

# Coaching for Meaning & Purpose

APS Coaching Conference 2014

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Meaning in life....

‘The extent to which people comprehend, make sense of, or see **significance** in their lives, accompanied by the degree to which they perceive themselves to have a **purpose**, mission or overarching aim in life’ Michael Steger

Psychological flexibility is:

“Contacting the present moment fully as a conscious human being, and based on what the situation affords, changing or persisting in behavior in the service of chosen values” - Steve Hayes

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‘Values are intentional qualities that join together a string of moments into a meaningful path’

Steve Hayes

Here are some suggested values, feel free to add values word of your own:

- Authenticity
- Adventure
- Acceptance
- Caring
- Compassion
- Conscientiousness
- Courage
- Curiosity
- Creativity
- Cooperation
- Empathy
- Enthusiasm
- Fairness
- Forgiveness
- Generosity
- Grace
- Gratitude
- Hope
- Honesty
- Humour
- Integrity
- Justice
- Kindness
- Learning
- Loyalty
- Being loving
- Mindfulness
- Patience
- Persistence
- Respect
- Being supportive
- Being trustworthy
- Wisdom
- Other?

# Questions to Assess Your Current Level of Meaning in Work & Life

(based on the WAMI and MLQ - Steger)

	Absolutely Untrue	Mostly Untrue	Somewhat Untrue	Can't say True of False	Somewhat True	Mostly True	Absolutely True
Positive Meaning in Work							
Presence of Meaning in Life							
Search for meaning							

## Positive Meaning in Work

1. I have found a meaningful career
2. I understand how my work contributes to my life's meaning
3. I have discovered work that has a satisfying purpose
4. I have a good sense of what makes my job meaningful

## Presence of Meaning in Life

1. I understand my life's meaning
2. My life has a clear sense of purpose
3. I have a good sense of what makes my life meaningful
4. I have discovered a satisfying life's purpose

## Searching for Meaning

1. I am looking for something that makes my life meaningful
2. I am always looking to find my life's purpose
3. I am always searching for something that makes my life feel significant
4. I am seeking a purpose or mission for my life

## Coaching for Meaning in Work

What are the values I want to express in my work?

What strengths and skills do I want to focus on?

What situations bring out the best in me?

Who do I want to serve through my work?

How do they benefit from what I do?

Why is that important to me?

What actions could I take to create more meaning in my work?

What uncomfortable thoughts and feelings might I need to make room for, if I am to take those actions?

# Relational Frame Theory and Meaning Making

RFT provides an explanation of language, cognition and learning that allows for more accurate prediction and influence of behaviour. RFT explains complex human behaviour such as storytelling, metaphors, humour, empathy and perspective-taking.

RFT is grounded in behavioural analysis.

RFT has one central idea: 'Human languaging and cognition consists of a specific kind of learned behavior: A particular way of relating stimuli' Niklas Törneke {Törneke, 2013 #787}

## Relational Frames

Coordination (Sameness, A=B)

Comparison (More than, Less than, Better than, Worse than, Bigger than, Smaller than)

Opposition (Is opposite to)

Distinction (Is different to)

Hierarchy (Contains, is a member of, or belongs to, in this category)

Analogy

Contingency/Conditional (if...then)

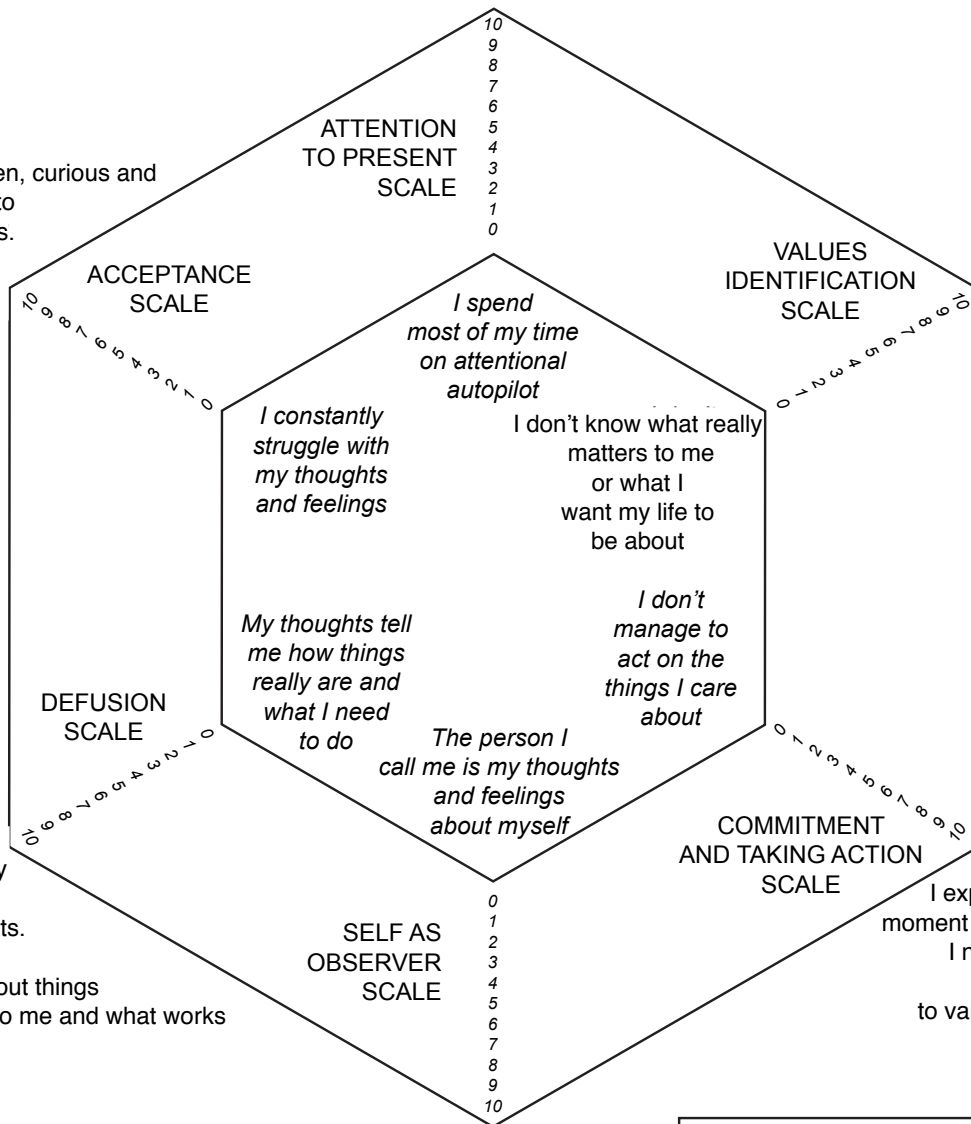
Perspective

- Deixis (I v You; Here v There)
- Temporality (Now v Then; Before v After, Now v Later, 5pm v 3am)

*I flexibly pay attention to what is happening in the present moment*

I choose to adopt an open, curious and compassionate attitude to my thoughts and feelings. I am willing to have discomfort in the service of living my values

I practice actively choosing my values and what I want my life to be about



I practice holding lightly my judgmental and categorical thoughts. Each thought is one of many ways to think about things - what I do next is up to me and what works

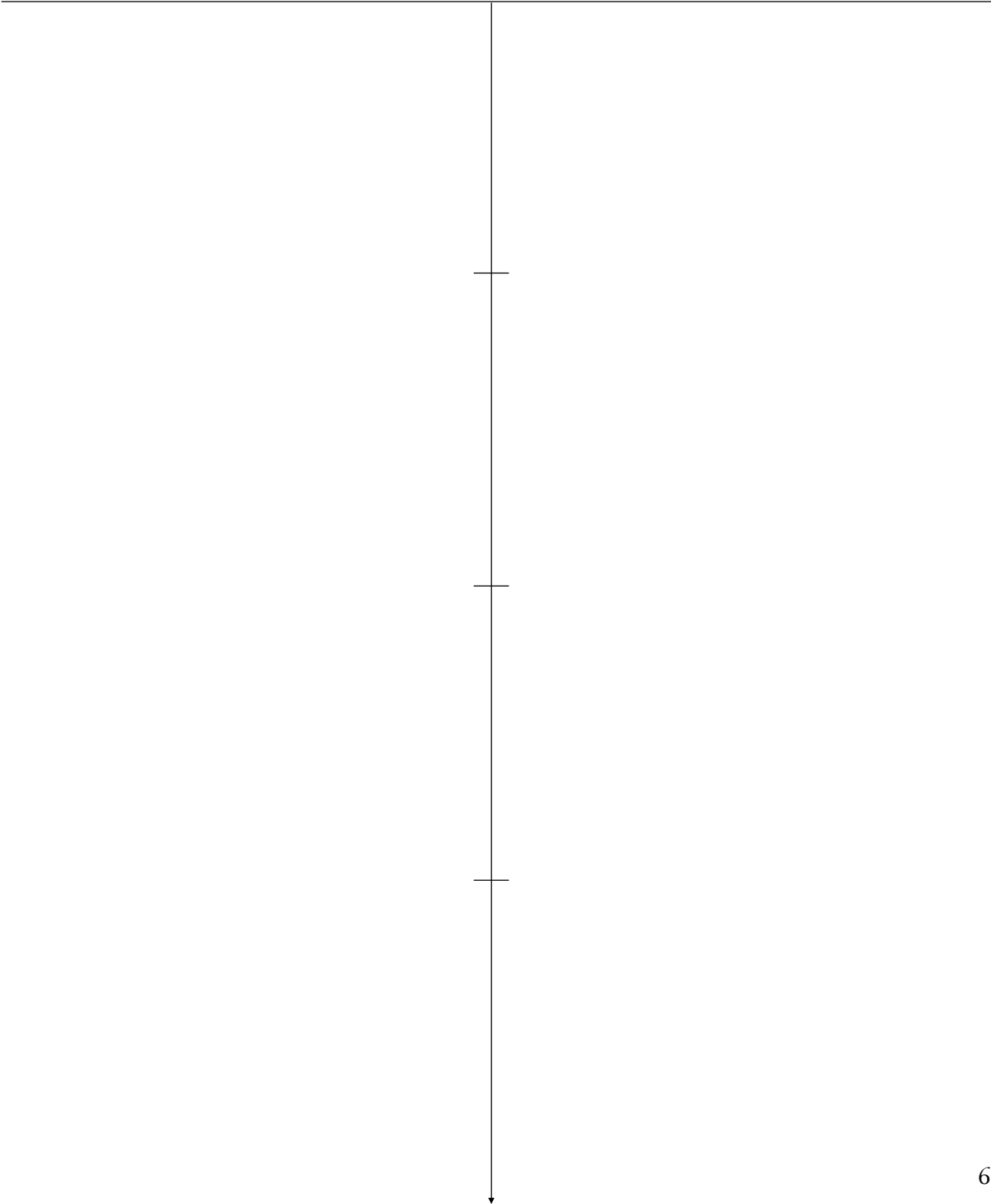
I express my values in my moment to moment behaviour. I notice inaction or away moves and return to valued patterns of action

*The person I call me knows what I am thinking and feeling but is distinct from that process I am able to flexibly take perspective*

SCORES	
<b>A</b> cceptance scale .....	_____
<b>C</b> ommitment and <b>T</b> aking action scale .....	_____
<b>A</b> ttention to present scale ...	_____
<b>D</b> efusion score .....	_____
<b>V</b> alues <b>I</b> dentification scale .....	_____
<b>S</b> elf as <b>O</b> bserver scale .....	_____
<b>R</b> esulting Psychological Flexibility Total Score .....	_____

# Sense of Purpose and Significance in Work

Thinking about your working life to date, what have been some of the key turning points?



## Building a Sense of Competence, Autonomy and Relatedness (Weinstein, Ryan and Deci, 2012)

Competence - feeling effective. You can bring about the outcomes that matter to you. You can master challenges. You acquire skills when needed. You seek out positive and constructive feedback. You work to make sure that what you do is at the right level of challenge for your level of skill. You are good at focussing your energy on what is important.

Autonomy - You see your behaviour as due to your own choice. You are able to act in line with your values. You seek out environments where you are encouraged to act in accord with your true self

Relatedness - You feel close and connected to others. You feel people care about you and you are caring towards others. You have trusting relationships with significant others. You are part of a community where you feel a sense of belonging. You relate openly and authentically to significant people in your life.

For most of us, these needs are fundamental to a deep sense of meaning, fulfilment and vitality.

‘Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom’- Viktor E. Frankl

‘Meaning is not something you stumble across, like the answer to a riddle or the prize in a treasure hunt. Meaning is something you build into your life. You build it out of ...your affections and loyalties...out of the things you believe in, out of the things and people you love, out of the values for which you are willing to sacrifice something. The ingredients are there. You are the only one who can put them together into that unique pattern that will be your life. Let it be a life that has dignity and meaning for you. If it does, then the particular balance of success or failure is of less account’ – John Gardner

‘Find something more important than you are, and dedicate your life to it’ Dan Dennett

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A process for creating meaning at work (based on appreciative inquiry and job crafting):

- a. Discover - Identify the best of what is.  
What are your strengths? What values do you want to express in your work? What situations bring out the best in you?
  - b. Dream - Explore what could be. If you could craft your current role into something more meaningful what would you be doing more of and less of? What would you be doing differently?
  - c. Design - Make a plan. How could you make this work? Who do you need to influence? What are the steps? What would the first and smallest step be?
  - d. Deliver - Take some action, notice what happens and repeat the cycle.
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## Resources

Rob Archer's Career psychology blog - [www.thecareerpsychologist.com](http://www.thecareerpsychologist.com)

Blog on ACT in the workplace (Rachel Collis, Rob Archer and Paul Atkins) - [www.workingwithact.com](http://www.workingwithact.com)

## Books and Articles

### *Career Planning:*

How to Find Fulfilling Work - Roman Krznaric

### *ACT:*

ACT Made Simple - Russ Harris

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, The Process and Practice of Mindful Change (2012) Steven Hayes, Kirk Strosahl, & Kelly Wilson

### *Meaning:*

The Human Quest for Meaning, Theories, Research and Applications (2012) Edited by Paul Wong

Promoting Meaning and Purpose in Life (2014) Joo Yeon Shin & Michael Steger, Chapter 5 in The Wiley Handbook of Positive Psychology Interventions

Using the Science of Meaning to Invigorate Values-Congruent, Purpose-Driven Action (2013) Michael Steger, Kelly Sheline, Leslie Merriman & Todd Kashdan. Chapter 11 in Mindfulness, Acceptance and Positive psychology Edited by Todd Kashdan and Joseph Cirrochi

### *Job Crafting*

Job crafting and meaningful work (2013). Berg, J. M., Dutton, J. E., & Wrzesniewski, A. In B. J. Dik, Z. S. Byrne & M. F. Steger (Eds.), Purpose and meaning in the workplace (pp. 81-104). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

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*In this very moment*

*Will you accept the sad and the sweet*

*Hold lightly stories about what is possible*

*and be the author of a life that has meaning and purpose for you.*

*Turning in kindness back to that life when you find yourself moving away from it?*

*Kelly Wilson*