

Three Steps to Unlocking Your Purpose

by Richard Leider

Why Purpose Matters?

“Why is it so hard to find my life purpose?”

“Does it really matter?”



There are many reasons. Sometimes the world’s problems just seem too big and we feel too small. At times, we may just be too busy or overwhelmed from life’s challenges. But, living purposefully is fundamental to having a meaningful, fulfilling life. New research is emerging that reveals how important it is to define and unlock our own purpose in life. Studies show that purpose can improve your physical health, lengthen your life, and, make you happier. **Mattering matters.**

Spend Time with Yourself

Take a moment to find a quiet space where you can contemplate. Take three deep breaths, find your center, and reflect upon the following question:

“Why do you get up in the morning?”

How did that feel? Did an answer emerge quickly, or did you have trouble coming up with something? Perhaps you said you get up so that you can make it to work and earn money to survive. Maybe you get up simply because your cat is meowing to be fed or because the alarm clock is going off!

Understand Yourself

But there is also a deeper layer to your answer that involves “why” you do those things. Purpose is where we feel meaning – what we want to do and contribute. However, purpose is not “out there” waiting to be found. It’s “in there” waiting to be unlocked. It can be unlocked through our job or career, but many people don’t feel their work is purposeful. And even if it is linked, purpose is deeper than just a job. For those who have a sense of spirituality in their life, purpose is generally interwoven around a sense of meaning and connection. Purpose goes to the heart of what we value and who we are.

Ask Big Questions

Gifts + Passion + Values = Purpose

- What are my “gifts?” Your “gifts” are not just your talents, but what you love to do.
- What are my “passions?” Your “passion” is something for which you feel a deep curiosity and commitment.

- What are my “values?” Your “values” include your beliefs and what you consider to be most important.

When you can answer those three questions, you will have a better sense of how you can maximize your sense of purpose in order to improve your health and sense of well-being.

Search Inwards

Here are three key steps I suggest to get started unlocking your purpose.

Step 1: Find out how you want to help.

When I launched my coaching practice, I helped anyone in any way I could. I conducted surveys, ran workshops, met in coffee shops, and spoke in church basements. This is what I knew and was reasonable at, but parts of it didn’t energize me. In fact, they drained me. As I acquired more and more clients with varying needs, I found that what I really loved to do was content creation and speaking. I’m even sitting here on a sunny afternoon writing this blog because I enjoy it.

~Ask yourself: What are my “gifts?” What do I love to do? To unlock your purpose, you need to figure out how you can best use the gifts you love to make a contribution to others.

Step 2: Find out who you want to help.

I have enjoyed the privilege of creating content and speaking to hundreds of people. I have written books that have reached more than a million readers worldwide. And, I’ve learned that the people I’m most motivated to help are those in the age of 50 and beyond. I feel most aligned with my purpose of “Growing and Giving” when I’m supporting people who want to “grow” old, not just “get” old. In fact, most of my work now focuses on the shift from adulthood to elderhood. And my new content creation is the book *Who Do You Want to Be When You Grow Old?: The Path of Purposeful Aging* by Richard Leider and David Shapiro (Berrett Koehler, 2021)



~Ask yourself: “Who do I want to help?” What pain or injustice or unhappiness have you witnessed that you just can’t live with? Is there something that touches you so deeply that it keeps you up at night? There is certainly no shortage of people whom we could use our gifts to help, inspire, or support.

Step 3: Find out what energizes you and what drains you.

It’s not enough to know the passion or problem you want to solve; you need to think carefully about the way that you want to solve it.

Early in my career, I worked in Personnel (aka Human Resources) at two large organizations. I was successful, but, restless. I created a “side hustle” – Lunch Hour, Ltd. You buy me lunch, I coach you. I found myself often obsessing about it and creating new content for my clients. The side hustle forced me to ask myself: “What do I really want to do?”

I often thought of things I wanted to do but didn't end up following through or putting in the work required to make the move required to succeed. Sound familiar? This time was different, though. I decided that I wanted to figure out exactly why so many people died shortly after retiring. My own father was an example. So, I applied for and received a Bush Fellowship, left my job, took a second mortgage on my house, and headed to Boston where I apprenticed on the Harvard Study of Adult Development. And, the rest, as they say, is history. This experience opened my eyes to how my gifts, passions, and values fit together. So, I took a giant leap and opened up a coaching practice and co-authored my first book: *THE INVENTURERS: Excursions in Life and Career Renewal*.

~Ask yourself: What am I willing to sacrifice for? When you discover something you're willing to sacrifice for, you know that you're on to your purpose.

"Do you feel the rapture of being alive?"

Choosing to name and live your purpose is an act of courage. Ultimately, what gives our lives aliveness is living with alignment – unlocking and acting in a way that is a bold expression of who we are at our core. When we do this we feel, as Joseph Campbell put it, "the rapture of being alive."

Campbell wrote in *The Power of Myth*: "People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances with our own innermost being and reality so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive."

There are no right or wrong answers to the three steps, and your purpose can change throughout your life. You may need to take some time and re-assess your responses to the questions a few times over the weeks ahead. Stay mindful of your feelings during the day, and catch yourself, hopefully, in the act of feeling fully alive. This process of self-discovery will help you move closer to your own reason for being, which can have powerful effects on your health and well-being.

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Richard Leider, founder of Inventure – The Purpose Company, is the author of ten books, including three best sellers, which have sold over one million copies. *Repacking Your Bags* and *The Power of Purpose* are considered classics in the personal growth field. Richard's PBS Special – *The Power of Purpose* – was viewed by millions of people across the U.S. His newest book, *Who Do You Want to Be When You Grow Old?: The Art of Aging on Purpose* will be available in 2021.