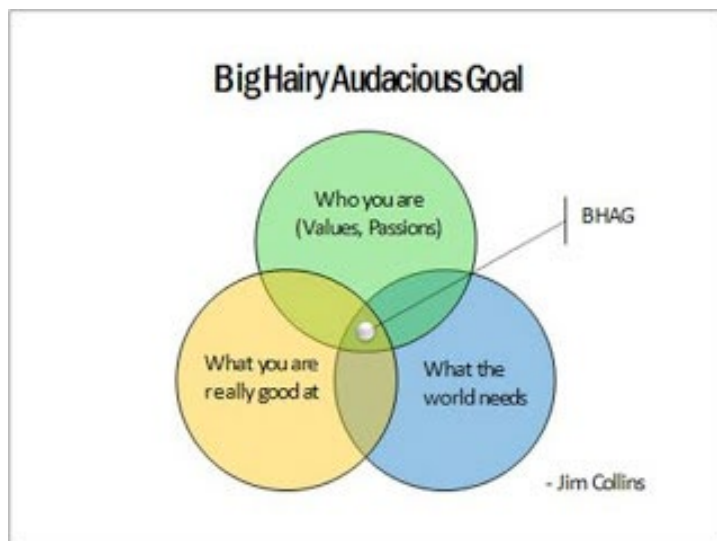


# GRUNDWERDEN: YOUR REASON FOR BECOMING

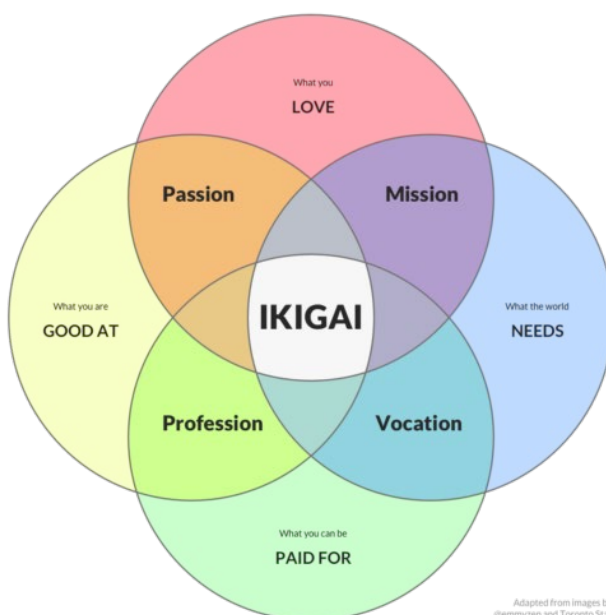
OR WHY THE IKIGAI DIAGRAM IS COMPLETELY BOGUS

## Introduction

So, there's this concept of Ikigai. Similar to the BHAG idea I talk about in my **DOING BIG MAGIC** book. The BHAG (or big hairy audacious goal) according to the book *Good to Great* is the intersection between who you are (your goals and values), what you are good at, and what the world needs:



When I originally learned about this, I didn't know about Ikigai, but it's a more flushed out version of the same idea that makes for a much prettier Venn diagram. [Ikigai](#) (or reason for being) is the intersection of what you love, what you are good at, what the world needs, and -- bonus -- what you can get paid for:



At first glance, the biggest difference between these two Venn diagrams is that Ikigai calls out getting paid directly, while BHAG assumes that if you get the first three right that money will follow (it's a more capitalist view if you think about it: need = monetary value).

Regardless, these kinds of rubrics don't really seem up for debate. You aren't going to find many people who are like "I don't want to do what I love" or "I want to suck at my job." Ikigai is literally your reason for being -- it must be good, right?

Whatever you call it (life goal, dream job, big goal, etc.) the metrics aren't the problem. If people who need what you offer will pay you for something you both love and are good at, you win. Congratulations!

## Venn Diagrams Don't Point Anywhere

The problem of course, is how to get from an attractive Venn diagram to an actual career. Some people will work on this will end up with very nebulous statements about their "perfect" career like:

**I WILL DEVELOP (GOOD AT) MY WRITING (LOVE) TO HELP DISADVANTAGED POPULATIONS (NEED) IN ORDER TO EARN A LIVING (PAID FOR).**

Which sounds lovely but isn't actually very helpful.

And that's because Venn diagrams don't demonstrate movement. They are a tool for describing the current state of something, not any kind of process. So, if you are already doing your Ikigai thing, it's easy to look at the diagram and say, "Yes, being a project manager is the right thing for me! Because I love it, I'm good at it, people (desperately) need it, and –yay! –will pay me for it." At least that's what I'd say, because project management is my reason for being (hey, nobody ever promised that the Ikigai would be glamorous).

But if you don't already know what your own reason is, staring at this diagram isn't going to help you.

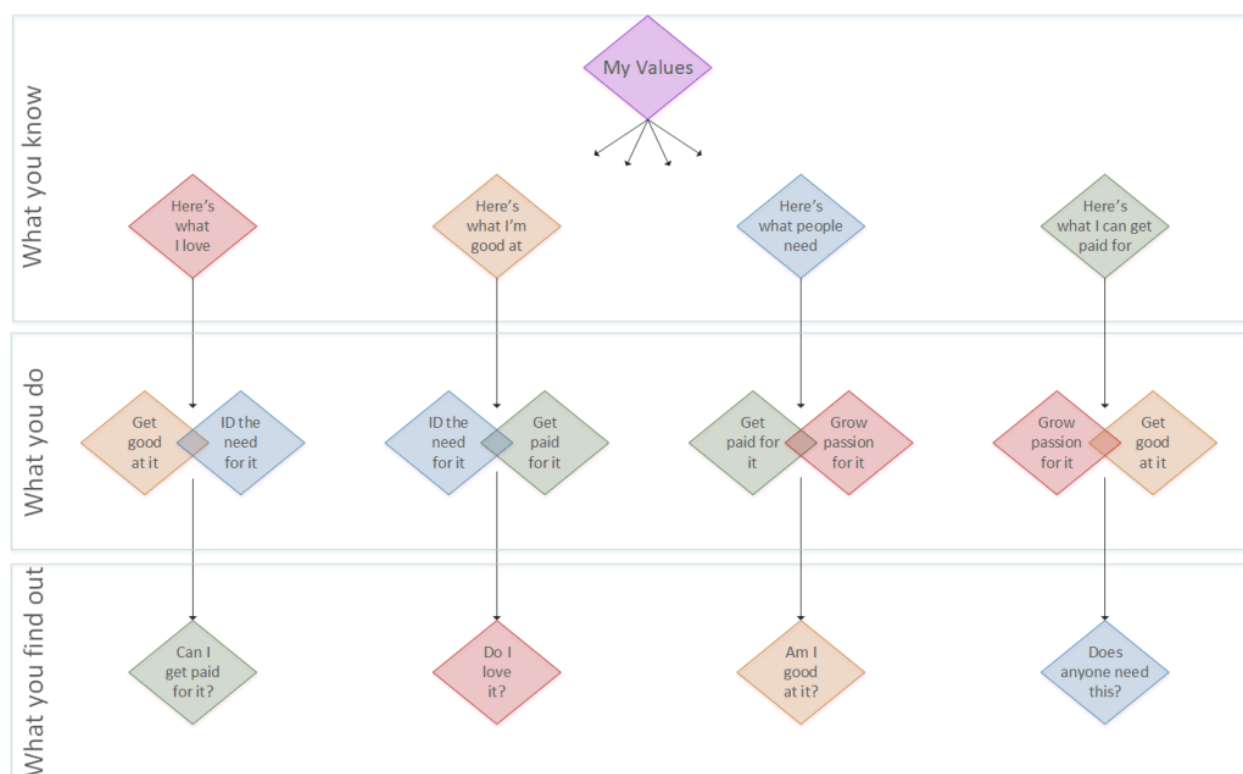
In fact, after thinking a lot about this idea, I'm going to propose the heretical notion that looking at this diagram and trying to find something to slot into this middle spot is futile. Because until you try things out, you don't know what you love and what you can become good at. And by the time you figure those things out, you aren't the same person you were before, and the economy isn't the same economy (meaning needs and pay structures have also changed).

## What You Need is a Process

I'd like to suggest this concept as a JOURNEY and not a destination. It's a path and not a spot on a map. It's a cyclical process rather than a career product.

This probably means I need a different name for it, and since I don't know Japanese, I will henceforth refer to this as Grundwerden, from the German GRUND ZU WERDEN or "reason for becoming." In fact, grund means both "reason / motive" and "ground / land" (and is obviously the source of our word ground). So, this is literally your motive for finding your land... the place where you belong.

This makes for a less pretty, but much more useful diagram...



So how to you take this journey to a fulfilling career / life purpose? One where you feel confident, passionate, and financially successful?

## 1. Start with what you know (your ground)

Step one is figuring out your starting point. This originates with your values, the things you care about. This is your true grounding, so always keep values in mind as you move through the rest of the process.

Next though, you identify where you already have some knowledge to start your journey...

**What you love:** Maybe you are just starting out and aren't good at anything yet. You don't know much about the options out there; you just know what sparks your passion.

**What you're good at:** Maybe you are already a skilled professional, with a good idea of your strengths and weaknesses and a built-in skill set you can leverage.

**What people need:** You could be the kind of person who is really focused on what's needed to make the world a better place.

**What you can get paid for:** Some people have a real entrepreneur mindset. They can see a dozen ways to make money.

## 2. Identify your key question (your becoming)

Step two is identifying the key gap in your knowledge...

- Our young person knows what he loves, but he has no idea if he can ever make a living at it.
- Our unhappy career person would love to love her work, but she isn't sure how that's going to happen.
- Our do-gooder feels called to help others but doesn't know how he can help himself get better at it.
- Our entrepreneur would like to have more meaning in her life but doesn't know how that would work in practice.

### 3. Fill in the gaps (this is the work of finding your work)

The final step is to start where you're at and fill in the gaps that will get you to your answer. Note, this isn't about thinking or planning, this is about doing and trying things out over time...

- Our youth gone wild would immediately begin to start getting better at his passions while researching opportunities to use those passions to fulfill a need. The goal would be to eliminate things where there wasn't a skill match while keeping a close eye on changing needs and demands in the market. By the time he builds up his skills, he should be able to find a way to make a living.
- The skilled pro needs to start a systematic search for places where the skills she already has dovetail with both need and economic viability. This is particularly important if she has existing expenses and responsibilities that make a year in Tuscany to find herself unfeasible. Instead, she should pivot laterally into career alternatives that use the skills she already has until she finds the area that sparks her passion.
- Florence Nightingale would do well to try an objective assessment of what financial success looks like when focusing on other's needs, while identify what aspects of this work really excites him personally. This knowledge would be used to get him to the skillset that he needs to help himself while helping others so that he can build a career in a field focused on the needs of others.
- Ms. Big, on the other hand, can use her flush bank account to vigorously explore life options to identify both what she loves as well as what skills she needs to develop to be successful at (empathy maybe?) and use her fiscal talent to help others.

Remember, this process of learning and discovery is going to take however long it takes. It could take a month or a decade or be the work of a lifetime. The duration doesn't matter because it's the journey toward the answer that is Grundwerden, not the answer itself.

Note: These are four logical examples (I've had personal experience with two of them) but there are other combinations. Mix and match as necessary and remember that step three is doing, not thinking or planning.

## Conclusion

On first glance, this might seem less satisfying than the original Venn diagram because it's more work (and less pretty). However, the chances of success in a constantly changing environment - and remember, you change too over the course of a lifetime - increase by making this a process instead of a one-time guess.

Even if my 18-year-old self had somehow magically found her perfect career (actually, I thought I did at one point), I'm a very different person than I was at 18. Passions change, skills develop, and of course the market changes. I could never have imagined the work I do now, or how much I would love it.

The journey of becoming never stops. Even if you find yourself in that sweet spot in the middle of the Venn diagram, the actual world keeps changing -- you keep changing. A Venn diagram hides the reality that everything is constantly on the move. The risk isn't trying the wrong thing, the risk is not trying anything. It's remaining in the same place, getting more and more unhappy, while things change around you. It's trying to be the same person and not letting yourself grow and change.

When you see this as a process, a journey rather than a destination, a VERB rather than a NOUN; then you realize that you are already moving. The win is moving mindfully rather than arbitrarily. It's owning your own process (your values, your knowledge, your desires) and finding your own reason for becoming.