STRATEGIES
THE THREE HOPER
PRACTICING

From Here to There
choice. Should we stay on the charted path or take entertaining (but
our longer trips into the future, focused on where God’s shape our
the future)
choices each day, more than a third of them are spent lining things up
choice. Of the twenty thousand chances of experience your brain re-
coffees, you’re meeting an important administrator named a family
moment over weeks, you might start thinking about the first six of
most people begin learning about mental maps into the future the
fundamentals skill for making things happen.
out minds, fundamentals—how well we can picture the future—is the
best thing—or capacity to reflect back in time and into the future in
out bodies are grounded in the present so we have to stay on the next-
Old Doc Brown works on the bugs in his delorean, this caption’s
want to land on the artificial paradise and our children’s way but until
seen, that shows what is happening, where I’m planning to visit. I
enough. The machines exist. I would buy a fast one with a present
Making Your Goals Come Alive

Enact a

Chapter 9
possibly unproductive) side trips? If you went to college believing that you would get a good job when you graduated, you probably visited the future, considered your many options, and then chose a major that would get you where you wanted to go. When you open a retirement account, you probably fantasize about how you will spend your savings and your much-deserved free time in the future. If you exercise and eat well today because you think it will make you live longer and better, you are a health-conscious time traveler.

So let's put your ability to move through time to the test. Imagine a ladder with steps numbered from zero at the bottom to ten at the top. The top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you, and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder would you say you stand at this time? On which step do you think you will stand about five years from now?

This ladder exercise, or “best possible life” question, is not something I just dreamed up. It's a tool called Cantril's ladder (after a psychologist who pioneered opinion polling). Researchers and pollsters have been using it to measure people's expectations worldwide for more than forty-five years. No matter where you start, and no matter how far off your best possible life seems, if you expect to be on a higher rung five years from now, you share the first core belief of the hopeful: “The future will be better than the present.”

When I asked my best friend these questions, she found her best possible life in her own past. “I would like to be surrounded by lots of people, like I was back at college. And, I would like to be using my brain more like back then. That is what I want my future to look like.” She gave her current self a 7 and then backed up to a 6.5. When I asked her about her life five years from now, she smiled, looked up at the ceiling and said, “A nine. I would like to be at a nine.” She covered many years in a brief exchange. And a preview of her future self gave her a twinkle in her eye.

A Future That Draws You Forward

An athletic six feet, six inches, Andrew DeVries had spent most of his fifty-five years chasing a ball of one kind or another. So friends and family were not surprised when Andy tried out for the Michigan Senior Olympics volleyball team and made a good showing. Unfortunately, just weeks after the Olympic trials, in September 2002, Andy was riding his motorcycle on a Grand Rapids street when a car struck him. He would not step back on the court for nearly a year.

The accident crushed part of Andy’s left leg. After several surgeries to try to repair the damage, doctors told him that they would have to amputate the leg at mid-thigh. They drew a black line with a Sharpie to show him where the cut would go. That’s when a physician’s assistant named Sarah Scholl reminded Andy how to futurecast.

Andy recalls, “As everybody was making plans for my life without a leg, a young hospitalist came up to me and said, ‘Andy, what kind of golf ball do you play?’” Scholl’s question brought Andy up short. Under the circumstances, he said, “talking about golf balls seemed almost idiotic.” But he told her he liked the Titleist Pro V1, and the next morning, there, in the midst of all the cards and flowers in his room, was a twelve-pack of Titleist Pro V1 balls.

“She helped me stop thinking about how sorry I should feel for myself,” Andy says. “And she brought a glimmer of hope.” Scholl reminded him that he still had a future to think about.

When Andy woke up in recovery, he still had ten toes. The surgeons had discovered a little bit of blood flow and decided not to take the leg after all.

Sarah and Andy became very close during the rest of his hospital stay and, on the day he was released to a rehab facility, Sarah arranged to be the one wheeling him out to the ambulance. She also had a favor to ask him. She’d lost her father while she was still in high school and, when the time came for her to get married, she wanted Andy to be the one to walk her down the aisle and give her away.
Sarah had a gift for shaking up Andy's world. Here he was, going into another hospital knowing he might never get out of a wheelchair and Sarah didn't even have a boyfriend. When he pointed that out, she replied, "Someday I will." They promised to stay in touch.

Sarah wasn't the only one making plans for Andy's future. While he was still at the rehabilitation hospital, he got a phone call from John Wilder, the Senior Olympics volleyball coach. John had some good news. "Congratulations, Andy, you made the team!" Andy tried to explain the realities: the accident, the surgeries, the rehab. Coach Wilder persisted. He told Andy that he had earned the spot, and it was his, on one condition. "You get better. I'll play you if you can just stand up." The coach's promise touched Andy. "His words ignited a spark. I went at rehabilitation with a vengeance. Seven months later I was able to show up for the Senior Olympics. Although I could barely stand, John kept his word: he put me in the game. I collected myself enough to serve. We won that game and the next. As the competition intensified, the coach had to take me out, but our team went on to win the gold medal."

Like Sarah, Coach Wilder helped Andy travel through time to his future, imagining himself on the court during the Olympics. All he had to do was stand up.

Andy's story doesn't end with that team gold medal. Over the next few years, he faced several life-threatening setbacks and surgeries that would have sidelined many people permanently—including an injury caused by pushing too hard in rehab. Andy got smarter about getting stronger; he learned that slow and steady paid off. He began to look into the future again. "For the first time in five years, I subscribed to a magazine in my own name." He also began to craft a new second act for himself, becoming a fund-raiser for his beloved alma mater, Calvin College.

Then, in the summer of 2009, seven years after his accident, Andy got an email from Sarah Scholl, who had moved to Oregon. "I have a boyfriend—will you come?" Andy did not think twice. Sarah picked Andy up at the Portland airport before the wedding. When she saw him strolling toward her, she burst into tears. It was the first time she'd ever seen him standing upright. And for Andy, "What a joy it was walking—not wheelchairing, but walking—Sarah down the aisle."

Most of us are like Andy. If we have a vision and plan for the future, we can't help but be pulled forward by life, even when our present betrays us. We start to create a narrative about a future self that competes with the old stories about ourselves. As we fill in more details and take small steps in our future direction, our energy is freed up. When we're excited about "what's next," we invest more in our daily life, and we can see beyond current challenges. That's the big point behind all the goal-setting strategies I'll discuss in this chapter.

**Expecting a Better Future Is Universal**

To find out if the tendency to expect a positive future is universal, two psychology colleagues and I analyzed answers to the "best possible life" question gathered from the 2008 Gallup World Poll, a representative sample of people in 142 countries. Across all countries, people said they expected to be on about the seventh rung of the life ladder in five years. The vast majority (84 percent) expected their future life to be at the midpoint of the scale (5) or above. Eighty-nine percent of people polled worldwide expected their life in five years to be as good as or better than their current life.

The people who had the most positive expectations lived in Ireland, Brazil, Denmark, New Zealand, and the United States. The most pessimistic people worldwide lived in Zimbabwe, Egypt, Bulgaria, Haiti, and Lebanon. But only one country (Zimbabwe, homeland of Tererai Trent, who had envisioned going to America for her education and Ph.D.) had negative expectations overall (a mean response of lower than 5).

We don't have an optimism problem in the world. As the
Creating Goals

Over the last twenty years I have gone to my share of goal-setting workshops. In the 1990s, I learned how SMART goals could make me a better student and employee. Theoretically, goals that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound get more of our attention and, therefore, are likely to be achieved. In the last decade, I also learned the hard way that juggling too many big goals undermines progress. One big goal at a time is a good rule of thumb, but it has to be one you care about deeply.

Most of the clients I work with, whether in psychotherapy or business consulting, are familiar with the kind of goal-setting rules I was taught. So I try to give them a new way to think about their aims. "Which goal are you most excited about?" I ask. "Excited?" they often ask. "Yes, excited. If you could spend your time all day on a single goal, what would it be?" One client responded, "You don't hear those kinds of questions in a goal-setting workshop."

She was right. Most people consider goal-setting to be work for diligent ants, not freewheeling grasshoppers. But the truth is, our rational, strategic thinking about goals is guided and spurred on by our emotions. As a result, we invest the most resources and make the most gains on goals we are excited about. And what if the goal that creates energy in you is not the goal your teacher, boss, or family needs you to work on right now? You do what you can to focus on two goals: one for them and one for you. You also do your best to find something that excites you about the goal that has been assigned to you.

This is where a clear and specific goal can help, because it automatically calls up more energy than a fuzzy one. Take a vague goal like "I want to feel better." How would you know where to start or what tools you need to make it happen? You can get closer to it by futurecasting. Ask yourself: "If you were feeling better, what would you be doing?" "How would your typical day change?" "How would your behavior change?" Finding workable goals is like bringing a distant object into focus with a pair of binoculars.

You boost your energy when you state goals positively. In other words, a goal should add to your life rather than subtract from it. "I want to fight less with my coworker" is clear enough, but its negative focus makes it difficult to find a workable pathway. You're looking for positive behaviors that can help change your situation. "I want to get along better with my coworker" is an additive goal. What do people who get along do? They spend time discovering common interests. They say hello and compliment good work. They laugh at the latest office absurdity. These are some ideas you can act on.

Strengths Help You Pick Your Goals

"Find out what you do well and do more of it" was Don Clifton's advice to me and many others. Gallup chairman and the father of strengths psychology, Don thought many people invest too much time and energy in overcoming our weaknesses and not enough time doing what we do best. I find that to be true of some of my clients when I talk to them about their goals. They spend much of their effort on goals that require them to work outside their strengths. I try to help these clients—individuals, schools, and businesses—figure out what they do best and find ways to do more of it.

Recently, thanks to meetings with my own strengths coach, Cheryl Beamer, and through my study of super-hopeful people, I figured out
that a very hopeful person almost always outpaces a less hopeful peer because, in Cheryl's words, they "only accept A-plus opportunities." That means they dedicate themselves to goals they are excited about, that align with their strengths, and that make a big impact on themselves and others. These criteria work when choosing which sports to play as a kid, which roles to take on at a job, and which activities to engage in during retirement.

**Salience: The Goals That Matter Most**

There is a lot of competition for our attention and resources. We are more likely to put time and energy into the goals that stand out and grab our attention. Psychologists call these *salient goals*. I typically explain salience to audiences by asking them a question I’d like you to answer now: Have you ever washed a rental car?

Recently, out of nearly one thousand conference goers, not a single hand was raised to say yes. *Why?* Because 1) you don’t own that rental car and 2) other things rank higher on your mental checklist. Washing the rental car is not a salient goal.

For many students at the schools I visit, graduating from high school or college is just like washing a rental car. They might give lip service to the goal, but they don’t deeply identify with it or own it. Maybe nobody in their family has gone to college. Maybe their role models never mention education when they talk about their success. Maybe getting a job and making money rank a lot higher in their minds than getting a degree. Many of them are under day-to-day pressure from family problems, social relationships, dangerous neighborhoods, and turbulent schools.

Many workers also have a saliency problem. Sometimes the toughest part of their job day to day is identifying what is most important. Where should they put their time and energy? There are often competing priorities and mixed messages coming from coworkers and management. Identifying the goals that can make the most impact is essential to managing finite resources. Leaders are expected to be salience seekers. As a leader, each goal you endorse pulls resources from other projects.

**Visiting the Future: Tips for the Time Traveler**

Too many of us make life-altering decisions based on images that live only in our minds (and may not be shared with anyone else on the planet—including friends and family affected by the decision). We are much better off when we upgrade our time travel to bring the future as close as we can. Here are more ways to use futurcasting to explore and refine your goals.

**Picture Yourself in the Future**

“People have trouble seeing their future,” says Eva Quinn, vice president of corporate relations for the Principal Financial Group. “When a financial advisor says ‘what are your financial goals?’ people can’t figure it out.” That’s why Principal built a simple, free mobile app called Dreamcatcher.

When you open the app, you are prompted to “[c]ollect your dreams for the future.” This means taking new photos or uploading pictures that symbolize your dreams from your phone or tablet, or pulling them from other websites, and sorting, prioritizing, and labeling them. You can also add text, making your picture of Paris or an isolated trout stream even more specific. Once your Dreamcatcher reflects what you want from your future life, you are ready to start on your financial plan.

When I asked Eva Quinn about her own Dreamcatcher, she said, “There is a pottery wheel, I have a log cabin in the mountains, I want to spend my winters on the beach. There is a college graduation photo.
I need to get my little kids through college." Sharing these images with her own Principal—twenty-nine volunteers Alli had recruited from local businesses, arts agencies, and colleges—and then, with a little help, drafted an essay illuminating their paths to the future. The exuberance and concerns of the students were matched with the excitement and support of the mentors, and a shoulder-to-shoulder editing process helped develop their writing skills. Even more important, the mentors listened and asked questions about the seniors’ day-to-day lives, and pushed them to identify pathways to their desired futures. Over six weeks, many of the students thought harder about these issues than they ever had before.

This exercise is not for students only. Try listening attentively to your own thoughts, and then put your future fantasy on paper. You may find yourself opening up and charting a new life course. The complete Future Day Fantasy script is at www.makinghopehappennow.com.

Take Your Future for a Test Drive

On a visit to see my uncles in California, Alli and I decided to rent a small SUV so we could all travel together on day trips and still have room for our luggage. When the agent asked if we had a preference among the available cars, I said, "Not really. What would you recommend?" That’s how we ended up in a Ford Escape.

This scenario is repeated thousands of times a day, and every business or vacation rental is a chance to take your future car for a test drive. Is there room for everyone and the kids’ car seats? Is it easy for the kids and the grandparents to get in and out? How do you like the handling? Would it improve your commute?

Alli and I were surprised by how much we liked the Escape, which hadn’t previously been on our short list. After a long drive to Lake Tahoe, Alli said, "Maybe this is our next car." And just over a year later, there was an Escape in our driveway.

I first realized the value of test-driving the future when I had to pick a college. As a first-generation student, only the second person in my family to go to college, I knew that there was a lot I did not know
Consult Experienced Guides

Sometimes you have to make a decision without a test drive. If so, find people who are living the future you imagine and get their take on it. Say you are considering moving to a new neighborhood. Talk to a Realtor or from one chat with a new-neighborhood insider. This will give you a more unwarranted assessment than you’ll get from a

This number of people who live there and a new neighborhood. Talk to a

It’s a good idea to talk to as many people as you can. Who is doing the work, what does it mean to them? Who is doing the work, what does it mean to you? Who is doing the work, what does it mean to you? Who is doing the work, what does it mean to you?"
When I visited ULL and LSU, I tried to think about what I would want and need from a school not just as a freshman, but also as a sophomore, junior, senior, and graduate. Some of my thoughts about each school were reinforced, whereas some of my beliefs were challenged. But both visits gave me new information I could use to create a more accurate vision of me going to school, graduating, and then going to graduate school. Contrasting that vision with my reality of being a high school kid with only one relative that went to college helped me realize that the path to graduation would be bumpy but there would be people along the way who would help me get where I wanted to go.

Getting specific about the needs of her future self helped Lisa, a talented graphic designer, weather her first career setback. She was downsized during the recession when her firm lost a major account. It took her weeks to face the reality of being out of work and the bad feelings that come with being let go. When she first started looking again, she adopted what I call the "message in a bottle" approach to finding work. She would start her day by scanning online job boards for openings, spend hours completing generic applications, and then attach a résumé. Hitting "send" put her into the purgatory that is waiting for a response from a message set adrift by a desperate castaway. In Lisa's case, the sea was the economic downturn, and it was filled with bottles that looked very much like hers.

Lisa's turnaround came when she started to time travel. She imagined herself sharing her portfolio with the department manager at a hot new design firm she'd read about in a local business magazine. She thought she'd be a good fit for the company, and she was excited by the thought of working there. Next she made an honest assessment of the now: she realized that her portfolio needed refreshing, that she actually had little background knowledge about that design firm (or others in her area), and that she was anxious about going on interviews and meeting new people. Mentally contrasting the then with the now led to more thoughts: She needed to upgrade her wardrobe if she wanted to look right for a hipster agency. She needed to practice her interview skills with a designer friend. Lisa still didn't have a job, but instead of feeling worn-out and discouraged, she had a vision of her possible future self plus a list of positive steps she could take to get there. She was on her way from Point A to Point B.

Say Hello to Your Future Self

How well do we really know our future selves? Comedian Jerry Seinfeld, in one of his immortal monologues, captured the problem most of us face as we plan for that stranger in our future:

I never get enough sleep. I stay up late at night, 'cause I'm Night Guy. Night Guy wants to stay up late. "What about getting up after five hours sleep?" oh that's Morning Guy's problem. That's not my problem, I'm Night Guy. I stay up as late as I want. So you get up in the morning, you're exhausted, groggy... ooooh I hate that Night Guy! See, Night Guy always screw's Morning Guy. There's nothing Morning Guy can do. The only thing Morning Guy can do is try and oversleep often enough so that Day Guy loses his job and Night Guy has no money to go out anymore.

So, how do we get Night Guy to sit down and have a conversation with Morning Guy? Better yet, how do we get them to realize they are the same guy?

Hal Hershfield, assistant professor of marketing at NYU's Stern School of Business, might have the answers. He researches how thinking about time can affect our decision-making and emotional experience. His work has shown that people who are primed to be aware of their future self (sometimes by as low-tech a method as visiting with an older relative) focus more on their best interest and/or the best interest of society, compared with participants who haven't made the connection between now and the future. Among other things, they choose to save more money and act more ethically.
In one study, Hershfield and his colleagues used digitally altered photos to bring undergraduates face-to-face with an image of themselves several decades into the future. As if in a mirror, they saw how the contours of their cheeks and jaws changed, how their hair whitened and their skin wrinkled. Then they were asked what they would do with one thousand dollars if they received it unexpectedly. Hershfield reported, "They allocated twice as much to a long-term savings account if they saw an older version of themselves versus just seeing themselves now."

The age-progression software Hershfield used is not available to the general public. But there are other ways to meet the future you.

**Enter the Aging Booth:** A trip to the mobile app Aging Booth can give you a sense of how you’ll look decades from now. Download the app and age away. What financial or health decisions can you make now with the help of the older you?

**Write a letter to your future self:** The website futureme.org allows you to send a note to yourself months or years in the future. A note from a futureme user, "Joan in New Mexico," captures the benefits of this tool: "I love the fact that I have a ten-year plan for my future and I will receive emails periodically along the way inquiring how I am doing on some of my goals . . . it will make me reflect on this time and question my reasoning as to why I felt a certain way and if I have matured or grown from the experience."

**Ask your future self’s opinion:** Thirty years from now (or even five), will your future self be glad you bought the expensive car, the premium vacation, or the house that’s a stretch for you? (Don’t assume that future self will always be a killjoy. Hershfield says that if he’d thought long term, he’d have paid extra for a sunroof, the pleasure would have outweighed the slightly higher loan payments.) When you are in the midst of making your next big life decision, seek the opinion of the future you.

**Spend time with an older person:** Do you have an older friend or relative who’s similar to you in interests and values and positive in thought and mood? Imagine yourself looking back at your life from their perspective. How does taking the long view change your feelings about the situation you’re in and the choices you face?

**Trips and Goals**

By taking these short and long trips, you have been practicing future-casting. Now let’s put your skills to the test. Remember the question about your best possible life, five years from now? Take some time now to describe what that best possible life looks like. Be as vivid as you can. Preview the future you hope to create. Identify the goals that will help you get there. Write all this down to flesh out the details. Then say hello to your future self.