

Dream it, Do it!



There's no reason to put off your grandest goals and desires until "someday." Three life coaches offer guidance to help you harness your dreams, starting now.

"The world needs dreamers and the world needs doers. But above all, the world needs dreamers who do."

--Sarah Ban Breathnach

What do you really want to do in your life? If money were no object, what would you do? Write a novel, travel the world, start your own company? Many of us dismiss such dreams as indulgent fantasies. After all, with so many challenges in the here and now, the idea of dreaming about the future may seem pointless, even decadent.

If that's been your perspective to date, maybe it's time you retired it. The fact is, getting a grip on your deepest desires and ambitions is incredibly important. And while the notion of actually building the cabin, getting the degree or launching the record label may seem awfully far off at the moment, the payoff of such dreams doesn't have to be decades hence. In fact, inspiring ambitions like these can galvanize your focus, rev up your energy supply and increase your life satisfaction starting right now.

For a dream to provide fuel for your present-day reality, it can't be just some random whim or fancy, though. To yield real benefits, the ambition has to be a true reflection of your spirit, your character and your deepest-held values. You can start with a desire for an expensive car, an island paradise or a more shapely physique. But to make your dream work full-time, you must mine beneath that appealing surface.

What's the underlying desire? What is the "why" behind the "what"? What will you do – and what qualities will your life reflect – once you achieve this dream? What does your dream reveal about you and who you want to be?

Armed with such knowledge, you can use the dream to add purpose and momentum to your life right now. Or, if you aren't yet clear about what your life dream is, you can begin developing and defining it. Not only will your dream move you toward a more fulfilling future, but it will also help you peel away the less essential parts of yourself to discover what truly makes you tick.

Valuable Fuel

Successful, satisfied people know the value of dreams and visions, and they're always working on them. In their eyes, life dreams aren't static, isolated solutions or escape hatches from the here and now. Nor are they fantasy cure-alls or "consolation prizes" that will someday compensate them for otherwise meaningless labors. Rather, to people who are actively working on their dreams, the dream is their life.

Like a painter repeatedly drawn back to work on a canvas, a dream-motivated person sees all his or her daily achievements (even mundane ones) as contributing to a larger effort that expresses his or her very essence. Because that effort is meaningful and rewarding in itself, it propels the person forward – in good times and bad, through successes and setbacks – in a way that no mere carrot or simple material reward could.

"Dreams keep our eye on the big picture," explains Richard J. Leider, coauthor of the best-selling *Repacking Your Bags: Lighten the Load for the Rest of Your Life* (Berrett-Koehler, 2002) and *Whistle While You Work: Heeding Your Life's Calling* (Berrett-Koehler, 2001). By honing our focus, he notes, a life dream can help us identify where our lives are confused, cluttered or off course.

Having a clearly defined dream is so inspiring, explains Leider, that it puts our less authentic priorities to shame. Once we have our highest goal in sight, we want to simplify

our days and free ourselves from distractions so that we can pursue our passion with even more clarity of purpose. In this context, sacrifices become less painful. Obstacles seem less daunting. Our best abilities are sharpened, and often our sense of higher purpose unfolds.

Our dreams not only point the way to a richer future, they also keep us connected with our guiding values. They help us guard against the direction-drift that can occur in their absence, and they serve as rocket fuel that helps us blast past little diversions and temptations that might otherwise lure us off course – or leave us idling for years at a time. "When we are courageous enough to convert our dreams into present-day goals," asserts Leider, "we're prepared to live a life of no regrets."

For those of you who think this is just another goofy and unrealistic load of New Age hooey, consider this: Martin Luther King Jr. changed the course of American history with his dream of racial equality. The point is, dreams can be personal accomplishments, but they can also be humanitarian contributions, spiritual quests or creative desires.

In fact, most of history's great accomplishments are the expressions of individual or collective dreams for something better – something that had not as yet been done, but which a person (or a group of people) believed could be.

To help you start making your dream happen for you, we've assembled a highly qualified "dream team": Joyce Chapman, Marcia Wieder and Richard Leider are all nationally recognized life-dream experts who help ordinary people, Fortune 500 companies and big-time celebrities (like Oprah) harness the life-changing potential of their deepest desires.

The approaches of all three experts vary, but they agree on one thing: that those seemingly silly daydreams and doodled notes of yours could contain huge potential value.

In fact, if properly mined, illuminated and harvested, they could very well become your ticket to a better life.

Dream Quest: Awaken the Dreamer
Coach: Joyce Chapman
Purpose: Investigate your deepest desires

Some of us are so busy dealing with the daily grind that we've lost the ability to dream, to fantasize or wonder "what if?" We may be complacent or numb, or stuck in a negative rut so deep that when little visions pop up, we wave them off without further investigation or inquiry.

Joyce Chapman helps such people get back in touch with their dreams. Chapman is a California-based life coach, speaker and the author of *Live Your Dream: Discover and Achieve Your Life Purpose* (New Page Books, 2002) and other books . Below are Chapman's recommendations for getting started.

1. Honor Your Fantasies

To get a more definite idea of what your life goal or dream is, you need to recognize that your current fantasies, even the silly ones, may be trying to tell you something about what you want out of life, or how you wish your life were different, says Chapman. So listen to what they are saying.

For example, instead of dismissing your fantasies of a sexy Italian lover as an unrealistic escape from an unsatisfying relationship, look beyond that initial impulse. Perhaps your dream signals a real longing for more physical or emotional passion, or for a deeper connection with your partner. Ultimately, you might use this realization to rebuild or reconsider your current relationship. Or maybe there is an entirely different sort of passion trying to surface, and this is just its way of getting your attention. Try coming at the fantasy from a few different angles to see what insights it might yield.

Your homework: Instead of letting daydreams flutter into your brain and out again, stop and examine them. Write them down in your diary or planner; start a three-ring binder or collage; create a file on your PDA or computer. Do you see any patterns or themes? What are these fantasies about, and what are they trying to tell you? When do they come up? How do they make you feel? How are they different from your life now? How would you be different if they came true?

2. Evolve The Dream

Making sense of your daydreams will help you get in touch with the circumstances in your current life that you would like to change and point you in the direction you want to go. While Chapman encourages her clients to write the details of their daydreams into a journal, that's not the only way you can troll for deeper meanings. You can also ponder the details during your morning run or commute (just remember to stay focused on the road). Using a recorder with your iPod or PDA, dictate your dream insights as they come up. Toss attractive snippets from magazines into an envelope, then create a collage. Or share your findings with a life coach or a trusted friend. Just be sure that you review all the thoughts and feelings that the visualization evokes. Notice the values that reappear. How are they present, or absent, in your daily life?

Your homework: After you've reviewed your daydreams, ask yourself what you want to accomplish in this lifetime: What do you want to be remembered for? If you could do anything in the world you wanted, what would that be? Whom do you most admire and why? Does your emerging dream reflect those values or abilities?

Finally, ask yourself: What is my dream? Any and all answers, no matter how outrageous, have value. Come up with a clear, simple statement that expresses your dream. Chapman cites as an example: "My dream is to travel the world as an actor, making people laugh." Write your dream statement in your journal or turn it into an affirmation that you review each morning and repeat throughout the day.

3. Test Your Dream

Is your dream an expression of your deepest desires, one you are willing to put into action? Or is it just an impossible whim that you're chasing as an excuse to steer clear of a more attainable (and potentially more terrifying) real-world option? To find out, ask yourself how much you'd be willing to risk in order to get this dream. If the answer is "not much," Chapman says that your dream is probably more of a fantasy.

That's not to say that fantasies don't serve their purpose. In fact, they can help you clarify your priorities. Let's say you've always fantasized about being a movie star. Would you be willing to move to Los Angeles and audition, knowing that if you landed a role, you might have to move your family? If not, perhaps taking on a challenging role in a regional theater would fulfill your fantasy. Or maybe you don't want to act at all. Perhaps you just want to get recognized, period. Would other dreams allow you to satisfy this desire?

Your homework: To incorporate your dream into your daily life, identify one thing you are willing to risk or do for your goal right now. The actor who wasn't able to move to L.A., for example, could sign up for auditions closer to home.

Then, up the ante. Make a list of five tradeoffs you are willing to make to attain your dream. If you can't come up with at least five ways that you are willing to put yourself on the line, it's time to look for a more dynamic dream.

Dream Quest: Break through Barriers

Coach: Marcia Wieder

Purpose: Identify and overcome unconscious stumbling blocks

Most dreams aren't easy to attain. By nature, they're daring, extreme and sometimes risky expressions of our deepest desires. To even begin talking about an aspiration, let alone taking action on it, requires courage (for more on that, see the October "Courage Issue" of Experience Life). It also requires overcoming a lot of negativity. "In the early phases of a dream, there is often no evidence that your dream is even a good idea," says life coach Marcia Wieder. "But it is your believing in it, talking about it and acting upon it that will make it real." To do that, you'll have to limit beliefs that can hold you back. Wieder, author of *Making Your Dreams Come True* (Random House, 1999), has this advice:

1. Choose Positive Beliefs

Everyone gets bogged down with negative thinking now and then, but you don't have to let a negative mindset con you out of your goals. Instead of coming up with a list of reasons you can't have your dream, ditch what Wieder calls the "doubter voice" and recast your aspirations in a more positive light. Even if it feels weird at first, try making positive statements, such as: "I can make this happen" and "I know who can help me."

Your homework: Acknowledge that you believe in your dreams, and celebrate the successes you have every day in keeping to them. If you spend an hour online researching opportunities to study abroad, or share your dreams with a friend over coffee, give yourself the credit you deserve for making your dream a part of your day-to-day reality.

Also, realize that exploring and subsequently rejecting a dream has value, too. Your route will change as you go along. Be open and alert to where it leads you and honor that, by engaging in trial and error, you are living your dream. Your primary responsibility lies in following the path you can see now, not in knowing precisely where it will lead beyond the next bend. (For more advice on effectively pursuing your dreams, see "Getting There.")

2. Leverage Fear and Doubt

The No. 1 way we sabotage our desires is by projecting our fears, doubts and concerns into our dreams. For example, Wieder says that it's common for people to tell her that they don't have enough money to pursue their dream. When she asks how much they need, the answer is invariably, "I don't know how much I need, but I know I don't have enough." Says Wieder, "We too often kill off our dreams before we explore the possibilities of where they might take us and how we might get there."

Fear is a gauge, a feedback mechanism that tells us we are leaving our familiar shallows and moving into deeper, unfamiliar and perhaps uncharted territories, says Wieder. "It's a sign that you are in process, an indicator that you are moving forward in the pursuit of your

dream." Fear doesn't always say "STOP!" she notes. Sometimes it says, "proceed with focused attention" and other times it simply says, "Hey, your dream boat is now departing!" But unless you learn to recognize fear as an indicator of progress and possibility, it will drag you back to the dock every time.

Your homework: Test your limiting reactions. Rather than just tamping down your ambitions by saying, "I'm afraid," Wieder suggests that you challenge that thought to make it clear and specific. What, exactly, are you afraid of? How much, precisely, would a step toward your dream cost? The more clarity you have, the easier it will be to get the support you need to work through your fears.

Dream Quest: Take Action

Coach: Richard Leider

Purpose: Anchor your dream in reality

Dream building isn't just about feeding life into your dream, it's also about feeding your dream into your life.

Richard Leider works with individuals, leaders and teams to help them integrate life dreams into work and family time. Leider is founding partner of the Inventure Group, a Twin Cities–based training firm that works with Fortune 500 companies such as General Motors, AT&T and 3M. His top suggestions:

1. Find Purpose Partners

When you make the changes necessary to live your dreams, your relationships change, too. Say that after years of dreaming about running a marathon, you've finally signed up for one. You join a running club and start devoting your Saturday mornings to 10-milers. You're ecstatic. But the people closest to you aren't. They miss the person who always had time for a weekend-morning phone chat or an afternoon movie.

To get your important people on board with your dream, Leider suggests that you help them distill and define their dreams, too. Then, you can trade on the mutual enthusiasm you share in discovering what fulfills each of you. This can help create some new glue in your relationship. From there, it will be easier to find ways of supporting each other's individual pursuits while maintaining common bonds.

Your homework: Work with your friends and loved ones to create what Leider calls a "master dream list," essentially an exhaustive accounting of all the things each of you wants to do before you die. Have your friends, even your children, write lists of their own. Then compare your lists, finding out more about the details of each other's goals and plans. Leider stresses that it's important not to push your own agenda. Listen carefully to everybody's dreams. They may point your relationships in an exciting new direction.

2. Develop an Action Plan

Whether you're a corporate CEO or a college freshman, Leider says that the most common characteristic of people who achieve their dreams is the ability to set concrete mini-goals to keep their momentum going. Before they can be achieved, says Leider, most dreams must be broken down into much smaller steps. The more specific your action plan, and the more closely you can adhere to your own deadlines, the better your chance for success.

Your homework: Leider suggests choosing four things to do in the next month – more will be overwhelming, fewer won't set the bar high enough. Write them on a calendar and plan to complete one goal today, one this week, and the remaining two at the middle and end of your deadline.

At the same time, examine your schedule for events and obligations that don't contribute to your dream. Use your dream work as a tool to simplify and streamline your life. Repeat this strategy each month.

Planning and executing goals will give you a sense of accomplishment and momentum. It will also give you feedback you can use when refining your dream.

3. Go Public

When it comes to talking about your dream, it's wise to share it with only a select few until you are confident about your desires. If your dream is to start your own business, you may not want to confide in an embittered coworker who is stuck in a dead-end job. But once you've reached the point where you have the support of your important friends, and are feeling confident and willing to make the tradeoffs necessary to realize your dream, there's no need to hide your plans.

Your homework: Explain your dreams and mini-goals to a few important people and ask them to hold you accountable for reaching them. Mark down dates on the calendar when you will report your progress to your newly founded dream-oversight committee. And don't forget to look back occasionally to see how far you've come!

RESOURCES

Web

www.joycechapman.com for more on Joyce Chapman
www.inventuregroup.com for more on Richard Leider
www.mydreamcoach.com for more on Marcia Wieder

Books

Live Your Dream: Discover and Achieve Your Life Purpose by Joyce Chapman, MA (New Page Books, 2002)

Celebrate Your Dream: Fulfill Your Destiny One Wish at a Time by Joyce Chapman (New Page Books, 2002)

Whistle While You Work: Heeding Your Life's Calling by Richard J. Leider and David A. Shapiro (Berrett-Koehler, 2001)

Repacking Your Bags: Lighten the Load for the Rest of Your Life by Richard J. Leider and David A. Shapiro (Berrett-Koehler, 2002)

Doing Less and Having More: Five Easy Steps for Discovering What You Really Want – And Getting It by Marcia Wieder (Quill [HarperCollins], 1999)

Making Your Dreams Come True by Marcia Wieder (Random House, 1999)