



Discovering Your Life Purpose

by
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Are you clear about the purpose of your life? And are you fulfilling it? Or are you one of the many people who have spent your entire life (until now) feeling restless, confused, just going through a monotonous routine day after day – and never feeling certain about the purpose of your life? If the issue of life purpose has entered your life at this juncture, it is important to find a process to discover it. Why? Because without it, you will never feel the level of fulfillment that is possible in your work. In my 22 years in the career development field, guiding people through transitions of various types, nothing has been more transformational for my clients than discovering and fulfilling their life purpose.

What do I mean by life purpose? First, in a broad sense, we all have a shared overall purpose, in that we are here to discover as much of our true self as we can and to express our true self through our lives to the greatest possible extent. We do this through all of the experiences we have, the people we relate to, the jobs we choose, and the teachers whose message rings true with us.

Each of us also has a specific purpose. It is a calling, a mission, or an overall theme for your life which transcends your daily activities. It is the quality you have come to earth to develop, the type of service you are here to render, the segment of the planet you have come to enhance or improve. It is much broader than one job or career; it pervades your entire life.

In fact, most of us will have at least five different careers in our lives. Your purpose is not found in a career area or a job description. Rather, you use your career (as well as the other aspects of your life) to accomplish our broadly stated purpose. For example, one man's life purpose was to promote peace. He did so by working as a mediator and by consciously pursuing peaceful relationships. Another woman discovered her life purpose was to nurture the earth. She learned all she could about conservation, worked for the park bureau, and soon was in demand as a teacher for other nature guides and conservationists.

Perhaps you have had a sense since you were a child that you had a 'mission.' Or you may have periodically asked yourself, 'What is the meaning of my life?' If neither of these questions has come to you consciously, you may notice that you life has consisted of much drifting from one job to the next, one relationship to another, with no sense of order or meaning – and a resulting feeling of emptiness.

If you have not experienced the level of success that you know you are capable of, or if you have felt as if something is 'missing' from your life, take note of this very important principle: *You will experience success in your life to the extent that you are clear about your life purpose.*

Qualities of Life Purpose

Life purpose is fun, joyful, and playful. When you are carrying out our life purpose, you will find that the time goes by unnoticed. Hours pass in pure bliss. Joseph Campbell and the eastern mystics use the phrase, 'Follow your bliss.' The dictionary defines bliss as 'complete happiness.' Thus Joseph Campbell is saying to pursue those things that cause you to experience complete happiness. Abraham Maslow called these experiences 'peak experiences.' Peak experiences are a regular occurrence when you are following your life purpose. Both of these concepts are closely aligned with discovering and following your life purpose.

Have you ever had the experience of reading a good book, working at a hobby you love, or listening to beautiful music when several hours later it seemed as if only minutes had passed? That is the feeling that is available to you when you have discovered your life purpose – and are living it.

Another characteristic of life purpose is that it is *completely unique* to you. *No one else can fulfill your purpose.* Whether it concerns an area that is being explored by many or by only a few, what matters is that no one can approach it as you can.

Clues to Your Life Purpose

Following are ten clues which will help you to discover your life purpose.

Clue No. 1: What do you love to do? That is, when you have spare time, how do you like to spend it? Your spare time activities are important because they show what you enjoy doing when no one else is making demands on you. This is truly *your* time. What do you enjoy doing with it?

Even if these activities do not seem related to your career, they may be the seeds of an opportunity you have not yet recognized. Two ladies in a career counseling group a couple of years ago mentioned that what they liked to do in their spare time was watch soap operas. Once they acknowledged that as the thing they most loved to do, they converted that passion into a flourishing career writing syndicated summaries of all the daily soaps!

Another way to think about this clue is: what would you do even if you were not paid to do it?

Clue No. 2: What parts of your present job or life activities do you thoroughly enjoy? Even if you feel miserable in your current job or career field, think about this question. If you think back to why you took the job or chose the career area to begin with, there are likely some specific tasks or objectives that are (or were) enjoyable to you. It might be a small thing, as in the case of the receptionist who disliked dealing with all the people in her job but thoroughly enjoyed the few moments each day that she got to type letters and sort the mail. She later learned that she was not a 'people' person, but a data person who enjoyed organizing things. That clue led her into her new job as a word processor.

As you go through these clues, forget all about what others may think of your answers. This process is for you, and you need not share it with anyone else. Another pair of homemakers in a northwest state realized that, even though it sounded silly, they loved to clean house. They were perceptive enough to recognize that this was a clue to a business opportunity, and they are now famous as the Clutter Ladies and make their living helping people clean up their messes and stay organized.

Clue No. 3: What do you naturally do well? You have some natural abilities. These are the things you just naturally do well. They have always come easily to you. Perhaps you are naturally athletic or can learn foreign languages quickly with little effort. You may be a born organizer or have innate intuitive abilities. The areas in which you naturally excel are indicators of your life purpose – particularly if you also enjoy the things you do well. Your Enjoyment Quotient – the sum total of the things which give you the greatest joy – is the most important guide to your life purpose.

Clue No. 4: What are your ten greatest successes to date (in your eyes)? For this clue, put aside what others in your life may view as your successes. What things do you view as your greatest successes? It may be something as simple as a gesture that helped someone in need – or it may be a widely publicized improvement you made in your company's efficiency. Whatever it is, list your successes, as well as – and this is important – what it was about the accomplishment or event that makes you label it a success. (For example, the person who made many an improvement in her company's efficiency may label it a success because of the benefit to the company, the way it made her feel, the money it saved, the recognition she got, or for other reasons.)

Clue No. 5: Is there a cause about which you feel passionate? Many times, the essence of our life purpose is revealed through a cause which attracts our commitment at a deep level. For example, if you feel strongly about world peace, or the save-the-whales movement because of a love for Mother Earth, or for the whales themselves, or a desire to preserve the animals for future generations? What is it about the cause that attracts you to it?

Clue No. 6: What are the ten most important lessons you have learned in your life? It is said that we teach that which we most need to learn. What do you feel are the most valuable or important things you have learned through your life experiences so far? (They need not be related to work.) One of these that was on my list included a simple realization in my days as a secretary of the importance of approaching challenges at work, such as how to handle an issue for my boss, as though they were my own personal challenges. This gave me a sense of ownership and self-confidence in my own judgment which allowed me to experience increased peace of mind in my work. No doubt you have had experiences that you recall often which were life-changing or pivotal in your life.

Clue No. 7: Are there some issues or perceived problems that have occurred over and over again? This clue is related to the previous one, in that out of one of these repeated issues may come your greatest lessons. But some of them are probably still occurring. That is, you have yet to learn how to break the pattern. Do you keep choosing mates that put you down? Or jobs that are beyond your skill level? If there were a theme for your life, how would you describe it?

I believe this lifetime is one of many we will experience in our ongoing process of spiritual growth. Whether or not you agree, these recurring issues or ‘problems,’ as we sometimes call them, often represent the key qualities you are here to develop. The Buddhists call them ‘uncooked seeds,’ or the qualities that aren’t yet fully matured in you.

Clue No. 8: What do you daydream about doing? This is important because your daydreams have their basis in your subconscious mind. This is the largest part of your mind, but not as easily accessed as your conscious mind. Our mind resembles an iceberg: the conscious mind is the ten percent of the iceberg above the water that we can easily see, but the subconscious is the ninety percent that lies submerged below the water.

It is in your subconscious mind that your beliefs reside, as well as your deepest desires for success and fulfillment. If there are images or issues about which you repeatedly daydream (or dream of at night), they may be aspects of your life purpose. Their importance cannot be overestimated.

Clue No. 9: Imagine you are writing your epitaph. What things do you want to be remembered for at the end of your life? What things will your life be incomplete without? This exercise is a good way quickly to access the essence of your life and goals. What are the first things that come to your mind – before your other chattering voices (sometimes referred to as the ‘committee’) override your initial impulse? Another way to approach this clue is to imagine you only had six months to live. What would you do differently than you are now? Once you realize what is most important for you, the next question is – what are you waiting for to make those things real for you?

Clue No. 10: What would you do if you knew you could not fail? Our final clue is a fun, and very effective, game you can play with yourself. If you have struggled to respond to the previous clues, this one encourages you to look beyond your perceived limitations. If you have been saying, ‘I’d really like to do it, but I know I could never succeed,’ I encourage you to forge the last part of that sentence for now, and think what you would do with your life if you knew you could not fail.

So now we know that life purpose is an overall theme or mission of our life that is unique to us. It is fun, joyful, absorbing, and fulfilling, and it meets a deep inner need within us.

Taking the answers to the 10 clues, the next step is to notice any themes in the answers, e.g., do many of them relate to being with people in a particular way, or to solving problems or working with your hands? Those themes can then be distilled down into an ‘essence,’ the core of your purpose that is relatively unchanging, and the ‘expression,’ or the ways in which that purpose is being expressed (or could be!) in your life now. Here’s an example: ‘My life purpose is to promote harmony and balance through working as a mediator, parenting my children to live nonviolently, and volunteering in my community association.’ What is your life purpose? Do you have a clearer idea now?

Implementing your Life Purpose

Now that you have begun to discover your life purpose, the next step is to implement it in your life on a daily basis. Here are several easy ways to do this.

1. *Do the activities related to your life purpose first thing in the morning.* This will allow you to do what is important to you before other distractions have a chance to tempt you off course.
2. *Whenever you have a decision to make, ask which of your options will take you closer to your life purpose.* Usually, one of your options will be more joyful than the other(s). This will be the one that leads to the fulfillment of your life purpose. Each small step builds on the last, and soon you are living the life of your dreams!
3. *Be willing to change.* To fulfill your life purpose, you must be willing to change anything which does not take you there. If you are harboring resistance, fear, or old programming, merely stating to the Universe a willingness to change it will propel you in the direction you want to go. You may not know the precise steps to take, but your willingness will lead you to take the right action for you.

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