



## **Past, Present, & Future:**

*(I Know How this Movie Ends)*

Did you ever watch the same movie a second time even though you knew the ending was tragic and sad? If you feel for the main character in the film, watching the movie the second time can be a painful experience especially if you find yourself wishing that this time everything could work out instead of watching the tragic ending all over again. Another similar real life example would be witnessing a young person who you care about follow a course that you know ends up in a bad place, like failing in school or getting in trouble with the law at an early age. Maybe from your own experience you know how the story of that “movie” ends.

What about you? Are you following some kind of proverbial “script” that common sense may say will likely lead to an unhappy ending? Obviously there are exceptions to every rule when someone follows an unwise or unhealthy life course but it still works out okay (Like for instance the 95 year old woman who smoked 2 packs of cigarettes per day for her whole life and never got cancer) Still, using common sense (which at times ain’t too common) and being honest with yourself, try to think about how some of these all too common stories end:

- Johnny struggled with alcohol use problems for decades but now after a solid period of abstinence says he is going to go out with the boys again to the bar and just drink sodas
- Sally finally kicked intravenous heroin and has been sober for 3 months but she convinces herself that she is just going to sniff a bag now and then just to relax and that’s it
- Mary has been broken up with her on again off again boyfriend who emotionally abused and cheated on repeatedly for years but she is considering meeting up with him again because he swears that “this time he’s changed”

Perhaps you are thinking to yourself, “I get it but those types of things can’t happen to me, I know better than those people” and hopefully that is true. Still, many of us have at least one challenging life struggle or experience in which we may have put our hand in the fire repeatedly before we were fully convinced that we would get burned, only to still do it again a few more times anyway before we really learned our lesson.

**With all of this in mind, trying to be as honest, insightful, open and self-aware as possible, discuss some of the following:**

**PAST** – Do you have a life experience from your past in which you may have neglected to see the signs or fail to listen to the advice of others, telling you that you were headed in the wrong direction?

(Example – “When I was a kid, everyone told me to put more effort into school and stop hanging with people who got into trouble and now as an adult I feel like I could have been much better off if I had just listened back then)

**PRESENT** – Is there a life area now that you may be struggling with in which you have a sense of concern about where things may be headed but you are having difficulty changing anyway?

(Examples – “I get so depressed over how much debt I am in, but then I still keep on spending and wasting money anyway and it just gets worse and worse” – “I have a pattern of getting into bad relationships over and over again and as I keep promising myself I won’t do it again but then I find a new one and it starts all over”)

**FUTURE** – Comparing your current life circumstances to a movie, what can you do now in order to increase the likelihood that your current situation has a happier ending?



## **Activity Past, Present Future**

### ***Part 1 - Past:***

**Directions** – Write a short paragraph about yourself as a child somewhere around the elementary to middle school age. Try not to give away any identifying details about yourself like your appearance or your name or gender. Some suggestions about your childhood that you may want to include are:

- What was your personality like? (For example were you quiet, mischievous, outgoing, shy, etc.)
- How would you describe yourself emotionally? (Happy, insecure, anxious, angry, care-free, silly, serious, etc.)
- What were some relevant circumstances going on in your life at that time?

**Activity** – When everyone in the group is done writing, pass your childhood descriptions to the group leader. The group leader should arrange the childhood descriptions in a pile and number them one by one. Then, one by one the group leader should read each person’s description to the group announcing it just by number (not revealing the name of the writer). After each description is read, each group member should take notes and write down their best guess as to who wrote each childhood description. At the end, after all the descriptions have completely been read aloud, then the group leader should reveal who wrote each description and the group should discuss if they guessed correctly or not.

### ***When complete discuss the following:***

- Were there any childhood descriptions that were easy to guess and why?
- Were there any surprises?
- How did it feel to listen to your own description being read aloud and to hear other people’s reaction to it?
- How does it feel today to talk to others about your childhood?
- What is at least one valuable life lesson that you have learned from your childhood that still is useful today?

*“Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it”*



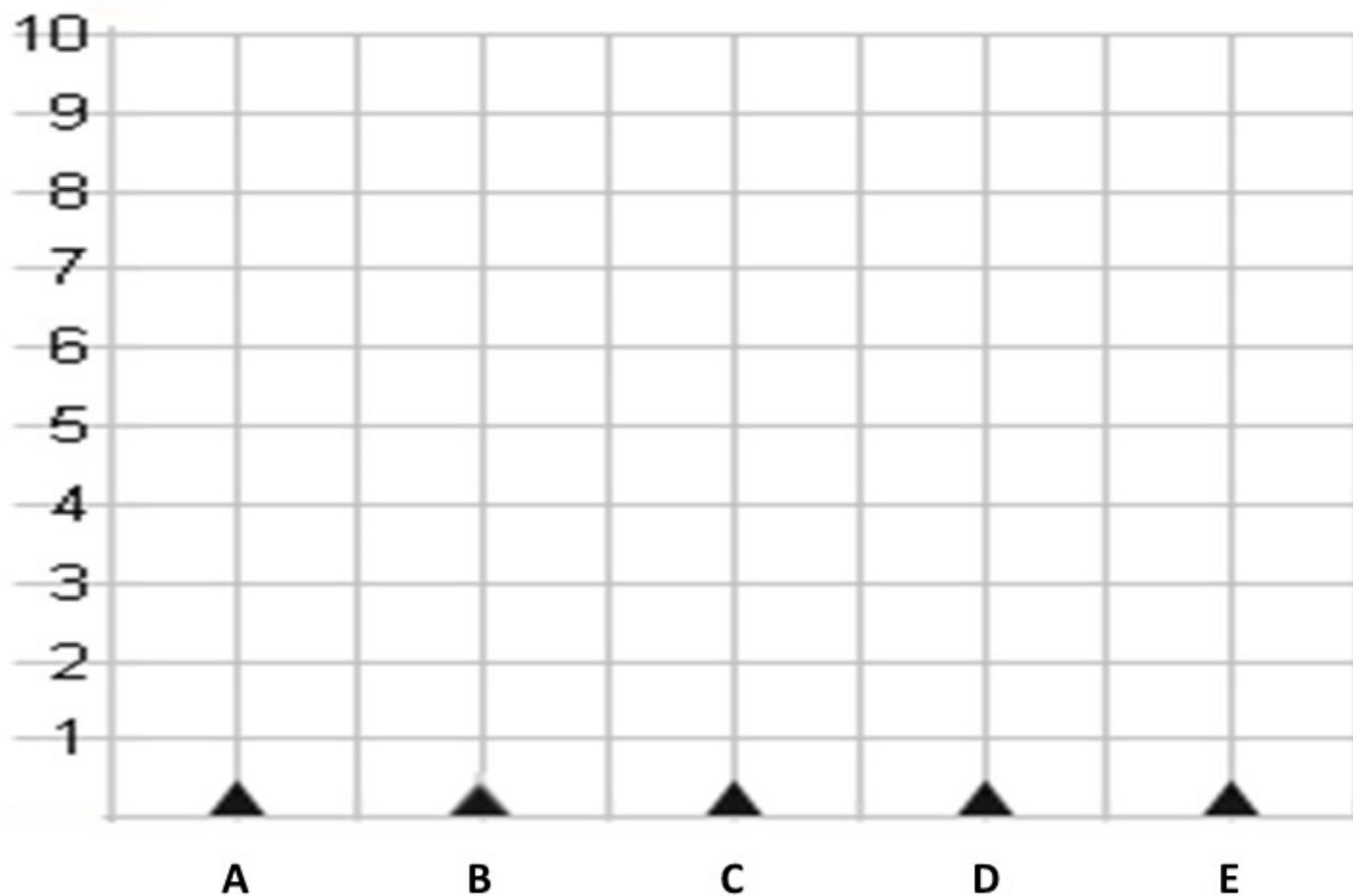
## Part 2 – Present and Future

Directions – This exercise will consider 5 life areas:

- A. Emotional Functioning, Stability and Overall Sense of Well-Being
- B. Relationships, Friendships, Support, Social and Family Functioning
- C. Educational, Occupational, and Financial Goals and Achievements
- D. Physical, Fitness, Health and Wellness
- E. Purpose, Meaning, and Overall Satisfaction with Life

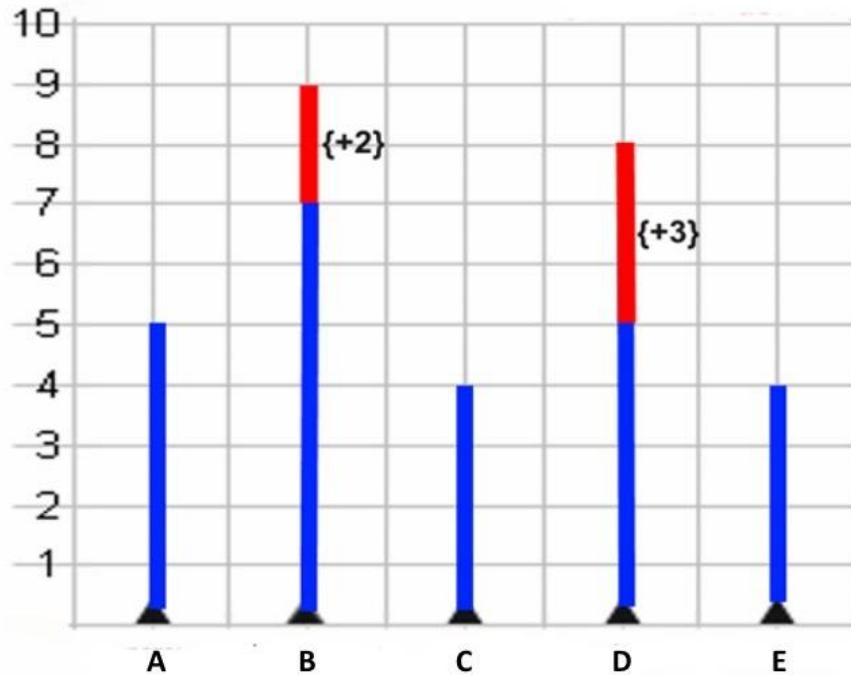
**Present** - As a group briefly discuss all 5 areas together so that everyone in the group has a collective sense of what each life area is all about.

Then individually fill in the graph below by rating (on a scale of 1-10) where you believe that you currently are in each area (**A** through **E**) in the present:





**Future** - Finally now thinking in terms of your future and self-improvement, suppose you could add 5 points worth of improvement to any of the life areas on your graph, where would you place them? For example, with the 5 points you could add one to each of the 5 life areas or you could divide up the five points any way that you choose. To understand this better see the example below in which the individual wants to improve their Relationships (B) and Health (D):



Once that everyone in the group understand the instructions for this part clearly, go back and add in your 5 points worth of self-improvement to your own graph.

### Closing Discussion

Once everyone is done, group members should take turns sharing and discussing their charts. Discuss some of the following areas as a group:

- **What life areas are you doing well in now (in the present) and which areas did you see a need for self-improvement?**
- **Share with the group where you see yourself in the future based on what was covered in this exercise**
- **What practical strategies and plans do you need to put into action in order to make the improvements that you decided upon for brightening up your future functioning?**

*It is easy to dodge our responsibilities,  
but we cannot dodge the consequences of dodging our responsibilities. - Josiah Stamp*