

# This is Your (future) Life

*Simulation and Discussion activity created by Dr. Christine Metzko, Director of Academic Initiatives*

## **Timing:**

This activity would fit well in a seminar class as you begin to talk about values and goals and/or career and life planning.

The activity can be done in 30 minutes or extended to fill a full 50-minute class session depending on how many “life happens” rounds are done and how you integrate discussion to introduce broader class goals.

## **Supplies:**

- Notecards and pens/pencils
- Set of Life Event Cards (see suggestions below)

## **Activity backdrop (feel free to read this to students):**

On p. 5 of *The Good Food Revolution*, the first sentence reads, “I am an urban farmer.” As you read the book, you learn that he has been many things in his life, and that, at least in his own mind, this was a most unlikely path for him. But from an education major, to a professional basketball player, to a marketing executive, to an urban farmer, Will Allen followed his passions and his skills to adapt as life gave him setbacks or events presented new opportunities.

“Planned Happenstance”<sup>1</sup> is a theory of how chance events often play a role in shaping a person’s career path. So while it is important to plan, one should be prepared to be flexible and persistent in the face of potential setback, willing to take risk and keep an open-mind about new opportunities, and think creatively and optimistically about ones future.

In this class we will be talking about your goals for college, career, and life. This activity is a chance for us to think about being creative and resilient with our goals, taking a little inspiration from Will Allen.

## **The Activity:**

**Tell your future story (5 minutes):** Have students write a set of 4 notecards to create a timeline of the future they imagine for themselves.

- The Next Four Years:
- 5-10 years From now:
- 20 years from now:

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<sup>1</sup> Krumboltz, J.D. (2009). “The Happenstance Learning Theory,” *Journal of Career Assessment*.

- Where you will be when you retire:

**Life Happens (8-15 minutes, depending on how many rounds):** Have students put their note cards in chronological order. You (and the mentor) randomly give each student a “life event” which might be an opportunity or a setback (see suggestions below). Place it at one of the four points in time.

Ask students to flip over that notecard and all the ones following to write a new story responding creatively to whatever the life event was that you gave them. You could do 2 rounds of this depending on how much time you have and how much time it takes.

At various points in the exercise you can stop and discuss the various visions they have for their lives, in pairs or small groups. One variation would be to have students take their cards and move to find someone to sit by who shares a life goal. This would allow them to compare how they handle different setbacks and opportunities at different stages of the exercise in a paired or small group discussion. It also connects them to someone in the class right away with whom they have something in common.

**“Life Events” cards:** Here are some suggestions for Life events. Note that not all students need to have different life events. In fact, it can be a stronger exercise if students have had some of the same life events used, because then you can process in the discussion how certain events happening at different life stages “feel” different or how different students responded to the same life events based on their values and goals.

- **Death of a Parent/Beloved Adult in your Life:** A parent/beloved adult in your life dies unexpectedly. You have been very close to this person all of your life and are deeply affected by the loss. You fall into a period of depression that you are finding it difficult to get out of. It begins to seriously affect your (school) work and your relationships.
- **Job Loss:** Your company/organization is experiencing financial difficulties. They are having to let 10% of employees go. You learn that you are one of the people who will be let go. You will have 60 days remaining on your job now that you have been notified.
- **Inheritance:** You come into some land about 50 miles from where you currently live. The land has a lot of potential for either agricultural or commercial development because of its location. To maximize the opportunity you would have to give over a fair amount of your own time and effort.
- **Medical Emergency:** You have a sudden accident that leaves you injured and having to take off work/school for 6 months. You will miss out on opportunities for leadership on projects and will be set back in progress toward important goals.
- **Major Location Change:** Your employer has asked you to take a position that will require you to move to a completely new and unfamiliar city. You would be moving thousands of miles away from any family or close friends. This is the only way you would be able to advance in your current position unless you leave the company/organization. There are no other companies in your area that would give you the kind of work you currently have.
- **Midlife Crisis:** You have decided that you no longer find meaning in the things you once did. You no longer enjoy your work; in fact you truly dislike your boss. You have decided something has to change, starting with a complete change of employment.

- **Parent/Sibling in Need of Live-in Care:** A parent/sibling is in need of live-in care and you are the only immediate family member in a position to handle this. It will mean a significant change in lifestyle.
- **Unexpected Pregnancy:** You/your partner discover that you are expecting. The timing is not what you had wanted, but you decide that you will carry on with the pregnancy.

**Processing Questions (10-20 minutes):**

How open would you say you are to changing circumstances and changing plans?

How many of you took what could be perceived as a setback by some and turned that into an opportunity? Share with the large group how. Why do you think you were able to do that?

How might you spur opportunities in your life? What can you do to create a mindset that helps you respond to change as opportunity?

How important do you think curiosity is to being able to do this?

What would you like to do this semester to help yourself think about your present and future goals and aspirations?