

Meetup Lesson 7
Living on Purpose: Discover Your Calling and Passion
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Objectives

1. To realize why the idea of death can save many lives.
2. To understand the different types of life purpose.
3. To find out ways to discover your own purpose in life.

Introduction

- The resignation of Steve Jobs
- The death of Jack Layton
- If you were told that you only had 3 months to live, would you live any differently? What would you do with the remaining days of your life?
- Both Jack Layton and Steve Jobs are examples of people who have found their calling and mission in life so that they can die happy doing what they love.

The Idea of Death Can Save Many Lives

Steve Jobs learned the wisdom of purposeful living through his encounter with cancer. He recently resigned as the CEO of Apples because of declining health. Here are three quotes from his 2005 Stanford Convocation Address:

“Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven’t found it yet, keep looking. Don’t settle. As with all matters of the heart, you’ll know when you find it. And, like any great relationship, it just gets better and better as the years roll on. So keep looking until you find it. Don’t settle.

When I was 17, I read a quote that went something like: “If you live each day as if it was your last, someday you’ll most certainly be right.” It made an impression on me, and since then, for the past 33 years, I have looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself: “If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?” And whenever the answer has been “No” for too many days in a row, I know I need to change something.

Remembering that I’ll be dead soon is the most important tool I’ve ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life. Because almost everything — all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure — these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important. Remembering that you are going to die is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose. You are already naked. There is no reason not to follow your heart.”

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UF8uR6Z6KLC&feature=player_embedded

Jack Layton passed away a few days ago. He devoted all his time and energy to his last political campaign in spite of physical pain and the prospect of an untimely death. Here is a segment from his last letter to Canadians:

“To young Canadians: All my life I have worked to make things better. Hope and optimism have defined my political career, and I continue to be hopeful and optimistic about Canada. Young people have been a great source of inspiration for me. I have met and talked with so many of you about your dreams, your frustrations, and your ideas for change. More and more, you are engaging in politics because you want to change things for the better. Many of you have placed your trust in our party. As my time in political life draws to a close I want to share with you my belief in your power to change this country and this world. There are great challenges before you, from the overwhelming nature of climate change to the unfairness of an economy that excludes so many from our collective wealth, and the changes necessary to build a more inclusive and generous Canada. I believe in you. Your energy, your vision, your passion for justice are exactly what this country needs today. You need to be at the heart of our economy, our political life, and our plans for the present and the future.

And finally, to all Canadians: Canada is a great country, one of the hopes of the world. We can be a better one – a country of greater equality, justice, and opportunity. We can build a prosperous economy and a society that shares its benefits more fairly. We can look after our seniors. We can offer better futures for our children. We can do our part to save the world’s environment.”

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/story/2011/08/22/pol-layton-last-letter.html>

The Power of Purpose

What makes one’s life rich in poverty and another unfulfilling in abundance? Why do some organizations thrive in difficult times, while others languish in prosperity? One may also ask: What turns an average student into an outstanding success and a gifted student into a failure?

The answer may be found in the seriousness of purpose. In spite of its appearance as a simple and hackneyed concept, purpose has the potential to affect everything that really matters in life and death. In fact, our survival, both individually and collectively, depends on it.

Purpose and School Achievement

My own research (Wong, 1998) shows that students attending university because of external motivation tends to underachieve, whereas those with a clear sense of intrinsic motivation tend to excel.

Academic value and achievement motivation study (Wong, 1998)

Three wrong reasons for attending college

1. No better option
2. Parental pressure
3. Social interest

Three right reasons for attending college

1. Intrinsic value
2. Instrumental value
3. Personal development

Purpose and Career Accomplishment

Three different attitudes towards work:

1. As a job to make a living
2. As a career for self-advancement
3. As a vocation for fulfilling a calling

Purpose also plays a vital role in career attainment. It is difficult to get excited about going to work when there is a mismatch between one's life purpose and the job. On the other hand, one cannot help but become highly motivated when passionate about what work represents.

Such passion seldom comes from a pay raise or promotion; it can only stem from a deep sense of calling and commitment to serve someone or some cause much larger than oneself. This is perhaps the best-kept secret in motivational psychology.

Wrzesniewski and her research teams (1997, 2003) have found that it makes a difference how you view your work. Those who consider work as a calling or vocation, report greater work satisfaction, life satisfaction than those who regard work as a job or career.

Changing Concepts of Calling

- Calling defined as fulfilling a specific life role for the greater good.
- The theology of work according to Luther and Calvin (Hardy, 1990; Weber, 1958).
- A sense of calling from alternative transcendent sources (Steger et al., 2010).
- The positive psychology of calling (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997, 2003).
- Calling to parenthood and child rearing (Coulson, Oades, & Stoyles, 2010).
- Each person may have two or three callings in his or her lifetime.

Purpose as Biological Imperative

Biologists and psychologists have long recognized that purposiveness is hardwired in all animal species - the survival instinct. A major part of animal activities are directed to the goal of pursuing life's necessities in order to survive.

For humans, their brain is designed for purposeful living beyond mere survival.

Happiness and health depend on our capacity to project into the future and anticipate

success in achieving cherished life goals. Such a purposeful future orientation provides direction, energy, and satisfaction, even when survival becomes too painful to endure. The biological imperative of purposefulness has been documented by Klinger (1998, in press).

Purposefulness and Mental Health

Dr. Viktor Frankl, the founder of logotherapy, demonstrated the power of purpose in surviving Nazi death camps. Similarly, many victims of trauma and the chronically disabled would not have survived without a strong sense of meaning and purpose, which gives them certain measures of hope and joy in spite of suffering.

According to Dr. Frankl, a greater threat to Western civilization is not the terror of physical suffering, but the epidemic of "existential neurosis." When there is an absence of purpose, when one's life is basically aimless and meaningless, the brain begins to deteriorate, and life becomes unbearable because of boredom. An existential vacuum leads to depression, violence and addiction. Just witness the prevalence of depression among children of the super-rich, or the high incidents of drug addiction among celebrities!

Crumbaugh and Maholick (1964) have developed a Purpose in Life test based on Frankl's logotherapy. The test measures both the level of existential vacuum and purposefulness.

Different Kinds of Purpose

Everyone is striving for something. Everyone is pursuing something. The important question is whether they are pursuing something of value and that makes their life worth living. Therefore, we must differentiate the different types of purposes.

Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation

- Ryan and Deci (2000) emphasized the important distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. They have also demonstrated that extrinsic reward can undermine intrinsic reward.
- Intrinsic motivation refers to the pursuit of some activity for its own sake. Intrinsically motivated activities are rewarding and satisfying in their own right.
- Extrinsic motivation refers to the pursuit of some activity for some external reward such as approval/praise, monetary incentives, and recognition or honor. Extrinsically motivated activities are a means to an end.
- All available research shows that intrinsic motivation is far more effective than extrinsic motivation in contributing to people's success, satisfaction, and level of motivation.

Five Sources of Intrinsic Motivation

1. Love someone unconditionally
2. Do something you love
3. Learn something new

4. Do something kind
5. Pursue an ideal beyond self-interest

Duncker's Candle Problem [before and after]

Participants are presented with the following task: Fix a lit candle on a wall in a way so that the candle wax won't drip onto the table/floor below. To do so, you may only use the following items provided: a candle, a book of matches, a box of thumbtacks.

- Participants were presented with this problem, each given differing values of monetary incentive to solve the problem.
- Results: participants given more money to solve the problem took a longer time to solve the problem.
- Rationale: When presented with high-stake jobs or problem solving situations, monetary incentives have adverse effects because solving these problems are in itself rewarding. Monetary incentives work for simple tasks only.

Approach vs. Avoidance Motivation

- Approach motivation: primarily motivated to achieve some positive goals and outcomes.
- Avoidance motivation: primarily motivated to avoid some negative outcomes, such as failure and stress.
- Going through life with an avoidance orientation tends to create more stress and anxiety and less life satisfaction.
- Emmons and Kaiser (1996) differentiate between positive goals and avoidance goals. Individuals with primarily approach-oriented goals tend to show less anxiety and distress than people who motivated by avoidance-oriented goals.
- Similarly, Elliot, Sheldon, and Church (1997) have shown that people with positive goals enjoy a higher level of subjective well-being.
- Wong, Reker, and Gesser (1994) have shown that people with an "approach" attitude towards death show lower levels of anxiety and depression than people with an "avoidance" attitude towards death.

Meaning vs. Happiness Motivation

- Wong (2011) has made the distinction between the meaning-orientation and happiness-orientation as the terminal value or ultimate concern.
- A meaning-orientation is more likely linked to intrinsic motivation and approach motivation.
- A happiness-orientation is more likely linked to extrinsic motivation.
- These two types of life orientations tend to result in different kinds of life goals.

Conclusion

Of course, the complexity of purpose cannot be adequately addressed in a short essay. Suffice to say that type of purpose you choose affects both your present life and your destiny.

What is the purpose of your life? The choice is entirely yours. A moment's pausing to reflect on this fundamental question may yield blessings that last more than a lifetime.

How Do You Find Your Purpose in Life?

- Be consistent with inner goodness and ethical principles.
- Look deep into one's own heart.
- Assess one's unique gifts, strengths, and interests.
- Assess available opportunities and resources.
- Seek God's will and consult experts.

What is Your Mission in Life?

Perhaps, a good starting point for a purposeful life is a personal mission statement. For example, the Apostle Paul said, "To me to live is Christ." What a simple statement! And yet, what an abundance of energy followed from this conviction!

Write a concise and realistic mission statement for your work or your life. Then, describe two or three objectives or life goals based on your mission statement.

A mission statement is a practical guide for planning and actions.

Recommended Readings

- Dale Bourke's *Second calling: Passion and purpose for the rest of your life*
- Charles Colson's *The good life: Finding meaning, purpose, & truth in your life*
- Lee Hardy's *The fabric of this world: Inquiries into calling, career choice, and the design of human work*
- Richard Leider's *The power of purpose: Creating meaning in your life and work*
- Rick Warren's *The purpose driven life*
- Irvin Yalom's *Momma and the meaning of life: Tales of psychotherapy*

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