

ON PURPOSE

FOR THE SAKE OF WHAT?

by Richard J. Leider

Purpose. A hard word to define, perhaps; yet we're born with it. It may not have a name or a face. We may not see it as purpose. But it is there.

Purpose is the eternal quest to be connected with something larger than our own life. It is an answer to the spiritual question, "For the sake of what?" For the sake of what am I living? What is the true meaning of my existence here, now? The word "purpose," misused and open to challenge as it is, still conveys a question that each of us must answer.

Purpose is like art. We know it when we embody it. It comes through us as we gaze at the Northern lights in the clear, cold fall sky. It is the deep center we feel as we warm ourselves around a fire on the plains of East Africa. It is the helper's high we feel when we make a difference in another's life. We sense our place in the grand pattern of life. We feel centered.

Some people claim that there is no grand pattern of life, no reason for our being here. They claim that purpose is an invention of people who refuse to face the harsh realities of life or who deny death. They argue for purely rational explanations of our true nature.

We should not argue with these people. They are the people the Chinese philosopher Chuang Tzu observed when he wrote, "A frog in a well cannot be talked to about the sea."

If you sense a call to the sea—a purpose in your life—it's time to choose. You must leave the well to those who enjoy debating the temperature of the

water in the well in which they are trapped. Their well is a place that they have chosen for a sea which is not yet seen.

Purpose is a path to the sea. There are many paths. Like life, paths are uncertain. Tennessee Williams wrote, "There is a time of departure even when there's no certain place to go." How do we know when it's time to depart? How do we find the path to the sea?

ANSWERING THE CALL

Today, when we think of exploring a new path, we recognize that we are more vulnerable and that life is more difficult than we had been led to expect. There is a widespread sense among many people that everything that was once tied down is coming loose.

On September 11, 2001, the world absorbed a devastating act of darkness. Suddenly, we were forced to think hard and to think deeply about what matters most in our lives. When faced with a crisis this immense, matters of purpose could seem trivial. But the truth was that the question, "For the sake of what?" became the operative question of the day. Purpose was not trivial but essential. The events of September 11th called us to the sea. They called us to ask the big question, not only so we could cope and heal but so we could make sense of the new world we're living in. The tragedy brought forth the question in firefighters, rescue workers and ordinary people who dropped everything to simply serve. Their deeds were a witness to our intrinsic

purpose and a clear answer to the question, “For the sake of what?”

A great tragedy of many lives is that the big question is never put to us but by crisis. And when we are confronted with a crisis, then we are given a choice to answer the call, to fulfill our highest purpose. What matters are the choices we make in a crisis.

Purpose is our answer to the question, “For the sake of what?” Our answer is crucial to our health and happiness. Our bodies need messages of hope from the brain to cope and to heal. Those of powerful purpose have always known this. They have understood that a meaningful life must somehow celebrate the purpose that life provides. They have understood what the great South African playwright Athol Fugard wrote, “The only thing that ever matters in the world is what one person does or says to another person.”

After 27 years in prison, Nelson Mandela knew this. He demanded dignity for himself and his people and got it because he was centered in the big question. Despite his stature as one of the most admired people in the world, Mandela never lost his sense of the African tradition of “*ubuntu*,” described by retired Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu as: “A person is a person through other persons.”

TAKING A STAND

Purpose is rarely handed to us. We get it by choosing to have it. We get it by embodying it. A sense of purpose comes from within. Only we know if we have it. Only we know if there is something in our life that makes us want to take a stand.

Purpose requires a mind and a body that work together—an integrated mind-body state. I’m drawn to people who embody passion and purpose. When I saw Nelson Mandela speak many years ago, I felt affirmed and inspired, not through his words but

because he was fully present with me. The man smelled of purpose.

Heeding the call to become president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela said of himself: “I was not a Messiah, but an ordinary man who had become a leader because of extraordinary circumstances.” Surely time and circumstance favored Mandela in distinct ways. He takes with him a legacy like few others in world history. The power of his purpose places him beside 20th century giants like Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Like them, Mandela risked his life for the sake of dignity as he sought to overthrow a white police state with a well-equipped army. Unlike Gandhi and King, however, he lived to see his legacy. No one will be able to deny Mandela his legacy: “I want to sleep for eternity with a broad smile on my face. I want those who remain behind to say this man has done his duty.”

It takes centering to live on purpose. The authority of Nelson Mandela reflected a deep knowing of center. Being centered allowed him to tell the truth in a simple way. From a centered way there was no need for him to exaggerate his own importance in order to win approval. He knew very clearly that who he was, was enough.

How will we know we’re enough? The world is a great and mysterious place and it contains more paths to the sea than our minds can conceive. The single most important step we can take is to live authentically enough to be tested and challenged by the question of destiny—“For the sake of what?”

Centering is a simple art available to all of us. We each have the capacity to organize body, mind and spirit in a way that makes us more present, more hopeful than ever before.

MARATHON OF HOPE

Terry Fox is a clear example. For this young Canadian, the necessity to answer the big question

was thrust upon him early in life. Two days after his eighteenth birthday, Terry learned he had a cancerous tumor in his right knee. His leg would have to be amputated immediately, or the cancer could spread through the rest of his body. Suddenly life was tentative, no longer to be taken for granted. Despite the shock and the speed with which Terry's life had changed, he spent little time in the trap of self-pity. Within the confines of his hospital room, Terry detected a purpose, his personal answer to the "for the sake of what?" question.

Most of us will be forced to answer the question when we experience life crises. But as Terry Fox put it: "You don't have to do like I did—wait until you lose a leg or get some awful disease—before you can take the time to find out what kind of stuff you're made of. Start now. Anybody can."

Two weeks after his surgery, Terry began chemotherapy. The cancer clinic and the painful treatments were a reminder to Terry that almost half of all cancer patients never recover. Terry could no longer take his life for granted. He decided he wanted to do something for the sake of people who were still there. He began to detect what it was he cared deeply about, what moved him. Terry began to discover a new sense of purpose.

He would run all the way across Canada to raise one million dollars to fight cancer. He would give the money to the Canadian Cancer Society.

Months later, Terry dipped his artificial leg in the ocean off Newfoundland and began his epic run. After running three-fifths of the way across Canada—a marathon a day for five months—Terry Fox had to leave his Marathon of Hope. The power of purpose had transformed an average athlete into a person who, with an artificial leg, ran a marathon a day. He never finished. The cancer had spread to his lungs.

By the time of his death, one year later, he had raised many millions of dollars and had inspired hundreds of thousands of people.

Terry Fox had a profound impact on my life. While camping around the perimeter of Lake Superior, I came upon him running just outside of Thunder Bay, Ontario. Sandwiched between the flashing red lights of a highway patrol car and the van with a "Marathon of Hope" banner on its side was Terry Fox—with a centered purpose. There is no true hope without center. Terry embodied hope. Whenever the art of centering is practiced, things change dramatically. That unexpected meeting changed the course of my own life dramatically.

He challenged me with that centered look. He made me ask, "For the sake of what am I living my life?" He made me realize that I needed to embody a purpose by which I could deliberately guide my life. I began to shape a new vision for my work. I would dedicate myself to helping people to "uncover their calling."

CLAIMING YOUR PURPOSE

There is no true path without purpose. Purpose is not something that is granted to one person and not another. Neither is it reserved for only the great or near great. It is not something impractical or mystical. When you come from center, you can be courageous. You are secure in yourself, in your deep connection to the ground you stand upon. Therefore, you can step out in life answering, "How can I contribute?" "How can I make a difference?"

Perhaps we were placed on earth to meet the challenge of a single day; perhaps, like many ordinary people in New York City, to respond to a devastating disaster. Or perhaps, like Nelson Mandela, to change the world. Or perhaps, like Terry Fox, to raise millions to fight cancer.

Like a path, purpose must be walked. Our purpose is determined by one thing and one thing only: the degree to which we add to or subtract from other people's lives. The degree to which we dare to fully live in the question, "For the sake of what?" The degree to which we are willing to say "yes" to what truly matters to us.

Centering ourselves from the essential question allows us to feel our passions and at the same time gives us the strength to take action from our highest purpose. Centering is always a choice we can make. Centering works.

When they sense a path or face a crisis, people like Nelson Mandela, Terry Fox and countless others give themselves to it with their bodies, minds and spirits. They embody the practices of centering that strengthen them to get up every single day saying “yes” to what matters most in their lives.

Purpose is a path to the sea that has been taken before, and the path is well trodden for those who dare to follow it. In my thirty years as an executive coach, I have observed that purpose is the single most significant prediction of life fulfillment. It is one of the critical factors in emotional intelligence—considered by some to be a better predictor of success than technical knowledge or general intelligence.

CHOOSING A PURPOSEFUL LIFE

Purposeful people have made three simple, yet profound, choices in their lives.

First, they see their part in the scheme of things. They sense their special place in the grand pattern of life. They do their part by choosing to leave the well and follow their own path to the sea. It’s often a different path. It’s the historic path Thoreau captured when he wrote, “If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps he hears a different drummer.”

Second, they see that no problem ever comes to them that does not have a teaching in it, that cannot contribute to their spiritual growth. They choose to see problems as opportunities in disguise. They know that if they did not have friction, they would drift through life. They recognize that we need friction to grow.

Third, they see that the path to the sea is a path of service. Serving others is what they choose to make their lives about. Our motive, if we are to be truly happy, must be an external motive—it must be service. It must be giving, not getting. When we live to give, instead of to get, we step onto the path to the sea.

Terry Fox symbolized what most of us want to know—that there is a purpose to life, that our being here does mean something, that what we do matters. Behind the creation of any great deed is at least one individual who was consumed by the hope to make a difference in the world. People like Terry Fox and Nelson Mandela learn to move the focus of their attention away from themselves to others. They learned to let life question them.

There is in each of us, no matter how humble, a purpose. We are all part of the human family. We all have a place in this world. There is no tragedy so great, no life so small, that we cannot answer the big question, “For the sake of what?”

No amount of walking on the path will reveal for certain our place in the world. Purpose demands hope. It is a mystery. Anne Morrow Lindbergh captured that mystery in her book, *A Gift From the Sea*, when she wrote: “I would like to achieve a state of inner spiritual grace from which I could function and give as I was meant to in the eye of God.” When we come to the edge of the sea, and the issues that so consumed our lives recede from us like waves from the beach, it will be our daring answer that will become our gift to the universe.

Richard J. Leider is a founder of The Inventure Group and editor of the On Purpose journal. A nationally recognized speaker, author and executive coach, he has just published his fifth book, Whistle While You Work: Heeding Your Life’s Calling. He can be reached at info@inventuregroup.com.

OUR GOAL-SETTING WEEKEND

By Bill and Michelle Stimpson

“Just do it” advised Michelle’s grandma when we told her we were thinking of setting aside a weekend for goal-setting just like she and Grandpa had done almost 30 years ago on their 25th wedding anniversary. “It’s a process that can change your life and help you achieve the things you want,” she said. With that encouragement, we became enthusiastic to set out on the trek and begin a process for re-shaping our lives—together, as well as individually.

Armed with the energy to have our own little summit one cold weekend in January, we had everything perfectly planned. We cleared our calendars and arranged to get cozy and “hole up” in our home while we shut out all outside distractions. We were truly excited for our journey to begin...

ENVIRONMENT

We took the first step Friday night by creating an environment that set us up for success. This included no interruptions—we turned off the phone and answering machine, agreed to a “No TV” rule, and left the newspaper, mail, and paperwork alone. During our Friday night kick off, we eased into our weekend with a bottle of wine and casual conversation about our dreams and hopes for the future...discussing the “big picture” of life. We enjoyed relaxing after a tough week at work, and we were setting the tone for a fun and productive weekend. With our new frame of mind, we were all set to go on Saturday morning!

BRAINSTORM

We agreed that our first task the next morning would be to brainstorm. Grandpa had challenged us to ask ourselves the questions: “Where have we been?” and “Where are we going?” What did we

want out of life? We reflected on these questions and wrote down everything. A sampling of topics included setting aside more time for reading, taking a yoga class, and early retirement. We also went one step further and addressed the issue: “What works well in our lives and what doesn’t?” In our notes we said that we were frustrated with our workout routine as well as our weekly grocery shopping trip, which always seemed to be a drag—both of these processes needed to change.

In addition, Bill was reminded of how dissatisfied he was with his current career path; this was a perfect time for him to re-think his professional goals. We both visualized what success would look like for us and how we wanted our lives to be in the future. This was a time to put even our dreams on paper—things we’ve always wanted to do, such as renting an RV and traveling around the country!

ORGANIZATION

We put our multitude of ideas, thoughts, and dreams in writing, which was a bit overwhelming at first. To get a handle on everything, we began to categorize our notes to make sense of all the seemingly random data. Our categories came out more like a timeline, and the headings on a new sheet of paper read: “Things to tackle immediately,” “Things to explore within a year,” and “Things to put aside for now and revisit later.” It felt great to get all of our thoughts in writing—even issues we might not address for years.

We felt more focused after organizing our thoughts, and we started to feel an awesome sense of control over our lives and all of its happenings just by getting it all on paper. Since that Saturday, we have added to the list and expect to do so in the future as we continue to grow, change, and shift our priorities. Organizing our goals has provided us

with a powerful framework of reference for purposeful living.

VALUES

We determined that we should involve our values in the prioritization process, serving as a checkpoint for the things that mattered most to us. What did we *really* want? We reviewed our lists and then highlighted the ideas that reflected our values. For example, we strongly value a healthy lifestyle and relaxation, so it made a lot of sense to have “Take a yoga class” and “Take more time to read” at the top of our list. Sure, there were other things on the list that were important to us, but prioritizing helped us realize we couldn’t do it all—we definitely had some decisions to make! Some things took a backseat *for now*. Our priorities came first.

To continue the process, we quickly jotted our key values at the top of the sheet. In addition to “Healthy Lifestyle and Relaxation,” we wrote: “Balance, Simplicity, Togetherness.” Later, after reviewing our list, we found that these three simple words were at the very core of our value system as a couple. These words serve as a daily reminder of how we want to live our lives. In fact, the “Togetherness” factor is so important to us that we envision planning to work together down the road (it’s on our “Things we’d like to explore within a year” list!).

Saturday night came quickly—time to set aside our hard work and simply enjoy the evening...proud of all that we had accomplished.

EXECUTION

With all these great ideas floating around, the natural flow on Sunday morning was to move forward with our big plans. We further clarified each goal and determined the next steps. In some instances, we had to completely re-evaluate the way we did things. Since one of our goals was to improve our grocery shopping process (this was

always a hassle, and we tended to procrastinate nearly to the point of starvation!), we decided to explore alternatives and research the option of home delivery service. This would not only improve our process, but also free up an extra hour each week for doing more of the things we love.

We also wrestled with our current workout routine. During our discussion, we estimated that we spent three extra hours a week just driving to and from the gym, searching for a parking space, and waiting for the equipment we wanted to use. Yikes! Could we afford to set up a home gym and workout in our basement? That would be ideal. We came up with the steps to take us to that goal, which included canceling our current health club membership, setting aside a fixed amount of money each month to finance a home gym, and researching various equipment. Our goal was to have a gym in our basement within three months. Again, this would not only improve our process, but it would give us an additional three hours a week for doing other, more important things.

REVIEW AND CELEBRATE!

So far, we had brainstormed, taken a bunch of notes, organized, categorized, prioritized and finally come up with a plan of action! We had worked hard and used a lot of mental energy. It’s tough to search your soul for your dreams and desires all in one weekend! We took frequent breaks, which always provided a refreshing new perspective, and continuously reviewed our work. Most importantly, we celebrated our successes along the way.

Once we were committed to our goals, we wanted to guarantee our success. Our plan was to routinely revisit our goals and surround ourselves with: 1) People who support us and who cheer us on, and 2) An environment that is conducive to getting us to our goals. To serve as an inspiring reminder, we chose a framed picture of Michelle’s godfather and godson, Tom and Tommy, embracing each other on a bright summer day in the backyard. They died at

ages 42 and 7. Today, that picture is a powerful time here on earth is limited. That's why this goal-setting weekend was so important to us.

We talk about things as they come up and we aim to be flexible. In fact, this goal-setting weekend was initially postponed due to life's unpredictability—Bill came down with a terrible flu bug that weekend! But, we bounced back. Currently, we set aside an hour or so every weekend to check in on how we're doing, and we consistently review and celebrate. These mini-sessions also help to re-fuel the enthusiasm we felt from the very beginning. It feels great to be creating positive habits—we are living life proactively, intentionally, and deliberately.

Of course we've learned that we're human, and we make mistakes and have setbacks. Sometimes a weekend will roll around and neither of us will feel like discussing goals or plans or dreams. Instead, we rent movies, take naps, and order pizza. We don't want to get too rigid with our goals, as one of our values is to have fun with life. So, maybe next weekend that will come in the form of movies and pizza!

REFLECTION

Looking back four months to that milestone weekend in January, it's amazing to realize the

reminder of the preciousness of life and how our difference it made in our lives. To date, we just finished our first yoga class, we set aside a few nights each week to read our favorite books before bed, we have our groceries delivered every Friday at noon, and we workout on our own time in our very own gym. It's funny to think that we may have never taken any of these actions if we hadn't pushed ourselves or questioned the way we do things. We might continue to be frustrated, spending valuable time on things that were getting in our way.

When Grandma and Grandpa look back on their goal-setting weekend almost 30 years ago, they are "blown away" by the changes their planning made in their lives. We wonder to what extent we are changing our lives, at this moment on our 7th anniversary, and what we will be saying 30 years from now about making the leap to dare to set goals and get our dreams on paper. Maybe we'll be enjoying early retirement and reflecting from a state park in our RV.

Bill and Michelle Stimpson have been married for eight years and reside in Minnetonka, Minnesota. Together, they are on a continuous quest for personal growth and self-improvement. Bill and Michelle's "Goal-Setting Weekend" helped them discover their passion for realizing and maximizing potential, and they are eager to share this passion by helping others refine and improve their lives.

MAPPING YOUR LIFE

"Organizing our goals has provided us with a powerful framework of reference for purposeful living."

—Bill and Michelle Stimpson

Has Michelle and Bill's story inspired you to plan your own goal-setting weekend? If so, you pick the weekend and we'll provide the perfect guide to help you brainstorm, organize and execute your life goals.

Drawing on years of experience in life/work planning, The Inventure Group designed its 56-page *Life Map Instruction Booklet* to help individuals effectively build their own framework for purposeful living—the *Life Map*.

As its name suggests, the *Life Map* serves as a navigation tool for the most important journey of all—your life. Use your *Life Map* to chart goals as

an individual, as a couple or as a family, and define the plan of action for achieving those goals. Start constructing your *Life Map* with the help of the *Life Map Instruction Booklet*, which first asks you to reflect on the four major aspects of your life: work, personal, relationship and financial.

Create your own Master Dream List process using the exercises in the instruction booklet. A values sort exercise (like Bill and Michelle used) will help you determine what's most important to you so you can prioritize your dreams. Additional exercises help you to develop your purpose statement and create your own personal vision for your future.

The tools and exercises found in Instruction Booklet make designing your *Life Map* both a fun and rewarding project. Use included stickers to illustrate your map, or find your own pictures to personalize it.

Your map will serve as your reminder and keep you on track as you work to achieve the goals you have



laid out for yourself. Also included in the *Life Map* package are Action Plan sheets that fit right into your daily planner so your goals are always in sight. Map refills are available for updating your map.

To create your own *Life Map*, visit The Inventure Store at www.inventuregroup.com or call us at 952-249-5222 for more information.

INVENTURECOACH

by Richard J. Leider and Barbara L. Hoese

We are often asked, “How do I know if a coach will help me?” Experience shows us that people most often seek coaching when they want to make a life or career transition, become a better leader, or want more balance in their life. They usually sense a desire and readiness for something more for their life and want a guide to help them discover and achieve that something more.

You are ready for a coach if you have a gut instinct that you could be getting more out of life and a hungering to discover what that might be. To find out, talk to others who have a coach and learn how coaching has helped them. Ask them about their experiences and the benefits they achieved. It may help you to take some time and list what you expect from a coach and the objectives you'd like to

achieve. And finally, consider coaching an investment in yourself.

To help you learn more about whether or not this might be the right time for you to invest in coaching, The Inventure Group has launched a new Web site, InventureCoach.com.

InventureCoach.com is an information center for two distinct types of people—those looking for a coach and those who coach. If you're looking for a coach, InventureCoach.com offers suggestions for determining if you need a coach and, if so, how to go about finding the right coach for you. Life/work changes are usually complex and require a multi-disciplined approach by a coach who has extensive education, training and experience. On

InventureCoach.com you can find a list of questions to use when interviewing prospective coaches to work with you.

If you determine that a coach isn't for you right now but you would still like some direction in life/work issues, InventureCoach.com offers resources for self-coaching and personal growth. Simply choose a topic area to access a number of resources, including articles and tools, to jump start you on your own path.

If you're in the coaching field, you can learn about The Inventure Group's unique approach to coaching, discover articles, tools and site links to enhance your practice and get the latest on upcoming Inventure Group Coaching Clinics. To be the first to learn about Coaching Clinics in your area or new Inventure tools, books and guides,

subscribe to The Inventure Group's broadcast e-mail list on the Web site. Broadcasts also include information about Richard Leider's speaking engagements. Upcoming events open to the public are scheduled in San Francisco, Chicago and Toronto.

InventureCoach.com can be accessed directly at www.InventureCoach.com or through The Inventure Group's Web site at www.InventureGroup.com under Coaching.

If you would like an InventureCoach to answer your questions, write or e-mail us at info@inventuregroup.com. We will select a letter each issue and invite a professional career coach to respond. This issue's commentary is by Richard Leider and Barbara Hoese, principals of The Inventure Group.

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