



The End of the Roundabout Way: Why Quality of Life Will Finally Take Center Stage | JULIA VALENTINE

The Joy Compass

Like a modern alchemist, the Joy Compass is designed to:

- Distill the essential part of the matter
- Transmute complicated concepts into simple truths

By mixing different combinations of metals, alchemists hoped to create either gold or the elixir of life. Simply put, alchemy is an ancient philosophical practice aimed at attaining the ultimate type of wisdom.

And we, too, can create our own “gold” or “elixir of life”. It will mean something different to each of us, but we invite you to define it as an “astonishing quality of life.”

I am going to make a prediction. I have spent enough time in the field of economics to learn not to attach a timeline to any predictions, but I do think it will happen sometime this century. Here it goes: Quality of life will finally reach top-billing status. Quality of life will emerge as our largest concern and, subsequently, as its own industry.

Everything seems directed towards preserving life and very little towards making it worth living. H. Poincare said that his problem was not to earn his meals but to keep from being bored between them.

—Abraham Maslow, *Personality and Motivation*

al·che·my /al-kuh-mee

noun

1. An ancient philosophical practice aimed at attaining the ultimate type of wisdom.

What is Quality of Life?

When I say quality of life, I am not asking *Are your sheets 100 or 400 thread count, what car are you driving, do you have a high salary, do you have enough money to retire?* I am not asking for economic indicators. They are all important, and rightfully so, but the Quality of Life I am referring to is best answered by asking *Am I enjoying my life, no matter what the circumstances?*

Do I suffer from insomnia as I'm lying on my 400 thread count sheets? Do I have anxiety about the loan I took out to be driving this car? I make a great salary, but do I have to spend a lifetime doing what I hate? I have enough money to retire on, but why am I depressed?

As the old adage says, *what gets measured gets done*, and in our society, more emphasis is put on measuring the thread count of our sheets, the size of our bank accounts and the national GDP than on our emotional wellbeing. We seem to care about everything except how we feel.

In quality of life research, one often distinguishes between the subjective and objective quality of life. Subjective quality of life is about feeling good and being satisfied with things in general. Objective quality of life is about fulfilling the societal and cultural demands for material wealth, social status and physical well-being.

—Quality-of-Life Research Center, Denmark

In his book *Intuition: Knowing Beyond Logic*, Osho points out that our left brain hemisphere is concerned with money, houses, prestige or power, while the right brain hemisphere is concerned with inner being, peace, bliss. If a right-brained person can “get the goodies,” that’s great. But if she cannot, then she is fine with that, too. The right-brained person cares about the present, rather than the future; the poetry of life, rather than its arithmetic. Now, none of us are completely “right” or “left” brained, but it is an instructive framework for the discussion. We need to learn to strike a balance on our journey, to use our compass to find more creative and purposeful lives.

A Litmus Test for the Quality of Life

There are many tests that measure your life satisfaction, but let me offer a highly unscientific one—a test that consists of a single question.

If you were offered a chance to either:

1. Be born (exactly as yourself) or
2. To never have been born at all

Which would you choose? Would you choose your life? If you say no, well... boy, is your quality of life rotten.”

It may seem like a dramatic question to consider, but ask your friends in a candid moment, and you will be amazed at how very few people appreciate their life.

A quality life is one in which you are the You who is worth the trip down to this planet Earth. Despite the ups and downs, mistakes and victories, depressions and elations, despite or because of all of that, you would still resoundingly say *Oh, YEAH, I’m in!!!*

The Roundabout Way

The roundabout way is the long, scenic route from you (right now) to the You who is joyful and fulfilled. It's the habit of going around in circles, deluding yourself into thinking that you're taking the most direct route possible. It gives you that unmistakable sense of boredom, the dull sense of wasting time and the feeling that nothing good is in store for you.

Boredom, loss of zest in life, self-dislike, general depression of the bodily functions, steady deterioration of the intellectual life and of tastes, and so on were produced in intelligent people leading stupid lives in stupid jobs.

—Abraham Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*

Going out of Circulation

Yet again, the simplest analytical tools come from my economics background. Economics, which studies behavior, says that human behavior is about information and incentives.

Good Information Is Getting Cheaper; Bad Information is Getting More Expensive

Good information is easier to access now than at any other time in history. Most of it is even available for free. If we do not take the time to educate ourselves on how to feel good—joyful, fulfilled, self-actualized—then there is no one to blame but ourselves.

Human folly, on the other hand, is getting more expensive. For example, if you were inefficient with your time before the advent of e-mail, now you're going to drown in a flood of communication that you receive. Bad information is a distraction, and it's expensive.

Incentives

There is a diminishing return to scale to all the material things. In other words, they are not making us feel as good as they did in the past. Allow me to illustrate.

The Quantum Leap

Imagine that you live in a mud hut in a small village. There is no electricity, and you do everything by hand. You lead a life of physical labor. If you need to visit another village, you have to walk on foot for two days. You make the trip only a few times a year.

Then, all of a sudden, you get a horse. Now, you can ride into another town and this time you can carry things. You are not as tired as you used to be, and you have more free time. How do you feel? Elated?

A few centuries go by, and you trade in your horse for a car. You can now get into town in minutes, not hours. You don't get wet in the rain and your back no longer hurts.

Diminishing Returns

Now, instead of a boxy car, you get a round car because it looks so much better to you. However, it is not going to have the same impact on you as going from walking to riding a horse, or going from riding a horse to driving a car. If you could teleport, that would be a quantum leap. But another car? It will make you feel amazing in the first week. Then, you'll get used to it.

Unfortunately, physical and economic wealth do not inevitably get used for higher need gratification. Higher needs can be gratified under poverty, it's harder, but possible if we remember what we're dealing with—respect, love, self-actualization, not autos, money, bathtubs.

—from *The Journals of A. H. Maslow* by Richard Lowry

The Next Quantum Leap

The next quantum leap will occur when a critical mass of people realizes that one of the major purposes of life is JOY. Until then, most people will accept an ersatz, an imitation, or a roundabout way of creating joy.

Is JOY a BMW? (That's the advertising campaign the company has been running).

Not really. Sorry, but no. With all due respect to BMW, joy has nothing to do with a (great!) metal box on wheels. That's transportation. And if you do not feel joy unless you have money to buy this car, you're really in trouble. Because next year joy is going to be your own private Boeing. Or a trip to Mars. Or watching shooting stars on Jupiter.

For decades, we have been conditioned to believe that the road to JOY always involves some material detour—the car, the job you hate despite its high salary, the newest fashion accessory.

We are conditioned in such a way that it does not even occur to us to work with our inner world directly. This is why when we look around us, we see so many people who are unhappy, aggressive, dishonest and downright mediocre.

They will invest in their STUFF, but they won't invest in THEMSELVES.

Happiness, fulfillment, and purpose in life are all inner concepts.

—Wayne Dyer

What should we do next?

The paradox is that helping people improve how they feel, in a real and honest way, and not through round-about means such as medication, defense or avoidance mechanisms, the manipulation of neuroses, etc. will become a huge industry of its own, because it is where the biggest need is, and because the conditions for it are getting just right.

This won't come from mainstream society. Society won't help make this happen because it is not profitable to have strong, self-aware people—people who won't think that Joy has anything to do with a car, or a new dress that they will wear once and donate to a charity.

In other words, we are trained away from creating a great quality of life for ourselves.

I have observed people living with stress and anxiety their whole lives and not investing a minute of their time, a dime of their money or an ounce of their energy into changing this state. Meanwhile, plenty of solutions are readily available.

I have also observed people making one mistake after another because they do not understand their own decision-making strategy. They have never discovered their own, unique approach to making the right decisions. It is as if we honestly believed that how we feel absolutely does not matter. But that is beginning to change, and you can be a part of that change for yourself and others.

Going Beyond Comfort

If this theme resonates with you, then you will undoubtedly notice that many top best-selling books actually deal with quality of life. Timothy Ferriss's *The 4-Hour Work Week*, Tom Rath's *Wellbeing*, Daniel H. Pink's *Drive* are all about quality of life. We cannot help but move in this direction.

We aim for comfort, and then rebel against the outcome through mid-life crises, depression, overweight and a myriad other signals that comfort is the first step in the pyramid, and our souls crave more than survival.

—Abraham Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*

If you make quality of life your priority and set your joy compass to true north, you will see a cascade of great decisions coming out of this first step. After that, it is simply about finding the right alchemy to produce your own personal elixir of life and helping those around find the same. **We wish you luck in achieving everything your heart desires!** 🍀

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

After Julia Valentine's grandparents went through years of debilitating illness and emotional meltdown before their deaths, she began to think about the process of growing older and how people could live better lives as they pass from youth and young adulthood into older adulthood. She recalled people she had met in the Himalayas, Machu Picchu and Italy. They were alive, vibrant, joyful, fulfilled. And so she embarked on a journey to research the main themes of Joy Compass, a website for people who want the second half of their life to be even better than the first. Julia is passionate about figuring out life strategies that work, then sharing them with people in a simple and practical way. Find JoyCompass on [Facebook](#) and read Julia's blog at joycompass.com.

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