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SECTION C. WRITING A PURPOSE STATEMENT FOR YOUR CAREER PORTFOLIO

Each life has a natural built-in reason for being . . . the integration of who we are with what we do is one of the true joys of life. Richard J. Leider

Today most corporations have a mission statement which guides their decisions. A mission statement brings focus and cohesion to a company; a purpose statement can do the same thing for an individual. This section explores the subject of *purpose* and how to use it for guidance when making personal and professional choices.

Since this section comes at the end of the book, you may or may not complete it as a part of class requirements; but it is here for you when you are ready to use it. Though defining purpose may not help you acquire your first job, it will assist you in developing a touchstone to use in making career decisions.

Many successful business professionals in their 40s and 50s wake up one day to discover that they feel unfulfilled in a career in which they have dedicated their lives. By getting in touch with purpose early on, you help ensure that your career objectives will intertwine with your life objectives and each will enhance the other. As you deepen your understanding of purpose, you will apply it more fully to your career and life.

The exercises at the end of this chapter provide a number of reflection writing exercises to help you develop your written purpose statement. Your purpose statement can then become a valuable part of your career portfolio.

What is Purpose?

Purpose answers the deep questions of life, such as,

Who am I?
Why am I here?
What am I meant to do?
How do I lead a meaningful life?

While these questions are not easy, you may find that they tug at you until you answer them; that's because humans are purpose-seeking beings. While some of us might imagine that these questions were developed in recent times, ancient tribal rituals of indigenous peoples tell us that the search for purpose has been with us for centuries. Thus, understanding purpose has been on the hearts of humans throughout recorded history.

Twentieth century mythologist Joseph Campbell discovered an uncanny similarity among unrelated native tribes from different parts of the world. These unrelated tribes told similar stories of how they sent young adults on a quest for meaning to find their own purpose. It was considered a right of passage to adulthood for a child to leave the tribe to go on a journey to uncover his or her purpose. The newly christened adult would return to the tribe, ready to live purposefully within the local community.

Those of us who do not live in tribes and no longer participate in these ancient rituals are often at a loss for how to go about uncovering our own life purpose. After you explore the subject of purpose as presented in this section, complete the reflection exercises at the end of this chapter so that your purpose statement can guide your work choices.

Begin Sidebar

Communication Challenges

What is important to you? What is the most valuable thing in your life right now?

Take a moment to rank the following items. Give a numerical value to each one and then organize them according to their priority.

Achieving Career Goals (school and work related)
Family Relationships
Friendships
Status in Social Groups
Sports Activities
Personal Possessions (such as car, clothes, jewelry)
Learning and Developing

Which ranks the highest? Do you think your values and goals will change throughout your life?

End Sidebar

Purpose Is Unique

You may *belief* that there isn't anything unique about you or your life. At one point or another, most people doubt the unique qualities of their lives. A starting point with purpose is for you to realize that no one can offer to the world exactly what you can do, done in the way that you can do it. No one else has the same set of gifts, values, life experiences, and passionate concerns that you possess. As a result, your purpose is uniquely yours and different from everyone else's.

After reflecting on your gifts, values, life experiences and passionate concerns, you will come to realize that it is not even possible for another human to be the same as you are.

In a world filled with billions of people, you and your purpose are unique (whether you realize it yet or not).

Purpose Is Uncovered, Not Discovered

Your attempt at writing a purpose statement could be a disaster if you are more concerned about constructing something that sounds good to others rather than writing a statement that really describes you. Thus, don't look for something outside of yourself that sounds impressive but that has little to do with the real you.

Purpose is uncovered by looking inward, engaging in a process of self-reflection. You are not finding something new; it's a matter of uncovering what is already within you. Raising your own awareness of what feels fulfilling and gives your life meaning isn't easy. Self-reflection is challenging because it requires quiet; real silence. Most people find it difficult to focus on *feeling* and *being* instead of the *thinking* and *doing* that typically dominates our lives.

Real quiet can be a particular challenge if you integrate technology into your way of living. Most of us crave constant stimulation, and technology-driven interruptions are part of life. When everything is turned off, the real quiet that results can feel overwhelming.

Technology has become so ingrained to our way of living that we have a hard time separating from it when we finally take the time to reflect. People work on laptops while "reflecting" in nature preserves and even answer pagers while attending religious services. Real quiet means making your life a high priority so that you are willing to shut everything off in order to open the space needed to explore your purpose.

Begin Sidebar

Vocabulary Builders

Inspire: the root of the word inspire comes from the Latin word "inspiro": *in* and *spiro* literally mean *to breathe*.

When you inspire others, you literally breathe new life into the situation.

End Sidebar

Purpose Evolves Over Time

Regardless of your current age, your purpose will continue to evolve over time. It is not too early for a 10 year old to consider this question, nor is it too late for a person approaching 90. Some people have a clear sense of direction right away and others are in the fog for many years before clarity comes.

Start from where you are regardless of your age and continue to reflect on the question of purpose, raising your consciousness of it in all aspects of your life. Your sense of purpose

will evolve and deepen if you are willing to commit to working on it over the long term. Purpose is a series of continual adjustments over the journey of a lifetime.

Purpose Guides Work Choices

The word purpose comes from the Latin word *proponere*, which means “to put forward.” When you are clear about your purpose, you are putting forward your intention to live your life in a particular way.

- Being intentional means making choices.

Consciously consider all possibilities and make deliberate choices instead of letting possibilities choose your direction. Making a choice is powerful because choosing one direction means excluding another.

Sometimes people don't want to make a choice because they want to keep their freedom, keep their options open. However, the opposite is true. Trying to live with all possible options can be a heavy load to bear. Full commitment to a conscious decision can feel liberating. A great deal of attention is required to keep two different expressions of purpose going at the same time. Narrowing possibilities is a source of freedom, so commit to your purpose and lighten your load.

While purpose is expressed through work, it isn't job specific. Many of us can express our unique purpose through many different kinds of work. If a person's purpose were to add humor to people's lives, that purpose could be expressed through nearly any kind of work imaginable. Look for opportunities to express humor in the way you approach any kind of experience. However, if you look to express humor through a role, such as being a comedian, you have put a limit on the kinds of work available to express that purpose. What is important is ensuring that your chosen work gives the opportunity to express your purpose, even if that is done in a less direct or nontraditional way.

After you settle on the type of work that represents the best expression of your purpose, your next choice will be whether you join an organization or work independently through forming your own company. If you form your own company, you will have an easier time ensuring that your purpose remains aligned with your work for obvious reasons. If you choose employment, assess whether your purpose will fit under the umbrella of the organization's purpose, or mission. If your purpose and your company's purpose are aligned, it increases the possibility that you will be able to express your purpose at work.

Most companies commit their organizational purpose to writing, and include it with promotional materials about the company such as marketing brochures, press releases, and websites. The mission statement for one company is:

To help people achieve performance with fulfillment

The way that they help people achieve performance with fulfillment is through learning. Their employees who have “learning” at the heart of their own purpose will feel aligned

with the company's mission. Alignment with purpose and a company mission leads to more work fulfillment and satisfaction.

Once you determine that there is some level of alignment between your purpose and the stated mission of the company, it is important to verify whether or not the company lives its mission statement. Not all companies "walk their talk," and you want to find out if the corporate culture exudes the mission before accepting a position. Here's a comment from someone who learned this lesson the hard way:

"Early in my career I wanted to switch employers; I read about a company's mission statement and felt that it was a perfect match for me. After I joined, I learned that in reality the company had drifted away from its stated mission years ago, and it turned into a place that was nearly opposite its stated mission. If I had known about this, I never would have taken the job"

To find out about a company's mission as it is carried out, here are some questions to ask during the interview process:

- Describe the company mission statement. What are some examples of how it is put into action on a daily basis?
- Describe the company culture. How does it support the company mission? What about the company culture needs to change?
- What would most employees want to change about the company mission statement?
- Who talks about the company mission statement, when do they do it, and how often?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, rate the extent to which the company mission statement matches the current beliefs of people within the company. Explain your answer

Answers to these questions will give you further insight to help answer the question of whether or not the company mission statement is authentically lived within the organization.

On your first job, you may or may not find a company that lives its mission statement, but it is a goal for which you can strive. In addition, you may someday want to form your own company. Keep these points in mind as you develop your business. By the way, most successful businesses start with an idea and a passion to bring the idea to life. The first thing many young entrepreneurs do is write their company mission statement.

Explore/Practice/Apply

The activities at the end of this chapter contain reflective writing exercises to help you begin to uncover your own purpose. When working through reflection exercises, minimize anything that will distract you. Consider taking a walk or sitting quietly prior

to writing to help quiet and focus your mind. Find a peaceful writing location conducive to concentration such as a library, empty classroom, coffee shop, church, synagogue, or city park. Turn off communication devices such as your phone and start writing.

Take a moment now to follow these instructions and journal about the ideas that came to you as you read the last section of this chapter. (You may want to review these instructions as you complete EOC Activities 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8.)

Section C Concept Check

1. Writing a purpose statement helps a person become conscious of meaningful choices.
2. When a person's purpose statement is congruent with a company mission statement, an enriching, fulfilling career becomes more possible.
3. Though a flash of insight may contribute to understanding purpose, purpose actually evolves over a lifetime.

Chapter Summary

Giving and receiving feedback has its challenges for just about everyone. However, feedback provides fuel and direction for growth; feedback is the best way to shape attitudes, behavior, and skills. Thus, if you learn to communicate feedback effectively both verbally and in writing, you have a tool that will serve you well every day of your career.

Everyone receives constructive feedback at some time in a career. Be careful about taking feedback too personally; being too hard on yourself over a mistake does not necessarily help you grow out of the behavior or the faulty thinking that caused it. Once you learn to use job performance feedback as an avenue to growth, you have a significant career advantage.

Another career advantage relates to defining your purpose statement early on in your career. By merging your personal and career goals, you are likely to feel more satisfied with your work; to take that one step further, use your individual purpose statement to connect with a company that has a congruent mission statement. Once you achieve that goal, you are even more likely to find your career (and life) fulfilling.

Take control of your own growth and success. Sometimes what you need to learn will be obvious; it will come from within through insight and be carried out through motivation. At other times, it will come through feedback that others provide. According to Dr. Ralph Tyler, a 20th century educator,

Sometimes it isn't what you are currently doing that you need to do better; sometimes it is what you are not doing at all that you need to begin to do.

Good luck in achieving your career goals—and also enjoy a fruitful journey on the path on which your life leads you. One more thing, don't forget to journal once in a while; it clears away the stress from your mind.

Chapter 10 End-of-Chapter Activities

ACTIVITY 1:

Process Memo

Write your instructor one last memo which describes your dreams, goals, and aspirations. Also indicate how this class has helped get a little closer to achieving them.

ACTIVITY 2:

Team Activities

Once you have completed the your purpose statement, meet with 3 to 5 class members to compare statements and discuss what “purpose” means to you at this point in your life.

ACTIVITY 3:

All-Pro Temps

The CEO of All-Pro, James Riley, stopped by your desk to let you know that he has many new opportunities opening up soon. He would like for you to describe your “dream job.” Write him a short memo or letter giving a few details.

The next 4 activities are steps in writing your purpose statement.

ACTIVITY 4:

Step 1: Writing Your Story

Instructions: Write a six to ten page essay on the story of your life. In particular, explore the following areas:

- Recall the earliest instance when you declared what you want to do when you grow up. Write about how your vocational declarations deepened or changed over time.
- Describe the influential people in your life and the impact they had on your life.
- Explain the major events that had a life-changing effect on you.
- We all have gifts, or natural talents. Since they are natural, they are often overlooked because they come easy to us. From as far back as you can remember, what are the natural talents that other people noticed in you?

ACTIVITY 5

Step 2: Leaving a Legacy

Instructions: Write out your responses to the following questions:

1. How old do you believe you will live to be?
2. Imagining that you are that age and looking back on your life, what do you want to be able to say about the legacy of your life?

3. What might you do with your remaining time between now and then so that when you look back on your life you have no regrets about how you lived it?

ACTIVITY 6

Step 3: Life's Peak Experiences

Instructions: Write about one or two work experiences (paid or unpaid) that had a deep impact on you. Describe the situation, your contribution, the end result, and how it made you feel. What parts of that experience were energizing for you? Why?

ACTIVITY 7

Step 4: About Work

Instructions: Write out your response to the following questions:

1. Why do you want to work (the reasons other than to earn money)?
2. What are your expectations of work? Is work something to be suffered through and endured or should it be more than that? Why?
3. Describe your dream job. If you had no constraints (money, family, or geography requirements), what work would you love to do?

ACTIVITY 8

Step 5: Bringing it all together: writing a purpose statement

1. The first step in writing your purpose statement is to read through everything you wrote in the previous exercises, looking for themes about your passionate concerns, deep interests, and natural talents. Make notes about what you notice.
2. Based on your notes, write several different drafts of a purpose statement. Begin each sentence with "My purpose is to . . ." Consider starting with an action verb (see the list of action verbs on page XXX). It is important that you simply let the words flow and not be concerned about writing coherent sentences. You will have an opportunity to edit later.
3. Over the period of a few days, reread your purpose statement drafts, noticing how they feel to you. Notice any words or sentence segments that are emotionally appealing. Read the drafts out loud. Take note of any words or sentence segments that quicken your heart when you hear them.
4. Write a new draft of your purpose statement, incorporating the words and sentence segments that you emotionally connected with in Step 3.
5. Read your revised draft to a partner and get feedback (or read it to the entire class with no feedback; see Activity 2 above).