



This document is an extract from the full chapter which is available for download in the table via this [link](#) and is intended for use by participants of meetings.

Skilful Livelihood – sustaining life without causing harm

The logistics of the voyage

Ethical logistics

“There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones abandons wrong livelihood and maintains his life with right livelihood.” ~ Gotama (The Buddha).

“Our vocation can nourish our understanding and compassion, or erode them. We should be awake to the consequences, far and near, of the way we earn our living.” ~ Thich Nhat Hanh.

Skilful Livelihood is where ethics meets economics. It's the discipline of sustaining life without causing harm – earning, spending, and resourcing ourselves in ways we can stand behind. In the chapter on the Five Gifts (Chapter 04) we established key planks of the raft, especially non-harming and honesty. Here we apply those commitments in the real world: how we work, what we sell, what we participate in, and what our livelihood asks of our nervous system. The question is simple and searching: Can I make a living in a way that supports my journey to freedom, protects others, and keeps my raft seaworthy?

Skilful Livelihood is about how we support our life. It asks where our money and resources come from, whether our work is honest, and whether it harms other

people or harms us. It also asks what our work does to our nervous system: does it push us into stress, secrecy, and constant reactivity, or does it support stability and our journey to freedom? Work can feed us and still cost us – through anxiety, shame, burnout, or pressure to compromise our values. Skilful Livelihood is the practice of earning and living in a way we can stand behind, without creating avoidable harm.

Skilful Livelihood governs how we acquire supplies – food, fuel, and shelter – to keep our raft afloat. First, we consider the source: do we acquire our supplies through ‘piracy,’ relying on fraud, theft, or exploitation? If so, the crew lives in constant anxiety, looking over their shoulder for authorities or retaliation. Piracy provides resources but poisons the peace of the voyage. Second, we consider the cargo: are we transporting ‘toxic cargo’ that endangers the ocean and the vessel itself? Dealing in harm, intoxicants, or weapons weighs down the raft with heavy consequences. Finally, livelihood represents the day-to-day maintenance of the vessel: if the work is toxic, the hull rots; if the work is ethical, the journey remains sustainable over the long haul.

Traditionally, Skilful Livelihood begins with how we earn our living: whether our work depends on deception, exploitation, killing, intoxication, or harm. In this workbook we also widen the lens to include the whole logistics of daily life – how we spend, schedule, resource, rest, and recover – because livelihood is not only income. It is the pattern of conditions that keeps the raft afloat.

Self reflections

1. Does my work regularly ask me to cross a line on honesty or non-harming? Where do I feel pressure to lie, hide, exploit, or harden?
2. Where is harm most likely to arise in my day – to me, colleagues, customers, or family (because work spills over)? What one boundary would reduce that this week?
3. Does my livelihood mostly give me clean supplies (stability, dignity, enough rest), or does it keep bringing toxic cargo on board (stress, triggers, secrecy, burnout)?
4. Which value most needs strengthening in my livelihood right now – care, fairness, non-harm, or clarity? What would it look like in one specific action?

5. What clean reward exists in my work (help offered, skill grown, contribution made)? How can I notice it without chasing approval, status, or adrenaline?
 6. Where am I over-giving (burning out, rescuing, saying yes from fear) or under-giving (withdrawing, cutting corners, doing the minimum)? What would one balanced step look like?
 7. If changing roles isn't realistic right now, how can I craft the role I have – one conversation, one boundary, one routine, or one ally at a time?
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Journaling prompts

1. **Livelihood map:** Draw three circles – self, others, wider field. Under each, write two ways your current work supports it, and two ways it risks it. Choose one small change to try this week.
 2. **Friction and ease design:** Pick one unhelpful work pattern (over-checking email, skipping lunch, late nights). List three frictions that make it harder. Pick one helpful pattern (walk at lunch, prepared food, leaving on time). List three eases that make it easier.
 3. **Boundary script:** Write one clear, kind boundary for time or energy. Write the exact words you'll say, who you'll say them to, and when you'll say them. Add one backup line if you get pushback.
 4. **Clean reward log:** Record one wholesome outcome from today's work (help offered, skill grown, task finished cleanly). What did it feel like to earn that result through effort rather than a quick fix?
 5. **Repair plan:** Outline one proportional repair for a professional slip or conflict. What impact needs naming? What is the clean apology? What change will you make? When is the earliest appropriate moment?
 6. **The supply chain:** List the 'supplies' your job gives you (money, structure, purpose, community) and the 'costs' it charges (stress, triggers, time, fatigue). Is the trade-off sustainable as it is? If not, what is one adjustment you can make now?
 7. **The clean supplies check:** Describe one episode at work where you paused before acting from stress or scarcity. What was the cue, what did you do to steady, and what cleaner choice became possible?
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Remember to remember

Skilful Livelihood is the factor that keeps the voyage sustainable. It reminds us that practice doesn't happen in theory – it happens inside the conditions we live in every day: the hours we keep, the stress we carry, the compromises we make, the people we serve, the way we earn and spend. A livelihood that repeatedly demands deception, exploitation, or chronic overdrive gradually erodes steadiness and makes training harder. A cleaner livelihood – or even a cleaner way of doing the livelihood we already have – protects the mind from remorse and protects the body from burnout. It gives us 'clean supplies': enough stability, honesty, and safety to keep practising.

Remember, too, that this is rarely an all-or-nothing decision. Most of us can't redesign our whole life overnight. So we take the next good-enough step that reduces harm and supports wellbeing, then we learn and adjust. We craft the role we have, set boundaries we can actually keep, and create friction for what destabilises us while making it easier to do what helps. And when we do drift – a corner cut, a compromise, a mistake – we repair early and proportionally so the conscience stays clean. In RAFT terms: we keep the supply lines honest, the cargo safe, and the hull maintained, so the crossing can continue – day by day, steadily, without sinking our values to stay afloat.

“Your values are the heartbeat of meaningful work.” ~ Diana Hill, PhD.

“Integrity is choosing courage over comfort.” ~ Brené Brown.

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