

Life List Dos & Don'ts

By Jill Smolinski

A life list—a list of things you hope to do before you die—can be a great tool for helping you get more out of each day. Here, some dos & don'ts:

DO put your life list in writing. Experts say the very act of writing down goals increases the chance you'll achieve them.

DO aim for a good number of goals. Between 10 and 50 is typical. Too many, and you may feel overwhelmed—too few, uninspired.

DON'T include a goal because you think you “should.” Yes, many people dream of climbing mountains or visiting exotic locations, but if those types of things don't appeal to you, they'll only get in the way of what does.

DO include different types of goals: ambitious (write a novel, tour Europe, start a business), crazy (dance in your underwear, audition for *American Idol*), fun (go on a roadtrip, make a mud pie), self-improving (get organized, lose 10 pounds), skill-based (learn French, take a cooking lesson), world-changing (volunteer, buy a hybrid car), personal (get married, get a tattoo), risky (skydive, speak in front of at least 50 people), or even give yourself a quest (meet a celebrity, find the best taco stand in town).

DON'T worry if you can't come up with a lot of ideas for your life list at first. Momentum is an amazing force. The more you do, the more you'll want to do. You can add to it as you go.

DO involve other people. Together, you can brainstorm ideas and tackle any shared goals. Plus, with friends checking in on your progress, you'll be less likely to lose steam.

DON'T be vague. If you say, “be a nicer person,” it's hard to know when you can check it off your list—one grumpy day can throw the whole thing off. Try instead, “do a kind gesture for someone I love” or “go a week without yelling.”

DO be realistic. If your goals seem beyond your grasp, you'll stop reaching. Sure, it's great to dream big—after all, if no one envisioned the impossible, we wouldn't have space travel or cures for diseases. But a list you *can* do is a list you *will* do.

DON'T etch your list in stone. That was fine for the Ten Commandments, but a life list will serve you better if it remains a work in progress. Some things are beyond our control. If you lose your hair, for example, “grow a Mohawk” will not only seem ridiculous, but maybe even depressing. It's okay to drop goals when they're no longer relevant to you.

DO consider giving yourself a deadline, at least for some of your items, i.e., one year to check off five things.

DON'T stress yourself out. A life list is supposed to be a catalyst, not a chore.

DO jump-start your life list with at least one task you can do immediately. Try a new food or restaurant. Cuddle puppies at a pet store. Call an old friend. Crossing off a task right away will put things in motion and give you the impetus to keep going.

And lastly, DO have fun with it.

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