

A photograph of three children in a classroom setting. In the foreground, a young boy with dark hair is smiling and looking down at a project on a table. Next to him, a young girl with long brown hair is also smiling and looking at the project. To her right, another young boy with dark hair is smiling and looking at the project. They are all working on a project that involves colorful beads or small objects. The background is slightly blurred, showing other children and a classroom environment.

Meaning & Purpose in Life 101

Ten scientific facts everybody should know about living a meaningful life in a meaningless world

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IMEC International Meaning Events & Community (UK)

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**Who do you think
you are to tell us
key facts about
meaning?**

**People in all eras have spoken much about meaning.
Influencers want us to recognise their authority on this.
But I am not a fellow searcher for meaning in life.**

I am a listener.

I systematically listen to what people say is meaningful.

I listen with my heart and soul.

I systematically collect facts.

I systematically examine what helps them in life.

I look for trends and summarise these.

I apply these trends and share what works.

I use this to help people live more meaningfully.

I use this to help make the world a more meaningful place.

Judge this for yourself.

Listen to this talk.

Read my books and articles from 25 years of research.

Listen and read with a critical mindset.

Check what resonates with your authentic intuition.

**What about your looks?
You don't look like an
academic
(even IRL, and not only in
this weird AI photo).**



VINTAGE
GOODS

CAFÉ
LUNA

CAFÉ LUNA

LIFE IS
TOO SHORT
TO LOOK
BORING

Dr. Joel Vos
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Being yourself is easy for you.
You are an academic.
You have no street cred.



You do not
judge a book
by its cover.



Do not judge
me by my
boots and
braces.



How can I live an authentically meaningful life?



How can we live an authentically meaningful life?



We need meaning myth busters

WHY WE NEED MEANING AND PURPOSE 101: A Blueprint for Individual & Society Flourishing

LIFE IS SHORT:
DON'T WASTE TIME

FLOURISHING

DO NOT REINVENT THE WHEEL
- USE PROVEN STRUCTURES

COMMON LANGUAGE →
COMMUNITY UNITY

KEY FACTS →
WORLD UNITY

GROUND PRACTICES IN SYSTEMATIC RESEARCH
EVIDENCE, NOT OPINIONS.



KEY FACTS →
WORLD UNITY

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We need agreements and a common language about key facts on how to live meaningfully.




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Fact 1. Follow your meanings.



We are equal in birth and death,
And thus equal in doubt and meaning about what we do in between.
(Everybody deserves to live a meaningful life.)

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A group of five children are gathered in a war-torn city, sitting on a concrete slab amidst rubble. A girl in a headscarf is reading a book to four other children. The scene is set against a backdrop of destroyed buildings and a sunset sky. Colorful Easter eggs and a mural of a phoenix are visible in the background, symbolizing hope and resilience.

*Living a meaningful life
is a human right
that should be
protected and fostered.*

TREAT OTHERS AND YOURSELF
WITH **DIGNITY**
R.E.S.P.E.C.T. (REFLEXIVITY • EXPRESSION • SELFHOOD • PURPOSE • ENABLEMENT • CHOICE • TOTALITY)



Dr. Joel Vos
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Dignity is an individual's inherent ability and right, supported by social recognition and protection, to their own...

R-Reflexivity

The ability and right to reflect on, interpret, and make sense of one's own experiences, meanings, and meaning-making processes.

E-Expression

The ability and right to express oneself authentically, participate in collective meaning-making, choose one's social environment, and gain value from actions and social standing

S-Selfhood

The enduring, inherent core of personhood and uniqueness that supports self-esteem and authentic identity.

P-Purpose

The ability to envision, realise, appraise, and experience one's own meanings in life

E-Enablement

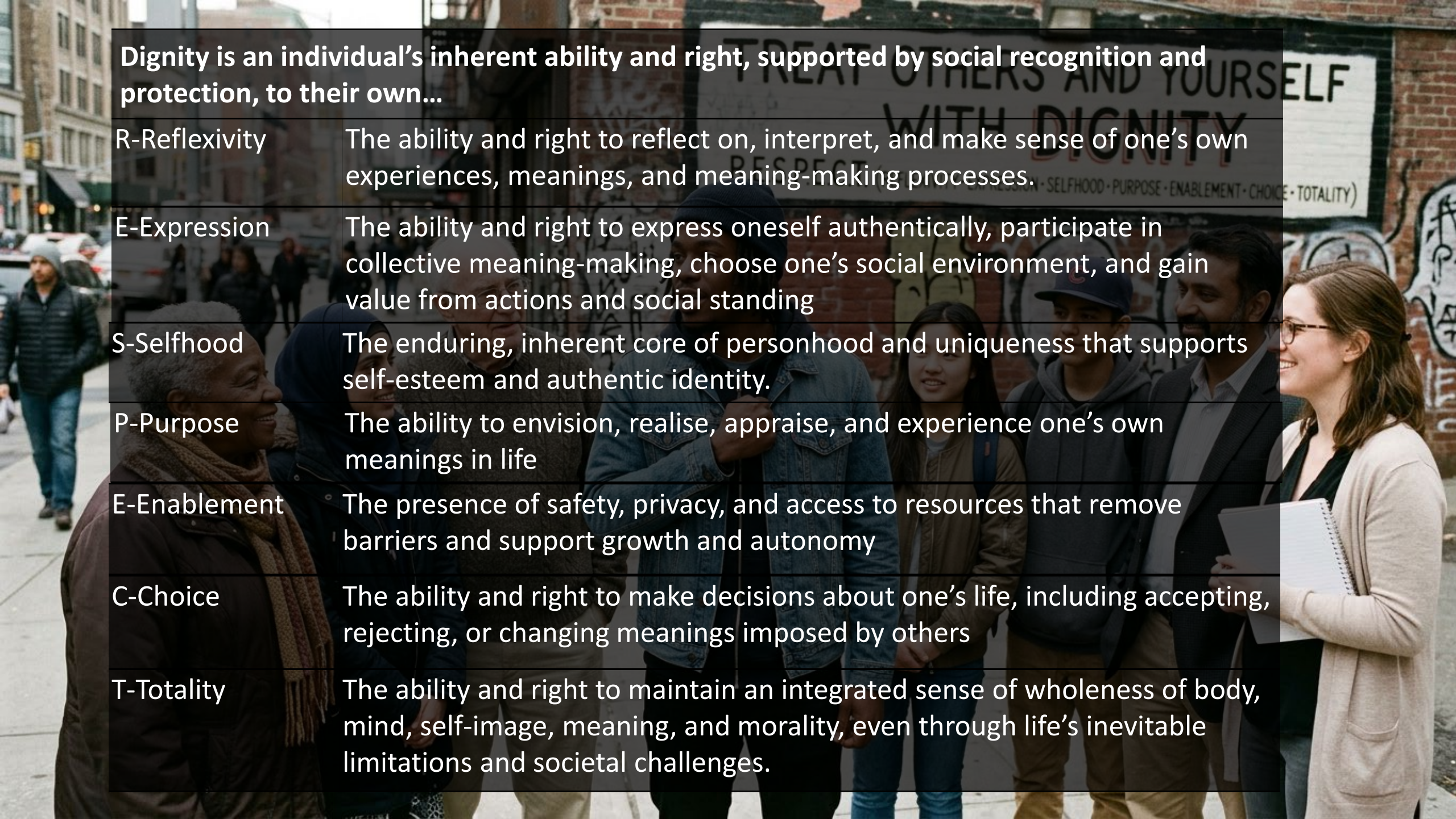
The presence of safety, privacy, and access to resources that remove barriers and support growth and autonomy

C-Choice

The ability and right to make decisions about one's life, including accepting, rejecting, or changing meanings imposed by others

T-Totality

The ability and right to maintain an integrated sense of wholeness of body, mind, self-image, meaning, and morality, even through life's inevitable limitations and societal challenges.



Fact 1. Follow your meanings.
Fact 2. Create stable foundations for life.



**JUDGE A SKYSCRAPER NOT BY ITS HEIGHT, BUT BY ITS FOUNDATIONS;
JUDGE A PERSON NOT BY THEIR SUCCESS, BUT BY THEIR PURPOSE.**
(Everybody builds their life on deeper foundations, even if invisible.)

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Living a meaningful life is the totality of... →

... long-term, deep and often implicit and unreflected ... →

... motivations in life (e.g., purpose, goals, directions). →

... values in how we build our lives. →

... understanding how our actions, identity and life events make sense in the coherent stories of our own life and the world around us. →

... self-worth and significance to follow my own meanings. →

... translating abstract meanings into everyday goals, actions, goal evaluations and adjustments. →

... flexibility in responding to life's inevitable challenges. →

... commitment to actually living a meaningful life and not merely theorizing about it. →

Foundations are broad and involve many components

Foundations are often invisible

Meaning can be about being (e.g., focus on foundations) + doing (e.g., making plans and building)

How to build (conscious construction companies)

Foundations are broad + should be well placed in the surroundings on strong soil etc.

Everybody deserves a house on solid foundations to protect them and enjoy.

Architects and project managers

Construction workers with various professional skills

Actually building

Living a meaningful life starts with the nuts and bolts

Let's go beyond general definitions of meaning in life and ask: what, how, how many?



Measuring meaning in life at macro and micro-level: real-world implications and directions (types, approaches, and number of envisioned and realized meanings in life)

Joel Vos, IMEC International Meaning Events and Community, London, United Kingdom

Advocates measuring meaning in life at a micro-level, addressing limitations of instrumenting macro-level concepts such as the presence and search for meaning, purpose, and significance. Three studies were conducted: a worldwide survey ($N = 1281$), a Corona-Survey ($N = 1451$), and a clinical trial on Systematic Meaning in Life ($N = 70$). Micro-level instruments included: Meaning Sextet Questionnaire, Meaning Scale, Number of Meaning Scale. Findings revealed that social and large-scale factors strongly predict positive well-being, while materialistic, hedonistic, and self-directed negative outcomes. The critical-intuitive approach to meaning-making predicted better well-being, whereas traditional-conformist and goal-oriented approaches predicted worse outcomes. The minimum number of realized meanings for well-being. Micro-level instruments identified larger effects and explained more variance in well-being. This research suggests micro-level assessment (realized and envisioned meanings and number of meanings) is particularly relevant in real-world situations and individualized meaning-making matters, such as psychotherapy and counter-interventions.

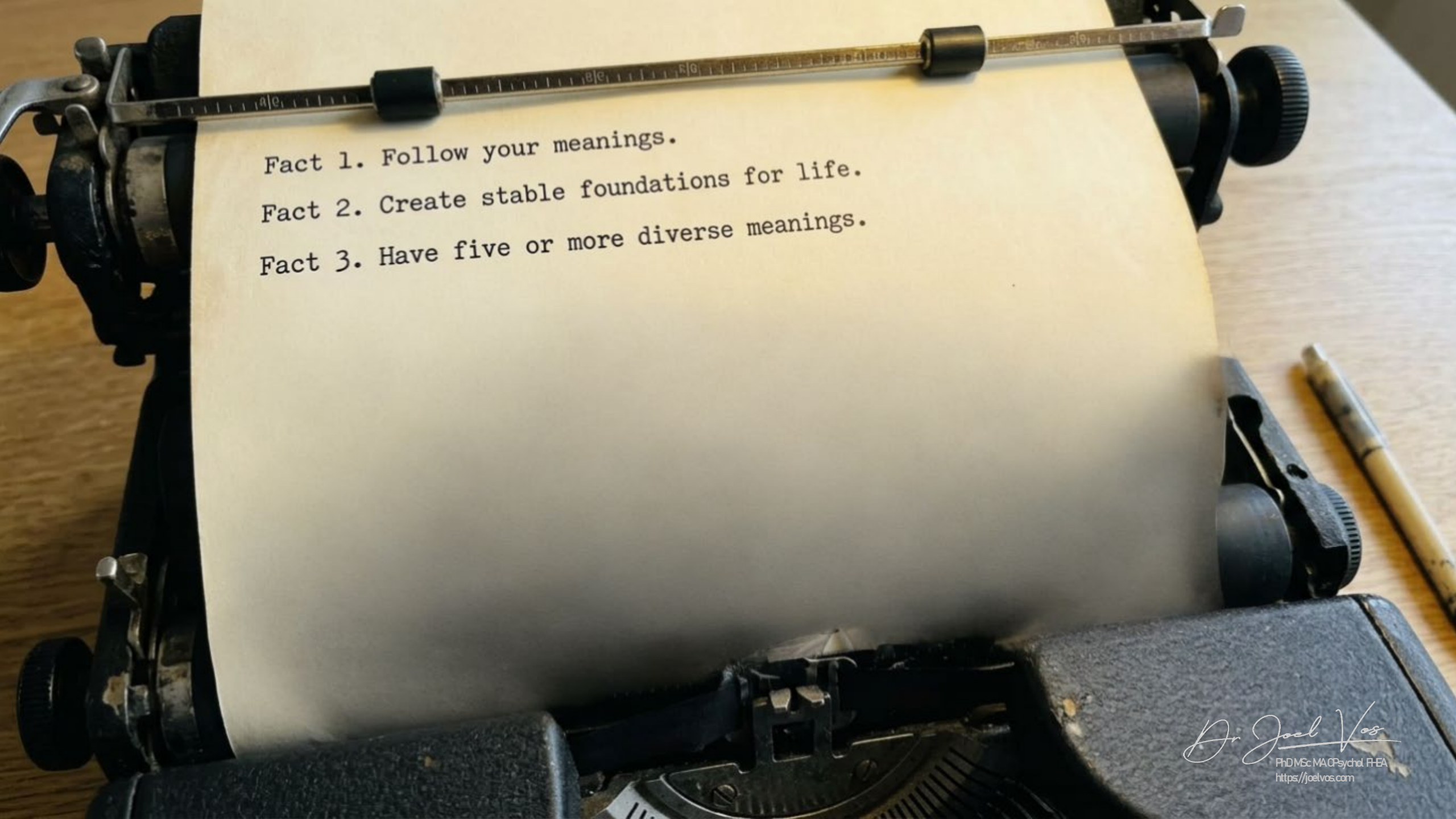
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KEYWORDS
Meaning; purpose; well-being; measurement; questionnaire; psychotherapy; existentialism

A multifaceted concept that has garnered significant attention in psychological research (Vos, 2022), particularly as it has been associated with improved mental and physical health (Park, 2010; Schulenberg et al., 2008; Vos, 2022, 2021a-b, 2016a-b; Wong, 2021). Many definitions encompass three core components: comprehension, purpose, and mattering (Vos, 2016, 2017; Martela & Steger, 2016). A recent systematic review has expanded these definitions, framing meaning as an individual's overarching sense of purpose and motivation (e.g. purpose, goals), understanding of their context (e.g. worldview, cultural and historical context), and self-worth (Vos, 2016a, 2016b, 2018, 2022). Importantly, these definitions underscore that meaning transcends philosophical theories, incorporating practical and existential dimensions (ibid.). While these definitions have been valuable for research purposes, they often prove challenging for practical application in psychotherapy, coaching, or individual training (Vos et al., 2025). Whereas traditional definitions address general meaningfulness at a macro-level, a more granular, micro-level examination

of meaning may be needed to precisely understand an individual's struggles and develop tailored psychological interventions and personal development strategies. This article proposes four distinct micro-level components of an individual's sense of meaning in life: types of meaning, approaches to meaning, number of meanings, and detailed differences between envisioned and realized meanings. To illustrate the relevance of micro-level meaning, consider the following case study:

Sarah, a 35-year-old accountant, epitomized success in her career but grappled with a profound sense of emptiness and unfulfillment. Initial macro-level assessment using the Meaning in Life Questionnaire revealed a low score on the presence of meaning and a moderate search for meaning. Subsequent meso-level examination, in line with the Multidimensional Existential Meaning Scale, indicated moderate levels of meaning coherence and purpose but low personal significance. These generic outcomes confirmed the need for a more granular, micro-oriented approach. Sarah had already told her therapist that she was a materialist. However, the questionnaires failed to provide specific insights or practical solutions. Recognizing this limitation, her therapist administered three micro-level questionnaires. The Meaning Sextet Questionnaire unveiled a discrepancy between Sarah's most valued social types of meaning (i.e., personal relationships

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- Fact 1. Follow your meanings.
Fact 2. Create stable foundations for life.
Fact 3. Have five or more diverse meanings.



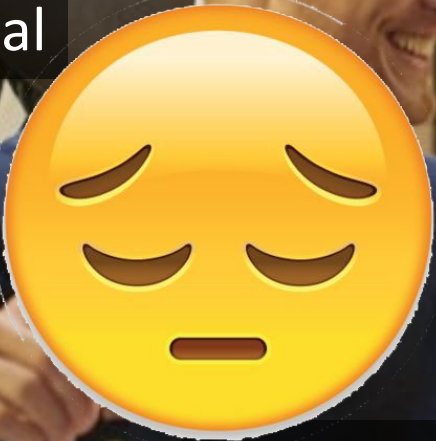
A meaningful life is not
a single skyscraper in the desert
but a mountain range
with
many meanings
at various heights.



Have five or more examples of meaning (small, everyday + big, life-changing ones) for optimal well-being and prevention of radicalisation .

The Universal Meaning Sextet:
Six universal types of meaning

Existential-
philosophical



Hedonistic

Large









Self-oriented

Materialistic

Social

The Universal Meaning Sextet

Vos, *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 2022: 107 studies in 45.710 participants + Meaning Sextet Questionnaire in 1281 participants in 49 countries; validated in Vos, *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 2025

Type of meaning	Underlying value	Sub-type of meaning	Example
 I. Materialistic types of meaning	the value of materialized situations, such as owning material goods or having achieved objective success	A. Material conditions	A. Finances, housing, possessions, practical activities, physical survival
 II. Hedonistic types of meaning	the value of the enjoyment and embodied experiences	B. Professional-educational success	B. General success, professional success, educational success, social status, power
 III. Self-oriented types of meaning	the value of the self	A. Hedonistic and experiential activities	A. Hedonism, fun, leisure and joyful activities, enjoying beauty (music, art, eating, drinking, etc.), nature and animals, peak experiences, pain avoidance
 		B. Health & embodied experiences	B. Being healthy, healthy lifestyle, sports, sex
		A. Resilience (coping successfully with difficult life situations)	A. Flexibility, perseverance and hardiness, accepting challenges, effective coping skills, positive and hopeful perspective
		B. Self-efficacy	B. Effective actions in daily life (setting specific activities or goals, planning, organizing, discipline, evaluating and adjusting daily life activities or goals), being in control
		C. Self-acceptance	C. Self-insight, self-acceptance, self-worth, self-esteem
		D. Autonomy	D. Self-reliance, non-selfish balance with social context
		E. Creative self-expression	E. Creative self-expression
		F. Self-care	F. Self-care
 IV. Social types of meaning	the value of being-connected-with others, belonging to a specific community and improving the well-being of others	A Feeling socially connected	Sociability, friends, family, intimate relationships/partne
		B Belonging to a specific community	Family, community, history and society
		C Following social expectations	Doing what is socially expected, following social virtues, conformism, tradition
		D Altruism	Altruism
		E Giving birth and taking care of next generations	Giving birth and taking care of next generations

V. Larger types of meaning

the value of something bigger than their materialistic-hedonic experiences, themselves and other human beings, merely for the sake of that larger value



A. Specific life purpose

A. Specific larger goals, purposes, aims or dreams in life

B. Personal growth

B. Self-development, self-transcendence, self-realization fulfilling one's potential, wisdom, authenticity

C. Temporality

C. Sense of coherence, future-oriented, reflection on the past, legacy, after-life, position in life-span, awareness of having little time or resources left

D. Justice & ethics

D. Following ethical standards, being treated in a just way, contributing to a just world

E. Spirituality and religion

E. Spirituality and religion, beliefs, worship and religious practices, insight in cosmic meaning, spiritual union, peace harmony and balance, Platonic Idea or Highest Good

VI. Existential-philosophical types of meaning

the value of life as such. This type of meaning does not have a specific content like the other types of meaning but is more abstract: the mere fact that someone is breathing and is able to make unique decisions within freedom is a gift to which one may feel grateful and may want to respond to with responsible decisions.

A. Being-alive

A. Being-born, feeling-alive, being-until-death

B. Uniqueness

B. The unique individuality of one's own experiences, own life, own world and own self

C. Connectedness with the world and others

C. Being-in-the-world, being-in-context, being-in-relationships

D. Individual freedom

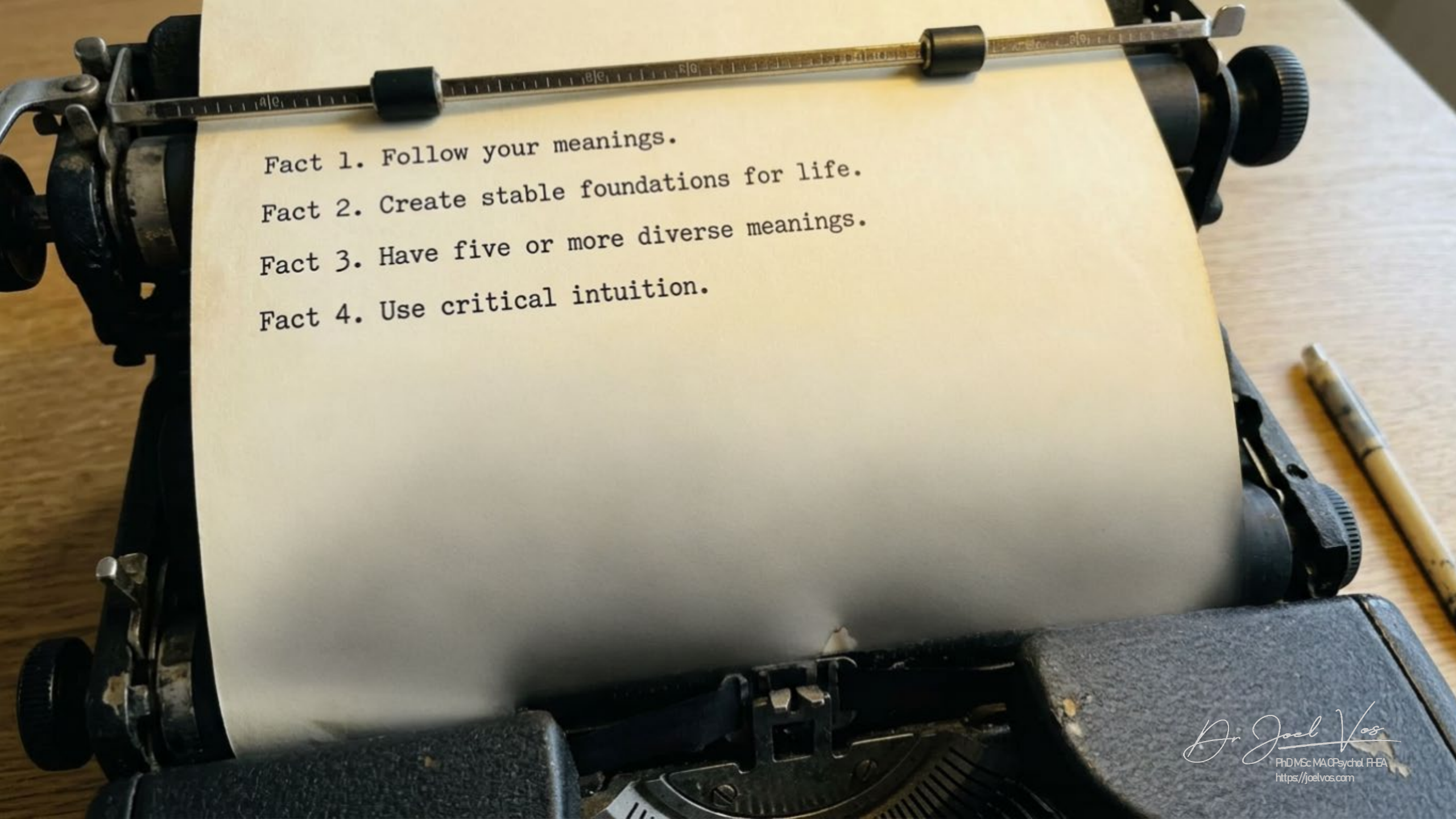
D. Freedom of decision, freedom to decide one's attitude toward a limitation situation in life, the possibility to leave a legacy

E. Gratitude to life as a gift

E. Experiencing the mere fact of being-born as a gift or miracle that one did not ask for but that one regards as highly precious and special, and to which one responds with gratitude

F. Responsibility

F. Individual responsibility for oneself to live a meaningful life according to one's highest values

- 
- Fact 1. Follow your meanings.
Fact 2. Create stable foundations for life.
Fact 3. Have five or more diverse meanings.
Fact 4. Use critical intuition.



Authentic meaning begins
where the world stops
telling and the soul starts
listening.
(Everybody needs to listen
critically to their intuitions.)



Traditional-conformist

Meaning 1.0.



Three approaches to life

Mechanistic/goal-oriented/functionalistic

Meaning 2.0.



Critical-intuitive

Meaning 3.0.

(Vos, 2025 J of Pos Psych; Vos, 2024 J of Constr Psych;
Vos 2020 Economics book; Vos 2018 Meaning book)

Meaning 1.0.

Traditional-conformist

Do as others tell you

Religion; social expectations;
being born into a position with
predetermined meaning

Dominant until end of middle
ages, non-western countries

Meaning-makers telling
meaning to meaning-followers

Religious, far-right, counter-
extremism

Worse mental and physical well-
being

Traditional-conformist

Meaning 1.0.

Meaning 2.0.

Mechanistic, goal-oriented, Functionalistic

You can achieve anything, like a
mathematical function: do behaviour X and
you will get Y

Rationally and consciously decide well-
defined ambitious goals ('live life to the max')
which you strive towards in a linear line to
maximise all activities; action is more
important than critical reflection and
authentic intuition; any type of meaning goes

Enlightenment, West, capitalism, self-help
books, postmodernism

Everyone has the right to meaning-making
but to fulfil our meaning we may need to
manipulate other people's meanings.

Propaganda, marketing

Worse mental and physical well-being

Mechanistic/goal-oriented/functionalistic

Meaning 2.0.

Meaning 3.0.

Critical-intuitive,
phenomenological

Listen critically to your
intuition

Intuition = more than
emotion; doing justice to
the complexity of yourself +
your situation; critical = not
being slave to your
emotions + social situation

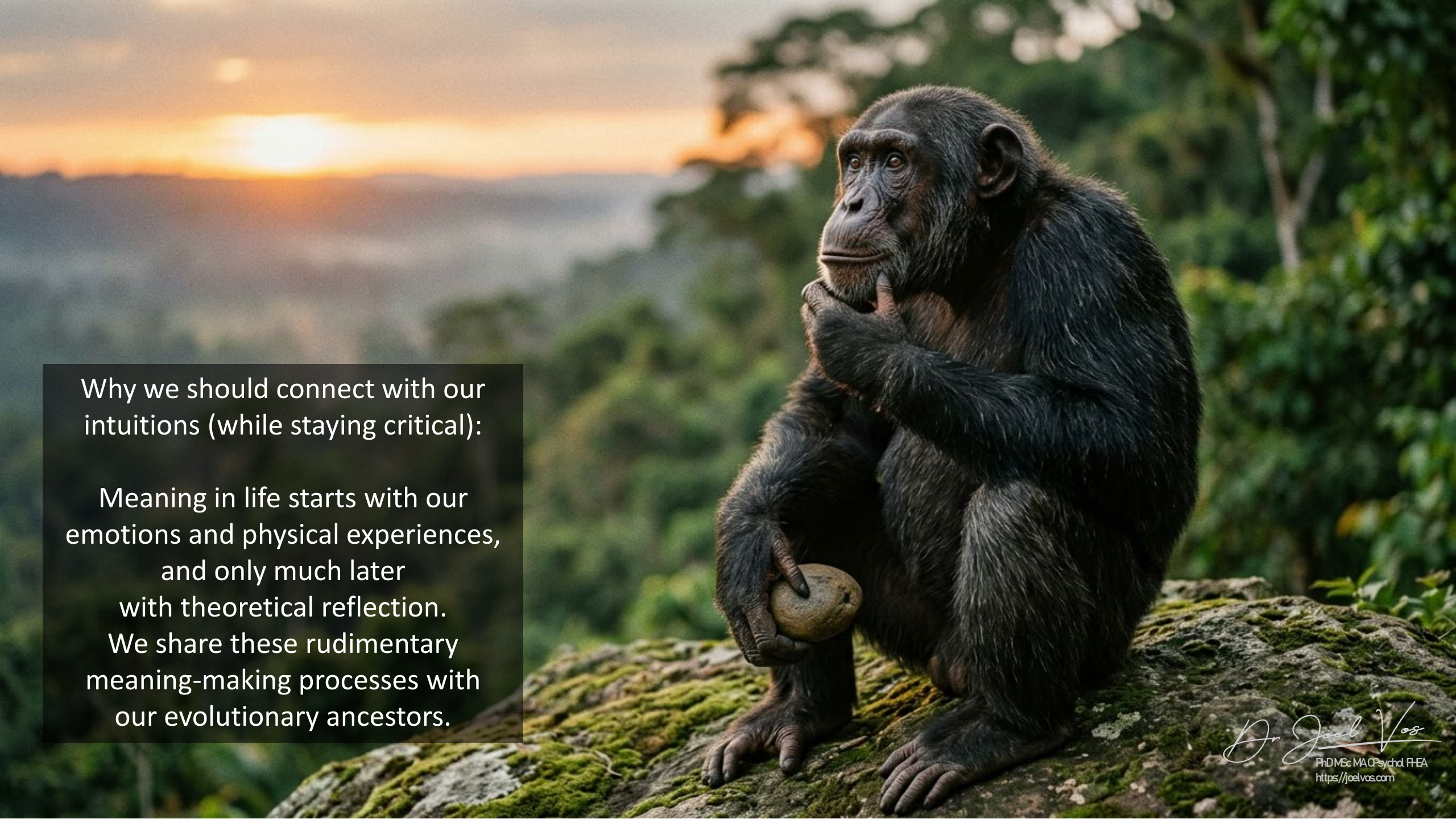
Non-western cultures,
contemporary philosophy

My full dignity + your full
dignity + our shared dignity.

Better mental and physical
well-being

Critical-intuitive

Meaning 3.0.

A chimpanzee is sitting on a mossy rock, holding a piece of fruit in its right hand. The chimpanzee is looking thoughtfully to the left. The background shows a sunset over a forested landscape.

Why we should connect with our intuitions (while staying critical):

Meaning in life starts with our emotions and physical experiences, and only much later with theoretical reflection. We share these rudimentary meaning-making processes with our evolutionary ancestors.

Being outside the hot flow of experiencing a meaningful life

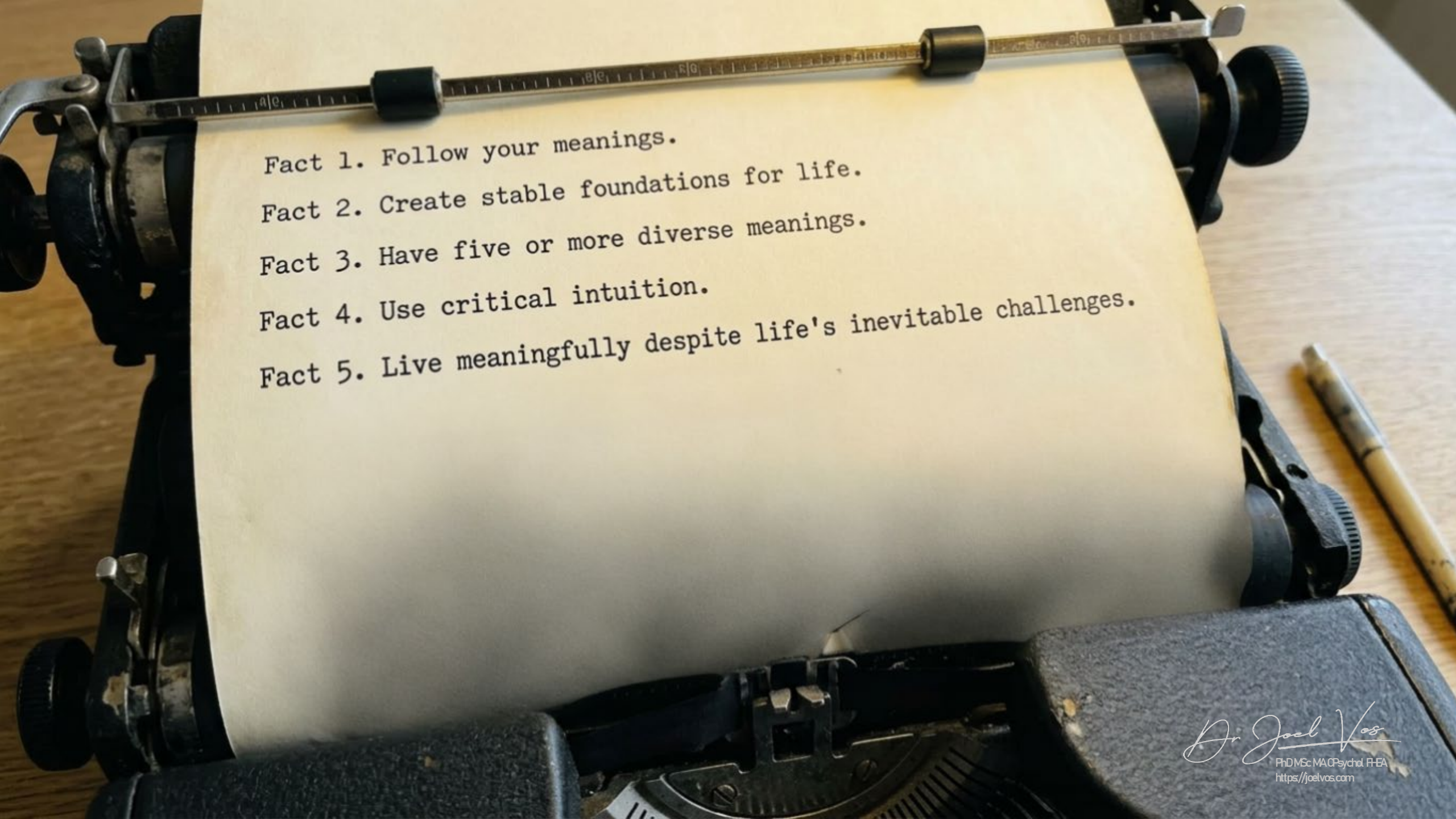
- Meaning as mere symbols and imagination
- 'Heady', theoretical, disconnected and splitting
- Speech: nouns, e.g. 'The Meaning Of Life'
- Frankl: hyper-reflection and hyper-intention
- Brain: Default Mode Network disconnected from Salience Network. Central Executive Functioning and Subcortical/limbic systems

Based on: Vos, 2011, 2017, 2020

Being inside the hot flow of experiencing a meaningful life

- Meaning as reality
- 'Guts', experiential and integrated
- Eg. flow, mindfulness, peak experience, life satisfaction
- Speech: present participle (-ing) and adjective, e.g. 'I feel that I'm living a meaningful life'
- Brain: balanced connections between Default Mode Network with Salience Network. Central Executive Functioning and Subcortical/limbic systems

Based on: Vos, 2011, 2017, 2020

- 
- Fact 1. Follow your meanings.
 - Fact 2. Create stable foundations for life.
 - Fact 3. Have five or more diverse meanings.
 - Fact 4. Use critical intuition.
 - Fact 5. Live meaningfully despite life's inevitable challenges.

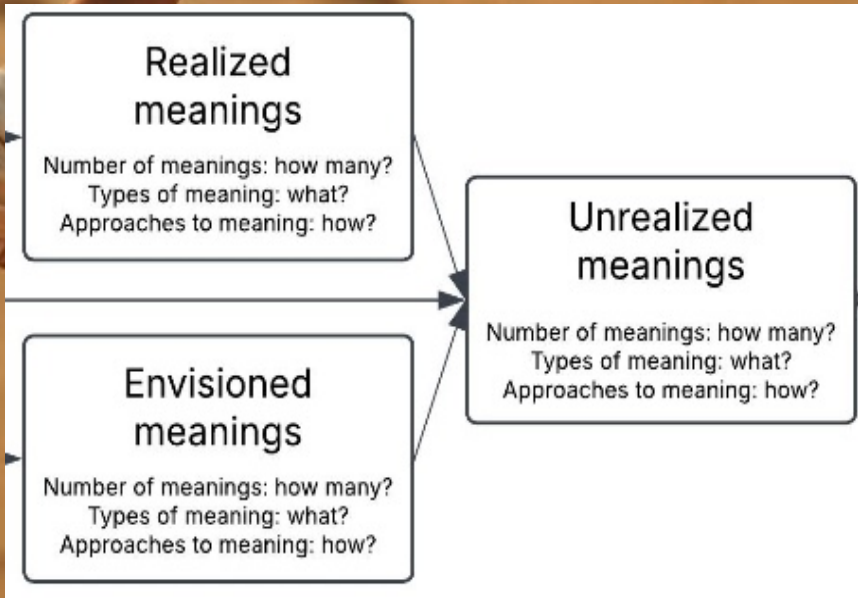
A man with a serious expression looks out from a window at a busy street scene. On the windowsill, there is a framed photograph of a family and some papers. The man is wearing a grey button-down shirt and holding a small object in his hand.

“He who has
a why to live for
can bear almost any how.”

(Everybody can live meaningfully
despite life's inevitable challenges.)

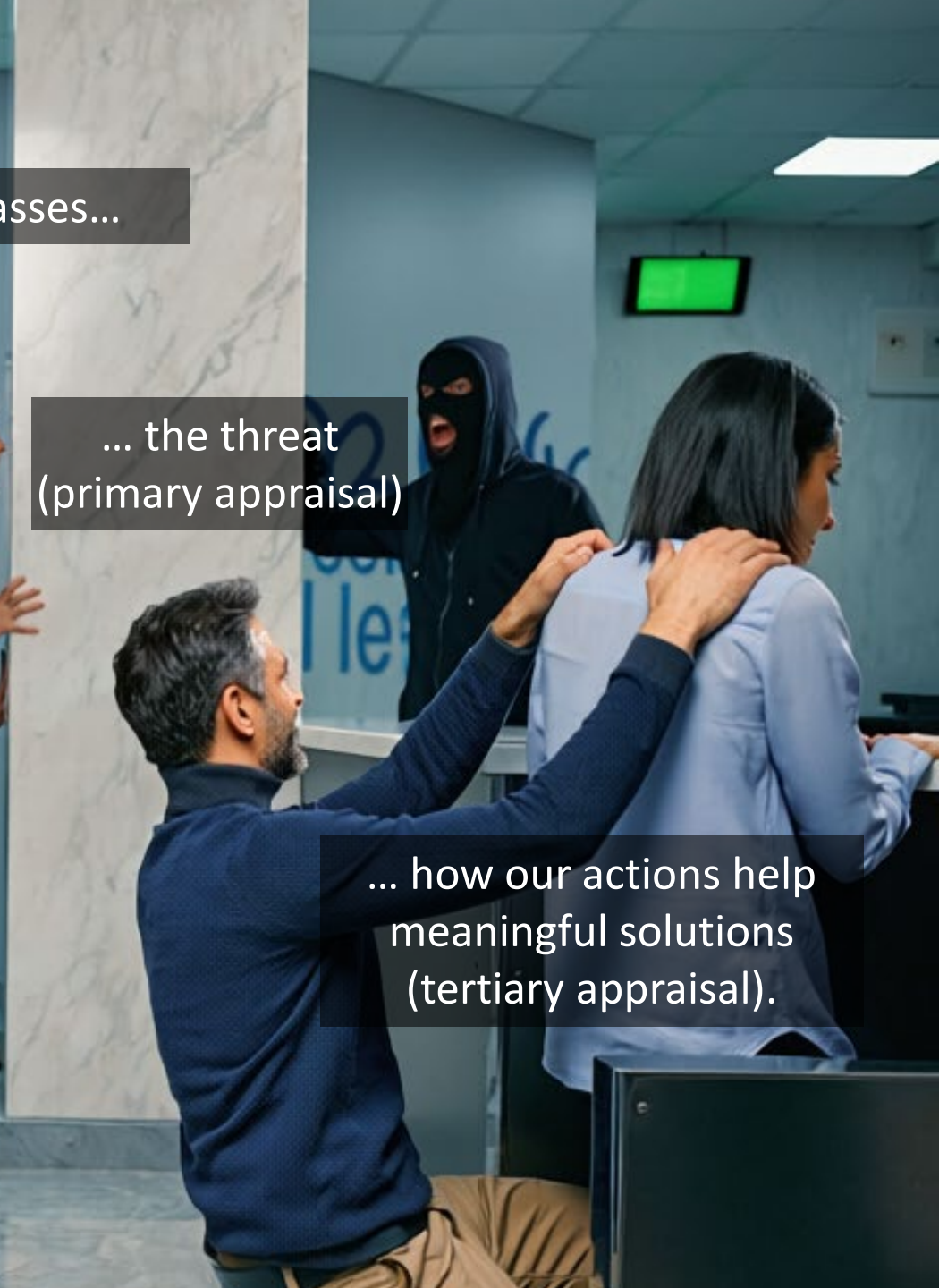


Life inevitably challenges the actual realisation of the meaningful life we envision for ourselves.





Confronted with life's challenges, we assess...



... the threat
(primary appraisal)

... resources to
cope with threats
(secondary
appraisal)

... how our actions help
meaningful solutions
(tertiary appraisal).

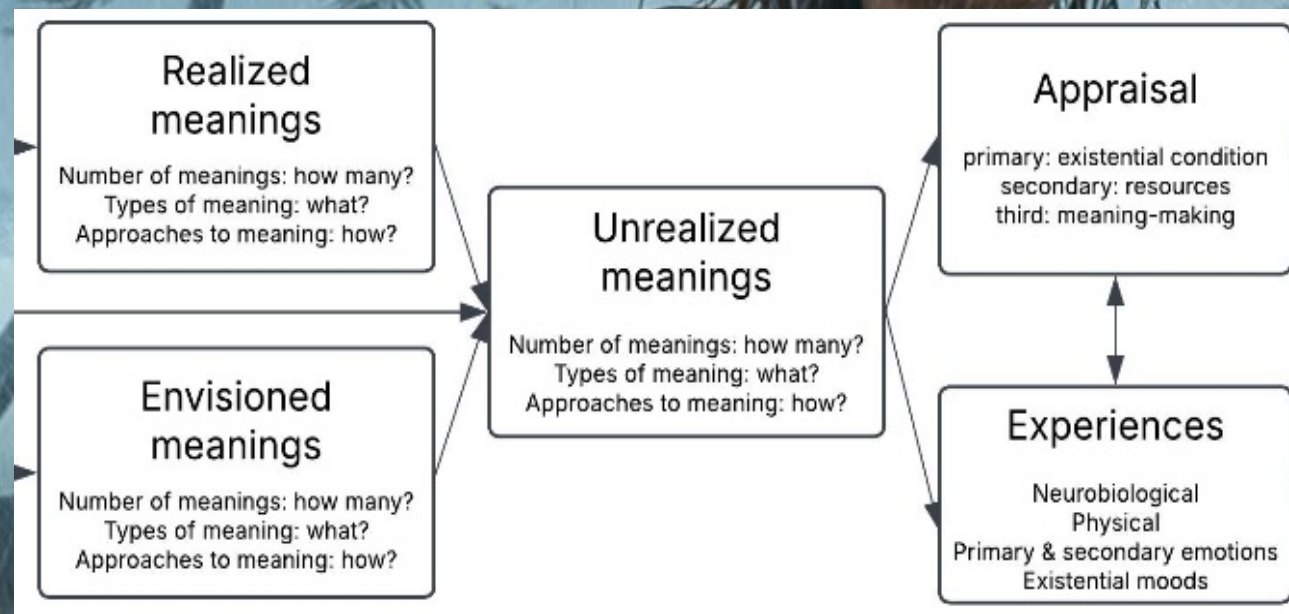
Neurocognitive & evolutionary research shows that under subjective threat, our brain preserves energy by focusing on rigid meanings and goal-oriented action. Nuanced, complex appraisal becomes more difficult.


If our inner Hunter detects a threat to his meanings, he tells our inner Leader to silence the nuanced, prosocial Storytellers and activate the Crafters to set goals, plan, and act.

(Formal neurological terms: Saliency Network functions as switch between Default Mode Network and Central Executive Network.)



Unrealized, appraised meanings
can be experienced and regulated
emotionally, physically and existentially.





Being at a cross-roads in life,
we can decide and respond in various ways
to unrealised meanings.

Change our methods and
strategies to try realising our
envisioned meaningful life

Change how we
envision a
meaningful life

Re-appraise the threats,
resources, and our
meaning-making

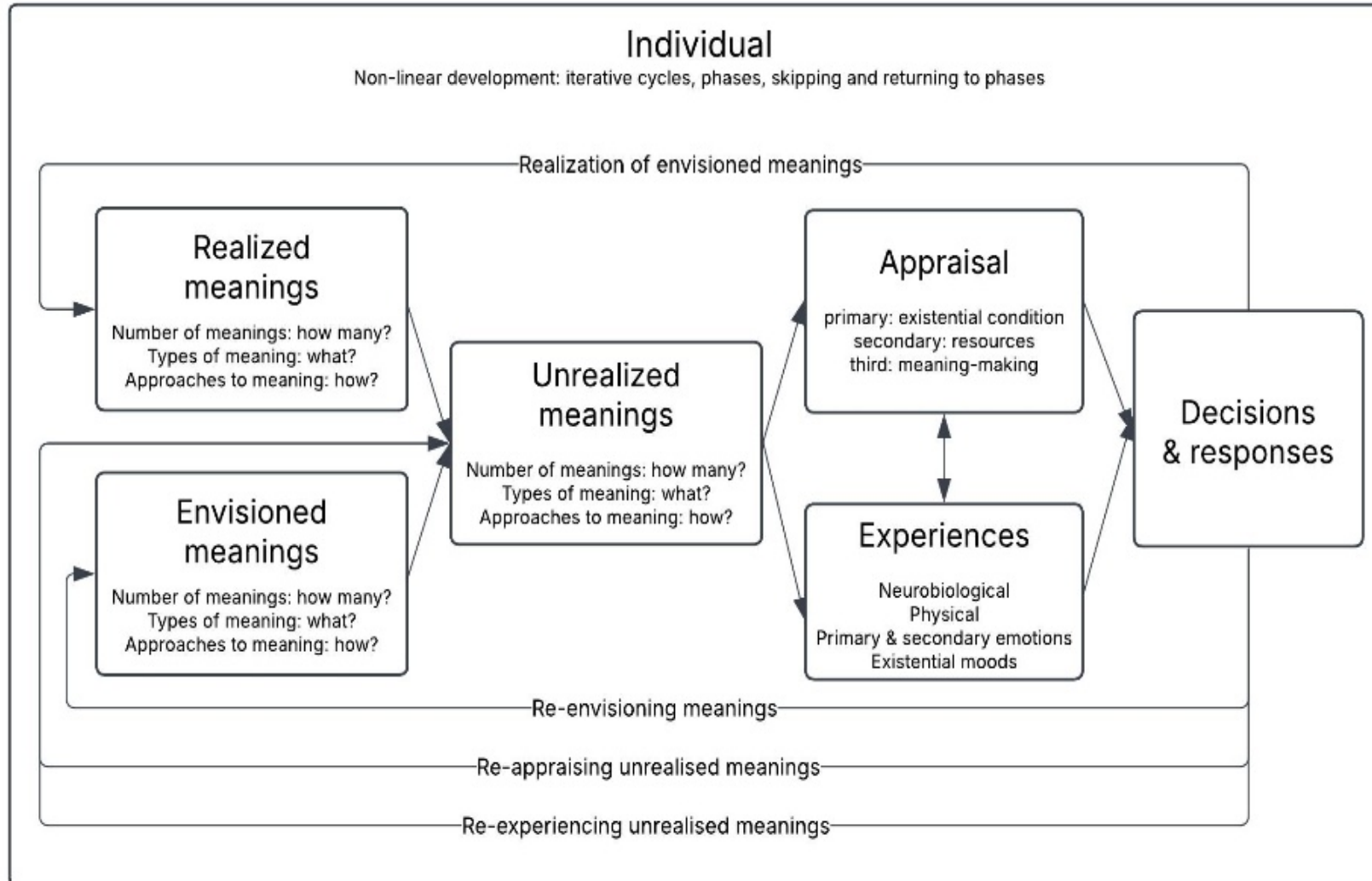
Change how we cope with our
emotional, physical and
existential response

← TOWN CENTER
← AIRPORT
↑ ROUTE 6
LOCAL ROAD →

STOP

Meaning Oriented Social And Individual Changes (MOSAIC) framework

Vos, 2025, J of Pos Psychol; research on radicalisation under review



- Fact 1. Follow your meanings.
- Fact 2. Create stable foundations for life.
- Fact 3. Have five or more diverse meanings.
- Fact 4. Use critical intuition.
- Fact 5. Live meaningfully despite life's inevitable challenges.
- Fact 6. Know the context of your meanings.

drte 3. ct.y . dñl.cis nare san.

We think our meanings are 'personal',
but all meanings are socially embedded.

Person

Micro-level opportunities and limitations,
intrapersonal dynamics and competencies

- Envisioning and re-envisioning meanings
- Resources to realize envisioned meanings
- Appraising and re-appraising unfulfilled meanings
- Experiencing and re-experiencing unfulfilled meanings

Society

Macro-level opportunities and limitations,
social dynamics and socialisation

- Envisioning and re-envisioning meanings
- Resources to realize envisioned meanings
- Appraising and re-appraising unfulfilled meanings
- Experiencing and re-experiencing unfulfilled meanings

Social network

Meso-level opportunities and limitations
social dynamics and socialisation

- Envisioning and re-envisioning meanings
- Resources to realize envisioned meanings
- Appraising and re-appraising unfulfilled meanings
- Experiencing and re-experiencing unfulfilled meanings

MEANING IS THE NEW CURRENCY
Harmony Bank

Invest in Your Soul
Harmony Bank

Harmony Bank:
We Trade in More Than Just Money



Arthur Pendelton
Chief Operating & Fidelity Strategist



THE PURPOSE MARKETPLACE:
Tiered Meaning & Legacy Portfolios

Legacy Preservation

Deep Connection

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Foundational Autonomy Plan

- Personalized Investment Strategy
- Diversification: Global & Domestic
- Tax-Efficient Withdrawal Strategies
- Risk Management: Insurance & Hedging
- Estate Planning: Trusts & Beneficiary Designations
- Charitable Giving: Impact Investing
- Retirement Planning: 401(k), IRA, Rollovers
- Financial Review: Quarterly & Annual

Legacy Preservation Plan

- Personalized Investment Strategy
- Diversification: Global & Domestic
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- Charitable Giving: Impact Investing
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- Financial Review: Quarterly & Annual

The economic-political system offers...
... visions for a meaningful life (envisioned meanings)
... resources for living a meaningful life (realised meanings)
... appraisals of unrealised meanings (appraised meanings)
... experiences and ways to respond (experienced meanings).

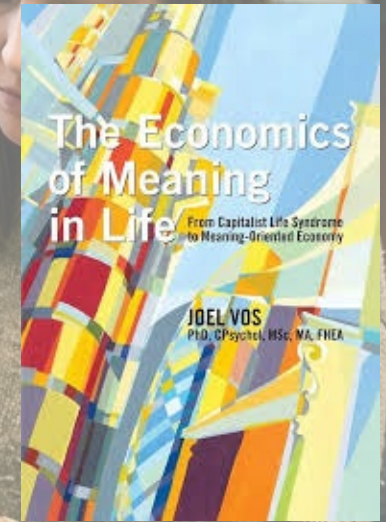


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The economic-political system offers...

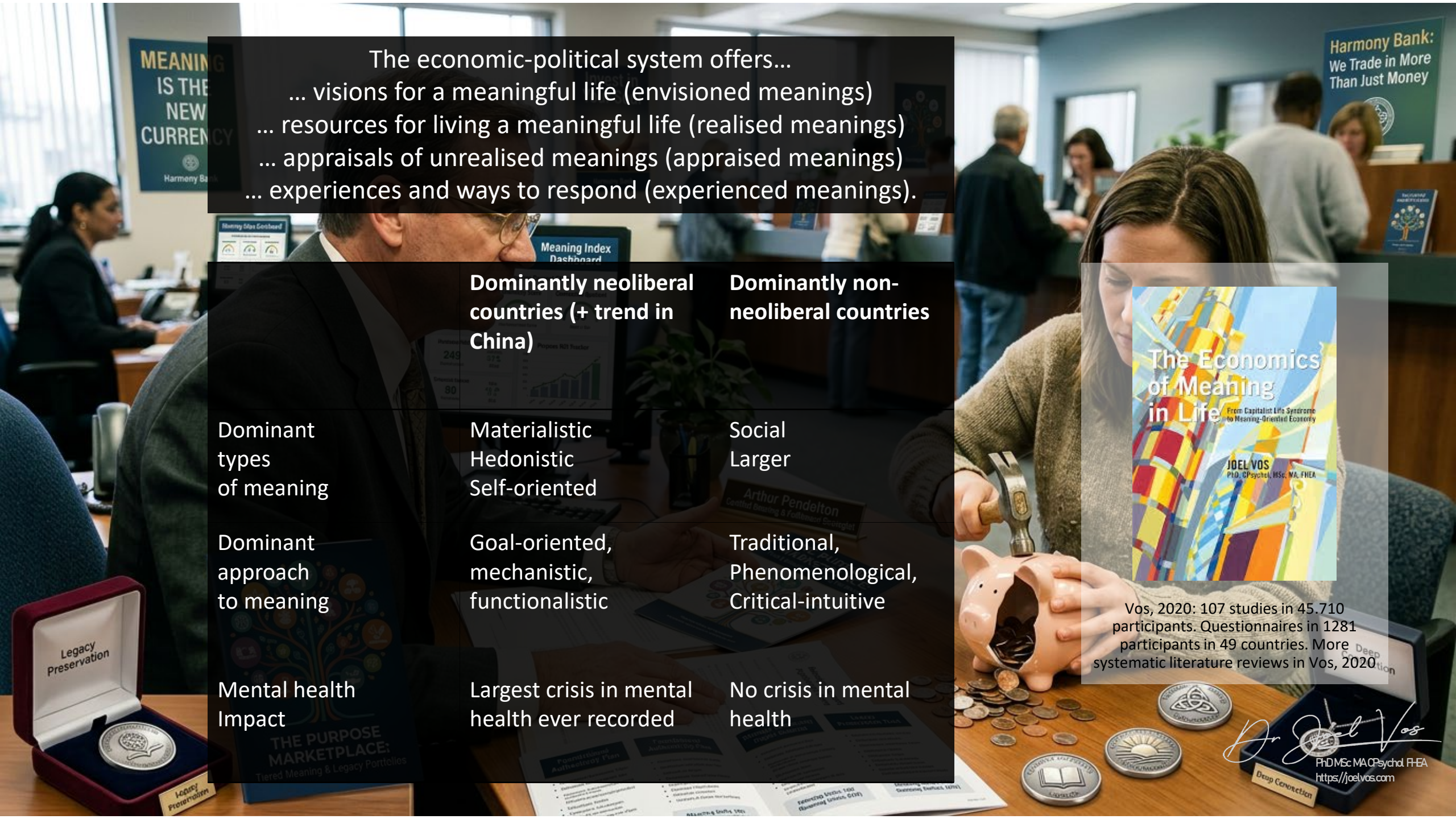
- ... visions for a meaningful life (envisioned meanings)
- ... resources for living a meaningful life (realised meanings)
- ... appraisals of unrealised meanings (appraised meanings)
- ... experiences and ways to respond (experienced meanings).

	Dominantly neoliberal countries (+ trend in China)	Dominantly non-neoliberal countries
Dominant types of meaning	Materialistic Hedonistic Self-oriented	Social Larger
Dominant approach to meaning	Goal-oriented, mechanistic, functionalistic	Traditional, Phenomenological, Critical-intuitive
Mental health Impact	Largest crisis in mental health ever recorded	No crisis in mental health



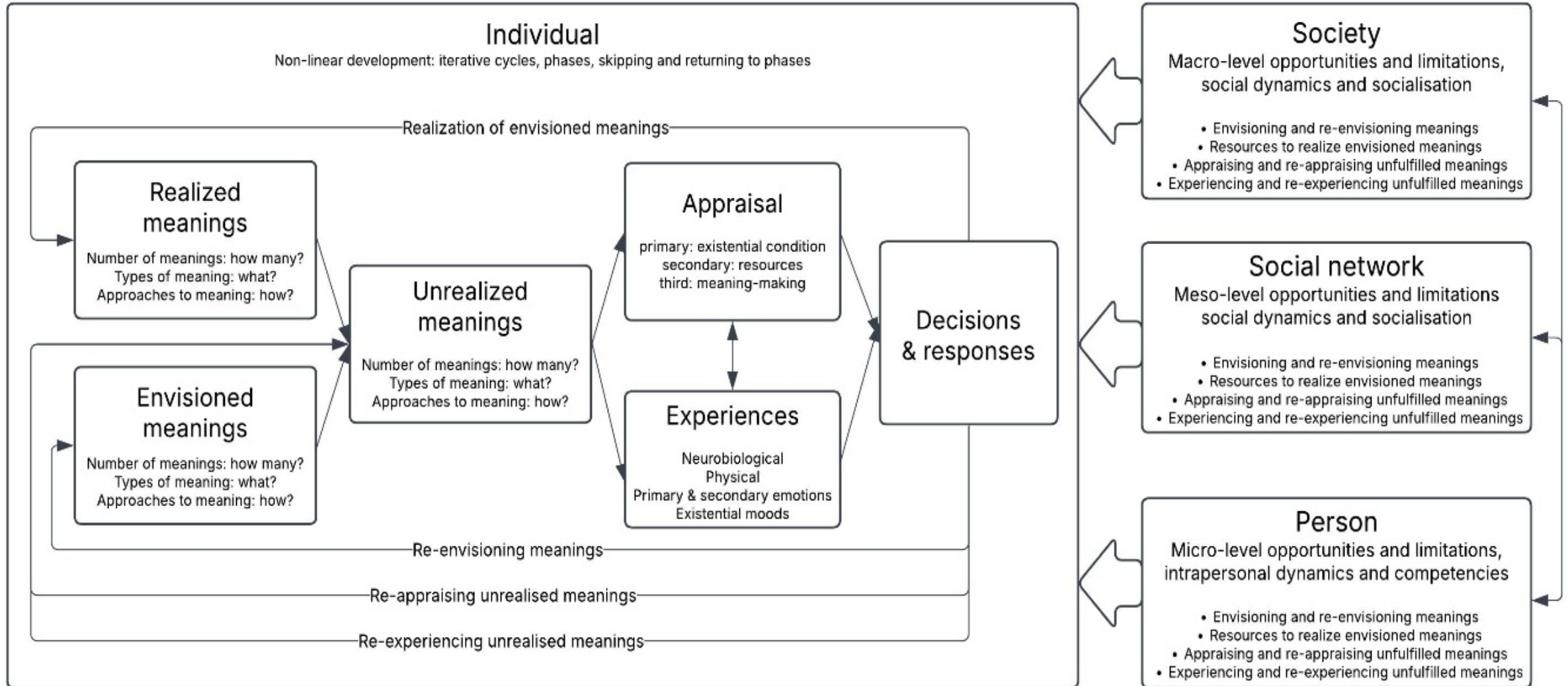
Vos, 2020: 107 studies in 45.710 participants. Questionnaires in 1281 participants in 49 countries. More systematic literature reviews in Vos, 2020

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Meaning Oriented Social And Individual Changes (MOSAIC) framework

Vos, 2025, J of Pos Psychol; research on radicalisation under review



- Fact 1. Follow your meanings.
- Fact 2. Create stable foundations for life.
- Fact 3. Have five or more diverse meanings.
- Fact 4. Use critical intuition.
- Fact 5. Live meaningfully despite life's inevitable challenges.
- Fact 6. Know the context of your meanings.
- Fact 7. Differentiate authentic meanings from existential fast food.



BURGER
McMEANING
FINDING PURPOSE

MAN'S
SEARCH
FOR
MEANING

Dr. Joel Vos
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Our culture offers infinite fast food but zero nourishment for our soul, which binges on everything but thrives on nothing.

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Panasonic
ideas for life

MAKE it
POSSIBLE



Learn to see how businesses try to make you buy their product as they promise you a meaningful life.



Make every drop count

“DON'T BE EVIL” ;-)

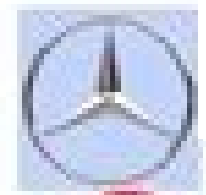
Because you're worth it
L'ORÉAL
PARIS




Think different.



Impossible is nothing



pepsi.

“The choice of a new generation.”



open happiness

NOKIA
Connecting People



Predictive transit time

11:0 min

For efficiency scores
Your personal transit improvements
you wvettun for imo the queue.

Transit Score	8.3
Countdown	72

U-tan
 ES00r r2
 Aisen S6

Personalized efficiency path

U-tan
 ES00r r2
 Aisen S6

AI's mechanistic approach to life reinforces our human mechanistic approach to life. Expect more **rigid mechanistic, goal-oriented** and **functionalistic** approaches in society.

Predictive Analytics, Optimization Metrics, Efficiency First

Dr Joel Vos
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<https://joelvoss.com>

10:48

Tuesday, Oct 26

 AMAZON • Now

now

Your delivery is arriving today
Amazon is delivering: **Your
New Meaning in Life*. This item
is expected to be delivered
by *Royal Mail later today,
between 11:15 AM and 1:15 PM.
Track your package: [https://
amzn.to/3gH1X9J](https://amzn.to/3gH1X9J)



Dr. Joel Vos

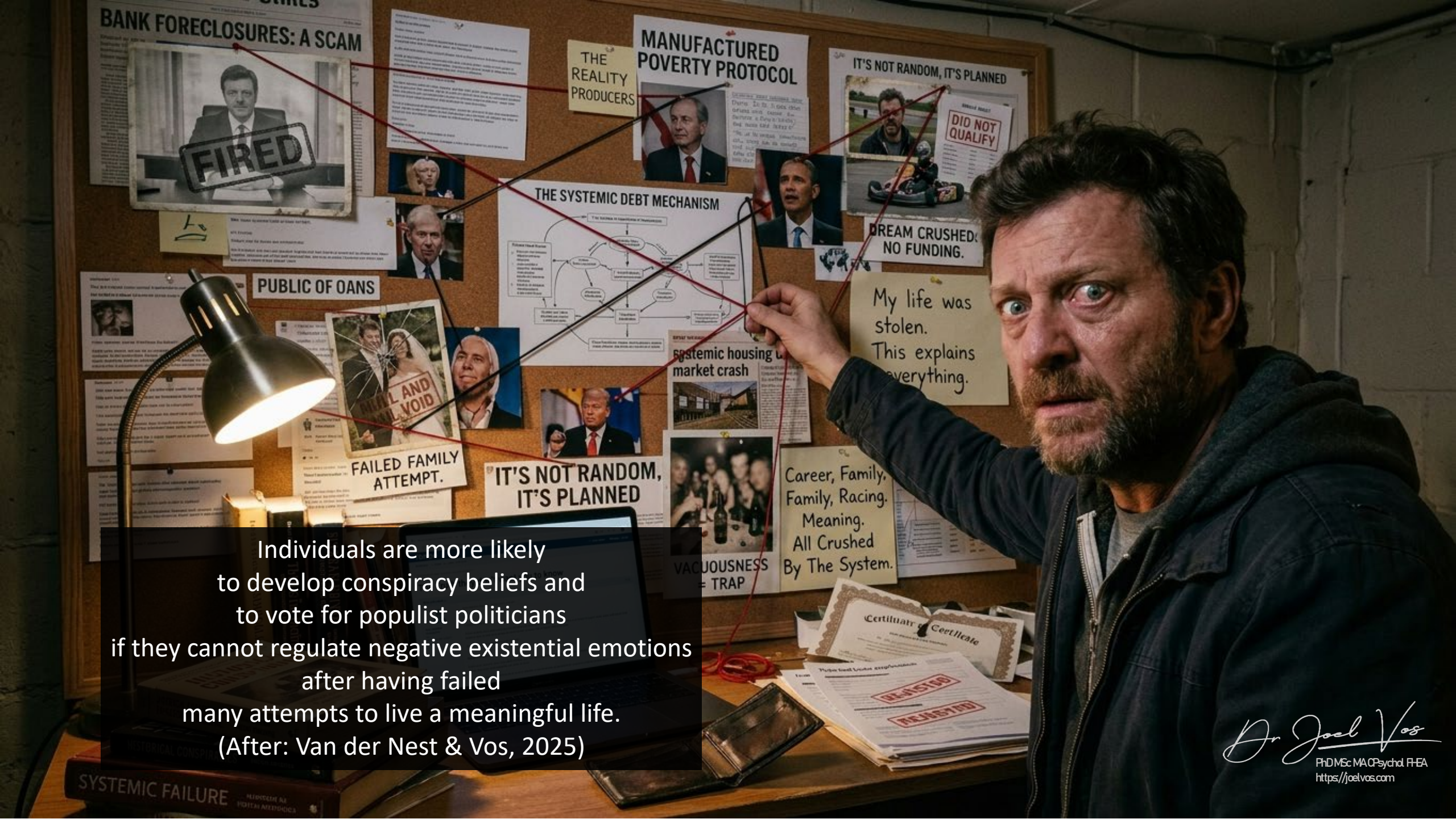
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Be critical of simplistic mechanistic and traditional-conformist "solutions".

Follow systematic science of meaning and purpose.
Not pop science.





Individuals are more likely to develop conspiracy beliefs and to vote for populist politicians if they cannot regulate negative existential emotions after having failed many attempts to live a meaningful life.
(After: Van der Nest & Vos, 2025)

SYSTEMIC FAILURE

THE REALITY PRODUCERS

MANUFACTURED POVERTY PROTOCOL

IT'S NOT RANDOM, IT'S PLANNED

BANK FORECLOSURES: A SCAM

FIRED

DID NOT QUALIFY

DREAM CRUSHED, NO FUNDING.

PUBLIC OF OANS

THE SYSTEMIC DEBT MECHANISM

My life was stolen. This explains everything.

WEDDING VOID

systemic housing market crash

FAILED FAMILY ATTEMPT.

IT'S NOT RANDOM, IT'S PLANNED

Career, Family, Family, Racing, Meaning, All Crushed By The System.

VACUOUSNESS = TRAP

Certituar of Certificate

REGISTERED REGISTERED

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Unrealised meanings
can lead to
radicalisation &
extremism.

Simple political meanings start to appeal to people who have repeatedly failed to live a meaningful life in a complex context.



Populists highlight unrealised meanings, increase the sense of threat, increase the pain, and then offer quick solutions.





The manosphere is an extreme attempt for existentially desperate men to find meaning in a meaningless world.



Gangs provide meaning
in a societal battle for meaning.



Vicious cycles in conflict happen when people threaten each other's meaningful everyday life in response to threats by the other to their meaningful everyday life.

LEAVE ME ALONE!
I JUST WANT MY EVERYDAY MEANING IN LIFE.

STOP THREATENING ME!
I AM JUST PROTECTING MY EVERYDAY MEANING.

- Fact 1. Follow your meanings.
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- Fact 4. Use critical intuition.
- Fact 5. Live meaningfully despite life's inevitable challenges.
- Fact 6. Know the context of your meanings.
- Fact 7. Differentiate authentic meanings from existential fast food.
- Fact 8. Overcome polarisation by living meaningfully & having existential compassion.



**DIRECTION
FOSTERS DIALOGUE**



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**DRIFT DEMANDS
A SCAPEGOAT**

A person with a compass seeks a fellow traveller; a person without one seeks an enemy. Direction fosters dialogue, but drift demands a scapegoat. (Everybody can avoid polarisation and extremism by developing meaning in their life and existential compassion for others.)

Our dignity / meanings are not opposites

Meaning 1.0./2.0.

E.g., Romans: 'dignitas':
meaning-makers versus meaning-followers
(not inherently meaningful, can be disposed)
E.g., Enlightenment 'personal life goals'
E.g., neoliberal blaming

Your dignity



My dignity

Meaning 3.0.

Ubuntu
E.g., Desmond Tutu


Your dignity



My dignity

Societal
dignity

I AM
BECAUSE
WE ARE

A photograph of two men in a crowd, smiling and looking at each other. The man on the left is wearing a dark beanie and a green jacket, holding a white sign with a large black letter 'A'. The man on the right is wearing a brown jacket and a grey hoodie, holding a brown cardboard sign with a large black letter 'B'. Both men have their hands on their chests. The background is a blurred crowd of people.

Our world needs existential compassion
to prevent being divided by opinions
and instead connect and support each other
in our human wish to live a meaningful life.

RESTRICTED
AREA

NO PASADOTAS EHO
SINGIENKJE OADU
JANTH MOE PASAALYDARA
MADATUJ NOSTOM

RESTRICTED
AREA

NO PASADOTAS EHO
SINGIENKJE OADU
JANTH MOE PASAALYDARA
MADATUJ NOSTOM

BORDER
PATROL

All it takes to overcome polarisation
is connecting with our HEARTS.

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Existential Compassion: HEARTS components

- H – Human dignity respects a person's inherent dignity, which encompasses their inalienable worth and value as a human being, enabling them to live a meaningful life with full authority to experience, appraise, envision, and attempt to realize their meanings on their own terms. This is grounded in our shared human aspiration to live meaningfully (e.g., Internally reclaim dignity e.g., self-compassion; Externally reclaim dignity (e.g., compensation)
- E – Embeddedness in a social context each person's unique meaning-making attempts are shaped by the resources, narratives, and social dynamics of their position in society, their social networks, and their personal life situations
- A – Attempts at meaning-making A person's beliefs, attitudes, and actions are genuine attempts to construct a meaningful life through strategies of realizing, re-envisioning, re-appraising, and re-experiencing in response to their context
- R – Reconstructing meanings and reconciliation a genuine commitment to supporting constructive meaning-making respecting everyone's dignity. This is grounded in a fundamental belief in people's potential for change and accountability within the constraints of their specific context, and an intuitive trust and hope in the empathic construction process itself (e.g., Truth and Reconciliation commissions Forgiveness)
- T – Truth telling honest, compassionate truth-telling. We do not treat a person with dignity if we unrealistically condone their violence or demonize them and fail to address key aspects of their life story, including how their meaning-making may have impacted and hurt others, and how others have impacted and hurt them. Truth-telling requires safety to speak about suffering without the threat of condemnation and punitive measures. This approach is grounded in recognizing our universal human imperfections and contextual limitations
- S – Safety, safeness and fairness Individuals will only tell their full, true, contextual story and consider meaning reconstruction and reconciliation if they feel safe to do so. This does not merely require negative safety such as preventing abuse, violence and condemnation. also requires positive safeness (facilitating integrative Storytelling) and offering resources to actively recognize human dignity and empower individuals to realize their human dignity



Existential Compassion during UK anti-immigrant/anti-Muslim riots 2024/2025

H –
Human dignity

We share our human desire to live a meaningful life, and be respected in our dignity in how we live our lives.

E – Embeddedness in a social context

Your meaning-making is the result from your context

A –
Attempts at meaning-making

Your opinions and actions are your attempt to live a meaningful life – even if these attempts are ineffective or hurting others.

R – Reconstructing meanings and reconciliation

We try to reconstruct and reconcile where our opinions and meanings may differ and challenge or hurt each other.

T –
Truth telling

I tell the truth about how I have hurt others/you, and I invite you to do the same.

S –
Safety, safeness and fairness

For beneficial meaning-making, we need safety (=absence of threat/primary appraisal), safeness (=positive, empowered sense/secondary appraisal), and fair distribution of resources (=tertiary appraisal)

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- Fact 8. Overcome polarisation by living meaningfully & having existential compassion.
- Fact 9. Take responsibility for your life: if you do not, nobody will.

We are not given
an instruction manual at birth.
We need to write and rewrite this ourselves.



Learn about meaning and purpose

OUR TEACHERS TEACH US HOW TO DO MATHS AND LANGUAGE, OUR PARENTS TEACH US HOW TO BEHAVE, AND OUR GOVERNMENTS TEACH US HOW TO PAY OUR TAXES, BUT NOBODY TEACHES US TO LIVE A MEANINGFUL LIFE.
(Everybody deserves to be taught and get the resources to live meaningfully.)

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Develop your skills and commitment

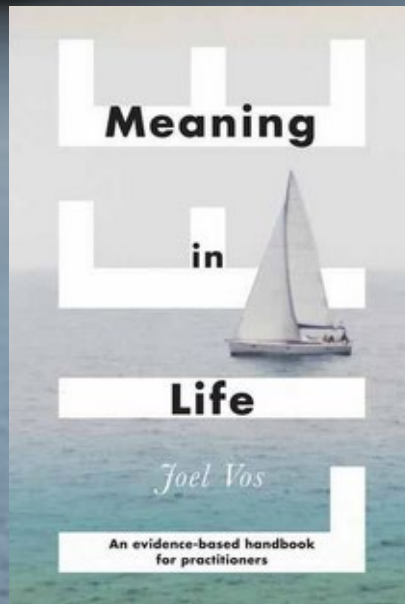
A map of life is useless without the will to enter the landscape and the skill to navigate the terrain.

(Everybody needs practical skills and commitment.)

Do not reinvent the wheel:
use evidence-based interventions

Review of all
intervention
research:
Vos & Vitali, 2019,
J Pall Supp Care

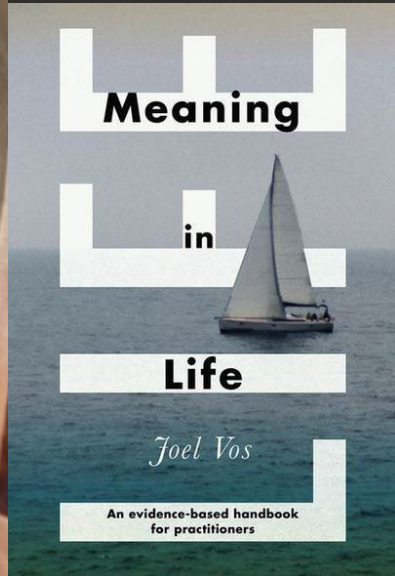
Book based on
review + practical:
Vos, Meaning in Life,
2018



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Vos & Vitali 2019: Systematic review & meta-analysis of meaning interventions

Vos 2018: Detail these evidence-based interventions, competencies and 10 session treatment manual



	Overview of topics of each of the 10 sessions	Typical steps within each session
Introduction & relevance	1. Introduction: what is meaning and why could this be relevant?	A. Introduction: aim and agenda for today, looking back at last week's session
	2. Assessment of meaning: how do we experience meaning, and how has this changed?	B. Emotional check-in: exploring any important developments since the last session, and re-connecting with each other
	3. Resilience as meaning: how can we cope in a meaningful way with challenges in life and specifically with the disease?	C. Didactics & group discussion: explanation of theory, usually interactive with examples from the group
Six types of meaning	4. Materialistic and hedonistic meanings: how can we experience this as meaningful?	D. Guided experiential exercise: an experiential or mindfulness exercise is used to help focus on inner experiences instead of merely theoretically speaking about meaning
	5. Self-oriented meanings: how can we experience this as meaningful?	E. Guided self-reflective exercise: the experiential exercise flows automatically into an exercise in which the clients are asked to reflect on some questions related to the didactics of the day (e.g. 'Find examples of moments that felt particularly meaningful.')
	6. Social meanings: how can we experience this as meaningful?	F. Self-expression: clients are invited to share their experiences
	7. Larger meanings: how can we experience this as meaningful?	G. Self-evaluation: clients are invited to evaluate in an individual exercise followed by a group discussion what was the most meaningful aspect of today, and decide on possible changes in daily life
	8. Being-here as meaning: how can we experience this as meaningful??	H. Session evaluation: clients are invited to evaluate today's session and write down 'the three most important messages of today'
Applying in daily life	9. Doing meaning in daily life: how can we apply meaning daily life: how can we set goals, create a plan, make changes, cope with challenges, evaluate and adjust our goals?	I. Ending: preview of next session and homework
	10. Ending and starting: what can we use from these sessions in daily life, and how can we continue living a meaningful life?	

Theory

Experiential exploration & expression

Conclusions & decisions

Preview & homework

Become a teacher in meaningful education

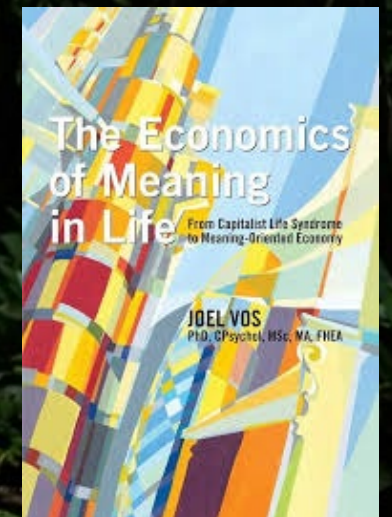
Our definition of meaningful education: short version



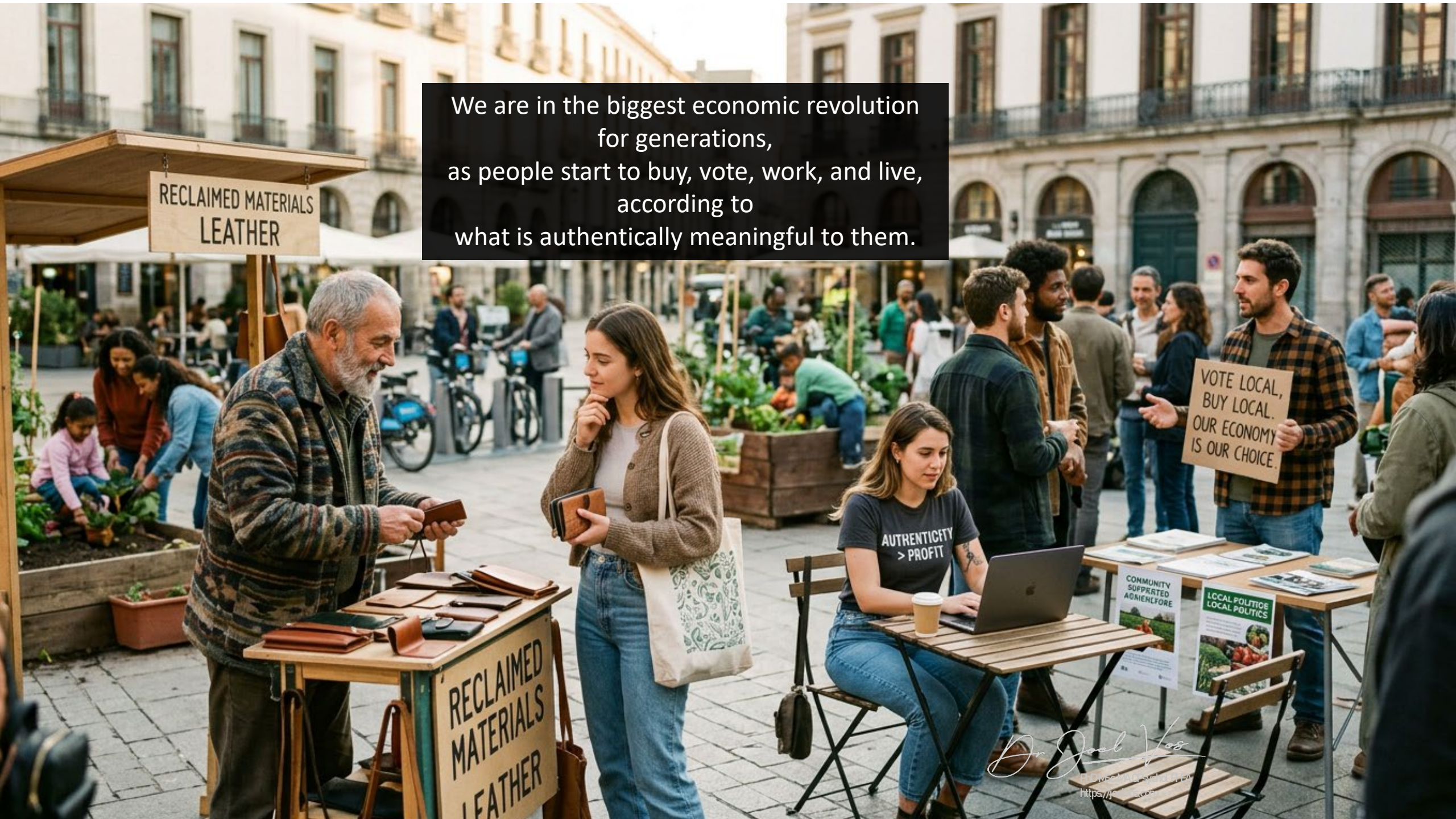
Meaningful education is a holistic approach that

- (1) intentionally focuses on the diverse meanings that education may have for all stakeholders (e.g., learners, educators, policy-makers),
 - (2) leverages meaning as motivation,
 - (3) recognizes the broader contexts in which learners, educators and the education system are embedded,
 - (4) actively supports all stakeholders to identify, express and negotiate the various meanings that education may have for them,
 - (5) enriches their overall meaning-making in the current lives of stakeholders,
 - (6) while empowering to develop their meaning-making skills for meaningful lives in future,
 - (7) cultivates compassion for the various meanings of self, others and their relationships,
 - (8) empowers societal contribution,
 - (9) stimulates individuals to envision and realize multiple, diverse examples of meaning in life,
 - (10) balances critical thinking with intuitive wisdom,
 - (11) adapted to the learners' unique developmental stages,
 - (12) promotes psychological, physical wellbeing and flourishing in life and society.
- (Draft definition by the Meaning And Purpose Education Network)*

Become a meaning-oriented economist.



We are in the biggest economic revolution for generations, as people start to buy, vote, work, and live, according to what is authentically meaningful to them.



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Fight against Purpose-washing.

**FIGHT AGAINST
PURPOSE-WASHING**

CORPORATE LIES, NOT CLIMATE ACTION

**BE REAL,
NOT
RE-BRANDED**

**WE SEE
THROUGH
THE
GREENWASH**

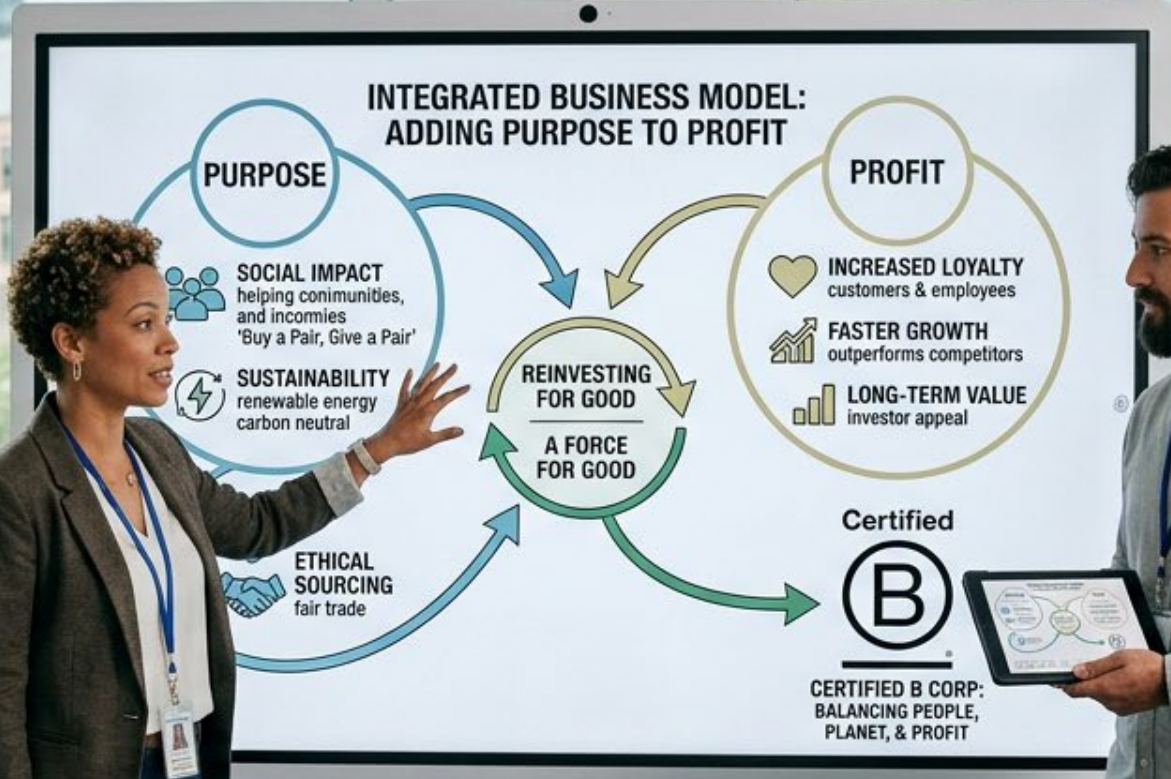
**WE SEE
THROUGH THE
GREENWASH**

**PROFITS
OVER
PURPOSE**

**PROFITS
OVER
PURPOSE**

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Become a purpose-driven business
(and create both more purpose and profit).



Prescribe meaning in mental and physical health care.



NHS
National Medic services
Prosenpdon

**MEANING
IN LIFE**

Doseage: Seek daily.
Refill: Non-essential,
follow intuition.
Dr. S. Jenkins

Dr. Joel Vos
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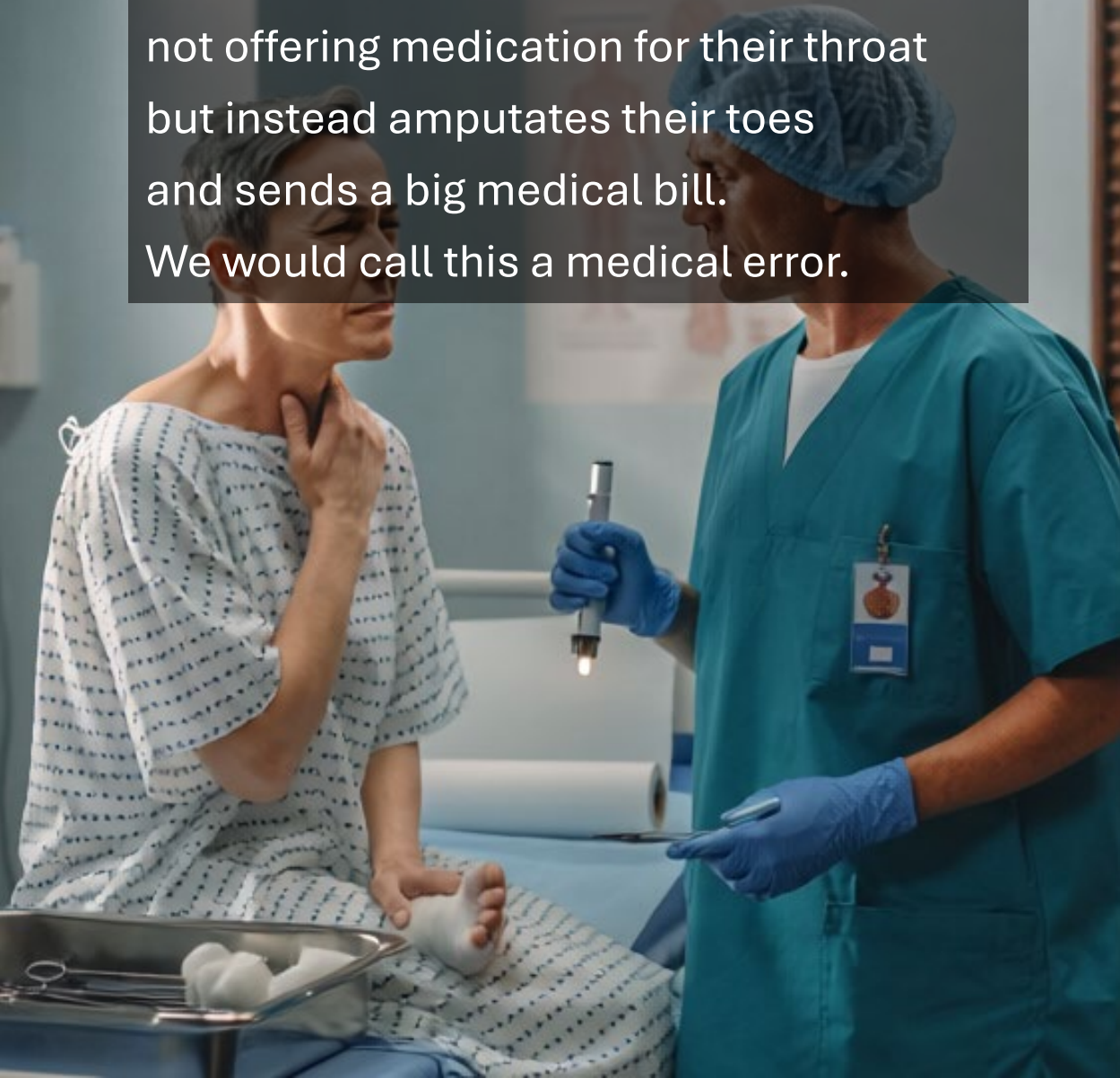
A sense of meaning
helps to calm down the autonomous nervous system
reduce stress levels
improve cardiovascular health
boost the immune system
support recovery from physical diseases.

Dear Mr. Smith,
I know it can seem like you're missing something when you're hospitalized, but it's not. You're not missing anything. You're just in a different place.
Love,
Joel Vos

Dr. Joel Vos

Ph.D. in Health & Behavior
<https://joelvos.com>

Imagine a patient has a sore throat.
Their doctor responds by
not offering medication for their throat
but instead amputates their toes
and sends a big medical bill.
We would call this a medical error.



Imagine a citizen feels frustrated
because they lack the skills and resources
to live the meaningful life they envision.
Their politicians respond by
not offering these skills and resources, but instead
punish them for expressing these frustrations
and use their anger to make them vote for them.
We should call this a political error.



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GLOBAL LEADERSHIP ANCHORED IN PURPOSE

BEYOND POWER: A MEANINGFUL FUTURE FOR ALL

FOUNDATIONS FOR A PURPOSEFUL WORLD

Become a leader of meaning and purpose

GLOBAL FORUM:
A COMMITMENT TO A
MEANINGFUL FUTURE

MEANING AND
PURPOSE FOR
EVERYONE

LIVING A
MEANINGFUL LIFE
IS A HUMAN RIGHT

PURPOSE-DRIVEN
COLLECTIVE
ACTION

GLOBAL ETHICS
THROUGH
MEANING

VIKTOR
FRANKL'S
'MAN'S SEARCH
FOR MEANING',
KEY TO
GLOBAL
PURPOSE

MEANING
AND
PURPOSE
FOR ALL
PEOPLE



MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING
VIKTOR FRANKL'S VISION FOR ALL

VIKTOR FRANKL'S
'MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING':
A GLOBAL FOUNDATION

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- Fact 8. Overcome polarisation by living meaningfully & having existential compassion.
- Fact 9. Take responsibility for your life: if you do not, nobody will.
- Fact 10. Be a rebel by living a meaningful life in a meaningless world.

ALBERT CAMUS: THREE RESPONSES TO THE ABSURD WORLD



1. PHYSICAL AND MENTAL SUICIDE


2. PHILOSOPHICAL SUICIDE
(GIVING UP FREE WILL & CRITICAL THINKING
TO EXTREMIST POPULISM & POLARIZATION)

3. REBELLION OF THE HEART AND SOUL

REFUSE SUICIDE
REFUSE KILLING
REBELLION = MEANINGFUL LIFE & BUILDING COMMUNITIES

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A man in a grey suit is holding a human heart in his hands, presenting it to a group of people in a formal, wood-paneled room. The group includes an older man in a dark blue suit who is looking at the heart with a serious expression, a woman in a dark suit who has her hand to her chin in a thoughtful or concerned pose, and another woman in a green suit who looks on with a worried expression. In the background, other people in suits and a police officer are visible, suggesting a high-stakes or official environment.

**Lobby for each person
to live a meaningful life:**

1. share positive visions for a meaningful society;
2. remove societal threats to people's meaning in everyday life;
3. offer people resources (internal skills, opportunities);
4. teach emotion regulation and existential compassion.

To change the world, analyse:

1. who are the powerholders needed for social change
2. what is meaningful to them
3. how could your idea be meaningful to them?

(Vos, 2020: Conditions and Mechanisms of Social Change model, based on a systematic review of meaning in life in 362 uprisings and social movements in the 20th century)



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Effective social movements:

1. Aim for social and large types of meaning
2. Stimulate critical thinking and listening to authentic intuition
3. Stimulate activists to have five or more diverse meanings and good emotion regulation to cope with unrealised meanings.

(Vos, 2020: Conditions and Mechanisms of Social Change model, based on a systematic review of meaning in life in 362 uprisings and social movements in the 20th century)

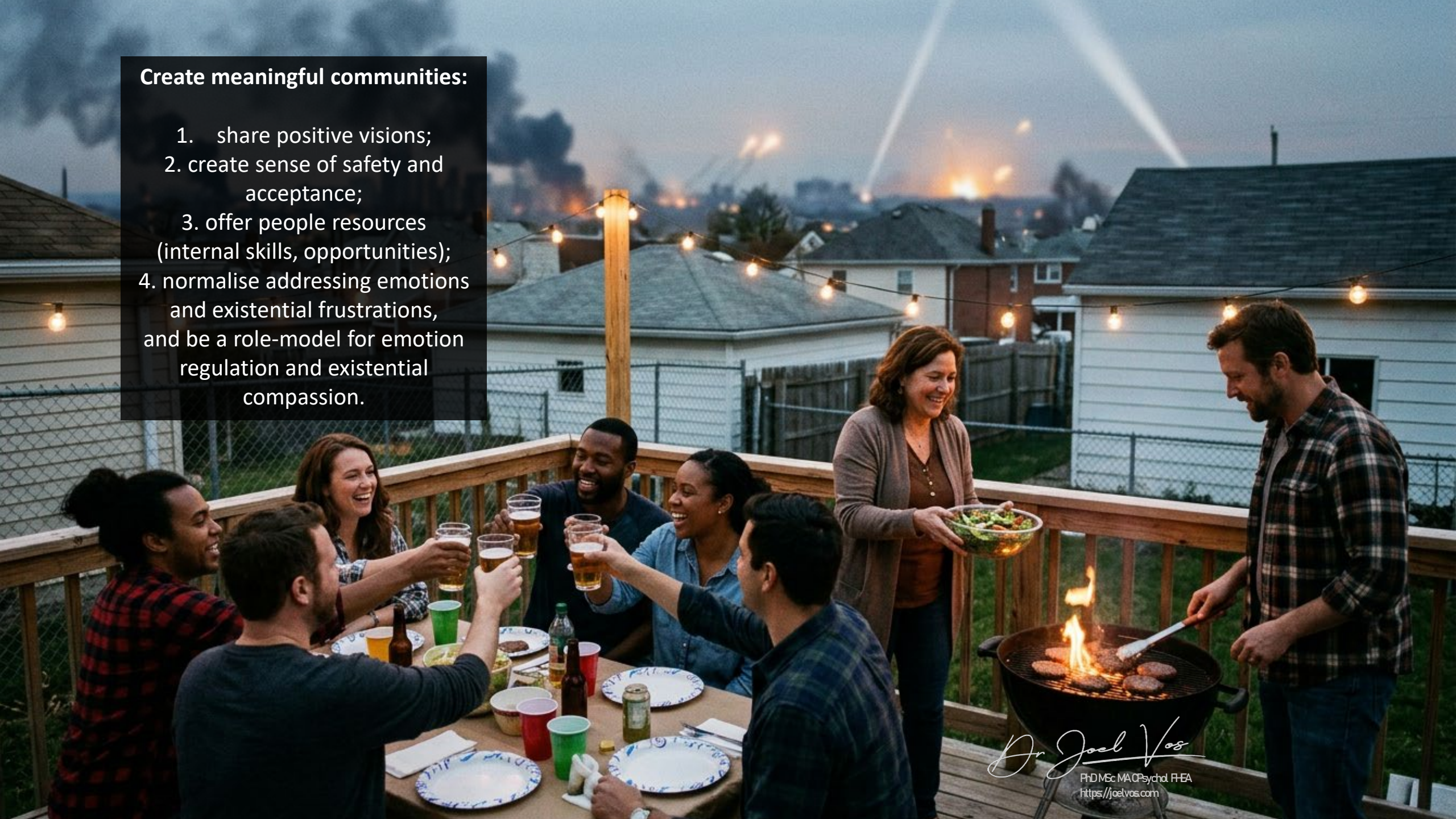


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Create meaningful communities:

1. share positive visions;
2. create sense of safety and acceptance;
3. offer people resources (internal skills, opportunities);
4. normalise addressing emotions and existential frustrations, and be a role-model for emotion regulation and existential compassion.



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Being a rebel starts in everyday life

Living a meaningful life
in a meaningless system
is the ultimate act of
personal rebellion against the system.

Because this individual
shows the emptiness of the system
and reminds the people around them
of the revolutionary dream of a system
in which everyone can live a meaningful life.

Therefore, individuals living a meaningful life
are the largest threats to dictators and fascists.
Frightened powerholders will allow individuals
to suffer and to suppress their suffering with pills or hedonism,
but they close churches, media, psychotherapy, music, and schools,
and replace these with propaganda about their own meanings.
They monopolise the methods of mass production of meaning.

Therefore, we need to declare living a meaningful life
an inalienable human right.
Because everybody deserves
a meaningful life.

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Everything can be taken from me but
my dreams about a better world.

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What now?

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Homework exercise:

At the end of each day, write down the three most meaningful moments of the day. After two weeks, notice any important patterns. Ask yourself what you can do to have more of these important meanings in your life.

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FAMILY MEANINGFUL ACTIVITIES PLAN

YEARLY ADVENTURE



- Summer Camping Trip to national park!
- Host Neighborhood Block Party

MONTHLY HIGHLIGHTS

July:
Volunteer at the Animal Shelter

August:
Beach day trip with cousins

September:
Learn to trip with cousins

September:
Learn to bake a pie together

September:
Learn to bake a pie together

WEEKLY CONNECTION

- Friday Family Movie Night
- Sunday Hike & Picnic
- Board Game Tournament

DAILY JOY

- Read together before bed
- Family walk after dinner
- Share "highs & lows" at dinner

Homework exercise (2)

Plan meaningful activities:
At least...

- One huge meaning per year;
- One large meaning per month;
- One medium meaning per week;
- One small meaning per day.

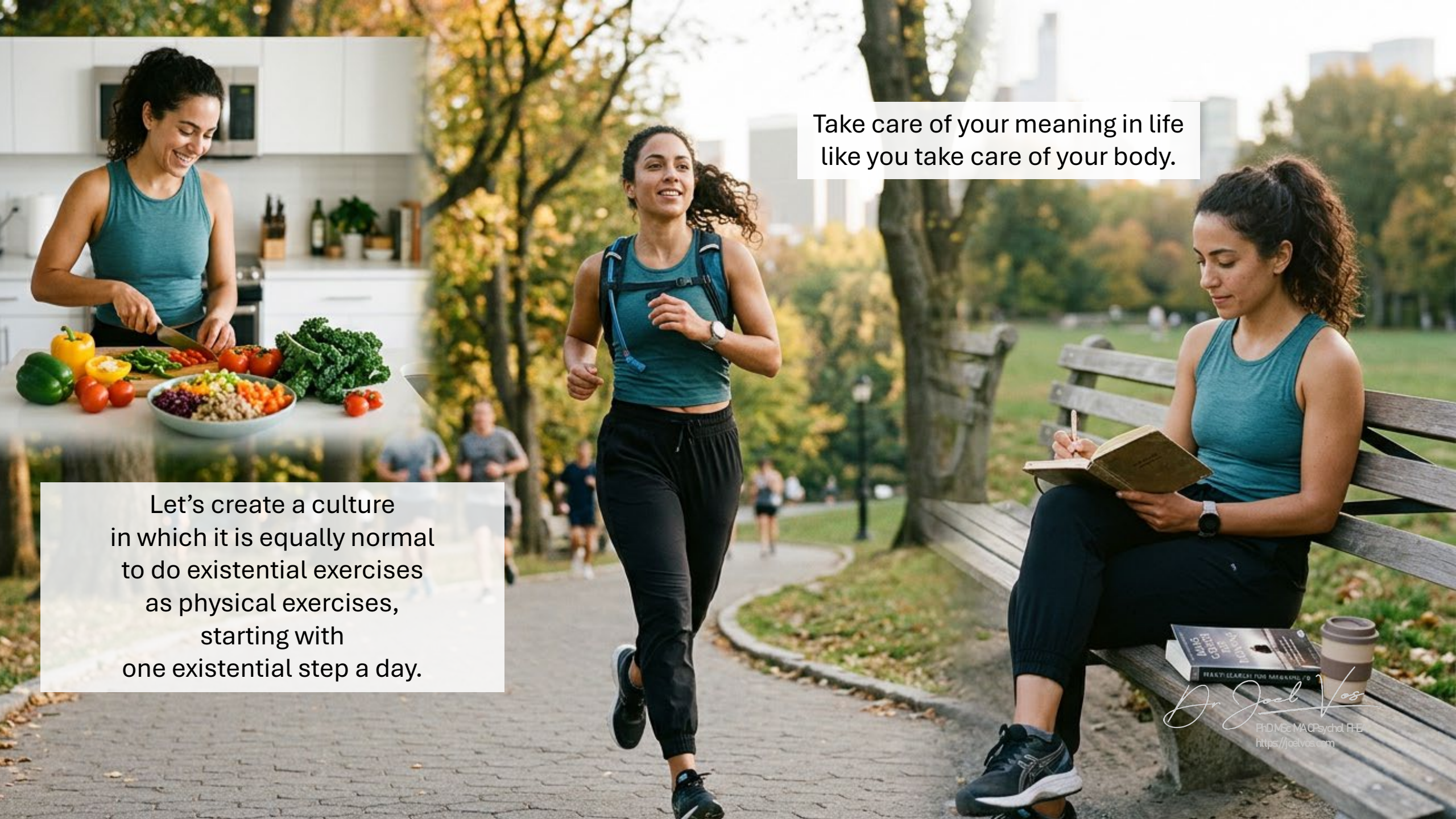
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<https://www.joellevoss.com>

Homework exercise (3)

Surround yourself with reminders of your meaning:
Put family photos on your office desk,
Pin the concert ticket forever on your kitchen board,
Use screensavers of your loved ones,
Make photos of meaningful moments.



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Take care of your meaning in life like you take care of your body.

Let's create a culture in which it is equally normal to do existential exercises as physical exercises, starting with one existential step a day.

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