



# HOW TO GO FROM JUST SURVIVING TO THRIVING

Thrive Now: The  
Essential  
Blueprint for  
Living a Fulfilled  
Life

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# CONTENTS

## **PAGE 1**

Surviving vs  
Thriving

## **PAGE 2**

Definitions

## **PAGE 3**

Fight Flight  
Freeze Fall

## **PAGE 5**

Rest, Digest,  
Create







## **PAGE 6**

A Historical  
Perspective

## **PAGE 7**

Culture Wars

## **PAGE 8**

Thinking Small

## **PAGE 9**

Maslow's Heirarchy of Needs

## **PAGE 14**

What to Do to Thrive

# Surviving vs Thriving

Nobody wants to just survive, although many people feel that is the best they can do. That's because they haven't learned the skills to actually thrive. You may want more than to just survive, but don't really know how to get beyond that. This e-book can help.

Our innate impulse to dream was nurtured for the first few years of our lives, which our own neurology supported. Children are asked what they want to be when they grow up, and parents and other adults entertain those answers with a measure of patronizing. They won't TELL their chubby 6 year old that she will never grow up to be a ballerina—at least not verbally. But by the time children are in middle to late grade school, children start being encouraged to think more rationally, and give up on the dream—even if it is just the dream of the week. We start learning to think small because we are rewarded for thinking conventionally and eventually mocked if we insist that we will be the first person to explore the Marianas Trench.

We learn all sorts of reasons why we should think small. By the time we graduate high school (assuming our dreams have carried that far) most of us have given up on our dreams. Or the dream has become a kind of conventional one, like earning a college degree so you can get a good job. For those who still have their dreams, most lack the skills to create them. Children in the United States are taught that if we want to achieve something, we just have to work harder. For generations people have worked harder—to get the raise or promotion or a house of their own—only to discover that it takes more than just working harder. People look at wealthy people and see that often they don't work as hard as their employees who are burning the midnight oil. And that very resentment can be a stumbling block to thriving.

## Surviving versus Thriving

We are always in a state of Growth or Survival. It takes energy to grow, and that is a luxury if we are in a threatening situation. If you just ate a picnic lunch and go for a walk in the woods where a grizzly bear spots you near her cub, your body will stop digesting your sandwich in order to send all resources to your heart, lungs and muscles, in an effort to keep you from being the bear's lunch.

If you take a skin sample from your cheek and put it in a petri dish with something poisonous on the other side of the petri dish, the sample would move away from the poison. If there was food on the other side of the petri dish, the skin cells would move toward the food. Just like the skin sample, we go toward things that help us restore and we move away from things that don't help us restore. Some activities that help us restore include sleep, nutritious food, movement, supportive social contact, and growth.

We have a lot of problems moving from that survival mode to growth once it is safe. Until we can do that, we have no chance of actually thriving.





# Definitions

So what does it even mean to thrive? There are some things that seem to be a part of thriving but aren't thriving. For instance, it is not just enjoying experiences, although that is part of it. Even people who are just surviving have times when they are enjoying themselves. People who are thriving DO enjoy their lives, but it is so much more.

Resilience is similar to thriving. People who survive well have learned how to be resilient. Surviving is important. If you don't survive, you won't be around to thrive. But it is more than just being resilient.

People who thrive are growing, always learning new skills and information that they apply. But it is more than just growing.

Because thriving has become a popular subject of research, there are a lot of operational definitions of thriving. I like the one Dr Daniel Brown uses: "In the simplest terms, what underpins it is feeling good about life and yourself, and being good at something." (Human Thriving, <https://doi.org/10.1027.1016-9040>)

Many definitions include the concept of prospering, such as "one's business is thriving" and therefore making a lot of money. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines "thrive" as "to grow vigorously: Flourish, to gain in wealth or possessions: Prosper or to progress toward or achieve a goal despite or because of circumstances, often used with On" as "to thrive on conflict."

The Cambridge Dictionary defines it as "to grow, develop or become successful."

Almost all definitions include the concept of growth. If you think of a garden that is thriving; healthy growth is at the heart of it.

The origin of the word goes back to the Old Norse meaning "to grasp for oneself." I appreciate that this recognizes the personal power that people who thrive have. People who thrive are not your go-with-the-flow crowd. They are proactive.

So thriving sounds like a great thing to be doing. But most people in the US spend a significant part of their lives in Survival mode—and don't even realize it. Maybe that's you.



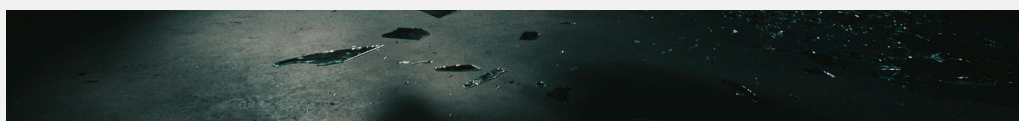
# FIGHT FLIGHT FREEZE FALL

*W*e have two nervous systems. The Sympathetic Nervous System helps us survive. It is what is active when we are in Fight, Flight, Fall, or Freeze. We used to think when people felt threatened, we either fought or ran away. And many times, we do engage in one of those behaviors. But sometimes we basically fall or get so lethargic that we don't take action. And sometimes when threatened, we can't move. When we freeze, we are not relaxed, we just are not moving.

So, when you are vegging on the sofa, you are probably not relaxed, you have probably fallen into Survival mode. The average feeling reported when someone is watching a sit-com is low-grade depression. Vegging on the sofa does not make us happy. It is a way for us to hide from the stresses facing us. Other ways of doing this include spending lots of time on Facebook or some other social media, computer games, or binging on the latest show. Social media can push us deeper into Fight, Flight, Freeze or Fall. These are all indications that you are in Fight, Flight Fall or Freeze.

There are lots of other ways Fight, Flight, Fall or Freeze can show up.  
 Are you anxious? Worry a lot? Have difficulty relaxing your muscles?  
 Do you assume the worst or engage in all the (pessimistic) What Ifs?  
 Do you have trouble soothing yourself once you get upset?  
 Do you want to avoid being around others? Just stay home?  
 Do you have poor motivation? Trouble getting yourself started doing something, even if it is something you want to do? Do you just do what you absolutely must do? Are you in a rut?

Are you suspicious of others, notice how they are different from you instead of how they are similar?





Are you irritable? Impatient? Angry a lot? Short-tempered? Explosive? This anger may be directed at individuals, but may also be directed at groups? Do you tend to lump people into Friends or Enemies?

Do you get aggressive, either verbally or physically? Do you feel the need to carry weapons because you perceive the world as dangerous?

Are you always seeing the worst in situations, so that you complain a lot? That includes complaining about yourself. Are you very self-critical?

Do you hold grudges? Ruminates over past hurts? Have difficulty forgiving?

Does your future look bleak?

Being in Fight or Flight also impairs one's physical health. It impairs one's immune system. It can interfere with your digestion, even negatively affecting the bacteria in your gut. High blood pressure is frequently due to the Fight or Flight Response. It also causes low-grade chronic inflammation. Inflammation has been implicated with all the most prevalent chronic health conditions, including Type 2 diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular disease.

Being in Fight Flight Fall or Freeze chronically is bad news.

It is exactly what is needed when we are actually in danger. And for the vast majority of our history, the world really was a pretty dangerous place. For some places in the world it still is. We are actually wired to be on edge as we look for trouble. Imagine you are walking through a jungle or forest, and you don't notice that all the birds have stopped singing. You are unlikely to be able to pass on your genes to the next generation because you have become some predator's dinner. There is an appropriate time for our Sympathetic Nervous System to be activated. But once the danger is gone, we are supposed to relax. In this day and age, most of the dangers are not life-threatening. That doesn't mean we may not perceive danger. When we feel shame, which is that fear of being disconnected from others, we feel we are in danger and stay in Fight or Flight.

As long as we perceive danger, we never have a chance to shift into our other nervous system. Instead of Fight Flight Freeze or Fall, the Parasympathetic Nervous System allows us to Rest, Digest and Create.

To thrive, you have to be able to shift into Rest, Digest, and Create. So what does that look like?

# REST, DIGEST, CREATE



Do you have a dream or vision to expand your life in some way? Are you actively working on it?

Are you frequently engaging in creative activities? Even cooking can be a creative activity with the right mindset.

Are you able to relax your muscles? Are you usually pretty calm?

Are you optimistic? Do you see the glass half full? Are you grateful for what you have even as you are working to have something more?

Are you learning new information? Are you applying that information? Are you learning new skills?

Do you enjoy trying new foods? New activities? Are you adventurous?

Do you have activities you love doing? Activities that you look forward to doing?

Do you have wonderful supportive people in your life that make it safe for you to try new things, even if you fail?

If you look back on your life, can you recognize how you have grown and changed throughout your life?

Are you generous? Do you know that there will be more that comes to you as you share what you have with others?

Are you fairly confident that whatever happens, you can handle it or find the resources needed for you to handle it?

Are you able to adapt when situations change?

Do you get outside your comfort zone now and then?

Do you forgive yourself quickly and easily when you make a mistake, but still take responsibility for the effects?

Are you comfortable enough in your skin to be authentic, embracing your vulnerability?



# A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

How did we get to the place that even when we are not in danger, we still FEEL like we are in danger? The short answer is that we have been living, primarily, in a worldview that is geared to make us feel like we are in danger. It keeps us living small. It communicates that survival is the best we can expect.

For at least the last 6,000 years people have been living with 2 prominent world-views: Dominator and Partnership. Each has been more primary at various times and places, and they are both vying for our support right now.

In the Neolithic Age, around (8,000 BCE to 4,000 BCE) Partnership was the name of the game. They didn't live in nations at that point, but rather city-states. Archeological research reveals that they were prosperous, felt safe enough to create art, invented sewing, weaving and pottery, domesticated animals, cultivated fields for food, and engaged in trade with other city-states. Both men and women had political power. The guiding principle was making sure everyone in the city-state had their needs met.

Then tribes from the north started invading these city-states, conquering them. The attacks continued periodically over several thousands of years. Not only did they conquer these city-states militarily, but they dominated them culturally. Before the invasions, art was of the Mother Earth/Goddess, who generously and compassionately cared for her people. After many years, the art indicated the Goddess had taken on a male consort. After that, the Goddess and the male God were seen as equal.

The next step showed the God had a female consort. The last step was that the Goddess disappeared entirely and only the male God was left. Domination was complete.

That male God was a good reflection of the Dominator world-view. He was strong, aggressive, vengeful, told people what to do, who to be and what to think, and doled out punishment.

There are some big differences between the Dominator world-view and the Partnership world-view—and let me remind you that they are both still around.

Communication and power is top-down in the Dominator worldview. The powerful take the best for themselves, leaving those without power to fight over the crumbs. Whoever has the power gets to determine the rules/laws that work to consolidate their power. They tell those without power what appropriate action is. They tell those without power who they should be and what to think. And they make sure people comply by the free use of punishment.

The Partnership world-view holds that “we are all in this together,” and everyone does better when the resources are shared, making sure everyone gets their needs met. There is an emphasis on opportunities for growth. Diversity is seen as a benefit, so people are encouraged to think and behave creatively. Communication is lateral, with friendly debate encouraged. And instead of using punishment, reward is used to reinforce helpful behavior. Sensuality is even considered good. How do these look in modern-day America?



# CULTURE WARS

Partnership says it's good to be whoever you identify yourself to be, whether that be straight, gay, transgender, Democratic, Republican, Mexican, woman, man, etc... while Dominator says that (Someone, whether that be God or a political party) we should conform in our gender identity and sexual orientation, and that some countries (and political parties) are deserving better than others.

Dominator says that the use of violence is a preferred way to offer protection; therefore weapons should be readily available in all places. Partnership says that since weapons have not shown themselves to be particularly helpful in keeping people safe, and that the more weapons there are in an area, the more people are injured or killed, weapons should be tightly regulated.

Partnership says that each human has the inherent right to determine how their body is used, by themselves or others; therefore, nobody should be forced to engage in any activity they do not want to engage in. This includes sexual behavior (e.g. rape) or labor (e.g. slavery.) They also have the inherent right to engage in behavior that does not injure another human. Dominator says that the bodies of people who do not have power may be controlled by others if they do not conform to the expectations or identity that the Powerful have determined to be appropriate. That non-compliance can even be punished by physically punitive means.

Dominator says corporal punishment and the death penalty are appropriate punishments when laws are broken. Partnership says that people have inherent worth and therefore rehabilitation is called for when a person breaks laws. If rehabilitation is not possible, then the offender should be imprisoned, not to punish but to keep the rest of the population safe.

Partnership says that people (and therefore society) functions best when we are encouraged to grow and learn new information and skills, that failure is not a reflection of a person's worth and encouragement based on success is more effective in achieving further success. Dominator says that when people do not conform, shame is an appropriate way to punish people, including for their failures.

Dominator says that a good education is important for people who are or will be in the group of the Powerful, but that if a person is not in or going to be in the Power group, education beyond what is required in order to do a particular job is a waste of money. Partnership says that everyone benefits when everyone gets a good education and has the opportunity to apply what they learn.

Partnership embraces art and creative expression, as well as seeing the world in new and different ways. Dominator embraces art that is very traditional in style and supports seeing the world in established ways.





# THINKING SMALL



*A*s you can see, we are exposed to both of these world-views, and they seem to be competing with each other. The Partnership world-view has been growing here since the foundation of the country. The Founding Fathers (and lesser-touted Mothers) were creating a nation that was anything but traditional. They established a country that was based on the input of the people being governed to a radically expanded extent. The franchise of who could vote was originally limited to landowners. Then it was expanded to all white men, regardless of whether they owned land, then to black men. Then

Native Americans who gave up their tribal affiliation could become (non-voting) citizen, followed by women being given the right to vote (in Wyoming only, at first.) Then Native Americans who served in the military in World War 1 were allowed to be (non-voting) citizens. Then all women were granted the right to vote. Then all Native Americans were given the right to vote (despite already being citizens.) Then citizens in Washington DC were given the right to vote. Eventually the right to vote was extended to people who were 18 years old. That expansion was because of the Partnership world-view. So was releasing black people from the bonds of slavery and the expansion of other rights, like the right to have an abortion or to marry the adult of your choice.

The Dominator world-view has slowed the expansion of all these rights, and the efforts to take back those rights are also rooted in that world-view. It is also where the roots of being discouraged from being all you can be came from—assuming you are not in that Power elite. (Being in the group with the Power doesn't guarantee you are thriving, after all, since it still encourages conformity. Even success is supposed to look a certain way.)



# MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

*A*braham Maslow theorized in 1943 that all people have a hierarchy of needs, with the meeting of higher order needs resting on the ones below it having been met. Although Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs isn't perfect, it was revolutionary when he proposed it and is the basis for all the research in Positive Psychology.

The Hierarchy has five levels of Needs, and is often presented as a triangle or pyramid. At the base of the pyramid is Physiological Needs. Safety rests on that. Then Love and Belonging. Next is Esteem, with Self-Actualization (and thriving) at the top of the triangle.

**Physiological Needs** are things like food, shelter, warmth, and sleep. At first glance that looks like everyone in America has that need met. Poverty aside (there are an estimated half million people who are homeless, and about 41 million people in America who struggle with food insecurity) many people do not attend to these basic needs even when they have the ability to do so. If you want to thrive, you must attend to these physiological needs.

Eat food that is healthy for you. Not everyone needs the same type of food. But how well our bodies function depends on the fuel we give it. Everyone needs a certain amount of protein to build muscle mass and strength, repair injury to tissues and supports immune function. Vitamins and minerals are needed in sufficient amounts and ratios so the body can carry out the myriad functions required for health. If we eat foods that lack these (and don't take anything else that would provide them) our body is not getting its physiological needs met.



We require around 8 hours of restful sleep. When we regularly stay up until all hours of the night, and don't get sufficient restful sleep nightly, we will stay in survival mode. It is vital for our metabolism to slow so the energy that is freed up can be used to build and repair tissue, the immune system is activated and hormones are released for growth and development. The brain also requires sleep in order to repair and maintain itself and even flush out toxic molecules that are associated with the development of Alzheimer's. A person may feel like they do fine with reduced amounts of restful sleep, but the evidence is that it will inevitably catch up with that person.

Safety needs include both physical and emotional safety. So obviously if you live in an area (or a home) in which you feel in danger, you aren't going to be able to thrive.

That threat from safety can be actual danger, like living in a war zone, or someplace that has a lot of drive-by shootings. It could also include being in a situation where a person (or someone that person cares deeply about) is being sexually or physically abused. If a person is uncertain of their survival, that person has no energy available to be creative. Survival is more important than anything.

I think emotional abuse can be included here. For a young child, there can be fears that there will be nobody to take care of them, fearing that the caregiver will abandon him/her. We know

that a person can feel in danger for their lives just by being constantly shamed. Shaming creates (or triggers) a belief that if you are in danger you will be unable to protect yourself, and others will not value you enough to protect you, because you are so worthless.


Unrelenting self-criticism can also increase a person's feeling in danger. You know better than anyone what your shame triggers are. Pulling those out and assaulting ourselves with them reinforces the belief that we will lose connection with those in our tribe. It puts you back in Survival mode.

Safety really is primarily the perception of danger. A person can be in real danger and not realize it, and a person can be safe and not realize that. They can indeed perceive themselves to be faced with a danger that is not real. You are going to have a really hard time thriving if you are in real physical danger, but you are also going to have a hard time if you perceive yourself in danger when you are safe. In real danger there may well be something you can do to protect yourself. When the danger is not real, there is typically no solution. There is the feeling of not being safe in the absence of true threat. We refer to it as anxiety.

Anxiety is free floating, looking for a place to land, and assumes that safety is lacking. Fear is focused on something specific. If you fear something that is unfounded, like returning home to find that the house burned down because you forgot to turn the stove off, that fear is going to keep you from thriving.







**B**ut the free floating anxiety can sometimes interfere with functioning even more. With anxiety, everything is potentially the source of the danger. Williams James, noted 19th century psychiatrist said that if we wake up feeling a certain way we will then look around and find a reason for it—and we'll always find something to blame it on. Haven't you had times when you woke up feeling a little achy and decide you probably got exposed to the flu that's going around, and start acting like you have the flu? Or you wake up out of sorts, and start worrying about how your boss might be disapproving of you in some way.

## Chemistry

Often anxiety is connected with what we are thinking. Thinking affects which bio-chemicals are released in the body. Anxiety is experienced in the body. When a person is anxious, they release more cortisol and adrenalin, and less GABA, (a neurotransmitter). It's chemical.

All kinds of chemicals can affect one's level of anxiety, both decreasing it and increasing it. Some medications, such as benzodiazepines, are intended to reduce anxiety. They work, but there is no evidence that they continue to be effective beyond about a month. Antidepressants also reduce anxiety, and many psychiatrists are turning to these to treat their patients with anxiety, even for those patients who don't have depression.

But there are also medications that can increase anxiety as a side effect, e.g. corticosteroids, bronchodilators used for asthma, and certain thyroid medications. If you suspect your medication is causing anxiety, speak with your prescribing physician about alternatives.

Street drugs, such as LSD, cocaine and other stimulants, and even alcohol, can also increase anxiety. But so can marijuana, which despite being legal in many states is still considered -- as of this writing -- a Schedule 1 drug. It has a reputation for making a user mellow, but there are some strains that can make a person not only more anxious but down-right paranoid. If you choose to partake, make sure you know how *any* particular drug affects you.





*F*oods are also chemicals; what we eat can have an effect on our level of anxiety. The most widely recognized is caffeine. Some people can drink coffee right up until bedtime without apparent problems, but other people can't sleep if they drink it past noon—or sometimes at all. Some energy drinks have comparable amounts of caffeine but some have 2 ½ times more caffeine than 8 oz of coffee. If you are prone to anxiety, you may have to reduce or remove caffeine from your diet. At least be aware of the effect it is having on you.

It's important to keep your blood sugars stable. Eating refined carbohydrates-- including things like pastry, pastas, bread (think sandwiches) and anything sugary gets metabolized in your body very quickly, giving you a brief feeling of relief or just feeling good, but it leaves your system quickly as well, resulting in a drop in blood sugar that can create feelings of craving more sweets, sweating, light-headedness, nausea, irritability, heart palpitations and even a feeling of dread or doom. Keeping one's blood sugars stable is vital to managing anxiety. Generally eating some protein or a healthy fat with it can stabilize blood sugars if refined carbs are consumed.

Breathing also has an effect on our body chemistry. Have you ever noticed that your breathing gets ragged when you are anxious, and there is a tendency to hold your breath? In fact, panic attacks can be caused from having too much carbon dioxide in the blood stream. Pranayama breathing is a yogic practice that can be used to significantly reduce anxiety. My favorite breathing technique to reduce anxiety is to breathe in through your nostrils slowly to a count of 4, hold for a count of 2, then exhale even more slowly, through pursed lips, to a count of 6.

So, whatever you ingest, from drugs to food to air, can affect your level of anxiety. People who thrive are proactive in dealing with the problem.







## Filtering

We are exposed to messages about ourselves and about the world from others all the time. Some of those messages we accept and some we reject. WHICH messages we accept (or reject) can make a big difference in whether we thrive and to what extent.

When we pay attention to talk about how dangerous the world is and how untrustworthy people are, we put ourselves in Survival mode. It's easy to get caught up in fear-based conversation. Facebook's algorithm even prioritizes posts that are likely to make readers angry. With increased political polarization, we are far more likely to see others as either friends or enemies.

But is it really true? If we look for evidence we can probably find it either way. I've read that at any one moment there is around 2 billion bits of information we could potentially pay attention to, but our brains can process only a tiny bit of that information—maybe 135 bits. So we are unaware of most of the information available to us. We have to filter, choosing what information to attend to and what information to ignore. If we have had a lot of experiences of being betrayed, we will notice the information that tells us we may be betrayed again—even if we are in an entirely different circle of people. If we have had experiences that people are wonderful, compassionate, and trustworthy, we will pay attention to information that supports this belief—which will also support our thriving.

Anxiety is often related to the SELF-talk we use. That self-talk is based on years of filtering in and out information that supports our conclusions about our experiences. When that self-talk is

critical, we typically increase our anxiety. When we tell ourselves that we are stupid, or unlovable or worthless, we give ourselves reasons to look for danger. It rouses our shame. It makes us feel less able to face the challenges in our lives.

People who thrive actively challenge themselves. They have learned to tame the inner critic and change the self-talk.





## S hame

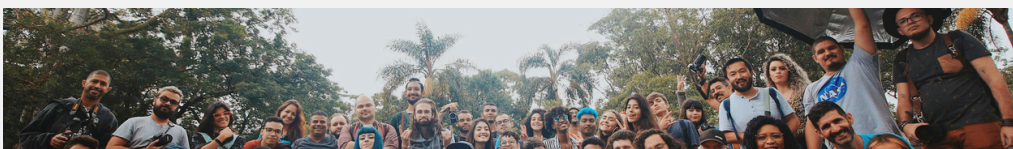
We all experience shame sometimes. It is the fear that we will lose connection with others. We are wired for connection. Infants that do not receive enough physical touch can die from failure to thrive. Being placed in solitary confinement in prison causes long-lasting harm. Thus, we all fear being ostracized.

Fortunately, we can develop shame resilience. Brene Brown says that her research shows that we need to be aware of what our shame triggers are, do some reality testing (e.g. are you really a failure,) and seek out a person who is safe to discuss those feelings with. She says shame needs 3 things: secrecy, silence and judgement, but “it cannot survive being spoken and being met with empathy.”

None of us are perfect and we have all made mistakes. But we have all also had successes. We can calm ourselves, and even get ourselves into Rest, Digest and Create mode as we focus on our successes. Our thriving builds on our successes.

There are ways to train oneself to change our self-talk so one not only suffers less anxiety but also is more optimistic and motivated. Cognitive Behavior Therapy is a widely used and very effective therapy used to treat anxiety and worry. There is lots of information available on how to apply the principles yourself but if your anxiety is debilitating, you may owe it to yourself to find a good mental health therapist to teach you some strategies to manage your anxiety.

**Maslow’s Love and Belonging needs** are about being connected with others. Having any kind of community, even one that is not emotionally supportive, is better than being all alone. Even if the group one belongs to is abusive, it acts to protect its own from outside dangers. Have you had a sibling who was mercilessly mean to you but would beat up anyone else who was mean to you? Our brains are wired for belonging, for being loved by others as well as being loving others. People stay in abusive relationships because of their need for connection. On average a woman with a physically abusive partner will leave the relationship seven times before she leaves permanently. A hormone, oxytocin, is released whenever a person is bonding to another person, even when there is occasional abuse. That oxytocin keeps a person feeling bonded despite the abuse.





There are practical reasons for having people in your life. Having someone who will bail you out of jail or watch the sick kids when you have to go to work or who will help you move makes life so much better, even when those people don't believe in your ability to be .

better than you are.

But imagine having people in your life that believe in you and see you as being greater than you are at the moment. Thriving is supported if you have people in your life that provide not just physical support and companionship, but encouragement to try new things, safety to fail as you learn new skills, and an environment that embraces vulnerability.

The people you want to be in your support system, that meet your Love and Belonging needs, will encourage you to be more than you are, not because there is something lacking in you now, but because they see your potential. They love and accept you for who you are. They respect you, and respect your right to make decisions for yourself, even when they prove to have not been your best decisions. They recognize your ability to learn from your good decisions as well as your bad decisions. They encourage you to explore new frontiers and learn new skills. These are the people who will help you thrive.

**Esteem Needs** are about getting respect from others as well as respecting yourself. It has to do with feeling good about who you are and what you have accomplished. Once a person has gotten to this place on the pyramid, they may re-evaluate how they have been doing on some of the earlier needs. They may decide that eating junk food may keep them alive, but that they deserve to feel good and have strong muscles and a strong immune system, which they can make happen with a different choice of foods. A person may decide that they are worthy of separating themselves from people who are abusive or disrespectful and find people who really accept and value them.

People who thrive typically have come to believe that they came into this world with worth and then have added value to their lives by the actions they have taken. They look at their accomplishments and feel good. They are generous in their definition of what an accomplishment is. It's not just that they have a college degree. It might be that they graduated high school. It might be that they studied really hard and got a C in Algebra. It might be that they made the football team (although they never actually played in a game.) They recognize what effort and grit they put toward the accomplishment, and they give themselves credit for it. They recognize that even painful experiences, perceived failures, made them better people. Thomas Edison had esteem when he persevered in his (and his team's) quest to make the first light bulb. When asked how he felt to have failed 10,000 times in that quest, he responded that he never failed, that it was all just feedback.

That is an important lesson to learn and apply. When people see their actions as either success or failure, and that failure is bad, they are far more likely to be dragged into shame. If we work hard to avoid failure we can't thrive.



People who thrive grow. They learn new information and how to apply it; they learn new skills. They create things. And in the process, they get a lot of feedback. They discover ways not to do something. They discover ways that work well. They even discover ways that work better.

In the process, they face the prospect of rejection. Not everyone is so generous with their support. Some people don't like what was created. Others may love it. And the person who is thriving focuses more on the acceptance without basing their worth on it.

**Self-Actualization Needs** are considered by some to not actually be needs, but I disagree. There is within us a drive to grow, to become more. That is what self-actualization is all about. Even the Universe is expanding. The moment a baby draws it's first breath it is growing into someone it has never been.

Are you the same person you were at birth? Or when you were 13 years old? Of course not! It is in our nature to grow. We grow physically, but also emotionally and intellectually and spiritually.

Are you the same person now as you were when you turned 21 years old? Of course not. You may not have continued growing physically (although the brain continues to wire the Executive Function area of our brains until the mid-to-late 20's) you continued to grow. You moved into new roles, maybe as a spouse or parent or the manager at work. You learned new skills. Maybe you furthered your formal education.



And you are not done growing. I love the line in the movie/musical The Lion King when Mufasa says to Simba "You are more than you have become." You have grown into being someone at this point in your life, but you have far more potential, far more that you can become. This is the stage at which we are reaching for our fullest potential.

This is the land of thriving.



When I first learned about Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs I was about 20 years old. Self-actualization seemed as far-fetched as enlightenment. I figured only an extremely few people were working on self-actualization. Maybe that really was true for the time (although I doubt it.) I suspect that my awareness has expanded greatly; I know lots of people who are self-actualizing. (It's a process; you can't complete it.) I also know many people who are thriving.

Some traits shared by people who thrive include having a positive perspective, spiritual practices, being proactive in addressing problems, self-directed motivation, psychological resilience, and social competence.



# WHAT TO DO TO THRIVE

## Get Your Needs Met

First, refer back to what I said in the Hierarchy of Needs section about what some of your needs are and how to meet them. Use some of your Esteem skills to decide if there are some changes you need to make.

We have all kinds of needs, and a practice that can be done that supports you being able to meet your needs is a particular kind of meditation.

Any meditation practice can be helpful. We know that meditation reduces the stress hormone cortisol, lowers blood pressure, increases empathy, improves your concentration, and makes it easier to get into Flow. Meditation is also a great way to clear your mind so that you can tune in to your divine guidance system.

Only Mindful Meditation and Meta Meditation wire up specific parts of your brain so that it improves emotional regulation, improves concentration, improves processing of non-verbal cues of others, helps one gain a better sense of who they are, what their values are, what they want to do and how best to accomplish it.



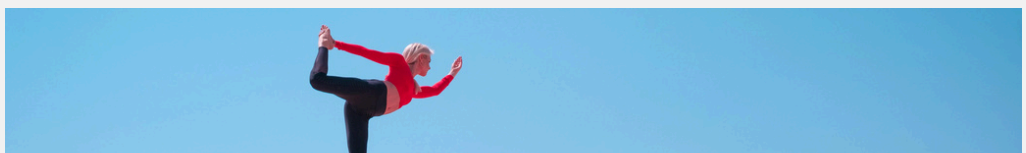
Having good emotional regulation is vital to thriving. Not only does it help with anxiety (so you can move into Rest Digest and Create) but also negativity, and reactivity. We have talked about anxiety. Negativity is rather self-explanatory. Reactivity, however, may show up in a variety of forms and isn't always as easy to recognize.

When a person “flies off the handle” or is verbally or physically aggressive, they are almost always being reactive to something. It can look like irritability and being overly critical. And sometimes a person can be reactive when their shame gets triggered, or they are feeling abandoned. Reactivity in any of these expressions is far less likely to happen when a person is practicing Mindful Meditation regularly.

Reactivity is one of the significant symptoms I saw in people I was doing psychotherapy with who had Borderline Personality Disorder. Despite many therapists working unsuccessfully with this group of clients, I saw dramatic improvement in them, and I am convinced a lot of it was because they were practicing Mindful Meditation daily as they agreed to do as part of their therapy. This practice really does help a person be less reactive, which is pretty important if you are being creative; by its nature, creativity requires vulnerability. Some people will love what you are doing, some will hate it or mock you. People who thrive let the criticism roll off them—or are bothered for a short time then bounce back.

Another thing Mindful Meditation does is increase one's ability to concentrate, as well as see what the unintended results may be for any possible course of action. People who thrive are motivated and are able to stay on track with what they are doing, when the situation calls for it. They are creative but they are also self-directed.

Mindful Meditation is easy to do. Just set your timer for 15 minutes, get in a comfortable position in a quiet (no auditory guidance) setting, and tune into your body. Start counting your breaths, at the bottom of the breath, starting with one. After eight, start over with one. Keep doing this for 15 minutes. And I can guarantee you that at some point your mind will have wandered and you have quit counting altogether, or you will be on some number other than 1-8. This is where the magic takes place.





There are three circuitries in the brain: 1) avoiding something, 2) going toward something with the feeling that it must be done, and 3) satisfaction, in which everything is just fine the way it is. When you notice that you have not done what you set out to do, (counting your breaths 1 through 8 then starting over) the thing most beginner meditators will do is to flip into judging themselves. Instead, stay in the Satisfaction circuitry, letting it be totally okay that your mind wandered. After all, I just told you that I could guarantee that your mind would wander. It's okay.

## **Surround Yourself With Supportive People**

Find people who see the best in you, who see potential in you that you may not even see. Find people who celebrate your attempts at something new, even when it didn't turn out the way you wanted, because they remind you it is not failure, its feedback.

Many people who thrive even have Power Partners in Believing or are a member of a Mastermind group. This group is composed of people who are going for their dreams and need more structured support. The people in the group may have information or are aware of resources needed by someone else in the group, or they have a skill or experience that can be shared that can help move someone in the direction of their dreams. And they believe in the other people in the group (and their dreams) even when someone is having a hard time believing in themselves.

Some people get coaches. I am a Life Mastery Consultant and Dreambuilder coach. If you think you might be interested in working with me, feel free to email me at [novellalifecoach@gmail.com](mailto:novellalifecoach@gmail.com) to set up a free 45 minute Clarity session in which we will talk by Zoom about what your dream is and what the next steps are to creating the life you would love living.

## **Live Whole-Heartedly**

Brene Brown's description of people who live whole-heartedly sounds to me like they also are thriving. She has 10 Guideposts for Whole-hearted Living. She says we must be authentic, cultivate self-compassion and a resilient spirit, cultivate gratitude/joy, cultivate intuition, and a trusting faith, cultivate play and rest, cultivate calm/stillness, and meaningful work, as well as laughter, song, and dance. I think if you are doing those things, you are probably thriving!

## **Be Creative**

It is in our nature to grow and be creative. Creativity can look very different from one person to the next. For some people it may be in the visual arts, like sculpting, drawing, or crocheting. Some people write—novels, blogs, letters to the editor, greeting cards. Some people write music. Performing music, either singing or with some instrument, is a creative process as well. Some people restore old cars, or garden, or play with children, or cook, or redecorate their home. How your creativity is expressed is less important than that it is being expressed.

There is a state of mind called Flow, that was identified in Positive Psychology research by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. Basically, when a person is in Flow they are doing something that requires them to be using a skill (not something passive like listening to music,) they have almost immediate feedback as to how well they are doing, there is nothing they would rather be doing, and they love doing it, so much so that they lose track of time. Some people refer to this as being in "the zone." The person is fully immersed in whatever they are doing. There are many benefits from getting into Flow on a regular basis, including being happier, having greater creativity, having greater self-directed motivation, and better emotional regulation.

People who thrive get into Flow regularly.





## *I*nfuse Your Life With Passion

What do you get all excited about? When you start talking about it, you feel more energized and alive? What are you most interested in learning more about, or teaching more about, or being involved with in some other way?

Passion is essentially your attachment to life. The more expansive your passion, the greater your vitality. Passion generalizes to other parts of your life

if you let it. But when you lack passion, it can spread too.

Find something to be passionate about. Take small risks and notice if it arouses passion. Join a group that shares an interest with you, where some of the people are passionate about the subject. Passion can be contagious. If it's still difficult, explore where the blocks to your passion may be. Perhaps you were told as a child that you needed to behave properly, that if you got too excited about something, or expressed yourself differently in some way, you would be rejected. If that is true in your life NOW, then you may need to find other people to support you for who you are- not who someone else wants you to be. Passion is a skill that can be cultivated. Take risks and see where your passion is.

Be attached to living your amazing life to the fullest!

### **Create the Life You are Dreaming**

A dream is simply your vision of you and your life as you would love it to be. Everyone has a dream, but not everyone is aware of it. If you aren't aware of your dream, you may be growing, but in no intentional way.



Successful people decide for the life they would love before they know how to create it. Once a person decides

what they want, it changes where they put their attention. When I decided to buy a red Prius, it seemed that everyone had one. The decision to create the life you would love also seems to act as a magnet to the ideas and resources needed to create it. Just deciding for it isn't enough (it's not magic, it's science) but being clear about what you would love in your life and making a decision for it are the first couple steps.

If you could live a life you would love, what would it look like? What would it feel like? Who would be with you? How would you spend your time and energy?

In Dreambuilder we talk about creating a life you'd love in 4 areas: Health/Wellness, Relationships, Vocation/Expression in the World and Time/Money Freedom. Each one affects the other, so its best to design a holistic dream in all quadrants. Everything is created twice, first as an idea, then as something of substance. Get a clear idea of what you want to create in your life, then do something every day that moves you toward the dream.

Working to create a dream can get you moving. It can get you out of the rut of living a small restricted life. People who thrive are working on expanding themselves in a variety of ways. Having a dream provides an opportunity to learn new skills, discover new aspects of oneself and increase one's sense of deserving as they accomplish what they set out to do. By its very nature it gives hope that life will be better. Of course, life doesn't have to be bad for you to want it to be better. Optimism is associated with greater happiness and even a longer, healthier more successful life.







## Discover Your Purpose

A person's purpose in life is his/her primary motivator in life. What gets you out of bed in the morning? Why are you here?

Having a purpose in life is associated with a longer, more fulfilled life.

As you design your dream, you may start exploring what you feel you are here to accomplish. You may start considering what your purpose in life is. Some questions to ask yourself include:

What gives me great satisfaction when I am helping others?

What do I most want to be involved with in changing in the world?

When I am on my deathbed, and I think back on my life, what would I have accomplished that gives me peace or joy, knowing that I have lived my life well?

When we look at identifying a purpose in life, it always goes beyond ourselves, our personal interests, our personal wants, or goals. For example, your purpose in life would not be “to make a lot of money,” but it may be that, having made a lot of money, you then used it to make the world better in some specific way, like providing education to underprivileged high school graduates so they can make great contributions to the world themselves.

A high Spiritual Intelligence is associated with having a purpose in life. Spiritual Intelligence involves having an awareness of how one fits into the world. A person with high Spiritual Intelligence has an understanding of how they can make the world (at least their corner of it) better, and how they can also make it worse—and they take responsibility for the actions they decide to take.

They are people who have compassion. I would maintain that a person cannot have a purpose in life that is self-centered. (Survival is not a meaning to life. Neither is accomplishment for accomplishment's sake.) They want to be engaged in making the world better in some way.





How a person wants to make the world better, what they see as their purpose in living, is unique, even if it is similar to someone else's meaning in life. It could be working with some particular group, e.g. children or people with a particular disability. It could be working with some particular issue, e.g. ridding the world of land mines, or homelessness, or a specific health issue, like helping people with breast cancer. It could be in the context of the environment, e.g. save the whales, or organic farming or creating beauty in the world.

Whatever it is, it has an impact on others. Someone may be a great artist but unless other people see it, it's not having an impact on the world and therefore not a meaning to live. It may be a passion but not a purpose.

So what is your meaning in living? If you are

So what is your meaning in living? If you are unsure, it may be helpful to write a personal Mission Statement. Just the process can be helpful.

## Summary

For a person to thrive, they must practice moving out of Survival mode into Growth mode. They must shift their perceptions away from Fight, Flight, Freeze, Fall, (and the assumption of danger) to Rest, Digest, Create, (and the assumption that the world is full of good and safety.) There are a lot of ways to do that; I've touched on only a few. We've done a quick review of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and addressed the importance of having our physiological, safety, love and belonging and esteem needs met before we really get to the stage of Self-actualization where thriving takes place in earnest. I've addressed several strategies a person can take to thrive, which include growing, having people in your life that encourage you to be more than you are, and people with whom it's safe to be vulnerable. I've talked about how vulnerability is center stage to thriving, and therefore the importance of learning to be resilient when shame gets triggered. I've touched on the importance of having a dream you are creating in a conscious manner, of passion for life and of finding your purpose for living, to find the way you fit into the world and how you can contribute your unique talents, passions and dreams so that you have a positive impact on the rest of the world.

When you thrive, it helps all of us.

Namaste'

Novella Keyler – Life Mastery Consultant

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