Most people spend their entire lives living thoughtlessly and without aim. Your emotional and mental health problems may have caused you to be discouraged and feeling hopeless. Perhaps you have had difficulty starting tasks or following through. Dreams and aspirations fall by the wayside. Time spent planning and focusing on the pursuit of life goals may have evaporated completely. As you get stronger emotionally, it can be a pleasant privilege to once again focus on the important aspects of your new life. To be intentional means to be meaningfully focused on key areas of living. This lesson focuses on 13 essential areas to help you create a purposeful vision for your life, ignore the many interruptions along the way, and accomplish your goals.
LIVING WITH INTENTION

LIVING HAPHAZARDLY
Most people spend their entire lives living thoughtlessly and without aim. Your emotional and mental health problems may have caused you to be discouraged and feeling hopeless. Perhaps you have had difficulty starting tasks or following through. Dreams and aspirations fall by the wayside. Time spent planning and pursuing life goals may have evaporated completely. As you get stronger emotionally, it can be a pleasant privilege to once again focus on the important aspects of your new life.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE INTENTIONAL?
To be intentional is to meaningfully focus on key areas of life; your actions are purposeful and not random or chaotic. You are deliberate in the way you live and what you do. Your desires, wishes, and dreams have significance and meaning for you and others; dreams are pursued with purpose and intention. You understand that sacrifices will be made. You are able to ignore interruptions and delay gratification in order to accomplish your goals.

LIMIT DISTRACTIONS AND INTERRUPTIONS
To be intentional, it is valuable to focus on how you will achieve your goals. Looking at the matrix of importance and urgency on the next page, goals are best understood as having a high level of importance but a low level of urgency.

PERSONAL GOALS
Goals are activities to help us achieve important personal and professional tasks. Adequate time to accomplish your goals should also be considered to help avoid unnecessary urgency or crisis. It is important to allow enough time to work on and accomplish your goals. Poor planning can lead to unnecessary crises or half-finished plans.
INTERRUPTION
If a task is urgent, but not important, you might be easily interrupted. Other people are often the source of these interruptions. Someone walking by your chair while you are reading and asking a question might be seen as an interruption.

DISTRACTION
If the task is not urgent and not important, consider it a distraction. Watching television, playing video games, and endlessly texting may be viewed as distractions. They are neither urgent nor very important, but manage to engage our attention and keep us from working toward any significant goal.

CRISIS
If the task is extremely urgent, and very important, it may feel like a crisis. These are unexpected, but often critical, such as taking a family member to urgent care for immediate medical attention; it cannot be avoided. Some people live in crisis mode all the time, as though they are moving from one disaster or emergency to the next. There are naturally occurring crises, while others seem self-imposed out of neglect, procrastination, poor judgment, and other self-sabotaging behaviors and attitudes. It is always good to have enough time in your schedule to manage these one-time and unplanned events when they do arise.

In your efforts to live intentionally, you will need to limit distractions and interruptions. By addressing concerns before they become a crisis, they will be easier to manage and you will be more equipped to handle them. And as you do, it will become easier for you to set personal goals and accomplish them.

STICK TO THE GOAL
We often spend far too much time with distractions and interruptions and too little time focused on our passions or goals. We are both the interruptions in others’ lives and, of course, find ourselves on the receiving end of interruptions as well. After an interruption occurs it can take several minutes or more to refocus. Distractions too, gobble our time, diverting our attention from the tedious task in front of us to something more interesting and entertaining.

INTERRUPTIONS AND DISTRACTIONS
- Someone asking you to check their work
- Answering your phone
- A child crying, calling your name
- Face to face conversations or requests
- Lunch break
- Using the restroom
- Checking your schedule
- Looking for something you can’t find
- Playing a game on your phone or computer
- Daydreaming

(Covey, pp. 145-183)
• Checking the score of the game
• Minor health issues—headaches, colds, allergies
• Mindlessly watching TV
• Reading a news story
• Checking your email
• Glancing at a magazine

Distractions and interruptions are inevitable; it becomes a frustrating problem when they consume your time and block your goals and passion.

CREATING AN INTENTIONAL VISION FOR YOUR LIFE

Consider each of the following areas of your life. How can you live with more thought and intention?

1. **Family**
   
   Family can be difficult and challenging. Consider various ways you could make a difference in the lives of your family members. What can you do to improve the relationships? Do you have family relationships you need to spend more time on or work to rebuild trust? Are there certain relationships with family members that can be restored or improved?

   Name three things you can do to improve the quality of your family life.

   1. ____________________________________________________________________
   2. ____________________________________________________________________
   3. ____________________________________________________________________

2. **Spending**
   
   Spending habits vary from person to person and can be different for each of us from time to time. We may have difficulty delaying pleasure and end up buying things we do not need or spending more for something because we want it right now. Our culture tries to convince us to buy something now and pay for it later. This can add to painful financial troubles down the road.

   What common impulse buys can you delay or go without?

   ____________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________

3. **Financial Planning**
   
   If you have had emotional difficulties for a long time, perhaps you have financial problems as well. Digging out of financial difficulty can be daunting, and sometimes overwhelming. Commit to starting over, knowing you can make progress over time. Perhaps you have some things to catch up on or clean up. Are you planning to apply for Social Security disability, general assistance, or find
employment? Do you need a loan or other financial help? Do you need to call creditors to determine what needs to be done? Who can help you make sound financial decisions?

Determine three financial goals for the next year.

1. ____________________________________________________________________
2. ____________________________________________________________________
3. ____________________________________________________________________

4 Support Network
As you build and develop your emotional health, it is vital to assemble a support team. Choose friends and peers from treatment who believe in you, can help you grow as a person, and will support your progress. Are there other people in your life you want to reach out to? Are there people in your life with whom you need to limit contact, delete from your phone, or refuse to see?

List three specific steps you can take to strengthen your social network.

1. ____________________________________________________________________
2. ____________________________________________________________________
3. ____________________________________________________________________

5 Mental Health Treatment
In treating emotional problems, it is wise to consider both medications and counseling. Psychiatric medications and counseling often work better in conjunction with each other than either one alone. In thinking about your ongoing mental health needs, how can you best maintain mental health stability and long-term recovery?

List three specific action steps to maintain your mental health.

1. ____________________________________________________________________
2. ____________________________________________________________________
3. ____________________________________________________________________

6 Transportation
Having a car or another way to get around can do wonders for your sense of independence and self-esteem. Being stuck at home can feel isolating and reduce self-sufficiency. Waiting until the last minute to find a ride can be aggravating for everyone involved. Begin thinking things through and intentionally planning ahead. If you fear driving, seek help. The longer you avoid challenges, the more difficult they are to overcome. If your condition is disabling, perhaps learning about busing, medical rides, or finding transportation companies in your area would be helpful. Getting or restoring a driver’s license, and having or using a car may be an important goal for you. If you will not have use of a car in the near future, what alternative means
List three specific ways to maintain or manage your transportation needs.

1.  
2.  
3.  

7 Developing Relationships

In addition to the social network mentioned above, close friendships can improve your overall happiness and mental health. High-quality relationships rarely appear out of the blue or develop by chance. You must be intentional to find and maintain friendships. Is there anyone you would like to reconnect with who would be a strong, loyal, and affirming support for you? Are there people in your life with whom you need to sever relationships? Are you willing to make some phone calls, set aside differences, forgive offenses, give second chances, and make substantial effort to gain new friends or restore old relationships?

List three things you can do to meet new people, foster strong relationships, and make new friends?

1.  
2.  
3.  

Housing

Consider efforts you could make to create a home for yourself and those you are responsible to care for. Where will you live? What can you do to rent or own a home? Looking ahead six months or a year, what housing plans are you pursuing? Who will you live with? What furnishing or maintenance concerns do you have?
9 Hobbies and Interests
As you grow in recovery and get stronger in your mental health, you may find increased interest in hobbies and activities that fell along the wayside. What old hobbies and interests are you excited to start again? Which of your old activities do not support your recovery and keep you disconnected from a sober community? What new interests would you like to develop?

List three specific activities you will pursue over the next several months.
1. ____________________________________________
2. ____________________________________________
3. ____________________________________________

10 Formal and Informal Education
In addition to the hobbies and activities mentioned previously, learning something new can contribute to a sense of accomplishment, pride of achievement, and increased self-esteem. Consider finishing your GED, enrolling in an education class or program, or learn new things through on-line resources. You can grow, learn, and expand your life through both formal and informal education opportunities.

List three specific learning opportunities you would like to pursue.
1. ____________________________________________
2. ____________________________________________
3. ____________________________________________
Managing Legal Problems

Facing legal difficulties can be overwhelming. It is tempting to put off this stressful situation or avoid it altogether, but procrastination often makes things worse. Think through what you need to do to prevent future legal problems, manage your probation or parole requirements, stay on top of your community service, attend probation meetings, and prepare for upcoming court dates.

If you have any current court involvement, list three known action steps needed to comply with your present legal situation.

1. ____________________________________________________________________
2. ____________________________________________________________________
3. ____________________________________________________________________

Physical Health

Consider how you can take better care of yourself physically. Are you willing and able to exercise? Are you getting enough regular exercise, and rest? Do you see your primary care doctor regularly and take medications as they are prescribed? How do you need to change your diet?

List three specific ways you can keep yourself physically healthy.

1. ____________________________________________________________________
2. ____________________________________________________________________
3. ____________________________________________________________________

Attitude

To get the most out of treatment and have the best chance for ongoing, long-lasting emotional health, consider how you can keep a positive attitude. What are some simple things you can do to remain upbeat, positive, and optimistic? Consider being around positive and encouraging people. Use positive self-talk to challenge your old pessimistic and negative scripts.

List three specific positive attitude adjustments you are willing to make.

1. ____________________________________________________________________
2. ____________________________________________________________________
3. ____________________________________________________________________

BEING INTENTIONAL

*Self-discipline is the ability to make yourself do something you don’t necessarily want to do, to get a result you would really like to have.*

(Andrews, n.d.)

*Anything worthwhile is opposed.*

*If you don’t have a plan for your life, someone else does.*

*We can’t improve what we don’t assess.*

*Having clarity on where you want to go is one of the most critical components of your life.*

*You can’t change the past, but all of us have the power to change the future.*
Whatever the goal, small, daily investments can bring big results.

The more belief and confidence we feel toward achieving our goal, the higher the probability of our making the changes required to hit our targets.

(Hyatt, 2016)

The first step towards getting somewhere is to decide you’re not going to stay where you are.

(Morgan, n.d.)

Success is a process, not an event.

(Norton, n.d.)

Simply giving something ‘a shot’ is not giving something our ‘best,’ for our best is made up of as many ‘shots’ as it takes in order to be our best.

(Lounsbrough, n.d.)

**SOURCES**


