

CLIENT ESSAY

Topic(s): Financial life planning; regret minimization; long-term decision-making; goal setting; retirement transition

Suggested email subject lines:

- What would your life look like in reverse?
- A helpful exercise for your future planning

Life, in Reverse: A Better Way to Plan Your Future

Most of us plan life the way we watch it: moving in one direction, always forward. But sometimes the clearest way to understand where you're going is to rewind.

If you grew up with VHS tapes or cassette players, you remember the old rewind button. When you pressed it, everything moved backward. People walked in reverse, conversations unhappened, scenes unfolded.

It was the only way to rewatch the part that mattered.

There's a version of this in life planning. It's called inversion – looking at your life from the opposite angle. Instead of asking *What should I do next?*, you ask, *What would I hope my life looked like if I hit rewind 20 years from now? What would I want to see? What would I hope not to see?*

The legendary investor Charlie Munger, who loved this technique, once said: "A lot of success comes from knowing what you want to avoid." He summed it up in a simple principle: "Invert, always invert."

In other words, imagining what could go wrong helps reveal what must go right. Psychologists and decision scientists call this backcasting or backward induction. Basically, you start at the end, then work backward to the present. When people do this, long-term goals feel less overwhelming, and choices feel less confusing.

You're not predicting the future. You're uncovering ways to shape it. So, imagine this: It's 20 years from now. You pick up the remote and press rewind on your life.

What would you be grateful to see in reverse? More time with people you love? More room for your health, a passion or meaningful work? A sense that your money supported your values, not the other way around?

And what would you not want to see on that tape? Missed time, missed chances or old habits running the show?

You can do this with something as simple as a daily practice. While writing this piece, I asked myself: How would I write a truly awful version of this article? My answers: be boring, be sloppy, say nothing new. So I focused on reversing it. I tried to make it clear, insightful and worth your time. Working backward often reveals the path forward.

The same is true for the bigger chapters of life, especially retirement. Many people think retirement planning starts with spreadsheets and savings targets. Those matter. But the most important question is much more human:

Who do you want your future self to become – and what choices today get you closer?

SAMPLE END