CHAPTER NINETEEN

We're All in This Together

A value is an aspiration. A virtue is a value in action. Values come from inside us and point our way, but the ultimate measure of our lives is the actions we take. We derive the most powerful sense of purpose when our values fuel behaviors that serve something beyond ourselves.

The need for purpose is unique to human beings. We're the only species that hungers for meaning and is capable of reflecting on why we're here. "Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life," Apple CEO Steven Jobs told Stanford's graduating class in 2005, just a year after he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer at the age of forty-nine. "Don't be trapped by dogma—which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become."

We can find purpose in many pursuits, from making a living, to doing our work with excellence, to bringing up our children, to expressing ourselves creatively. Adding value to others generates another level of meaning and significance. The more we contribute, the more valuable and connected to others we feel. So how, then, do we cultivate the behaviors that characterize us at our best—the energy of the upper-right spiritual quadrant—while also taking care of our own basic needs?

DO WHAT YOU LOVE

Purpose represents a specific intention, a course of action, and an aim toward which we point ourselves. We're trained through our education

to accumulate knowledge, build skills, and seek a career. We're rarely taught how, practically and intentionally, to develop a sense of purpose.

Because all of our actions are fueled by feelings, a logical starting point for defining our purpose is to ask, "What do I most love doing?" We each bring the most energy to the activities we most enjoy, and the enjoyment we derive sustains our energy. Think about a time when you felt truly alive in your life—when you felt so immersed in whatever you were doing that you lost track of time. It's what the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has termed "flow."

What exactly made this experience so engaging?

In my own case, I feel most alive when I'm figuring out what makes it possible for people to operate at their best and what obstacles stand in their way, and then being able to explain what I've found in simple, understandable ways. I love doing this sort of thinking in collaboration with others, but I also need time alone for it, especially when I'm writing. Sometimes this work provides pure pleasure in the moment, and sometimes it's very difficult and even frustrating, but over time it's proven to be remarkably satisfying.

In the spring of 2008, at the tail end of a long economic boom, Drew Gilpin Faust gave her first baccalaureate ceremony address, as Harvard University's new president, to the graduating class. Her talk was prompted by conversations she'd had with dozens of undergraduates who were struggling with career choices. "Is it necessary," she asked the students, "to decide between remunerative work and meaningful work? . . . Finance, Wall Street, 'recruiting' have become the symbols of this dilemma, representing a set of issues that is much broader and deeper than just one career path. . . .

"You are worried because you want to have both a meaningful life and a successful life. If you don't try to do what you love—whether it is painting or biology or finance; if you don't pursue what you think will be most meaningful, you will regret it. Life is long. There is always time for Plan B. But don't begin with it. . . . Find work you love. It is hard to be happy if you spend more than half your waking hours doing something you don't."

We experienced this vividly beginning in the fall of 2008, when we began working with ninth graders at the Riverdale Country School, an independent high school in the Bronx, on a project we call "The One Big Thing." Our goal was to give these fourteen- and fifteen-year-

olds the opportunity to pursue a project they felt passionately about in a school day otherwise filled with classes they were required to take.

To our initial surprise, many of the kids found it challenging at first to identify something they really wanted to do. Few of them had ever been given the opportunity and the encouragement to pursue an interest purely for its own sake. Over the months, a high percentage of the kids embraced the challenge and brought great enthusiasm to projects that included building a skateboard, composing a rock opera, creating a fantasy baseball league, building an elaborate dollhouse, and writing and performing a rap. (You can watch a video about The One Big Thing at bit.ly/a6PZvR.)

The pilot was so successful that nearly all of the participants signed up to do it again as tenth graders. We've also launched it with a new group of ninth graders, and twice as many of them signed up the second year. The most common response we get from adults who watch the video is, "Wow, I'd really like to do that myself." Consider for a moment: What project would you choose if your organization allowed you to devote some percentage of your time to something you felt passionate about undertaking? Just thinking systematically about what interests you most deeply can be inspiring.

From an energy perspective, it's also more efficient to nurture the skills that come to us more easily. What we're good at emerges through some blend of genetics, the encouragement of others, the investment we make in disciplined practice, and the rewards we get for our efforts along the way, especially early in our lives.

Ultimately, though, passion can almost always trump genetics. As Anders Ericsson and others have shown so convincingly, we're each capable of developing expertise at virtually anything if we're willing to work at it intentionally, for sufficient hours, over time. Deliberate practice—as Ericsson discovered with the violinists—is hard work, and it's often not very enjoyable. The question of what to pursue as your life's work ought to be less about what you think your natural gifts or strengths are, and more about what engages you most and how hard you're willing to work to master it.

The limitations we set on ourselves are mostly our own. The willingness to delay immediate gratification in the pursuit of excellence is the surest way to achieve rich, deep, and enduring satisfaction. Wherever you are in your journey toward excellence, you will experi-

ence frustration, discomfort, and setbacks along the way. Passion is an extraordinary fuel for persevering as we struggle at times along the learning curve. It also helps keep us committed to continuing our growth once we've achieved excellence.

WALKING THE TALK

There are multiple dimensions of a satisfying, well-lived life, and it helps to begin the search for purpose by clarifying our priorities. What follows is a simple version of an alignment exercise we do with clients. You can do it here or re-create it on a separate piece of paper.

	1	2	3
WORK/CAREER			
FINANCIAL SUCCESS			
SPOUSE/PARTNER			
CHILDREN			
FAMILY			
FRIENDS			
FITNESS			
CREATIVITY/ SELF-EXPRESSION			
ENJOYMENT/ HAPPINESS			
LEARNING/ GROWTH			
SERVICE TO OTHERS/ CONTRIBUTION			

In column 1, rate how important each of these dimensions is in your life on a scale of 1 to 10. One is low and 10 is high. This isn't a forced ranking, so you can give each category as high or low a number as you'd like.

In column 2, estimate how much energy you invest in this dimension of your life, using the same scale. Finally, for column 3, subtract the numbers in column 2 from those in column 1, and write down your answers. It's possible that you'll get a negative number in one or two categories, and that's fine. If you're not sure about an answer, try to imagine what someone who knows you well would say—or simply ask that person.

Column 1 is a reflection of what you value—what you aspire to in that dimension of your life. Column 2 is a reflection of how you actually live. Column 3 is a measure of the gap between the two. Obviously, the ideal number for every category in column 3 is zero, which would mean that in each facet of your life you invest your time and energy directly in proportion to how important you feel it is to you. That level of alignment is exceedingly rare. In all likelihood, you'll have several categories for which there is a notable gap between column 1 and column 2. In our experience, a gap of 2 is worth exploring, and a gap of 3 or more is highly significant.

Typically, people assign a high value to most of the categories in column 1, but have lower numbers for several of them in column 2. Occasionally people discover they're investing more time and energy in a dimension than they feel it deserves. That's most common, we find, at the office, where people feel compelled to work hard but aren't especially engaged by what they're doing.

In most cases, however, those we've worked with find their intentions in column 1 run out ahead of the time and energy they invest in column 2. There are many reasons that's so, but it's when we feel under threat and most overwhelmed that we tend to behave in contradiction to our deepest values. Such behaviors show up in the upper-left spirit quadrant.

Often the gap is simply about neglect—doing nothing at all or less than you believe you should in a given area of your life. If that's the case, what's the story you've been telling yourself that has made the gap acceptable until now? What's the cost to you and to others in your life? Are you okay with the trade-offs you're making, consciously or

unconsciously? It's in the crucible of high demand that we're challenged to translate our best intentions into our best behaviors. If you say your children, or your spouse, or your health, is a 10 in importance in column 1, but you give them only a 5 or a 6 in terms of time and energy, what do you need to do to close that gap? What ritual could you build that would create a better alignment between what you say you value and how you actually live?

CLOSING THE ALIGNMENT GAP

For Simon Ashby, vice president of operations at Sony Europe, the disconnect he found most distressing was in his relationship with his daughter. "When I first began doing this exercise," he told us, "I thought to myself, 'I'm pretty well sorted out across these things.' On closer reflection, I realized that the time I spent with my daughter probably wasn't the highest quality. She's from my first marriage, so I only have a certain amount of days with her. The story I was telling myself was 'I'm a forty-five-year-old man and she's an eleven-year-old girl, and what have we in common?' We'd just sit around when we were together, and I wasn't really that involved with her. I decided to make a ritual that I would always plan ahead what to do with her when we were together. We began to take all kinds of excursions, but what it really did was to make me truly be with my daughter when we were together. Four years later, she's fifteen—always a difficult time for kids—and we have a terrific relationship. My daughter is so important in my life, and I don't know how good I would have been if I hadn't been intentional about my time with her over the last few years."

For Adam Williams, the head of strategy for Sony UK, struggling with the gap between what he valued and how he actually lived resulted in an unexpected insight. "Being able to reflect deeply on these questions led to a breakthrough," he told us. "I'd always thought I needed to emulate my father and uncle and set up my own business. At the back of my mind, throughout my career in the corporate world, I'd be thinking, 'What is the business I need to create?' But when we did the spirit work, I began to ask myself, 'If I was really motivated to be an entrepreneur, then why haven't I done it? Why I am still doing this work?' I realized it had been about the expectations set by my father's achievements.

In reality, the scope of work at Sony—the intellectual challenge, teamwork, and freedom to be an innovator—was something I'd be very unlikely to achieve in setting up my own business.

"Seeing that really reenergized me. It put me back in charge of the choices I was making, and it made me feel as if I had renewed my contract with the company. If I worked a long evening, I felt clearer about why I was doing it. If I took time off in the afternoon to attend my children's sports day, I didn't feel guilty, because I was giving my all at work. It just seemed that these things were now joined up. I think I'm a better father and husband as a result. I don't carry my work home anymore, and I'm able to switch between work and family more effectively. The lightbulb moment for me was the realization that no one was making me do what I was doing. I'd made a choice, and I'd made it for a reason. I love what I do."

MAKING WORK MATTER

The second key to fueling purpose is putting what you love to do and what you do best into the service of something beyond your immediate self-interest. "The big insight I got doing this work," explains Matthew Lang, the managing director of Sony South Africa, "is that I don't get my value from capabilities like marketing or sales. I get it from empowering people and bringing out the best of their skills. Having that clear definition of purpose means it now takes precedence over everything else. And because I'm clear about what I want and who I want to work with, I've gotten much more focused. It's also made my job easier and much more satisfying."

Pedro Jesus is a twenty-nine-year-old sales manager in the consumer division of Sony Portugal who has won numerous awards for his leadership. His job is in sales, but that isn't how he finds his purpose. "I feel most aligned with myself when I help others to find their inspiration and creativity," he says. "Occasionally this brings me into conflict with the more pragmatic concerns of the people who work for me. Their job is to make sales, and they can get frustrated with me because I want them to bring vision and creativity to everything they do. But I also know that on balance, they would rather I challenge them to seek creative breakthroughs than simply let them settle for the status quo.

"In doing this work on my spirit, I realized that it's all connected. Not taking better care of myself physically, because I was working so hard, was actually undermining my passion and my purpose. I've gotten much more honest with myself now, and the result is I've given up smoking, reduced my alcohol intake, and made sleep more important. I've built boundaries between work and home that make me feel more satisfied and more in control. I've become the guardian of my spirit rather than just its beneficiary."

UBUNTU

Purpose extends our sphere of influence not through the accumulation and exercise of power, but by giving us a clear route to adding value to others. As Ian McCallum puts it, "We are obliged to nurture an intelligence capable of making the shift from short-term survival thinking—me versus you—to one that consciously grasps the long-term significance of I and Thou." Practically, we must operate less from our primitive instincts and more from the wiser, more embracing perspective of our best selves.

In modern Africa, the word *ubuntu* is used to describe the way in which generosity of spirit connects us to the energy and affirmation of a larger community. "A person with *ubuntu*," explains Archbishop Desmond Tutu, "is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished."

No career automatically provides a purpose, but no job precludes our finding a purpose in it, either. It isn't the role we fill that prompts a sense of purpose but how we choose to approach whatever work we do. As Marian Wright Edelman puts it, "We must not, in trying to think about how we can make a big difference, ignore the small daily differences we can make which, over time, add up to the big differences that we often cannot foresee."

Some years ago, I took my oldest daughter to get her license at the local motor vehicle bureau. It was a typical day in a government office, marked by long lines, disgruntled customers, and stone-faced clerks.

I sat down with Kate to wait our turn, and after several minutes I noticed a single clerk who was smiling and laughing with each client who came to her window. "I guarantee you," I said to Kate, "there's some good reason that woman is so different than every other employee here."

As it happened, we eventually ended up being called to this woman's counter. "I have one question I want to ask you," I said, to Kate's mortification. "All the people you're working with look as if they can't wait for the day to end. You've got a big smile on your face, and you seem like you're in a great mood. Why is that?"

"I'll tell you exactly why that is," the woman said, reaching out for a photograph in front of her. She turned it around. It was a young boy, perhaps six years old. "That's my son," she said. "This job is what's making it possible for me to take care of him and send him to a good school, so he can get the education I never did and the kind of job I never could. Anytime I start feeling a little frustrated, I just look at that picture, and I feel good again. That's why you see me smiling."

This woman knew exactly why she was coming to work every day. Whatever limitations and frustrations her fellow clerks felt doing their jobs, she felt energized by her deeper purpose all day long. One happy consequence was that she shared her positive energy with every person who had the good fortune to show up at her counter. She made *them* feel better, which made her feel better about herself. Without any conscious intent, she created a virtuous circle that got wider with every connection she made. Much as Kate and I did, the people she encountered walked out the door of the Department of Motor Vehicles feeling a little better about life, instead of a little bit worse.

WHEN MEANING IS THE PRIMARY FUEL

Purpose and the community it creates can be a source of positive energy even when our more basic needs go largely unmet. When we spent time with intensive care unit nurses at the Cleveland Clinic, we discovered they felt severely overburdened by their jobs in a range of ways. Chronic staffing shortages forced them to stick closely by the bedsides of their critically ill patients. They rarely had time for meals, much less breaks, and they often worked twelve- to fourteen-hour

shifts without eating anything and sometimes without even sitting down. And as hard as they worked, they felt painfully devalued by the doctors whose patients they looked after.

What kept these nurses so passionately committed to their work, even though they had no time to take care of themselves and received little or no appreciation from their superiors? Above all, they told us, it was the deep sense of satisfaction they derived from caring for their patients. In short, they survived almost entirely on spiritual energy, the feeling that what they were doing truly mattered and made a difference.

Even the opportunity to save people's lives is not, it turns out, a guaranteed source of purpose and significance. The Cleveland Clinic surgeons we met worked under conditions nearly as demoralizing as those the nurses described. They put in long hours, were expected to meet high quotas for the number of surgeries they performed, and felt undervalued by the hospital's administrators. They were much better compensated than the nurses, and they enjoyed far more prestige. But many of the surgeons, we found, brought less passion to their work than the nurses did.

The biggest difference, we eventually concluded, was that the surgeons felt much less emotionally connected to their patients. "Yes, I save lives every day," one surgeon told us. "But I sometimes feel like I'm working in a factory. I barely have time to see my patients, except during surgery, when they're knocked out. My favorite experience is when I can find the time to call patients after they've left the hospital, just to see how they're doing. I can't tell you how surprised and thrilled they are to get those calls and how much satisfaction I get from making them. But the truth is, I don't have time to call my patients nearly often enough."

THE TRAGEDY OF THE COMMONS

Having a purpose larger than our immediate self-interest serves others and makes us feel better about ourselves, but it's also increasingly crucial to our survival. That's because we live in a world of increasing population and accelerating demand for the earth's finite resources.

In 1968, an ecologist named Garrett Hardin foresaw our current predicament and wrote an article about it for the journal *Science* entitled "The Tragedy of the Commons." Hardin began by pointing out that despite extraordinary advances in fields such as science, medicine, and engineering, there remains a class of problems that can't be solved by technical means but instead require a fundamental shift in our values and in our resulting behavior.

To illustrate his point, Hardin painted a hypothetical scenario: "Picture a pasture open to all. It is to be expected that each herdsmen will try to keep as many cattle as possible on the commons." This approach works fine for all of the herdsmen, Hardin explained, as long as the capacity of the land exceeds the number of cattle that make use of it. At some point, however, the ratio reverses. The land is no longer sufficient to support all of the cattle and a day of reckoning arrives. This is the tragedy of the commons. "Each man," wrote Hardin, "is locked into a system that compels him to increase his herd without limit—in a world that is limited. Ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons."

Much as we might seek to deny it or avoid it, this is the tragedy that we, too, increasingly face. We're all herdsmen, living in a system that encourages us to increase our herd without limit. But the ethic of self-interest is sustainable only in a world of unlimited resources. Consider just population statistics. In the early 1800s, the world's population hit 1 billion people. As the environmental writer Douglas Chadwick points out, it took *a million years* to reach that first billion. It took just 130 more to reach 2 billion, and only 30 more to get to 3 billion, in 1960. By 2000, that number had doubled to 6 billion. A decade later, as I write these words, there are 7 billion people on Earth. At the current rates of increase, we'll reach 10 billion by midcentury.

For better or for worse, we're all in this together. Much as rising demands in our own lives are overtaxing our personal energy reserves, so it's depleting the external reserves we depend on: food, water, clean air, and fossil fuels. To survive, we must find ways to renew the resources we use up, both internal and external. Our challenge is to add value to the commons, not deplete it. We must learn to focus less on instant gratification for ourselves, and more on behaviors that ensure that the commons will survive and thrive.

CHAPTER NINETEEN ACTION STEPS

- We bring more energy to the activities we most enjoy. What do you love doing? Think about a time when you were doing something that made you feel more fully alive or that you found so absorbing you lost track of time. Write down in as much detail as possible each aspect of this experience. Were you doing it alone or in collaboration with others? Where were you, and did the environment make a difference? What precisely did you find most exhilarating? What lessons from this experience can you apply to your everyday work?
- It's one thing to say something is important to you, another to live in alignment with that belief. Go back to page 252 and complete the "Walking the Talk" exercise, if you haven't already. Which gap between column 1 and column 2 do you find most unacceptable? What is one behavior you could add into your life to close that gap?
- Having a purpose that transcends our immediate self-interest extends our sphere of influence by providing a clear route to adding value to others. Our small, daily choices can add up over time and ultimately make a big difference. Choose one behavior you could add into your life every day that would add value to others.