



# Your Personal Power Timeline Exercise

## Which Kind of Power Do You Want?

*\*Imagine looking back at 80 and thinking: "I built the perfect career... for someone else's life\*." This exercise helps you build a life of meaning and purpose on your terms.*

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## Quick Start Guide

**Time Required:** 20 minutes solo (or 45 minutes total if doing with partner)

**Materials Needed:** This guide + pen and paper

**The Big Question:** When do you want to be the CEO, and when do you want to be on the beach?

**Picture this:** You're 50. Are you in the corner office making million-dollar decisions, or are you teaching your kid to surf on a Tuesday morning? Both are valid. But which do YOU want? And when?

This exercise gives you a compass for navigating career decisions. Move from drifting to navigating.

You'll map out which type of power you want, when you want it, and why.

Doing this with a partner? Complete Parts 1 & 2 solo first, then come together for Part 4. (Part 3 is your individual action planning.) You'll first develop your own vision, then align together as a couple.



# The Tale of Two Powers

## A 2,400-Year-Old Story That Still Matters

Alexander the Great, in his 20s, ruled most of the known world. Curious about a famous philosopher named Diogenes who lived in a barrel, he visited him in Corinth.

*"I am Alexander the Great," he announced. "I can give you anything. What do you want?"*

Diogenes looked up: *"Move. You're blocking my sun."*

Alexander's soldiers gasped. This was the ultimate disrespect to absolute power.

Instead of rage, Alexander turned to his men: *"If I were not Alexander, I would wish to be Diogenes."*

This moment captures the two types of power available to us all:

### Power as Control (Alexander)

- Command over resources and people
- Impact and outcomes at scale
- Higher income and status potential
- Responsibility you cannot delegate
- **Modern examples:** CEOs, executives, entrepreneurs, political leaders
- **The price:** Stress, time constraints, golden handcuffs

### Power as Freedom (Diogenes)

- Complete autonomy over your time
- Minimal external obligations

- Location and schedule flexibility
- Limited by personal resources
- **Modern examples:** Artists, FIRE movement, digital nomads, consultants, freelancers
- **The price:** Limited resources, smaller impact, vulnerability to economic downturns

## The Key Insight: Life Has Seasons. You Can Have Both (Just Not at the Same Time)

You can have both types of power in your life, but rarely at the same time.

The art is in the sequencing.

Most people read about Alexander and Diogenes and think "I must choose one path." Wrong: You can be Alexander in your 30s and Diogenes in your 50s. Or vice versa. Or alternate every decade.

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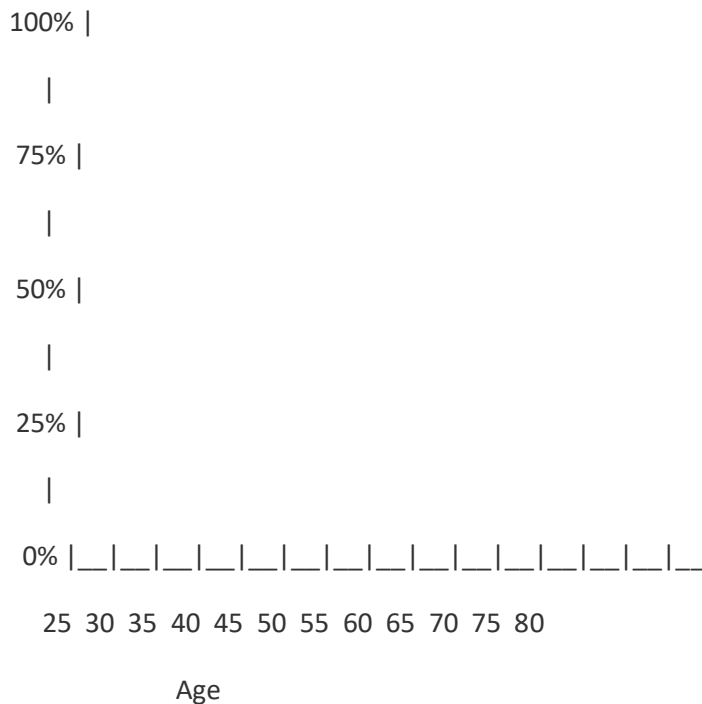
# Part 1: Create Your Personal Power Timeline

## Step 1: Set Up Your Chart (2 minutes)

Draw or print this template:

[Print & Download your Personal Power Timeline Template](#)

**Or draw your own:** 1. on the y-axis, you plot % starting with 0%, then 25%, 50%, 75%, and 100% 2. on the x-axis, plot 'age' in a way that is meaningful to you. For example: 25, 30, 35, 40, etcetera 3. use two coloured pens to add (in red = how much freedom you want, blue = how much control you want)



Legend: Red = Power as Freedom | Blue = Power as Control

## Step 2: Map Your Ideal Personal Power Timeline (5 minutes)

For each 5-year period, draw a bar showing your preferred mix:

- More red = More freedom desired
- More blue = More control desired
- The bar should always add up to 100%, what changes is 'how much red (power as freedom)', or 'how much blue (power as control)' you want at different times of your life.

## Step 3: Consider Common Patterns (3 minutes)

People approach life very differently. After guiding many executives and students through this exercise, I recognise **four** distinct patterns. Have a look and see whether you want to update or revise your own plans after seeing this?

**"The Sprint & Coast": Maximum control until 40-45, then freedom**

- ✓ Build wealth early
- ✓ Achieve career goals while energetic
- ✗ May miss early family years
- ✗ High stress in prime years
- *Example: Investment banker → early retirement*

**"The Explorer's Path": Freedom first, control later**

- ✓ Adventure while young
- ✓ Flexibility for young family
- ✗ Financial pressure later
- ✗ Late career development

- *Example: Travel blogger → late-blooming executive*

### "The Chapter Book": Alternating between control and freedom phases

- ✓ Balance throughout life
- ✓ Regular renewal
- ✗ Multiple transitions
- ✗ Less momentum
- *Example: Consultant → Executive → Entrepreneur → Advisor*

### "The Steady Climb": Consistent balance

- ✓ Predictable lifestyle
- ✓ Sustainable pace
- ✗ May miss extremes
- ✗ Potential regrets
- *Example: Mid-level manager maintaining work-life balance throughout*

## Step 4: Add Life Context (2 minutes)

Mark major life events on your timeline:

- **Where are you now?** Add your current power balance to the timeline
- Marriage/partnership plans
- Children (current or planned - mark ages like "when kid is 5/10/15")
- Parent care responsibilities
- Financial milestones

- Dream projects
- Health considerations

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# Part 2: Mining Your Timeline for Insights

## Deep Questions

Complete these first on your own. If doing this with a partner, share answers only after both finish.

### 1. Trade-off Tolerance: What are you absolutely unwilling to sacrifice?

- Missing your kids' childhood
- Living paycheck to paycheck
- Working for someone else
- Being location-bound
- Lacking intellectual stimulation
- Never having tried to build something big
- Sacrificing health for wealth

### 2. Alignment Check

Look at your timeline versus your current life:

- Where are you aligned with your vision?
- Where are you off track? What future misalignments do you need to prevent?
- What's causing the misalignment?

### 3. Surprise Analysis: What Jumped Out?

- What surprised you about your timeline?

- Which periods worry you? Why?
- Which periods excite you most? What makes them exciting?

#### 4. Capability Audit: Your Skills & Resources Inventory

What do you need for your next phase?

- If moving toward control: Leadership skills? Network?
- If moving toward freedom: Savings? Portable skills? Lower expenses? Permission to step back?

#### 5. Values Clarification

What are you ultimately optimizing for?

**Rank your top 3 in order:**

- Impact and legacy
- Faith
- Time with family
- Financial security
- Creative expression
- Adventure and experiences
- Service to others
- Personal growth
- Health and wellbeing

**Your #1:** \_\_\_\_\_

Your #2: \_\_\_\_\_

Your #3: \_\_\_\_\_

## 6. Reality Check

Is your timeline realistic given:

- Your current financial situation
- Industry constraints
- Family obligations
- Health status
- Geographic limitations
- Skills and education

**If something seems unrealistic, you have three options:**

1. Adjust the timeline (delay certain phases)
2. Adjust the intensity (80% control instead of 100%)
3. Adjust your current actions (start building toward it now)

Which will you choose? \_\_\_\_\_

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# Part 3: From Insight to Action

## This Week (Pick One)

- Schedule a "power audit" of your current role: List what gives you control vs freedom

- Have one honest conversation about your vision **with someone who matters**
- Stop one activity misaligned with your timeline **today**

## This Quarter

**What shift needs to begin?** Look at your timeline. What's your next phase? What one change moves you toward it?

- Career move?
- Skill building?
- Financial changes?
- Relationship decisions?

## This Year

**What major decision would honor your vision?**

You've mapped your ideal future. But if you share your life with someone, your timeline isn't just about you, your partner also matters. Now it's time to ensure you're not planning two different lives.

# Part 4: The Couple's Power Timeline

Ready to discover if you and your partner are planning the same future? This section could be the most important conversation you have this year.

## Why This Matters

One MBA student discovered his timeline was the opposite of his wife's. She wanted CEO by 45. He wanted to sail the world at 45. They'd never discussed it.

Better to **surface** this now than in divorce court.

## The Three-Timeline Approach

Why three timelines? Because assumptions can kill relationships. This approach reveals what you want, what you think they want, and what you could build together.

**Timeline 1: Your Timeline** (You just completed this)

**Timeline 2: You Guess Their Timeline**

- Draw what you think your partner wants
- Note where you're uncertain
- Include their likely life events

**Timeline 3: Your Shared Vision**

- Create your ideal combined future
- Show where you both can thrive
- Mark necessary compromises

## The Conversation Guide

**Round 1: Share Individual Timelines (15 min)**

- Present without judgment
- Partner listens and asks clarifying questions only
- Explain your reasoning
- Highlight what matters most
- Share what surprised you

*Prompts:*

- "I see myself wanting **more** control in my 30s because..."
- "Freedom matters **most to me** when I'm 50 because..."
- "I realize now that I really care about..."

**Round 2: Reveal What You Assumed (15 min)**

- Show the timeline you drew predicting their wants
- Discuss accuracies and misses
- Explore assumptions
- Celebrate learnings!

Remember: Every difference you discover now is a future conflict **prevented**. This isn't about being right - it's about getting aligned.

*Prompts:*

- "I thought you wanted **more control** in your 30s because..."
- "I had no idea that **freedom** mattered so much **to you** in your 50s..."
- "I'm relieved that we both..."

### Round 3: Build Your Aligned Future Together (15 min)

- **Create one combined timeline**
- Find natural alignment
- Negotiate differences (**focus on shared values**)
- Commit to next 5 years

#### *Prompts:*

- "We're perfectly aligned when..."
- "Our challenge period is..."
- "What if we tried..."

## Common Couple Patterns

**"The Tag Team"**: Alternate who pursues each power type

**"The Sprint Together"**: Both chase control, then freedom together

**"The Complement"**: One stays control-focused, one freedom-focused

**"The Independent-Together"**: Both pursue individual paths with planned connection points

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# Your Next Step

## For Solo Exercisers:

You've mapped your power trajectory. Now what?

**Option 1:** Share this with someone who matters

**Option 2:** Put your timeline somewhere visible

**Option 3:** Schedule a check-in for 6 months from now

**Option 4:** Make one decision that honors your timeline

## For Couples:

You've aligned your visions. Now protect them:

**Option 1:** Schedule quarterly timeline check-ins

**Option 2:** Make one joint decision based on your alignment

**Option 3:** Share your combined timeline with a trusted couple

**Option 4:** Celebrate one thing you discovered about each other

Remember: Alexander conquered the world and died at in his early 30s, seemingly unsatisfied. Diogenes lived into his late 80s in his barrel, owning little but missing nothing.

There's no right answer. Only your answer.