ATTAINMENT & ATTUNEMENT

Finding Value in What We Accomplish & How We Experience Life

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THE STARTING POINT | THERE'S MORE THAN ONE WAY TO EXPERIENCE SUCCESS

We often measure our days by what we've accomplished.

The tasks completed. Goals reached. Responsibilities managed. Problems solved. Progress made.

These achievements matter. They help us develop capabilities, create opportunities, meet responsibilities, and experience satisfaction.

But not everything meaningful produces a measurable result.

Sometimes the value comes from taking a walk, stretching, spending time in nature, connecting with someone, helping another person, creating something, or simply enjoying an experience without needing to accomplish anything.

We might spend an entire day being productive and still feel depleted or disconnected.

Or spend an afternoon doing very little that we can measure, yet feel restored, connected, and satisfied.

Attainment focuses on what we accomplish.

Attunement focuses on what we notice, experience, nurture, and connect with.

Both can contribute to a meaningful life.

The opportunity isn't to choose one over the other. It's to broaden how we recognize success, satisfaction, growth, and well-being.

UNDERSTAND ATTAINMENT & ATTUNEMENT

What We Accomplish & How We Experience Life

Attainment and attunement offer two complementary ways of engaging with our lives. One emphasizes outcomes and progress. The other emphasizes awareness, connection, and the quality of our experiences.

Neither is inherently more valuable.

WHAT TO EXPLORE

Attainment | Accomplishing & Achieving

Attainment involves pursuing goals, completing responsibilities, developing capabilities, and creating tangible outcomes. Examples include advancing in a career, completing a project, improving fitness, learning a skill, managing finances, or accomplishing something personally meaningful.

Attainment can provide direction, satisfaction, confidence, and a sense of competence.

Attunement | Noticing & Experiencing

Attunement involves paying attention to our internal experiences, relationships, surroundings, and what contributes to our well-being. Examples include yoga, stretching, spending time outdoors, listening to music, connecting with others, reflecting, or engaging in acts of kindness.

These experiences may not produce a measurable achievement, but they can provide meaning, enjoyment, connection, or restoration.

Attunement doesn't always mean relaxation or feeling good. Sometimes it involves recognizing fatigue, sadness, frustration, or an unmet need.

The Same Activity Can Offer Both

Consider hiking. Attainment might involve completing a challenging trail, improving endurance, or reaching a destination.

Attunement might involve noticing the environment, enjoying the movement, connecting with someone, or appreciating the experience.

Neither diminishes the other.

Autonomy, Competence & Relatedness

Self-Determination Theory, developed by psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, identifies three basic psychological needs associated with motivation and well-being:

- **Autonomy:** Experiencing choice and ownership in our actions.
- **Competence:** Feeling capable, effective, and able to develop skills.
- **Relatedness:** Experiencing connection, belonging, and care.

Both attainment and attunement can support these needs in different ways.

The objective isn't simply to accomplish more or experience more. It's to recognize what supports our psychological needs and makes life meaningful.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How do I typically define a successful or worthwhile day?
- Which experiences provide satisfaction through accomplishment?
- Which experiences feel meaningful even without a measurable outcome?
- How well does my current life support autonomy, competence, and connection?

THE OPPORTUNITY: Recognize that accomplishment and meaningful experience are complementary contributors to well-being.

RECOGNIZE HOW WE DEFINE SUCCESS

Achievement, Identity & the Hedonic Treadmill

Our definitions of success influence where we direct our attention, energy, and time. For some, success is closely connected to productivity, achievement, financial stability, or recognition.

These can be meaningful pursuits.

However, difficulty can arise when accomplishment becomes our primary measure of personal worth or satisfaction.

WHAT TO EXPLORE

Our Metrics of Success

We often use measurable outcomes to evaluate progress. Did I finish? Improve? Earn more? Reach the goal? Complete the task?

These metrics can be useful.

But they don't capture everything that contributes to a meaningful life.

We might also consider whether we experienced connection, enjoyment, curiosity, restoration, or opportunities to act in ways that reflect our values.

The Hedonic Treadmill | When the Goalposts Keep Moving

Hedonic adaptation describes our tendency to adjust to changes in circumstances, including positive achievements.

We pursue something meaningful, accomplish it, experience satisfaction, and eventually adapt to the new circumstances.

Then our attention may shift toward the next goal.

For example: *Get promoted → Enjoy the achievement → Adjust to the new role → Focus on the next promotion*.

This doesn't mean accomplishments lack value or that satisfaction always disappears.

The concern is when we're continually pursuing the next achievement without allowing ourselves to appreciate what we've already experienced or accomplished.

When Achievement Becomes Identity

Being ambitious, productive, dependable, and capable can be genuine strengths.

But when our sense of worth depends primarily on achievement, rest may feel unproductive, mistakes may feel threatening, and unfinished tasks may overshadow everything we've accomplished.

Consider whether your identity includes who you are and how you engage with life—not only what you produce.

Recognizing the Experience of Achievement

Sometimes we move so quickly toward the next goal that we overlook the experience of reaching the current one.

Pausing to recognize effort, celebrate progress, or appreciate what an accomplishment means can help us experience more of its value.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What metrics do I use to determine whether I'm successful?
- How long do I allow myself to appreciate an accomplishment?
- Do I feel uncomfortable when I'm not being productive?
- What parts of my identity and self-worth exist beyond achievement?

THE OPPORTUNITY: Develop a broader definition of success that recognizes accomplishments without making them the sole measure of a meaningful life.

EXPLORE DIFFERENT FORMS OF ATTUNEMENT

Recognizing What Connects, Nourishes & Engages Us

Attunement isn't one particular activity. It involves becoming more aware of our experiences, needs, relationships, and surroundings. Different experiences may provide different forms of value.

What feels meaningful or restorative for one person may not serve the same purpose for another.

WHAT TO EXPLORE

Physical Attunement | Connecting With Our Bodies

Stretching, yoga, walking, gentle movement, mindful breathing, or resting can provide opportunities to notice physical sensations, tension, energy, and capacity. The objective isn't necessarily improving performance.

Sometimes it's simply becoming more aware of what our bodies need.

Emotional Attunement | Understanding Our Inner Experience

Journaling, reflection, meditation, quiet time, or talking with someone can help us recognize and process our emotional experiences.

This might involve identifying what we're feeling, understanding what matters, or recognizing when something needs attention.

Relational Attunement | Connecting With Others

Listening, sharing experiences, expressing affection, spending time together, and demonstrating care can contribute to meaningful connection.

Attunement may involve recognizing another person's experience and responding with curiosity, empathy, or support.

Environmental Attunement | Connecting With Our Surroundings

Spending time in nature, gardening, visiting a park, or simply sitting outdoors can provide opportunities to engage with our environment.

Sometimes referred to as *green therapy* or nature-based experiences, these activities may support restoration, perspective, and well-being.

Social & Altruistic Attunement | Contributing Beyond Ourselves

Volunteering, helping a neighbor, mentoring, offering support, or engaging in acts of generosity can provide meaning and connection.

The value isn't necessarily in what we accomplish, but in the experience of contributing to something beyond ourselves.

Creative & Experiential Attunement | Enjoyment, Play & Curiosity

Music, art, cooking, reading, exploring, playing, or trying something unfamiliar can create opportunities for enjoyment and engagement. Not everything needs to be productive, improved, or mastered.

Sometimes the experience itself is enough.

The Activity Isn't the Whole Story

Yoga can become a performance goal. Volunteering can become another obligation. A nature walk can become a race to meet a step count.

The same activity may support attainment, attunement, or both depending on our intentions and how we engage.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Which activities help me feel connected, engaged, or restored?
- Which forms of attunement receive little attention in my life?
- Do I sometimes turn enjoyable experiences into performance requirements?
- What activities would I choose if there were no outcome to measure?

THE OPPORTUNITY: Expand our awareness of the different experiences that contribute to meaning, connection, and well-being.

UNDERSTAND WHAT NOURISHES US

Recovery, Restoration, Enjoyment & Savoring

Not all meaningful experiences serve the same purpose. Sometimes we need to recover from demands. Sometimes we need connection or enjoyment. Sometimes we need to slow down long enough to recognize what we're experiencing.

Understanding these differences can help us make more intentional choices about how we spend our time.

WHAT TO EXPLORE

Recovery | Replenishing Our Resources

Recovery involves responding to physical, emotional, or cognitive demands. Sleep, rest, reduced stimulation, and time away from responsibilities may help us replenish resources.

Sometimes what we need isn't another activity. It's less demand.

Restoration | Reconnecting With Ourselves

Restorative experiences can help us reconnect with our needs, surroundings, or sense of balance. A quiet walk, time in nature, stretching, or meaningful reflection may provide opportunities to reset.

What feels restorative depends on the individual and their circumstances.

Enjoyment | Making Room for Pleasure & Play

Enjoyment doesn't always need to serve another purpose. We can listen to music, laugh with friends, play a game, or explore something new simply because we enjoy it.

These experiences don't have to improve our productivity to be worthwhile.

Savoring | Appreciating What We're Experiencing

Savoring involves intentionally noticing and appreciating positive experiences.

We can savor something:

- **Before:** Looking forward to an experience.
- **During:** Being present and appreciating what's happening.
- **After:** Reflecting on a meaningful moment or accomplishment.

Savoring can help us experience more of the satisfaction associated with both attainment and attunement.

Rather than immediately moving to the next goal, we might pause to recognize what we've accomplished and what the experience meant to us.

Recognize What You Actually Need

A person who's physically exhausted may need rest rather than social activity. Someone who's isolated may benefit more from connection than solitude. Someone who's overwhelmed may need fewer obligations rather than another wellness practice.

The opportunity is to recognize our needs rather than assuming every activity will provide the same benefit.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- When I'm depleted, what actually helps me recover?
- What experiences provide restoration, enjoyment, or connection?
- How often do I pause to appreciate positive experiences or accomplishments?
- Am I choosing activities based on my needs or because I believe I should be doing them?

THE OPPORTUNITY: Become more intentional about how we nourish ourselves without turning well-being into another achievement requirement.

INTEGRATE DOING, BEING & BECOMING

Creating a Life That Reflects What Matters

Attainment and attunement don't need to compete for our attention. They can complement one another. We can pursue meaningful goals while also making room to experience, appreciate, and connect with our lives.

WHAT TO EXPLORE

DOING | What Am I Accomplishing?

Doing involves responsibilities, goals, actions, and tangible progress. It helps us create structure, develop capabilities, and move toward desired outcomes.

BEING | How Am I Experiencing Life?

Being involves awareness, presence, connection, and engagement. It invites us to recognize the value of experiences beyond what they produce.

BECOMING | Who Am I Cultivating Myself to Be?

Becoming connects our actions and experiences to our values, identity, and personal growth.

For example: Someone who values physical well-being might establish a regular exercise routine (doing), enjoy movement and notice their body's experience (being), and gradually develop a more supportive relationship with their health (becoming).

Self-Achievement Activities | When More Is a Personal Choice

Sometimes we choose to go beyond what's required because doing so provides personal satisfaction, enjoyment, or a sense of accomplishment.

Within shared responsibilities, this additional effort may reflect an individual's preferred standard beyond a mutually agreed baseline that's sufficient for the shared system.

That additional effort can be meaningful without automatically becoming an expectation or obligation for someone else.

For example, one partner may enjoy maintaining an exceptionally organized home while the couple has agreed that a more modest level of organization is sufficient.

The opportunity is to recognize when we're pursuing something because it matters to us—and when we're unintentionally expecting others to adopt our personal standards.

Attainment & Attunement Can Support Each Other

We might set a goal to spend more time outdoors, but the value comes partly from experiencing nature. We might plan regular time with a partner, but the meaningful part is how we connect. We might learn a new skill and experience both the satisfaction of improvement and the enjoyment of the process.

The objective isn't to achieve a perfect balance.

It's to create room for both accomplishment and experience in ways that reflect our needs and values.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Where does my life emphasize doing more than being?
- What goals or activities could provide both attainment and attunement?
- How do my personal standards influence my expectations of myself or others?
- Who am I becoming through the choices and experiences I prioritize?

THE OPPORTUNITY: Integrate accomplishment, meaningful experience, and personal growth rather than treating them as competing priorities.

PRACTICE A MORE COMPLETE DEFINITION OF SUCCESS

Notice, Experiment & Build Meaningful Experiences

Understanding attainment and attunement creates an opportunity to evaluate how we spend our time and what we recognize as valuable. We don't need to abandon goals, reduce ambition, or create an elaborate wellness routine.

Small changes in awareness and intention can help us recognize more of what contributes to a meaningful life.

WHAT TO EXPLORE

Notice What You're Already Doing

Consider how much of your attention is directed toward completing tasks, meeting responsibilities, and achieving goals. Then consider what experiences provide enjoyment, connection, restoration, or meaning.

You may discover that you're already engaging in attunement but rarely recognize its value.

Expand Your Metrics of Success

At the end of the day or week, consider more than what you accomplished.

Ask:

- *What did I accomplish?*
- *What did I experience?*
- *What did I appreciate?*
- *What helped me feel connected or nourished?*
- *What did I learn about myself?*

Create Opportunities Without Adding Pressure

Consider introducing small experiences that support your needs.

- Stretch for a few minutes.
- Spend time outdoors.
- Reconnect with someone.
- Engage in an act of kindness.
- Enjoy an activity without measuring performance.

These aren't assignments to complete. They're possibilities to explore.

Practice Savoring

When something meaningful happens, pause long enough to experience it. Notice the satisfaction of completing something difficult. Appreciate a moment of connection. Reflect on an enjoyable experience.

Allow yourself to recognize what's present before immediately moving toward what's next.

Review & Adjust

Different periods of life may require different priorities. Sometimes attainment needs more attention. Sometimes recovery, connection, or restoration becomes more important.

The objective is flexibility not maintaining a perfect ratio between doing and being.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What did I accomplish recently that deserves acknowledgment?
- What meaningful experience have I overlooked because it didn't produce a tangible outcome?
- What small opportunity for attunement could I create this week?
- How might I recognize success more broadly in my everyday life?

THE OPPORTUNITY: Develop a more complete understanding of success that includes what we accomplish, how we experience life, and what we're cultivating along the way.

CONNECTING ME TO WE & US

Accomplishment, Connection & Shared Experiences

ME | UNDERSTANDING MY NEEDS & PRIORITIES

- How do I define success?
- What helps me experience competence, autonomy, connection, and satisfaction?
- Am I making room for both accomplishment and meaningful experience?

WE | UNDERSTANDING EACH OTHER

- How do we recognize and support each other's goals, efforts, and needs?
- Can we appreciate that different activities provide different forms of nourishment?
- How do we remain attentive and responsive to one another beyond managing responsibilities?

US | CULTIVATING OUR RELATIONSHIP

- Are we primarily focused on what we need to accomplish together?
- How do we create opportunities for play, connection, enjoyment, restoration, and shared experiences?
- What does a meaningful relationship look and feel like beyond completing the responsibilities of life?

WHERE DO I BEGIN?

A Brief Reflection

Consider your experiences over the past week.

ATTAINMENT | What did I accomplish?

- Identify something you completed, improved, learned, or made progress toward.

ATTUNEMENT | What did I experience?

- Identify something that provided connection, enjoyment, meaning, awareness, or restoration.

BECOMING | What am I cultivating?

- Consider how your actions and experiences reflect the person you want to become.

Then ask: **Which of these do I tend to recognize as valuable, and which do I overlook?**

Choose one small opportunity to broaden how you experience success in the coming week.

A FINAL THOUGHT

Goals matter. Achievements matter. Developing capabilities, meeting responsibilities, and making progress can provide meaningful satisfaction.

But a worthwhile life isn't measured only by what we accomplish.

Sometimes the value comes from the experience itself.

- A conversation.
- A walk outdoors.
- An act of kindness.
- A moment of play.
- An opportunity to rest.

Or simply recognizing something meaningful that's already present. We don't need to choose between ambition and enjoyment, accomplishment and connection, or doing and being.

We can make room for both.

Attainment helps us recognize what we're accomplishing.

Attunement helps us recognize what we're experiencing.

Together, they can support a more complete understanding of success, satisfaction, and well-being.

Not everything valuable needs to be accomplished. Some things are valuable because they're experienced.