

Finding Your Element

How to Discover Your Talents and Passions and Transform Your Life

By Ken Robinson

Being in your Element is more than doing things you are good at. You have to love doing those things too.

The most important reason to find your Element is personal – understanding who you are and what you are capable of doing. A second reason is social – to find a purpose in your life. Finally, if you are doing what you love, even if it is not your job, you attain a balance to your life that allows you to live with less fear and negativity.

The major criticism of 'the Element' was that it didn't focus enough on how people can determine what their Element is and this book is designed to help with that question. It is constructed in the form of a study course and the thematic threads covered are...

- Ideas and principles
- Stories and examples
- Exercises
- Resources
- Questions

Ch 1 – Finding Your Element (basic principles and ground rules)

In the quest to find yourself you have to look both inward – to fathom your own talents and passions – and outward – to creatively look at opportunities around you. To do these things you have to turn down the noise of the outside world and get to know yourself better. Tools to do this include meditation, mind mapping, vision boards, and automatic writing.

There are three elemental principles we need to understand to help us understand ourselves and remain open to new experiences and possibilities.

1. Each life is unique and we all need to understand the powers and passions we were born with.
2. We create our own life and each of us has immense powers of imagination and creativity.
3. Life is organic, not linear, and is a process of improvisation between our interest and personality versus our circumstances and opportunities.

Ch 2 – What are You Good at? (understanding your aptitudes)

Aptitude tests are useful, but should be taken with a 'grain of salt' because your Element may evolve over time. Much of our literature implies that things like IQ tests and aptitudes are static and determined at birth, while experience shows people's interests change and expand over time and opportunity.

Ch 3 – How do You Know? (the real depth of your abilities)

Things that limit our knowledge of ourselves and our abilities are lack of opportunity and exposure, as well as cultural inhibitions related to class or sex. Additionally, western education often disregards different ways of learning, aside from verbal or mathematic reasoning, and therefore fails to engage individual learning styles. Few people learn the same way all the time.

Ch 4 – What do You Love? (discovering your passions)

- Physical energy: Related to the health of your body.
- Spiritual energy: Related to your motivation, your feelings, and your unique life force.
- Passion: A deep personal attraction to something. The power of positive spiritual energy and what feeds your spiritual energy instead of consuming it, i.e. it doesn't seem to tire you out.

Our spiritual energy has three levels...

1. The spirit within us: our unique life force
2. The spirit between us: the feeling of connection or lack of connection to another human being
3. The spirit among us: our connection to the universe – a constant factor in religions

We all live in two worlds – our own consciousness and other people and events. The interaction of these two worlds makes up who we are

- Mind: The internal flow of thoughts, feelings, and perceptions.
- Personality: A general outlook and disposition to yourself and the world around you.
- Consciousness: Your fundamental awareness of yourself as a human being.

There are innate relationships between how we think and how we feel

- Negative emotions occupy the oldest part of the human brain and are related to individual survival.
- Positive emotions are what bind us together as human beings and cannot be distinguished from what people understand as spirituality.

Being in your Element is about connecting with and dwelling in the positive feelings that express and fulfill your own spiritual energies. Meditation is a way to quiet your mind and discover the roots of your feelings.

Your Element(s) relate to internal motivation (inherent pleasure), rather than external motivation (what the world demands of you).

- You need some aptitude for what you do, but passion is what makes the real difference.
- If you are on the right path, much of the pleasure is in the process of what you are doing.

The two most important questions in the search for your passion are...

1. What do you love?
2. What do you love about it?

Ch 5 – What Makes You Happy? (happiness)

One of the most fundamental reasons why so many people feel unhappy is that happiness itself is so widely misunderstood.

- Having a purpose in life is the wellspring of sustained happiness
- Happiness is a spiritual state

As you try to find your Element, pay careful attention to your emotional states

There are three elements of happiness, but happiness is part of a larger concept of well-being and this adds two additional elements.

1. Positive emotions – what we feel
2. Engagement – being in the flow of what we are doing
3. Meaning – serving something larger than yourself
4. Relationships
5. Achievement

There are five areas of well-being in our lives

1. Career – liking what you do
2. Social – strong relationships and love
3. Financial – managing your economic life
4. Physical – good health and energy
5. Community – engagement with your surroundings

Increasing your happiness has distinct components that you may or may not be able to affect

- Circumstance (10%) – you have no choice over where you were born
- Biology (50%) – much of who you are is inherent in your genes
- Behavior (40%) – what you choose to do, think, and feel

While we are definitely a product of our parents and their circumstance, there is a sizable part of us that we can change. Finding your Element is largely about finding meaning and purpose in that part of your life.

Ch 6 – What's Your Attitude? (how attitudes help move you forward or backward)

To be in your Element, you have to be willing to do what it takes – this means your attitude. In chapter 4 we related the Element to your positive feelings. In chapter 5 two factors affecting happiness are natural disposition and actual behavior. In this chapter how your attitudes can help or hinder your search for your Element is discussed.

- Temperament – your patterns of behaviors, feelings, and responses
- Disposition – your customary moods and attitudes (are you a half-empty or half-full person)
- Character – your overall moral qualities

Attitudes can be physical (a practical skill) or mental (a position taken regarding a situation, issue, or relationship). Fresh insights and experiences can change your attitudes; therefore it is important to keep an open mind to all new experiences (growth mindset).

- Fixed mindset – qualities are set at birth and little change is possible (IQ is misperceived to be fixed)
- Growth mindset – you can develop your attitudes and possibilities through your own efforts (nature vs nurture)

Ch 7 – Where are You Now? (take stock and create opportunities for change)

This chapter is exercises and stories.

Ch 8 – Where's Your Tribe? (connecting with others)

A tribe is a group of people who share many of your same interests and passions. Whenever common interests align, tribes can emerge; providing support and peer review. The benefits of connecting with people who share your Element are...

- Affirmation
- Guidance
- Collaboration
- Inspiration

To be truly in your Element you must enjoy the lifestyle that goes with it. This is often your reason for choosing one Element over another in your life.

Ch 9 – What's Next? (creating an action plan)

This is a review of core principles.

Ch 10 – Living a Life of Passion and Purpose (reflecting on the book's main themes)

Common themes from those on the verge of dying are that they wish they had had the courage to live a life true to themselves, instead of meeting the expectations of others, and that they worked so hard they didn't find enough time for their family and loved ones. Important lessons to be learned from this reflection are...

- Honor your dream
- Reduce the burden – simplify your lifestyle to those things you consider important
- Value your own life and feelings
- Value those you love

Finding your Element is about discovering what lies within you and, in doing so, transforming what lies before you.