

Why the unused path?

This book is called *The Unused Path* for several reasons.

Paths lead from one place to another. This work contains advice and practical approaches you might find useful on your life journey.

The path is unused because a good deal of the information in this book isn't emphasized as much as it once was. Most of the advice and the skills offered here have been circulating for a very long time. They're fundamental and valuable but, like so many worthwhile concepts in this increasingly technological age, they can get overlooked in the competition for our attention.

That doesn't mean the path's irrelevant, or that it's gone. A path that isn't used becomes overgrown, but it's still there even if it's not easy to see.

This path is still there because it leads toward a valuable destination—the living of an authentic life you can truly call your own.

Let's walk some of it now.

Author's Note

This work is a companion to my futuristic fiction novel *A Pause in the Perpetual Rotation*. Although this book is featured prominently in that novel, it is a non-fiction work in its own right that is intended to offer good advice and sound approaches for building an authentic life.

One of the primary principles of *The Unused Path* is that each of us is unique. That means there is no way to tailor the advice in this book to fit every individual who reads it.

Please feel free to modify the suggestions in this work to suit your own circumstances, abilities, and needs. Do not follow any of these suggestions if doing so would place you or anyone else in any kind of danger.

In addition to helpful observations and sound advice, this book offers concrete skills for approaching a wide range of choices and issues we may encounter in life. These techniques are intentionally basic, and this book does not pretend to contain all the answers.

Instead, this work is a starting point that will hopefully help you find, choose, or create your own path leading to an authentic existence.

Take a moment

This book begins with a question:

Whose life are you going to live?

The discussion of this question starts on the next page, but take some time now to consider it.

What does this question mean?

What does it mean to you?

How would you answer it?

Give it some thought, because it's a bit of a trick question.

Whose life are you going to live?

Whose life are you going to live?

Yours.

That's a simple fact. No matter who or what chooses the things you'll do in life, that life is going to be lived by you.

That means you will personally experience the successes and the failures, the high points and the low, the accolades and the criticisms.

This does not mean you should ignore the advice of others and rely only on yourself. Nor does it suggest you should live a life dedicated only to your concerns.

It means that, whatever life you lead, you should be the one who chooses it.

After all, you're the one who's going to live it.

Living an authentic life

When something is authentic, it's not false or imitation. It is genuine.

If you let other people and random circumstances choose your beliefs, actions, and attitudes, you might end up with a life that doesn't fit you or your personality. If you're the one who makes those choices, however, you may just end up living authentically. Your actions, words, and thoughts will match who you are. They will be genuine.

Leading an authentic existence can help you to weather the storms that life throws at all of us. It's easy to lose your bearings in difficult circumstances, but if you know who you are and what you value, the experience of living the life you choose will help you stay on course.

This doesn't mean you should be selfish or self-centered. You can serve others. You can include them in your life. You can take advice from people you trust. The point is that you actually choose the existence you lead.

Defining your authentic life is a never-ending process, because we all change as we go down the road. We adjust our attitudes based on experiences and new information—which can lead to true wisdom.

Making choices

Every life is different. That includes the degree to which we're able to select what we do. Many decisions are made for us by circumstances and by events beyond our control. Even if you aren't given a whole lot of choices in this life, it's important to make good decisions when you can.

A little later we'll explore a basic approach for identifying different options and making informed choices. Along the way, we'll also discuss how you can find reliable sources of guidance, information, and example that can help you decide what you'll do in a given set of circumstances.

None of those approaches is meant to take the place of your own common sense and the information you gather with your own eyes and ears. If you can develop sound judgement regarding the advice of others and your own thought process, you'll have the tools to recognize good information and create solid options from it.

Now let's take a look at how we might start honing that judgement.

Develop your mind—always

Not surprisingly, there are many definitions of the human mind.

One definition calls the mind the human consciousness that originates in the brain and is manifested in thought, perception, feeling, will, memory, or imagination.

For our purposes, your mind is the combination of who you are and how you navigate the world around you. Your mind is unique, and it improves with learning. That learning can be gained through your own experiences or from the knowledge you get from others.

Think of your mind as your command center as you go through life. Your command center takes in information and makes judgements and decisions about those inputs based on what you've learned beforehand. Receiving too many inputs at once, or getting conflicting information, can lead to confusion.

This has always been true, but in our modern age we're subjected to a flood of images and ideas that is larger, more constant, and more demanding than ever before.

So let's discuss some approaches for dealing with that huge amount of information.

The world is a classroom

If reading the word “classroom” made you roll your eyes, this section of the book is for you.

Knowledge can be obtained in countless ways. To name just a few, we can learn by attending school-style classes, reading the written words of others, interacting with more knowledgeable people, viewing instructional media such as informative videos, performing new tasks, or thinking things over ourselves.

Additionally, we can learn a great deal simply by being alive. Everyday life is packed with reliable and unreliable information, good and bad examples, sound and unsound advice, and experiences from which we can glean both knowledge and wisdom if we just pay attention.

That’s how the first human beings learned. Before there were classrooms, books, teachers, or videos they learned by observing and by doing. They advanced through trial and error, and developed effective methods and answers because there was no one to show or tell them how.

The way they did it has been with us ever since. It worked for them, and it’s an excellent foundation. The world is a classroom.

Time is a resource

As promised in the book's introduction, this work offers a range of specific skills that can be of great value as you go through life. They can help you organize your thoughts and actions, manage your time and your money, and solve complex problems. They're fundamental skills for getting things done.

Something that is fundamental serves as a foundation for greater growth and development. The examples in this work are relatively simple, but with a little imagination every one of the skills covered here can be applied on a larger scale. Individual techniques of time management—which we'll discuss next—can easily be taught to a group or used for managing a project.

We're starting with time management because it has such a wide application to so much of what we do. There's a limited amount of time in each working day and before every deadline. Sometimes there simply isn't enough time to accomplish everything on the list.

Time is therefore a resource. A resource is anything that we use in order to accomplish a task, and so it's important to manage our resources wisely.