

Exercise 3 – A Reason for Being

Recap

In the last lesson we talked about counterfactuals – possible outcomes of any situation that could have been different based on 'if only' thinking.

Have you used 'what if' scenario thinking lately to create downward counterfactuals to bring on positive emotions? Did you journal on any incidences where you created a counterfactual, upward or downward?

Remember

- it takes 21 days to form a habit
- and the formula for happiness is – $H = G + C + T\&A$

Your thoughts and actions are the most important part of the change that you are wanting to make. Be the change you want to see.

How do you feel you went in the past 3 weeks?

Scientists believe that genetics account for only about 20 to 30% of our lifespan. The other 70 to 80% of what determines our longevity is based on environmental factors, such as diet and lifestyle (Google the Danish Twin Study – 2872 sets of same-sex twins born between 1870 and 1900 in Denmark, studied for determinates of longevity).

Dan Buettner identified five regions of the world as "[Blue Zones](#)" in his book of the same name. Blue Zones are geographic regions that are home to some of the oldest people on the planet. People in these zones commonly live to be in their 90s, and many live beyond 100 years of age. The five are:

- Okinawa(Japan);
- Sardinia (Italy);

- Nicoya (Costa Rica);
- Icaria (Greece); and
- the Seventh-day Adventists in Loma Linda, California.

Dan Buettner worked with National Geographic to put together a team of medical researchers, anthropologists, demographers and epidemiologists to find out what the evidence-based common denominators of the 5 regions were. These were the answers:

- Move Naturally – you don't need a gym routine – just move
- Purpose (Okinawans refer to Ikigai, which is the subject for this lesson) – people with a life purpose can add up to seven years onto their life expectancy.
- Down Shift – develop a routine to reduce stress (Okinawans take time each day to remember their ancestors)
- 80% Rule – stop eating when you are 80% full – the Okinawans have a 2,500 year old mantra that they say before meals which reminds them of this
- Plant Slant – beans are the basis of the diet
- Wine at 5 – drink moderately with friends and food
- Belong – to some type of community. Faith-based is stronger, but denomination does not matter.
- Loved Ones First – family comes first, including aging parents. People in these zones tend to commit to a life partner and give time and love to their children.
- Right Tribe – Okinawans create groups of 5 friends that commit to each other for life.

The points above are also re-worded and outlined in [The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life](#) by Hector Garcia and Francesc Miralles, who claim “our intuition and curiosity are very powerful internal compasses to help us connect with our Ikigai”.

Okinawa is home to the world's oldest women and the largest number of people per capita living beyond 100. Some say their longevity is due to the fact that they eat a lot of soy-based products and they practice tai

chi.

However, many believe it is because they live the Ikigai philosophy. They don't have the western desire to retire at a young age, and so continue with their work as long as possible depending on their health. Okinawans also subscribe to developing a close-knit group of friends. People that matter to them.

So I just wanted to give you that background, to give you a basis for why Ikigai is important.

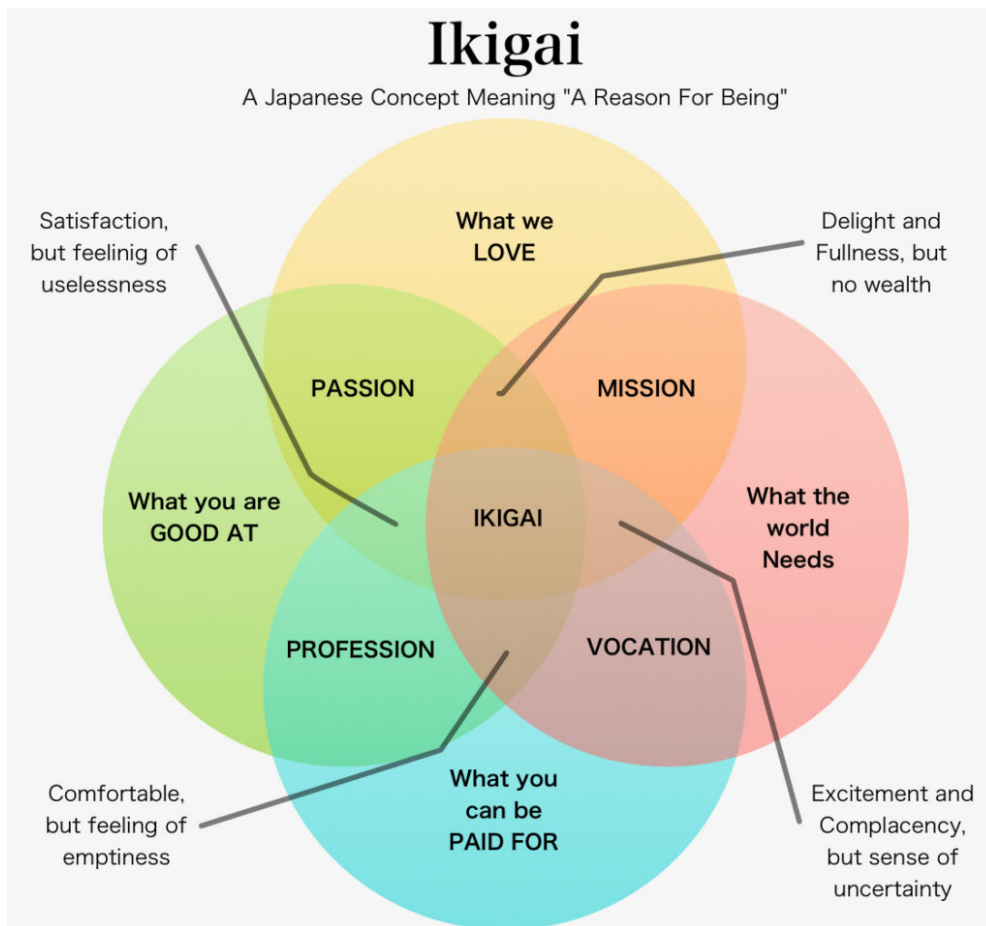
Ikigai – you cannot say the word without smiling. To pronounce it, open up your cheeks – ee – and again – kee – then round it out with a big 'gai'. (Do not do the lazy pronunciation that makes it sound like the yucky man next door – icky guy!).

Ikigai simply means 'a reason for being'.

Iki = life gai = purpose/value

Joseph Campbell called it 'following your bliss'.

If you can focus your energy on your own personal Ikigai you will have a happy and balanced life. It is the intersection where your passions, gifts and talents converge with what the world needs and is willing to pay for.



To find your own Ikigai you are going to have to undertake a personal inventory. You cannot rush this process. Do you have a passion? What does drive you to get up in the morning?

If you have a job, you will know that this is what you do to get paid so that you can provide shelter, food and clothing for yourself and possibly a family. However, your work is what you do to get a result. Often these get confusing. Ikigai is different – it is purposeful and mindful.

To find your Ikigai we are going to have to break it down.

> What you are good at PLUS what you love is your **PASSION**

- If you are doing this then you will feel delighted and fulfilled, but you will possibly not be earning enough to live on.
- Aspiring artists are following their passion, but they will need to market their work if they want to get paid for it.

> What you love PLUS what the world needs is your **MISSION**

- You'll be feeling excited, entertained and purposeful, but there will be a sense of uncertainty to your life.
- Bloggers and activists have a mission, but they have to focus to ensure they are getting better all the time at what they do.

> What the world needs PLUS what you are being paid or rewarded for is your **VOCATION**

- You are going to be feeling comfortable, but you will probably be sensing a feeling of emptiness and boredom. How many people have all the trappings of success – money, house, car – but live lives of quiet desperation.
- Lecturers generally have a vocation, but they may be teaching the same things over and over again which in turn just develops into a job.

> What you can get paid for PLUS what you are good at is your **PROFESSION**

- You are going to be satisfied, but there will be a feeling of uselessness.
- If you have a nine to five job and you don't love it and can't see the meaning of it, then you need to try new things, get innovative.

You need the balance of all areas to know your own individual reason for being.

Ken Mogi, a neuroscientist and author of [Awakening Your Ikigai](#), advises that to find your Ikigai you need to understand first what he labels the five pillars, which are:

1. Starting small
2. Accepting yourself
3. Connecting with the world around you
4. Seeking out small joys

5. Being in the here and now.

This process to work out what your individual Ikigai is will take some time. Nothing worth doing is worth rushing. You have to take the time daily to incorporate this mindset into your life. If you are not a morning person, either become one, or dedicate some time at night to it. You are going to have to sacrifice some other things, such as your favourite TV show, or the news, or rearranging your sock drawer.

Keeping the five pillars above in mind, take 10 minutes to ask yourself these four core questions. Be honest in your answers and see what you come up with.

1. What do I love?
2. What am I good at?
3. What can I be paid for?
4. What does the world need?

“Never once in my life did I ask God for success or wisdom or power or fame. I asked for wonder, and he gave it to me.”

— Abraham Joshua Heschel

What is the one simple thing you could do or be today that would be an expression of your Ikigai?

Find it and pursue it with every fibre of your being. Life is too short not to.

Exercises:

- Focus on Mogi’s five pillars
- Keep asking yourself the 4 questions until you feel you are getting some answers
- Write down your answers in your journal
- Google Ikigai tests – there are many on the internet that you can try
- Keep up whatever exercises you have been doing for the past 3 weeks.

