



## *Higher Purpose and Meaning*

# Chapter 28

## Identify Your Higher Purpose

*"Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive." Howard Thurman*

Finding meaning in your life and your Higher Purpose requires you to identify it not search for it. Quitting your job and leaving behind your obligations so you can search for meaning on a trek through the wilderness will most often result in disappointment. Search implies evaluating thousands of options to see what fits best. The assumption is you will "know it when you see it." The mere thought of evaluating thousands of options does not give you the opportunity to thoroughly explore each option and unfortunately you might not "know it when you see it." You may toss out the meaning that works for you because of a few minor challenges you don't yet understand or because of a rush to get to the next option to evaluate. Understanding that you are already living according to your values, with some exceptions for mistakes and errors in judgment, and you are already attempting to do

the things that bring you joy and happiness, again with exceptions for lack of discipline or knowledge, can make it much easier to identify your Higher Purpose. You already have the hints and indications of your Higher Purpose embedded in what you do every day.

Identify the values you are living by or at least aspiring to live by. Identify the areas that are providing you happiness in the short term and long term. Give yourself a break for the mistakes and bad judgment. They are a part of your past but don't have to be a part of your future. The hints and clues and sometimes clear answers to what your Higher Purpose will be found in your current and past life. Make elements of how you are currently living the foundation on which you start, and then you can make short strategic explorations into unknown areas for potential clarity of your Higher Purpose.

I was working with a mentee, Austin, who was considering a different job. He was not progressing as quickly as he would have liked and thought there might be better opportunities at other companies. He started working on his resume and interviewing with other companies, none of which seemed like a good fit. The job search was distracting him from his current job where his performance was quickly sliding to levels that could result in him being fired. His challenge was not having a clear focus on his Higher Purpose. He thought he was unfulfilled because of his job, when in reality, without a clear Higher Purpose, it would be difficult for any job to give him that sense of fulfillment. With a little effort, he was able to identify and focus on his Higher Purpose and find ways to become fulfilled it at his current job. His performance improved significantly and his peers and superiors took notice of his renewed energy. He was able to switch his direction from trying to leave a situation he didn't like to finding a position that was a good fit for his Higher Purpose. This gave him more time to find the right position rather than just another position. Fortunately, he seems to have identified that his current work actually is actually a good fit with his Higher Purpose.

*"Man is capable of changing the world for the better if possible, and of changing himself for the better if necessary." Frankl*

One of our challenges is feeling comfortable with the status quo. We know there may be another path for us. But it is scary to think about making major changes in our life. Following a path that meets the

expectations of our friends and families can be very safe. Thinking about straying outside of that path to do what we really want to do can be overwhelming. Especially when we are not sure what is a dream and what is a realistic assessment of the possibilities. It requires time (days, weeks, and months) to clarify our values and our purpose. Once we gain that clarity, the decisions will be much easier. Once we are sure, “this is what I want to do with my life”, then we can find ways in our current life to fulfill that purpose. That may include taking a new perspective on our work, finding a charity to work with, or playing in a band. Once we are clear on our values and our purpose and we can find ways to live them in our current lives, we can start looking at what obstacles we need to overcome to make our purpose an even bigger part of our lives. We can look for jobs or companies that match our values and enable us to live our Higher Purpose. We can find ways to live more conservatively and reduce our expenses so we will be ready for opportunities to pursue our Higher Purpose. We can also find creative ways to make money doing what will fulfill our Higher Purpose. We don’t have to jump off a cliff with no safety net. For some people that may work and be a good option, but for many of us, we need to find ways to thoughtfully move towards making our Higher Purpose more prevalent in our lives. I met a friend while we were vacationing in Wyoming. His first love was art and his second love was surfing. The problem was he couldn’t make enough money at either to pay his living expenses. He found several jobs where he could work enough hours to live conservatively and still make time for his art and surfing. Eventually he was able to turn his art into a business creating collectible duck decoys that sold for thousands of dollars. He found a niche that provided a healthy income and engaged his passion for art as well as leaving time for surfing. It didn’t happen all at once, but by having clarity on his purpose and values, he was able to overcome obstacles and find creative solutions that led to a fulfilling life. As a side note, he met his wife while he was on the beach painting. Life came together for him when he pursued his passions.

## **Religious and Spiritual Beliefs**

In the search for a Higher Purpose, religious or spiritual beliefs and

practices may be one of the best places to start. Rabbi Harold Kushner explains that religion satisfies “the most fundamental human need of all. The need to know that somehow we matter, that our lives mean something, that we are more than a momentary blip in the universe.” Spirituality and organized religion provide people with perspective, hope, and a deeper sense of meaning. They provide people with an outward focus instead of an inward focus. They give people something bigger than themselves to make the center of their attention. They provide a perspective that there is more to life than what is impacting us at this moment and the ups and downs are part of a bigger picture so they are not as catastrophic or miraculous as they might seem at the moment. They help us understand the “Why” in our lives. They also provide clarity around values which is a key ingredient to finding purpose and meaning in life.

Religious and spiritual beliefs encourage many happiness building behaviors. They provide a plan for an idealistic future and specify positive behaviors today that will ensure we attain that future. They provide hope when events in our lives are going horribly wrong and help us build resiliency. They provide an opportunity and incentives for connections and positive relationships. They provide direction and opportunities to be grateful and to pray, meditate, or otherwise spend time being quiet and calm. They teach us to help other people and support our community. Religious and spiritual beliefs also provide a reason that you are worthy. Most religions promote that even the most insignificant individual has value and is worthy of love.

The science confirms the benefits of religious and spiritual beliefs. Religious people are happier, healthier, and recover better after trauma. People who’s religious beliefs prescribe healthy diets and discourage smoking and alcohol use live longer. Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, and Amish have been found to live as much as 50% longer than non-religious comparison groups. Scott Schieman, a professor of sociology at the University of Toronto found that "Regular and frequent religious attendance does seem to be one of the significant predictors of less stress and more life satisfaction." Ardel conducted research with 103 seniors age 58 and above and found that an intrinsic belief in a religion gave people purpose and meaning in their lives and made them happier. Kennedy and Kanthamani did a similar study with 182 people that came to similar conclusions, religious commitment helps

provide meaning in life which in turn helps people be happier. Religious and spiritual beliefs that you are authentically committed to can provide you with a Higher Purpose.

## **Finding Purpose and Meaning in Your Current Actions**

*“Hard work is painful when life is devoid of purpose. But when you live for something greater than yourself and the gratification of your own ego, then hard work becomes a labor of love.” Steve Pavlina*

In working with a mentee, we were discussing his internship. It was boring because all he does is spreadsheets. Doing a spreadsheet lacks purpose. When we discussed how the spreadsheet would help the company significantly reduce expenses over time, the spreadsheets started to gain purpose and interest. When we connected that purpose to how his unique abilities to produce the spreadsheets made an impact on the organization, he was able to find meaning in his work and a new level of interest. Re-stating what you are doing to show how it impacts others across time and especially how it is a result your unique efforts brings meaning to situations and helps them move from boring to interesting and even inspiring.

## Activity: Find the purpose and meaning in your actions

1. In column A, write actions you take every day at work or at home.
2. In column B, write who they impact, and how it impacts them.
3. In column C, write the impact of those actions over time.
4. In column D, write why you are uniquely suited to make that contribution.

As you can see in the first example below, the current action of “I have to make the coffee” can turn into “I contribute to the success of the company by helping my friends be more awake and get along better because I make great coffee the first thing every morning.”

A. Action	B. Who and How	C. Impact over Time	D. My Contribution
1. Making Coffee	Friends at work are more awake, and in a better mood so they get along better.	Better collaboration at work leads to better ideas and a more successful company.	I am the first one in and make the best coffee.
2.			
3.			
4.			

## Tips for Finding Your Higher Purpose

Higher Purpose and the resulting happiness comes from being connected to something bigger than yourself. It is about giving rather than receiving. Many people looking for meaning in their lives, find it by losing themselves in causes greater than themselves. That can include family, country, team, company, religion, or anything you can identify with and find ways to personally support.

Start by asking, How can I be of service or how can I help someone else? How do I help others with the talents, experiences and skills that I have? How can I make the world a better place? How do I plant seeds of greatness in the lives of those around me? How do I make an impact in the circles of influence where I find myself. How does what I do impact people? A video game programmer helps people have fun. A

food service worker helps people have a relaxing enjoyable meal. A janitor helps create a clean and safe learning environment for the kids. What are the positive impacts you can have on other people?

*“This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one...” George Bernard Shaw*

Focus on what’s inside vs. outside. A paycheck is external motivation. Helping a co-worker is an internal motivation. External motivation, like getting a paycheck and recognition from our peers are important parts of our lives. The key is to make sure those are not the only forms of motivation. What makes you feel good inside? What makes you feel peaceful and fulfilled? Helping another person or making an impact on the goals of your company or team provide internal rewards and fulfillment that lasts.

Another opportunity to find your Higher Purpose is meet the people you are helping. If you work at an agency, meet and get to know your clients. At a restaurant or store, meet and get to know your customers. If you work at a large business, go sit with the customer service team and listen to customer calls or ride with a salesperson.

Our Higher Purpose can be related to our dreams. We all have dreams of what we want to be or do, but we often ignore them or hide them away because they seem impossible or unreasonable. We should pull them out and explore them. Find out how they are related to other people. Knowing our dreams can help us define what will provide meaning in our lives.

Don’t limit your thinking to one Higher Purpose in only one part of your life. You can have more than one Higher Purpose and they can be related to your work, family, religion, hobbies, etc. Creating a great environment for your kids and contributing to team accomplishments at work can both fit into your life. Experiment with different types of Higher Purposes in different areas of your life.

Your Higher Purpose can change. Life events like getting married or divorced, having kids, or changing jobs can be catalysts to stop and reconsider your Higher Purpose or ask yourself “Why?”. As your life changes so will the ways you find meaning.

*“If you can’t figure out your purpose, figure out your passion. For your passion will lead you right into your purpose.” Bishop T.D. Jakes*

Combine your passions, strengths, and values to find meaning and purpose. Your strengths are what make you unique and what you uniquely bring to the table. Martin Seligman writes that a meaningful life includes lots of positive feelings, the ability to amplify those feelings, the use of your signature strengths to obtain abundant gratification, and the use of your signature strengths for something bigger than yourself.

To help you find your Higher Purpose, identify those times when you feel truly happy. When you are contented rather than excited and thrilled. What are those things we do every week that we are passionate about. What are the things we have an almost irrational sense that we can't give up. For what types of activities do you say "I love to do that. It gives me such joy and fulfillment?"

**Activity:** (Pick Two)

1. Pretend you are 100 years old and explaining to your great grand children what is important in life. What would you tell them about your life? What lessons would you tell them you learned?
2. Find someone who you feel has meaning in their lives. Where does their meaning come from? How can you use them as an example?
3. What does your gut say? When you take the time to think deeply, what idea or concept keeps popping up and then gets buried again because it is not realistic? Who is that one person you can share this crazy idea with?
4. Make a list of your values. What can you do that will help you fulfill those values.
5. What are the things in your life that give you energy? How can you do more of those?

Here are some more examples of Higher Purposes that were posted on the Internet:

*My life purpose is to live and mentor an authentic, adventurous, spiritual life, while being a catalyst for positive change.*

*With friendship and affection, I will interact with others to improve my home life and obtain pleasure and recognition.*

*My purpose in life is to serve others in a balanced and flexible manner in areas of health in such a manner that I get feedback on improvement.*

*I want to be a spokesman for wildlife issues and help people connect their daily actions to saving the wildlife on this planet.*

*My purpose is to teach under privileged children the keys to success and how to become young and successful entrepreneurs by igniting their ambition to change their lives.*

*My purpose is to grow nutritious, organic food that helps people grow and thrive and have vibrant health. I want to use my skills as a grower to build a sustainable farm that educates as well as feeds people, and builds a community of like-minded organic growers and consumers.*

*My purpose is to build awesome custom bikes that win mountain bike and speed competitions. I will use my talent for design, prototyping and customizing to dream up, develop, test, refine, build and sell world class cycling equipment.*

*My purpose is helping distressed homeowners refinance their mortgages and become better financial consumers by understanding the real details behind home buying, credit ratings and approvals, and secured debt. I want to use my analysis and coaching skills to help people stay in their homes and keep their dream of owning their own home alive.*

*My purpose is to design and build beautiful wood desks, elegant computer cabinets and amazing dining tables. I will use my eye for detail, my intuitive sense of old world styling and craftsmanship to make custom furniture that evokes traditional styles with modern functionality.*

**Remember you are looking for your Higher Purpose and not someone else's. You don't have to impress anyone or get anyone's**

approval. Your Higher Purpose doesn't have to be related to your work and you can have more than one. Most importantly you can change it if it doesn't feel right or if your life circumstances change. Don't stress over it, and don't worry about getting it perfect. Just try something and keep trying until you feel good inside and can smile when you think about it.

Review your Higher Purpose statement from Chapter 26. Make any changes or adjustments and start trying it out.

My Higher Purpose statement:

I \_\_\_\_\_  
(Active Verb)(Who)(details)