

Application Guide

JIM COLLINS ON WHAT TO MAKE OF A LIFE, PART 1



BOTTOM LINE:

A meaningful life is built through an ongoing process of discovering how you're wired and continuing to move forward, even when the path ahead feels unclear.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- I. Throughout life there are multiple moments when we are all faced with the questions: *How do you think about your life? What do you make of life?*
 - A. When you transition out of your youth.
 - B. When you face an event that radically alters the trajectory of your life.
 - C. When you're well past your midpoint and begin thinking about your legacy and remaining years.
- II. **Encodings:** The pre-packaged capacities we have that make up our intrinsic construction
 - A. Encodings are **discovered**, not created, through the **experiences of life**.
 - B. When you discover your encodings, you should orient your life around them in order to obtain the greatest level of fulfillment.
 1. Ex: Barbara McClintock became a famous geneticist. From a young age, she discovered a strong desire and enjoyment in solving puzzles. She would get so immersed in a puzzle that it was all she could think about until she could figure it out. This discovery led to a career that not only impacted the scientific community but also helped her operate out of her natural capacities/encodings to bring her fulfillment.
 - C. Discovering your encodings is **ongoing**. There can be different times when you're more aligned with them, and when you're less aligned.
 1. If you haven't discovered the ones that really pop for you, it's never too late. You just need to keep exploring.
 2. You may be operating out of certain encodings early in your life and discover new ones that you never knew existed later in life.
 - D. When you are out of alignment with your encodings, it may not be bad, but it won't feel as **energizing**.
- III. Leaders can play a powerful role in helping others discover their encodings.
 - A. When you're perceptive and observant of the people around you, you can point out things in them that they may not yet see in themselves.
 - B. When you think about your team, ask the question: *Do I have the right people in the right seats?*
- IV. Parents can also play a powerful role in helping their kids discover their encodings. They can then provide them with opportunities and point them in the right direction to succeed.
- V. **Cliffs:** Significant events that alter the trajectory of life and force choices about what's next.
 - A. There is no such thing as a life without cliffs; our lives are punctuated by them. There are so many different ways cliffs can hit our lives.
 1. Career cliffs
 2. Tragedy cliffs
 3. Disease cliffs
 4. Scandal cliffs
 5. Retirement cliffs

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B. These events can become powerful moments that shed light on what you should make of your life as you figure out what comes next.

VI. **Fog:** What appears on the other side of a cliff. It's a period of time where people feel lost, confused, disoriented, uncertain, and/or befuddled.

A. There is nothing wrong with you if you're in the fog; it's not a defect.

B. The fog is simply a part of living that can occur after both big and small events. It comes and goes, and at times it can take a little while to get out of.

C. When you find yourself lost in the fog, avoid big, irreversible decisions.

1. Making big, impulsive decisions when you can't see clearly often leads to another cliff.

VII. **Simplex Stepping is the key to coming out of the fog.**

A. In the middle of the fog it can feel uncomfortable, which drives an impulse to get out and find clarity. But oftentimes, we won't know the destination we are moving toward in the thick of the fog.

B. You have to slowly find your way through the fog to the destination by looking at the few steps you can see and deciding what the next best little step you can take is. Once you take the step, look around and find the next one.

C. Coming out of the fog is a **process of making a series of iterative little steps over time.**

1. During this process you may discover new encodings you never knew existed before.

2. As much as we try to avoid cliffs, they can be the catalyst for bringing our lives into frame.

a) Small steps get you moving, and movement creates energy that fuels more movement.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR TEAM DISCUSSION

1. What are some moments in your life that could be considered "cliffs," and how did they reshape the way you thought about your future?
2. What activities or responsibilities naturally energize you?
3. Have you ever experienced a season of "fog"? What helped you continue moving forward even when you lacked clarity?
4. What might "simplex stepping" look like in your current season? What is one small next step you can take instead of waiting for complete clarity?
5. How can difficult or disruptive moments actually help bring someone's life more fully "into frame"?

RESOURCES MENTIONED

[What to Make of a Life by Jim Collins](#)

[Built to Last by Jim Collins](#)

[Good to Great by Jim Collins](#)

[How the Mighty Fall by Jim Collins](#)

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