



Is It Time for a Time-Out? Take Stock of Your Life

You have a strategic plan for your organization.
Do you have one for your own life?

By Mark Mitchell

We often get so caught up in our daily commitments that we don't think about our lives' broader implications. Reflecting on what you've done, what you're currently doing, and what you want to do in the future will take both you and your organization to new levels. Once you identify your deepest passions, you can align them with your organization's values and vision. The goal is for you to begin thinking about greater-than-you outcomes. Such thinking will ultimately benefit you, your organization, the community around you, and the world.

What is Halftime?

According to the halftime paradigm, presented by Bob Buford in his book *Halftime*, most of us begin taking stock of our lives somewhere in our 40s (earlier for some, later for others). Buford uses a sports analogy, dividing time into halves with a break in between (see Table 1 on page 20).

Like a coach or athlete, you create a game plan and execute it in your first half. During halftime, you get a chance to take a time-out, go back to the locker room, and assess your performance. Through frank analysis, you identify needed changes to your game plan given new information. You then re-emerge from the locker room for your second half. If you use your time-out well, your second half can be the most rewarding part of your entire life.

Now, some folks may never enter the locker room. They'll stay engaged in first-half endeavors. Others will enter the locker room and get stuck in analysis and never emerge for their second half. Our hope is to help you assess your first half and plan accordingly for

“Through frank analysis, you identify needed changes to your game plan.”

your second half. For you, nothing less than a complete game victory will be acceptable.

Speaking to Younger Employees. Those of you in your early 30s to late 40s may be planning to remain in the workforce for the next 30 years. Such a realization can trigger self-reflection, including questions such as these:

- **What is the purpose** of your life?
- **Is there more to life** than your daily or weekly routine?
- **Is what you're doing meaningful** to anybody?
- **Could your skills be used** for a greater good?

TABLE 1: YOUR LIFE IN THIRDS

FIRST HALF	HALFTIME	SECOND HALF
<p>You acquire the skills and develop the talents to be successful.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtaining an Education • Getting Married • Building a Career • Acquiring Material Goods • Juggling Life's Competing Priorities and Expectations 	<p>You decide to take stock of your success and plan for a transition in your life to greater-than-you outcomes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calling "Time-out!" • Reflecting on Your Past • Evaluating Your Skills • Taking a Broader View • Establishing Your Priorities • Choosing New Challenges • Crafting a Second-Half Game Plan 	<p>You find ways to use your skills and talents to achieve a greater good.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focusing on Your New Priorities • Building on Your Identified Strengths • Experiencing Personal Satisfaction • Seeking Greater-than-You Outcomes • Fulfilling Your Passion

Speaking to Impending Retirees. Those of you in your 50s and 60s may be considering the prospect of taking your skill sets into retirement. You may find yourself addressing questions such as:

- **Have you really used** your knowledge, talents, and experiences to their fullest potential?
- **Are you restless** and disinterested with the successes you've had to date?
- **Could you start your work life over** and take a different path?
- **Have you dreamed dreams** but never pursued them? Could you pursue them now?
- **Is the world a better place** given your efforts?
- **Have you done as much as you could** with what you've been given?

Look Within & Look Around

If you've been asking any of the above questions, you may be ready for a time-out.

With a change in your perspective, you can channel your efforts to activities that contribute to a greater-than-you outcome.

Identify Your Competencies. During the strategic planning process, it's common to analyze your organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Have you done your own personal analysis? Here is a template to guide you:

PERSONAL STRENGTHS (SKILLS AND ABILITIES)
PERSONAL WEAKNESSES
OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPLORE
THREATS TO FULFILLING SUCH OPPORTUNITIES

Let's focus on your strengths. These are your unique skills. Map them on the matrix below:

HIGH ABILITY/HIGH SATISFACTION	LOW ABILITY/HIGH SATISFACTION
HIGH ABILITY/LOW SATISFACTION	LOW ABILITY/LOW SATISFACTION

“Have you dreamed dreams but never pursued them?”

Ideally, you have a large number of High Ability/High Satisfaction entries. We want to channel your second half efforts to fully utilize these unique skills for a greater-than-you good in the future.

Identify Your Passions. Most of us don't want simply to be remembered; we want to be remembered for something significant.

One way to discover what's truly significant to you is to use just one phrase or sentence to answer the following question: "What would you like to be written on your gravestone?" Your answer represents (to use Stephen Covey's term) your "end-in-mind" – the ultimate outcome you seek.

Try writing your own epitaph today. Are you comfortable with what it says? How might you change your life to create the outcome you would most like to see?

Combine Competencies & Passion: What's In Your Box? When you combine your competencies and your passion, you identify the possible greater-than-you purpose for your life. Bob Buford refers to this purpose as the item "in your box."

You should spend your second half focusing on matters related to the item you've put in your box. Placing your overriding purpose in your box helps you control your focus rather than having a focus thrust upon you.

So, what's in your box? Write your life's purpose in the box below:

“If you use your time-out well, your second half can be the most rewarding part of your entire life.”

Develop & Execute Your Game Plan

Craft Your Personal Mission Statement. Your organization (assumedly) has a mission statement that explains why your organization exists and what it wishes to accomplish. What about you? Do you have a personal mission statement? If so, are you mission-disciplined (focusing all your efforts on fulfilling your mission)? Or are you suffering from mission-creep (scattering your energy among activities that don't support your key mission)? Everything you do should point to the realization of your personal mission statement.

Expressly stating your personal mission can help bring clarity to your second half. In fact, you won't get very far in your second half without a clearly defined personal mission. You'll tend to drift from item to item, lacking discipline and focus. The questions below may help you move toward a simple one or two sentence personal mission statement.

- **What's important** to you?
- **What gives you a deep sense** of satisfaction?
- **What skills have you developed** over time? What latent skills might you develop more fully?

Use your answers to write your mission statement – what you want your life to be. Put it where you'll see it every day.

Allocate Your Time to Greater-Than-You Outcomes. In a typical day, you divide your time among competing interests (work, family, personal, community, and so on). Are you spending the bulk of your time on things that truly matter to you?

It's a Journey, Not a Destination

Use these resources to continue your journey of personal growth and fulfillment:

Books

- Buford, Bob, *Half Time*
- Covey, Stephen, *The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness*
- Maxwell, John, *The Journey from Success to Significance*

Articles (available at NonprofitWorld.org/members):

- **Six Ways to Get Out of a Rut** (Vol. 24, No. 4)
- **Creating a Values-Based Road Map** (Vol. 23, No. 2)
- **12 Heruristics that Will Raise Your EQ** (Vol. 26, No. 4)
- **Values for Ethical Choices: Rate Yourself** (Vol. 10, No. 3)

Web Sites

- halftime.org – organization founded by Bob Buford to assist you in your halftime journey
- bobbuford.com – collected resources by author Bob Buford
- leadertoleader.org – Leader to Leader Institute (co-founded by Bob Buford)

Questions to Aid in Your Reflection

To gain the most from your time-out, ask yourself questions such as these:

If your life were absolutely perfect, how would it look to you?

What have been the turning points in your life? What made these life-shaping events significant?

How open are you to change? Draw a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being the most closed to change and 10 being the most open). On this line, where would you rank yourself?

In the past six months, what major shifts in focus have you made in your life and in your organization?

What are your major regrets? Are there people connected to these regrets? How can you make peace with them?

Which things in your life and your organization do you wish were different? Which of these can you change? What can't you change? How can you turn those things you can't change into opportunities?

Use the table below to map your current time commitments. Once you've identified your second half focus, decide which time commitments deserve more or less of your time. Remember, you want to spend your time on what matters to you to achieve significance.


CURRENT TIME COMMITMENTS	INCREASE	DECREASE

Engagement Strategies. Can you create a greater good (and attend to what's in your box) by staying in your current role and organization? Can you reposition your current organization to a new orientation? Some engagement strategies for your journey toward significance:

- **Partner with those** who are engaged in your second-half focus area.
- **Continue in your current job** but with a new focus.
- **Change your present job description** to include your new focus.
- **Change jobs but stay** in your current field.
- **Shift** to a new career.

Look Ahead

The halftime paradigm is consistent with Stephen Covey's "eighth habit of highly effective people." He sums it up like this: Find your voice, and inspire others to find theirs.

As your personal journey evolves, you'll likely find colleagues who could benefit from their own halftime experiences. We hope you "pay it forward" and help them find their voices, too. The more you do so, the more likely that they'll think in terms of long-term significance rather than short-term success, and the better the world will be for us all. 

Mark Mitchell (mmitchel@coastal.edu) is professor of marketing and chair of the Department of Marketing and Resort Tourism at Coastal Carolina University (Conway, South Carolina). He earned a D.B.A. from Mississippi State University.