My Future Self: A Life Worth Moving Towards

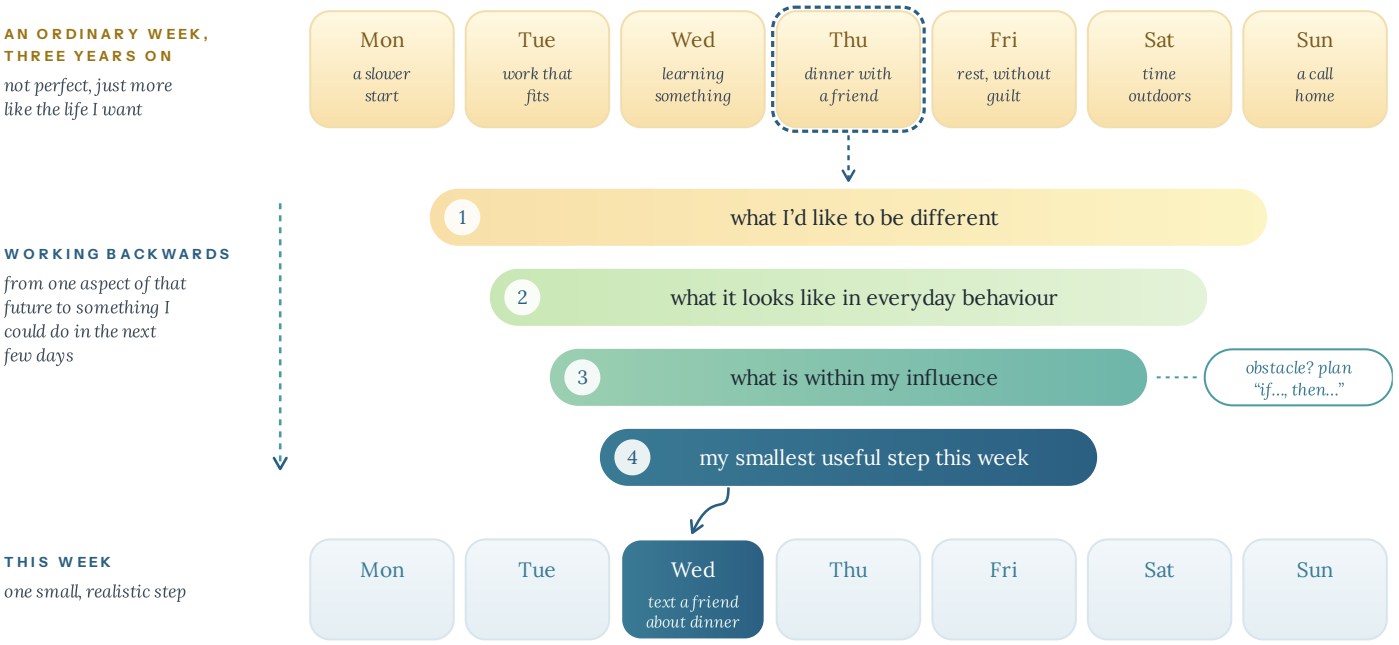
MOOD, MOTIVATION & BEHAVIOUR

Turning a hopeful future into practical direction

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What kind of life do I want to move towards, and what would that look like in ordinary daily life?

This form asks you to imagine a realistic future, then work backwards from it to the small, observable things you could begin doing now. It is not about becoming a different person or overhauling your whole life; it is about finding a direction and taking one manageable step.



01 Why imagine, then plan?

what the research suggests

Imagining can help

Writing about a hoped-for future self has been linked with improvements in wellbeing in several studies, beginning with King's (2001) work on the "best possible self". Effects are usually modest.

Daydreams alone aren't enough

Indulging in idealised fantasies about the future has been linked with less effort and poorer outcomes, whereas realistic expectations predicted more (Oettingen & Mayer, 2002). This is why the form includes obstacles.

Plans that name the obstacle

Specific "if..., then..." plans, such as "If I feel too tired after work, then I will take a ten-minute walk", have been shown to help people act on their intentions (Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006).

02 What this is, and isn't

keeping it realistic

It is
a realistic picture of an ordinary week, worked back into one small step you could take now

It isn't
a promise of a problem-free life, a test you can fail, or a demand to change everything at once

It can include
difficulties, limits and uncertainty; a meaningful life still has hard days

HOW TO USE IT

1. Imagine the week
2. Choose one aspect
3. Work backwards
4. Take one step
5. Review and adjust

A REALISTIC FUTURE

Imagine yourself three years from now. Not a perfect version of yourself, and not a life without difficulties: an ordinary week in a life that feels more satisfying, meaningful and consistent with who you want to be. If imagining the future feels painful or hard to reach at the moment, start with a few weeks or months ahead instead.

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02 The future self reflection

an ordinary week, three years on

Take a few quiet minutes. Picture an ordinary week in this future in as much everyday detail as you can, then answer the prompts that feel most useful. You do not need to answer them all.

What does an ordinary morning look like?

where you are, how you start the day, how you feel

What occupies your time and attention?

work, study, care, interests, rest

What kinds of relationships are you investing in?

who is around you, and how you spend time together

What are you learning, creating or contributing to?

large or small

How do you respond when something goes wrong?

difficulties still happen in this future

What have you made more room for?

rest, people, health, play, quiet

What have you stopped expecting of yourself?

the standards or pressures you no longer carry

What stands out most about this future?

the feeling or detail I most want more of

· Noticing my response

there is no right reaction

Imagining this future, I feel...

○ hopeful ○ motivated ○ calm ○ unsure ○ sad ○ overwhelmed ○ something else

If it was hard to imagine, what made it hard?

this is useful information too

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03 Future to present

working backwards from one aspect

QUESTION	MY RESPONSE
1 What would I like to be different? *choose one aspect of this future*	
2 What would that difference look like in everyday behaviour? *something someone could see me doing*	
3 What is currently getting in the way? *practical, emotional or circumstantial*	
4 What is within my influence? *even partly*	
5 What is the smallest useful step I could take this week? *specific: what, when and where*	
6 What might make this difficult? *be honest; obstacles are expected*	
7 How could I respond if that obstacle arises? *an "if..., then..." plan*	*If* _____ *then I will* _____

04 After the week

notice, adjust, continue

Did I take the step?

○ yes ○ partly ○ not yet

What helped, or what got in the way?

What would I adjust for next week?
a smaller step, a different time, more support

The aim is direction rather than perfection: small, realistic steps towards a life that feels more like your own.

SOURCES

Gollwitzer, P. M., & Sheeran, P. (2006). Implementation intentions and goal achievement: A meta-analysis of effects and processes. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 38*, 69–119.

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