

The Life Design Assessment

In order to start where we are, we need to break life down into some discrete areas—health, work, play, and love. As we’ve said, we’ll be focusing mostly on work, but you won’t be able to understand how to design your work until you understand how it fits into the rest of your life. So, in order to start where we are, we have to know where we are. We do this by taking stock of our situation—by taking our own inventory and making an assessment. It’s a way to get an articulated characterization of where we are and answer the age-old question “How’s it going?” But first let’s define the areas that will ground your answer.

Health. From the earliest days of civilization, thoughtful people have recognized that it pays to be healthy. And by “healthy” we mean being well in mind, body, and spirit—emotional health, physical health, and mental health. The relative importance of each of these aspects of health is up to you. How you measure

your own health in these areas is your call. But once you’ve figured out how you define “health,” you need to pay attention to it. How healthy you are will factor significantly into how you assess the quality of your life when answering that “How’s it going?” question.

Work. By “work” we mean your participation in the great ongoing human adventure on the planet. You may or may not be getting paid for it, but this is the stuff you “do.” Assuming you’re not financially independent, you usually are getting paid for at least a portion of your “work.” Don’t for a minute reduce work only to that which you get paid for. Most people have more than one form of work at a time.

Play. Play is all about joy. If you observe children at play (we’re talking more about finger painting with mud than about championship soccer here), you will see the type of play we are talking about. Play is any activity that brings you joy when you do it. It can certainly include organized activity or competition or productive endeavors, but when those things are done “for the joy of it” they are play. When an activity is done to win, to advance, to achieve—even if it’s “fun” to do so—it’s not play. It may be a wonderful thing, but it’s still not play. The question here is what brings you joy purely in the doing.

Love. We all know what love is. And we all know when we have it and when we don’t. Love does make the world go around, and when it’s lacking, our world can feel like it’s not moving us much. We won’t attempt to define love (you know what you think on that, anyway), and we have no formulas for finding your one true love (there are *lots* of other books about that), but we do know that you have to pay attention to it. Love comes to us in a wide range of types, from affection to community to eroticism, and

from a huge array of sources, from parents to friends to colleagues to lovers, but they all share that people thing. That sense of connection. Who are the people in your life, and how is love flowing to and from you and others?

So—How's It Going?

There is no appraisal or judgment *we* (or anyone) can make of your life in these four areas. We've all needed a remodel in at least one of these areas of life. The idea is to pick what to design first, and be curious about how you might design this particular area of your life. Awareness and curiosity are the design mind-sets you need to begin building your way forward.

The exercise below is going to help you figure out where you are and what design problem you'd like to tackle. You can't know where you're going until you know where you are.

Really. You can't.

Do the exercise.

That's why the sign says *You Are Here*.

The Health/Work/Play/Love Dashboard

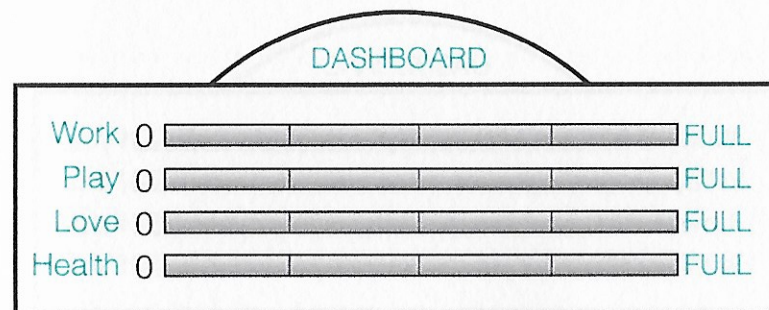
A way to take stock of your current situation, the "You Are Here" for you, is to focus on what we call the health/work/play/love dashboard. Think of this like the gauges on your car's dashboard.

Gauges tell you something about the state of your car: Do you have enough gas to complete your journey? Is there oil in the engine to help it run smoothly? Is it running hot and about to blow? Similarly, the HWPL dashboard will tell you something about the four things that provide energy and focus for your journey and keep your life running smoothly.

Dysfunctional Belief: *I should already know where I'm going.*

Reframe: *You can't know where you are going until you know where you are.*

We are going to ask you to assess your state of health and the ways you work, play, and love. Health is at the base of our diagram because, well, when you're not healthy, nothing else in your life works very well. Work, play, and love are built on top of health and represent three areas we think it's important to pay attention to. We want to stress that there is no perfect balance of these areas. We all have different mixes of health, work, play, and love in our lives at different times. A young single person, fresh from college, might

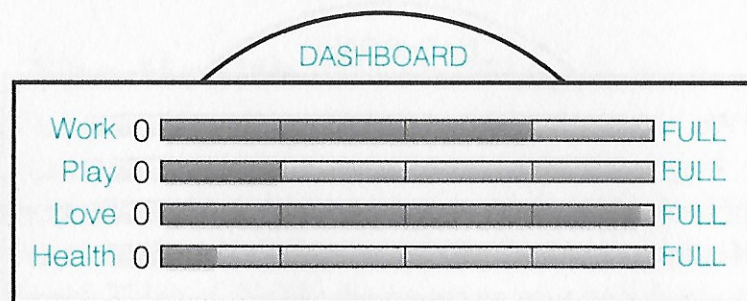


have an abundance of physical health, lots of play and work, but no meaningful love relationship yet. A young couple with children are going to play a lot, but in a different way from when they were single or when they didn't have children. And as we age, health becomes a bigger concern. There will be an appropriate mix for you, and you will have a sense of it, at whatever stage of life you are in.

When you think about health, we suggest you think about more than just a good checkup at the doctor's. A well-designed life is supported by a healthy body, an engaged mind, and often, though not always, some form of spiritual practice. By "spiritual" we don't necessarily mean religious. We call spiritual any practice that is based on a belief in something bigger than ourselves. Again, there is no objective perfect balance of these different areas of health, just a subjective personal sense that either "I have enough" or "Something is missing."

Even though perfect balance is not our goal, a look at this diagram can sometimes warn us that something is not right. Like an emergency light on your car's dashboard, the diagram may serve as an indicator that it's time to pull over and figure out what's wrong.

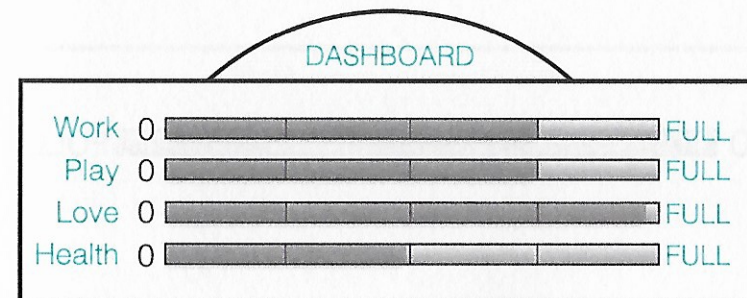
As an example, an entrepreneur who we know named Fred took a look at his dashboard and noticed that he had almost no entries in the health and play categories. His dashboard looked like this:



FRED'S DASHBOARD

Fred had been careful to make time for his wife and family—start-ups can be tough on relationships—so he felt good about his love gauge. He was willing to give up most of his playtime, because he was "all in" on his start-up, so the lack of balance there was okay with him. However, the assessment helped him realize that he had gone too far, especially when it came to his health, which was a red light on his dashboard. "To be a successful, high-performance entrepreneur, particularly under the extreme stress of a start-up, I can't afford to get sick. I need to manage my health, even more now that I'm in a start-up." Fred made some changes: he hired a personal trainer, started working out three times a week, and committed to listening to one audio book a week on a challenging intellectual or spiritual subject during his commute. He reported more efficiency at work and a much higher job and life satisfaction with this new mix.

Debbie, a product manager at Apple who recently stopped working to raise her twin boys, was surprised to find her dashboard reassuring. "I thought that, since I wasn't 'working' anymore, I had lost my 'work' identity. I realized that if I properly valued the work I was doing for the household and my kids, then I was actually working more now than before. And I'm taking good enough care of my body and my mind to make sure that I get to



DEBBIE'S DASHBOARD

enjoy my quality time with the twins. This dashboard validates my choice to stop working for money while my kids are little.”

So there are Fred’s and Debbie’s stories; let’s get started with your dashboard.

Your Health Gauge

As we said, healthy to us means being well in more than just your body; you might want to take into account your mind and spirit, too. The relative importance of each area is entirely up to you. Make a quick assessment of your health and then fill in your gauge—are you a quarter full, or half, or three-quarters, or really full? (Bill has also filled in the gauges for his dashboard as an example to reference.)

How you rate your health will factor significantly into how you assess the quality of your life and what you might want to redesign going forward.

Health



Bill’s example:

Health: I’m in good general health, had a good physical recently. I have slightly elevated cholesterol, I should lose fifteen pounds to be at my ideal weight, I am not exercising, I am out of shape, and I’m frequently winded if I have to run for the train. I read and write about my philosophy of life, work, and love; I read the latest research on the mind and the mind-body connection, but I am losing my memory faster than I think I should. I say an affirmation every morning, and this has completely changed my outlook on life. I have been in an intentional men’s group ever since my son was born (twenty-one years ago), and these men have been my guides and companions on many spiritual journeys. I rate my health as “half full.”



Your Work Gauge

Make a list of all the ways you “work,” and then “gauge” your working life as a whole. We are assuming that there are things on your list that you are getting paid to do. This will include your nine-to-five job, and your second job if the first isn’t enough, and any consulting or advising you do, etc. If you are a regular volunteer in any organization, figure that in, too. If you are a homemaker, like Debbie, make sure you remember that raising children, providing home-cooked meals for your family, taking care of aging parents, and doing housework are all forms of “work.”

Work

0  FULL

Bill's example:

Work: I work at Stanford and do some private consulting, I teach Designing Your Life workshops, I'm on the board of VOZ, a socially responsible start-up (noncompensated).

0  FULL

Your Play Gauge

Play is about activity that brings joy just for the pure sake of the doing of it. It can include organized activity or productive endeavors, but only if they are done for fun and not merit. We contend that all lives need some play, and that making sure there is some play in our day is a critical life design step. Make a quick list of how you play and then fill in your gauge—are you a quarter full, or half, or three-quarters, or really full?

Play

0  FULL

Bill's example:

Play: I play by cooking meals for friends and throwing big outdoor parties—but that's kind of it.

(By the way, Bill considers this to be a *red light* on his dashboard.)

0  FULL

Your Love Gauge

We do think that love makes the world go around, and when we don't have any, our world isn't as bright and alive as it could be. We also know that we have to pay attention to love, and that it arrives in a wide range of forms. Our primary relationship is where we go first for love, children typically come next, and then it's a flood of people and pets and community and anything else that is an object of affection. And it is as critical to feel loved by others as it is to love—it has to go both ways. Where is the love flowing in your life, from you and from others? Make a list, and then fill in your gauge.

Love

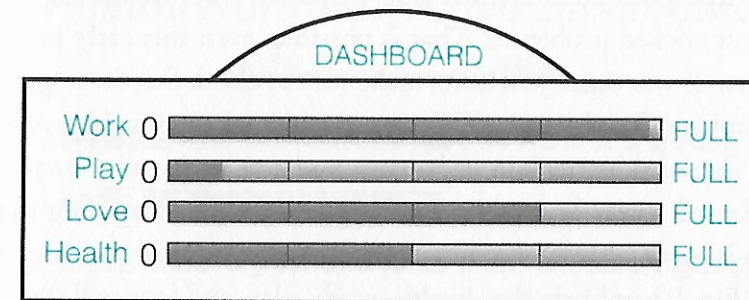
0  FULL

Bill's example:

Love: Love shows up in a lot of places in my life. I love my wife, my children, my parents, my brothers, and my sister, and I receive love back from all of them in their own ways. I love great art, painting especially, and it moves me like nothing else. I love music in all its forms—it can make me happy and can make me cry. I love the great spaces in the world, man-made or in nature, that take my breath away.

0  FULL

A look at Bill's dashboard highlights the lack of play and some issues with physical health. These "red lights" are indicators of areas that Bill may need to attend to.



BILL'S DASHBOARD
with "RED LIGHT" on PLAY and HEALTH

So—How's It Really Going?

Knowing the current status of your health/work/play/love dashboard gives you a framework and some data about yourself, all in one place. Only you know what's good enough or not good enough—right now.

After a few more chapters and a few more tools and ideas, you may want to come back to this assessment and check the dashboard one more time, to see if anything has changed. Since life design is an iterative process of prototypes and experimentation, there are lots of on ramps and off ramps along the way. If you're beginning to think like a designer, you will recognize that life is never done. Work is never done. Play is never done. Love

