

Going Deeper with Your Bucket

The tool gave you a snapshot. This guide gives you somewhere to sit with what the snapshot showed.

What this guide is for

Bucket Check is a noticing tool. It doesn't ask you to fix anything — it asks you to name what's filling you and what's draining you, and to look at the shape of your life right now. This guide takes that further. It's a set of questions to sit with, not a worksheet to complete.

ONE

What Bucket Check is doing

Noticing matters even when nothing changes.

Bucket Check doesn't ask you to do anything different. It asks you to look at what's already there — what's filling you, what's draining you, and how much each one weighs. That's it. No plan. No goals. No advice.

Sometimes that feels like not enough. We're trained to fix things. If a problem shows up, we want a solution. But there's a step before fixing, and it matters: naming what's actually happening. A lot of people skip it. They try to feel better without ever clearly seeing what's making them feel bad.

You don't have to fix what you name. You just have to see it clearly enough that you stop running from it.

If you got the personalized handout from the tool, it has space to write things down — one reflection prompt, plus three check-ins for later. Use it however helps. You don't have to write anything. But if you do, even a line, it'll be there next time you look.

A bucket is a simplification. Your life isn't actually a bucket. Things fill you and drain you at the same time — sometimes the same thing does both. Hold the metaphor lightly.

TWO

Going deeper with your fills

Start here: which fill is the most honest?

Look at what you named as filling you. Is there one that's there because it actually fills you — or one that's there because it's *what's supposed* to fill you?

This is worth sitting with. Exercise, journaling, time with friends, getting outside — these are real fills for a lot of people. But they're also the things we're told should fill us. Sometimes we list them because they should be true, not because they are. A performative fill is one you keep naming, and keep doing, that doesn't actually move the needle.

Naming a performative fill out loud is one of the more useful things you can do with this tool. It doesn't mean stop doing the thing. It means stop expecting it to do something it isn't doing.

→ Which fill is real for you, and how do you know?

→ Which one is there because it's what fills *good people*, but doesn't actually fill *you*?

→ What's something that used to fill you that you've stopped doing without noticing?

What does it cost to keep a fill?

Some fills are free. Some have a price tag you don't always see — time, money, a relationship that's complicated, energy you don't fully have. A fill can be real and still be expensive. It's worth knowing what each one costs you so you can decide what's worth protecting.

And some fills aren't optional. If you only have two fills and one of them is "my kid," you're not letting go of it. That's not failure. That's life. The question isn't always "what could I cut" — sometimes it's "what am I quietly paying to keep this, and is anyone else helping me carry it?"

- What does your most important fill cost you to keep?
- Which fills are non-negotiable, no matter what they cost?
- Is there a fill you'd let go of if you had to?

THREE

Going deeper with your empties

What does it feel like in your body?

Empties don't just live in your head. Some show up as a tight chest. Some as exhaustion that sleep doesn't fix. Some as a low hum of dread that you've started calling normal. Pay attention to where each empty lives in you — it tells you something about what kind of empty it is.

- Which empty do you feel in your body, and where?
- Which one have you stopped noticing because you've gotten used to it?
- What's the empty you'd name out loud if you weren't worried about what it meant about you?

What's in your control and what isn't?

Some empties you could change if you decided to. Some you can't. Most are somewhere in between — partly yours to move, partly not. The work isn't sorting them perfectly. The work is being honest about what's possible right now, this week, in your actual life.

Trying to fix an empty you can't move will exhaust you. Ignoring one you could move will too.

This is hard to sort. Sometimes what looks "in your control" only looks that way from the outside. Don't expect to nail this in one sitting — and don't beat yourself up for not having figured it out yet.

- Which empty is mostly out of your hands?
- Which one is more in your hands than you've been admitting?
- Which one would be smaller if one other thing changed first?

Small empties compound.

An empty marked small isn't always small. Five small empties stacked on each other can hit harder than one large one. A short night of sleep, a tense exchange with your kid, skipping lunch, a backed-up inbox, and a cold rainy walk to your car — none of those are large on their own. Put them in the same day and you're done by 4pm and you don't know why.

If you marked most of your empties as small, look again — sometimes "small" is what we call something when we don't want to admit it's adding up.

FOUR

The shape of your bucket over time

If you've done Bucket Check more than once, the most useful thing you can do is compare. Not to grade yourself — to notice. What's changed? What's still there? What surprises you?

The personalized PDF you get from the tool has space for three check-ins. Use them. Not to track progress like a metric, but to see the shape of your life across weeks instead of in one moment.

- What's still on your list from last time?
- What dropped off, and do you know why?
- What's new — and is it new because something changed, or because you finally saw it?
- What would your bucket look like in a year if nothing changed? What if one thing did?

Some things are seasonal. The empty that's huge in winter might be gone in June. Some things are persistent — they show up every time you check, regardless of what's going on around them. Both are useful to know.

FIVE

When the bucket feels empty

Sometimes you sit down to do this and nothing comes. No fills. Or only empties. Or a feeling that the whole bucket is just empty and you don't know how to start.

That's information too. A hard-to-fill bucket can mean a lot of things — exhaustion, burnout, depression, grief, a season of life that's just hard, or something else that's worth a real conversation. It doesn't mean you're broken or doing this wrong. It means something is worth naming with someone who can help you look at it.

If your bucket has felt empty for a while, that's worth bringing to your clinician. Not to fix it in one session — to start looking at it together.

If you're in crisis — thinking about hurting yourself, or you don't feel safe — please call or text **988** (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline) or reach out to your clinician right away. This guide isn't a substitute for that support.

The bucket is just a way of looking. What you see in it is what matters.