

Getting Intentional About Your 'Next Normal'

A self coaching framework



BY ABBY REES



I don't know about you, but I cringe every time someone says, 'I can't wait to get back to normal.' Covid-19 has undoubtedly presented many challenges, but a big bonus is the opportunity to unpack what we took for granted and explore possibilities about how it could be in the next chapter.

As intelligent as humans are, our brains are designed to scan their environment for repeated patterns and quickly create neural pathways. These pathways translate actions from our Cerebral Cortex to our Basal Ganglia that store all of our habits to be recalled effortlessly. Not convinced? Recall how hard you concentrated when learning to drive. My guess is that now you can organise your schedule, shopping list and solve your son's relationship issue all while navigating seamlessly through traffic. That's the basal ganglia at work!

This nifty neurological mechanism also leads us to develop some habits that have unintended, unhelpful, cumulative impacts on the way we say we want to live our lives.

Can you relate to waking up some days and having life dictated for you by other people's meetings in your calendar? Other people's needs? Or how about that feeling at 10pm when you realise it's the first time you've stopped and you've needed to pee since 4pm? If that was 'normal', Covid can keep it!

We've been gifted an opportunity right now. How? Imagine we're carrying a big, heavy unconscious bag containing all our habits including templates for all aspects of how 'we do life'.

Covid has disrupted these otherwise unconscious habits and given us the opportunity to have a good, hard look at our bag of unconscious stuff. We get to sit back and say, this is how I 'did life'. But how do I want my 'next normal' to look? Do I want to take all this with me? Do I have habits that aren't serving me anymore? Do I want to 'return to normal?' or get intentional about my 'next normal?'

The key to intentionality is to allow the time and space to reflect on how you are living now and what elements you can consciously sculpt to craft your life into a shape of your own choosing. Exploring this can feel nebulous and overwhelming, so I've created self-Coaching framework for beginning this exploration with yourself.

My framework helps us unpack life's activities into four key domains of our lives (work, family, recharging, connecting) and categorise these against 3 'energy ratings' (renewing, neutral and depleting). This is based on the positive psychology that if we amplify what energises us, and modify or delete what depletes us, we'll live a better quality life. For those who still have the 'self-care is selfish' demon-voice that was gifted you, hear this...I bet you can feel the difference when interacting with someone who is joyful and energetic as opposed to someone who is burned out and depleted. We unconsciously 'catch' this feeling through emotional contagion. When you take care of yourself, you're positively influencing those around you too! Bonus!

Draw from this framework to create your own. Not all of the domains will appeal. Fine, skip, add to or replace them. The language might not appeal. Cool, then change it to work for you!

<i>Life Domain</i>	<i>Renewal</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Depleting</i>
Work			
Family			
Recharging			
Connecting			

1) For each domain, do a quick-think brain dump of all the activities associated with that area of your life. Use post-it notes to bang-out your ideas so that you can categorise them afterwards.

- Work: how I make a living
- Family: how I/we run our home
- Recharging: how I manage my health: mental, physical, spiritual, social
- Connecting: how I connect with those I love and my life purpose

2) Then categorise each activity against one of the following:

- Renewing Activities: these bring you joy and energy
- Neutral Activities: these don't particularly energise or deplete you
- Depleting Activities: these drain your energy, time and joy

3) Then explore how you might alter each activity to increase your quality of life.

Tip: to fast-track, identify 'the big-ticket items' that will give you the biggest return on energy if you shape them. Renewing Activities: We want to amplify these!

Ask: How can I increase this in my life? (e.g. negotiate with my employer, shift how I spend my weekends, add this into every day?)

Neutral Activities: We want to replace this or tweak it

Ask: How can I change this activity to make it more enjoyable or swap it for something enjoyable (e.g. swap Netflix for TED Talks, add music or an audiobook to a routine drive, make a time to check emails instead of reactively checking)

Depleting Activities: We want to outsource this!

Ask: How can I eradicate this from my life? (e.g. never accept a job with this in it, negotiate a chores swap, get shopping delivered, hire a cleaner, throw out all your uncomfortable shoes)

4) Decide on the actions you're going to take to sculpt at least one of your activities. If you do this every week, you'll be building cumulative changes that are simpler to maintain and won't be too jarring to those around you.

Covid-19, in all its ups and downs, is providing us the opportunity to stop and ask: am I living the life I've really chosen? Or have I fallen into a structured series of unconsciously accepted habits? Here's a clincher: If I had a week to live, would I do in that week what I have done every other week? If the answer is no, take out a pen and get to exploring the framework.



Written by Abby Rees.

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Getting Intentional Framework - Worksheet

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