

## CHAPTER I

# Everyone Wants to Know the Future!

**F**OR thousands of years of written history, people have wanted to know about the future.

They consulted witches, fortune tellers, palm readers and astrologists, but to no avail. Finally, in the twenty-first century, most of them gave up. In this electronic age, people finally realized that no one can really tell them the future. But ...

Now it is possible. It is possible to understand and anticipate the future! It is even possible to influence or change the future. Not *all* of the future, but enough to be valuable.

In the 1950s and 1960s, think tanks and academics developed theories about anticipating the future. What was it that the think tanks found that the wizards and fortune tellers of earlier centuries had not? The answer seems so simple. The fortune tellers had focused on *the* future, assuming there was only one fixed, or preordained future.

The twentieth-century thinkers changed that main assumption. They were convinced that the future is *not* predetermined. That realization altered everything about the way we see the future.

Now, it became obvious that if the future is not fixed or predetermined, then more than one future must be available. Finally, they realized that it is possible to change the future through the actions we take in the present. This was a whole new way to look at the future!

Military and business organizations took those theories seriously and developed practical methods to explore and prepare for the future. The methods

proved successful and spread into businesses and governments around the world. Shell Oil developed scenarios that anticipated the OPEC crisis of the 1970s, to their great benefit. Futurists wrote scenarios for South Africa that changed the expected future of that nation and led to a peaceful exchange of power. Futurists raised the alarm of the millennium bug in computer systems. Business and government responded in time to avoid a disruption.

To business, the military, and governments worldwide, the concept was clear. Methods for anticipating the future work. As a result, futures or foresight methods are now practiced around the world. As the result of recent research, these same methods have now been successfully scaled down to fit the life of one person—or one family. Anyone. This book will introduce you to futures methods and how they work; then it will lead you, step-by-step, through the personal futuring process in just three parts.

1. Look at your life and where you are now
2. Explore your futures with scenarios
3. Create your future—the future you want to live

As you follow this personal futuring process, you will be practicing the same methods and techniques that futurists have applied successfully for large organizations over the past several decades.

Let's look at just a little more about those three steps.

## LOOK AT YOUR LIFE AND WHERE YOU ARE NOW

The first step in learning about your future is to look briefly at your past and your present, because they are the base from which you will launch into the future. Your map of the future will be based on biology and human experience over the centuries. You will learn about the six forces that are part of your daily life and how they will carry you through the events that you can expect to occur throughout your life.

That knowledge of your life will prepare you for the next section, exploring plausible futures.

## EXPLORE YOUR FUTURES WITH SCENARIOS

“Exploring your future” may sound mysterious, but it is really quite practical. In this section you will develop scenarios that explore different types

of futures, including the best, the worst, and the unexpected or “wild card” scenarios. These are all stories about you and what may happen in your life over the next ten years or more.

## CREATE YOUR FUTURE—THE FUTURE YOU WANT TO LIVE

Can you really do that? Create your future? Yes. You do that every day when you make decisions about what you are going to do in the days or weeks ahead. If you make plans for the weekend, register for school, make an airline reservation, you are changing or creating your future. Those are simple, short-term examples, but creating your long-term future is the same principle. First you must decide what you want to do. What do you want your future to be, for example, in ten years? Then you make a plan based on what you must do to achieve that future.

In reality, this futuring system is a guide that helps you think about your future in a systematic way. It has small, easy steps that add up to creating a future that you want.

In this busy, interactive world, changes happen fast, so you tend to react to whatever has your immediate attention. To some extent, the world around you is deciding your life. However, if you have a plan for your life, then as you make daily decisions, small as they may be, you will keep moving toward your plan and toward the future that you want for yourself.

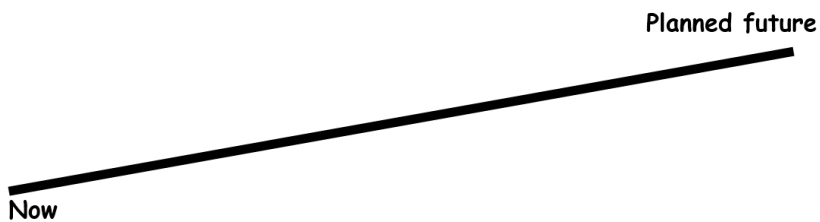


Figure 1.1 - A diagram of a plan for achieving a future.

If you have a vision, a picture in your mind, of the future you would like to be living in ten years, you have created a long-term view of your life. That long-term view will put the small things that occur in your daily life in better proportion. You will find that minor irritations are just that—minor. They

will be easier to accept, deal with, and move on from because they are not important in your long-term view. In other words, you will simplify your life.

You will probably not be able to follow a straight line from the present to the future, but if you have a vision of what you want in the future, that vision will provide a destination that you can be constantly moving toward. It is somewhat like tacking a sailboat into the wind. You may alter your course many times, but despite headwinds or obstacles, you continue to move toward your destination.

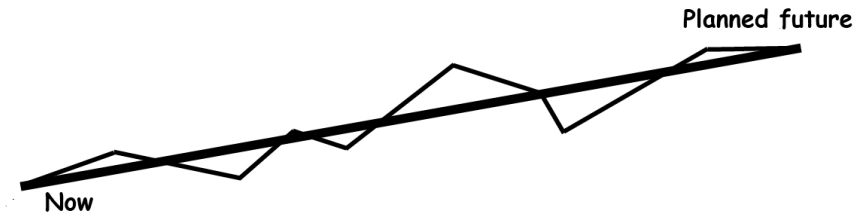


Figure 1.2 - Your route to the future may not follow a straight line, but having a vision of your long-term future will keep you moving in the right direction.

It really is that simple. Decide what you want for your future. Determine what you have to do to get there; then do it. Whether or not you make plans, you *will* create your own future, so it is worth whatever time you spend on planning to make your future a good one!

As you read through the chapters, you will probably want to try some of the exercises. Blank copies of the worksheets for each exercise are in the appendix of this book. There is also a workbook, *The Personal Futures Workbook*, available on my Web site, [www.personalfutures.net](http://www.personalfutures.net), as a free download. You can download the workbook and save it in your computer, then fill in the worksheets to build your personal plan. You can make changes over the years or have multiple workbooks. Print them, if you wish. The choices are up to you.

Now, it is time to start exploring your future, beginning with step one.