

Overview and Instruction Manual: “Design Your Life” Odyssey Planning Process

Main Takeaway

The **Odyssey Planning Process** is a central tool from the “Design Your Life” methodology, developed by Bill Burnett and Dave Evans at Stanford. It supports individuals in creatively charting alternative life paths by approaching career and personal direction with the mindset of a designer rather than a decision-maker. Odyssey Planning helps you imagine, compare, and iterate on multiple future possibilities, reducing anxiety around having one “right” path.

What Is Odyssey Planning?

Odyssey Planning invites you to sketch out three radically different five-year life plans (“Odysseys”). Each plan is equally possible and attractive, intentionally broadening your perspective and breaking out of limiting assumptions.

Instruction Manual

1. Preparation

- Set aside quiet, uninterrupted time. Use paper, digital notetaking, or the Odyssey Plan worksheet.
- Adopt a mindset of curiosity and creativity—there are no wrong answers.

2. The Three Plans

You will create three different five-year plans:

- **Plan 1: The Life You’re Currently Pursuing**
 - Project your current direction into the future as if nothing major changes.
- **Plan 2: The “If Plan 1 Were Suddenly Gone” Life**

- Imagine that your current career or main project vanishes. What else might you love to do?
- **Plan 3: The Wild/Out-There Life**
 - Pursue something completely different—perhaps a secret passion, a childhood dream, or a career you imagine only in your wildest moments.

For Each Plan, Include:

- Professional goals and roles
- Personal developments (skills, family, relationships, health)
- Community, travel, or adventure
- A sketch or timeline for each year (optional, but useful)
- Taglines or headlines summarizing each plan, like “Leading the Remote Life” or “Building a Wellness Startup”

3. Adding Detail

For each plan, also note:

- The resources needed (skills, qualifications, savings)
- The “odds” (how likely does this feel to you?)
- What excites, scares, or intrigues you about each plan
- How your values are reflected or challenged

4. Reflection and Review

- Review your three plans side by side.
- Ask yourself:
 - Which plans energize or scare you most? Why?
 - What are common themes or values?
 - Where do you need more information or experimentation?
- Share your plans with a trusted friend or coach for feedback.

5. Prototype and Experiment

- Identify small experiments (“prototypes”) you can quickly try from each plan (e.g., talk to someone in that field, take a side project, try a new hobby).
 - Iterate your plans as you learn and grow.
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Key Principles

- There is no one “correct” life; life design is an ongoing process of curiosity, exploration, and re-design.
 - Prototyping and feedback are essential—move from imagining to trying.
 - The goal is not to predict your future, but to expand your sense of what is possible.
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Final Thought

Odyssey Planning empowers you to step beyond default choices and intentionally design the next chapters of your life with greater clarity, freedom, and creativity.