

# Significance: A 100,000 Mile Check-up

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While automobiles today are designed to last longer, perform better, and require less service, they still require routine checks to maintain peak performance and satisfy customers. Similarly, even high performance executives get knocked out of alignment by the routine road hazards of every day life. Without realizing the effects, many executives speed along using low octane fuel, poorly inflated tires, and out-of-date road markers. Without periodic maintenance, they unintentionally depreciate their most important asset—their selves.

### Achieving High Performance

In the workplace the emphasis is on moving the organization and fast. But where and at what cost? Too often executives run their own lives by the same standard. Many “driven” individuals approach life like the Indy 500—speeding along, working to outmaneuver others, trying to get ahead—all without realizing that they have been going in circles in someone else’s race. They may have been on the fast track, made all the right moves, and followed the steps of current business thinking only to ask, “Have I made a significant difference?” As George Odiorne points out, people “can make great time going in the wrong direction.”

If you can relate to these comments, it may be time to pull over, check your directions and ask:

- what is important to me now,
- what impact do I want to have, and
- what do I need to continue my journey?

### What’s Important Now?

Most careers take different turns than originally expected. Through life’s detours and side trips, people end up in places or positions much different from their original background or educational training. Think about your own experience. Over the course of your career, you’ve upgraded your skills and competencies—instead of a basic model with standard equipment, you now operate as a high-performance racing machine. By combining your career talents and assets, you are now in a better position to design a meaningful roadmap to direct your journey.

This article was written to help you appraise your progress and reset your instruments. Moving through the following questions will help you decide whether or not you’re on the right course.



### What’s Important to Me Now?

The first step is to determine if you are on the right highway and moving in the right direction. As Ken Blanchard and Michael O’Connor write in *Managing by Values*, “The most important

thing in life is to decide what is most important.” So to begin, identify the guiding principles you want to drive your decisions and behaviors.

Visualize three people whom you admire most. What values and characteristics attract you to these individuals?

Person	Characteristics
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Are these people living their values? Are you living yours?



### What Impact Do I Want to Have in the Future?

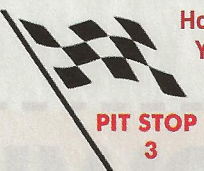
Individuals who have the most impact on their desired futures have a clear idea about where they want to go.

Many have a personal mission statement that gives purpose and direction to their lives. If you haven’t written a personal mission statement, use what you identified as important above to capture key values and concerns.

Consider the impact your future will have. How will others be different? What legacy will you leave? Imagine you have six million dollars to give away. What impact would you want to have if you could give two million dollars each to:

- favorite charity \_\_\_\_\_
- community issue \_\_\_\_\_
- yourself \_\_\_\_\_

What themes do you find from your gifts?



### How to Achieve Balance and Condition for Your Next Journey?

Consider what happens when a car’s tires are out of balance. Not only do passengers get a bumpy ride, but tires wear unevenly when things are out of

alignment. As you examine your personal achievements, you may realize that you’ve lived your life out of alignment. Perhaps you noticed times you were out of balance with what you actually valued most. Were any aspects of your life neglected? If you were careless in maintaining your personal relationships, community service, physical fitness, personal development, or quiet contemplation, the results may have been failed relationships, health problems, or burnout.

If so, it is time to reset your odometer to achieve the significance you desire. Determining how to achieve “significance” requires a diagnostic evaluation of four key





pressure areas:

- Purpose (spirituality),
- Intellectual Stimulation,
- Emotional Equilibrium, and
- Physical Stamina.

**Purpose.** The first area of significance is highly related to fulfilling one's purpose. Identifying your purpose for living is an individual quest that takes contemplation and reflection. One way to begin is by asking, "Why am I here?" While some individuals identify a spiritual purpose that is greater than themselves, others read, meditate, or ponder about what gives their life meaning. Do you take time for quiet reflection?

Do you have a personal philosophy of life? How will you know when you have achieved success?

To identify your purpose, consider what has given you the most joy.

Personally:

Professionally:

**Intellectual Stimulation.** Another area of significance is one's intellectual stimulation. Are today's challenges giving you what you need to learn, grow and develop? Do you find yourself doing the same things in the same ways? How long has it been since you acquired a new skill or competency? Do you look at colleagues and wonder how they stay abreast of new developments and trends? Do you use your time productively or do you find yourself avoiding new opportunities to enlarge your knowledge base?

To determine your intellectual needs, consider what has most broadened your perspective intellectually:

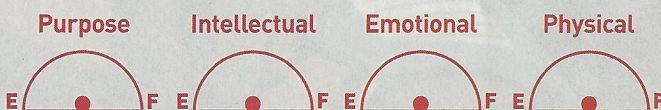
**Emotional Equilibrium.** The third area of significance is emotional equilibrium. Are you in touch with your feelings and emotions? Have you found ways to recharge by listening to music, experiencing new sights, or relaxing with a good book? Are you able to communicate what you need emotionally? Do you have a network and support system that allows you to share your goals, dreams, fears, and/or concerns? Are you in a position to help and be helped? Do you have a sense of connecting with others personally and professionally?

To assess your emotional needs, consider what has given you the most satisfaction emotionally:

**Physical Stamina.** The final area of significance, physical stamina, is easiest to measure. We have opportunities on a daily basis to see the impact of our physical fitness regime. Have you had a yearly check-up and found that you've gained a few pounds? Are you eating more healthy foods? Have you maintained a regular aerobic exercise routine? Have you had to run to catch a plane and felt winded? Do you find it difficult to unwind or to fall asleep?

To evaluate your physical needs, identify when you practiced peak physical conditioning:

After answering these questions, consider how fulfilled you are by completing the gauges below. Place an arrow on the gauge from full to empty.



Is one or more areas low or on empty? Are your activities reinforcing what is most important to you? What could you do differently to live your values and achieve the alignment that you want? While you may have plenty of intellectual stimulation, you may sense a need to read more about spiritual issues. Alignment does not necessarily mean equal measures for each area. Alignment suggests fulfillment.

### Conclusion

You may have devoted years to pursuing another career direction to now look back and find yourself lamenting old dreams, who you might have been, and what you might have accomplished. The desire to turn back the odometer and start over can be very powerful. Yet, focusing on "what could have been" only serves to limit your ability to fully appreciate the value of your current achievements and the unique competencies, skills and capabilities you've acquired along the way. The journey toward significance, by its very nature, is forward focused. As you look to your future take time to regularly refuel and recharge. By checking your own internal systems you will be better able to draw upon the significance that will allow you to successfully "go the distance."

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For more information on expanding your self awareness see AMA's emotional intelligence seminars on pages 27 and 68.