

The First Steps on Your NEXT Path

Some exercises
to help you get
underway

Carol McGowan PhD

Author of 'Life's NEXT Path'



Strategic Achievement
COACHING

Understanding your own story marks the beginning of your journey along your next path. This is an opportunity to see what you are saying about yourself, and identify what you focus on, what you're leaving out, and how you interpret what has happened in the past.

This is not about the stories others tell about you; it is about the stories you tell about yourself. When you tell stories about yourself, you can experience a sense of release, and there is a power in feeling that your story is being heard, and most importantly, heard by you. This is not about telling a pretty story; it's about telling your 'real' story.

By listening to and understanding your voice through your life stories, your goals, desires, and aspirations will likely surface and help inform how you may wish to travel along your next path. This enables you to lay a solid foundation for what comes next.

Your story is powerful. It's yours, and it matters!

To move beyond the theoretics, I've included three short, simple, but powerful exercises here to help prepare you for your next path:

1. Starting to Tell Your Story
2. Determining Your Ability to Change
3. Assessing Your Willingness to Change

1: Know how to define and describe yourself

Humans are superb storytellers, keeping cultural traditions alive over vast periods. We love listening to other people's stories, and yet we rarely, if ever, take time to listen to our own.

Knowing how to define and describe yourself means examining your own story from your perspective and not taking others' views into account. We all carry stories that have come to us from various people – our parents, siblings, friends, and other influential people we may encounter in life. Now, it's time to become conscious of those external stories and cast them off so you can focus on how you tell your own.

The risk of not telling your story is insufficient identity formation, which means a reduced understanding of who you are and how you fit into your world. Telling your story is an act of generosity to yourself and others. Giving yourself and others the chance to explore your story allows for a better understanding of who you are. It helps you and others connect to the essence of you. It is a mechanism that binds us together and assists you with making sense of your experience.

You might think, 'My story isn't that interesting. I can't see how telling my story will be helpful.' We dismiss our past as boring or irrelevant, but it is our greatest asset. It's the history of our GPS that has formed as we have navigated life's trials. This is the best learning menu you will ever have, and you can add chapters you have crafted in the past and up to this point as you travel your next path.

NOTE If you have had experiences that you found difficult, I recommend you speak with your mental health professional, counsellor, therapist, or psychologist and develop strategies that will enable you to do this in a way that ensures you stay psychologically safe, which is paramount.

EXERCISE 1

STARTING TO TELL YOUR STORY

Set aside 15 minutes in a space where you're unlikely to be interrupted. It's beneficial to find a space that is comfortable and calming – for example, your garden, by a river, or in your favourite room or chair. Set a timer for 15 minutes, then write things from your story that come to mind. No editing!

You might start with where you are today, where you lived as a child, or a happy memory. There is no right or wrong about this - listen to what comes up when you ask yourself, “What is my story?”

This is your opportunity to set aside time to hear your story as the first step towards your next path. Try not to judge what you write. Just start somewhere. Every part of your story matters. It's like dots in artwork. Alone, they don't seem like much, but when seen as a connected whole, the picture is beautiful and compelling.

A few things crop up quickly, and then you might feel like you've run out of steam. Stay the full fifteen minutes. Accept the gaps as natural, regular, and helpful. The gaps allow you to think of more profound, significant, or relevant things.

Remember, this is not a one-off activity. It's a start. Do it as many times as you think you need to.

Barriers that might arise are thoughts that your own story has no value or feelings of discomfort with writing or recording your story. Remember, this is about you and for you—no one else!

Start small and only write for five minutes. Progress is progress, so just do something. Surprisingly, it will snowball. Don't overthink it. Just let it flow without judgment.



If you're having trouble tapping into the story of you, here are some thought-starter questions you may also want to consider:

- Who am I?
- Where have I been?
- What have I done?
- What am I proud of? Not so proud of?
- Who surrounds me?
- What's important to me?
- Where do I live?
- How do I spend my time?
- What are my interests, hobbies, and skills?
- What have I still left to do?
- Do I have regrets?
- What have I learned?
- How am I different from what I used to be?

Set that timer!

Go!



[illegible]

[illegible]

2: Your ability to change

You need to understand your past and present circumstances to fully understand your ability to change. This encompasses the physical, emotional, and psychological conditions of your life—they all impact your story and how you see and describe yourself.

This is not about how much money you have, where you live, whether you are married, or where you work. You write about a particular point or circumstance that helps explain where you find yourself in life. There may be a point of discontent or discomfort where you feel stuck and want to make a shift. Or you may want to make a significant change, but it seems overwhelming because of what is involved in making that change.

Equally important is understanding your own story and the circumstances you find yourself in. These become a part of the first draft of your own story, a story of triumph rather than regret. When they are being written, books do not start on page one and finish with the conclusion. Usually, the author picks a starting point somewhere and then builds on it. The same applies to you picking a point to start your story. Creating order in any story comes later in the process.

When seeking to undertake change, there are three essential considerations:

1. The **ability** to change – the skills, know-how, expertise, and resources that will help you facilitate change.
2. The **willingness** to change – a commitment to do something different, a desire to change.
3. The **capacity** to change involves reviewing the enablers and barriers that will either help or hinder you in achieving your desired change.

In this section, we will look at your ability to change by considering what levels of willingness and capacity you have at your disposal to enable you to change.

EXERCISE 2

DETERMINING YOUR ABILITY TO CHANGE

Set aside 15 minutes and create a list in your journal of your circumstances over the last three months. It might help if you use these three questions as headings:

1. What has persisted over the previous three months, both good and bad?
2. What has changed for the better in the previous three months?
3. What has changed for the worse over the last three months?

Once you have completed this activity, take stock of how you perceive your current circumstances. Do you think you have more ability to change than you first thought, or less?

I have found that writing a list of my circumstances has helped me put a boundary around what is occurring and contain it. This activity always seems to make what I'm experiencing that much more manageable. Is that your experience?

You might think, 'I feel too overwhelmed by my current circumstances,' or 'There's not much I can do about my current circumstances.' Start small and focus on one aspect of your life –work, family, or other relationships. There's no right or wrong here, so start in one area and then progress out.

Set that timer!

Go!



[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

Record your observations here:

[illegible]

3: Your willingness to change

A willingness to change is an openness to accepting something different. Your attitude to change is a key consideration in this instance. Some people love change, and others do not. Knowing your preference helps with ascertaining your willingness to change and whether it needs to be adjusted to enable the change you desire.

This assessment of willingness to change requires an appraisal of how you see your current situation and how open you are to change. Do you see your current situation as enabling change or limiting change? This is not about who or what has contributed to your current circumstances; instead, it requires you to judge how you see them. It's not about being hard on yourself; it's appreciating where you have come to and what might have contributed to that.

By considering your current circumstances, you will gain an indication of your willingness to change. This will help you determine the degree of difficulty of change and whether you think it's worth it. It also provides an indicator of how you see the likelihood of change taking place.

You might think, 'I don't think my circumstances are the problem. I'm the problem.' Remember, our perception of a situation and the decisions we make because of that perception are the primary contributors to the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Be mindful not to fall into the global conversations about self-doubt when what you are dealing with is less pervasive and may only require more understanding of where you find yourself.

Anaïs Nin, a French-born American diarist, essayist, and novelist, succinctly sums up what occurs: 'We don't see things as they are. We see them as we are.'

EXERCISE 3

ASSESSING YOUR WILLINGNESS TO CHANGE

Using your journal and sitting in your favourite location, take ten minutes to list factors in your current circumstances that apply to your willingness to change. An example may be: 'I cannot talk to my manager; he does not listen. I need a holiday; I'm so exhausted.'

Factors in my current circumstances that I think apply to, or are influencing, my willingness to change:



Prioritise these items on your list based on importance and impact. You should talk to your manager first to help reduce tension in the workplace. Planning a holiday might take some time. By doing this, you've prioritised the order in which you want to act, which will help determine your willingness to change and the order in which you choose to change.

What are my top priorities from this list and why?



If you were considering the situation at arm's length, what would stand out for you as significant? What is it that makes it essential?

[illegible]

Well done for getting this far!

Your path is calling you.

I hope these exercises have helped you take the first steps along your journey.

These are the first of 34 helpful exercises you'll find throughout my book, *Your NEXT Path*.

I encourage you to give them all a try by accessing my book in print or ebook format – see my website at www.strategicachievementcoaching.com.au/product/books. I hope they provide you with greater insight that will inform your journey.

If, after trying these exercises, you would like more significant guidance, I would love to talk with you.

If you're keen to learn more about how coaching could help, please contact me for a no-obligation chat at carol@strategicachievementcoaching.com.au.

I hope your next path leads you somewhere fabulous!

Carol McGowan PhD

Author of *Life's NEXT Path*

Life Strategist & Master Coach

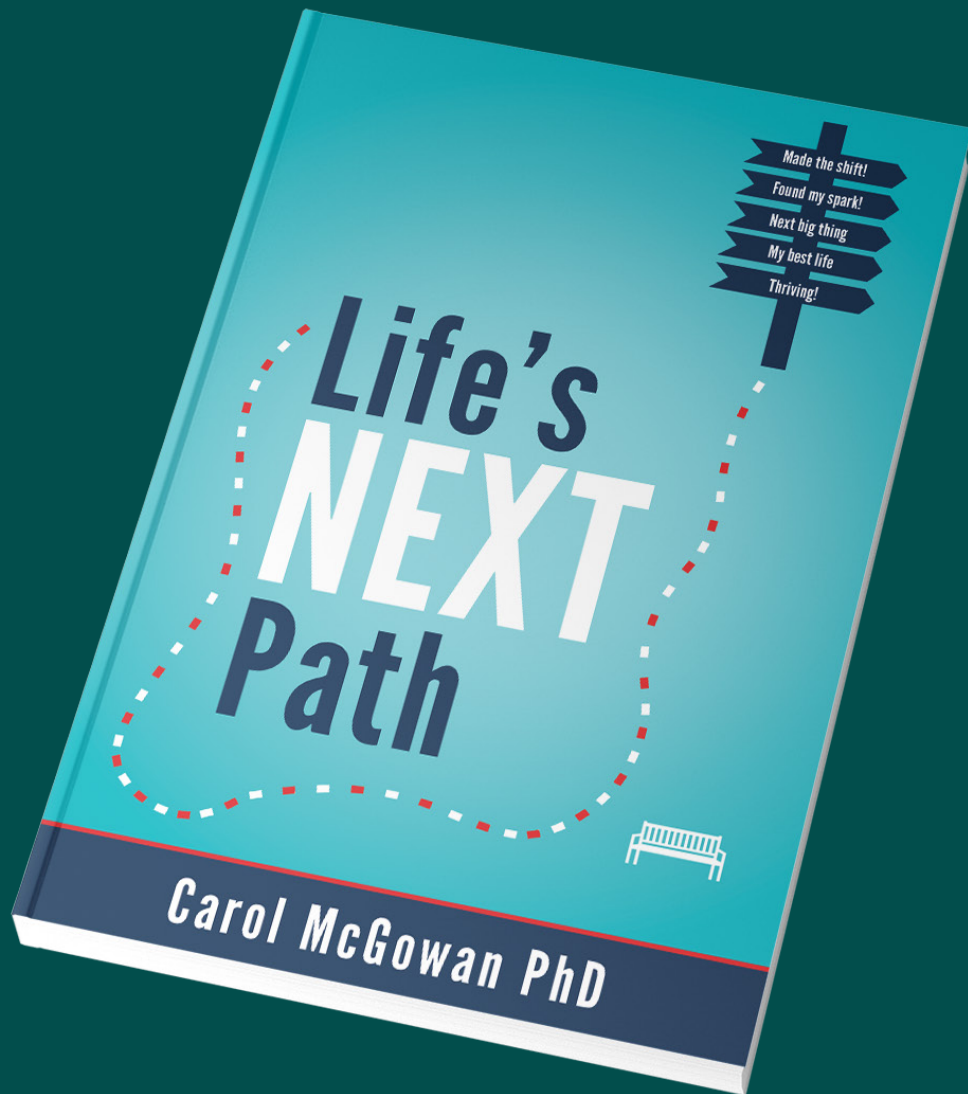
Strategic Achievement Coaching

Website: www.strategicachievementcoaching.com.au

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/carol-mcgowan-phd

Email: carol@strategicachievementcoaching.com.au





**Order Your Copy of
Life's NEXT Path Here**



Strategic Achievement
COACHING