

# ON PURPOSE

## WHEN WE WERE ALL HUNTER-GATHERERS

By Richard J. Leider

Since forever humans have been pondering the existential mysteries of life. The same question has riddled us throughout our evolutionary history: “What is my purpose in life?”

The only way to truly discover the secrets of the bush is on a wildlife walk. You become one with nature. So here I find myself contemplating the same question while hiking, miles from any town, on the edge of the Serengeti Plains. But I’m not exactly alone. A large community of wildebeest surrounds me, poised as if ready for conversation, looking directly at me. These are quiet, unassuming friends whom I’ve known for years and I’m ready to do some catching up with my bearded companions. In fact, that’s why I’m here. Africa is a sanctuary when I need a solitude fix, when I want to socialize with nature.

I walk in silence. I recall poet Emily Dickinson describing herself as having an “appetite for silence.” In my case, I would say that I’m a *silence addict*. To me, incessant societal

noise is a disease that can only be cured by going *back to the rhythm* of silence. These vast, windy hills and plains are a good place to go back to the rhythm. The nothingness fills me. Looking across the Serengeti, I can feel the rhythm. I can feel the earth inhale and exhale with every breath of mine. The air is heavy with silence, my medicine.

I love the softness of early morning. The air is moist and cool. Hiking in the early morning is still the best strategy to avoid the intense midday sun and heat. My other friends, the impala, share hillsides with umbrella acacia trees, a classic African scene. Wildlife flourishes around me, both in diversity of species and size of populations. Guinea fowl explode from beneath almost every thorny bush.

Thomsen’s gazelles and zebras are too numerous to count. Hyenas yip and yodel from dusk until dawn. Here, some predatory voice is always calling.

Hiking between the Serengeti and the great Rift Valley, I imagine hunter-gatherers exploring



the same route, foraging seasonally among food resources on this vast savanna. The path ahead is unclear. There are no trails, only animal paths. I like that, since real trails attract people. Not only in location but in attitude, this place is a world away from any place I know. Here evolutionary history floods my senses. I feel the heartbeat of a thousand generations. I ponder the thought that we all live on the same blue marble that circles the same orbit and subjects each of us to the same gravitational pulls. And I sense that hunter-gatherers had so much more, even with so much less.

The freedom of being off trail sharpens my evolutionary senses and makes me alert. It allows me to discern the sense and essence of life's secrets. It reawakens the instincts that were, at one time, critical to our survival. In the hunter-gatherer world inattention to small movements and sounds could get you eaten. In the natural world the secrets of the universe speak clearly.

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***“In fact, it is precisely because of our challenges that we can evolve. It is through our challenges that we become more.”***

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I ponder the recent discovery of skull bones of the earliest known ancestor of humankind in the desert of Northern Chad—a fossil nearly seven million years old that will revolutionize our understanding of our beginnings. The discovery—a nearly complete skull, two lower jaw fragments and three teeth—is three million years older than any other hominid skull discovered to date. The fossils suggest an evolutionary complexity and diversity in human origins that seem to defy description by the family trees of the past. It plays havoc with the current model of human origins in the place where I'm hiking. Because the fossils were found so far from here (long considered the cradle of humanity) scientists conclude that these first primitive hominids ranged much more widely than researchers had expected. It is a stunning find.

As I try to wrap my thoughts around this discovery, I realize that everything in life is natural and an evolutionary part of the landscape. While I may view life's challenges as an abnormality, an unnatural state, hunter-gatherers hold life's challenges differently. Their perspective might suggest that it is normal to have challenges; suffering and death are part of life. This acceptance does not imply powerlessness or disinterest in a meaningful life. What is implicit is the belief that one can enjoy life *in spite* of adversity. In fact, it is precisely *because* of our challenges that we can evolve. It is through our challenges that we become more.

I hear a still, small voice within myself. Although I'm walking on terra firma, I feel a shifting of the underlying tectonic plates. It tugs at my anthropology—my beliefs about the origin, nature and destiny of humankind. This voice speaks to me through centuries of human existence. This voice has been with us since we all were hunter-gatherers, an innate sixth sense. This sense has allowed us, as humans, to survive as a species. I'm convinced that we survived because we maintained a quiet, powerful sense of our purpose on Earth.

We survived because some time ago we chose to live a life that addressed not the times but the eternities, as Thoreau put it. Purpose is what makes us human, after all. Among the animals we, perhaps alone, retain this sense of legacy—this sense that living well means more than just surviving. Lions and birds care for their young but we separate ourselves from the others in the bush in that we harbor something as ephemeral as the notion of passing something on to others after we pass on.

When we were hunter-gatherers we might have thought of legacy in terms of passing along a prized bow and arrows. As time passed and we became more removed from the bush, we began to think in terms of passing along more than survival goods. We began to develop a sense that our stories, our experiences, our wisdom were worth passing on to those who survived. We began to pass on something of ourselves—something of the spirit—of who we are and what we have meant.

Hunter-gatherers help me see my place in the world. They are a mirror where we meet life face-to-face

and see our place in it. They whisper our *anthropology* to us. They remind us that our purpose has long been to enrich other people's lives through the power of sharing.

An African elder once told me that the problem with visiting Africa is that you feel forever in exile after you have left. It's true. That's why I return year after year. Many people tell me that they have always wanted to go to Africa, but they cannot explain why. They discover when they do go that Africa is evolutionary bedrock in some deeper sense. It has a primal draw that truly may be genetically hardwired. I felt that way from my first safari and I leave with the same feeling today. The safari may be over but my journey isn't.



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*is dedicated to helping people to live on purpose.*

## NOTES FROM THE CORPORATE UNDERGROUND

By Kenny Moore

I'm tired of listening to Tom Peters. I refuse to buy Jack Welch's book. I've grown weary of reading the latest management guru's list of *Habits* and *Business Principles*. I become depressed when I get to the part of the book that states: "...Get everyone together, tell them the business plan and demand that they believe and implement it fully." Then it quickly ends, with very little said on how to make this happen. I've started looking elsewhere for answers to my business needs.

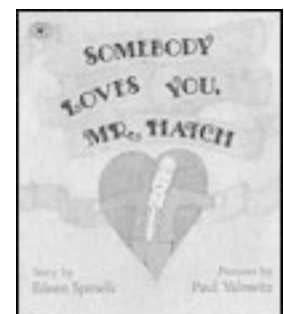
### THE STORY OF MR. HATCH

Of more help to me is *Somebody Loves You, Mr. Hatch* by Eileen Spinelli. It's a children's book about an isolated working man, who lives, works and sleeps alone. Neighbors say: "Mr. Hatch likes to keep to himself." One Saturday, while cleaning his porch, the postman delivers a heart-shaped box of candy with an anonymous note signed "Somebody loves you." Mr. Hatch is confused because he interacts with no one. He finally concludes: "Why, I've got a secret admirer." Mr. Hatch begins to change, dressing up and walking the streets of town, greeting and helping strangers—all with the hope of meeting the person who sent him the candy. Children are drawn to him. He bakes brownies, serves

lemonade and plays an old harmonica that he's had from his boyhood. Everyone dances. Time passes. Mr. Hatch is having so much fun, he's even forgotten about finding his secret admirer.

Then the postman returns informing Mr. Hatch that he delivered the candy to the wrong address and takes back the now-empty box. The "Somebody loves you" note falls out in the transfer, reminding Mr. Hatch that he was correct at the outset: nobody really does love him. He

withdraws back into his isolation. But the kids won't have it. The neighborhood revolts: "We can't let this happen to Mr. Hatch." And they don't. Their response is truly prodigal. My



seven-year-old son made me promise not to tell how it all ends, so go read the book. But the story left me thinking. What would happen if Mr. Hatch showed up in corporate America? What havoc might be wrought by small gifts, anonymously given to an ordinary worker—possibly even the wrong person? How might our corporate neighbors respond? I decided to find out.

## A PROGRAM IS DESIGNED

My plan was to anonymously send a \$40 floral arrangement to two unsuspecting employees every Monday morning—a Mr. Hatch Award. They would be subjectively chosen, sometimes based on their commitment to the corporate common good. Or because they just happened to be at the right place at the right time. Attached to the flowers would be a note: “Don’t ever think your good efforts go unnoticed.” Signed: “From someone who cares.” The business world has taught me to always do a pilot before you jump into full implementation. I also learned that it’s better to ask forgiveness than permission—so I kept the idea to myself and got no formal approval. For my trial run, I picked one employee from the opposite side of my floor, as well as my Senior Vice President. While I personally hate anyone in authority, I notice that no one ever says “thank you” to executives. Granted, they do make mistakes, but they also do some good things—for which they seldom get credit. Besides, my therapist would be proud to hear me even consider doing something positive for someone in authority. So the S.V.P. got flowers too.

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***“ ‘Don’t ever think your good efforts go unnoticed.’ Signed: ‘From someone who cares.’ ”***

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On Monday morning I walked down to the florist who handles our corporate account and asked what I could get for \$40. She showed me a small bowl with five petite flowers in it. (Their overhead must be high.) I told her I wanted to send two arrangements and to insure anonymity, I would pay cash and I would not sign my name or leave my phone number. The florist was extremely uncomfortable with this. I wasn’t feeling too happy about the transaction either. Maybe this is how all pilot projects feel? By that afternoon, the flowers arrived. I said nothing to nobody. On Tuesday I made it a point to pass by the desk of the woman who worked on my floor. I said: “Hey, nice flowers. Is it your birthday?” “No” she said. “Somebody sent them to me. Look. Here’s the note.” By this time, all her co-workers were crowded around,

telling me the layout of events. They also knew that an executive got the same flowers delivered. One of them even called the florist to find out who sent it. Nobody seemed to know. They all continued to speak in utter giddiness about the strangeness of the delivery and what made this woman so special.



They also spent considerable time trying to figure out what she had in common with the executive, and who might have sent them both the flowers. Even as I left, they continued on in frenzied conversation and merriment.

A few days later I had a project-update meeting with my Senior Vice President. I planned to tell him about my pilot as well as get his reaction as a recipient. Before I even got to my part of the conversation, he said: “You know, Kenny, last week some employee sent me a bunch of flowers, thanking me for something I did. I’m not even sure who it was, or what I did. But it got me thinking. I only have a few more years before I retire and I think I’d like to use that time focusing on individual employees, their needs and concerns. I know it’s impractical—we’ve got 13,000 of them. But I’d like to give it a try.” Gulp! Now I felt both entrapped and embarrassed. How could I tell him that I sent the flowers, or that he was only part of a program I was testing out? He had arrived upon a worthwhile executive goal that I wasn’t going to knock off

track. I kept my mouth shut, gave my project update and exited as fast as I could.

## PILOT REVIEW AND IMPLEMENTATION

These two conversations made me want to continue my plans with Mr. Hatch. Even though the company knew nothing about the program, I believed they would support it. If I can give an employee a \$5,000 on-the-spot award for customer excellence, \$40 is not going to break the bank. The pilot even taught me a few lessons: 1) run the program on my own and forget about formal corporate support; 2) keep the anonymity of the program intact; 3) ditch the corporate florist.

The next Monday I moved into full implementation. I chose two more workers but didn't go to the swanky florist. I walked a few blocks north into the combat zone of downtown Brooklyn and found an all-purpose store. The proprietor sells a lot of things, including flowers. I said to him: "Here's my offer. Every week I want you to deliver two floral arrangements to my headquarters. I also want a "thank you" balloon attached along with a note that I'll give you. You put the note in an envelope and deliver it all." "OK with me," he says. "I'll pay cash. You don't contact me; I only contact you. I'll show up every Monday with the names, notes and money." Unlike the corporate florist, he had no problem with this arrangement. Apparently, he does a lot of his business this way. "One final question," I said. "What kind of flowers do I get for my \$40?" "Give me a minute" and he disappeared. What he brought back was a massive array of floral specimens: birds of paradise, tulips, roses, babies' breath. I think I got half of his storefront display. "Looks fine to me. Do a good job and I'll keep coming back every week."

## THE RESULTS

It's a year later and I'm still sending flowers, anonymous notes and balloons. My company still knows nothing about it. Have I changed our corporate culture? No. Was I able to get everyone together, tell them the business plan and demand that they believe and implement the Mr. Hatch Award? Hell, no. But here's what has happened:

1) I actually look forward to coming to work on Monday mornings.

2) A small number of employees go home Monday night with a smile or quizzical look on their faces.

3) Co-workers are having a blast trying to figure out who's sending flowers to their friends, what for and how come. I suspect a few even dream of receiving flowers and a balloon for themselves.

4) One aging executive is making retirement preparations by meeting individually with employees. While this is the least verifiable part of the program, I trust that the S.V.P. is making the effort. (Did I actually say that I *trust* someone in authority? Who knows, maybe Mr. Hatch is getting to me . . .)

5) I've got a proprietor in downtown Brooklyn who smiles when he sees me coming and warmly shakes my hand. I also have the feeling that the storefront area is a bit more revitalized than it was a year ago.

And that's the present state of progress with the Mr. Hatch Award. I'll probably keep it up until I read another kid's book that leaves me feeling hopeful and alive. Then I'll experiment with another idea. Maybe something based on *The Velveteen Rabbit* or *Ira Sleeps Over*.

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***"Some things work just fine when they're small, personal and unique."***

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I'm sure some well-meaning executive will read this article and try to formulate a corporate "Mr. Hatch Award." Fuggedaboutit! Not everything needs to be imitated and mandated into business policy. Some things work just fine when they're small, personal and unique. There's organizational strength in fermenting a mixture of the institutional along with the idiosyncratic. Executives would be better served by encouraging staff to "hatch" their own ways of nurturing the corporate common good.

Oh, one more thing. While I was finishing this article, I passed the woman who received the first Mr. Hatch Award when it was a pilot. She had fresh

flowers on her desk. "Is it your birthday?" "No," she said. "Somebody still sending you anonymous flowers?" I whispered. "Nope, not this time. They're from my boss," she said. "I got promoted and she sent them as a present." "Sounds like you have a growing list of admirers," I said, and walked away feeling a little renewed.

Who knows, Mr. Hatch might start a trend in corporate America. I can hear Tom Peters talking about it now....

*Kenny Moore is a former monk and present day businessman. He is co-author of The CEO and the Monk: One Company's Journey to Profit and Purpose, his poetry has been published in several anthologies and he also dabbles in painting and photography. Kenny is the Founding Director of Art for the Anawim, a not-for-profit charity which works with the art community in supporting the needs of terminally ill children and the inner city poor. He currently resides in New Jersey with his wife Cynthia, where they try to maintain their sanity while raising two growing boys. Kenny can be reached at kennythemonk@yahoo.com.*

## INVENTURECOACH

By Clare O'Connell

### **Dear *Inventure Coach*:**

*I've read about the idea of a creating my own board of directors—or sounding board—and think it's a great idea. But how do people use this concept in real life? Can you share how others use their sounding boards?*

*Signed,  
Bored without a Board*

### **Dear *Bored without a Board*:**

Great question! Just as most organizations have a board of directors, you can select your own group of trusted advisors to offer you counsel and support. The members on your sounding board need only have one thing in common—you!

There is no one right formula or strategy for working with your board, but here are some tips and practices that have worked for others:

As you think about creating a board, be sure you are clear on why the board is being created. What is it you're looking for? For example, the primary responsibilities of the board are to challenge you, provide feedback and hold you accountable for achieving the goals you want to accomplish. Ask yourself if you are open to your board being com-

pletely honest with you. Boards are only effective if the members are able to tell you the truth about yourself.

As you talk with the individuals you'd like to serve as your board members, explain why you're asking them to participate. Do they have a particular perspective on you or the marketplace that you value? Are they good at giving advice, deep listening, asking challenging questions, providing encouragement?

Some people choose to meet with board members one on one to discuss a specific issue. Others convene an actual board meeting where they've presented their business plan, given progress updates and generated discussion or feedback on an issue. Another approach is to make your board part of your discernment process for a decision you're facing. I recently asked my board to participate in a clearness committee with me. This is a process for discernment that comes from the Quaker tradition. The author, Parker Palmer offers directions for conducting a clearness committee in his article, *The Clearness Committee*.

Encourage your board members to ask you the great—and often challenging—questions that will keep you focused on your purpose, values and goals and then brainstorm with them on how they can

support you and hold you accountable for the choices you've made.

Good luck!

*Clare O'Connell is a Master Certified Coach and works closely with The Inventure Group. She is the founder of Passage West, Inc., her own consulting and coaching practice. Clare holds dual citizenship in the United States and Ireland and leads an annual outdoor adventure trip for individuals interested in personal renewal.*

Do you need help selecting your own personal board of directors? Our guide, *My Sounding Board* was designed to help you do just that. The guide will take you through the process of determining who should be on your board and how to utilize those individuals to help you live out your purpose. To learn more about and/or purchase the guide, please visit our website at [www.inventuregroup.com](http://www.inventuregroup.com).



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Its purpose is to support your purpose. . .to empower. . .to inform. . .to identify lifestyle and workstyle possibilities..

