

# Five Ways to Become More Intentional

by *Elaine Voci* Ph.D.

*In a world filled with seemingly endless noise, conflict, and distractions, how can we live a life with purpose? A life filled with resilience, vitality, compassion and altruism in which we feel strongly connected to our community, our family, our life's work and our personal mission. Here are five time tested ways to build a life worth living:*

## Self-awareness and Mindfulness

Knowing yourself is venerable advice; over the entrance to the temple of Apollo at Delphi in ancient Greece were the words, 'Know Thyself'. Being aware of what makes you unique enables you to explore, exploit and expand the gifts you were born with. When we live consciously, with deliberation and thought, we demonstrate a high level of self-esteem and self-trust and we make choices on behalf of what is right and true for us.

Self-awareness encourages the spiritual intelligence to discern what is often imperceptible to our conscious mind: our inner liveliness, our emerging self and our destiny. To increase self-awareness:

Create an Inspirational Scrapbook by keeping track of what uplifts, inspires and encourages you. Select lines of poetry, stories, or photos that draw you in or other works of art that speak to you nonverbally. Give yourself time to listen to your inner voice; be patient and allow awareness to come to you.

Cut from newspapers and magazines, or print from online blogs, stories that inspire you and goals that are worth pursuing; reflect on the pattern of movies and books that you typically seek out. How do they illuminate or rekindle your hopes?

Keep a journal about experiences that add to your self-knowledge and reveal inner needs, values and wants that remind you of how your life can be at its best.

Take a self-assessment to increase your awareness and acceptance of self. One such instrument can be found on the website, [www.greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://www.greatergood.berkeley.edu) and is entitled, "How Mindful Are You?" "The level of mindfulness is determined by combined levels of awareness and acceptance.

## Choose a Legacy

Legacies are defined as a 'gift of will' and are based on values – what you stand for, what you feel passionately about, and what you believe in.

Each day brings new decisions and opportunities to decide what your attitude will be; to choose the people, places and things on which you will spend time and energy; and to determine how you will act toward yourself and others.

No one can tell you what your life purpose is, but if you seek to convert your passions and interests into a meaningful life, you must stay put and prepare for the long haul. Life is a river of choices flowing toward goals and destinations; ask yourself, 'Does the flow of this river suit me?' and "Is it taking me where I want to go?' and 'Am I moving in the direction of my dreams and the legacy I want to leave?' If the answers are 'no' then correct course now; don't delay. As Steve Jobs once told a graduating class, "Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life."

Use each day wisely to engage with and gradually build the unique legacy you have chosen. By moving slowly, you will gain balance, poise and increase self-knowledge and skills. You will cultivate your authenticity, your perseverance and your compassion – for yourself and others. Gradually your legacy will take shape as you practice the mental discipline to focus on, and prepare for, living your best life. In *The Invitation*, author Oriah Mountain Dreamer reminds us, "We are not offered guarantees. What we are offered is knowledge of life and ourselves, and if we are awake, glimpses of the wisdom held in the story our life is telling the world."

## Align Daily Actions with Your Legacy

Congruence is when your actions match your words and stated goals. For example, if you aspire to leave a legacy of love then caring actions will be undertaken with all your heart, and you will give your time, talent and treasure loving those causes and people you care about. When you are motivated by love, it shows; other people can sense it, feel it, and see it. You will feel alive, and as your life satisfaction grows, you will be motivated to choose love over and over again.



By aligning your actions with your legacy you are committing to something greater than yourself. You are learning to wisely care about the things that truly matter; you are treating yourself and others well, with respect and compassion. You have concentrated and committed your heart, attention and intention to what matters to you. This produces a sense of wonder and awe that gives rise to the deep understanding that all life is sacred.

### **Self-discipline and Perseverance**

There is a difference between being intentional and being well intentioned. The key is commitment and action. We can be committed to many different kinds of interests, for example, and we may have some great ideas about what we want to do with our life, but if we don't actually consciously choose what we pursue and how we think, then not much will happen. Simple acts like turning off the TV, taking time to read, to think, to talk and share ideas with people we love, to leave the phone off for an hour – these are all ways to lower the volume of this noisy world and to help us focus on our life goals.

Self-discipline includes the willingness to be patient, to build positive habits over time, and to resist the temptations in life to waste time, to misuse our talents, or to shrink from the opportunity to serve others. In the classic book on emotional awareness, *The Language of Feelings*, author David Viscott, M.D. writes, "Your goal in life is to become your best self. Your immediate goal is to get on the path that will lead you there... You are here to develop and grow, to do your share to make the outside world a better place to live, and to make the immediate world in which you live, the world that is you, as honest and as true to your feelings as you possibly can."



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### **Learn from Others**

Don't compare yourself with all others – only the ones worth emulating, the ones who inspire your spirit and encourage your heart. Look around and study the heroes in your community; how do they choose to live? What do they treasure? What impact are they having on others? How do they view challenges? You will find that heroes are seldom selfish people; they look for ways to help others as they go through life. To heroes, service is a lifelong process, a way of thinking about life.

If you start your day by asking yourself the question, "How can I be of service?" you will find a multitude of ways that you can be helpful to others. Answers will pop up all day long. Your opportunities to be of service are endless. Some of the best ways to be of service are in simple actions - quiet, often unnoticed, acts of kindness. Things like being supportive of a new endeavor by a friend, or taking the time and energy to listen to someone share their concerns.

These five positive and protective ways toward a life of intention help you respond to life more gracefully and each of them acts as a navigational guide to keep pointing you in the right direction. As you consciously give more of yourself in your own unique ways, you will experience greater feelings of peace than you ever thought possible and you will grow in resilience and happiness.