



---

**AN ACTION PLAN FOR LIFE**

# The Right Questions Workbook

Understand your values, unlock  
your purpose, achieve your dreams

---

# **The Right Questions Workbook**

Understand your values, unlock your  
purpose and achieve your dreams

*By Simon Ash*

© Simon Ash, The Right Questions

1st edition published 2011

2nd edition published 2021

Christie Ash Ltd  
152-160 City Road  
London  
EC1V 2NX

[www.therightquestions.co](http://www.therightquestions.co)

*“A prudent question is one half of wisdom.”*

*Francis Bacon*

# Prologue

*The Right Questions* is a planning and decision-making framework based upon asking interrogative questions. The idea for the approach is rooted in Simon Ash's experience as a bomb disposal officer. The framework has then been developed through research, application in management roles, and coaching of senior leaders.

The Right Questions approach can be used for individuals or groups who want to plan strategically and make effective decisions.

## **How to use this workbook**

This workbook shows how you can use The Right Questions approach to achieve personal life goals. The book is designed to be interactive and to build into a personal action plan that you can keep.

You can either print off the book and fill it in by hand, write out the exercises in a notebook, or use the template electronically. The workbook is structured so you can complete the exercises as you go along and the action plan naturally builds as you follow through the steps.

There is introductory information for each step but you will also find hyperlinks to more in-depth advice and further exercises that can help you along the way.

# An Overview of The Right Questions

---

*“I keep six honest serving-men, (They taught me all I knew); Their names are What and Why and When, And How and Where and Who.”*

*Rudyard Kipling*

The Right Questions is a planning and decision-making framework based upon asking simple questions. These questions are based upon the seven primary interrogative questions that we use in our language: *why, where, what, which, how, who and when*.

The questions come in an order of sorts but the process of asking The Right Questions is also iterative and cyclical. In other words, the answer to one question is likely to inform an answer to another, and even after we have worked through all the questions we will generally go back and revisit the others to refine our answers.

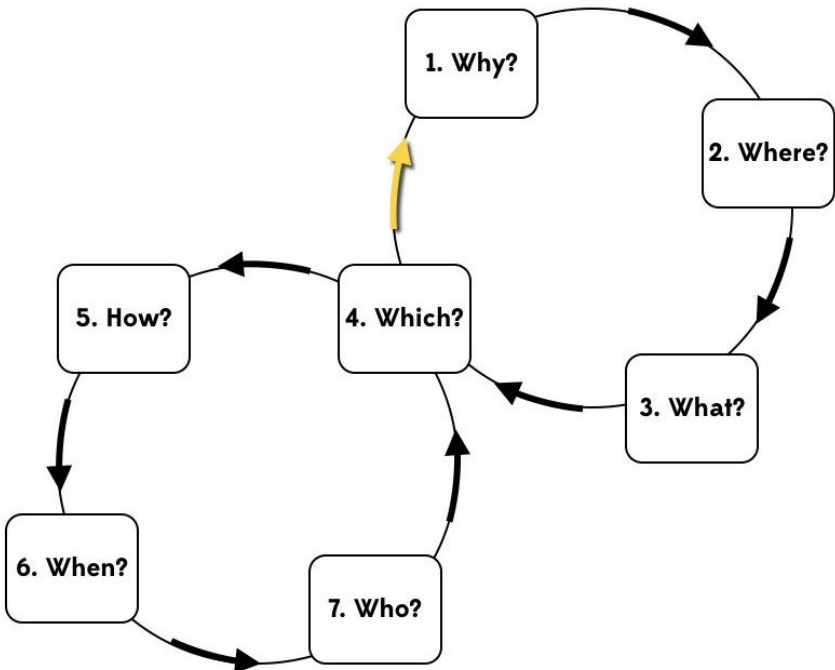
## **The Right Questions Decision-Making Cycle**

It is beneficial to explore the questions in two broad groups. The first is comprised of the where, what and why, and these encompass the *strategic framing* of a situation. The second group is made up of the questions how, when,

and who and these help us with *planning* within the aforementioned strategic frame.

The two groups are joined by ‘which’ and this creates a *reflection intersection* in the thinking process. After looking at the overall strategic picture we use ‘which’ to explore courses of action from which we can choose an option to develop into a more detailed plan. We then return to this same question to weigh the risks as the plan progresses. Looking at these options and risks are the key decision points and can lead us to return through the strategic framing or planning loops again.

Taken all together these seven questions create a planning and decision-making process that follows a figure of eight, as demonstrated in the diagram below.



# Step 1: STRATEGIC FRAMING

---

Why, where and what?

*“The kernel of a strategy contains three elements: a diagnosis, a guiding policy, and coherent action.”*

*Richard Rumelt - Good Strategy, Bad Strategy*



# Why?

---

*“We are not in control, principles control. We control our actions, but the consequences that flow from these actions are controlled by Principles.”*

*Stephen R. Covey*

## **Why do you act the way you do? (Values and Priorities)**

The ‘Why?’ represents our values and priorities. Our values are our identity; the things at our centre that define why we have the vision in the first place, why we do the things we do, why we attract certain people. They are our beliefs and worldview. These are often things we hold in common with others at one level but the particular combination and application of the values make them unique to us. Knowing our principles shows us what we value most and therefore it also helps us to prioritise and make good decisions.

Write down your personal values in priority order in the table below. If you need help working out your principles then read What Are Your Personal Values.

Priority Rating	Personal Value
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	

## Where?

---

### **Where are you now and where are you going? (Situation and Vision)**

‘Where?’ is the present location and the future destination, the situation and the vision. We look at whence we have come from and whither are we going as our journey is bracketed by these ideas of ‘where’. When you get out a map the first thing you do is identify where you are and get your bearings; only once you have done this do you plan to move. And when you move, you don’t want to wander

aimlessly (movement in itself is not progress), there needs to be a destination, something we are aiming for. This destination is the dream, the thing that stokes our passion and gives us our drive.

One quick way to analyse your present situation is to use the SWOT method to assess your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Use the template below to create a personal SWOT analysis.

<b>Strengths</b> 1. 2. 3.	<b>Weaknesses</b> 1. 2. 3.
<b>Opportunities</b> 1. 2. 3.	<b>Threats</b> 1. 2. 3.

# What?

---

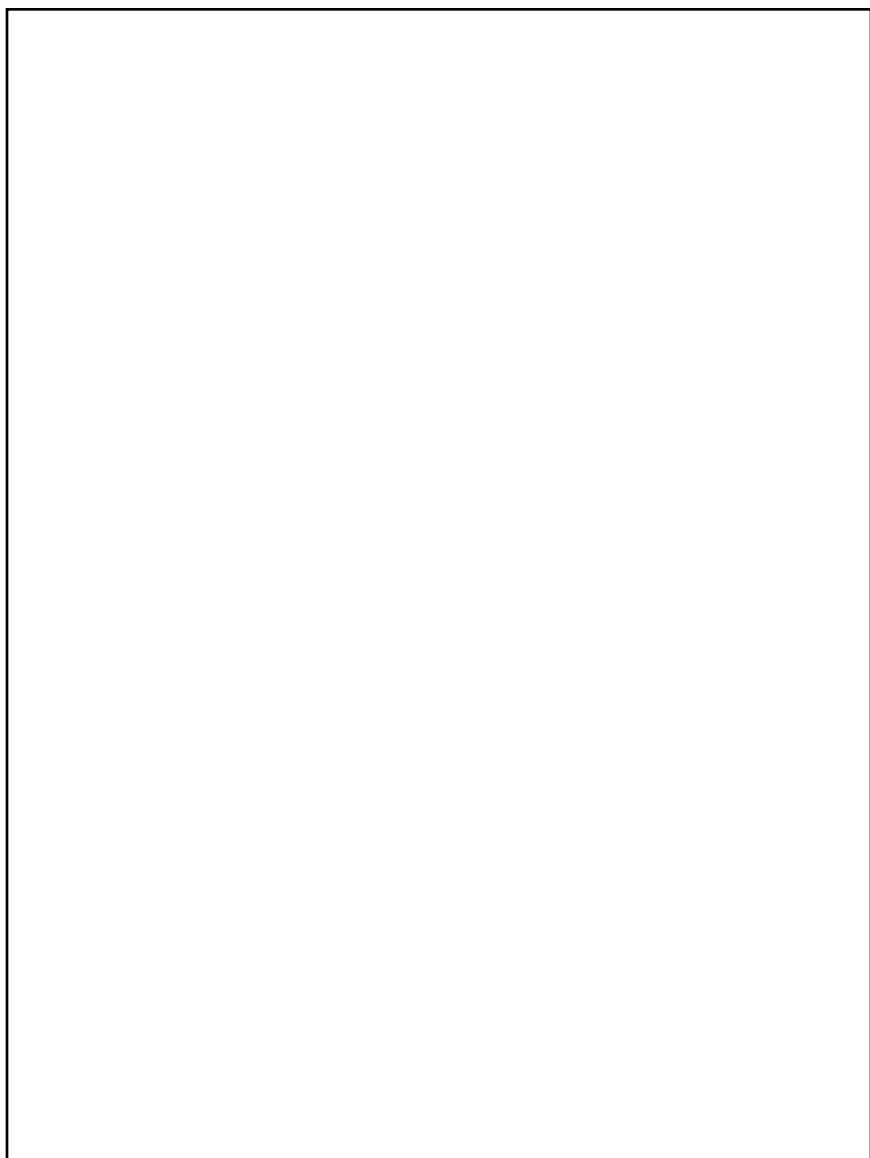
*“It is not enough to be busy. So are the ants. The question is: What are we busy about?”*

*Henry David Thoreau*

## **What does success look like? (Mission)**

‘What?’ represents the mission, the reality of what we are going to do. The mission is the bottom line, the tangible measured difference that we are to make. To work out the mission we need to define success so that we know our finish line. We can then sum this up in a pithy and memorable way to get our mission statement.

Use the box below to write out your personal success statement. If you would like some help crafting your mission then read [What is a Mission Statement and Why do You Need One?](#)



## Step 2: REFLECTION INTERSECTION

---

Which?

*“Sometimes the situation is only a problem because it is looked at in a certain way. Looked at in another way, the right course of action may be so obvious that the problem no longer exists.”*

*Edward de Bono*

# Which?

---

## Which is the best choice? (Options and Risk)

### Options and courses of action

We have to choose which way to go and therefore ‘Which?’ deals with the idea of selection. First, we have to generate a range of courses of options we can choose from. This is a creative process, requiring divergent thinking, and taking time to step out of the purely logical process in order to examine unorthodox ways of problem-solving. Generating these options is something we can do before looking at the how, when and who questions. We are generally faced with various strategy options and we have to select a route by assessing relevant factors.

Think of three courses of action that you could take to achieve your personal mission and look at the advantages and disadvantages using the table below. Then score each option and choose your preferred approach.

*“Opportunities multiply as they are seized.”*

*Sun Tzu*

<b>Option</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
Description			
Advantages			
Disadvantages			
Score (1 to 10)			



## Risks, challenges and obstacles

One of the major factors affecting a decision is the risks relating to obstacles and challenges. If a venture is deemed too risky it is the surest thing that will stop us from acting, no matter how attractive the option first seemed. To make good decisions we need to identify and assess risks, then mitigate and manage risks accordingly.

Capacity for risk varies between people and situations so it is important to remember that this is an ongoing process of management. At the same time we don't want to become defensive, timid or risk-averse; achieving bold visions means taking risks. We just need to make sure we have counted the cost before we commit ourselves.

Use the table below to capture the biggest obstacles you are likely to face and the risk they pose to your success. Then think of ways to overcome these challenges or manage the risks.

*"Obstacles don't have to stop you. If you run into a wall, don't turn around and give up. Figure out how to climb it, go through it, or work around it."*

*Michael Jordan*



## Step 3: PLANNING

---

How, who and when?

*“Plans are worthless but planning is everything.”*

*Dwight Eisenhower*

# How?

---

## How are you going to succeed? (Strategy, Goals, Planning and Resources)

‘How?’ is the method or plan by which we achieve the mission. Goals and activities support the overall strategy and propel us towards our dream. Breaking down the route into manageable steps gives us the basis of an action plan and makes the dream an achievable reality.

Once we have worked out the detail of each task it is much easier to assess the correct resources we need for each step and therefore, by adding up these resources, we can get a better estimate of the total resources we need to achieve the whole mission.

Use the table below to work out the three most important goals that you need to achieve in order to succeed in your mission. Then, break these down into the activities needed to achieve the goal. Make sure you break down these actions until you know the first or next step that you need to take in order to progress.

*“When it is obvious that the goals cannot be reached, don’t adjust the goals, adjust the action steps.”*

Confucius

Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3
Activities/actions:	Activities/actions:	Activities/actions:
1st/Next step:	1st/Next step:	1st/Next step:
Resources to start:	Resources to start:	Resources to start:

# Who?

---

*"Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much."*

*Helen Keller*

## **Who can help you? (Roles, Team, Structure and Network)**

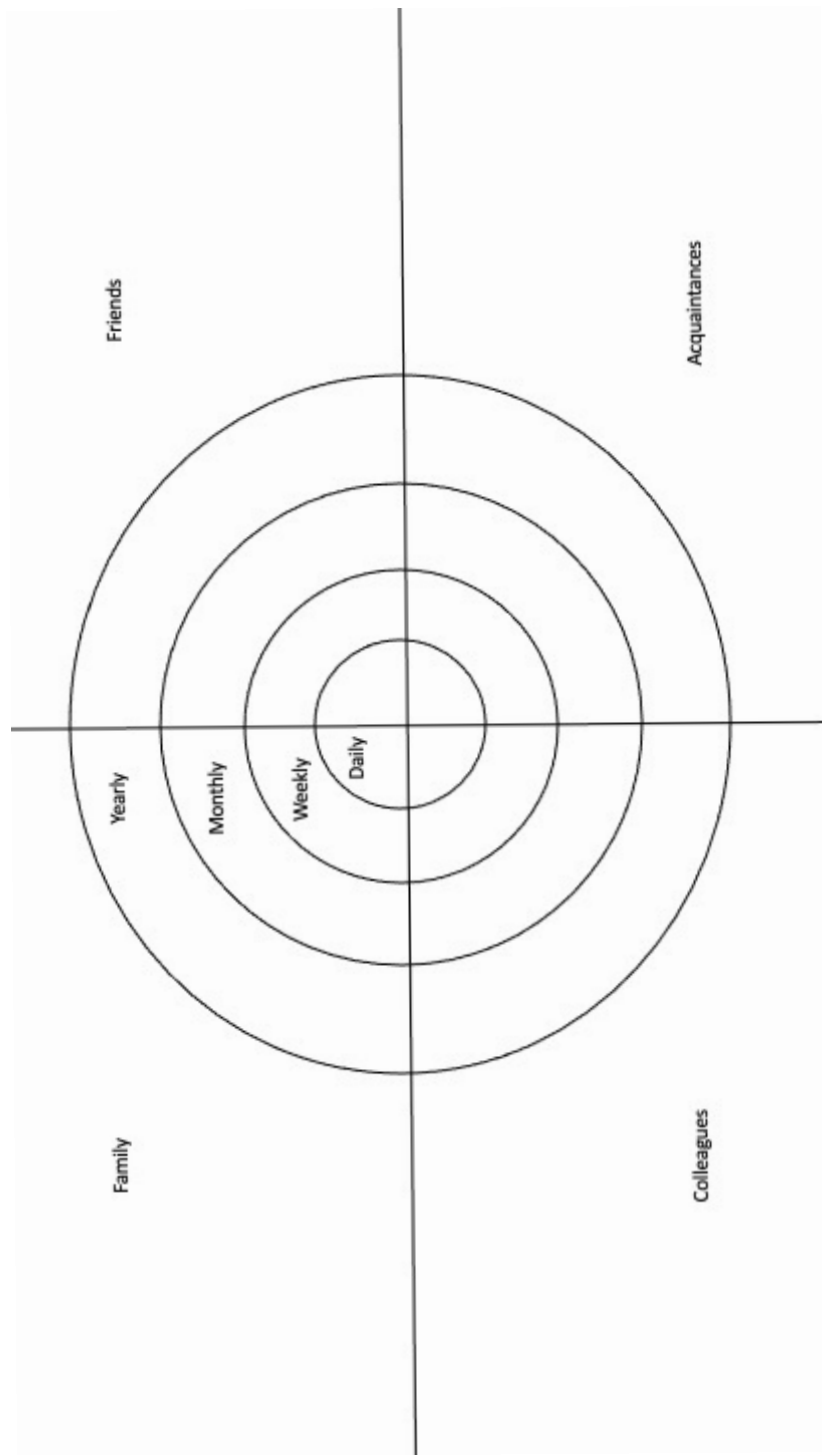
The 'Who?' is primarily about the roles different people fulfil, and the makeup of our team and personal network.

Even if we are operating alone, not having a specific team or organisation, we always have a unique network of contacts to draw upon. People are always involved one way or another on our journey and they are the most important resource that we can draw upon.

Start by analysing your personal network and who can most help you in achieving your goals. Also, watch out for those who might be obstructive to your success.

Add names into the circles below of key people that can either help or hinder you.

There may be people outside your present network that you would like assistance from. Add these outside the circles and identify if there is anyone in your existing network who can help you connect with them.



# When?

---

## **When should you take action? (Timing and Programming)**

It is no surprise that ‘When?’ refers to time. Timing is critical. Choosing the right time makes the difference between success and failure and it takes an equal measure of planning and wisdom to know when to implement strategies, to go for goals and ultimately achieve missions. Time is key to planning and is the one truly limited resource. As we overlay our plan with time we create a programme with milestones that help us to measure our progress towards our goal.

Revisit the table that you filled out in the ‘How’ section. Work out when you want to achieve each goal, then estimate the time needed for each activity.

The most important thing is the first step towards your most important goal. Identify what it is and how long it will take and then put it in your diary. Do that now - don’t delay! Plan it in right away and make that first step towards your dream.



*For I now know that the hardest part of most adventures is summoning the nerve to begin, to just make it happen. The rest usually takes care of itself. The Scandinavians have a phrase the “doorstep mile”, meaning that the first mile away from your front door is the hardest of all.*

*Alastair Humphreys*

## **Postscript**

---

Congratulations! You have started on your way to success!

Planning and decision-making never stop so keep revisiting each question and refining your answers. Use the workbook as a personal action plan that you can review and update as you progress towards your goals.

I hope you have found this workbook helpful and I wish you every success with achieving your goals.

## About the Author



Simon Ash is a writer and leadership coach who has a love of adventure and a fascination with decision-making. He started his career as a bomb disposal officer and worked in senior leadership positions, in the public, private and voluntary sectors, before starting his own business.

*The Right Questions* started out as a personal blog exploring the science and art of decision-making. In the ten years since it has grown into a resource site, accessed by thousands of people, who want to unlock their leadership and make better choices.