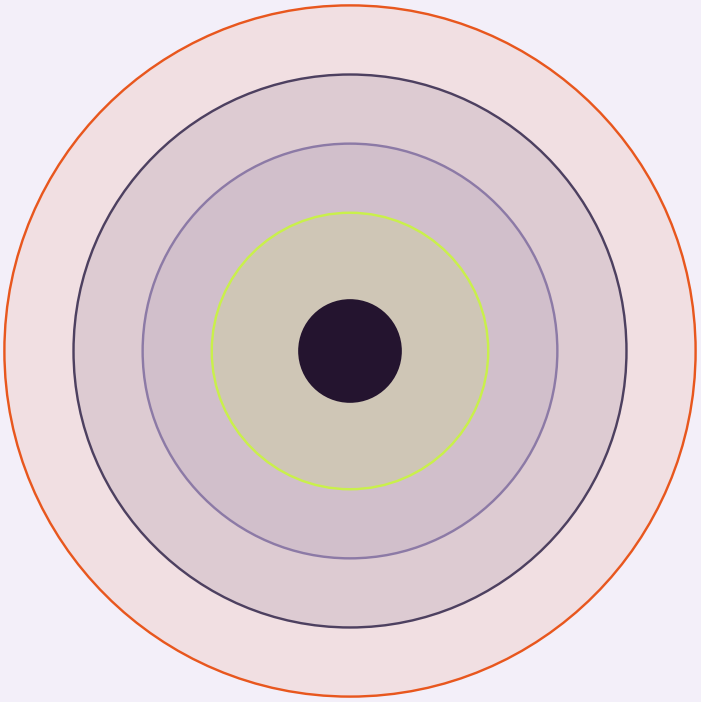


What to Make of a Life

A reading of the book by Jim Collins (2026)

1. ACTION BOOK

CONTENTS

Inside this edition

The book in a minute 3

The takeaways 4

Your action book 6

Before you go 7

PART TWO · THE ACTION BOOK

The setup checklist 9

Take one visible step a week 10

Refuse to announce a direction you can't see 11

Log the moments the fire lit 12

ABOUT THIS EDITION

This is HourLife's reading of What to Make of a Life, in our own words. It is not a substitute for the book.

BEFORE YOU START 01

The book in a minute

Jim Collins spent a decade studying lives in matched pairs, and in this 2026 book asks how people get through the cliffs that end one chapter, the fog that follows, and the fire that keeps a life going.

Below are the 8 ideas HourLife readers vote up most, each in our words with a note on what it asks of you, and then the steps that put them to work.

WHAT READERS KEEP

The takeaways

1

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

You carry encodings — durable capacities built into your construction, waiting for the right frame to draw them out.

The book speaks of being encoded for a role: less a list of strengths than latent capacities that show up in the right circumstances.

2

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

The question is never what is wrong with this person. It is what frame would make them extraordinary.

HourLife's reading: swapping frustration for curiosity about the frame changes how you look at people, including yourself.

3

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A cliff ends the life you were living. It does not tell you what comes next, and it will not wait for you to be ready.

Death, redundancy, retirement, a lost election, a diagnosis: the cliffs that end one version of a life take many forms.

4

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

The danger in the fog is not standing still. It is committing loudly to a direction you cannot yet see.

HourLife's reading: moving loudly toward a direction you cannot yet see is a risk in the fog.

5

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Take the next best visible step. Then look again.

HourLife's reading: in the fog, clarity comes cumulatively, out of motion, not out of reflection.

6

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Your personal hedgehog is the One Big Thing — and unlike a company, you are allowed more than one across a life.

HourLife's framing: the hedgehog idea applied to one life, loosely held. You can find one at twenty-five and replace it at sixty.

7 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

The greatest reward for doing the work is being allowed to keep doing it.

HourLife's reading: the reward for doing the work well is being allowed to keep doing it, so what sustains you matters more than what motivates you.

8 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Stop asking what you want to be remembered for. Ask what you would choose to be responsible for.

HourLife's framing: responsibility is specific and in your hands, where legacy is not.

PUT IT TO WORK

Your action book

Do the setup steps once, then keep the habits going. The setup changes your week; the habits keep it changed after the first good one.

The download puts this whole reading and a printable action book in one PDF: the setup checklist, then a page of real calendar days for each habit, starting on the day you choose.

SET UP ONCE

- [ ] Map your cliffs
- [ ] Collect your click moments
- [ ] Describe the frame, not the job
- [ ] Draft a personal hedgehog
- [ ] Write your responsibility list

KEEP UP DAILY

- ◯ Take one visible step a week
- ◯ Refuse to announce a direction you can't see
- ◯ Log the moments the fire lit

30 days · Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026

Part two, after the reading, prints each of these as a page to fill in by hand.

THE LAST WORD

Before you go

Pick one step from the action book and do it today. An idea from a book starts to count once it changes what one ordinary day looks like.

PART TWO

The action book

Change the setup once, then keep it up. 5 setup actions to do once, and 3 habits to mark each day for 30 days.

Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026

Print it, or write on it in any PDF app.

SET UP ONCE

The setup checklist

Each of these is done once. Do one a day, and check it off when it is done.

- [ ] SETUP 1

Map your cliffs

List every event that ended a version of your life — jobs, losses, moves, diagnoses.

Note how long the fog lasted after each. The pattern in that second column is more useful than the first.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 2

Collect your click moments

Write down the times something felt unreasonably natural the first time you tried it.

Collins treats these as evidence of an encoding, and most people have five or six they have never listed together.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 3

Describe the frame, not the job

For your best period of work, write the conditions rather than the title: who was around, what the pace was, how decisions got made.

That description is what you are actually looking for next.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 4

Draft a personal hedgehog

One sentence at the intersection of what you are encoded for, what you cannot stop caring about, and what someone will sustain.

Expect to rewrite it — a first draft you can test beats a perfect one you delay.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 5

Write your responsibility list

Not the legacy question.

Just: what would you choose to be responsible for over the next ten years? Collins found the answer to this predicted a life far better than ambition did.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

DAILY HABIT 1 OF 3

Take one visible step a week

In any fog, name the next step you can actually see and take it inside seven days.

Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
16 ○	17 ○	18 ○	19 ○	20 ○	21 ○	22 ○
23 ○	24 ○	25 ○	26 ○	27 ○	28 ○	29 ○
30 ○						

December 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
7 ○	8 ○	9 ○	10 ○	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 2 OF 3

Refuse to announce a direction you can't see

The pressure to declare a plan comes from other people's discomfort, not yours.

Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
16 ○	17 ○	18 ○	19 ○	20 ○	21 ○	22 ○
23 ○	24 ○	25 ○	26 ○	27 ○	28 ○	29 ○
30 ○						

December 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
7 ○	8 ○	9 ○	10 ○	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 3 OF 3

Log the moments the fire lit

Once a week, note what you did that you'd happily do again tomorrow.

Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
16 ○	17 ○	18 ○	19 ○	20 ○	21 ○	22 ○
23 ○	24 ○	25 ○	26 ○	27 ○	28 ○	29 ○
30 ○						

December 2026

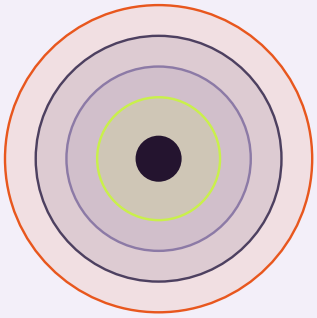
MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
7 ○	8 ○	9 ○	10 ○	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP



You cannot see the destination from inside the fog. You can always see the next step. Take that one.

JIM COLLINS