

YOUR LIFE'S WORKSHOP presents:

Get to the Good Stuff

By Illana Burk



FORWARD

What is *The Good Stuff*, anyway?

Stop me when this sounds familiar. You're sitting in front of your computer, notepad open at your side, post-its of your infinite ideas strewn about like snowflakes, while you try desperately to figure out which of your brilliant scribbles is THE thing that will take you from wherever you are now to wherever you want to be.

What you're trying to find is The Good Stuff.

The stuff that *feels* right.

The stuff that *WILL* work.

The stuff that won't waste your time/energy/life force/money/effort/etc...

The stuff that your clients will leap for and that you will be overjoyed to talk about over and over because it lights you up THAT much.

***THAT's* the good stuff.**

The problem is – in addition to the chorus of brilliant voices singing ideas in your head, you also have a few drunk assholes in the front row heckling every note.

Picking apart your brilliance. Telling you all the reasons why, “This isn't it.”

So it goes, your genius choir starts singing and out comes the hecklers and you are left doubting every tune – every idea – every move – every choice.

It's exhausting, it's counter-productive, and most of all, it's expensive.

What most people don't know is that making the right decision is actually not that hard. It's a skill that can be learned, and once learned, it will save you precious time, emotional strife and overall, moolah.

I have spent the better part of the last decade working with hundreds of clients who make big decisions every day. From

designers to executives to coaches to florists, the path to making better decisions faster is the same. Through my client work, I found that most people hire a consultant because they are in a time of uncertainty. They don't always need plans and recommendations, they often really just need validation that their choices are the right ones and their thought-process in getting there is sound.

Early in my career, I realized that the best way to serve that need was to empower my clients by teaching them how to evaluate their decision-making process on their

own. So, I spent years developing and testing a system that could work for anyone in any profession. Working through this very process has been the first step in all of the work I do with clients.

I am overjoyed to be sharing this with you.

-Illana

A QUICK WORD ABOUT HOW TO USE THIS BOOK:

This is a *system*. Every step builds on the last [that means no skipping ahead]. It's designed to help you actually *learn* how to get laser-focused and make decisions fast that are right for you and your business.

If you really do the work, you will get to a point where you can run through the steps automatically – it will just become how you think about new problems and opportunities.

But it only works when you do the work. And the work is hard. And fun. And eye-opening. And self-actualizing.

It's totally ok to plow through the whole thing in a day or two, just do it all in order. If it feels overwhelming, slow down. Do each step over and over if you need to – until it feels easy.

Have faith in the process. When you think it's difficult, or redundant, or boring, know that every step has a solid, proven purpose.

Stick with it and your brain will grow like two whole sizes.

For reals.

Step 1: What are the three things you want out of life? Think in simple, one or two word terms.

[Example: create community, travel the world, improve the environment]

WEEK 1a: Understanding what you really want – Your Deepest Path

This step will help you clearly identify what you REALLY want, and the skills you learn will keep you zeroed in, on-track, and moving into your next phase. This is positively the most important and personal part of this process.

Take it slow. Work through each step with a clear mindfulness that this is all about you and what you want and need. It's not about your responsibilities or your obligations, just YOU.

Step 2: Check each word for value/priority, judgment, and truth. Use this grid to help you:

[illegible]

Step 3: Considering all you learned in the previous step, re-write your three things again. If you dramatically change any of them (like if you discovered that you really don't want something that you thought you did), then go through Step 2 again until you are crystal clear on all three being EXACTLY what you *truly* want.

Step 4: Combine all three into a *Deepest Path* Statement

[Example: - Using our Step 1 statements - My Deepest Path is to travel the world creating small communities committed to improving the environment.]

Step 5: Check for lack of actionable specificity and ambiguity [Look for 'fuzzy' words – Words that lack clarity. For example: - My Deepest Path is to travel the world

creating small communities committed to improving the environment.]

- *World* = Do you really want to travel the **WHOLE** world? Or perhaps just Europe?
- *Creating* = Do you want to start a foundation? Throw parties? What does community mean to you?
- *Improving* = How will you measure improvement? How much do you want to improve things?
- *Environment* = The natural world as a whole? The yard outside your house? What does 'environment' mean to you?

Now you try:

statement that is: True, specific, actionable, measurable, concise, and clear. It should be something you can easily memorize, and that makes you feel good to think about and say. When you hit all the right notes, you will feel its *rightness* in your belly. If you hit any bumps in the overall cadence, or words that feel muddled, keep working the steps.

[Example: My Deepest Path is to travel to a new place every month spreading a message of environmental conservation to children as a way of building environmental advocacy in a new generation.]

Step 6: Hone your statement by going through the previous steps as many times as it takes to arrive at a

NOTES:

1. **Your Deepest Path is a changeable statement.** As you and your business grow, your statement should as well. It's a good idea to reevaluate it every three to six months or so.
2. **The purpose of The Deepest Path statement is to give you a filter that you can pass future opportunities through.** Essentially, your Deepest Path is like a moral code, of sorts. If an opportunity presents itself that doesn't align with your Deepest Path, you know to pass on it.
3. **The critical approach used in this exercise can be applied to almost anything.** The lessons here have taught you how to check for truth. Never underestimate the value of critical thought.

WEEK 1b: Framing your idea

We're going to create an *Opportunity Statement* out of the random light-bulb ideas rattling around your noggin.

The first step to figuring out if you've got something or not is to put a name on it [*for now, let's call your idea Stan*].

Together, we're going to map out Stan. We're going to write out several versions of it.

As an example, I'm going to assume that you are just dying to start a marketing consulting business. To begin, let's look at the ways you can misstep right from the start, so we can help you avoid potholes.

First, you could over-simplify and say,

"The opportunity is to create a marketing consulting business."

Or,

"The opportunity is to create a new product."

You could also overcomplicate it with details or nonsense words that you aren't completely sure of yet. Like,

"The opportunity is to envision a consulting firm where I can use my marketing talents to enrich the businesses of people in my community."

For the sake of our ongoing example, we will use the statement,

"The opportunity is to create a marketing consulting company focused on small business."

Now you try. Write out at least six statements relating to different opportunities/ideas in front of you RIGHT NOW:

Next: Look back at the worksheet grid from the previous section. Rethink your opportunity statements based on the Deeper Path you found for yourself. Cut the ones that don't align with your Deeper Path. Fill in what's left or write a couple of new ones that fit better for you.

WEEK 2a: Fine-tuning your opportunity statement

Write out your favorite version of your Opportunity Statement from the previous lesson here [Choose the opportunity that you REALLY want to focus on and work towards so that this lesson can both teach AND help you reach something new.]:

[Exercise Example: The opportunity is to create a marketing consulting company focused on small business.]

On the next page, you'll find the same truths/assumptions grid from the very first lesson. Take your favorite opportunity statement and run it through the grid. Modify your opportunity statement accordingly, based on your results. Don't be afraid to change it until you get it right.

[illegible]

ASSUMPTIONS - TRUTH & IMPORTANCE:

To truly know when you have an opportunity in front of you, you need to separate out the fibs you might be telling yourself, then evaluate whether the assumptions you have made are important or not.

<p>Step 1: List the assumptions you have made about your opportunity statement.</p>	<p>Step 2: Evaluate each assumption for its level of truth. <i>Weigh each assumptions truth level based on both how true it is to you, and how true it is to other stakeholders who may be affected by the opportunity in your statement. Enter your most reasoned average when considering both factors.</i> <i>1=not true -to- 10=totally true</i> </p>	<p>Step 3: Now that you know what's true, evaluate each assumption for its level of importance when considering how this opportunity will fit into your Deeper Path. <i>Hint: An assumption CAN be a 10 in the truth column, but be a 1 in the importance column. Remember that assumption can be untrue, but important, and vice-versa.</i> </p>
<i>[ex: I assume that small biz people need a marketing consultant.]</i>	<i>[9 - It is very true that people need marketing consultants]</i>	<i>[10 - It is very important that this assumption be true.]</i>

Finally, apply what you've learned and re-write your opportunity statement here:

***For this section, **read all the steps** before you begin. Knowing what questions you will be asked next will help inform your answers.

Step 1: Make a list of the things that you are really good at, but that you *DON'T REALLY LIKE* doing [like, I ROCK at retail sales, but would rather have my fingernails removed one by one than work at the mall at Xmas again]:

WEEK 2b: Discovering and Evaluating your 'Near Gifts' and your 'True Gifts'

Let's define what these terms mean, first...

Near gifts are the things you are either naturally good at, or that you have gotten good at, but that don't really light you up.

True gifts are the things that you're good at, or that you could get good at with a little work, AND that make your soul SING!

Step 2: Make a list of the thing you are really good at, and *DON'T MIND* doing [I am pretty darn good at wreath design, but it doesn't get me all hot and bothered]:

Step 3: Make a list of the things that you are NOT that good at, but really *LIKE* doing [*I SUCK at relaxing, but I really like doing it.*]:

(and enjoying at least *most* of it) [*Ha! No example for you... you can work this one out, right?*]:

Step 4: Make a list of the things you ARE really good at, and really *LIKE* doing [*I REALLY like writing smart-ass remarks in square brackets, AND I am pretty damn good at it.*]:

Step 5: From your answers above pick the three things that you can see yourself doing daily for a *long* time

“But Illana,” you say,

“My list reads:

1. I like coffee
2. I am a great cook
3. I have always wanted to design shoes.

How the hell do I make a business out of that?”

Sounds to me like you might want to open a coffee shop/shoe store, and commit yourself to a personal cooking challenge, like learning a new cuisine.

Or, go to shoe design school, your love of coffee will fit right in. Finance it by writing a cookbook for students.

The point is, the world is full of connections that most people don't see. The trick is to focus on what you love, what you're good at, and what you have always wanted to be, and stick with that. That is your Good Stuff, if you must focus, focus on that.

My list reads:

1. *I love to write*
2. *I am great at helping other people see and realize their dreams.*
3. *I love making beautiful things.*

So, I write for a living, I consult with entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs, and I design stuff too. Number four is that I am passionate about sustainability and quality, so that influences how I see my business and writing life, as well as my design work. I am never bored, and I get to decide how I spend most of my days.

conclusions [*read that last sentence again... it's important and those were some big words that you may have skipped over*].

For clarity's sake, and to be inclusive of all various business models and types, I will refer to your clients/ customers/ audience simply as 'your people' from this point on.

Why is this important when we are supposed to be talking about teasing out good ideas from bad ones?

Because a good idea is not a good idea, if you are only considering your needs, and not the needs of the people you serve.

It sounds simple, I know.

But most people consider one or the other to have more weight. They make decisions without fully valuing either the internal [what you need/want] or the external [what your people need/want].

Good ideas emerge when both are in balance.

WEEK 3a: Facts, Preferences, and Judgments – Discovering the point-of-view of your target market

If you want to know the difference between a good opportunity and a bad one, you have to consider the POV of the party you are trying to serve. Until this point, we have looked at *you*. This is where we look at *them*.

The basic concept of fact vs. opinion is incomplete. What is a factual and solid truth for one person may seem to be an opinion to another. This is why we have to look at the preferences and judgments that make up situational

Here's what you need to know:

1. **Each of us (humans) comes from a unique and singular place.**

Recognizing that your people are different from you is key. Yes, they may share your interests, but they also have many of their own. Finding a way to tap into their collateral interests, values, and judgments can be extremely enlightening [*think surveys, friendly/non-sales-y contact, etc...*].

Think of a particular current or potential client [yes, an actual person]. Write a couple of sentences creating a story about what you think that client might like. What are their interests? Are they cat people? Are they yoga lovers? Do they eat at snazzy bistros?

The idea is to start thinking about what THEY like, not what *you want them to like*.

2. In any new endeavor, you *will* lose people, if you don't address ALL of your people's unique preferences.

This is, however, totally impossible. But you can mitigate the losses by considering as many ways to meet their *learning style and personal preference* needs as possible.

That means that you need to remember that some people like video, some prefer audio, some like to read, and to some, a personal card or physical advertisement will hit home better than anything.

Yup. If you want to hold everyone's attention, you actually do have to be everything to everyone. Or, you make peace with losing a few along the way, and then gaining new ones.

In this exercise, write down a few ideas about what you can do right now, with skills and resources you already have, that can creatively meet the unique needs you created in the previous exercise:

3. Judgments are reality. I judge. You judge. We judge *everything*... *ALL* the time.

Recognize that being judgmental is part of the human condition, and that it is not *necessarily* a bad thing; it's part of all of our decision-making processes.

Judgment is our intuitive barometer, but its lack of measurability often prevents us from listening to it.

Instead, we rely more heavily on quantifiable indicators. But, when making a new move, judgments are your internal map to what works for you and what doesn't [*yes, I have just given you permission to be judgmental... try not to be a dick about it*].

Now, think about one customer you have that you could do without. What would you have time to do if they weren't sapping your energy?

4. Your people want you to do and say EXACTLY what is in your heart of hearts, and risk it all to do so.

That is the one and only place from where something unique can emerge. I am not telling you to be original. That's too abstract. I'm telling you to drop your ego and see what's behind it. Look for inspiration in the same spot where that original entrepreneurial fire started burning. Staying true to that is really all anyone wants from you. It's inspiring, and people want to be inspired [*go ahead, cover Stan in purple glitter. You know you want to... and Stan can be a little freaky like that*].

So, what's one thing you have been dying to show your people that you haven't yet?

every single day. That is not what I'm expecting of you, nor should you attempt to expect that of yourself.

The point here is to train yourself to give your emotional responses a well-deserved vacation at crucial times so you can make room for your newfound laser-focus.

WEEK 3b: Using your True Gifts to empower your people

As you might have guessed, knowing your gifts is just the first step. **To really make change, you have to identify exactly how you can use those gifts to best benefit your people and *their* respective paths.** To do that, you have to get comfortable setting aside your natural limiting factors so you can focus on forward motion.

I KNOW this is WAY hard. What I'm about to ask of you will feel HUGE. But here's what you need to remember: **Each of the following steps would only be huge if you were expecting yourself to do this every single minute of**

Think of it like this: Everyone can diet for a week, right? But, depriving yourself of natural cravings indefinitely is much harder, maybe even impossible. So, the following steps are meant to be implemented in a task-specific manner so that you **don't overwhelm yourself**.

IMPORTANT NOTE: *On the next pages, you will find several exercises that will seem deceptively simple. Once you have done each a few times on paper, you'll find that the lessons and tools will begin to come really naturally when you need to give yourself a pep talk, and can be done in a few short minutes of self-conversation. That said, DO EACH ONE ON PAPER a few times first. We are working on re-patterning your brain here. That doesn't happen if you just skim the info.*

Step 1: Set aside self-doubt. Doubt is the sworn enemy of personal growth. When embarking on a new endeavor, whether it's a new offering, or simply writing a blog post, the ability to convince yourself that you CAN do it is invaluable [and HARD].

Banishing Self-Doubt Exercise:

First – Breathe. Center yourself. Do whatever you need to do to calm yourself down.

Second – Grab a pen and paper.

Third – You are going to write THREE short sentences answering the following questions:

Sentence 1: What is your biggest, meanest personal doubt statement you are feeling about the issue you have in front of you right this moment? [*ex: I am not a good enough writer to blog regularly.*]

Sentence 2: What can you do about it?

Sentence 3: If you weren't spending your energy focusing on this feeling, what could you be doing for your people instead?

Step 2: Set aside distractions. I'm not talking about TV or family obligations. This exercise assumes that you have already found your best logistical set-up for putting out your best work. No, *this* exercise is asking you to set aside emotional distractions. The *overachiever* kind.

We are talking about that little voice in your head that tells you to plan three steps ahead when you really need to take just one.

We are talking about that little voice that tells you that you can *tooooooalllly* go back to work after you check Facebook for the seventh time in the past hour. These types of distractions are much more destructive to your work because when we give in to them, we feel guilty later which then saps our energy even further. This exercise is not about internal clarity, it's are about forgiving yourself for your foibles and moving *through* them.

First – Breathe. Center yourself. Do whatever you need to do to calm yourself down. {Yes, *again*.}

Second – Grab a pen and paper.

Third – You are going to write THREE short sentences answering the following questions:

Sentence 1: What are the top three things that you tend to fill your procrastination time with?

Sentence 2: How much more time and energy would you have if you didn't do those three things for just one day? *Extra Credit: Try actually banishing just those three things from your routine for just one single day and see how you feel.*

Sentence 3: What could you do that would benefit your people in the time you've now created?

Step 3: Banish Fear.

Banishing Fear Exercise:

First – Breathe. Center yourself. Do whatever you need to do to calm yourself down.

Second – Grab a pen and paper.

Third – You are going to write THREE short sentences answering the following questions:

Sentence 1: Repeat after me: Fear will not kick my ass today. Maybe tomorrow, but not today. Today, I'm brave.

Sentence 2: What can you think about right now *instead* if thinking about everything you are afraid of?

Sentence 3: How does fear help or hinder you to better serve your people?

Step 4: Banish Pre-Judgment. Judgment is ultimately unavoidable and is not at all a bad thing. It's how we process information and assign value to new stimuli. *Pre*-judgment, however is a totally different animal. Pre-judgment implies that you are making choices based on your assumptions. It implies a lack of complete information, and incomplete information means you can never make a truly informed decision.

Banishing Pre-Judgment Exercise:

First – Breathe. Center yourself. Do whatever you need to do to calm yourself down.

Second – Grab a pen and paper.

Third – You are going to write THREE short sentences answering the following questions:

Sentence 1: What do you gain from pre-judging the outcome of a situation?

Sentence 2: What opportunity could you be missing out on by creating the blind-spot of pre-judgment?

Sentence 3: Think of an opportunity or decision you are currently facing. Make your best attempt to reframe your dilemma without your pre-judgments. Notice how your perspective changes.

This section explores those two core ideas, and how to know when you've hit the mark.

1. Implications are not just about you.

Business is like a spider web. You and your actions are connected to an infinite number of peers, clients, potential clients, naysayers, and people that don't give a flying crap about you. Every move you make has the potential to cultivate new connections and strengthen relationships.

Unfortunately, despite your best intentions, each move also has the potential to weaken bonds and burn bridges.

You probably have a good understanding of who your actions affect directly, but who might your actions affect indirectly [and how]?

WEEK 4a: Implications and Higher

Purpose

In any new endeavor, there are really just two things that it all comes down to:

- a. What are the implications of your next steps?
- b. Does your new 'thing' [*Stan*] serve your higher purpose? How so [or what do you need to change so that it does?]?

2. Considering implications involves two things:

- a. **The game of chess** – Thinking at least three steps ahead will help you see what happens after what happens next, and will help you avoid the wrong first move.

Exercise: Think about a current opportunity. What happens after whatever happens next?

- b. **The world at large** – Your actions affect not just the logistics and functions of your business, but the people around you, the people who love you, the people in your community, the home you occupy, and the planet you live on.

Exercise: Who are the core people that will be affected by any action you take?

3. The most important implication you must consider is: *Does this action serve your deepest path?*

You have a cause, a purpose, a reason for doing what you're doing. Since you are an entrepreneur, your purpose is most likely different than others. It's bigger, more expansive, and more divergent from simple patterns and goals.

play well together? How can you change where you are now to reframe your current opportunity so that it is optimal benefit to your deepest path **AND** your people?

At the end of any brainstorming session, the most productive question you can ask yourself it, "Does Stan [your idea] respect and consider the impact he/it has on the greater vision I have of myself?"

Exercise: Think about your Deepest Path and about an opportunity you currently have on your plate, and the people that it will affect. Do they all

WEEK 4b: Framing your focus and put it all together

As you embark on your exercises in Get to the Good Stuff, we are going to pull back the curtain a bit to help you close the circle on your new toolset.

As you may have gathered, our overall approach to focus is about framing boundaries around a challenge, opportunity, or problem so that you can break down small chunks that are not only easy to tackle, but will help you move brilliantly into the **right** next phase for **you**.

To move into that next phase, **it is absolutely crucial to be able to simultaneously prioritize your wants and needs**

with the wants and needs of *your people*. They are relying on you to deliver a problem-solving outcome. If you lose track of what that is for them, you will lose them as they will seek solutions elsewhere.

So, how do you juggle those two things? How to you give equal weight to both your dreams and your people? Glad you asked!

Up until this point, your Get to the Good Stuff exercises have been about self discovery and new learning patterns. Today is a little different. Today, you are simply asked to go back through each of the previous sections and review the concepts you learned. The following worksheets will help you bring all your work together.

My Deepest Path is:

I have evaluated my current opportunity statement for truth:

Totally!

Oops! I forgot. I shall head back to Weeks 1-2 and work it out.

My MOST pressing opportunity [current opportunity statement] is:

My current opportunity is in alignment with my deepest path:

Absolutely!

**Hmmm, not sure. Maybe I need to rethink this a bit.
[Don't proceed until you can answer 'Absolutely!']**

Which of my people will this opportunity affect and how? [Family, friends, clients, etc...?]

How will my truest gifts benefit my people in this opportunity?

Which of my true gifts can I apply to the opportunity at hand?

What is the point-of-view of my people, as it affects this opportunity?

What risks am I willing to take for this opportunity?

Who does my idea affect the most?

The who, what, where, why, and how of focusing on my people:

What problem does this opportunity solve for my people?

Where can I go from this point?

**How can I format this opportunity to grow my vision
AND benefit my people?**

When can I implement this opportunity?

Afterword

For this workbook, I used business opportunities as a way to frame the lessons, but the steps are the same no matter what you're grappling with.

The workbook steps you have now completed are a way of helping you get out of your own way without sacrificing a. the needs of the people and that matter most to you or b. the greater vision that you know you are meant for.

A well-rounded business is a business that fuels the world, makes good money, and values the needs of the community it occupies. Balanced choices are the key to balanced business.

When you see a facet of your business that is out of alignment, now you have the skills to frame new opportunities, instead of getting crushed by the overwhelm of options and choices.

If you have ten ideas in front of you and aren't sure which to pursue, you can run through the steps you've learned here for all ten of them. You'll find that the more you run through them and get an intuitive handle on your Deepest Path and the needs of your stakeholders, the faster your decision-making process will become, and the faster you will get to The Good Stuff.

Now go be brilliant!