

Leeds Older People's Forum

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Time well spent

A Workbook for Men Navigating Retirement and Life Transition

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May 2026

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Welcome

There is a particular kind of life stage that does not always get talked about clearly.

On the surface, it may look like a practical change – stepping away from work, having more time, fewer external demands.

But many men discover that the experience runs deeper than that.

The structure that has quietly held life together for years begins to shift.

Days feel different.

Time feels different.

And sometimes, without warning, familiar ways of coping or staying steady feel less reliable than they once did.

This workbook is for that stage.

Why this workbook exists

For many men, life has been shaped by responsibility, routine, problem-solving, being relied upon, and getting things done.

There has not always been much reason, or time, to stop and reflect.

But when life changes, as it often does in retirement or later years, questions that were once in the background start to come forward:

- What gives my days some shape now?
- What still feels worthwhile?
- What do I want more of from here?
- Why does this feel harder than I expected?

These are not signs that something is wrong.

They are often signs that something important is shifting.

How to use this workbook

This is not a test. There are no right answers to reach.

It is not about dramatic reinvention.

Think of this as a structured space to:

- look back at what has shaped you
- understand what this stage of life is asking of you
- notice what supports your wellbeing
- identify what still gives life meaning
- begin moving forward in a way that feels more deliberate

With thanks to Leeds Community Foundation and Public Health (Leeds City Council) for funding Time Well Spent.



MODULE 1: MY STORY SO FAR

Looking Back to Understand
the Man I Have Become

- Why Looking Back Helps Us Move Forward
- My Life Map
- Significant Moments That Changed Me
- Strengths I Have Built Along The Way
- What My Story Tells Me About Me

Many men reach retirement or later life having spent years - often decades - focused mainly on what needed to be done.

Work.
Family responsibilities.
Practical pressures.
Keeping things moving.

For long stretches of life, there is not always much opportunity to stop and ask deeper questions. The demands of ordinary living tend to take priority, and understandably so.

But when routines begin to change and the pace of life shifts, something interesting often happens.

The past begins to feel more present.

Old memories surface unexpectedly.

Certain decisions make more sense than they once did.

Patterns become easier to spot.

And experiences that seemed simply part of “getting on with things” can start to feel more significant.

This is not about dwelling or becoming stuck in the past.

It is about understanding.

Because the better we understand the pressures, strengths, losses, turning points and habits that have shaped us, the easier it becomes to make sense of where we are now — and what we may need from the years ahead.

This first module is simply an invitation to look back with a little more curiosity than we may usually allow ourselves.

Not to judge.

Not to rewrite.

Just to notice.



Exercise 1.1 Why Looking Back Helps Us Move Forward

Retirement and later-life transitions often create a different kind of mental space.

There may be fewer urgent deadlines.

Fewer people needing immediate answers.

Fewer daily routines running automatically.

That extra space can be welcome.

But it can also feel unfamiliar.

Without the constant forward motion of practical demands, many men notice that older thoughts and reflections begin to surface more readily.

You may find yourself thinking about:

- earlier ambitions
- missed opportunities
- family relationships
- difficult periods
- sacrifices that were made
- things you are proud of
- things you still carry



This is a normal part of life transition.

When the pace slows, the mind often starts taking stock.

Looking back helps because it gives context.

It helps explain:

- why certain changes feel harder than expected
- why some habits are deeply ingrained
- why some losses still carry weight
- why some strengths feel dependable
- why certain values still matter deeply

Without that context, it is easy to feel only confusion.

With that context, things begin to make more sense.

You start to see not just what happened, but what it built in you.

Reflection Prompt

As you begin this workbook, ask yourself:

What parts of my past seem to be asking for attention more than they used to?

A large, empty light blue rectangular area intended for reflection. It is a solid light blue color with rounded corners, occupying the lower half of the reflection prompt section.

Exercise 1.2 My Life Map

One useful way to understand ourselves is to stop viewing life as one long blur and instead break it into recognisable chapters.

Each chapter usually carries its own pressures, priorities, identities and emotional tone.

Some chapters feel expansive.

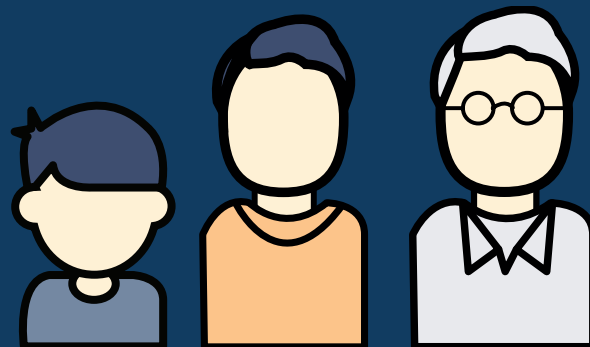
Some feel difficult.

Some pass in a rush.

Some leave a longer mark.

Take a few moments to divide your life into broad sections such as:

- childhood and early family life
- teenage years / early adulthood
- first working years
- partnership / marriage / family-building
- major career phases
- periods of pressure or crisis
- years of change or loss
- retirement / recent years



You do not need exact dates unless useful.

The aim is simply to create a visible map.

Then look across that map and notice:

- Which chapters felt most defining?
- Which chapters felt most demanding?
- Where did you feel most confident?
- Where did you feel least in control?
- Which periods still feel emotionally close?



childhood

teenage years

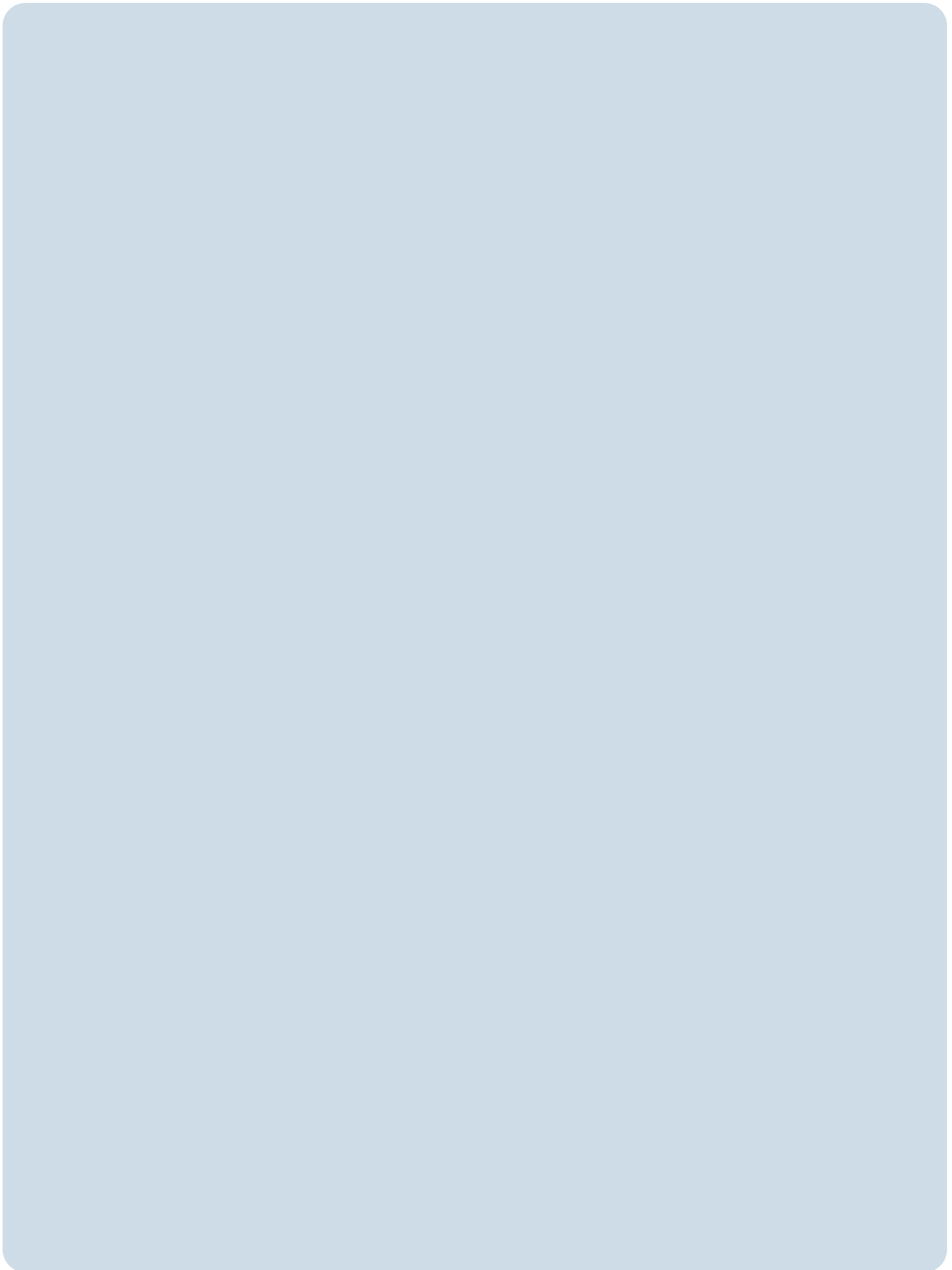
first job

first partner

Workbook Exercise

Create your own life map below.

You may use words, years, arrows or short notes.



Exercise 1.3 Significant Moments That Changed Me

Most lives contain a number of moments that quietly alter the course of who we become.

Some are obvious.

Some are subtle.

Some feel positive.

Some are painful.

Examples might include:

- getting a first serious job
- becoming a parent
- losing someone important
- redundancy or career setback
- illness
- moving house or country
- divorce
- financial pressure
- military service
- caring responsibilities
- retirement itself

These moments matter not only because they happened.

They matter because they often leave behind:

- beliefs
- coping habits
- fears
- confidence
- caution
- gratitude
- determination

Think about three to five moments or periods that changed you in some way.

Then ask:

- what did this experience teach me?
- what did it harden in me?
- what did it strengthen in me?
- what did it make me avoid?
- what did it make me value more?

Workbook Exercise

Significant moment 1:

What changed in me?

Significant moment 2:

What changed in me?

Significant moment 3:

What changed in me?

Exercise 1.4 Strengths I Have Built Along The Way

People often think of strengths as personality traits they either naturally have or do not have. But many of the most useful strengths in later life are not inborn.

They are built.

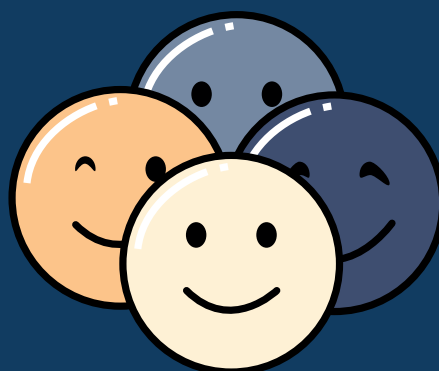
Built through repetition.

Built through necessity.

Built through difficult ordinary years.

Often without much fanfare, men build qualities such as:

- reliability
- persistence
- humour under pressure
- practical competence
- patience
- loyalty
- calmness in emergencies
- problem-solving
- self-discipline
- endurance



Because these qualities become familiar, they are easy to overlook.

But they matter.

Particularly at times of transition.

This stage of life is easier to navigate when we recognise that we are not arriving empty-handed.

We are arriving with resources.

Reflection Prompt

Which strengths have life required me to build?

Which of these still serve me well?

Which strengths do other people probably rely on in me?

Exercise 1.5 What My Story Tells Me About Me

By now, you may already be noticing that certain themes repeat themselves across life.

Perhaps:

- keep going
- stay useful
- do not burden others
- solve the problem
- stay steady
- cope quietly
- keep feelings to yourself
- do what needs doing



These patterns are not random.

They are often the rules we learned – explicitly or implicitly – about how to function.

Some of these rules have been extremely useful.

They may have helped you build a career, support a family, survive difficult years, or become dependable.

But some rules can become restrictive when life changes.

For example:

- The habit of always staying useful can make rest feel uncomfortable.
- The habit of coping quietly can make support feel unnatural.
- The habit of pushing on can make reflection feel unfamiliar.

This is not about abandoning the man you have been.

It is about noticing which internal rules still serve you – and which may need loosening.

Closing Reflection For Module 1

As you finish this section, consider:

What do I understand a little better now about the man life has shaped me into?



MODULE 2: CHANGE, LOSS AND LIFE TRANSITIONS

Understanding Why This
Stage of Life Can Feel
Bigger Than Expected

- Why Retirement Can Feel Bigger Than We Expect
- What Am I Losing? What Am I Gaining?
- The Hidden Losses Of Change
- Where Am I In This Transition?
- Things I Have Not Yet Said About This Change

Retirement is often spoken about in practical terms.

More time.
Less pressure.
Fewer demands.
A chance to slow down.

And sometimes those things are true.



But many men discover that the experience reaches further in than expected.

What looks from the outside like a simple lifestyle change can feel internally much bigger.

That can be confusing.

You may wonder why, after years of looking forward to fewer obligations, things do not simply feel easier.

Why motivation feels less reliable.

Why days can feel strangely flat.

Why there can be an undercurrent of restlessness, irritation, or lack of direction.

Part of the answer is that retirement is rarely only about stopping work.

It is often about the quiet loss of structures that have been holding life together for years.

The loss may include:

- routine
- predictability
- social contact
- visible productivity
- external expectations
- evidence of competence
- a familiar role
- a reason to keep moving

These are not always things we consciously notice while they are there.

But we often notice their absence.

This module is about understanding that absence more clearly.

Not to make retirement sound bleak.

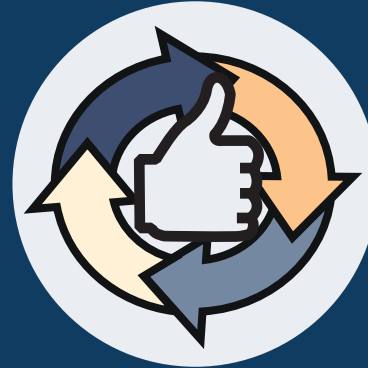
But to explain why adjustment can take longer – and feel more emotionally complicated – than many people expect.

Exercise 2.1 Why Retirement Can Feel Bigger Than We Expect

For years, work quietly does a great deal more than provide income.

It often provides:

- somewhere to go
- people to speak to
- practical problems to solve
- deadlines
- tasks completed
- reasons to get moving
- evidence that the day counted for something



Even jobs that were stressful, tiring or frustrating still tend to supply shape.

And shape matters more than we often realise.

When that structure falls away, men can find themselves not only with more free time, but with far more self-generated time.

That sounds positive in theory.

But in practice, self-generated time asks much more of us.

It asks us to decide:

- What the day is for?
- What matters enough to begin?
- What counts as productive now?
- What creates enough movement to feel engaged?

Without clear answers, time can begin to feel less like freedom and more like drift.

This does not mean retirement was a mistake.

It means the transition deserves more respect than the simple phrase “more free time” allows.

Reflection Prompt

What parts of work or previous routine do I suspect I miss more than I expected?

Exercise 2.2 What Am I Losing? What Am I Gaining?

One of the reasons retirement can feel emotionally confusing is that gains and losses often happen at the same time.



You may genuinely appreciate:

- not being under constant pressure
- more control over your hours
- less commuting
- fewer workplace frustrations
- more opportunity to rest



And at the same time feel:

- less purposeful
- less visible
- less needed
- less mentally switched on
- less connected

Both can be true.

This is important because many men assume that if retirement was “wanted” or “earned,” they should not be feeling loss.

But life transitions do not work that neatly.

Something can be chosen and still involve grieving.

Something can be objectively positive and still involve disorientation.

The aim here is simply honesty.

Not forcing the experience into either “this is great” or “this is terrible.”

Just noticing what is actually happening.

Workbook Exercise

Create two lists:

What feels gained:

What feels lost:

Which losses am I perhaps underestimating because they are less obvious?

Exercise 2.3 The Hidden Losses Of Change

Some losses are obvious.

Loss of a salary.

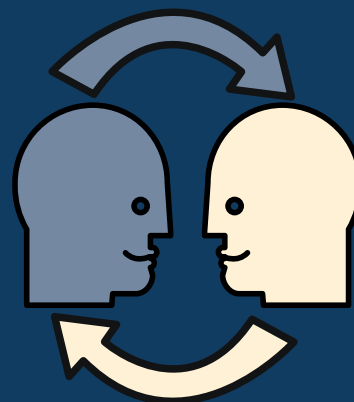
Loss of a title.

Loss of colleagues.

But many of the more psychologically significant losses are quieter.

For example:

- fewer spontaneous conversations
- fewer reasons to leave the house
- fewer small decisions being made for you
- less visible proof of progress
- less structure in the morning
- fewer people depending on your input
- less mental urgency



These things can sound minor when listed.

But together they change the texture of daily life.

They change how quickly a day gets going.

They change how stimulated the mind feels.

They change how accountable we feel.

They change how connected we feel to a wider world.

This is why some men describe retirement not as terrible, but as strangely thinner than expected.

Reflection Prompt

Which small background parts of life seem to have quietly disappeared?

Which of these matter more than I first thought?

Exercise 2.4 Where Am I In This Transition?

Not everyone experiences retirement in the same way.

And even for the same person, feelings can change over time.

Some men initially feel relief.

Then drift.

Some feel novelty.

Then flatness.

Some feel busy at first.

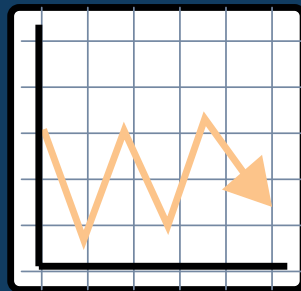
Then restless later.

This is why it can help to think of transition not as one feeling, but as a process.



You may recognise some of the following:

- relief
- novelty
- uncertainty
- drift
- frustration
- questioning
- rebuilding



There is no correct timeline.

The useful question is simply:

Where do I think I am right now?

Because once we can name the stage more honestly, it becomes easier to respond to it appropriately.

Workbook Exercise

Write about the stage that feels most familiar at present.

What tells me I am here?

What do I seem to need most at this stage?

Exercise 2.5 Things I Have Not Yet Said About This Change

Not all reactions to retirement or later-life change are easy to say aloud.

Some feel ungrateful.

Some feel self-indulgent.

Some feel hard to explain.

And so they remain unspoken.

Yet unspoken thoughts still shape mood.

They still shape behaviour.

They still shape confidence.



Examples may include:

- I did not expect to feel this flat
- I miss feeling needed
- I feel guilty that I am not making better use of this time
- I thought I would have settled by now
- I do not quite know what I am doing with myself
- Some days feel longer than I want to admit



There can be relief in simply writing what has remained private.

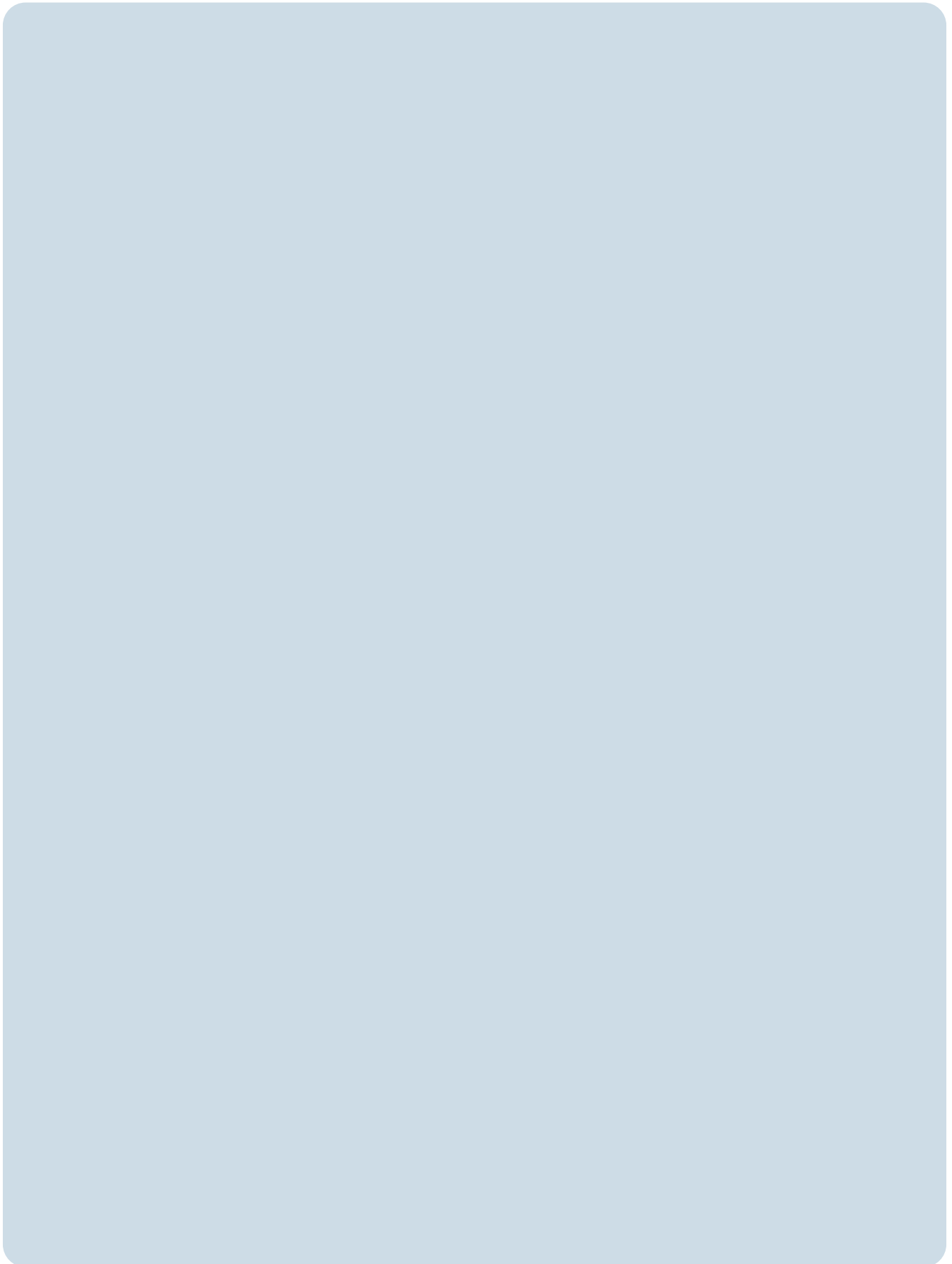
Not because every thought needs solving immediately.

But because unnamed thoughts tend to carry more weight.



Closing Reflection For Module 2

What truths about this life change have I perhaps been minimising or not fully acknowledging?





MODULE 3: BEING ON MY OWN SIDE

Understanding the Habits That Help, or Hinder, Me Internally

- Why We Often Treat Ourselves More Harshly Than Anyone Else
- Understanding Self-Compassion
- How Do I Speak To Myself?
- Speaking To Myself More Steadily
- Box Breathing: A Simple Reset
- Resetting A Difficult Day
- How Am I Really Doing?

Once life changes externally, something else often becomes easier to hear.

The way we speak to ourselves.
The way we react to difficult days.
The habits we use when we feel less steady than we would like.



For many years, a lot of men operate on some version of the same internal instructions:

- get on with it
- push through
- do not make a fuss
- sort it out

These instructions are not necessarily bad.

In many phases of life they are useful.

They help with pressure.

They help with responsibility.

They help with simply keeping things moving.

But they can become less helpful when the challenge is no longer simply practical.

Retirement, later-life change, or a loss of routine can create more unstructured emotional space.

And in that space, the old “just get on with it” style can start to feel surprisingly blunt.

Some men become harder on themselves.

Some become more irritable.

Some feel frustrated by their own lack of motivation.

Some quietly criticise themselves for not using time better, feeling better, or coping better.

This module is about noticing those internal habits more clearly.

Not to become endlessly self-analytical.

But because difficult days become much heavier when we are also fighting ourselves.

The aim is simple: less internal friction, more internal steadiness.

Exercise 3.1 Why We Often Treat Ourselves More Harshly Than Anyone Else

Years of responsibility often create an internal style of constant demand.

Keep going.

Do not complain.

Do not fall behind.

Do not let things slip.

For a long time, that demanding internal voice can feel productive.

It keeps standards high.

It keeps us reliable.

It keeps us from becoming complacent.

But there is a difference between discipline and constant self-attack.

When life becomes less structured, or motivation becomes less automatic, many men discover that the old demanding voice no longer creates action.

Instead it creates:

- tension
- guilt
- irritation
- discouragement
- shame about “wasting time”



The day starts to feel like an argument with oneself.

This is exhausting.

And importantly, it rarely produces the steadiness we are actually looking for.

Reflection Prompt

When I am having a difficult or unproductive day, what do I tend to say to myself internally?

Exercise 3.2 Understanding Self-Compassion

Self-compassion is one of those phrases that can sound softer than many men are comfortable with. So it helps to define it clearly.

Self-compassion does not mean:

- letting yourself off the hook
- pretending everything is fine
- or lowering all standards



It means not making a difficult day harder by turning yourself into the enemy.

There is a practical difference between:

“I need to get moving a bit more today”

and

“What is wrong with me? Why am I wasting another day?”

One response creates direction.

The other creates self-contempt.

Self-compassion is really just practical steadiness.

Less attack.

More realistic patience.

More useful self-management.

It is the ability to respond to yourself as someone worth helping rather than someone worth criticising.



Reflection Prompt

What would “steadier” self-talk sound like for me?

Exercise 3.3 How Do I Speak To Myself?

We often do not notice our inner voice because it is so familiar.

It sounds like a fact.

But familiarity is not the same as helpful.

Over the next few days, notice what your internal commentary sounds like when:

- you feel flat
- you have not done much
- you feel frustrated
- you feel low in motivation
- you compare yourself with how you “should” be doing



Ask is this voice:

impatient?

Critical?

Dismissive?

Demanding?

Mocking?

Simply tired?

Then ask a second question:

Does this tone make me more capable – or less?

Often the answer is revealing.

Workbook Exercise

Write down three common phrases your mind uses with you.

1

2

3

Are these helping me?

Exercise 3.4 Speaking To Myself More Steadily

Replacing self-criticism does not mean replacing it with unrealistic positivity.

Most people do not believe forced affirmations.

What helps more is believable steadiness.

For example:

Instead of:	Try:
"I am useless today,"	"I am clearly feeling low in momentum today and need a sensible next step."
"I am wasting my retirement."	"I may need more shape than I currently have."
"Why can't I just sort myself out?"	"This may be a harder adjustment than I allowed for."

Notice the difference.

These responses are not indulgent.

They are constructive.

They create room to act.

Reflection Prompt

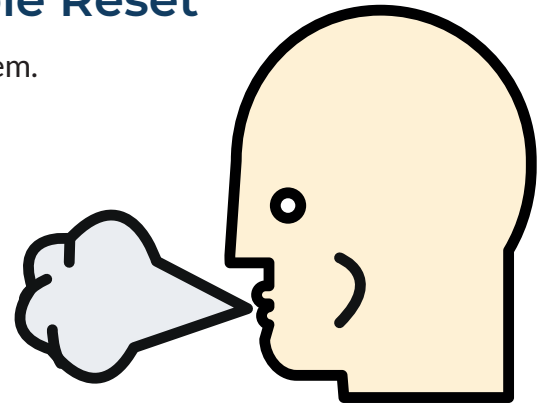
Write two or three steadier alternative responses you would like to practise.

Exercise 3.5 Box Breathing: A Simple Reset

Not every difficult day begins with a dramatic emotional problem.

Sometimes it begins with:

- restlessness
- tightness
- irritation
- mental clutter
- a sense of low-level agitation



Before trying to solve the whole day, it often helps to calm the system trying to deal with it.

A simple breathing reset can help:

Breathe in for
a count of 4.

Hold for 4.

Breathe out
for 4.

Pause for 4.

Repeat this for
a few cycles.

The point is not to become instantly calm.

The point is to interrupt escalation.

To create a small pocket of steadiness before reacting automatically.

Practice Note

Try this at the beginning of a flat or irritable day and notice whether it changes the tone of the next ten minutes.



Exercise 3.6 Resetting A Difficult Day

Some days will still feel off.

That is part of life, not failure.

What matters is having a simple way to reset rather than abandon the day entirely.

A useful reset can be built around four steps:

1. Name what is happening

“I feel flat.”

“I feel irritated.”

“I feel unmotivated.”

2. Make one physical shift

Shower, walk, open the curtains, make tea, leave the house briefly.

3. Choose one manageable next thing

Not ten things – one thing.

4. Reduce isolation

Send a message, speak to someone, go somewhere people are.

This is not a miracle cure.

It is a way of reducing how stuck the day becomes.

Workbook Exercise

Which of these reset steps do I neglect most often?

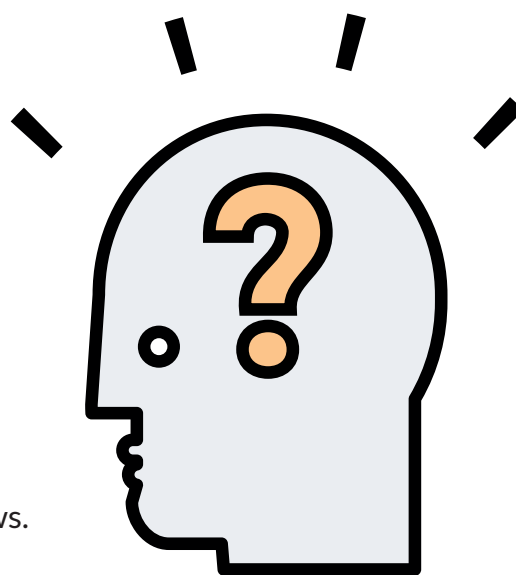
What tends to help me regain traction?

Exercise 3.7 How Am I Really Doing?

By this point, it can help to stop asking the vague question “How am I?” and instead check a few specific areas.

Take stock of:

- connection
- physical movement
- mental interest
- daily structure
- usefulness
- enjoyment
- rest



You do not need all of these to be perfect.

But if several are undernourished at once, mood often follows.

This exercise is not about diagnosing yourself.

It is about identifying where support may actually be needed.

Workbook Check-In

Score each area from 1–10.

- connection
- physical movement
- mental interest
- daily structure
- usefulness
- enjoyment
- rest

Then ask:

Which two areas need the most attention right now?

Closing Reflection For Module 3

What have I noticed about the way I currently help myself - or make things harder for myself - on difficult days?





MODULE 4: WHAT MAKES LIFE FEEL WORTHWHILE?

Rebuilding a Sense of Purpose, Usefulness and Connection

- Purpose Does Not Retire When Work Does
- One Helpful Way To Think About Purpose
- Discovering Where My Purpose Clues Are
- What Still Brings Energy?
- Ways I Still Want To Contribute
- Connection, Community and Being Needed

Once we begin to understand what helps us stay a little steadier internally, another question often starts to make itself felt:

What am I actually getting up for now?



This question does not always arrive dramatically.

Sometimes it appears quietly.

A sense that the days are fine, but slightly samey.

A feeling that there is not enough pull.

A suspicion that too much time is being spent passing rather than engaging.

For many men, work supplied more than income.

It supplied:

- targets
- responsibilities
- people
- practical usefulness
- external expectations
- and visible proof that the day had gone somewhere

Even when work was tiring, stressful or frustrating, it still gave life a kind of built-in momentum.

Without that, many men find themselves asking:

What now gives the day some weight?

What still makes me feel mentally engaged?

Where do I still feel useful?

What still feels worth the effort?

These are purpose questions.

And purpose in later life does not have to mean a grand mission.

More often it means:

having enough reasons to feel involved in your own days.

This module is about finding those reasons.

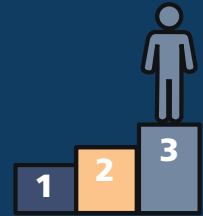
Exercise 4.1 Purpose Does Not Retire When Work Does

One of the most common misconceptions about retirement is that once work ends, the need for purpose somehow ends with it.

But purpose is not the same as employment.

Purpose is the quiet sense that:

- what I do still matters in some way
- that my effort still has somewhere to go
- that the day is not just being filled, but inhabited



Without this, time can begin to feel strangely weightless.

Days may not be terrible.

But they can start to feel repetitive, vague, or underpowered.

Purpose does not need to be dramatic to be effective.

It can come from:

- helping someone regularly
- building or maintaining something
- learning
- mentoring
- volunteering
- creating routine around health
- contributing knowledge
- caring for family
- practical projects
- community involvement

Reflection Prompt

Where in my current life do I still feel that my effort genuinely counts?

Exercise 4.2 One Helpful Way To Think About Purpose

Purpose often feels too vague when we ask:

“What is my purpose?”

That can sound like one giant life answer is required.

A more useful question is:

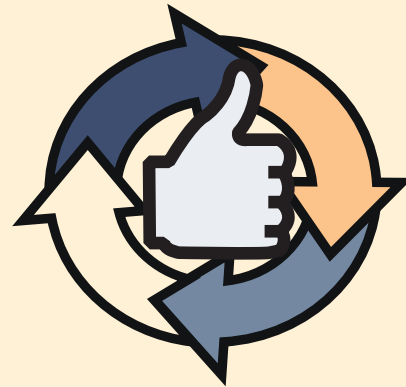
“Where do four things overlap?”

1. What do I enjoy?



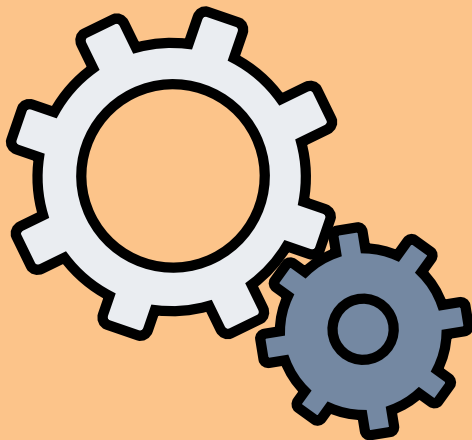
What naturally holds my attention?

2. What am I good at?



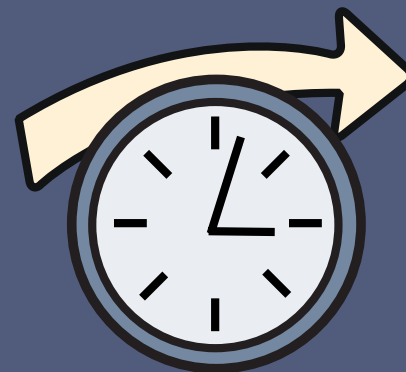
What strengths or experience do I already have?

3. Where do I feel useful?



Where does my input matter?

4. What feels worth giving time to?



What seems meaningful enough to continue?

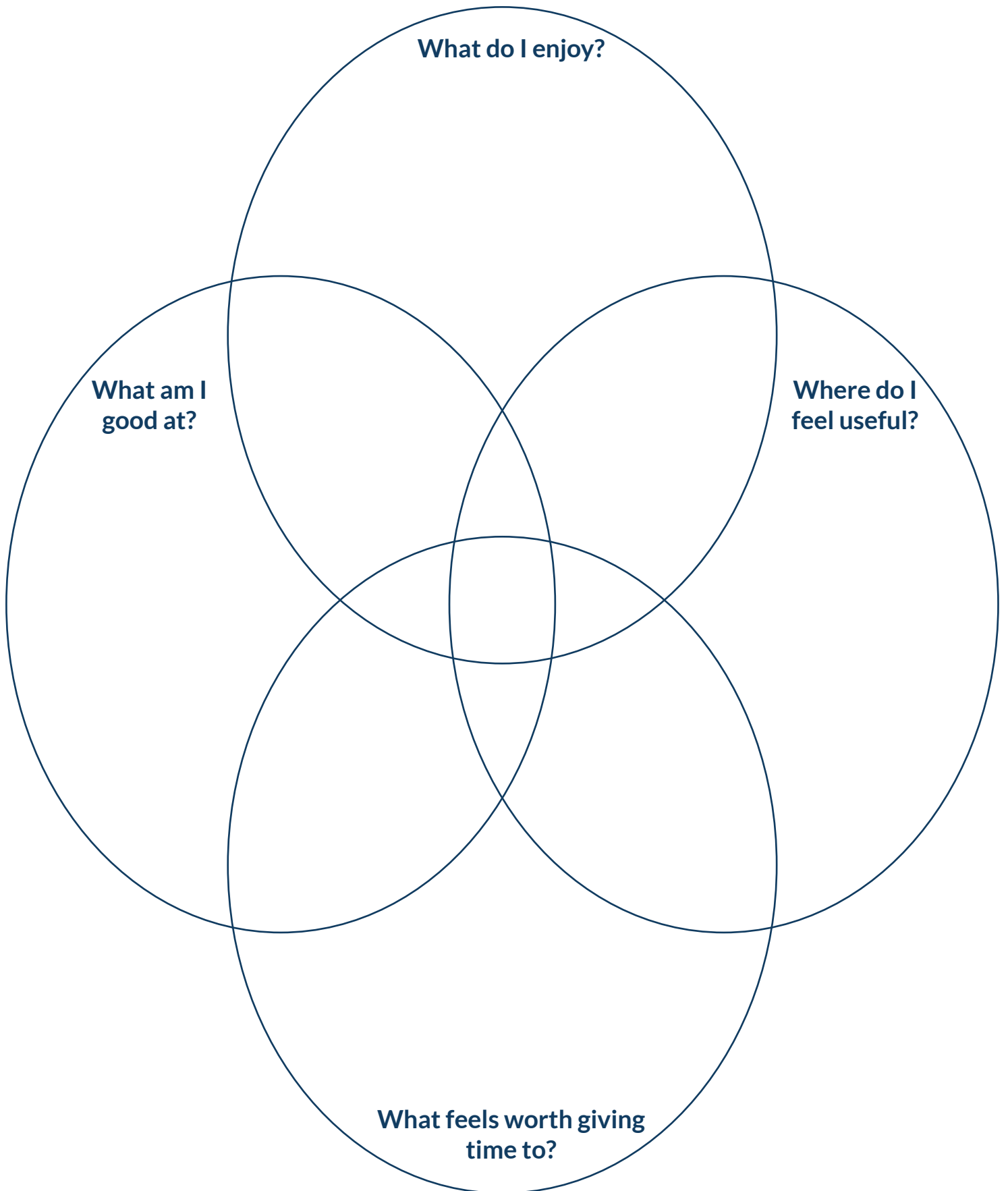
Purpose often begins where some of these areas meet.

Not perfectly.

But enough.

Workbook Exercise

Write notes under each of the four headings and look for overlaps.

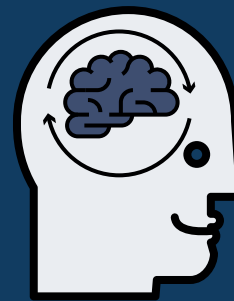


Exercise 4.3 Discovering Where My Purpose Clues Are

Often we already have clues, but dismiss them because they do not look impressive enough.

You may notice:

- certain conversations leave you more animated
- certain tasks still absorb you
- certain people draw out your helpfulness
- certain subjects keep your interest
- certain environments make you feel more switched on



These are clues.

Purpose often shows itself first as energy.

As repeated interest.

As a sense of “I do not mind giving time to this.”

The mistake many people make is assuming purpose has to arrive as a fully formed new chapter.

Usually it starts as patterns.

Small recurring signs of engagement.

Reflection Prompt

What do I repeatedly find myself drawn toward, curious about, or willing to spend effort on?



Exercise 4.4 What Still Brings Energy?

Not all activities affect us equally.

Some drain.

Some numb.

Some simply fill time.

Others leave us feeling:

- mentally awake
- quietly satisfied
- more connected
- or more alive than before

Energy is useful information.

This does not mean constant excitement.

It means noticing what leaves you with a little more internal movement.

Examples might include:

- practical making or fixing
- walking somewhere stimulating
- being with certain people
- reading particular subjects
- planning projects
- helping family
- mentoring
- sport
- gardening
- local groups
- writing
- learning something new



Workbook Exercise

List ten things — large or small — that still give me some energy.

Then circle the ones that are currently underused.

1:

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

Exercise 4.5 Ways I Still Want To Contribute

Contribution matters because it answers a deeply human internal question:

“Am I still of use?”

Many men underestimate how strongly this question affects mood.

Feeling unneeded for long periods can quietly flatten confidence.

Contribution does not require formal status.

It may involve:

- helping grandchildren
- supporting a partner
- neighbourly practical help
- mentoring younger people
- charity work
- sharing skills
- community tasks
- checking in on others
- fixing, organising or building things



The scale matters less than the felt reality that:

“My presence still adds something.”

Reflection Prompt

Where could I contribute more consistently in ways that feel genuine?

Exercise 4.6 Connection, Community and Being Needed

For many men, work supplied a large amount of casual connection without needing much planning.

Brief conversations.

Shared jokes.

Being known.

Being expected.

After retirement, that casual contact often reduces sharply.

And because men are not always socialised to deliberately build connection, isolation can creep in quietly.

Not always loneliness in the dramatic sense.

But reduced contact.

Reduced inclusion.

Reduced visibility.

Connection matters because it helps days feel inhabited.

It gives shape.

It provides interruption to overthinking.

It reminds us we are part of something beyond our own routines.



Workbook Exercise

Ask yourself:

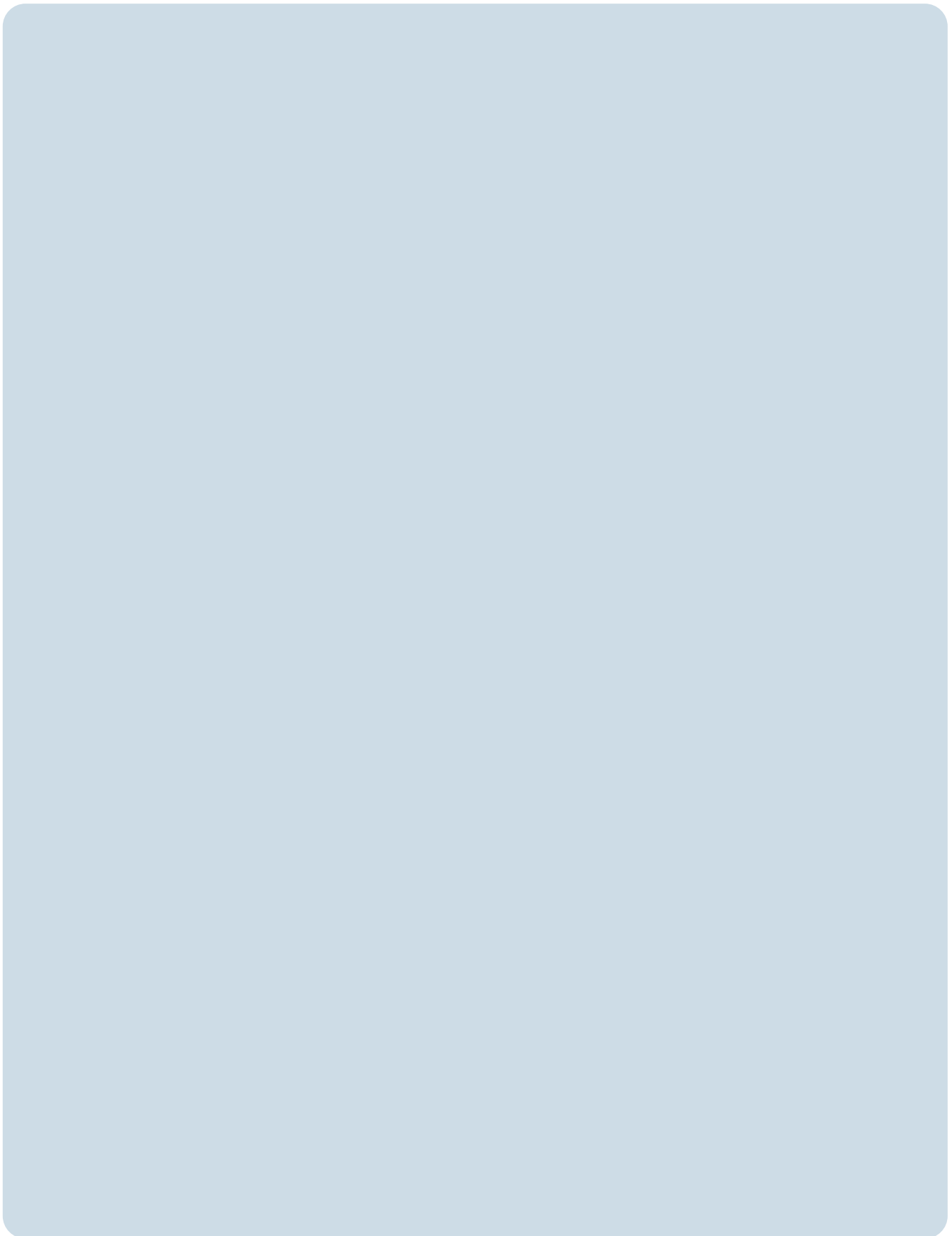
Where do I currently feel:

- connected?
- welcomed?
- included?
- needed?

And where might I need to build this more intentionally?

Closing Reflection For Module 4

What seems most likely to give my days more meaning, usefulness or momentum than they currently have?





MODULE 5: IMAGINING MY NEXT CHAPTER

Shaping the Years Ahead
More Deliberately

- The Future Does Not Shape Itself
- An Ordinary Day I Would Like To Be Living
- How Do I Want My Life To Feel Now?
- A Postcard To My Future Self
- What Is Worth My Time Now?

By this point in the workbook, you may have noticed two things becoming clearer.

First: some parts of this life stage make more sense than they did.

Second: there are likely aspects of life that feel under-shaped.

Not necessarily disastrous.

Not even deeply unhappy.

But under-shaped.

Too much left to chance.

Too much happening by default.

Too little that feels deliberately chosen.

This is common. Many men assume that once retirement arrives, the years ahead will naturally arrange themselves into something satisfying.

Sometimes they do not.

Without some degree of conscious shaping, life can become comfortable but vague.

Busy enough, but not especially involving.

Occupied, but not especially directed.

This module is about beginning to shape rather than simply drift.

Not by designing a perfect future.

But by becoming clearer about:

- how I want ordinary life to feel
- what deserves more of my time
- what I no longer want to keep postponing



Exercise 5.1 The Future Does Not Shape Itself

There is a quiet assumption many people carry that with enough free time, the right life will somehow emerge on its own.

But free time and meaningful time are not the same thing.

Without some intentionality, time tends to get absorbed by:

- habits
- errands
- television
- passive routines
- low-level procrastination
- and “I’ll think about that later”

Days pass.

Weeks pass.

And life can start to feel as though it is being spent rather than lived.

This is not about filling every hour productively.

It is about accepting that if something matters, it usually needs some degree of deliberate shape.



Reflection Prompt

Where in my current life do I feel I am mostly drifting by default?

Exercise 5.2 An Ordinary Day I Would Like To Be Living

When people imagine the future, they often imagine big events.

Trips.

Achievements.

Major changes.

But life is mostly made of ordinary days.

So one of the most useful questions is not:

“What extraordinary things do I want?”

It is:

“What kind of ordinary day would actually feel good to live?”

Imagine a fairly typical weekday five years from now.

Not a holiday.

Not a fantasy.

Just a normal day that feels quietly satisfying.

Ask yourself:

- What time do I get up?
- What gives the morning shape?
- Am I physically active?
- Who do I see or speak to?
- What occupies my mind?
- What feels useful?
- What feels enjoyable?
- What gives the day enough momentum?

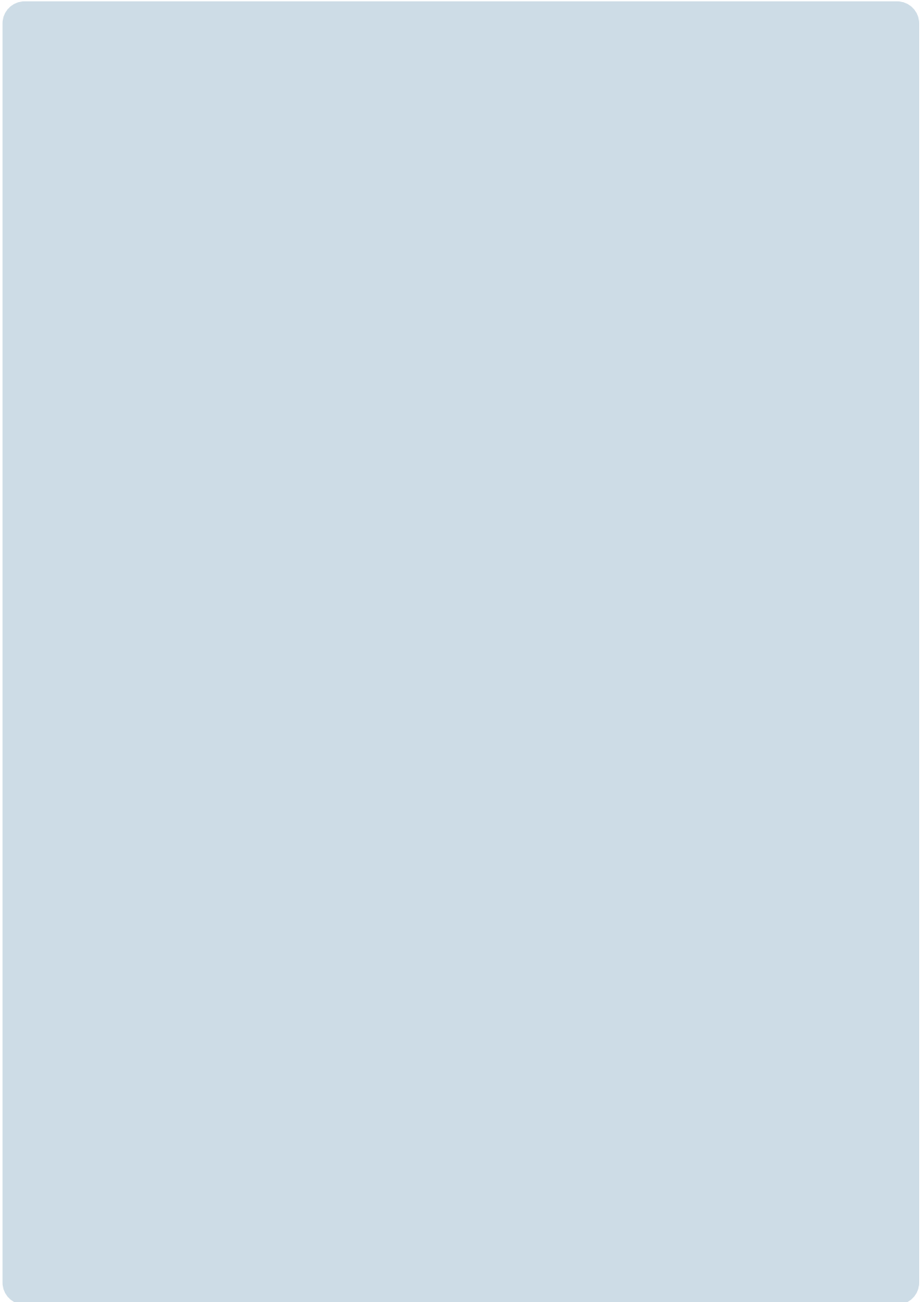
The point of this exercise is not prediction. It is a preference.

You are identifying the texture of life you want more of.



Workbook Exercise

Describe that ordinary satisfying day in as much practical detail as possible.



Exercise 5.3 How Do I Want My Life To Feel Now?

Sometimes it helps to think less in terms of tasks and more in terms of atmosphere.

What do I want more of in my days?

Perhaps:

- steadiness
- structure
- challenge
- calm
- variety
- usefulness
- connection
- stimulation
- satisfaction
- enjoyment



These are emotional and practical textures. They shape how life is experienced from the inside.

Often people keep trying to solve life with activities before they are clear on what feeling they are trying to create.

This exercise reverses that.



Reflection Prompt

Circle or list the qualities I want my life to contain more of from this point forward.

Which of these are currently too absent?

Exercise 5.4 A Postcard To My Future Self

Imagine yourself five years ahead.

Not a perfect version.

Just a version of you who is quietly glad certain things did not continue to be postponed.

This future self writes you a short practical postcard.

What might he say?

Perhaps:

- I am glad you started getting out more
- I am glad you took health more seriously
- I am glad you rebuilt friendships
- I am glad you stopped waiting for motivation
- I am glad you gave yourself more structure
- I am glad you tried that thing you kept dismissing

The point is not sentimentality.

It is perspective.

Future distance often makes current avoidance easier to see.



Workbook Exercise

Write your postcard below.

Exercise 5.5 What Is Worth My Time Now?

This may be the simplest but most important question in the module:

What is genuinely worth my time now?

Not what fills time.

Not what distracts me.

Not what keeps me vaguely occupied.

What feels worth building around?

As people get older, this question often sharpens naturally.

Patience for nonsense reduces.

Patience for postponement reduces.

There is often a stronger awareness that time is still plentiful in some ways — but not infinite.

That awareness can be clarifying rather than depressing.

It helps separate:

habit from value,

convenience from meaning,

delay from decision.



Reflection Prompt

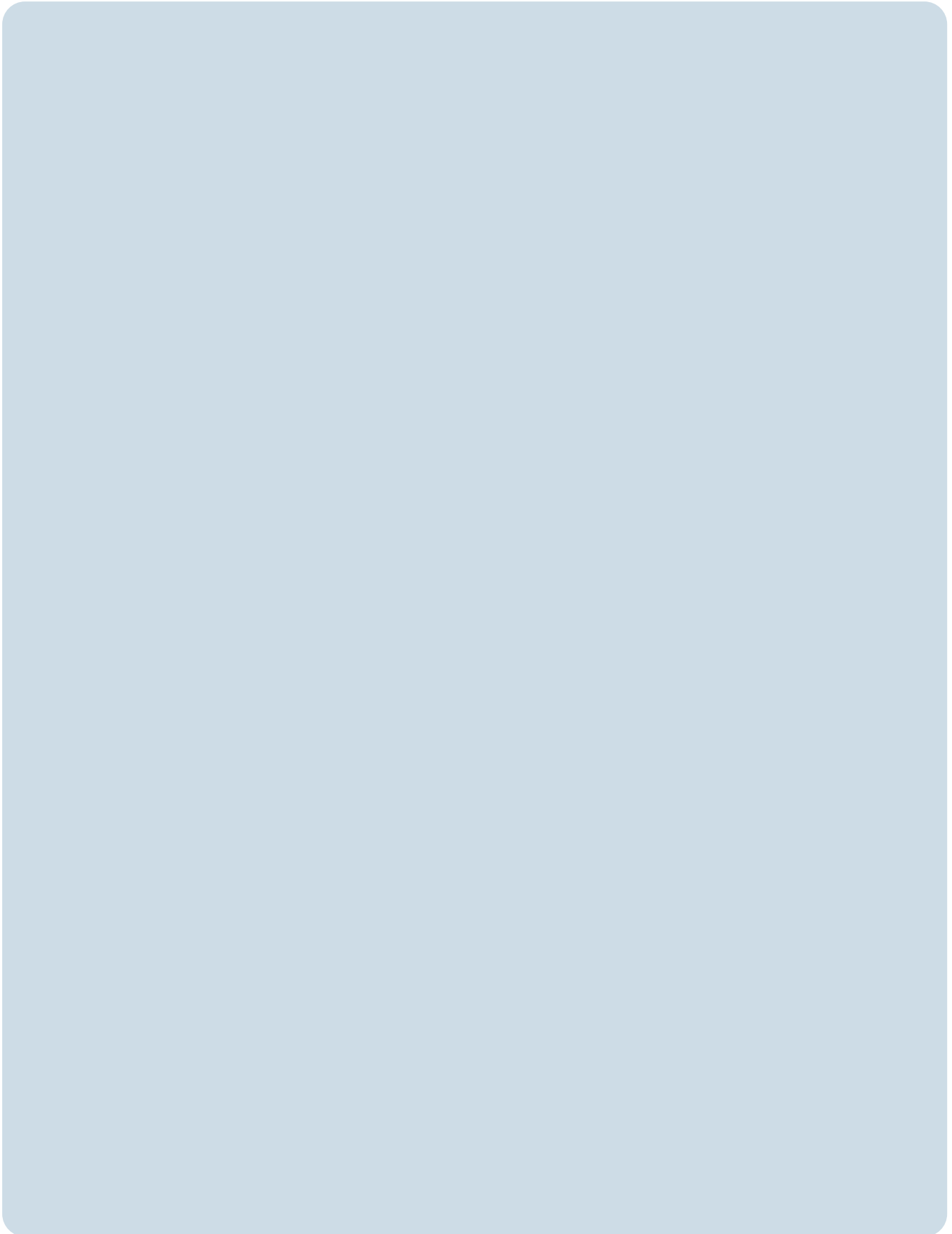
What feels increasingly worth my time?

What feels increasingly not worth losing more years to?



Closing Reflection For Module 5

If I were shaping the next chapter more deliberately, what would need to become less accidental in my life?





MODULE 6: WHAT HOLDS ME BACK?

Understanding the Thoughts and Habits That Keep Me Circling

- The Stories I Keep Telling Myself
- Familiar Beliefs That May Be Limiting Me
- How True Is This Really?
- More Useful Thoughts To Stand On
- Small Risks I Am Willing To Take

By this point, you may have a clearer sense of what matters. You may have identified areas of life that feel underused. You may even have a stronger idea of what you want more of.

And yet...

clarity does not automatically create movement.

This can be frustrating.

Because it is tempting to assume:

“If I know what would help, why am I still not doing it?”

The answer is usually not laziness.

And it is usually not a lack of intelligence.

More often, it is the quiet power of familiar thoughts, familiar habits, and familiar postponements.

Humans are very good at staying inside known patterns — even patterns that no longer serve them particularly well.

We delay.

We rationalise.

We tell ourselves there is time.

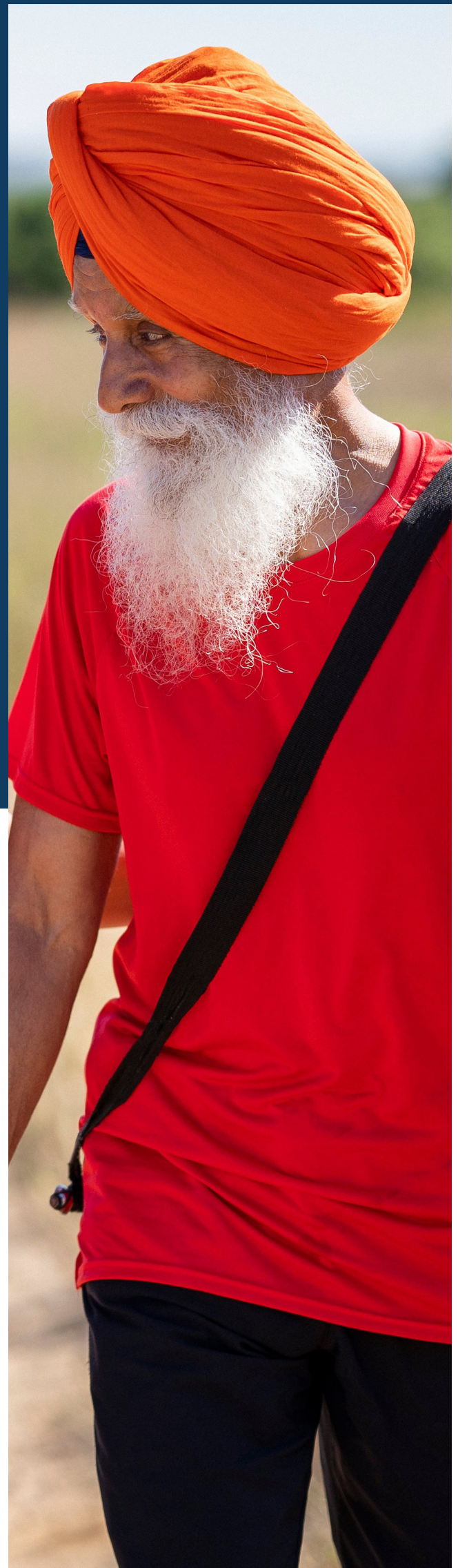
We wait for motivation.

We make things seem bigger than they are.

We return to what is familiar.

This module is about noticing those loops more clearly.

Because until resistance becomes visible, it tends to keep running the show.

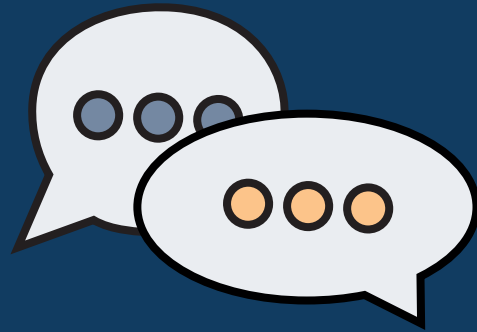


Exercise 6.1 The Stories I Keep Telling Myself

Most of us carry a set of repeated internal explanations for why we are not moving.

Often they sound reasonable.

- I'll start when I feel more like it
- It's probably too late now
- I should have sorted this earlier
- I'm not really the kind of person who does that
- I'm too out of the habit
- It won't make much difference anyway



These thoughts can feel factual.

But repeated thoughts are not always accurate thoughts.

Sometimes they are simply familiar thoughts.

And familiarity makes them persuasive.

This exercise is about identifying your own common delaying narratives.

Workbook Exercise

Write down the recurring reasons or excuses your mind gives for not beginning, changing, reaching out, or committing.

1

2

3

4

Exercise 6.2 Familiar Beliefs That May Be Limiting Me

Underneath everyday excuses there are often broader beliefs.

Beliefs such as:

- I have left it too late
- I am too set in my ways
- other people cope without this much effort
- I should not need help
- if I cannot do it properly, there is no point
- change should feel easier than this

These beliefs are powerful because they shape what feels possible before we even try.

They narrow behaviour quietly.

They make certain actions feel unnecessary, embarrassing or futile.

The first step is not instantly replacing every belief.

It is simply seeing which ones have been running for years.



Reflection Prompt

Which limiting beliefs feel most familiar to me?

Where do I think I learned them?

Exercise 6.3 How True Is This Really?

Once a limiting thought is visible, the next useful step is to test it.

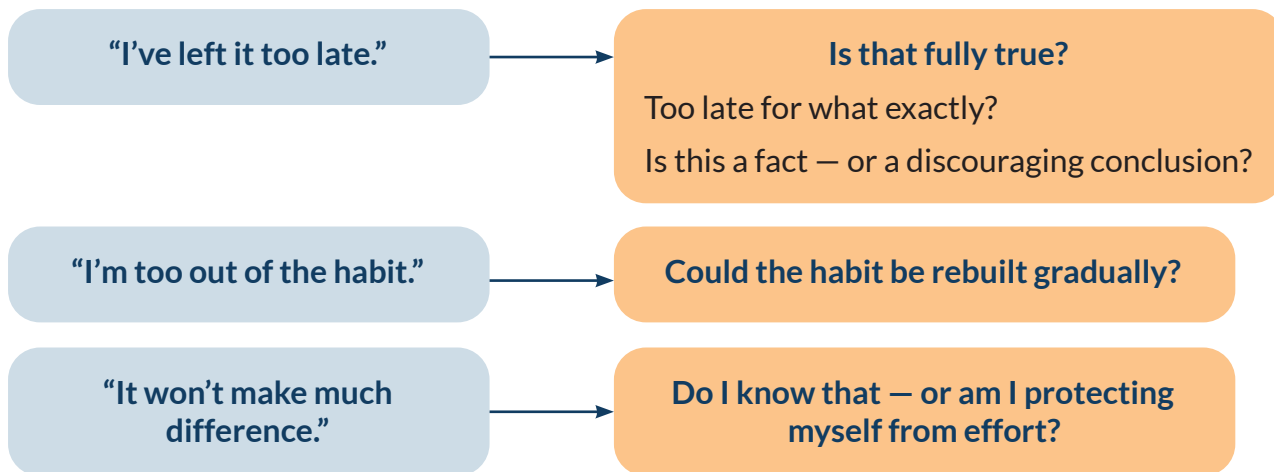
Not aggressively.

Not with forced positivity.

Just with honest curiosity.

Take one repeated thought.

For example:



This is not about arguing with yourself endlessly.

It is about loosening the certainty of thoughts that have gone unquestioned.

Workbook Exercise

Choose one limiting thought and examine:

- evidence for it
- evidence against it
- a more balanced version

Evidence for	Evidence against	Balanced version

Exercise 6.4 More Useful Thoughts To Stand On

Once we loosen an old limiting belief, it helps to replace it with something more useful.

Not a slogan.

A working thought.

For example:

“I’ve left it too late.”

“There is still enough time for smaller changes to matter.”

“I need to feel motivated first.”

“Action may need to come before motivation.”

“This should not be so hard.”

“This may simply need more repetition than I expected.”

Useful thoughts are thoughts that create room.

They create possibility instead of closure.



Reflection Prompt

What steadier, more useful thoughts would help me move more than the ones I currently default to?

Exercise 6.5 Small Risks I Am Willing To Take

One reason change gets postponed is that we imagine it too globally.

Get fitter.

Become more social.

Find purpose.

Completely change routine.

These sound heavy.

And heavy things invite delay.

Real movement usually begins much smaller.

A phone call.

A walk.

Signing up.

Asking.

Trying.

Scheduling.

Repeating.

Small risks matter because they interrupt the old agreement to stay where things are familiar.

They prove movement is possible before confidence fully arrives.



Workbook Exercise

List five small risks or actions I am willing to take over the next month.

1

2

3

4

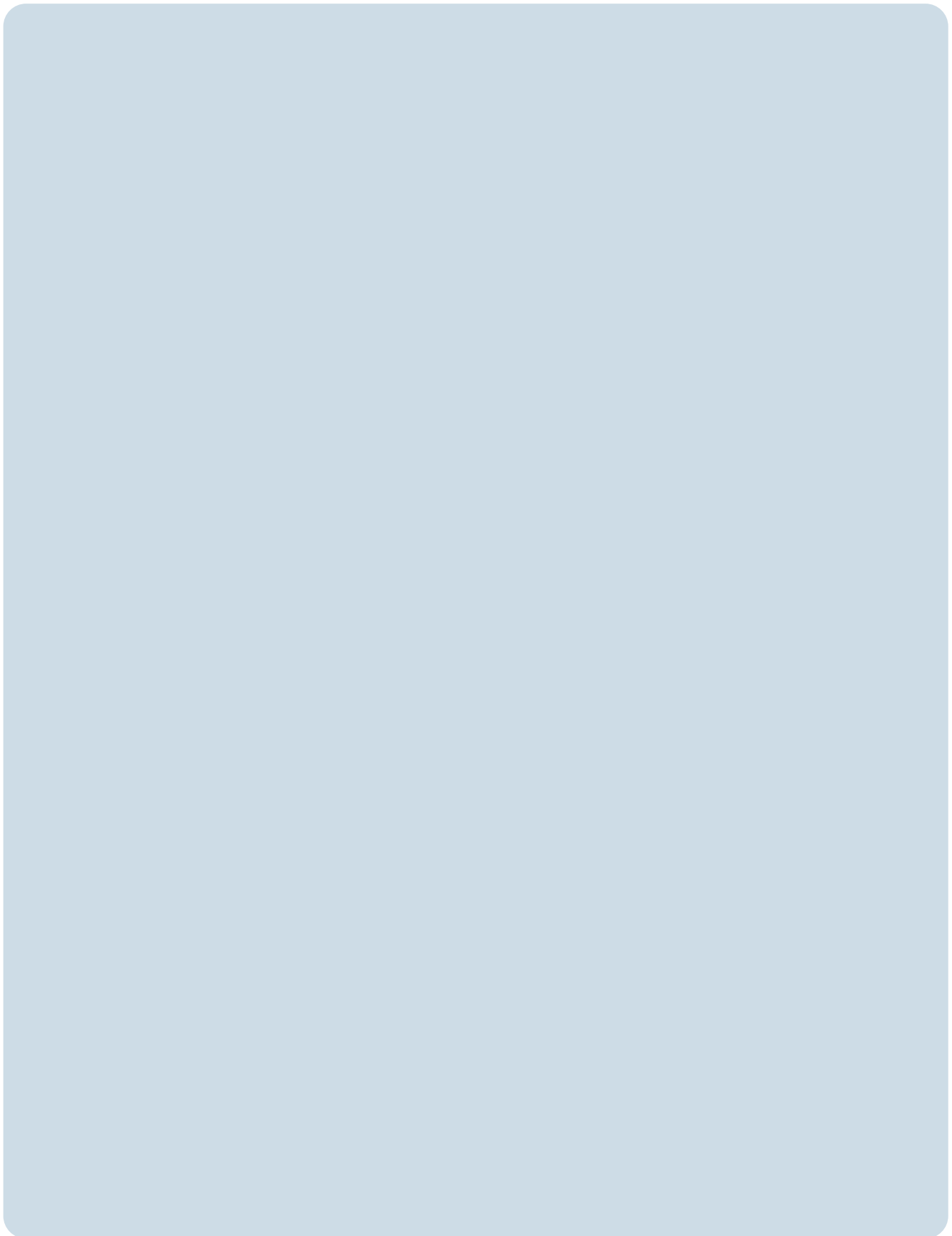
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Then circle the easiest one to begin this week.

Closing Reflection For Module 6

What do I suspect has been holding me in place more than I usually admit?

And what feels small enough to challenge now?





MODULE 7: MOVING FORWARD WITH INTENTION

Turning Insight Into the
Shape of Ordinary Days

- When Good Intentions Meet Ordinary Days
- Building Enough Structure To Hold Me
- Who Or What Helps Me Stay Connected?
- What I Am No Longer Willing To Keep Postponing
- My Personal Moving Forward Plan

By now, you may understand yourself a little better than you did at the beginning of this workbook.

You may have clearer language for:

- what this transition has felt like
- what you miss
- what helps
- what matters
- what you want more of
- and what has been keeping you circling

That clarity matters.

But insight on its own does not alter ordinary life.

Ordinary life changes through repetition.

Through what we continue.

Through what we return to.

Through what becomes built into days rather than occasionally thought about.

This final module is about giving everything you have noticed somewhere practical to live.

Not through a dramatic reinvention.

Through enough structure,

enough consistency,

and enough follow-through

that life starts to feel shaped more by intention than by drift.



Exercise 7.1 When Good Intentions Meet Ordinary Days

Many worthwhile intentions fail for one simple reason: they remain abstract.

We think:

- I should get out more.
- I should move more.
- I should reconnect.
- I should be less passive with my time.

But “should” is vague.

And vague intentions are easy to postpone.

The ordinary day wins.

The television wins.

The inertia wins.

Good intentions need somewhere practical to land.

They need:

- times
- routines
- triggers
- commitments
- repetition

Otherwise they remain thoughts rather than lived patterns.



Reflection Prompt

Which of my current good intentions remain mostly ideas rather than repeated actions?

Exercise 7.2 Building Enough Structure To Hold Me

One of the hidden difficulties of retirement is that too much freedom can quietly become lack of traction.

Without enough anchors, days blur.

Morning drifts into afternoon.

Small tasks replace meaningful ones.

Time passes, but does not always feel inhabited.

This does not mean every day needs rigid scheduling.

It means most people benefit from some consistent anchors such as:

- a set waking time
- planned movement
- designated practical tasks
- social contact points
- regular projects
- recurring outside commitments

Structure reduces the number of decisions that have to be reinvented each day.

And that makes action easier.



Workbook Exercise

What three to five weekly anchors would give my days more shape?

1

2

3

4

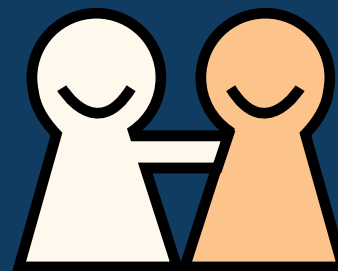
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Exercise 7.3 Who Or What Helps Me Stay Connected?

Self-management is easier when it is not done entirely in isolation.

Connection creates:

- accountability
- interruption to overthinking
- practical encouragement
- and a reminder that life is not happening only inside our own routines



Support does not have to mean formal help.

It may mean:

- one friend who expects contact
- a walking partner
- a volunteer commitment
- a club
- a class
- family routines
- neighbourly involvement

The question is not:

“Do I need rescuing?”

The question is:

“What helps me stay engaged with life outside my own head?”



Reflection Prompt

Who or what currently helps me stay connected?

Where do I need to build a more reliable connection?

Exercise 7.4 What I Am No Longer Willing To Keep Postponing

There often comes a point where delay starts to feel more tiring than action.

The same thoughts.

The same intentions.

The same “I should.”

The same waiting for a better mood or a better moment.

Sometimes progress begins less with inspiration and more with decision.

A quiet line in the sand:

I am no longer willing to keep leaving this entirely to default.

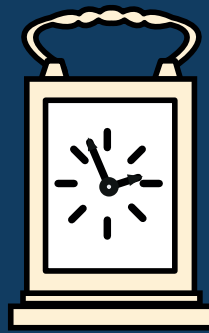
This does not require dramatic pressure.

Just honesty.



What has been postponed long enough?

- health?
- social contact?
- routine?
- purpose?
- trying something?
- asking for support?
- making plans?



Workbook Exercise

Complete this sentence:

The area of my life I am least willing to keep postponing is:

Because

Exercise 7.5 My Personal Moving Forward Plan

This final page is not about perfection.

It is about clarity.

Gather what matters most from the workbook and turn it into a simple practical plan.

What I want more of:

What I need less of:

Weekly anchors I will build:

Small risks I am taking:

People/places that help me stay connected:

One area I am no longer postponing:

Keep this plan visible.

Not as pressure.

As orientation.

As a reminder of what this stage of life needs from you now.

Closing Reflection For Module 7

As I leave this workbook, what feels clearer, more possible, or more worth acting on than when I began?

A FINAL WORD

There is no perfect way to do this stage of life.

No final exam to pass.

No requirement to become a completely different person.

More often, this period asks for something quieter: honesty, attention, a little more self-understanding, a little more structure, and a willingness to stop leaving everything to default.

That is slower work.

Less dramatic than reinvention.

But often far more important.

Because ordinary life is not shaped in one sweeping decision.

It is shaped in the repeated small ways we choose to spend our time, energy and attention.

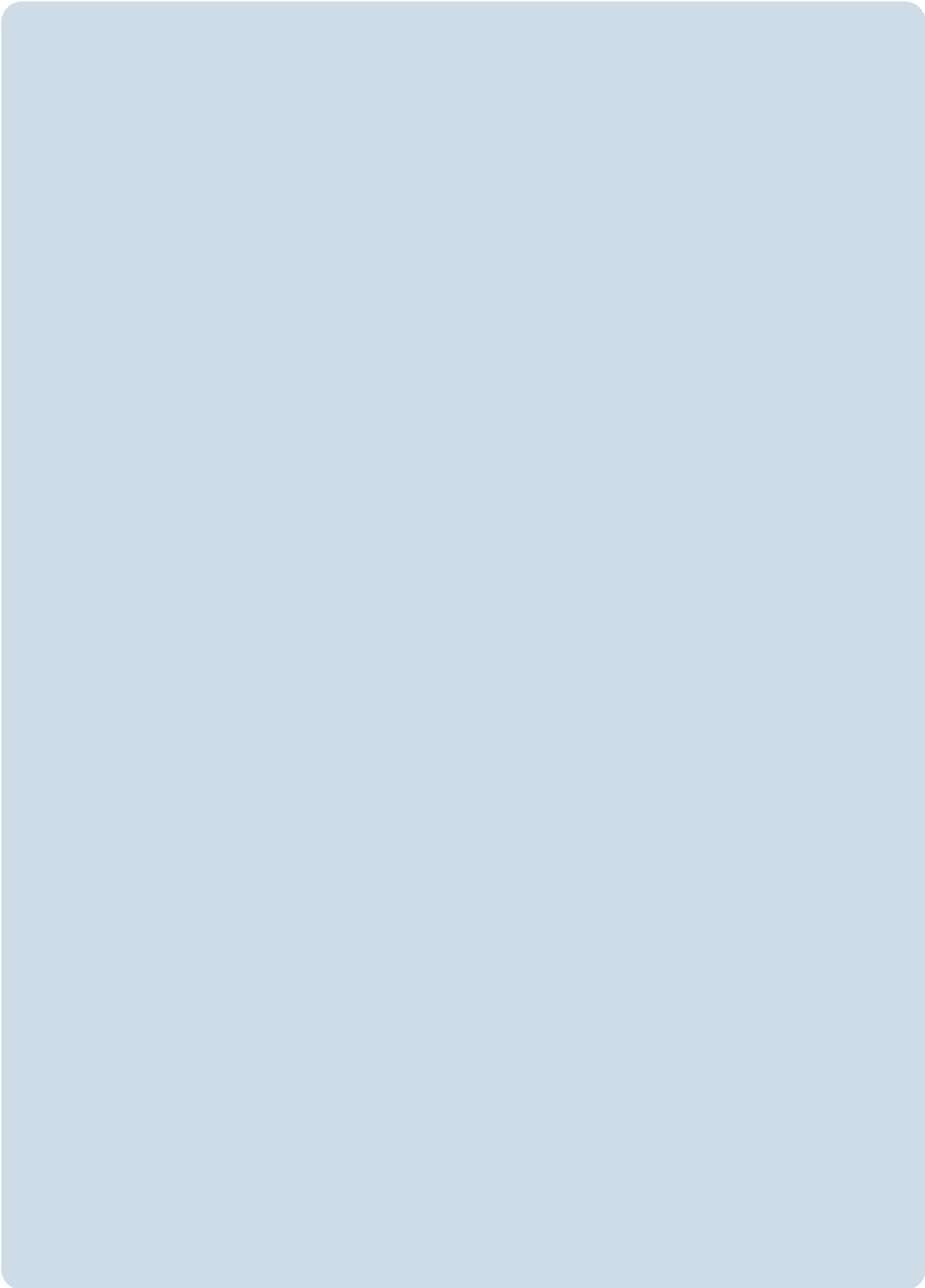
This workbook was never about solving everything.

It was about noticing enough to begin moving more deliberately.

That is already meaningful progress.



Notes



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