



Before-You-Die Bucket List

 Values

 Exercise

 30 min

 Client

 No

A bucket list is a register of things or experiences that one wants to do before one dies. Bucket lists are highly personal, individual, and unique, and usually contain extra special or once-in-a-lifetime experiences or events, such as 'visiting the Taj Mahal.' One reason for creating a bucket list is to make life more memorable. This notion is consistent with Daniel Kahneman's (1999) peak-end theory, which suggests that what we remember in life are the peaks (the most intense high points) of an experience rather than the experience as a whole. In a way, completing bucket list items allows life's great memories to be set in place.

Another reason for creating a bucket list is to make life more meaningful. The process of creating a list of all the things we want to do before we die naturally connects us to our values, as we become aware of what's really important to us and how we want to live the remainder of our lives. With this knowledge, we can evaluate how we are currently spending our time and make adjustments toward a more value-congruent and thus meaningful existence.

Bucket lists also increase motivation for healthy behavior change. Since bucket lists are, per definition, a collection of things one wants to do before one dies, therein lies an implicit challenge against time and mortality. Because of this, creating a bucket list serves as an energizing and motivating exercise in that it gives a person an imminent time frame and a sense of urgency.

The idea with this tool is to help clients find more meaning in life and move towards valued living through first creating a bucket list and then reflecting on value patterns within that bucket list.



Author

This tool was adapted from Dr. Michael Winters' 'Meaningful Bucket List' exercise by Lucinda (PsyD) and Hugo Alberts (Phd. D).



Goal

The goal of this tool is to help clients clarify values and find meaningfulness by creating a bucket list.



Advice

- Importantly, the value of this exercise is not as much in clients' completing bucket list items but more in clients' clarifying values and finding more meaning in their lives. An optional step is to explore other activities that clients could do to live by the values they identified (Step 4) in everyday life (see Optional Step 6).



References

- Kahneman, D. (1999). Objective happiness. In D. Kahneman, E. Diener, & N. Schwarz (Eds.), *Well-being: The foundations of hedonic psychology* (pp. 3-25). Russell Sage.
- Peterson, C. (2013). *Pursuing the good life: 100 reflections in positive psychology*. Oxford University Press.
- Reiner, R. (Director). (2007). *The Bucket List* [Motion Picture]. Warner Bros.

Before-You-Die Bucket List

Instructions

A bucket list is a list of things that you want to do before you die. Creating a bucket list is a valuable exercise for identifying what is important to you in your life and for guiding you to live more in line with your values. The following steps will help you create a meaningful bucket list for your life.

Step 1: What do you want to do before you die?

For the next few minutes, close your eyes and consider how you would feel if you received news that you only had one year to live. What would you do with that year? What activities would you want to do - what is on your 'before-you-die bucket list'? Spend some time here, imagining that this is your reality. When you are finished, open your eyes and write down what you came up with in the first column of the table.

In the first column, make a list of all the things you want to do or experience before you die. Come up with as many things as you can, and don't worry about priority or practicality.

Step 2: Why is this item meaningful?

Consider what each of your bucket list items means to you by asking yourself the following questions, "Why would this be meaningful to me?" and "How would this increase the meaning in my life?" Write down your answers in the second column of the table.

Step 3: How important is this item?

In the third column, rate how meaningful each item would be to you. Ask yourself the question, "How important or significant is this item to me?"

Figure 1. Example of bucket-list

Item <i>Things I want to do before I die</i>	Why would this be meaningful to me?	Meaningfulness rating (0 = not at all, 10 = extremely meaningful)
<i>E.g., Visit Paris with my spouse</i>	<i>E.g., Opportunity to spend quality time together; experience European culture; broaden my understanding and experience of France, and the world; sense of adventure; reconnect romantically</i>	7 / 10



Table 1. Bucket-list

Item <i>Things I want to do before I die</i>	Why would this be meaningful to me?	Meaningfulness rating <i>(0 = not at all, 10 = extremely meaningful)</i>
		/10
		/10
		/10
		/10
		/10
		/10



Step 4: Identify values

See if you can notice any value patterns within your bucket list, particularly in those items scored as highly meaningful. For example, numerous items may involve connecting with others. In the space below, write down the values that appear to be present.

Step 5: Reflection

- Which item on your bucket list inspires or excites you the most? Why?
- Which item on your bucket list could you complete first?
- Were you surprised by any identified value patterns?
- Now that you have a better understanding of some of the values underlying your bucket list items, can you think of ways you could integrate these values into everyday life (i.e., before you complete the 'big ticket' bucket list item?). See optional Step 6 for further details.

Optional Step 6: Everyday bucket list

Consider your list of values (Step 4) and come up with at least one concrete action that you can take this week to live in line with one (or more) of these values. For example, if you identified connecting with others as one of your bucket list values, you might choose to set a date night with your spouse this week. In the space below, write down a potential valued action, including as much detail as possible (i.e., who, what, where, when, why).