

Audio-Tech Business Book Summaries

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Volume 12, No. 9 (2 sections). Section 1, September 2003
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Optimal Thinking

How to Be Your Best Self

by Rosalene Glickman, Ph.D.

A summary of the original text.

Optimal Thinking is the next step beyond positive thinking. It empowers you to be your best and stops you from settling for second best.

With Optimal Thinking, you focus on the best or most constructive thought at all times. You choose your best option in any given moment.

When thinking Optimally, you are not concerned with other people's concepts of "the best." You are not in competition with anyone. You are concerned with what "the best" means to *you*, and you attach your own value to it.

We are all Optimal Thinkers. Some of us use Optimal Thinking from time to time, others use it more frequently, but most of us don't use it consistently. One of the most exciting aspects of Optimal Thinking is that at this very moment, and at any time in the

future, you can optimize your thinking. Before we go further, here are a few quick ways to start applying Optimal Thinking right now.

In any situation in your life in which you need to make a decision, ask questions like:

- What is most important to me?
- What's my major objective?
- What are my greatest talents and abilities?
- How can I make the best use of them?
- What is the most constructive action I can take right now?

With Optimal Thinking, you can also bring out the best in others. Just focus on the best ways to help them achieve what's most important to them. When someone is off track, use the

best questions to help them find the best resolution. For example:

- What's the best way to handle this?
- What's the best solution?
- What's your highest priority right now?
- What the best opportunity you can act on right now?

If you run a business, you can maximize its success by using Optimal Thinking. You will need to define your business in terms of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, values, objectives, and plans by answering key questions such as:

- What are the greatest strengths of this company?
- Who are our most valuable employees?
- Who are our best customers?
- What are their most important needs?
- What are our most profitable products and services?
- How can we make the most of their strengths?
- What are our greatest weaknesses?
- What's the best way to minimize those weaknesses?

Quite simply, anyone can use the tools in this summary to achieve his or her goals.

First, we'll discuss how Optimal Thinking is different from positive thinking. Second, we'll explore what *Optimal* means to you so you are guided by your own concept of "the best." Then we'll explain how you can use Optimal Thinking consistently. Next, we'll examine how you can define your purpose in life and in your career, and the steps you can take to achieve your most important goals. Finally, we'll consider how you can apply Optimal Thinking to a leadership role in the workplace.

Now, let's begin.



OPTIMAL THINKING IS NOT POSITIVE THINKING

For decades, productive people have followed the slogan, "Think positive!" While positive thinking is better than negative thinking, it is not enough.

Let's look at the five key reasons why positive thinking often falls short, and how Optimal Thinking resolves these shortcomings.

The first reason is that ***positive thinking is often used to suppress negativity***. Positive thinkers want to hear only the good news, and they isolate themselves from any negative thoughts or feelings.

For example, the vice president of one company told employees he didn't want to hear any more negative thoughts, doubts, or anxiety from them. They were expected to show enthusiasm at all times, despite the fact that the company faced serious problems that positive thinking couldn't possibly fix. The vice president's refusal to hear negative thoughts didn't change the underlying problems, which grew into a major crisis.

The lesson here is that negative thoughts and feelings are not resolved when we suppress, deny, or devalue them. We just function with layers of unresolved problems, which affects our morale, stress level, productivity, and teamwork. It's no surprise that positive thinkers experience severe emotional and financial distress because they ignore negative warning signals.

For example, here's how a positive thinker typically deals with a friend's problem. When told that her friend doesn't have enough money to cover all of the bills this month, the positive thinker says, "Just be positive and it will all work out fine."

By contrast, the Optimal Thinker would respond to the problem by asking, "What is causing the problem? What are your options? What do you think is the best solution?"

As you can see, Optimal Thinkers acknowledge

negativity as an authentic expression of reality. When Optimal Thinkers notice themselves finding fault and worrying, they accept their negative viewpoints, seek to understand them, and immediately ask the most constructive questions in order to find the best solution.

Here's a simple exercise: Think about a negative idea, feeling or experience you have suppressed. Write it down. What are the best actions to resolve it? Jot them down. Now prioritize these actions and decide upon the best time frames to complete them. When you act in your best interest, you optimize your life.

The second reason why positive thinking falls short is that ***positive thinking is often no more than wishful thinking***. Many positive thinkers believe that their dreams will be realized by a magical, divine process that is triggered by the intensity of their hopes, wishes, and faith. They approach life with a false sense of security, and are poorly prepared for negative consequences. In this sense, positive thinking can be extremely dangerous.

On the other hand, Optimal Thinkers eliminate unnecessary disappointment because they have realistic expectations and focus on optimizing situations within their control. Optimal Thinkers also ask the best questions to invite the best responses from others, but recognize that they are

ultimately powerless over others' decisions and actions. They simply explore their options and make the Optimal choice from realistic alternatives.

Optimal Thinkers embrace reality and ask: "What's the best thing I can do under the circumstances?" When the stakes are high, they use a contingency plan against the worst-event scenario to minimize danger and negative consequences. When evaluating risk, they weigh the probability and cost of failure against the cost and benefits of prevention.

Take some time now to consider the role of wishful thinking in your life. Write down your greatest wish. Are you hoping that your wish will manifest miraculously? How realistic is this?

Now, use Optimal Thinking to give yourself the best chance of making your wish come true. Underneath your wish, write down: "What's the best thing I can do under the circumstances?" Carefully consider your response, and decide upon the best time to take your first action step.

The third reason why positive thinking falls short is that ***there are varying shades of positive thinking***. Communication between positive thinkers on different levels is often problematic. Conversation between them does not provide the best outcome because they are not on the

same wavelength.

For example, a *mediocre* positive thinker who makes a good living may be quite happy and see the positive side of his life the way it is. But if his wife is an *extraordinarily* positive thinker, she may envision herself as a multimillionaire with highly successful businesses around the world. Her husband sees her as a wishful thinker. She perceives her husband as mediocre and limiting. They are in continual conflict because their different levels of positive thinking are not in harmony.

The fourth reason why positive thinking falls short is that ***it gets in the way of Optimal Thinking***. Consider these differences between positive thinking and Optimal Thinking:

1. Positive thinkers often achieve good or great results; Optimal Thinkers achieve the *best* and *greatest* results.
2. Positive thinkers are interested in being productive; Optimal Thinkers make sure they are *most productive*.
3. Positive thinkers take a smart approach to achieve an important goal; Optimal Thinkers take a smart approach to achieve their *most important* goal.

If you are willing to give life your best shot, write down one behavior that reflects

suboptimal thinking and performance you are ready to change. For example, you might notice that your exercise regimen is suboptimal. Optimize your thinking by asking: "What's the best thing I can do about this?" Write down your answer. Now decide upon the time frame that will work best for you to optimize your performance.

Finally, the fifth reason why positive thinking falls short is that ***if we don't maximize a situation, we don't complete it.***

Many positive thinkers constantly seek to *improve* their situation. They want better relationships, more satisfying work, and a higher standard of living. If the current solution is *better* than a previous solution, it's good enough. Such thinkers rarely experience complete satisfaction because the unexplored alternatives continue to haunt them. They are often regretful because they focus on what *could* have happened, *should* have happened, and *would* have happened.

Optimal Thinkers, on the other hand, do more than *improve* attitudes, skills, relationships, and lifestyles. They *maximize* them. They accept what they can't control and maximize what they can control. They embrace the present moment, trust their intuition, and investigate the alternatives for solving their challenges. They weigh their advantages and disadvantages, and then determine the best solution

within the given time constraints.

Here are two key action steps that will help jump-start your efforts to put Optimal Thinking into practice.

1. As soon as you notice yourself thinking negatively, accept this vulnerable part of yourself without judgment. Then ask: "What's causing this? What is the best thing I can do about it? What's the best solution?"
2. When someone you know is thinking negatively, instead of avoiding that person, determine if he is open to input. You might say: "I'm sorry this is a problem for you. Can I help you resolve it? What do you think is the best thing you can do about it? What are your options? What's the best solution?"

If the person is too angry to be reasonable, or is intent on maintaining a negative perspective, you could say: "I understand you are upset at the moment. When you are open to finding the best solution to this issue, I will be happy to give you my most constructive input."



WHAT DOES "OPTIMAL" MEAN TO YOU?

You are now ready to learn more about what "Optimal" means to you. As you go

through the exercise, do not allow yourself to be influenced by anyone else's concept of "the best." Simply complete the following sentences:

- I feel my best when . . .
- The most enjoyable vacation I can recall is . . .
- I can maximize my income this year by . . .
- The best career move for me this year is . . .
- The best action I can take today toward my most important goal is . . .

By using this sentence-completion process, you can discover what "the best" means to you in whichever context you choose. Just complete the sentence, "What I value most about this is . . ." Repeat this sentence until you are completely satisfied with your response.

You can then look at your answers and decide what you value above all else. One of the strengths of this exercise is that you can tailor it to focus on the things that matter the most to you in the realm of career, family, spirituality, or anything else that you value highly.

Remember that the quality of the questions you ask determines the quality of your life. When you ask the best questions of yourself and others, you invite the

best answers. You can discover what "the best" means in whichever context you choose. You can even create the best path to your most desired outcomes.

For example, to obtain the most enjoyable path to your goal, simply ask "most enjoyable" questions such as: "What's the most enjoyable use of my time right now?"

Similarly, if you are interested in financial profit, you can ask "most profitable" questions such as: "What's my most profitable activity?" "How can I maximize the profitability of this activity?" And, "What's the most profitable use of my time right now?"

It's easy to see how you can design questions like this for anything that is important to you.

You can face and resolve simple challenges by asking: "What's the best thing I can do about this?"

Confront your most difficult challenges by asking: "What's causing this problem?" "What are my options for resolving this?" "What's my best strategy?" And, "What are the most productive actions I can take?"

To make Optimal decisions, use the following processes. For simple decisions, there are seven steps:

- First, define the problem.
- Second, define the time frame in which the

decision must be made.

- Third, explore options for resolving the problem.
- Fourth, eliminate the options that are unrealistic.
- Fifth, examine the consequences of each option. Do this by writing down the advantages and disadvantages of each possible choice.
- Sixth, rate or "weigh" the pros and cons on a scale of 1 to 10.
- Seventh, determine which option is in your best interest by adding up the scores for the advantages and subtracting the scores for the disadvantages. Sometimes several options are highly advantageous. In such a case, the best solution may be to employ two or more of your options.

For complex decisions, use this nine-step approach:

- First, decide what you most want to achieve.
- Second, define the time frame in which the decision must be made.
- Third, make a list of the most important criteria that will influence your decision.
- Fourth, rate your criteria. Since not all criteria are equally important, you must weigh each factor

on its importance on a scale of 1 to 10.

- Fifth, rate how well your first option meets your criteria.
- Sixth, multiply the ratings for your criteria in Step 4 by the ratings for how your first option meets the criteria in Step 5.
- Seventh, determine the total score.
- Eighth, complete Steps 6 and 7 for your other options.
- Ninth, decide on your best option based on the highest score.

For example, an executive we'll call John earned a six-figure annual income with a network marketing company until it went out of business. He wasn't sure which career move would be in his best interest. John used the nine-step process we've just outlined.

He wrote down the factors that would influence his decision and then rated his criteria. The criteria on his list were Job Satisfaction, which he rated 10; Industry Growth Prospects, 10; Income, 9; Stable Business Structure, 9; Personal Status, 8; Freedom to Travel, 7; Flexible Hours, 6; and Location, 5.

Next, he made a list of options he wanted to explore.

Option 1: Join another network marketing firm in the same industry.

Option 2: Join the fastest-growing network marketing firm in the country.

Option 3: Start his own business.

Option 4: Join a direct-sales company in the same industry.

John rated his first opinion on a scale of 1 to 10 against his eight criteria. He then multiplied the scores in both columns to obtain his total score.

For instance, he concluded that another network marketing firm in the same industry would give him about an 8 for Job Satisfaction, a criterion that he had previously determined rated 10 in importance to him. By multiplying 8 times 10, he found the value of 80 for that factor.

Under income, he rated this option a 6 for this criterion, which he had rated a 9 in importance, which produced the sum of 54. He did the same for each of the other criteria, yielding a score of 414 for Option 1.

After completing this exercise for all four options, he found that Option 2 produced the highest score, so he decided the Optimal choice would be to join the fastest-growing network marketing firm.



HOW TO USE OPTIMAL THINKING CONSISTENTLY

In this portion of the summary, we'll talk about how you can consistently use Optimal Thinking. This involves three basic principles. Let's look at each in turn.

The first principle is to **consciously choose Optimal Thinking**. In any given moment, you can become conscious of your highest self by choosing who you most want to be. On a moment-by-moment basis, consciously choose your best self and think at your peak level. Ask the best questions to invite the best answers.

When you notice yourself thinking suboptimally, use Optimal Thinking to get back on your best track with minimum time loss. Ask yourself and others: "What's in my best interest? Is this the best I can do?"

The second principle is to **monitor yourself**. Constantly ask yourself: "Am I the right person, in the best place, at the best time, involved in the most important activity, in the best way?"

When you notice that you're not in the right place, for example, you can ask, "Where is the best place for me now?" and go there. If you decide that it is not the best time to be involved in your current activity, choose the right time. If you're not involved with the most important activity, simply

ask, "What is the most important activity I can involve myself with now?" and then do it.

At the end of each day, week, and month you can ask, "What percentage of today, this week, and this month, was I the best person in the best place at the best time involved in the most important activity in the best way?"

The third principle of consistent Optimal Thinking is to **overcome your limiting core beliefs**. Most of us don't consciously choose our beliefs. They are often based on interpretations of past experiences and information we've received from respected sources.

But you can uncover and overcome the core beliefs that prevent you from using Optimal Thinking consistently. Once you have done so, you can then maximize the power of the beliefs that strengthen you, and neutralize those that weaken you. (If you'd like to explore the six major limiting core beliefs, please refer to the list on page 7.)

Let's consider one of those beliefs. Many people believe they don't deserve the best in life. They don't give themselves what they really want, such as a first-class vacation, because they feel unworthy.

As children, they were often told by parents and teachers that their best wasn't good enough. But people who still think this way won't

achieve their goals because they'll let fear or insecurity prevent them from pursuing opportunities.

In order to become a consistent Optimal Thinker and live your best life, you must accept that you are entitled to it. To assess yourself, write "I deserve the best in life" several times on the left side of a page. On the right-hand side, record the responses that come to mind. Notice your supportive responses and take time to appreciate them. You may also notice thoughts and feelings that stop you from experiencing the best in life. Then answer these questions to resolve them:

- What has caused this problem?
- What am I thinking or doing to feel this way?
- What are my options for resolving it?
- What is the best solution?
- What is the best action I can take to overcome this?

Invest 15 to 20 minutes each day on this exercise until you are satisfied that you have dismantled this crippling core belief.



THE SIX LIMITING CORE BELIEFS

In order to consistently think Optimally, it's critical to overcome your limiting core beliefs. In this sidebar, we examine the six major limiting core beliefs, and some ways of conquering them.

The first major limiting belief is: "I am not responsible for my life." It's far too easy to fall into the trap of blaming your circumstances instead of yourself. The fact is that you can and should take full responsibility for your choices. You can explore your relationship with victim thinking and Optimal Thinking by answering important questions like: "Do I focus excessively on what is out of my control?" "Am I willing to take full responsibility for optimizing my thoughts, feelings, actions, and life?" and "What do I need from an external source that I am not giving myself?"

The second major limiting belief is: "Something is wrong with me, you, or the world." If you believe that something is wrong with yourself, your surroundings, and the people around you, you will sabotage your experiences, friendships, and plans by finding fault with them. You will see injustice and misery everywhere. On the other hand, when you believe that something is right with you, others, and the world, you have a foundation from which to be your best.

How can you divest yourself of a primary belief that something is wrong? Embrace your inner critic with compassion, and weigh the advantages and disadvantages of this negative core belief. When you decide that a belief is not in

your best interest, the door of new possibilities can open for you. You may find it useful to take some time to write down what's right with you, others and the world.

The third major limiting belief is: "I don't deserve the best in life." Many of us don't give ourselves what we really want because we feel unworthy. In order to become a consistent Optimal Thinker and live your best life, you must accept that you deserve the best that life has to offer. You must accept that you are entitled to it. Until you eliminate your belief in your lack of worthiness, you will sabotage your plans.

The fourth major limiting belief is: "I experience fear." You fear what you believe should be feared. When you believe in your ability to cope with all situations, you automatically minimize fear. Your security lies not in what you have, but in the knowledge that you can cope with whatever crosses your path.

You can start to minimize your fears by facing them. Determine what you are afraid of and then take the best actions to resolve the threats that are causing the fear. Working through fear is far better than living with feelings of immobility and helplessness. Most accomplishments are achieved with some fear. You can acknowledge and deal with your greatest fear right now. What are the best actions you can take to overcome it? Empower yourself continually by answering questions like: "What's the truth here?" "Am I risking more than I can afford to lose?" and "What's the best way of handling this?"

The fifth major limiting belief is: "I can't have what I want." When you believe you can't have what you want, you can become fearful of even thinking about what you want, because you "know" you can't have it. How can you eliminate this disabling belief? Think about how this belief originated. You may have been denied what you wanted from an early age. Perhaps you were labeled selfish for even wanting something for yourself. Perhaps your aspirations were ridiculed. To integrate the belief of having what you want, keep your mind on what you want, the benefits you will gain, and the reasons why you can have it. Written Optimal declarations strategically placed in the most appropriate locations will assist you in staying focused. Place your declarations in your diary or wallet, on the bathroom mirror, the refrigerator door, or car dashboard. The best places to display them are where you are most likely to see them.

The sixth major limiting belief is: "Life is a struggle." Many people who have experienced life as a struggle truly believe that this is the way it's meant to be. Many people create struggle by refusing to accept "what is" in the present moment. The intensity of your struggle is directly related to your degree of resistance. The present moment is all there is, all you have, and all you will ever have, so it is senseless to resist it. By resisting the eternal present, you are resisting life itself.



ACHIEVE OPTIMAL SELF-ESTEEM

The way you think and feel about yourself affects every aspect of your life. You will achieve your highest level of self-esteem when you can rely upon yourself to accurately assess your reality, make the best choices to deal with your challenges, and make the most of life. You will be comfortable expressing your thoughts, needs, and wants, and will feel entitled to enjoy the results of your best efforts. You will feel worthy of happiness and of life's best offerings.

Self-esteem is an internal experience. It implies a sense of personal confidence, worthiness, and competence. When we are compassionate toward our weaknesses and forgive ourselves for making mistakes, we embrace our vulnerability and humanity. When we validate ourselves and trust our internal voices, we esteem ourselves. We all hear internal chatter. Specifically, this internal chatter can be broken down into two kinds of inner voices: Optimal voices and suboptimal voices.

Your Optimal voice is, quite clearly, your highest voice. The Optimal voice expresses mastery, completion, and everything superlative. Examples of statements that would emanate from your Optimal voice are: "I deserve the best that life has to offer," "I'm making the most of my situation," and "I completed every project on time and on budget last year."

To make the best use of your Optimal voice, start by affirming your right to be exactly as you are without justification or judgment. Accept, approve, and love yourself unconditionally. Do your suboptimal voices dominate your thinking process? You can accept them, learn from them, and optimize them. Acknowledging and resolving your destructive negative voice is necessary for a healthy self-concept.

You can make the most of your internal talk by employing your Optimal voice at every opportune moment. When your suboptimal voices chatter, commission what the author calls "OptiSelf." OptiSelf is your highest self and your imaginary ultimate mentor who always embraces your suboptimal voices, and then optimizes them.

For example, let's say you express a very negative thought such as: "I feel extremely inadequate. I'm trying very hard and am not getting what I want."

Here's how OptiSelf might respond: "I understand that you're feeling deficient. Now, what's preventing you from achieving the results you want? What's the best way to overcome these obstacles? What's the best use of your time?"

To optimize your suboptimal voices, start writing your Optimal responses in a notebook dedicated to your Optimal Thinking exercises. Carry your notebook with you. Jot down each

suboptimal message, and then write OptiSelf's response next to it. The more you practice, the more competent you will become. When the technique becomes second nature, you can do it mentally.



OPTIMIZE YOUR ASSETS AND WEAKNESSES

The following exercise will help you take stock of your personal assets and liabilities. Take your pen and notebook to a quiet place where you won't be disturbed.

Let's begin with your assets. The following seven categories have been chosen to assist you in accurately describing your assets. For each category, write down your favorable attributes. Note what you like about yourself. Be as specific as possible. After you have identified your strengths, arrange them in order of greatest benefit to you, starting with your greatest asset and the proceeding down your list with those assets of lesser benefit to you.

Here are the seven categories:

1. **Physical assets.**
2. **Mental and spiritual strengths.**
3. **Personality strengths.**
4. **Social strengths.**
5. **Career and daily task strengths.**
6. **Personal achievements.**

7. What you like the most about yourself.

You also need to repeat this exercise focusing on your liabilities. For each of the seven categories listed above, make a list of negative traits. When addressing your weaknesses and limitations, be specific and nonjudgmental. After you have identified your weaknesses, rank them in order of priority, starting with your greatest liability and then continuing down your list with those liabilities that are less of a problem to you.

After you have completed this exercise, look at your list of assets. Now, under each asset, write the best actions you can take to appreciate, optimize, and enjoy the full benefit of that asset. It is, of course, in your best interest to accept what you can't change and optimize what you can.

Once you have finished writing down your list of action steps to optimize your assets, you should identify, in order of priority, the actions that will have the most beneficial effect on your self-confidence. Make sure that you give yourself enough time to complete your most constructive actions. It is best to transfer your list to your daily calendar to ensure that it gets done.

Next, go through your list of weaknesses and decide to accept yourself unconditionally. By extending compassion toward your weaknesses, you are honoring your humanity. Simply accept the weaknesses that can't be changed and resolve to correct those that can be changed.

To minimize any weakness, simply answer the following four Optimal Questions:

1. **What are the benefits I will gain by correcting this weakness?**
2. **What are all the losses I will avoid by correcting this weakness?**
3. **What's the best way to minimize this weakness?**
4. **What's the best action I can take right now to move toward what I want?**

After you have answered these questions, write down, in order of priority, the actions you will take to minimize your weaknesses. Make sure you write down the best actions to minimize your liabilities and negative traits. Be sure to allocate enough time, and to place your prioritized list on your daily calendar.



Optimal affirmations are another powerful esteem-building tool. These are first-person, Optimal statements you implant in your mind to affirm the best results. Examples of Optimal affirmations include: "I enjoy the best of health," "I am making the most of this situation," and "I associate with the right people."

When you have decided which Optimal affirmations you wish to integrate, you can write them repeatedly in

your notebook. Be sure to jot down and resolve your unsupportive responses.

To build your self-esteem, it's crucial that you visualize your best self. Our minds can't easily distinguish between what we visualize and what we actually experience. Many experiments support this.

Optimal visualization enables you to convey to your subconscious mind exactly what you want by using all of your senses. By giving yourself the Optimal preview, the desired result becomes real and concrete and you prepare yourself to experience the best. You start to adjust yourself toward having what you want by incorporating it physically, emotionally, and mentally. Optimal visualization prepares you to reach your most desired goals. A few times a week, and once a day if possible, find a quiet place where you can visualize yourself optimizing whatever comes your way.



DISCOVER YOUR ULTIMATE DIRECTION

Your life purpose defines your ultimate direction in life. It is your supreme reason for being and reflects your principles and what you value most in life. Your statement of purpose is the criterion or yardstick with which you evaluate everything in your life. It demonstrates your decision to live life to the fullest,

regardless of your circumstances. Your purpose guides your thinking and behavior even when life deals you its toughest blows. It empowers you to make daily decisions consistent with your highest values and principles.

Optimal Thinkers devote their best efforts to the clarification of their life purpose. They know what they most want to achieve, what they stand for above all else, and what they are most committed to. Their purpose provides the fuel that propels them past any obstacles they encounter. These people demonstrate the highest level of personal leadership.

The following 18 questions will help you to identify your life purpose. When you have many responses to a particular question, jot them all down. Then decide which one is most important to you.

1. What do I care about most deeply?
2. What and who do I love?
3. What am I deeply committed to?
4. What do I stand for? What are my principles?
5. When am I at my best?
6. What has given me the greatest feelings of importance in my life? What has been most beneficial for my self-esteem?

7. What is it that I definitely *don't* want?
8. What do I want more than anything else?
9. Which activities do I enjoy most?
10. In order of priority, what are the three things I value most in life?
11. In order of priority, what are my three most important ambitions in life?
12. If I had one year to live, how would I make the most of it?
13. How would I like to be remembered?
14. If I were given all the money I could ever need or want, how would I live my life?
15. If I could experience the ultimate day, what would it be like?
16. What would my ultimate environment be like?
17. Which one purpose would I concentrate on if I knew that there was no chance of failure?
18. What is my ultimate purpose? What do I most want to accomplish?

Once you have identified your ultimate purpose in life, you need to do the same for your career. By answering the following eight questions, you will learn about your career calling. You will

discover where you are headed and why, and where to focus your energies and best efforts. For each category, list your responses and rank them in order of priority.

1. What are my strengths? What are my talents and gifts? What are all the assets I bring to the table?
2. What makes me happy? What brings me joy?
3. What do I love to do?
4. What am I most interested in doing? What is my passion?
5. How do I most enjoy contributing to others?
6. What cause do I most want to serve?
7. What kind of organization am I best suited to?
8. What is my career purpose?

When you commit to your purpose, make the best use of your talents, and do what you love, you are being who you want to be, doing what you want to do, and creating what you want. Your thoughts, words, and actions align with your supreme reason for being.

Are you willing to do whatever is necessary to fulfill your life and career purpose? How much time are you willing to commit to your purpose daily? Are you fully committed to your purpose, or will you allow yourself to

be unnecessarily distracted? If you are truly committed, you will check in with yourself a few times a day to make sure that you are still "on purpose."



PLAN YOUR BEST LIFE

Optimal Thinkers set SUPREME goals for themselves. While the phrase "SUPREME goals" obviously has a certain connotation, SUPREME also stands for the following: **Specific, Uplifting, Paramount, Reachable, Exciting, Measurable, and Enjoyable** goals to be achieved within definite time frames.

Many people complain of a lack of time and resources, when lack of direction is their real problem. They don't know exactly where they want to go, and they arrive where they don't want to be. To make the most constructive use of your assets, resources, and time, you must take the best actions toward your SUPREME goals.

An Optimal plan provides you with the best possible map or blueprint for your success. It enables you to see how to reach your SUPREME goals, and gives you assurance that they can be achieved. When you plan Optimally, you choose to make things happen on purpose, instead of relying on circumstance or chance. Once you know where you want to go and how you plan to get there, you can place

your full attention on the step you are taking in the current moment.

It's highly unlikely that major corporations such as Intel or GE would experience the same success if their directors had the corporate goals in mind rather than written down. Similarly, writing down your SUPREME goals clarifies your thinking and purpose, providing the Optimal track for your progress. You know exactly what you must do to achieve what you want.

There are two modes of Optimal planning: forward planning and reverse planning. It is most important to balance their use. Let's take a look at how forward and reverse planning can help you achieve your goals.

In **forward planning**, you start from where you are. You move forward as far as you can see, and when you arrive at that point, you look farther. You write down your SUPREME goals in order of priority and then move into action. You continually ask yourself, "What is the most important goal that I must achieve?" and "What's the best action I can take toward it right now?"

In the **reverse planning** process, you start with the future and work backwards to the present by breaking down your most compelling dreams and SUPREME goals into realistic action steps. You begin by listing your Optimal dreams and goals. Dreams are desires

that do not have a clear series of steps to their fulfillment. Never judge or discount dreams. They are real and meaningful. They become goals when you can clearly define the specific actions necessary to achieve them.

When you reverse plan, you decide if a goal is in your best interest before involving yourself in the activities necessary for its accomplishment. Once you decide that a goal will bring out the best in you, will inspire the fulfillment of your ultimate purpose, and will triumph over the price you'll have to pay, you know that it is in your best interest to proceed.

At the outset of your reverse planning process, ask yourself: "What do I most want to be, do, have, and contribute?" List your goals, and decide which goal is of greatest importance to you. Then list all of the benefits to be gained by achieving this goal. To maximize your motivation, give yourself as many uplifting reasons as possible to proceed.

Qualifications, attitude, experience, and money are the most common obstacles that keep people from succeeding. But with determination, initiative, and Optimal Thinking, you can take the best actions to overcome these obstacles. If there were no obstacles in your path, you would have already achieved your goal. Why don't you have your SUPREME goal right now? What's in the way? Take

some time now to write down your obstacles. Of all the obstacles between you and your goal, decide which one is the biggest.

When you focus on all the damage, injury, and loss that could occur in reaching your goal, you face your worst fears. You must decide in advance whether you can handle them. You can then minimize the possible pain by formulating a contingency plan, which shows you how to make the best of the worst possible outcome.

Once you know how best to handle the worst outcome, you are free to direct all of your efforts toward achieving the best outcome. So it's very worthwhile to take some time now to confront the worst that could happen in achieving your SUPREME goal. It's the best way to minimize your fears.

Here are eight additional questions to keep in mind when you are attempting to achieve your SUPREME goal, along with some important considerations to keep in mind as you answer them.

1. What are your greatest strengths? Which organizations, people, and information can best assist you in achieving your SUPREME goal?

Your highest self is your greatest resource. The most resourceful people discover and acknowledge their strengths and encourage their full expression. They incorporate their greatest

strengths into the Optimal plan to achieve their ultimate purpose. Take some time now to itemize the best resources available to achieve your SUPREME goal. Make sure you list them in order of importance to you.

2. What are the best actions you can take to overcome obstacles and minimize the risks? What are your Optimal action steps, in priority, with target times?

It is best to throw light on the obstacles and risks involved. Accept them and then tackle your biggest obstacle first. Ask: "What's the best action I can take to overcome this and take me closest to my goal?" Acceptance, followed by the best possible action, will work in your best interest every time.

3. What is the best time frame for the completion of the goal?

Optimal time frames motivate you to employ your best efforts to do what's necessary to get the job done. These time frames change the operational value of your plan from "It can be accomplished one of these days" to "It will be accomplished by the best date."

4. What's the first step you must take to activate your plan?

Take a look at the Optimal steps you have identified in achieving your SUPREME

goal. Select the action steps that are best achieved today. Identify the first Optimal action step to achieve your goal, and do it immediately.

5. Are all the benefits to be gained worth the price you'll have to pay? Why or why not?

Be entirely honest with yourself as you consider whether this SUPREME goal is worthy of your complete commitment. Strength of desire and total commitment to your goal are paramount to success.

6. Which Optimal affirmations will be most helpful in accomplishing your SUPREME goal?

The options here are limited only by your own imagination, but many Optimal Thinkers use the following declaration: "I am now taking the best action to accomplish my most important goal."

7. Which Optimal visualizations will be most helpful in accomplishing your SUPREME goal?

Are you ready to create your most vivid mental picture of exactly what you want? Make the best use of drawings, photos, pictures, and other visual aids to assist in visualizing your SUPREME goals.

8. How do you know you're on track?

Your confidence and desire to accomplish your SUPREME goal are optimized when you

monitor your progress. Keeping records will help you gain an accurate picture of how far you've come. You can use your daily calendar, diagrams, graphs, ledgers, flow charts, and other tracking devices.



MAXIMIZE YOUR COMMUNICATIONS

Optimal communication enables us to make the most of our relationships. Getting along with people as well as we can is the key to maximizing our success at work and at home.

Here are four crucial questions to keep in mind when you are communicating with people.

- **"Am I giving my undivided attention?" By giving your complete and undivided attention, you show respect for the other person.**
- **"Am I showing total interest in the other person?" Be sure to show genuine interest in other people's favorite subject: themselves.**
- **"Am I seeking mutual understanding?" Always look for common ground. Focus on what unites you. Discover what is most important to others and what motivates them to do their best. Think and talk in terms of their best interests.**
- **"Am I inspiring Optimal action and resolution?" Encourage other people to make full use of their strengths and determine the Optimal action steps necessary to obtain the**

best outcome. When they tell you about a problem, ask, "What's the best thing you can do about it right now?"



OPTIMAL THINKING AT WORK

Because we spend almost one-third of our lives on the job, it is in our best interest to optimize our work situation.

During the past two decades, many corporations have adopted the philosophy of "continuous improvement." They want *better* solutions, *better* quality, and *higher* profits. This philosophy does not produce peak performance. Whenever employees seek to improve, rather than optimize, the company's sales and profits are compromised.

For example, in a mediocre company, a manager is likely to decide that the best way to improve sales figures this month is to have employees put in extra time so that the sales will be better than the previous month's totals. That would be an improvement, but it would not be the same as maximizing sales.

At an Optimal company, a manager and his staff will discuss what they can do to optimize sales. They might decide to skip a weekly meeting and devote that

time to doing real work. They could agree to ask for referrals from existing customers. And so on.

There are two other key differences between the way things are handled at an average company, and how they are handled at an Optimal company.

The first key difference has to do with ***the way negativity is handled***. At an average company, positive thinking is revered. Negative thinking is considered inferior and may even be scorned.

At an Optimal company, on the other hand, managers actually embrace negative thinking, and encourage employees to work together to resolve issues that are raised. Many leading companies view negative information as a perfect opportunity to discover the Optimal solution.

The second key difference has to do with ***wishful thinking***. Unfortunately, in many average companies, managers rely on optimism to solve their problems. Some of them are simply naïve and unaware of the dangers of wishful thinking.

At an Optimal company, there is a system in place to deal with problems and emergencies. Thus, managers are rarely overwhelmed. They may not know when specific problems arise, but they are ready to deal with them when they do.

Of course, Optimal companies are led by Optimal leaders. So we'll conclude this summary by exploring the attributes that virtually all of the best leaders have in common.

The best leaders are Optimal Thinkers who are wholeheartedly committed to their purpose. Their vision or purpose is an expression of what they most deeply care about. They dedicate their lives to what is most meaningful to them.

Superior leaders treasure their vision enough to do all they can to manifest it in reality. They see its implementation as an opportunity to make the most of their own talents, abilities, and energies. They galvanize others to involve themselves wholeheartedly because it is in their best interests to do so. Furthermore, they focus on tasks and people.

The most effective leaders do not lead as "saviors," encouraging passive following. They share their power and responsibility with other people. They plan the best use of available resources and evaluate their greatest strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities. They determine what is most relevant to the achievement of their mission. They establish reachable goals and Optimal conditions to motivate people to do their best. They monitor and measure performance against the highest achievable standards.

Optimal leaders enlist the best efforts of all their people

to fulfill their mission. They seek wholehearted commitment from those whose skills and expertise are most suited for the various tasks. They clearly define authority, responsibilities, and structures so that collective effort is maximized. Superior leaders discover what motivates each person to do his or her best, and work with those motivations to achieve the highest standards.

These leaders begin by understanding their people's needs and desires as well as their limitations. They believe there is no better occupation than to inspire others to be their best. They share stories that inspire peak performance. When their people experience a slump, they remind them of their greatest successes. They talk about others' struggles, conflicts, persistence, and eventual triumphs.

Optimal leaders relate to others solely in terms of their own best interests. They do not try to persuade them to do what is not in their best interests. They are also top-notch communicators. They are skilled at convincing others of the value of their ideas. What's more, they communicate with people in their own language. These leaders understand nonverbal communication and make the most of it.

They encourage their people to express themselves fully. They understand the maxim: "If I say it, they can doubt me. If they say it, it's true."

They are sensitive to the needs and expectations of their people and seek regular, honest feedback from them. They always encourage and respect understanding within their team.

The most effective leaders acknowledge their people for their contributions. They are specific with praise. They value their people for being themselves. They also recognize and applaud achievement, and celebrate accomplishments as they occur.

They act immediately to correct unwanted behavior. They do not criticize others' motives, but direct their comments to the behavior, not the person. When these leaders have to criticize, they do it privately and sometimes in the form of a question.

In short, Optimal leaders discover what "the best" means to their people, appeal to their best interests, stimulate in them the desire to be the best, and then acknowledge them for doing their best.

Optimal leaders display character in their voices, manners, postures, actions, mannerisms, and facial expressions. They follow through on what they say they will do. They honor agreements and demonstrate consistency and commitment. They act with integrity and inspire trust.

They understand that both failure and risk-taking are

part of achieving their ultimate success. They promote initiative, the generation of ideas, prudent risk-taking, and autonomy. Superior leaders encourage their people to be creative and to use their best efforts to solve problems.

They encourage innovative action, flexibility, and honest feedback. They also support the collaborative efforts of their personnel. Optimal leaders are also skilled at decision making, because they know that the worst decision, generally, is no decision. They keep their composure, choose the best time to make decisions, and then take the best actions.

When resolving conflict, Optimal leaders consider which alternatives will help those involved meet their needs in ways that move the organization closest to its goals. They consider which alternatives are most likely to minimize conflict and opposition to these objectives. They also examine what must be sacrificed to achieve the best resolution.

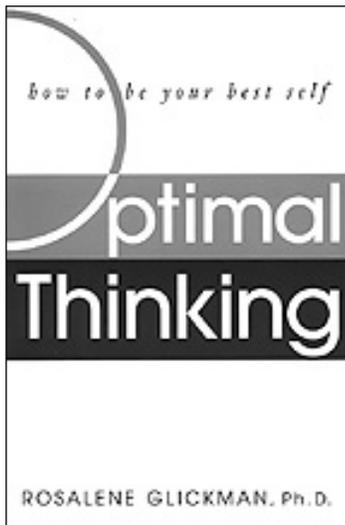
Above all, Optimal leaders trust their intuition. If you trust your intuition and combine it with the techniques in this summary, you, like these outstanding leaders, will become one of the select few who leads an Optimal life.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rosalene Glickman, Ph.D. is President of The World Academy of Personal Development, Inc. She has provided consultation and training for individuals and organizations including Warner Brothers, Mercedes-Benz, California State University, Fullerton School of Business Administration, National Australia Bank, the U.S. Army, The Australian Society of Accountants, and Mensa.

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