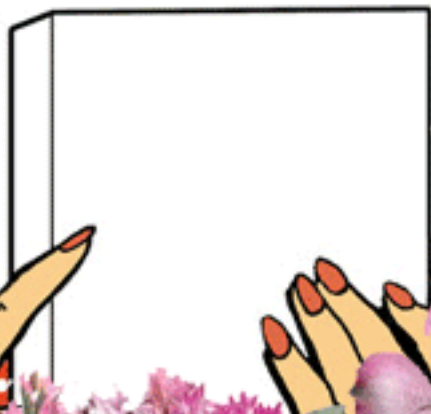


Desperation Equation



Try the
test now

See how desperate
or fulfilled you feel...



Desperation Equation



There's Susan Mayer, the divorcee and single mom who will go to extraordinary lengths for love. She's been feeling this way ever since her husband left her.



Lynette Scavo, the ex-career woman who traded the boardroom for boredom, mixed with moments of sheer panic as the mother of four unmanageable kids. She is trying to find sanity being a stay at home mum.



What have they all got in common?

Bree Van De Kamp, the Martha Stewart on steroids, whose family is about to mutiny. She is obsessed about controlling things and she wants perfection in everything. Perfect looking, house, children and wife.



Gabrielle Solis, the ex-model with everything she's ever wanted – a rich husband, a big house – so what is she doing with John, the 17-year-old gardener. She married for money and all the things money can buy. But despite all this she's bored and desperate.



Then of course there's the serial divorcee, Edie Britt. She's desperate for men and doesn't want anyone around her to be happy.



They are all as desperate as each other !

Desperation Equation



Avoid the desperation trap

By summarising some of the emerging trends in research into how fulfilled we are as a nation, we have pinpointed what it is that prompts us to feel desperate and therefore, what we need to do to become more fulfilled in our lives.

Click below to use the **desperation equation**. It's designed to help you understand the critical few factors linked to desperation, and to gauge your own level of desperation.

Using the bookmarks on the left you can see the full research paper which shows how the formula works. You can also send this to a friend, and browse a range of practical lifestyle suggestions to help you improve your sense of fulfilment in life and avoid the desperation trap.

$$\begin{array}{r}
 P \\
 + O \\
 + V \\
 - C \\
 \hline
 \text{Desperation}
 \end{array}$$

Gauge your
level of desperation...



Desperation Equation



Personal characteristics 1

Choose the items which are more characteristic of you at present
Click the green buttons beside those items and then click 'Continue'

I am someone who:

Sleeps badly and often feels
tired and restless

Feels energetic and
enthusiastic

Likes to be organised and
stick to a routine. Dislikes it
when plans change suddenly

Is flexible and quick to
adapt when circumstances
change

Worries when things don't
go well, tends to dwell on
things

Bounces back quickly from
set backs and disappointments



Desperation Equation



Personal characteristics 2

Choose the items which are more characteristic of you at present
Click the green buttons beside those items and then click 'Continue'

I am someone who:

Prefers to do things that are familiar, predictable, tried and tested

Enjoys change and new experiences

Tends to avoid or postpone difficult decisions

Takes responsibilities for my actions

Feels anxious, tense, sad or despondent

Is confident and self assured



Desperation Equation



Outlook on life

Again, choose the items which are more characteristic of you at present
Click the green buttons beside those items and then click 'Continue'

I am someone who:

Doesn't have a clear sense of direction. Not sure what I want in life

Sets myself challenging and worthwhile goals which I work towards

Tends to worry about the future and is concerned things will go wrong

Am optimistic about the future and believe things will turn out for the best

Focuses on problems and how to avoid the things I don't want

Focuses on solutions and how to make the most of my opportunities

Feels there is something not good enough about me or that I don't quite fit in

Feels positive about my life and concentrates on doing the things I enjoy



Desperation Equation



Value of achievement

Click to show how much you devote time and energy to each item:
Then click 'Continue'

I devote time & energy to:

a lot a little not at all

Looking after my health and wellbeing

Developing strong, supportive relationships

Building my confidence and self belief

Activities which give me a sense of
purpose, fulfilment and self worth

Activities which give me a real sense of
accomplishment or personal triumph



Desperation Equation



Catalysts for desperation

Click the following items which you are currently experiencing as a problem in your life i.e. finding it difficult to cope with or feeling trapped by, with no real choices.

Then click 'Continue' to calculate your level of desperation

Problems in my life are:

Financial commitments I cannot meet, loss of employment, or something which is threatening my security

Loss of a significant relationship; either a close friend, relative or partner

A traumatic event, humiliating experience or too many competing demands which cause me stress and pressure

A major change or life event (such as a new baby, menopause, disability or illness)

Becoming isolated from my usual social support structure (e.g. relocation, lack of time to spend with family and friends) coming



Desperation Equation



Your result

1 – 24

Your scores suggest you're probably feeling pretty desperate right now. Don't hesitate, take some action straight away. Enlist the help of a close friend or someone you trust (e.g. your GP). Remember, admitting you feel desperate is the first and most important step to radically altering your life.

25 – 39

Don't sweep your problems under the carpet. The timing is ripe to make a number of changes in your life. Pinpoint the critical few things you could do to cope better with your current situation.

40 – 59

OK, so you're not desperate, but you may need to watch out. You've now got a great opportunity to make some changes in your life to better prepare you for any challenges ahead.

60 – 74

You're doing well and your scores suggest you're feeling reasonably fulfilled. There are probably only a few things you need to act on to feel even more fulfilled.

75 – 100

You're doing great and should be feeling highly fulfilled. Look around you to see who'd benefit from some extra support and guidance.



Next...

Send this to a friend

Suggestions for a more fulfilled life



Suggestions for a more fulfilled life

We recommend that you focus on the critical few issues which will have the biggest impact. Use this as an opportunity to make a significant change in your life; see it as a reminder from a guardian angel.

- « Redefine your goals; think less about the problem and define the solution you want to achieve. Be clear in defining how you personally will intrinsically benefit.
- « If you've now realised that a goal you've been pursuing is the wrong one, ditch it, now! Recognise where you are over-preoccupied with material things, see them for what they are and challenge yourself to refocus your attention onto goals that will really make a difference in your life in the longer-term.
- « Break your goals down into smaller, more manageable chunks. Fulfilled people acknowledge the motivating affect of achieving their goals and so make them incremental and easy to achieve in the first instance.
- « Learn to like, nurture and pamper yourself.
- « Immerse yourself in the moment; focus on whatever is good at the time, put the past and future temporarily to one side and immerse yourself in that moment.
- « Invest in your close relationships; call on your friends and family to get a sense of perspective, ask them to help you and trust them to do it without expecting anything in return.
- « Exercise and rest; make sure you have balance in your life. Just pamper yourself!
- « Ask a close friend or trusted advisor to help you get a better perspective and build the resilience you need to move forward.
- « Learn the value of accepting and adapting to the things you cannot change. Change the things you can and build the support around you to ensure you recognise the difference.

Desperation Equation

Send to a friend...

Send this to all your desperate (and not so desperate!) friends by filling in the form below.

We respect your privacy.

Neither yours nor your friend's email address will be sold, shared or used in any way other than to send this link to your friend.

And don't worry - we **WON'T** be sending your desperation score to anyone!





Other things you may enjoy...

Desperate Housewives

Which Housewife are you?

<http://abc.go.com/primetime/desperate/quiz/index.html>

Herbal Essences

Club Eden

<http://www.herbal-essences.co.uk/>

Pete Cohen

Join Pete's mailing list

<http://www.petecohen.com/subscribeForm.cfm>



DESPERATION - HOW TO AVOID THE DESPERATION TRAP

This paper summarizes some of the emerging trends in research into how fulfilled we are as a nation in an effort to pinpoint what it is that prompts us to feel desperate and therefore, what we need to do to become more fulfilled in our lives. The dictionary tells us that despair is '*the loss of all hope*' and in this paper we present an easy to use formula, designed to help readers understand the critical few factors linked to desperation, and gauge their own level of desperation. Finally, a range of practical lifestyle suggestions are made to help readers improve their sense of fulfilment in life and avoid the desperation trap.

A DIRTY TOPIC....

From a psychological perspective we are very skilled at protecting ourselves; innately we've learnt to fight or run from threats. This self-preservational reaction is useful in the context of physical threats, but we're slightly less skilled when it comes to managing more psychological or emotional threats; we build protective walls around our problems and try to push the issues from our mind, for them only to re-emerge later as bigger and more troublesome issues. Often we are our own worst enemies.

Understanding and believing that it is healthy to openly acknowledge one's desperation is key to becoming fulfilled. When encouraged to be honest, our research suggests that as many as 4 in 5 people agree that they have felt desperation at some point in their lives (with as many as 1 in 5 experiencing clinical depression in their lifetime, with a 3 fold increase in anti-depression medication in the last decade¹), however, only a handful of people describe themselves as feeling fulfilled. Some of the myths surrounding desperation make it easy for us to believe we can buy, busy or hide our way through it. Our research shows that avoiding the desperation trap is a little more complex.

Desperate Housewives Gabrielle Solis shows us that even if you are successful in achieving your goals (e.g. wealth), if they are the wrong goals you will still experience desperation, particularly if they are suddenly taken away or threatened. In fact, all the main characters show us that by pursuing short-term, extrinsic goals (e.g. wealth, a tidy home, being seen to be the perfect mother etc.) this is often at the expense of more enduring, fulfilling achievements. Such achievements can sustain you through the bad times, especially if it is achievement derived from doing things that will help us cope better. *Where are you left if you've achieved all your goals but still remain unfulfilled?* Psychological research shows us that if we lose sight of what is really important to us we will feel increasingly desperate over time. Each successive triumph gives us hope that we will feel fulfilled, but we remain in an endless loop of hopefulness, not fulfilment. The effort we put in just doesn't seem to produce the reward.

It takes a step of bravery to acknowledge that you feel some degree of desperation; rather like a cough, it is a useful prompt to help us diagnose what the problem is and propels us into rethinking our tactics and trying out a different approach to fulfilment. In fact the very state of desperation is a useful mindset to be in; it forces us to take stock more coldly and objectively and then stimulates the right action to change things for the better.

¹ ONS, Social Trends 35, 2005

WHAT FACTORS LEAD TO DESPERATION?

Individually we bring with us to any situation a range of learnt and inherited **personal characteristics (P)** which shape how we relate to others, make life choices and adapt. People whose characteristics emphasise being more resilient, open to change and new experiences, taking personal responsibility, self-assured and confident, and who rarely feel anxious, tense or nervous are less likely to experience desperation.

Our **outlook on life (O)**, which may evolve more over our life time than our personal characteristics, will shape our reaction to the challenges we face in life. Those who are more inclined to have a positive outlook, to set themselves goals and think more about the solution they are seeking to achieve rather than the problem they are trying to avoid show greater resilience and are better able to cope in the face of difficulties. The type of goals we set ourselves and things we actively pursue in life plays an important role in how likely we are to feel fulfilled. We know that more optimistic, resilient people tend to set themselves *towards* goals; goals focussed on an opportunity in the future, something to strive for (e.g. a cash-rich life). Others tend to set themselves *away from* goals; goals focussed on avoiding something (e.g. to get of debt). What we see in practice is that in the case of the latter, when some progress has been made (e.g. halving our debt) the goal loses its power and ceases to be as compelling. Conversely, the *toward* goal drives us to continually maintain focus. Research shows that repeated failure to achieve our *away from* goals routinely leads to a feeling of desperation. Failure to achieve *towards* goals leaves us feeling hopeful; we remain focussed and persist without any permanent loss of momentum. Often this is achieved by realigning our goals with what is realistic and achievable. When successful, it is only *towards* goals that enable us to feel fulfilled; succeeding in avoiding something we don't want (e.g. to be alone or in debt) simply leaves us with a temporary feeling of relief, nothing more enduring. As a result we miss the opportunity to experience the 'feel good factor' associated with achieving something positive.

As is seen globally, individuals have a range of needs. These needs are in part a reflection of what we already have. It is human nature to adjust our expectations and view yesterday's aspirations as today's baseline. We all assume that having a little more money will make us a little more fulfilled. However, cross-cultural research shows us that despite huge shifts in wealth and consumer power, nations are not reporting any significant shifts in how fulfilled they feel. In practical terms this simply results in us desiring even greater wealth. Trends in UK consumer credit (2 ½ times greater than seen a decade ago²) suggest that we're madly focussing on pursuing a materially rich lifestyle. Within this set of needs there is a natural hierarchy, starting with basic existence needs (e.g. health, personal safety, financial security etc.) going on to include needs relating to status, relationships and challenge. Although the relative significance of the absence of these needs will vary depending upon what any individual actually has, research shows that in the developed world there are a number of situational variables which act as **catalysts (C)** and increase the likelihood of feeling desperation. Catalysts include bereavements or traumatic conflict with close friends, a significant change to financial status, recent and unexpected stress and pressure, going through a major life change (e.g. relocation, a newborn baby, menopause, disability). All of these have in common the fact that they prompt us to mourn what we have lost and bring to our attention the gap between our ideal and our current reality. Feeling trapped or robbed of choices make this gap feel all the more pronounced. Our reaction to these transitory states will define whether or not we fall into the desperation trap. Our personal characteristics will shape our reaction and how well we cope (i.e. survive or thrive) for better or worse.

Finally, what we actually achieve as a result of our efforts, their **value (V)** to us, plays an equally important part in whether we are successful in our pursuit of fulfilment. The key distinction here is between outcomes which have an *extrinsic* or *intrinsic* value. In the case of the former we are referring to things outside ourselves; external rewards and material gains (e.g. status, possessions etc.), and other's perceptions of our worth (e.g. other's approval and recognition, body image). At the root of the *Desperate Housewives* lack of fulfilment is their fundamental pursuit of factors of *extrinsic* value (e.g. wealth, being *seen* to be the perfect mother or domestic goddess). As Mary Alice predicted at the show's opening "if only they took the time to look" they'd realise they're all successfully pursuing the wrong goals, and therefore in an ever increasing cycle of desperation. *Intrinsic* goals are those that come from within and help us feel good about ourselves, building our sense of self worth and self-belief (e.g. overcoming a particular fear, asserting oneself, acknowledging the personal triumphs we *can* be proud of etc.)

² ONS, Social Trends 35, 2005

Put together, these four components form a framework which can be used to gauge an individual's level of desperation, and to help in pinpointing the aspects of their life they will need to work on if they are to become more fulfilled.

$$\text{DESPERATION} = \text{PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS} + \text{OUTLOOK} + \text{VALUE} - \text{CATALYSTS} + 50$$

RECENT RESEARCH FINDINGS

As a nation we in the UK are increasingly pursuing a lifestyle which puts us at risk of experiencing desperation. In general terms more of us are employed and full-time employees are more likely than before to be working longer hours. Lone-parent households have more than doubled in the last 30 years, with now over 24% children living in lone-parent families. Despite this increase in economic activity, our desire to enjoy material wealth is leading us to borrow at an ever-increasing rate, with the greatest increase in expenditure being seen on lifestyle purchases (e.g. mobile phones, holidays, luxury digital items etc.). Despite this we know that it is relationship-based and self-investment activities (i.e. activities with a 'spiritual' significance rather than simply self-indulgent short-term activities) which people acknowledge as leaving them feel most fulfilled; spending time with friends and family, travelling, getting closer to nature.

SUGGESTIONS FOR A MORE FULFILLED LIFE

Our research suggests that there are a number of things an individual has within their control which they could do to enhance their sense of fulfilment and develop stronger coping strategies for any desperate times ahead. We would recommend in the first instance that they develop a clearer understanding of what it is that is leaving them unfulfilled and/or desperate; is it their approach to goal setting and what they are aspiring to achieve or is it something more fundamental about a lack of personal focus and purpose? Completing the questionnaire will help pinpoint the areas you should focus on. Whether due to specific situational catalysts or a more general sense of desperation we recommend that you focus on the critical few issues which will have the biggest impact. Use this as an opportunity to make a significant change in your life; see it as a reminder from a guardian angel. Our suggestions are as follows:

- Redefine your goals; think less about the problem and define the solution you want to achieve. Be clear in defining how you personally will intrinsically benefit.
- If you've now realised that a goal you've been pursuing is the wrong one, ditch it, now! Recognise where you are over-preoccupied with material things, see them for what they are and challenge yourself to refocus your attention onto goals that will really make a difference in your life in the longer-term.
- Break your goals down into smaller, more manageable chunks. Fulfilled people acknowledge the motivating affect of achieving their goals and so make them incremental and easy to achieve in the first instance.
- Learn to like, nurture and pamper yourself.
- Immerse yourself in the moment; focus on whatever is good at the time, put the past and future temporarily to one side and immerse yourself in that moment.
- Invest in your close relationships; call on your friends and family to get a sense of perspective, ask them to help you and trust them to do it without expecting anything in return.
- Exercise and rest; make sure you have balance in your life. Just pamper yourself!
- Ask a close friend or trusted advisor to help you get a better perspective and build the resilience you need to move forward.
- Learn the value of accepting and adapting to the things you cannot change. Change the things you can and build the support around you to ensure you recognise the difference.

DESPERATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Compare the item in column A with the item in column B. Tick the box relating to the item which is more characteristic of you at present: **I am someone who....**

P

Column A

Column B

- | | | |
|---|---|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sleeps badly and often feel tired and restless | <input type="checkbox"/> Feels energetic and enthusiastic | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Likes to be organised and stick to a routine. Dislikes it when plans change suddenly | <input type="checkbox"/> Is flexible and quick to adapt when circumstances change | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Worries when things don't go well, tends to dwell on things | <input type="checkbox"/> Bounces back quickly from set backs and disappointments | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prefers to do things that are familiar, predictable, tried and tested | <input type="checkbox"/> Enjoys change and new experiences | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tends to avoid or postpone difficult decisions | <input type="checkbox"/> Takes responsibilities for my actions | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feels anxious, tense, sad or despondent | <input type="checkbox"/> Is confident and self assured | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Add up the ticks in column B only and multiply by 3 **(3xP) =**

O

Column C

Column D

- | | | |
|---|---|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Doesn't have a clear sense of direction. Not sure what I want in life | <input type="checkbox"/> Sets myself challenging and worthwhile goals which I work towards | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tends to worry about the future and is concerned things will go wrong | <input type="checkbox"/> Am optimistic about the future and believe things will turn out for the best | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Focuses on problems and how to avoid the things I don't want | <input type="checkbox"/> Focuses on solutions and how to make the most of my opportunities | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feels there is something not good enough about me or that I don't quite fit in | <input type="checkbox"/> Feels positive about my life and concentrates on doing the things I enjoy | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Add up the ticks in column D only and multiply by 3 **(3xO) =**

V

Tick all the items that apply to you in which you devote time and energy:

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Looking after my health and wellbeing | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Developing strong, supportive relationships | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Building my confidence and self belief | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Activities which give me a sense of purpose, fulfilment and self worth | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Activities which give me a real sense of accomplishment or personal triumph | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Add up the ticks and multiply by 4 **(4xV) =**

C

Tick the following items which you are currently experiencing as a problem in your life i.e. finding it difficult to cope with or feeling trapped by, with no real choices:

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Financial commitments I cannot meet, loss of employment, or something which is threatening my security | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loss of a significant relationship; either a close friend, relative or partner | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A traumatic event, humiliating experience or too many competing demands which cause me stress and pressure | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A major change or life event (such as a new baby, menopause, disability or illness) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Becoming isolated from my usual social support structure (e.g. relocation, lack of time to spend with family and friends) | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Add up the ticks and multiply by 10 **(10xC) =**

DESPERATION QUOTIENT

Desperation = (3 x Personal Characteristics) + (3 x Outlook) + (4 x Value) - (10 x Catalyst) + 50

HOW TO INTERPRET YOUR SCORE: Transfer your scores directly from the questionnaire into the below boxes:

Desperation = + + - + =

Desperation



1 - 24

Your scores suggest you're probably feeling pretty desperate right now. Don't hesitate, take some action straight away. Enlist the help of a close friend or someone you trust (e.g. your GP). Remember, admitting you feel desperate is the first and most important step to radically altering your life.

25 - 39

Don't sweep your problems under the carpet. The timing is ripe to make a number of changes in your life. Pinpoint the critical few things you could do to cope better with your current situation.

40 - 59

OK, so you're not desperate, but you may need to watch out. You've now got a great opportunity to make some changes in your life to better prepare you for any challenges ahead.

60 - 74

You're doing well and your scores suggest you're feeling reasonably fulfilled. There are probably only a few things you need to act on to feel even more fulfilled.

75 - 100

You're doing great and should be feeling highly fulfilled. Look around you to see who'd benefit from some extra support and guidance.

Fulfilment