

Four Key Words To Help You Define An Inspired Future

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In my post two weeks ago titled “Are You Goal Focused Or Purpose Driven?“, I asked the question “Do you know what your purpose is?” I went on to say that if you don’t you shouldn’t feel bad about it because many adults have yet to discover what that is in their life, and that it tends to be something that becomes more important in the second half of adulthood. The post has stimulated some interesting discussions, and there have been some common threads.

The first is that the word “purpose” doesn’t always resonate with people. Some people speak of their “calling” while others speak of their “passions” or their “sweet spot”. The idea behind the discussion was to make sure that we are talking about the same thing?

Let me clarify. What I mean by purpose is that aspect of our life or who we are that transcends any individual event, goal, accomplishment, etc. We see past any such single thing as just another opportunity to fulfill our purpose (or not). It is that which energizes us, and has us thinking about how we are engaged versus how we are rewarded. It is something that when we are in full pursuit of it, we are “in flow”, fully energized, focused and might pick our head up after several hours and wonder where the intervening hours went!

The second common theme was that it is hard to know where to start. The question at its highest level is something akin to “Why am I here?” and that is a daunting thing to consider. Many want to reduce this question down to something more tangible like “what job will make me feel more fulfilled?” or “what skills or gifts do I want to give to my community?” Our true purpose is hard to put in such a defined box ... it wants us to have the freedom to pursue it however we see fit in any given moment!

In response to these questions there are many great resources out there that you can tap into to help define how to get more clarity. I’ll list a few of them here:

- **Challenge Factory.** This progressive organization is focused on Legacy Careers®. As they state on their website “there is nothing ‘business as usual’ about today’s workforce. We bring experiential on-the-job methodology and tools to organizations and individuals navigating the next step in their career to overcome those challenges.” Lisa Taylor, President, defines a Legacy Career as “good, meaningful work that honours and values the knowledge and expertise [a person has] built up over a lifetime.”
- **Encore.org.** In their own words “Encore.org is spearheading efforts to engage millions of people in later life as a vital source of talent to benefit society. Our ultimate goal is to create a better future for young people and future generations.” To support this, they have created the “Purpose Prize” as a “large-scale investment in people over 60 who are combining their passion and experience for social good.”
- **World Purpose Forum.** This emerging organization defines its own purpose as “to enable people to imagine and achieve their purpose and live their full potential as citizens of the world” through a world network of local Purpose Forums – the first one is in Calgary, Alberta.
- **Reading List.** There are so many great books on this topic that it isn’t possible to list them all so I will mention just one. I love the book “Life Reimagined” by Richard Leider. I’ve mentioned this book before, but it is a straight forward guide on methods to explore living a purposeful life.

However, if you are looking for something simple and requiring less in the way of research, reading and formal programs here’s a meaningful exercise you can try that can shed first light on where to look for your purpose/passion/calling/sweet spot. It focuses on four words that complete the sentence ...

| *What do I long to _____?*

This powerful exercise is one that I learned from an excellent coach here in Calgary by the name of Kerry Parsons. Take each of these words and fill in the blank and in so doing ask your self four questions. How you answer is really important. If you start your answer with “I think I would like...” you probably aren’t at the right level. This is a feelings based question. Answer with that sense of longing that the question poses ... “I feel a deep need to ... “.

Here’s the words:

1. **Create** – what is within you that has never been done before? Something brand new. Is it art? Is it invention? A new venture? A not-for-profit? The key characteristic is that it is something that wouldn’t exist if you didn’t create it.
2. **Contribute** – what is it that you have that you really want to give to your world? The tricky part here is that there are so many choices! Is it something you want to do? Is it setting an example for those around you? What personal gifts do you have to give? The key characteristic is that because of you, someone else benefits.

3. **Express** – if you knew everyone was listening intently to you, what message would you want them to hear? Once again there are many possibilities here. Do you have knowledge you want to disseminate? Is this more philosophical or spiritually based? Is your intention to use your message to develop community? Do you want to evoke a shift in thinking? All of these require you to express yourself to others.
4. **Experience** -where the above three words are more “outbound” in that it is us putting something to the world, experience is what we get back from the world. It is a rich and amazing place with many things that may attract our attention. Authentic experiences are a great source of internal energy that fuel our capability to create / contribute / express. What pulls at you? What do you most long to experience? It’s a long list, but here are a few things to seed your thoughts? New cultures? Beauty? Physical challenge? Learning? New people? New places?

This may take more than one session. Start with a blank pad or journal and jot things down without judgement. Don’t worry how long the list gets. Walk away and come back later, adding to it if appropriate, but also looking for commonality and themes. Start to group thoughts together and then see if you can put them into some sort of order.

Pay attention to your inner energy level as you hold an idea in your mind ... that energy is trying to tell you to move forward or move on. Also notice how certain items are hard to associate with just one word. These items are probably ones worth spending more time with, as they may be those which speak more deeply to your purpose.

See if you can get your list down to a short list of in the range of two to four items that could indeed be the start of you defining your “sweet spot”, your calling or your purpose, however you choose to name it!