

SUMMARY

DESIGNING YOUR LIFE

BILL BURNETT AND DAVE EVANS



Summary of “Designing Your Life” by Bill Burnett and Dave Evans

Written by Alyssa Burnette

If you’ve ever wanted to lose your uninspired nine-to-five routine and create something meaningful, *Designing Your Life* (2016) is your handbook for making your dream a reality.

Introduction	5
Too Many People Are Stuck in a Rut	6
The Four Key Elements of Life	8
Blend Your Workview and Lifeview	10
Find Your Flow	12
Get Unstuck	14
Design Multiple Lives	16
Final Summary	18



QuickRead

F R E E B O O K S U M M A R I E S

Go to QuickRead.com/App now to download our app and get access to thousands of free book summaries as both text and audiobooks.

Get the key insights of non-fiction books in minutes instead of hours. Listen to our free audiobooks while you workout or on your commute to work.



Introduction

People appreciate masterful design. Whether it's the sleek power of a luxury sports car or the unique style of a designer dress, we love things that make us stop and consider how well-made it is. It gives us a sense of satisfaction and completion, a sense that everything is where it should be and it has all been pulled together by an intelligent being with impeccable taste. Now wouldn't it be great if we could feel that way about our own lives? Given the frequency with which we often sigh over the chaos of our lives, it sometimes seems impossible. But in fact, with just a few tools, we can learn to emulate the same skillful design we appreciate in our favorite products. So, through the course of this summary, we'll take a look at the design tools we need in our toolkit and learn:

- What the four most important parts of life are (and, most importantly, how we can balance them!)
- How to find your compass for life
- Why you want to design more than just one type of life

Too Many People Are Stuck in a Rut

Raise your hand if you feel completely, 100% satisfied with every single aspect of your life. What? No hands? Sadly, that's not much of a surprise, is it? Because as much as we'd like to feel totally in love with every part of our lives, that's rarely true for anyone. Because whether it's dissatisfaction with our relationships, appearances, or profession, there's usually something that causes us distress. And according to some recent surveys, for most people, that's the feeling that they've chosen the wrong career. For example, in a poll of workers across the United States, two-thirds of the people surveyed reported that they were dissatisfied with their job. In some cases, they said that was because they had gotten in a degree in a field that they felt no longer suited them.

For example, thirty years after their college graduation, some people with a degree in civil engineering said they now wished they'd chosen a different career all those years ago. But because that's what they pursued in school and how they've since made their living, many now feel trapped in a career that doesn't bring them any personal or professional satisfaction.

Additional studies on this topic confirm that 31 million Americans between the ages of 44-70 agree that they wish they'd chosen a different career, one which gives them a sense of personal satisfaction or the ability to make a difference in the world in addition to a steady paycheck. Sadly, when asked what's holding them back from pursuing that career, the same respondents affirmed that they either have no idea how to get there or that they feel trapped by their current degrees.

And with that being true for 31 million Americans, we don't have to read between the lines to conclude that we have a national epidemic on our hands. That means we don't need a simple tweak to the system, but rather an overhaul which would radically change our freedom to design our futures. Because after all, a college degree should expand your options, not limit them! And since three-fourths of college graduates in the United States wind up in a career that has nothing to do with their degree, it's

obvious that the potential for expansion is there; we just have to make it more accessible for people. Because if we were really thinking like designers, we would consider the fact that our education and careers should be tools which help us craft a masterpiece of a life, one which is both satisfying and joyful. So, in the next few chapters, we'll take a look at how we can use the tools at our disposal.

The Four Key Elements of Life

Have you ever tried to get directions from Google Maps? If you have, then you know that you can't just blindly type in directions and expect it to give you a route; you have to have an understanding of where you are as well as where you're going. The same is true of designing your life. And sure, that analogy might sound a bit on the nose, but you get my point. Because without accepting our current location and developing a practical plan for how to get from Point A to Point B, our "plans" for designing our futures are just daydreams. So, let's take a look at the four steps we need to assess in order to properly design our lives.

The first step is to identify the four key areas in your life: health, work, play, and love. Health encompasses every element of well-being, including your physical, mental, and emotional health. Work likewise addresses every type of labor you're putting in, both paid and volunteer. Similarly, play can be defined as any activity you enjoy and love applies to everyone you love, from your romantic partners to your friends and family to your pets. So, now that we know what those four areas of health are, let's take a look at how we need to balance them. The exact balance you choose is up to you, but it's important to remember that "all work and no play"-- or vice versa-- isn't okay. So, instead, try to conduct an objective survey of your life and start by asking if any of these areas are being neglected. For example, are you focusing so much on work that your loved ones don't feel very loved right now? Or have you spent so much time playing that you've neglected to develop your career?

Once you've established these preliminary conclusions, it's time to adopt what's known as a "beginner's mindset" and start asking the types of questions you might hear from a complete novice. Because, sure, you know yourself pretty well, but a beginner's mindset is a great outlook to have when you're making a life-changing definition. (You know, like, changing the design of your entire life!) For example, this is the mindset you would want to use when choosing your future career. If you were interested in

studying marine biology because you really love seals, a beginner's mindset might help you to ask helpful questions like, "What does a marine biologist's average workday look like?" and "How much of it really involves seals?" Questions like these can help you avoid a career path that might be potentially unsatisfying and the same is true for finding the right direction in your personal life.

Blend Your Workview and Lifeview

When we think about great discoveries, we tend to think of explorers like Christopher Columbus or Galileo, whose inquiring minds drove them to find new things even when they had little more than a compass to guide them. And although the technological advances of today often lead us to regard the compass as a primitive tool, in fact, a compass is still a useful tool-- and one which can help us chart the course of our careers. In your case, your two guiding poles will be your workview and your lifeview. Let's think of your workview as your own personal philosophy on work and how it should be accomplished. Everyone has one, even if it's simply "I don't want a job, I actually just want a paycheck." So, take a minute to reflect and consider what constitutes "good work" in your opinion and how important additional factors-- like personal satisfaction, social impact, and salary-- are to you.

Similarly, your lifeview is what you consider to be a good life. This encompasses everything from your personal beliefs to your sense of morality to the importance you place on religion, government, society, and personal relationships. If it helps to think of a concrete example, you might say that your lifeview places a lot of importance on the environment and therefore directs you to live a sustainable, plant-based lifestyle on a farm. Whatever views comprise your two guiding poles, it might be helpful to start by reflecting on each area separately and then writing down 250 words or less that accurately describes your views on both. Once you feel you have a fully developed grasp of your comprehensive work and lifeworlds, you can work on finding a balance. The key, of course, is to identify a job that will strike a harmonious balance between your work and lifeworlds.

If you've ever experienced personal or professional dissatisfaction, it probably makes a lot of sense to hear that discontent occurs when you compromise one or more of your defining worldviews. After all, if your lifeworld prioritizes respecting the planet, you'll probably feel deeply uncomfortable in a job with a big pharmaceutical company that dumps

chemicals into rivers. Likewise, if your worldview says that a high-paying job with a lot of notoriety is important to you, you'll feel dissatisfied as a cashier. No matter what your two guiding views are, it's important to consider them when designing the course of your future. Because without this consideration, you're going to feel discontent and misguided. So, now that we know our compass' poles, let's take a look at how we can put our compass to work.

Find Your Flow

The next step is helping you find a state of meaningful engagement that will bring fulfillment to your life. This, of course, is key to satisfaction because it concentrates on eliminating the amount of bored, dissatisfied time you waste in your life. And if you think about the amount of time the average person spends scrolling through Facebook in the bathroom or checking Instagram notifications while they wait for yet another meeting to start, that's a lot of time! So, let's start by thinking about what activities really get your brain engaged.

One good way to measure the things that engage and disengage you is to invest in a Good Time Journal. Unlike a regular journal, which provides a space for divulging all your thoughts and feelings or a bullet journal, which helps you stay productive, a Good Time Journal provides a dedicated space for recording your experiences-- both good and bad-- and understanding more about what brings genuine joy to your life. You can start by taking a moment each day to write down how engaged or happy you are with what you were doing throughout the day. Likewise, if you find yourself feeling unhappy or bored, write that down too. This might lead to some observations such as noting that when you're doing data entry or responding to emails, you feel bored and annoyed. But when you're brainstorming a new project or writing a report, time seems to fly by and you barely think of what you're doing as work.

This is the activity where you enter a state of flow. It's also important to note that this experience isn't limited to work activities; you can find your flow while playing soccer or baking a cake. No matter what the activity involves, "flow" is the state of being totally in the zone; it's when your brain is pleasantly engaged with an activity that's challenging enough to be exciting but not so difficult that it feels stressful or hard. Flow is what you feel when you find meaning and purpose in an activity, and if you really think about it, you might say it's what makes you feel complete. So, while it may not always be feasible to align your favorite flow-related activity with

your career, where possible, you should definitely try! Because if your work engages your brain to that degree, you'll always feel more stimulated than dissatisfied.

And as you search for stimulation, you can also measure your energy levels. Because, as we all know, every daily activity requires a certain level of physical and mental work, both of which drain our energy. But some activities-- like the things we dislike or find stressful-- take a greater toll than others. By contrast, activities that bring us a sense of fulfillment can actually raise our energy levels! Your Good Time Journal can help you track this too, so use it to make note of which activities drain your energy and which ones make you feel rejuvenated and engaged. For example, if you feel drained after sitting in a meeting but you're excited after speaking with a client, make a note of it!

Get Unstuck

But what about the times when life doesn't leave you feeling drained or engaged? What about the times when you just feel stuck? Most of us have felt that way at one time or another and we can all probably relate to the story of Grant, who was working at a car-rental company. Although he had studied literature in college and greatly enjoyed it, he had felt pressured to jump at the first paying job he could get, even though it had nothing to do with his area of study. And despite the fact that he had recently been promoted, Grant still felt completely unenthused by his job. Trapped by the daily grind of angry customers and contractual technicalities, Grant felt as though his life was in a rut.

And because he found his daily routine so unsatisfying, Grant-- like a lot of people-- found himself counting days until the weekend. When his time was his to control, Grant found that he loved hiking and playing basketball-- activities that kept him pumped up and energized, but which couldn't pay the bills. And it was precisely these activities which helped him get out of his rut.

After Grant was introduced to the concept of "mind mapping," he began with "outdoor activities" as his starting point for creating a map of the things he enjoyed. From there, he continued writing things down as they popped into his head, adding other outdoor activities like "surfing," "travel," and "hiking." And once he had these points in place, he began making secondary associations for each of them, like categorizing "mountains" and "exploring" under "hiking," and "Hawaii" and "tropical beach" under "travel." This mind map allowed Grant to freely explore his interests and formulate a plan.

Because the map allowed him to identify the things that made him happiest, he could work on pursuing a career that would bring him a more satisfying life. Mind mapping also encouraged him to realize that he could perhaps get more satisfaction out of his promotion by leveraging it with the

offer that he would take it only if he could transfer to the company's California or Hawaii branch, where he could surf and swim. And as you can see, this is the beauty of mind mapping! Because when you give your mind the freedom to explore new ideas, you find that you can create new opportunities for yourself with just a pen and paper.

Design Multiple Lives

Everybody has regrets. Whether they have to do with choices in our personal or professional lives, everyone can point to something and say, “If only I’d done that differently...” or “If only that hadn’t happened, everything would be better now...” And because everything looks clearer to us in hindsight, it often seems easy to pin-point one particular choice that would have changed the direction of our lives. But the truth is that it’s not so simple. In fact, there’s no such thing as a single, linear path to the life of our dreams, and in most cases, it wasn’t one choice that decided the direction of our futures. Even though we may not always be able to see them, our lives are constructed through hundreds of little choices and opportunities-- both the ones we take and the ones we don’t.

That’s why we need a contingency plan or the ability to plan multiple different lives. For example, let’s take a look at the story of Chung, who graduated from UC Berkeley with offers from four internships, three of which he’d been eagerly hoping to get. Of course he was excited to receive the offers, but he’d never expected to be in a position to choose between three fantastic opportunities. This curveball initially threw him into a cycle of pressure and confusion as he pondered the implications; after all, the internship he chose would likely influence his future career and the rest of his life. But as he struggled with the pressure, he realized that there was actually nothing to keep him from doing all three internships, one right after the other! And as Chung dove into his internships, he discovered another twist. He was so happy about his choice that he couldn’t stop talking about it with his friends, and this led him to discover a passion for helping his friends with their career choices too! And in the end, he realized that he loved helping other people with their careers so much that he quit the remaining internships and decided to study career counselling in grad school.

You can do something similar by designing three potential life plans for yourself, which the author calls “odyssey plans.” These plans take into

account the fact that life is an odyssey, with lots of twists and turns along the way, and that this means it's wise to prepare for a variety of possible outcomes. But instead of thinking of them as "best" or "worst" case scenarios, simply think of them as three equal and possible plans for any direction your life could take. In so doing, you'll find that removing the pressure to follow one singular path will help you feel more engaged and less stressed!

Final Summary

If you want to be happy with your life, that power is absolutely in your control. By approaching your future with the mentality and toolkit of a designer, you can craft a meaningful and satisfying future. Just remember to start by focusing on your current situation and then draft a plan to get from where you are to where you want to be. Next, remember to assess the four key elements of life and find a balance that works for you. From there, you can then move on to understanding your work and lifeviews and do some mind-mapping to help you develop three odyssey plans for your future.



QuickRead

F R E E B O O K S U M M A R I E S

Go to QuickRead.com/App now to download our app and get access to thousands of free book summaries as both text and audiobooks.

Get the key insights of non-fiction books in minutes instead of hours. Listen to our free audiobooks while you workout or on your commute to work.

