ED HAJIM'S LIFE DESIGN COURSE













THE LIFE DESIGN COURSE

The Life Design Course is based on the tenets in the book *The Island of the Four Ps*—passion, principles, partners and plans. In this syllabus, students learn how to turn these four fundamentals into a personal Life Design Plan they can use, change and adapt throughout their lives.

Below are eight sessions designed to build upon one another to help students understand themselves so they can learn how to make a life, not just a living. **This is just a suggested outline.** It is important that as the instructor, you add, subtract and alter this course to meet the needs of your unique student population.

While everything about this course is flexible, there is one essential tool—a notebook. Please make sure your students know to bring one to every class. This is where they will record their journey and create the Life Design Plan they will refer to and change for years to come.

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Below are some suggestions as you navigate the sections.

Time Limits

- Timing of each session section is up to you

Materials

- All students will bring a notebook to collect their thoughts and create the final Life Design Plan
- Everyone is different. Consider what classroom materials you might need for students to complete their assignment, such as a whiteboard, sticky notes, etc.

Homework Assignments

- Assignments should reinforce what the students have learned in class
- Student notebooks should contain assignments, personal reflections and notes, which will eventually become their Life Design Plan

Assessment

Assessment can include:

- Class participation
- Participation in exercises
- Timely completion of assigned materials
- Quality of notebook entries
- Final Life Design Plan

Bibliography

- *The Island of the Four Ps* by Ed Hajim
- *On the Road Less Traveled* by Ed Hajim
- *Just Enough* by Laura Nash and Howard Stevenson
- *Designing Your Life* by Bill Burnett and Dave Evans
- Additional texts as needed

Getting Started

Through this eight-session course, your students will explore the four important elements that contribute to creating a life: passions, principles, partners and plans.

To begin, let's talk about passions, the first element to introduce to your students. Our passions often hide in plain sight. They're the activities that energize us, the topics that make us lose track of time, the work that doesn't feel like work. Discovering our passions isn't like following a GPS to a predetermined destination. It's more like being an explorer with a compass. The process is at times exciting and uncertain. Students might find that what they thought was a passion was actually someone else's dream for them, or something they never considered lights them up in unexpected ways.

As their self-exploration continues, students develop their moral compass as they investigate their principles. This is where you'll help them figure out what rules they actually want to follow and what lines they won't cross. They might be surprised to discover that principles aren't about limitations, they're about bringing structure and organization into their lives.

No individual can succeed alone, which is why it's so vital to understand the importance of partners. Young adults gravitate toward romantic partners, and while very important, that's only one of the partnerships they will need in life. You will help widen their view as they learn about how to choose the kinds of friends, collaborators and advisers they'll need as partners throughout life.

Plans and planning might be a challenge for some of your students. Getting organized doesn't come naturally to everyone. By teaching your class how to benefit from understanding waves, cycles and trends you will generate enthusiasm as they learn how they can apply them to their passions and principles.

The Life Design Course is different than other workshops. Your students are not just going to think about the concepts outlined here—they're going to experience them. Through exercises, discussions, and real-world experiments, they will gather evidence about what truly energizes and engages them, the people they want in their lives, the values they cherish, and the plans that will create the foundation for a life.

Session 1

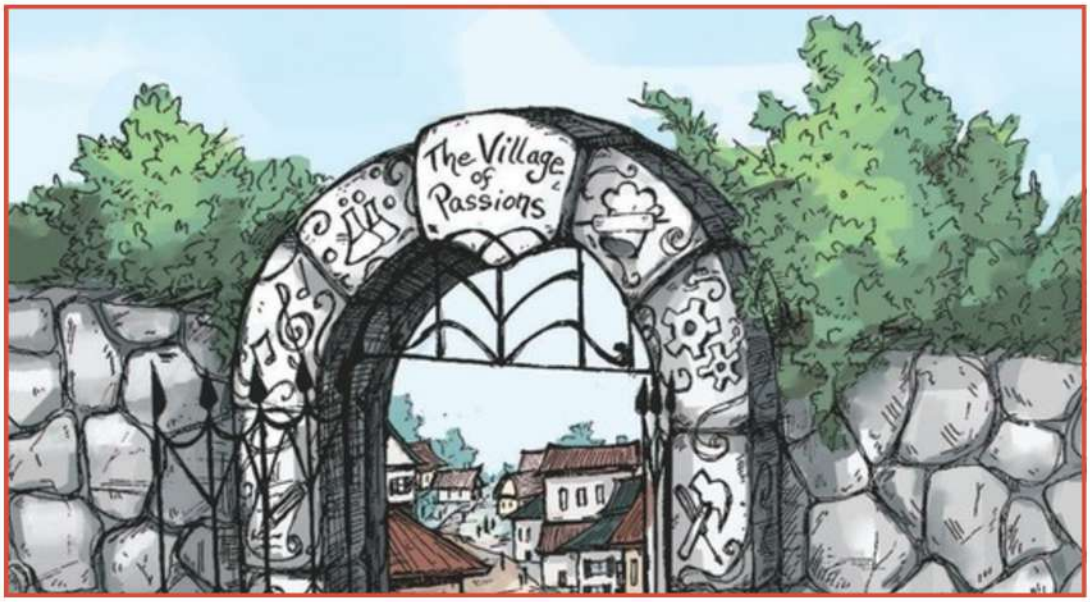
Discover Your Passions

"What makes you jump out of bed and take two steps at a time?"

In this first session, you will introduce your students to the course and they'll learn how the sessions provide the building blocks to create a personalized Life Design Plan. They will introduce themselves and share stories that speak to who they are. As a group, they will look for patterns that indicate potential passion areas. And they'll begin using their notebooks as an ongoing reference for their thoughts and feelings.

Session Objectives

- Introduce course objectives, expectations and final goal
- Establish relationships and start self-exploration by sharing personal stories
- Begin identifying connections between experiences and potential passion areas when students felt fully energized and engaged
- Start the process of noting thoughts, feelings and insights in students' journals



Session 1 Outline

1. Introduction

- Introduce course objectives and the goal of building a Life Design Plan, touching briefly on the final assignment: a Life Design Plan Journal
- Students introduce themselves and share their stories
- Discuss the concept of passions

2. Passion Indicators Exercise

- It may be best to form groups of four to five students to facilitate the discussion of passions
- Students identify examples of times in their own lives when they felt passionate using the following indicators:

    - Energy: Activities that energize rather than drain you
    - Time: Activities where time seems to fly by
    - Growth: Areas where you naturally seek to improve
    - Impact: Work that feels meaningful to others
    - Joy: Activities that bring genuine happiness

3. Pattern Recognition

- Students write down potential passion areas emerging from their reflections
- Discussion of how to identify potential passions
- Recognition that patterns evolve and change
- Brief journaling to reflect on this experience and what they learned from it

Session 2

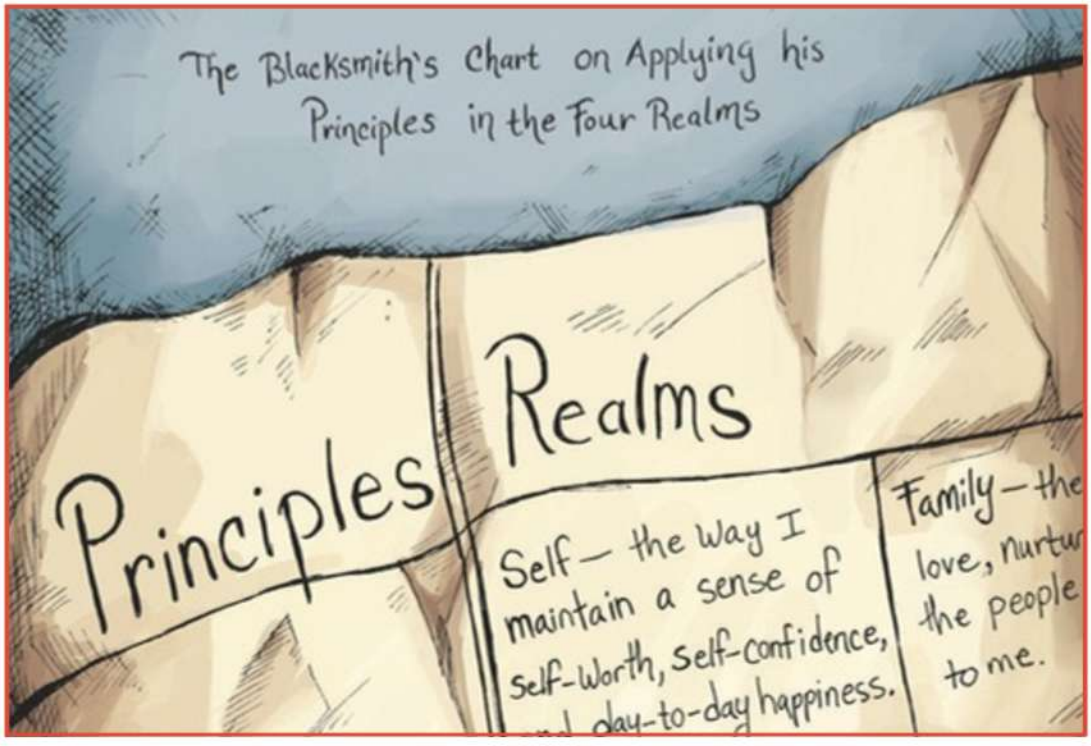
Uncover Your Principles

"Rules you will follow and the lines you won't cross."

You will define and discuss core and situational principles, how they're formed, and the important role they play in guiding life decisions. Students will brainstorm how principles influence their lives and how they may change over time.

Session Objectives

- Define core and situational principles and where they come from
- Recognize how principles shape life choices and personal boundaries
- Develop strategies for maintaining principles under pressure
- Explore how principles evolve over time



Session 2 Outline

1. Introduction

- What are principles?
- How do principles differ from rules?
- Where do our principles come from?

2. Understanding Core Principles

- Students write down their core principles
- Class discussion on why these are core principles
- Introduction to the concept of core principles as personal guidelines

3. Understanding Situational Principles

- Students write down their situational principles
- Class discussion on why these are situational principles
- Introduction to the concept of situational principles as personal guidelines

4. Identifying Personal Principles

Individual Reflection Exercise:

- Write specific examples of how students' principles have influenced their choices
- Identify potential conflicts between different principles

5. Principles Under Pressure

Case Study Discussion:

- Present real-life scenarios where principles are challenged
- Group problem-solving on maintaining integrity

Role-Playing Exercise:

- Practice defending principles in challenging situations
- Develop strategies for communicating boundaries

6. Personal Action Planning

- Create specific strategies for upholding principles
- Set goals for principle-based decision-making
- Recognize how principles will have to be added, changed and possibly deleted over a lifetime

Session 3

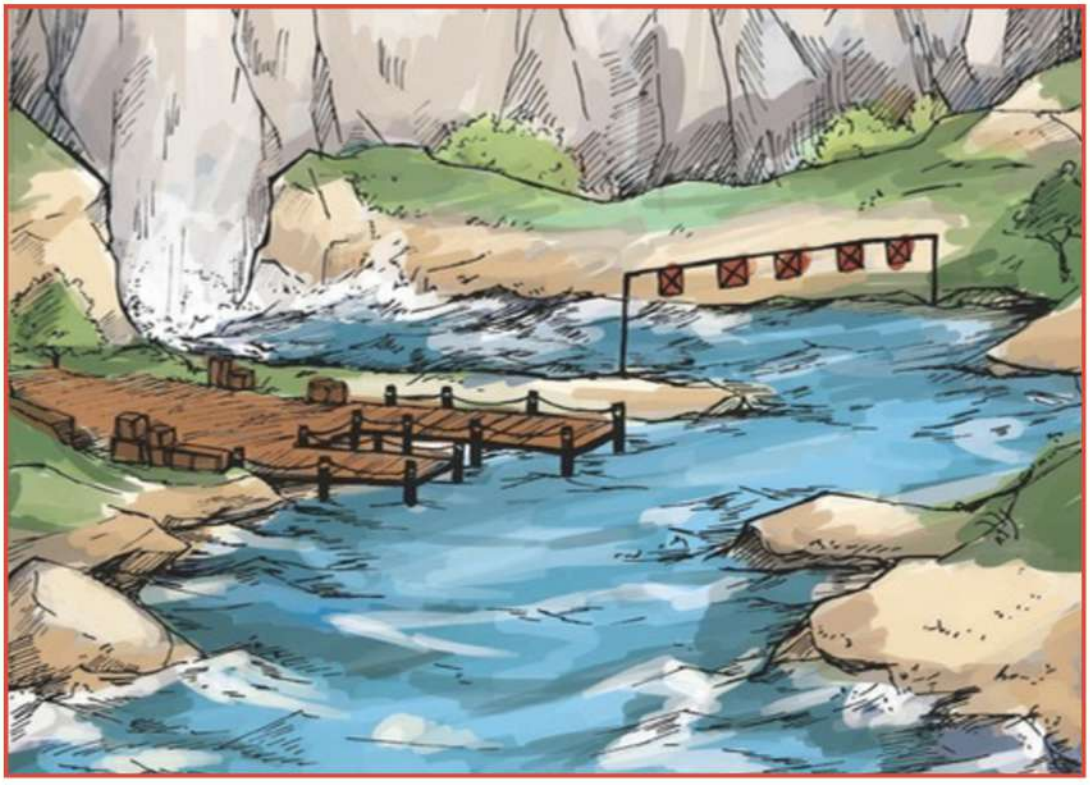
Overcoming Obstacles

"Disadvantages can become advantages."

Introduce students to the concept of turning disadvantages into advantages in order to overcome obstacles. Discuss how their principles can help them handle life's most difficult challenges.

Session Objectives

- Learn how disadvantages can become advantages
- Understand delayed gratification for long-term success
- Distinguish between permanent and situational principles



Session 3 Outline

1. Introduction

- Review personal principles identified in previous sessions
- Discuss how principles have evolved in students' lives
- Share examples of principles adapting to circumstances in self, family, work and community (giving back)

2. Challenges and Disadvantages Workshop

- Identify personal challenges and disadvantages
- Group exercise: Discuss how disadvantages can become potential strengths
- Discussion: Real-world examples of obstacles becoming opportunities

3. Delayed Gratification Exercise

- Introduction to delayed gratification concept
- Case studies of successful long-term planning
- Personal reflection: Short-term versus long-term benefits
- Developing strategies for maintaining motivation during periods of delayed gratification

4. Principles in Action

Identify:

- Core, unchanging principles
- Flexible, situation-dependent principles
- When principles need to be changed

Session 4

The Power of Partnerships

"I've only been as good as the people I've surrounded myself with."

Explore the crucial role of relationships and partnerships in shaping a life journey, focusing on how different types of connections contribute to personal and professional growth.

Session Objectives

- Identify different types of partnerships that influence life success
- Define key characteristics needed in various partnership contexts
- Understand the reciprocal nature of meaningful relationships
- Develop strategies for building and maintaining supportive networks



Session 4 Outline

1. Introduction

- Opening reflection on theme quote
- Discussion: Students share examples of people who have positively influenced their lives
- Brief overview of different partnership types (life partners, mentors, advisors, friends, community members)

2. Review Types of Partnerships

Life Partners

- Romantic partners, the most important relationship
- Close family ties
- Deep friendships

Professional Partners

- Mentors and advisors
- Colleagues and collaborators
- Professional network

Community Partners

- Social connections
- Volunteer relationships
- Cultural/spiritual communities

Session 4 Outline

3. Partnership Characteristics Workshop

Small group activity: Students identify and discuss essential characteristics for different partnership types.

Identify ideal characteristics of partnerships:

- Partners who do things you can't do
- Partners who can do things better than you can do them
- Partners who do things you do well but are things you don't want to do

Focus areas:

- Trust and reliability
- Communication styles
- Shared values and goals
- Growth and support
- Boundaries and respect

4. Collaboration

- How to find the right partners
- Discussion on reciprocity in relationships
- Exploring ways to contribute to partnerships
- Understanding the role of gratitude and appreciation

Session 5

Plans and Planning

"Getting the wind at your back."

Introduce students to using cycle drivers, such as technology, government, demography, geography and economics, in order to find waves, themes and trends, which will help identify potential future opportunities. They will also discuss how these opportunities might align with their passions, principles and partners.

Session Objectives

- Identify and analyze major trend drivers affecting future opportunities
- Connect personal passions and principles to emerging trends
- Develop a framework for identifying opportunities
- Create initial action plans that leverage favorable conditions



Session 5 Outline

1. Introduction

- Brief recap of previous sessions key takeaways
- Introduction to trend analysis and future planning
- Quick sharing: What does “planning for the future” mean to you?

2. Understanding Trend Drivers

- Interactive presentation on major trend drivers:
  - Technology (AI, automation, digital transformation)
  - Demographics (aging population, urbanization, migration)
  - Economics (gig economy, global markets, sustainability)
  - Government and Policy (regulations, education, healthcare)
  - Social and Cultural (remote work, wellness, diversity)
  - Geography and Context (neighborhood, town, city, state)

Small group activity: Each group analyzes trend drivers and identifies potential opportunities.

3. Opportunity Framework Development

Introduction to planning framework:

- Try to identify trends early
- Connect to passions, principles and partners
- Recognize that most waves, themes and trends follow an S-curve pattern
- How to plan action steps

4. Chance and Luck

- What part does chance and luck play?
- What part does geographical location play?
- What part does the period of history in which you live play?

Session 6

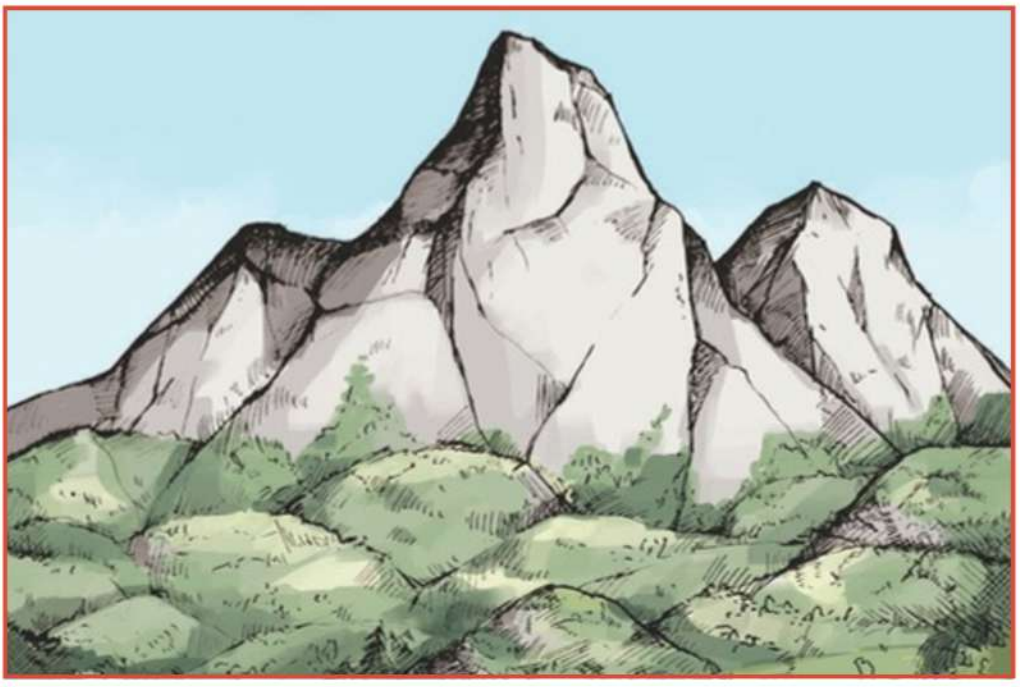
Self-Exploration

"Who am I? Where do I want to go?"

Building on sessions one through five, students will explore more deeply who they are, recognizing they are shaped by a combination of their genetic makeup and their environment (including family, neighborhood and friends). They will identify characteristics they wish to keep, improve, minimize, eliminate or add.

Session Objectives

- Recognize the interplay between genetic predispositions and environmental influences
- Identify core characteristics and behaviors
- Evaluate which traits they want to keep, modify or develop
- Create an initial action plan for personal development



Session 6 Outline

1. Introduction

- Discussion: What shapes who we are?
- Genetic factors (family, temperament, abilities, predisposition)
- Environmental influences (family, culture, education, peers)
- Personal choices and experiences
- Small group sharing: Key influences in their lives

2. Identifying Individual Characteristics

- Core self: Genes plus environment, nature and nurture
  - Inherited traits
  - Environmental influences
  - Chosen characteristics

3. Trait Analysis

- Traits you want to keep and why they serve you well
- Traits you might want to improve
- Traits you want to eliminate or minimize, and why these traits don't serve you well
- What traits do you want to add, and why?

4. Personal Action Planning

Create specific plans for:

- Traits to strengthen
- Traits to improve
- Traits to develop and/or add
- Traits you might want to modify or eliminate

Session 7

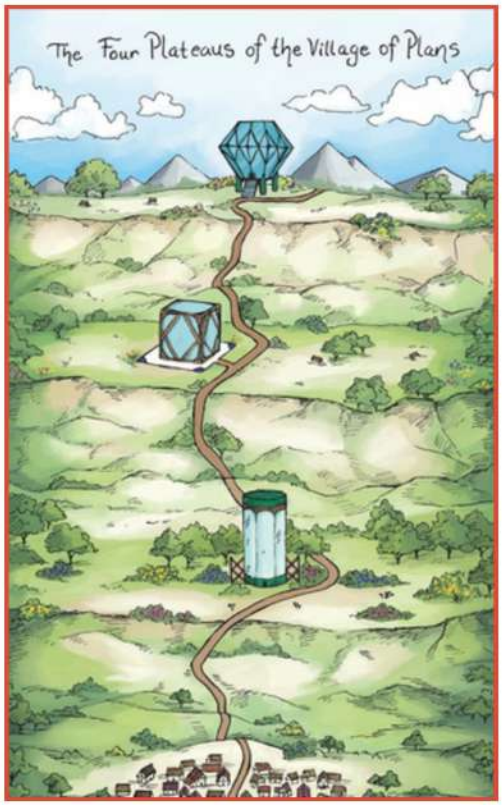
Discovering the Paths of Successful People

"Finding those who have been there, done that."

Students will read and report on several biographies of notable figures. These figures as much as possible should share characteristics, values, and goals similar to their own and exemplify the many different paths they have taken to success. Students will identify, contact, and interview individuals who possess the characteristics that inspire them, with the goal of seeking mentorship.

Session Objectives

- Analyze biographies of inspiring figures
- Extract life design principles from success stories
- Develop mentorship seeking skills



Session 7 Outline

1. Introduction

- Create a biography reading list
- Share insights from biography readings
- Group discussion of key themes:
  - Career paths and pivots
  - Values and principles maintained
  - Obstacles overcome
  - Life-work balance / harmony
  - Document common success patterns

2. Interview Skills Workshop

Students will learn how to:

- Craft meaningful interview questions
- Practice professional outreach
- Role-play mentor conversations
- Learn active listening techniques
- Focus on genuine connection
- Respect mentor's time
- Prepare thoroughly for each interaction
- Follow up and express authentic gratitude

3. Finding Your Mentors

- Create criteria for potential mentors
- Describe shared characteristics with role models
- Develop mentor research strategy
- Identify most inspiring people

Session 8
Writing Your Life Design Plan

"A road map for what's next."

Using what they've learned from the previous seven sessions, students will write their Life Design Plan. This document should include their passions, principles and potential partners. Students have the flexibility to include both short- and long-term goals, hopes and even dreams. This is the beginning of understanding that writing a Life Design Plan can lead to discovering their purpose. Explain that **the Life Design Plan is a work in progress**, the start of a lifelong effort, and a tool that can help them not only make a living, but also build a fulfilling life.

Session Objectives

- Create comprehensive Life Design Plans
- Integrate lessons from previous sessions
- Develop flexible, evolving frameworks
- Establish ongoing personal review process



Session 8 Outline

1. Introduction to Life Design Planning

- Review key elements from previous sessions
- Explain Life Design Plan structure
- Emphasize flexibility and evolution

2. Core Components Workshop

Students will document their:

- Passions and motivations
- Core principles and values
- Potential partners and mentors
- Short - and long-term goals
- Dreams and aspirations
- Alternative life scenarios

3. Integration Exercise

- Connect different plan elements
- Identify collaborations and combinations greater than their individual parts
- Recognize potential conflicts
- Discuss how to adapt to change

Session 8 Outline

Life Design Plan Components

Essential Elements:

- Personal Mission Statement
- Passion Areas
- Core Values and Principles
- Partnership Network
- Goals Timeline
  - Short-term (1 year)
  - Medium-term (2–4 years)
  - Long-term (5+ years)
- Alternative Scenarios/Plans
- Growth and Learning Plans
- Review and Update Schedule

How to Use Your Life Design Plan in the Future

- Guide college course selection
- Inform career decisions
- Direct personal development
- Structure life choices
- Build meaningful relationships
- Test future potential choices
- Facilitate ongoing consultation with mentor
- Review progress periodically

"The allegorical tale of The Island of the Four Ps is the road map Hajim followed to create a successful life that might have ended before it ever began. If there is a template for 'Inspirational Writing', this is it."

-SOL GITTLEMAN, UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR EMERITUS, TUFTS UNIVERSITY

"This is a must-read for anyone thinking about how to successfully navigate the inevitable twists and turns in the road ahead, leading to a fulfilling life."

-WENDI HEINZELMAN, DEAN OF THE HAJIM SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING AND APPLIED SCIENCES

"Ed Hajim is the brilliant entrepreneur who, against all odds, built successful businesses and dedicated his life to teach sound principles to others. This book is a must-read for anyone who wants to enjoy a life filled with success and framed with significance."

-DR. NIDO QUBEIN, PRESIDENT OF HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY

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