

A Toolkit for Working Through Discontentment

Introduction

The ideas presented here are nothing new. They have been extracted from personal experience, and secular and religious traditions. More importantly, they have proven effective in reducing the level of discontentment in my life at any given moment. The intent of this “toolkit” is to bring you relief from the crippling effects of discontentment in your life, in the shortest time possible.

There are as many causes for discontentment in life as there are people. Much of the discontentment I have experienced I would categorize as stemming from unrealistic or unhealthy thoughts. As a child my *thoughts* convinced me that if only I had that toy, then I'd be happy. Later in life I tried many other ways to fill my inner void, but these actions were once again driven by my thoughts and perceptions. I “knew” that happiness was not to be found in material things, relationships, or anything external to myself. However, my *thoughts* continued to bombard my peace of mind telling me otherwise. Your thoughts create your reality, and if they are telling you that you are not happy in this relationship, or in this job, or , then it is important to recognize that discontentment may be coloring your ability to think clearly. I've found that it is better not to make life altering decisions when in a state of discontentment, without first working to relieve the emotional distress associated with the discontentment.

I recognize that many people have unfortunate physical or mental challenges that constantly add to their level of discontentment. Ultimately my struggle with discontentment has been one of accepting myself for who and what I am. No matter what causes discontentment in your life I sincerely hope that you can find some relief by actively using this Toolkit. Please forward your comments to me. I'd like to know your struggles with discontentment and what works to help relieve it.

Steve Arroyo
scarroy@the-arroyo.net (email)
<http://the-arroyo.net/toolkit> (website blog)

Overview of the process

The more I pondered the phenomenon of discontentment in my life, the more it became clear that my thoughts and perceptions were at the root of this problem. The steps that I have laid out here are meant to help relieve the level of discontentment in your life, and where appropriate, help make changes in your life that will bring about a more contented life.

We start by examining discontentment and its effects on your life. Next we inventory your life at this present moment to identify what is causing the greatest level of discontentment. Once we have an idea of what is causing the discontentment, we determine where we desire to be in this area of our life. We'll refer to this as the “Desired State”. Throughout this process it is important to get the input of a trusted person to help us determine if this Desired State is healthy and realistic. Next we examine our thoughts about what the Desired State means to us, paying close attention to self-defeating thoughts. Self-defeating thoughts can take on various forms. For example you can feel fear when thinking about making a change in your life, which can prevent you from taking action.

Once we have made it this far we *may* begin to notice some level of relief from the discontentment we felt at the onset of this exercise. If we are sincere about making a positive change in our life we continue forward by mapping out steps to reach our Desired State. The point at which we begin our quest for the Desired State is

called the “Baseline”. For example, if you want to get to a size 10 and are currently in a size 14, your Baseline is a size 14. The Baseline is where you are right now. As you work through this process you may find that it is perfectly fine to be at your Baseline, and that you just needed to address some unhealthy perceptions about it! It is important to note that peace and happiness can be yours at the Baseline, while you are in the process of working toward your Desired State.

While this toolkit can be used alone, it is far more effective to use it with a trusted friend. Having someone you trust know your struggles and accept you as you are, while supporting your Desired State, is healing in and of itself. At any point you feel it necessary to seek the advice of a spiritual guide or professional therapist, I would highly recommend it.

Goals

The primary goal of this toolkit is to help relieve the discontentment that you are experiencing at this moment. One you gain some measure of relief from the effects of discontentment you may find that you are in a better state of mind and some measure of inner peace returns. By using this toolkit you may also recognize areas in your life that need to change and begin the process of working toward your Desired State. Each time you work through your discontentment using this toolkit, you can refer to previous toolkit notes to see where you have made progress, and where you remain stuck. This will help to clarify where you may need help in making changes in your life. As time goes on it is my hope that this toolkit will become one of many valuable assets you rely upon to better your life.

Understanding discontentment

1) *What is discontentment?*

In the context of this toolkit, discontentment is the perceived gap between where we are, the Baseline, and where we desire to be, the Desired State.

2) *What are some of the effects of living in a discontented state?*

- Feelings of sadness
- Perpetuates self-defeating thoughts
- Lack of energy
- Sleeping too much or not enough
- Diminished mental, physical, and spiritual capacity
- Interpersonal relationships suffer
- Tend to seek out unhealthy or non-productive distractions
- Addictive behaviors, like overeating, drinking, shopping
- Avoidance
- Self-pity

Left untreated these effects can contribute to depression.

The Process of Relieving Discontentment

Let's get busy working through your discontentment, starting by measuring the level of discontentment in your life right now:

Step 1) If you know what is causing discontentment in your life at this moment jot it down here, and continue on to step 3, otherwise proceed to step 2.

Step 2) If you need help pin pointing an area of your life that may be causing discontentment, consider each of the following areas. Fill out the table using these instructions:

In the table below, rate the level of satisfaction in each area of your life. Add new areas at the bottom of the table if need be. Mark each area as low, medium, or high. Low meaning you are very dissatisfied with this area of your life. High means you are very satisfied with this area of your life.

As you rate each area of your life pay close attention to how your *FEEL* about it. For example: If you rate Finances as low mark it with an X. If it carries with it a strong emotional reaction, then indicate this with an asterisk as so: **X*** This will be referred to as the “Emotional Multiplier”. See the example in the table below. More about the “Emotional Multiplier” in step 6.

Areas of my life	My Level of Satisfaction In This Area An asterisk indicates that you <i>FEEL</i> strongly about this area		
	Low (very dissatisfied)	Medium	High (very satisfied)
Finances	X*		
Material Goods/Property			
Career/Work			
School			
Level of Education			
Intellect			
Health/Vitality:			
Physical			
Mental			
Relationships:			
Marital			
Friends			
Colleagues			
Family			
Vitality			
Body Image			

Appearance			
Personality			
Spiritual Life			
Integrity <i>Have I compromised my:</i>			
Values			
Morality			
Principals			
Other areas not listed above			

Step 3) At this step you either know what is causing discontentment in your life from step 1 -OR- you have discovered this area of your life using step 2.

Step 4) Continue to examine this problematic area of your life by asking the following questions:

a) In this area of my life, where do I desire to be? (*Be as specific as possible*) Recall that this is referred to as the “Desired State”.

b) In this area of my life, where am I, or where do I perceive myself to be? Recall that this is referred to as the “Baseline”

c) Do I believe that the Desired State is healthy and realistic for me? Jot down your reasons why.

d) Does a person whom I trust agree that this Desired State is healthy and realistic for me? Does he/she agree with your rational in step 4c?

Step 5) Next examine your thoughts regarding this Desired State. Pay special attention to any *thoughts* that cause an emotional reaction.

a) If I reach this Desired State will I be happy, better off, or improved? Why?

b) What self-defeating or limiting thoughts do I need to recognize, that prevent me from reaching my Desired State? For example:

- i) I don't make enough money because I lack education, and I am scared to death to enroll in a class
- ii) I'm afraid that I will fail if I put myself “out there”, and then others will judge me.
- iii) I know what changes I need to make but I'll put off doing so for another day.
- iv) For other examples see: http://the-arroyo.net/toolkit/?page_id=24

Consider the possibility that a professional psychologist can help you deal more effectively with self-defeating and limiting thought patterns. For now it is sufficient that you have written them down.

Step 6) From step 4 you have determined your Desired State and Baseline. How you *FEEL* about the gap between your Baseline and the Desired State, is the “Emotional Multiplier”. Typically, the more intense the Emotional Multiplier, the more discontent you are in this area of your life. Please make sure that you understand this concept before continuing.

Step 7) If your Desired State is not healthy or is unrealistic, go to step 12. Otherwise:

a) Write down a draft of the steps you need to take to reach the Desired State. Don't over analyze these steps, just jot down some general steps to get you started.

b) Next ask the following questions:

- i) What changes do I need to make to take one step forward?
- ii) What if any risks are there in taking these steps?
- iii) What assistance, if any, do I need from others to take this step?
- iv) What fears if any come to mind about taking a step forward?

Step 8) For each step you listed to achieve the Desired State, describe what *action* you can take on it and when you can take it. If any step is overwhelming, break it down into more manageable, smaller steps.

Step 9) If you find that you are unwilling to take action on any of these steps to achieve the Desired State, ask yourself if you sincerely intend to achieve it. Be honest with yourself. Maybe all you needed was to process the emotional energy associated with this latest discontentment.

Step 10) Pause for a moment to check if the emotional energy associated with this Desired State has lessened. Has examining this area of your life caused the level of discontentment you feel to decrease? Take note of what worked best for you to relieve the effects of discontentment.

Step 11) Consider for a moment that it is okay to be at your Baseline while you work toward the Desired State. For example: “*I want to get to a size 10, but I am not there right now. In the meantime I am okay with myself while I work toward my Desired State.*” If we can't accept ourselves at this moment, we lack inner peace, and inner peace is one of the goals of this exercise.

Step 12) Did someone whom you trust indicate that your Desired State is unrealistic, or unhealthy?

a) One example of an unrealistic Desired State would be attempting to change another person. Or trying to change something which we are powerless to change. Consider some of the following suggestions to deal with the discontentment caused by a Desired State that you cannot control.

- i) Talk to a trusted friend about this matter. Describe the Desired State to him or her. Acknowledge that you are powerless to change this situation and how it makes you feel. Describe to him or her your *FEELINGS* around this matter.
- ii) To help you cope with this situation, recite The Serenity Prayer. Recite this prayer a number of times, thoughtfully and slowly. For the words to The Serenity Prayer see the FAQ page: http://the-arroyo.net/toolkit/?page_id=24

b) One example of an unhealthy Desired State would be trying to lose an unhealthy amount of weight. In addition to discussing the matter with a trusted friend, I would recommend that you bring this to the attention of a trained psychologist or your physician. He or she can provide a great deal of insight and healing, all of which will improve your level of satisfaction in life.