



Book The Power of Purpose

Creating Meaning in Your Life and Work

Richard J. Leider
Berrett-Koehler, 1997

Recommendation

Richard J. Leider believes everyone needs to find an individual sense of unique purpose. When you have this sense of purpose, you can use it as a central core of direction to guide your life and give it meaning. The book is simply written, easy to understand and targeted to a general audience. However, it also seems quite repetitious, in that the same ideas are explained many different ways. Some of these concepts are quite familiar, echoing some basic ideas about the importance of having a sense of mission, path, and goals, much like Laurie Beth Jones’ book, *The Path: Creating Your Mission Statement*. Finally, while some readers may respond deeply to Leider’s spiritual and religious references, others may find them problematic, given the split in the business community about spirituality in the workplace. *BooksInShort* recommends this book for readers who have not yet considered this mission-focused dimension of life planning and for managers who wish to understand this perspective.

Take-Aways

- You need a sense of purpose to live fully.
- Everyone has this sense of purpose. The challenge is to discover it for yourself.
- Trust your intuition to discover your purpose.
- Purpose is the basic theme, quality, or passion you center your life around.
- Everyone has a natural reason for making a positive contribution to the world.
- Having a purpose is necessary to organizing your life and giving it meaning.
- To discover your true calling, think about your gifts and talents, and how you can use them to help others.
- Searching for purpose will bring you in touch with the sacredness within you, and will allow you to express it.
- When you find your purpose, you will experience more joy and energy.
- You need to discover solitude, so you can reflect on your true purpose.

Summary

Why You Need to Discover Your Purpose

You have a life purpose; everyone has a "natural reason for being." Your purpose is that "deepest dimension within" that forms your central core, the essence that helps you understand your basis for existence. It tells you who you are, why you are here, and where you are headed.

“Purpose is already within us. It is there waiting to be discovered. If we open ourselves up to what’s inside us, we’ll discover it.”

The questions you ask about your purpose shape your life. Everyone should ask these questions regularly. Generally, these issues arise about every ten years, as people go through periods of transition. That is when you are most likely to ask "Who am I?" and "What is my purpose in life?". The questions you ask about purpose will shape your life more than anything else. Ask these age-old questions: "What am I meant to do here?" "What am I trying to do with my life?" again and again. The way you answer these essential questions will shape the quality of your life.

“Through giving our gifts, we help to both create purpose and to discover it.”

When adults older than 65 were asked how they might live their lives differently given the chance, many said they would be more reflective and courageous. They said they would be much clearer earlier in their life about their purpose. These interviews indicate that people have a deep and natural need for purpose.

Discovering Your True Purpose

This purpose exists in everyone. Look within yourself to discover it, and then try to live it. This will give you a greater sense of meaning and direction. Since all individuals have unique gifts, your purpose includes using your gifts to "contribute value to the world." To discover your purpose, trust your intuition. Finding your purpose will give you a sense of direction and true joy in your life and work. Without it, you will feel your life is incomplete and unsatisfying. You may even feel a sense of losing your way.

“To discover our purpose, we must trust our intuition.”

Most people want to be somebody. This is a basic desire, although people often think about it only when they face a crisis, such as an illness, loss of a job, or death. Before those turning points, the tendency is to take life for granted. A crisis may trigger a series of questions about who we are and what we are meant to do. As such, "crisis is the mirror of purpose." Look through the crisis and try to find your purpose for being.

“I believe that all people have a spiritual reason for being, and our world is incomplete until each one of us discovers it.”

To discover your purpose, you need to ask the right questions. One way is to use an "aliveness questionnaire." This parallels a physical examination, but it focuses on assessing how much you feel "the rapture of being alive." The more alive you feel, the more you are living your life’s purpose. Ask yourself such questions as, "Do I live my dreams?", "Do I feel that my life matters?", and "Do I have a spiritual practice in my life?" Gaining this sense of aliveness will help you avoid the "rustout syndrome," the burnout that occurs when you are not "challenged by meaningful tasks." You can rustout when you don’t feel positive about the tasks you are doing. Purpose will help inspire you, and prevent this feeling.

Beyond Earning a Living

Clarifying and living your purpose will help you express your real self. When you are more in touch with your calling, you will feel joyful. You will be able to express your own purpose, rather than trying to attain someone else’s purpose. Once you find your purpose, center your work around it.

“Most of us want to be somebody. The search to be somebody is basic to us all.”

Your purpose will orient you to your life and work. Discovering this true purpose is a way to recognize the "presence of the sacred within" you, so you can find work consistent with that purpose. Later, when you look back on your life, you will feel more satisfied, since you will feel you have become the "somebody you were destined to be."

“One of the chief requisites for feeling the true joy in life is purpose.”

A good way to find your sense of purpose is by letting life question you. Don’t just wait for a crisis. Instead, take some time now to reassess your values and priorities. Be willing to be yourself and recognize that you matter. Your sense of purpose already lies within you. You will find it when you use your "gifts and talents to respond to something" you believe in deeply.

“Behind the creation of any great deed is at least one individual who was consumed by a purpose to make a difference. The only place we can find this kind of motivation is within.”

Embracing your purpose will help you guide your work life, beyond just earning a living. Anyone who does a really "great deed" is motivated by a deep purpose. When you are motivated by such a purpose, you will direct your attention and concern away from yourself and think more about others.

The Essence: Spirituality and Service

To find your true calling or purpose, look more deeply into yourself. Go beyond the outer mask or false self, which is based on getting approval from others and getting through your busy, daily life. Start by asking yourself, "Why do I get up on Monday morning?" Ask yourself about your purpose every day, to help "revitalize the spiritual" in yourself.

“Life begins with questions. Nothing shapes our lives as much as the questions we ask - or refuse to ask - throughout our lives.”

This search for purpose is basic to most religious and spiritual traditions, which talk about an "essence at the center of ourselves." This essence is described in various ways as God or "the Higher Power, the Soul, the Divine, the Sacred, the Spirit, or the Essence." It is the core of the self, and those who "work on purpose" know how to express their core essence continually .

“Each life has a natural built-in reason for being. That reason is to make a positive contribution to the world around it.”

Find this core essence by recognizing your personal gifts and using your unique talents to serve others. Many also discover this essence in the presence of nature. It is deeply fulfilling to find and respond to that inner call.

A Fulfillment Model: Becoming Congruent

A good model for finding your fulfilling purpose is Carl Roger’s model of human behavior, which is based on the notion of congruence. In his view, we need to be congruent on three levels to fulfill our purpose as human beings. Our essence or core level has to be congruent with our middle level, which represents our perception of ourselves. This then has to be congruent with our surface level, which consists of the actual behaviors we show to others.

“Purpose is the conscious choice of what, where, and how to make a positive contribution to the world. It is the theme, quality, or passion we choose to center our lives around.”

To discover your purpose and achieve this congruence, you must make four key discoveries about yourself. You must discover how to "live from the inside out," discover your gifts, discover "what moves you," and discover solitude.

1. Discovering how to live from the inside out means finding your natural "built-in reason for being," which is based on making a positive contribution to the world. This inner essence and need for purpose triggers these deep questions about meaning.
2. Discovering your gifts will help you choose what you want to do. This discovery feeds the spiritual hunger to "connect deeply with the creative spirit of life," to know and express our gifts, and to feel that certainty that "our lives have made a difference."
3. Once you find your gifts and determine what is most important to you, you can center your life around what "moves" you. You will feel a much greater energy when you discover this passion and focus upon it.

4. To aid in this discovery, you need to discover solitude. Being alone allows you to listen within to your deepest yearnings and hear your calling. No one else can discover this for you. You need to listen to this voice within by yourself. Solitude lets you spend time reflecting on these questions about purpose.

Having A Purpose Can Help

Discovering your purpose and following it is valuable in four key ways. It can help you organize your life, it can provide meaning, it can allow you to follow your heart, and it can clarify your calling. Once you know your purpose, you can order your time and energies around it. This focus will help direct your activities and provide your life with a sense of meaning. You will understand what is most relevant in your life. Your world will make better sense.

“In the power of our questions lies the power of purpose. To hear our calling, we need a regular practice of solitude to listen to our deepest yearnings.”

Everyone needs a sense of purpose for health and survival, because we are born as "purpose-seeking creatures." You can see this in the higher rates of mortality and illness for people who retire without a purpose to guide them after they retire. When you follow your heart, you will feel more passion and joy because you are using your gifts for a goal that matters to you. Work on clarifying your calling by finding a cause that moves you and a role that best suits your gifts.

Information from Experts

This need to get in touch with purpose leads the hierarchy of needs, described by the psychologist Abraham Maslow. First, people need to have their basic physical requirements for air, food, and shelter satisfied. At the next level, people seek safety and security. After that comes the need for companionship and affection. Then, people seek self-worth, gained through participating in worthwhile activities. The need for self-actualization is at the top of the pyramid, where we seek to act based on a sense of purpose. This is the level at which you are, "growing, stretching, and utilizing" your talents and gifts.

“To follow a deeper call, we must understand that purpose can help us organize our lives, provide meaning, follow our heart, and clarify our calling.”

Different people have different types of intelligences, described as multiple intelligences by Howard Gardner, who listed them as linguistic, logical, spatial, musical, kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic abilities. These "intelligences" help shape each person's unique gifts.

Achieving Your Calling

To achieve this sense of calling, identify your "most enjoyed gifts and talents." Then, use them to serve an issue, product, or service you care about and to dedicate yourself to your work. Identify the work settings that best fit your identity and values. Ask yourself how well you are using your gifts, if you are doing work you love, and if you feel a deep energy or personal calling for what you are doing. Go through a list of possible passions to discover what moves you. You will know you have achieved your calling in life when you feel you are "working with meaning, joy, and a sense of contributing to the greater community." When you combine "spirit and livelihood," you will feel more enthusiastic about whatever you do.

About the Author

Richard J. Leider is a founding partner of the Inventure Group, a training firm in Minneapolis, Minnesota, devoted to helping individuals, leaders, and teams discover the power of purpose. He is an author, speaker, career coach, and pioneer in the field of "Life/Work Planning," who has worked with many Fortune 500 companies. His five previous books include the best selling *Repacking Your Bags*, *The Inventurers*, and *Life Skills*.
