there anything that I feel I should change?

Why do I want to change?

What is the predominant feeling that triggers me to change? Where does it come from?

How do I change it?

My action plan – how am I going to implement the change?

What do I do then?

I typically read through the email one more time and then send it off. Where change is measurable and important enough, I adjust my quarterly OKRs (I'll write about them another time) to make sure I keep myself accountable and incorporate changes into my daily or weekly habits.

Why 90 days?

I've found 'once a quarter' to be a good timeframe for myself to review and preview. I feel that longer time frames – e.g. annual goals – are too long for me to estimate what's going to happen and plan. And shorter periods – weekly or monthly – are too little time to make impactful changes.

I also don't want to constantly re-think and second guess my priorities and decisions. Doing that on a daily or weekly basis would take too much energy and time – and lead to very volatile goals based on my daily state of mind.

The 90 days allow me to focus 100% on execution in between these exercises. What's the worst that can happen? I go in the slightly wrong direction for a few weeks. That's a risk I can take!

I've found it very valuable to reflect on these 12 areas once every three months and turn my thoughts into written form. Receiving a note from the past three months later is always a very interesting experience – seeing that 'mirror' shows me how I've grown, how my values have changed and which wishes and predictions I've followed.

I've started this process on a birthday in the past and intended to do it on an annual basis only. Back then I wrote: Age is just a number – but a year is a year and this process helps me live each one to the fullest.

I feel that this process is very valuable to my life and incorporating it on a quarterly basis has helped me to be very conscious about how I want to live my life and what I want to do with it.

Source: https://cedricwaldburger.com/2017/06/06/a-simple-exercise-to-improve-all-areas-of-your-life/