A Simple Model to Unlock Full Self-Directed Wellbeing

I propose every human has the same basic needs necessary to thrive and pursue a life of full self-directed wellbeing. Building on the SAMHSA *8 Dimensions of Wellness* (https://library.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/sma16-4957.pdf) which addresses community-level principles and policies, I've distilled their prescription down to four essential elements – *safety, security, wellbeing and success* – I believe every person needs to live a free, prosperous and healthy life. Here's an image depicting what I'm describing.

Figure 1: Simple Model Unlocking & Ensuring Full Self-directed Wellbeing

This model distills fundamental human needs into four interdependent elements, making it both highly accessible and practical. Here are my thoughts on constructing the model in this fashion:

1. **Clear Hierarchical and Interdependent Structure**

   o The model implies a foundational progression: Safety (absence of harm) enables Security (stability and access to resources), which supports Wellbeing (holistic physical, emotional, and mental health), ultimately fostering Success (self-actualization and opportunity).

A Simple Model to Unlock Full Self-Directed Wellbeing

- o This aligns with both Maslow's hierarchy and SAMHSA's Wellness model but simplifies it in a way that is easier to grasp.

2. **Universal and Flexible**

- o While some models are focused on specific socio-economic contexts, this model applies universally. Whether someone is navigating addiction recovery, career growth, generational trauma, or psychological resilience, these elements remain relevant.

3. **Bridging Policy and Individual Growth**

- o This model retains SAMHSA's emphasis on systemic wellness (community, policy, and social supports) while making it more personal and directly applicable to individuals' lives.

Use as an Assessment Tool?

I like the idea of this functioning as an assessment tool to help someone determine where they have gaps or 'lack' - maybe a traffic light (red-yellow-green stoplight chart) indicating Full Access, Limited Access, or No Access to each of the conditions within each of the four dimensions. Once each segment has been qualified (full, limited, none), we could then analyze whether a 'lack' in any specific area manifests internally (e.g., perception, false narrative or faulty belief) or externally (e.g., systemic or institutional discrimination or other social injustice).

Framing the Safety-Security-Wellbeing-Success model as an assessment tool - with a stoplight-style rating system - could provide both a self-reflective and diagnostic function. Here's how I see it working:

1. **STRUCTURE OF THE ASSESSMENT TOOL**

Each of the four dimensions is broken into conditions that determine access:

- **Safety:** physical, mental, and emotional protection from harm

- **Security:** stability and access to resources

- **Wellbeing:** physical, mental, and emotional supports throughout all stages of development

- **Success:** opportunities for growth, autonomy, and self-expression

A Simple Model to Unlock Full Self-Directed Wellbeing

For each dimension, the person assesses their current level of access to these conditions using a **stoplight rating system**:

- 🟢 **Full Access** (Green) – no barriers, conditions fully met.

- 🟡 **Limited Access** (Yellow) – some barriers, conditions partially met.

- 🔴 **No Access** (Red) – major barriers, conditions not met.

2. INTERNAL vs. EXTERNAL BARRIERS ANALYSIS

Once each dimension is assessed, the next step is analyzing whether the gaps (red/yellow areas) are internal or external:

- **Internal Factors (Perception, False Narrative, Faulty Belief)**

  - Someone *feels unsafe* (emotionally or psychologically) but has no actual external threats.

  - A person believes they have *no opportunities for success*, but they actually have access but fear failure.

  - Learned helplessness or self-limiting beliefs hold them back.

  - Trauma has impacted their sense of security, even in a stable environment.

- **External Factors (Systemic/Injustice-Based Barriers)**

  - Living in an unsafe neighborhood or experiencing domestic violence.

  - Food, housing, or healthcare insecurity due to financial hardship.

  - Lack of social support or structural discrimination preventing access to opportunities.

  - Institutional oppression, systemic inequities, or cultural barriers.

Distinguishing whether a lack is internal (perception-based) or external (environment-based), allows for targeted interventions:

- *Internal gaps → mindset shifts, coaching, skill-building, reframing narratives*

- *External gaps → advocacy, policy change, social support, systemic interventions*

I'll spend some time fleshing-out these details in a future essay.

A Simple Model to Unlock Full Self-Directed Wellbeing

3. POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS

This assessment could serve multiple purposes:

1. **Personal Growth & Coaching Tool**

   o Helps clients identify areas of need and focus in their lives.

   o Can be revisited over time to track progress.

   o Guides interventions (mindset shifts vs. systemic advocacy).

2. **Leadership & Organizational Development**

   o Helps businesses or organizations assess employee wellbeing and structural barriers.

   o Could be adapted for team dynamics, engagement, or DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion) efforts (assuming DEI is used judiciously and not weaponized to advantage one group over another – merit still counts).

3. **Policy & Social Reform**

   o Used in community or public health assessments to identify social inequities.

   o Can be leveraged for research in social psychology, wellbeing studies, or advocacy initiatives.

Appropriate next steps to expand and develop the model are to:

1. Develop a visual framework (i.e., charts, worksheets, graphics, etc.) to make this tool easy to use.

2. Write assessment questions that guide users through each dimension.

3. Build a scoring system (numerical or qualitative) to help people interpret their results.

4. Determine interventions based on whether a lack is internal or external.

Building Assessment Tools & Capabilities

Here's a start to this expansion of the model into more applicable and practicable formats:

A Simple Model to Unlock Full Self-Directed Wellbeing

1. **Assessment Questions**

Each dimension (Safety, Security, Wellbeing, Success) will have three core questions to determine Full, Limited, or No Access to key conditions. These questions should be framed to capture both internal perceptions and external realities.

- **Safety (Physical, Mental, and Emotional Protection)**

   1. Do you feel physically safe in your environment (home, workplace, community) at all times?

   2. Do you feel emotionally safe expressing yourself, your needs, and your opinions without fear of harm, rejection or retaliation?

   3. Do you have access to legal, medical, or social resources to protect yourself in case of harm?

- **Security (Stability and Access to Resources)**

   1. Do you have stable access to essential needs (food, shelter, healthcare, financial resources)?

   2. Do you feel financially secure and able to meet your obligations without constant worry?

   3. Do you have a stable support system (family, friends, community) to rely on in times of need?

- **Wellbeing (Physical, Mental, and Emotional Support)**

   1. Do you have access to adequate healthcare, mental health support, and self-care resources?

   2. Are you able to maintain a work-life balance that supports your overall wellbeing?

   3. Do you feel a sense of emotional resilience and the ability to manage stress effectively?

- **Success (Opportunities for Growth, Autonomy, and Self-Expression)**

   1. Do you have opportunities to grow and develop in ways that align with your values and aspirations?

   2. Do you feel a sense of personal autonomy and control over the direction of your life?

      3. Do you feel supported in your efforts to achieve success by those around you (mentors, employers, community, peers)?

2. Scoring System

For each question, respondents can rate their access level using the **stoplight system**:

- 🟢 **Full Access (3 points)** → "Yes, I have this fully."

- 🟡 **Limited Access (2 points)** → "Somewhat, but there are challenges."

- 🔴 **No Access (1 point)** → "No, I do not have this."

Scoring Breakdown per Dimension (Total of 9 points possible per category)

- **7-9 points** (Green/Full Access): Needs are fully met in this area.

- **4-6 points** (Yellow/Limited Access): Some challenges exist, but conditions are partially met.

- **3 or below** (Red/No Access): Major gaps exist in this area.

3. Intervention Framework

Once an area is flagged as Limited (Yellow) or No Access (Red), the next step is identifying whether the barrier is internal (perception-based) or external (systemic/social barrier) and applying a targeted intervention.

Dimension	Barrier is Internal (Mindset, Beliefs, Trauma, Self-Limiting Narrative)	Barrier is External (Structural, Social, or Institutional Factors)
Safety	Trauma-informed coaching or therapy to address emotional safety. Challenging cognitive distortions about personal worth and safety. Building self-advocacy skills.	Addressing unsafe environments (domestic, workplace, community). Legal protections, advocacy, and social services. Connecting to resources (shelters, support groups, HR/legal support).

A Simple Model to Unlock Full Self-Directed Wellbeing

Security	Financial literacy and budgeting skills.	Identifying systemic barriers to housing, employment, and healthcare.
	Overcoming scarcity mindset or learned helplessness.	Accessing government or non-profit support.
	Reframing stress around financial stability and job security.	Advocating for workplace policies and fair wages.
Wellbeing	Mindfulness, stress management, and self-care routines.	Access to affordable healthcare and mental health services.
	Challenging negative self-talk about health or mental resilience.	Workplace accommodations for mental and physical health.
	Personal development coaching for emotional regulation.	Addressing cultural stigma around seeking help.
Success	Identifying and overcoming self-doubt and imposter syndrome.	Addressing discrimination or inequity in hiring, education, or career advancement.
	Goal-setting and accountability coaching.	Increasing access to scholarships, mentorship, and leadership opportunities.
	Learning self-advocacy and boundary-setting skills.	Advocating for inclusive policies.

Table 1: Distinguishing Between Internal & External Inhibitors

Suggestions for Further Development:

- **Expand on Interactions Between Elements**
  - Each of these puzzle pieces connects, meaning that a lack in one area disrupts the whole system. For example:
    - A person with economic Security but no Safety (e.g., an abusive environment) cannot thrive.
    - Someone with Wellbeing but no access to Success opportunities may remain stagnant.
  - Showing how these interplay might deepen the model.

A Simple Model to Unlock Full Self-Directed Wellbeing

- **Potential Alignment with Other Psychological and Social Models**

  - It might add value to frame this alongside Self-Determination Theory (Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness) or resilience models to show how these four pillars promote growth.

  - If linking this to coaching or addiction recovery, it could serve as a guiding framework for assessing someone's current needs.

- **Call to Action for Systems and Individuals**

  - This model has potential to help policymakers assess gaps in social programs.

  - It can also be a self-reflection tool for individuals to assess which area they need to focus.

Final Thoughts & Next Steps

This model represents a unique and powerful assessment tool for any individual to discover barriers and impediments preventing them from living a life of full self-directed wellbeing. The model articulates the four pillars of individual freedom and self-efficacy in self-determination, providing a simple structure for exposing internal or external blockers of growth, and has significant utility as:

1. *An actionable self-assessment* that highlights gaps in four core areas.

2. *A simple scoring system* to determine Full, Limited, or No Access.

3. *A dual-layered intervention framework* that distinguishes between internal and external barriers.

4. *A roadmap for coaching, advocacy, and systemic interventions*.