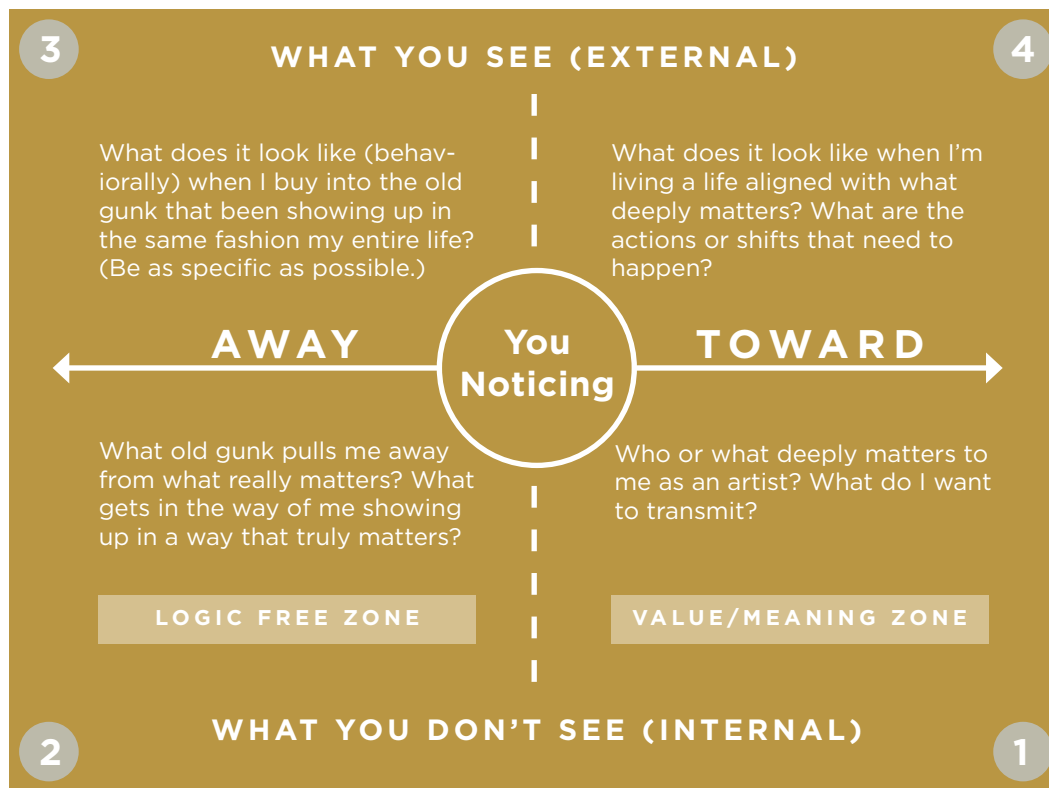


The matrix is a one-page visual tool developed by practitioners of ACT - Acceptance Commitment Therapy. ACT takes a radical approach to what ails people. It suggests that the struggle to be happy, the endless days and sometimes decades of trying to be different than you are is not only futile, but life and joy draining. It asks people to let go of that struggle, and to commit to a life that is meaningful to them. ACT teaches you how to let go of struggle, how to proceed mindfully in spite of troubles and how to determine what is meaningful to you. Finally, it teaches you to act, to move purposefully and daily towards a life in line with your own personal values.

By answering a series of questions you can see at a glance what really matters to you, what old stuff gets in the way of what really matters to you, and what your life looks like when you're either letting the old stuff drive your life, or being able to drive towards what matters even when the old stuff gets loud and demands to take the wheel.

You can run through the Matrix questions for your entire life or for any aspect of your life.



At the center of the Matrix is you; you NOTICING what's going on in your internal (bottom half) and external (top half) life. The right side of the Matrix describes the internal and external life you'd like to be living - it's the direction you're hoping to move TOWARDS. The left half of the Matrix describes the internal and external life that pulls you AWAY from what deeply matters to you.

1. We move through the Matrix in the same way, starting in the BOTTOM RIGHT quadrant - the values and meaning zone / Who or what really matters to me as an artist?

Remember, it's important that this be answered honestly and personally - not who or what you *think* should matter to you, but what really, deeply does matter.

If you're a representational painter who cares deeply about conveying and evoking strong feelings through figurative work but think it's au courant to do abstraction, DO NOT put down "do abstract work". Likewise, if what matters to you is to explore your inner landscape through paint, and you don't care or need to show or sell, DO NOT put that down.

2. Next up, BOTTOM LEFT: Logic Free Zone / What old gunk pulls me away from what really matters?

We're looking for the issues that have plagued you for a lifetime. You can be as general as saying "anxiety", "fear", "depression", or get more specific with recurrent thought loops that get you nowhere(good) but that show up uninvited and try to set down roots. Thoughts like:

"Who am I kidding - I'm no artist?"

"I'll never get another show"

"I've peaked, I've lost my mojo"

"I have no natural talent."

3. TOP LEFT / What does it look like when I buy into the old gunk that's been showing up my whole life?

Here we want to be very specific, since we'll be trying to use the Matrix as a noticing tool - what is it we're trying to notice? Things like:

"I spend hours on Pinterest and Instagram instead of in my studio"

"I binge on Netflix"

"I binge on food"

"I re-organize my closets"

"I lay in bed looking at the ceiling"

"I drink, smoke, snort"

"I snap at my partner"

The matrix is a context based model - so things like organizing your supplies, if done to help make it possible for you to paint, might belong in the top right quadrant. Once you start paying attention, using your discernment to really know what's going on with you, you'll have a sense of whether a particular behavior is helping you move towards or away from what matters.

4. TOP RIGHT / What does it look like when I'm living a life aligned with what deeply matters to me?

Here again, we want to be very specific. If you could hover over your life and witness yourself going about it, what would you see? Things like:

"I'm working consistently, in small bursts, but multiple times a week."

"I'm getting to the studio before my errands."

"I'm checking in with supportive friends, and avoiding the ones who consistently make me feel like crap."

HOW TO USE THE MATRIX?

Again, as a noticing tool. First thing - take a screen shot of the chart. Everyone loses the paper.

Second, try to pull it out at least a few times a week and just ask yourself - where have I been hanging out this week? Try not to say - "I've been bad and have spent too much time on the left side." It will only make you avoid using the tool to begin with because it will make you feel like a failure. The only way to fail at this is to not do it at all. And even then, if you notice you're avoiding it - that's a win. We just want to get more aware of our triggers, motivations, and reactions.

The better we get at paying attention, using discernment to get clear on what matters and what gets in the way, the more likely we are to be able to choose what we do, rather than be led around by our fears and demons.

TOOLS TO HELP THE WORK:

The Matrix has been called "meditation for folks who don't meditate" since it's primary focus is on noticing with curiosity and without judgment.

Where was I hanging out today? Wow - I didn't recognize what a trigger that was. What happened after that trigger? Did my reaction pull me closer or further away from where I hope to be?

There are some excellent mediation apps for those who want to go that route. I particularly like 10% Happier, for its roster of superb teachers, for the ability to choose how long you want your sessions to be, and for the 'Non woo woo', everyman questions posed by the host before each session.

<https://www.tenpercent.com>

Another great tool for those who really struggle with the self flagellation, despite their best efforts, is Kristen Neff's site, Self Compassion, and her [exercises found here](#).