



## INDIVIDUAL WELL-BEING

# Finding Purpose

How connections with others create  
meaning in our everyday work and life

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The authors are very grateful for support and funding for the research behind this article from Innovation Resource Center for Human Resources (IRC4HR®).

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# Finding Purpose

***With his business trip cancelled, Marco had a rare day off from work.*** He walked out of his front door and despite the beautiful sunlit day, felt a curious unease. He had nothing to do. His wife was at work and the kids were at school. He had stopped playing sports seven years ago following an ankle injury and over time had also quit playing the guitar. He thought, “I have no connections here. This is pathetic. I don’t have anything outside work and my immediate family.” Not that work was that satisfying anymore either. His boss was micromanaging and he no longer had the sense that he was contributing his skills to something important. Somehow it had all become about the numbers. That didn’t seem to bother anyone else at work. You could walk into the cafeteria at lunch and tell whether the stock price was up or down. If it was up, there was a buzz in the room and everyone was talking about buying their house on the lake. If the stock price was down, everybody was morose. And this all had nothing to do with anything they were actually making, or any sort of larger mission.

For years, Marco had thought that he was on the right course. He felt strongly about his role as a provider and worked hard to see that his family was in the best of schools and neighborhoods. By many measures, he was a great success. But he had been constantly worried about paying for college, the mortgage and retirement. He wasn’t entirely happy in his job but was so focused on trying to do the right thing — achieving at work and providing for family — that the years passed and, as he said, “there’s lots of temptation to just let stuff slide over time.” Marco reflected on how you invest an awful lot of yourself into work when you’re young in your career. You get kids and you realize that between children and your work, you don’t have a lot of time to do things that are for yourself. The pressures around upward mobility are immense. For him, it had become consuming and little by little, his life had lost balance. He used to spring out of bed on weekdays. But these days, he found himself hitting the snooze button over and over. There was little in his life that excited him. How had he let it come to this?

On that sunny afternoon, Marco had the rare opportunity to stop and take a look at where his life had taken him. And he was shaken by what he saw. He had always been proud of his work accomplishments, climbing the ladder to a senior position and fulfilling the role of provider for his family. But over time, after following the lure of bigger and better job opportunities, he found himself in what felt like a company without a soul. The sense of shared values and camaraderie that he had felt with colleagues early in his career somehow had fallen to the wayside. He used to feel like they collectively aspired to something greater than themselves, such as the customers’ success or the jobs they created in the community. But he no longer felt that sense of connection to the people around him. And this was especially painful to realize because, over time, his social world had narrowed to the spheres of work and home, with few connections in the community or with friends. Of course, he found inspiration in his family and his role as a provider, but beyond that his life had been slowly stripped of other sources of purpose.

Why does leading a life with purpose matter so much? A sense of purpose yields more than just motivation. Researchers have found that a strong sense of meaning in our work and life has remarkable influence on our health, well-being, and performance. But often, finding purpose does not come naturally. In fact, just the opposite. As Marco discovered, our lives often follow trajectories that we can’t always see while we’re in the midst of them, propelled by daily decisions and the choices we make at critical junctures. Thoughtfully made, those decisions can lead to a life filled with purpose. But without deliberate steps to anchor ourselves to sources of purpose, we are subject to an invisible tide that can pull us in the direction of societally-defined accomplishments, possessions or expectations. While laser-focused on the goals we’re “supposed” to attain and the symbols of this success, we may jettison the very things that create a life well-lived. And worst of all, we may not even notice that it’s happening.

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No one wants to pull into their driveway on a rare free day and realize there's no one to call and nothing they really want to do. But if you understand *why* that happens, *how* you

inadvertently contribute to that in the first place, and *where* your sense of purpose comes from, you can avoid finding yourself in that place.

## Relationships form a critical — but often invisible — source of purpose

Marco is not alone. Society today faces a deficit of purpose. According to the Gallup-Healthways Global Well-Being Index, only 18% of the world's population has a thriving sense of purpose. That leaves the other 82% somewhat ambivalent and unmotivated about what they do each day.<sup>1</sup> A lack of purpose is evident in the workplace as well where, according to Gallup's *State of the American Workplace*, only 44% of employees strongly agree that they can see the connection between their role and the success of their team and organization.<sup>2</sup> In a time when we have more latitude than any other point in history to sculpt what we do and who we do it with, we are somehow collectively miserable! Repeatedly, our interviewees told us stories similar to Marco's. There was nothing obviously wrong in their lives, but at the same time, they knew that things weren't quite right either. They were heads-down focused on a narrow set of goals only to have a sudden, sinking realization one day that they had drifted far from the people they had once aspired to be.

What are we missing? Our research points to a major blind spot when it comes to creating a sense of purpose: our relationships with others. When asked about our purpose in life, we inevitably default to thinking about *what we do* and whether it's a noble undertaking. Are we working on a cure for cancer? Building ground-breaking technology? Battling poverty? The nature of our work is, of course, a legitimate source of purpose. But

we often overlook the fact that it's not just the company's mission or the project we're working on that creates purpose in our lives — it's *how* we accomplish things and live our lives in *interactions with other people*. In fact, a company mission pales in comparison with how people feel about the values, intentions and shared aspirations of the people around them. We've seen through our interviews that people in organizations doing noble work can still be among the unhappiest while those doing seemingly mundane things can feel an unerring sense of purpose. The difference between the purpose-filled and purpose-bereft people was not the nature of the work but rather the quality of their connections with others.

The same is true in our non-work lives. We don't have to default to cutting back on work hours or piling on volunteer activities to find a sense of purpose outside the office. The magic in both our professional and personal lives can found in the people around us. People who help us to envision a purposeful life or help fulfill that vision, whether at work, home or in the community, are powerful contributors to our sense of purpose. Our interactions with them are essential to the lived experience of purpose. In our research, we wanted to understand exactly what kinds of interactions create this critical feeling. We have identified five "purpose generators" and our interviews have shown how we can intentionally build them into our lives.

## Why purpose is so important

Why is purpose so essential to our well-being? When it comes to physical and psychological health, feeling a sense of purpose is nothing short of a wonder drug. Research shows that people with a strong sense of purpose have a significantly lower risk of dying from a heart attack or stroke.<sup>3,4</sup> Physiologically, a strong sense of purpose is associated with an increase in natural killer cells, which help protect us against viruses and cancer.<sup>5</sup> People with a strong sense of purpose sleep better<sup>6,7</sup> and are likely to be more resilient to life's stresses.<sup>8,9</sup> Neurological studies are starting to reveal how a sense of purpose affects brain function. In one study, a strong sense of purpose was associated with slower responses from the amygdala — the part of our brain associated with fear and anxiety — and increased activation of the anterior cingulate cortex, which houses higher-level functions such as attention allocation, decision-making, and impulse control.<sup>10</sup> The implication is that a sense of purpose helps us to tamp down fear responses and enables our more rational thoughts to take precedence. As a result, we can better manage stressful situations.

A robust sense of purpose impacts our health and well-being in all stages of life. In adolescence and young adulthood, people with higher levels of purpose tend to have more positive self-image and higher overall well-being.<sup>11</sup> Later in life, they are less likely to experience cognitive decline<sup>12</sup> and, according to one study following nine hundred older people for seven years, half as likely to develop Alzheimer's disease.<sup>13</sup> There is also evidence that people with a strong sense of purpose live longer.<sup>14</sup>

A sense of purpose can also impact your effectiveness at work. In one study of almost 3500 adults, researchers found that people reporting greater sense of purpose in life scored higher on tests of memory, executive function and overall cognition.<sup>15</sup> Simply put, a sense of purpose may help you to think better. And according to Wharton School of Business professor Adam Grant, when people are reminded of why their jobs are important, they become more motivated and productive. He demonstrated this effect in a study of people at a university call center, working to solicit scholarship fund donations from alumni. The employees were divided into three groups. One group was read stories written by other

employees describing the personal benefits they got from the job, things like the financial package or development of personal skills and knowledge. This was called the “personal benefit” group. A second group, called the “task significance” group, read stories written by students who had benefitted from the scholarships. The students described the enormous impact that the scholarship had on their lives, helping them to achieve otherwise unattainable dreams and goals. The third group did not read any stories and acted as a control. Grant

then measured number of pledges and amount raised for each group. The results showed a stunning difference. Employees in the “personal benefit” and control groups performed about the same as they did before. But those in the “task significance” group more than doubled their weekly pledges and raised more than twice the amount of money as before the intervention. When reminded of the impact they had on the lives of others, employees were energized to make more calls and speak to more people.

## Why Companies Should Care About Purpose

Companies have good reason to care about sense of purpose. Not surprisingly, organizations that look beyond profit to the greater good they create reap the benefits of a more engaged workforce. When employees can link their goals to that of the company’s and see how their role contributes to the team or organization’s larger success, they are 3.5 times more likely to be engaged.<sup>2</sup> For Millennials in particular, feeling a sense of purpose in the work they do is among the strongest drivers of retention.<sup>2</sup>

### **Building a business with a sense of purpose pays off for the bottom line.**

In their study, *Firms of Endearment*<sup>16</sup>, researchers Raj Sisodia, David Wolfe and Jag Sheth examined a group of thirty companies characterized by their dedication to a revenue-transcending purpose. These companies included familiar names such as REI, Trader Joe’s, JetBlue and Patagonia. They compared these companies’ financial performance over time to a group of companies from Jim Collins’ book *Good to Great* — companies selected for their managerial and financial prowess. Over a ten year period, the Good to Great companies outperformed the market by 331% — but the Firms of Endearment companies shot ahead still further, beating the market by a whopping 1026%. Similarly, researchers Millward Brown and Jim Stengel identified the Stengel 50, a group of fast-growing brands such as Zappos, Starbucks and Luis Vuitton, that beat the S&P 500 by 400% over a ten year period. What characterized these firms was an ideal of making lives better, and that ideal served as an inspiration for customers and a decision-making compass for employees.<sup>17</sup> Harvard researchers John Kotter and James Heskett provide yet more evidence that purpose leads to long term financial success, showing that over a ten year period, the stock prices of purposeful companies outperformed those of their less purpose-driven counterparts by a factor of twelve.<sup>18</sup> In the words of Vic Strecher, author of *Life on Purpose*, “If you transcend revenue, you make more revenue.”<sup>19</sup>

A sense of revenue-transcending purpose lies not just in the company’s stated mission, however, but in the level and quality of interpersonal connection that people experience at work. Some leaders are better at creating purposeful connections around them than others. In one study described by Rob Cross and Amy Edmondson,<sup>20</sup> the top 600 leaders in a large investment bank were asked “Who leaves you feeling a greater sense of purpose in your work after an interaction?” The results showed a strong span of purposeful influence for the top quartile of leaders, who imparted a sense of purpose to 16 people on average. The bottom quartile was less effective, giving a sense of purpose to less than one person on average. But purpose-generating behaviors are eminently teachable. For instance, leaders can highlight the “why” of an assignment — the impact or importance of the work — before moving on the “what” or the “how” of accomplishing it.<sup>21</sup> And they can ensure that each employee sees how their contribution makes a difference in the collective efforts of the organization. For example, one of the managers we spoke to at a leading research institute makes sure her employees in the contracts department know that they save the day every time they remove a logistical blockage and science can move on. Making this connection between their role and the progress of research helps to fuel purpose.



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# Five Interactions that Generate Purpose

Our interactions with others are pivotal to creating purpose, whether in the workplace, at home or in our communities. But not all interactions are created equal. Just as some types of interactions can feed a sense of purpose, others can rob otherwise purposeful endeavors of their meaning. As part of a research program involving dozens of top tier companies and based on interviews with hundreds of women and men across industries such as technology, life science, finance and manufacturing, we probed for the relational factors that led to feelings of purpose. We asked people to reflect on times when they were showing up the way they wanted to at work or at home, and drawing on the best within themselves to create what to them was a worthwhile life. We dug deep into their stories to understand exactly how their interactions with others created purpose for them.

**The research revealed five “purpose generators” as well as some simple steps you can take to build them into your life.**

**1 Fulfilling life roles and priorities**

**2 Giving to others**

**3 Seeing purpose in everyday life**

**4 Co-creating**

**5 Living shared values**



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## 1 Fulfilling Life Roles and Priorities

Purposeful moments often involve fulfilling roles and priorities that we feel are important to a life well-lived. Whether it's being a good father, a supportive team leader, a fighter for justice or any of the limitless roles we can play or priorities we can hold dear, when we're involved in bringing these to fruition, we feel a sense of purpose. Choosing the roles and priorities in your life that matter most to you requires thought. Yes, you might automatically have the role of being a dad by virtue of having children, but how much does being a good dad matter to you? Do your actions support that answer? What about your role as a fighter for justice? Is that more important to you than a simple line on your resume? Choosing the roles and priorities that shape your life is about defining the person you want to be. If we don't have clarity about our "north star" roles and priorities, we may find ourselves drifting towards the lure of societally-defined accomplishments, possessions or expectations that may, over time and in almost imperceptible increments, lead us astray.

Relationships are key to defining and carrying out the roles that generate purpose for us. To start with, just defining our "north star" priorities often involves others to help crystallize what's important. Our interviewees invariably pointed to interactions with others such as parents who established values or friends who gave them perspective to help them realize what was important.

Of course, identifying our north stars, and staying true to them can be two entirely different feats, given the demands and pressures that surround us. Many of us can justify drifting away from the roles we say we most value — "Work has to be the priority for a little while until I get that promotion. I'll be a great dad next baseball season" — but it's much harder to look the people who you most care about in the eye and get away with that line of thinking. Many of our interviewees found that going public with their chosen roles helped keep them on track. It also brought other people on board with the trade-offs that inevitably had to be made, whether saying "no" to a plum assignment involving travel so they could be home for the baseball games or putting off a get-together with friends to honor a commitment to a work colleague. People would understand and respect that these decisions were made in a larger scheme of priorities — and not take them personally.

Consider Louis, an executive with a technology company. He has consciously worked to define six roles that define how he wants to live his life: a physically healthy person; spiritual being; organizational thought leader; concerned citizen; family member and friend. Everything that he does works into his desire to excel not at just one of these roles — for example work — but in integrating his efforts to fulfill them all. He thinks consciously about each of them and assesses

his progress regularly. To ensure that he stays true to the roles, Louis creates rituals and routines that make them a habit. Every Sunday, he reviews the week against his chosen roles — and has been doing this for almost two decades. "Did I devote time to my spirituality this week? What did I do to be a concerned citizen this week? Can I prioritize my friends this coming week?," and so on. Where Louis finds gaps, he doubles down to see how he can do better going forward or enlists the help of family and friends.

Relationships are woven into the habits that sustain Louis' roles. They create a "stickiness" that enables him to stay committed. For instance, his role as a natural being includes nourishing his physical self with sleep, exercise and good nutrition. One of his exercise routines is a Sunday soccer game with the neighborhood dads and their kids, and he gets a double bonus because it also helps him to fulfill his roles as family member and friend. Good nutrition involves family decisions, such as going for a few months without meat, and discussions about what they did and didn't like about that. Louis' physical health goals are not dictated by anyone's priorities but his own, and he is focused on accomplishing them in ways that help build and maintain connections with others. He will never win the game by society's standards. But there isn't a person around Louis who doesn't envy who he is and how he manages to live life.

Louis' six roles are not a secret. he talks about them regularly with his wife, family and colleagues. It's a way to take what's meaningful in his life and make it public. And, it's a way for others to play a part in refining the roles, refreshing them and keeping a balance among the many dimensions that are important to Louis. So if his work role as an organizational thought leader starts to overload the other five, he talks to the people in his life about why he's not at his best and what he's doing to gain better equilibrium.

We may do this subconsciously to some extent, but the reason that Louis has been so successful is that he is unabashed about sharing and committing to his six roles publicly. The result is that Louis lives a very intentional life and rarely finds himself doing something that falls outside of his prescribed roles. Knowing Louis' priorities, the people around him create the space for him to be his best self. Rather than feeling miffed that Louis isn't coming through on something important to them, they understand where he's coming from. The expectation changes from one in which Louis always has to deliver to one in which others figure out how to work around and with Louis' priorities to get everyone's needs met.

Louis is a highly successful and accomplished executive, but the only definition of success that he cares about is his own — or more to the point the one he has crafted with his wife

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and children. As Louis puts it, “When I see people who have written yet another book or have done another amazing thing, I don’t make reference to them. I make that reference to what creates *my* well-being which is all of my roles together. It helps me to socially and personally orient to my own definition of what a life well-led looks like.”

Throughout our interviews, the people we spoke with shared heartfelt stories of the roles and priorities that mattered to them and how fulfilling those created great purpose in their lives. Their stories ranged from that of a leader at a biotech company who very consciously wanted to show her daughter what it looks like to be an unapologetically successful woman,

to the executive who found his higher calling in passing on the company’s unique culture to the next generation, to the manager who prioritized giving respect and dignity to employees during a downsizing. In all these cases, people found that defining and fulfilling life roles and priorities in relation to others gave them a profound sense of purpose.

Can you identify the roles and priorities in your life? Do you know the person you want to be? Who helps you clarify what’s important and is there to help you? If you don’t have a clear answer to these questions, you may find life dictating roles and priorities to you, which is not, in our experience, a likely path to well-being in the long run.

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## 2 Giving to Others

Everyone knows the old adage that “it’s better to give than receive”— and in the case of generating purpose in your life, it turns out to be true. Time and again, the people in our interviews described how mentoring junior staff, delivering for their customers, supporting their friends, or volunteering for their community gave them a deep sense of purpose. Inherent in each of these stories was the act of giving in the service of others.

There’s a scientific basis that explains why giving to others generates a sense of purpose. It’s rooted in the distinction that researchers often make between activities that are “eudaimonic” versus “hedonic.” Eudaimonic activities are outwardly focused, and include those in which we give of ourselves to others. The term “eudaimonic” combines the prefix *eu* (meaning good) with *daimon* (meaning spirit or soul). It arises from what Aristotle described in his *Nicomachean Ethics* as “pursuit of virtue, excellence and the best within us” aimed at “what is a worthwhile life.”<sup>22</sup> In contrast, hedonic activities are focused inward and concerned with more momentary fulfillment of our wants and needs. Getting the latest iPhone, eating a gourmet meal or winning a new sales contract may give us the gratification of hedonic well-being. Eudaimonic well-being may not necessarily be pleasant in the moment but builds a more enduring life satisfaction of the type we get from, say, raising children or going to medical school.

Both types of activities are important. However, emerging evidence from neurological research shows that self-transcending activities such as giving are likely to lead to greater well-being over time. In one study, functional MRI scans were used to observe neurological activity in the reward center of the brain, the ventral striatum, when exposed to thoughts about either giving or getting money. In some people, questions about *giving* money (for example, if you were giving

money, who would you give it to and why?) stimulated high reward activity. In other people, questions about *getting* money (for example, if you were to receive money, what would you spend it on, and why?) activated the brain’s reward center. To understand which response creates greater well-being for us over time, the researchers measured depressive symptoms in each group one year later. They found that the participants with greater rewards from giving money experienced a decline in depressive symptoms while the people whose brains rewarded them for getting money showed an increase in depressive symptoms.<sup>23</sup> In essence, the more we feel rewarded by giving, the more we are likely to gain better life satisfaction in the long run.

In contrast, hedonic activities have been shown to lead to a never ending desire for more materialistic outcomes that researchers like Sonja Lyubomirsky have termed the *hedonic treadmill* — the human capacity to become rapidly accustomed to sensory or physiological changes. Numerous studies show that the gain in happiness from hedonic activity washes away quickly for two reasons: 1) *Rising aspirations* — New clothes, car, house, iPhone, computer, and so forth begin to feel natural, and quickly inform desire for the next item and 2) *Social Comparison* — Peers are going on desirable vacations, wearing fashionable clothes, eating at good restaurants or getting interviews with or hired by top organizations. What our work showed us is that the hedonic activities don’t have to be materialism in the sense of fancy clothes or vacations. Many people were pulled into unsatisfactory lifestyles by their socially created definition of what a good provider does — providing the best education, life experiences and homes for their families — and created this treadmill even though it originated from good intent.

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## A Step Too Far

A trap to beware of is one in which providing for family becomes the be-all and end-all, and overwhelms other sources of purpose in life. Kenneth, a high-ranking manager at an investment bank, devoted prodigious energy to ensuring that his family had financial security and the best of everything. Engagement outside of the provider role was something he just couldn't make time for and things like teaching his children a skill, volunteering or team sports were put on hold during his prime income-generating years. But over time, Kenneth was losing connection to relationships that could generate purpose outside of work. Looking forward 20 years to how he would spend his more relaxed years after becoming a bazillionaire, Kenneth was at a loss to think of how he would spend his time, reflecting that, "I don't even know what I would be doing." While Kenneth derived purpose from — and justified his uni-dimensional focus on work through — his role as family provider, he did so to the exclusion of other sources of purpose that could add dimension to his life over the long term.

Time and again we conducted interviews with conventionally successful executives — people who had risen to prominent roles in their organizations and provided well for their families — but who actually told fairly disheartening life stories. Narratives that were often unidimensional around work. Sometimes including a divorce or two. Sometimes lamenting that their relationships with their children were not stronger. But the shocking conclusion of these people's interview was often to the effect: It has been hard but I would do it again.

Why? One answer might be motivational of course. We need to defend how we have lived. But another is that these people had no idea what could have been if they had kept dimensionality in their lives. Like Kenneth, they hit points where they had more than enough money but just couldn't see how or what to move to and so maintained a flow of activity and accomplishments that were familiar.

When leaders spoke most passionately to us about their sources of purpose at work, it often involved a role they played in mentoring others. Anya, a senior leader in a financial services firm, described how she reveled in her role as a mentor but what made it meaningful involved more than just passing on tips and skills. It wasn't just a matter of talking with subordinates about career opportunities during periodic performance reviews but about creating relationships in which she could connect with junior people around their lives as a whole. She derived a sense of fulfillment from lively discussions on the larger questions of how you build character and life satisfaction. Junior people would collar her for advice on everything from do's and don'ts around the office to dating advice. Anya was deliberate in the ways that she made room for mentoring in her life. She kept regular office hours when anyone could make an appointment to talk and made it a point to be available for lunches when junior people would ask. In Anya's words, "It's seeing them grow and being able to say that I've had a hand in it, in their success, for their growth or any type of positive change in their life, whether it's work or their relationships, be it business or personal. It's a sense of pride that says, 'Okay. I did something good today.'"

Anya found purpose in giving to others beyond the office as well, particularly in the sphere of extended family. She made it a priority to keep a strong generational chain from grandparents to parents to children, passing on traditions or values she felt were defining or meaningful. For example, Anya recalled with fondness how her father loved going to work and

his excitement to get out the door each morning. Her father and mother worked in the same profession and would talk about it at the dinner table and over breakfast. It gave her a sense that work should be more than a paycheck, that it could be a source of fulfillment and joy. She wanted to make sure that her kids got that, too. As a result, Anya turned down a job that would have given her a 100 — 200% increase in annual income for one that got her enthused. Instead of thinking about work as a way to give her children more material things, she focused on giving her children a role model of how work can lead to a more meaningful life.

Routinely, the people we spoke with found opportunities to give to others through all walks of life. For example, the recruitment manager who felt great satisfaction helping people find fulfilling jobs whether at her company or elsewhere, the researcher who saw his work as providing patients with better medicines, or the executive who didn't have a "fairy tale" childhood and spent time volunteering to help inner city kids growing up without privilege. The common thread throughout was that these people all engaged in "eudaimonic" activities that transcended their own direct needs and drew on their best selves in helping others.

It may sound like simply an old adage, but the reality that giving to others is an enormous source of purpose is important to understand. Take stock in your own life. Do you have outlets for giving that can and do provide you with purpose?



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### 3 Seeing Purpose in Everyday Life

Some of our endeavors make us feel like we're building a meaningful future and speak to our higher aspirations. As Thoreau once said, they enable us to "live with the license of a higher order of beings." Others simply don't. When we feel pride in what we're doing or see the impact we have towards a personal or group mission that is clearly and consistently about ideals bigger than self or profit, we feel a sense of purpose.

But purpose is subjective — and sometimes we need others to help broaden our perspective so we can see the value in how we are living. The people around us can help to frame our experience in ways that we wouldn't on our own, opening the "aperture" to greater possibilities or situating our endeavors on a higher plane. Our interviewees often had moments in their lives when someone else — a mentor, a spouse, a child, a spiritual advisor or a coach — pointed out to them sources of purpose that they didn't realize were there. As a result of these framing conversations, already-existing endeavors became more meaningful.

Ted, for example, is a sales manager overseeing a team of representatives selling agricultural supplies in the southwest US. He's also active in his church and meets regularly with his pastor on church business. Every couple of weeks the pastor checks in with him to ask, "How is it with your soul?" Ted takes these questions to heart and it comes through in how he approaches his job, seeing great purpose where others might not. As Ted puts it, "It's my job to use my gifts and abilities to make the world a better place. I view my relationships with my dealers, my relationships with customers who I help with their farms, my relationships with the sales reps that report to me as pouring something positive into other people on this earth." Ted's conversations with his pastor encourage him to take what otherwise would be just a job and figure out how he can use his talents and the opportunities afforded by his profession to improve the lives of the people around him.

It's not just spiritual advisors who helped our interviewees to see what they do through a lens of purpose. For example, a procurement manager in a pharmaceutical company realized greater purpose in her day-to-day work because her division head would repeatedly point out that while they're not the

"hot shot scientists" in the company, the wheels of science would not turn without them. In another case, a marketing executive realized how valuable his contributions were only after volunteering at a non-profit and seeing how his peers there treated him like a rock star. What these cases have in common is that it took a relationship with someone else to open people's eyes to the purpose that was already there. Moreover, people who saw purpose in their activities more broadly had a tendency to lean into those dimensions, making slight changes to sculpt their work in purposeful directions.

For many of our interviewees, connecting with people outside of their everyday lives enabled them to see existing purpose with fresh eyes. In reaching out beyond their established spheres of work and home, they were able to gain new perspective. Some people connected through local sports clubs, others by keeping in touch with friends from the town where they grew up, some by volunteering in their community and yet others by getting involved in their children's school. The key was connecting with people who were not shaped in the same mold as themselves, who could broaden their perspective on what really matters and how it's achieved.

The places they found purpose ranged from the inspired to the mundane. Some people found it in their jobs, such as the HR executive who touched people through her advocacy of the company's diversity program. Others at home, for example, the father who was creating social stability for his family through their involvement in the local church. And others in the community, such as the banker who volunteered to teach financial literacy in low-income schools. Relationships with others played a pivotal role to them all.

You may be surprised to find there's more purpose in your everyday activities than you recognize. Think about how you spend a day, a week, a month. When you look at your calendar, do you see activities that generate a sense of purpose to you or to others? If not, look harder. Consider asking friends, family, or colleagues how your time together could help create value or meaning for them. You might be pleasantly surprised by small shifts that could have big impact.

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## 4 Co-creating

If you've ever been part of a team where people have each other's backs, where you connect with your teammates as your authentic self, and where you build off of each other's ideas to create something novel, you know that it can be an incredibly energizing and purposeful experience. In some ways, it almost doesn't matter what project you're working on; purpose arises from the dynamics of *how you're working together*, a process we're calling "co-creating." Co-creating is more than just working together with people on a team. It typically involves at least one of two things. The first is an element of synchrony — a deep sense of trust, commitment, and rapport. "We are in this together." The second is a dynamic of "scaffolding" in which "aha's" emerge from the way people intertwine and build on each other's ideas, taking them to levels of innovation that no individual could produce on their own. Through co-creating, we add value through the deep relationships we forge in the process and the strength of the ideas we develop as a team.

Dianna, a manager of engineering projects, experienced co-creation in both of its forms. She described the synchrony aspect of co-creating as one in which people can laugh together, even under intense pressure. In one instance, a team she was working with got called to an emergency meeting late at night. Nobody, of course, wanted to be up at that hour dealing with a crisis, but there they were, on video from home on their couches. The pressure was on to turn around a fix really fast. "And one of my colleagues just made a big joke and wrapped himself up in a blanket on his couch, and the whole call just erupted in laughter. And I took a screenshot at the time, because I thought like, 'Wow, this is a special team when we're under stress that we can actually have a laugh.' When you're working with a team like that — that's purpose."

In Dianna's experience, the synchrony of the team also involved a sense of commitment to deliver for others, recognizing their sacrifices and wanting to be the equal of them. "When you look around a room at people who you

have worked with for thousands of hours together, you feel responsibility to not to let them down. It's like, I know this person has given up Friday night for the last three years to do this patch process with us technically. I'm going to make sure that she benefits from that because I feel like that's a noble sacrifice, and I'm not going to screw it up." Dianna makes the point that your mission becomes that of coming through for your peers, independent of the project. "It doesn't really matter what you're working on at that point. It's just about, 'I like these people, and I'm not going to let them down because I'm part of this team.'"

Meanwhile, Dianna's team was one she described as "jazzed" by the way they built one idea on top of the other, finding they could break the mold and do things differently. It was liberating and gave people a sense of rising to their best selves in ways that they may not have in other circumstances. The experience of scaffolding on each other's ideas and energy led to a collective sense of momentum and creativity, where the whole was clearly greater than the sum of the parts. Think of the feeling many of us have when we look back at some of the best job experiences in our lives. Inevitably, they involve being part of a team that brings out the best in everyone on that team and the work itself.

Co-creating can happen in any manner of project or undertaking — it's all about the dynamics of synchrony and scaffolding. Our interviewees described co-creating in the context of activities as diverse as building a new computational biology platform, working with a scrappy group of volunteers to launch a mindfulness program, and playing on a soccer team.

Do you have opportunities to co-create with others? Are the groups you're involved with characterized by synchrony (trust, commitment and rapport) and do they scaffold on each other's ideas? Pause to consider whether the group dynamics bring out the best in you and those you are working with.

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## 5 Living shared values

The act of putting shared values into practice with friends, family or co-workers can be a powerful source of purpose. Many of our interviewees described how their sense of purpose hinged on being able to “do the right thing” — not in spite of the people or pressures around them but as part of a collective with shared beliefs and aspirations. According to one leader, a sense of purpose at work depends on the ability to make decisions that put your personal values first and at the same time cohere with the company’s values. There’s no conflict because they both fundamentally prize doing the right thing.

Dian, a senior leader at a manufacturing company, described how it gave him a deep sense of purpose when he saw values triumph over personal interest. He described one of the company’s North Stars as everyone pulling together for the customer regardless of the impact on individual bottom lines. “I don’t feel like there are a lot of situations where it’s my kingdom versus the sales kingdom versus the product development kingdom. I think that we organizationally have a team atmosphere that’s consistent with the North Stars.”

Dian had a very different experiences working for another company where people would say that they’ll pull together but commitment would falter when it came up against individual interests. According to Dian, “People would say, ‘Well yeah, that might be the right thing to do but you’re not taking it out of my P&L.’ or the sales person is like, ‘Hey, I got a quota to hit. I’m selling this thing anyway.’” Dian’s experience was not unusual. Companies often drain employees of purpose by talking about higher aspirations — such as working collaboratively, serving customers or making the world a better place — but in reality employees know that when push comes to shove, they’ll be evaluated on the basis of the bottom line.

Dian drew a stark contrast between the value system he works in now, which he sees as self-transcending, versus that of his former employer, which was focused solely on the numbers. “At my former employer I would go to the quarterly reviews and it was twenty-five minutes of an old school beat down on the numbers. Did you hit them or not and what were you doing to fix them? Now we have quarterly reviews and probably the first five minutes are about the numbers. The other twenty minutes are about how we can do more for our customers and how we build our team and help it grow. Those are two discussions I never had before. Now, the numbers are our responsibility but they’re not our purpose.”

Unfortunately, the majority of US employees see a gap between their company’s stated values and what occurs in practice. According to Gallup, only 27% of employees strongly agree that they believe in their organization’s values<sup>24</sup>, a result that is likely to drain employees of day-to-day purpose. But it doesn’t have to be that way. Even if employees are not deeply motivated by the values of the company at large, they can find micro-environments where they connect with people whose values they find meaningful. Catherine, for example, an executive with a technology company, felt generally bored and unmotivated by her day-to-day work. But she found a colleague, Sanjay, who shared her interest in growing the organization’s capacity for learning. And that colleague had incredibly creative ideas that energized Catherine around the whole concept of learning organizations. Catherine intentionally built interactions with Sanjay into her day, and found that they gave her otherwise uninspiring job a purposeful lift.

Other interviewees described to us a variety of sources of purpose beyond the workplace, all grounded in shared values and collectively putting those into practice. One woman described to us how purposeful she felt about the time she spent volunteering with her children’s school. “It’s the social, the ability to share experiences, but all centered around the common theme that we are all deeply committed to having an enriched experience for our kids by being part of this community.” Others felt similarly purposeful about things as mundane as just showing up for a weekly basketball game — because of the shared values of fitness, fun or perhaps just reliving the glory days of their youth — or things as seemingly innocuous as letting loose in a frisbee game with other successful professionals, all realizing how precious this time is in the busy schedules of their lives. What made these experiences purposeful was the felt sense of shared values with others.

Do you participate in activities that enable you to live out your values with other like-minded people? Where would you find others who share your values, whether around family, social justice, fitness, customer service or anything that’s important to you? Try creating micro-environments that connect you with others who share your values and you’re likely to give your sense of purpose a lift.

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## ACTIVITY: WHAT GENERATES PURPOSE FOR YOU?

Use this exercise to identify your existing purpose generators, see where you have gaps, and find ways to extend purpose through relationships with others. The goal is not to create an entirely new life plan, but to recognize where you find purpose now, think about how to be more conscious of those sources of purpose, and identify "low-purpose" activities that you might be able to find ways to adjust. This is a starting point for understanding and charting a path to finding greater purpose through the relationships in your life.

### ASSESS — Where do you get purpose through relationships today?

**A) Below, list up to five activities you are currently doing that create purpose for you.** Examples might be: mentoring a person or group at work, delivering to clients, playing on a sports team, volunteering for a non-profit, or cooking for your family.

1.

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2.

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3.

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4.

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5.

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**B) Then place them on the Purpose Tool grid** on the following page to visualize the relationships they involve and which sources of purpose they feed (see example on page 13).

### EXPAND — Where are you missing out on sources of purpose?

See where you have white space on the grid. You can tap into relational drivers of purpose in four ways, as shown below.

- ☐ **Extend existing activities to additional sources of purpose.** For example, perhaps mentoring your group fulfills a need to give to others and involve yourself in something worth doing. But it tends to be a one-way conversation that doesn't help to broaden your own perspectives. Change that to a two-way conversation that helps you to better understand how the younger generation sees the world.
- ☐ **Broaden your relational touch points.** Perhaps you're teaching financial literacy to dis-advantaged youth. What if you invited your brother or children to do it with you? Or a group of friends whom you've lost touch with over the years? Making it a shared experience with others adds dimensionality and purpose.
- ☐ **Alter a low-purpose activity.** Where are you spending time today in things that don't give you a sense purpose? Modify that activity in ways that tap into one or more of the five sources of purpose.
- ☐ **Add one new activity.** Reach back in your history to things you were passionate about or people you were close to. For example, a sport, spiritual pursuit or musical instrument. Did you used to play the guitar in a band? Reach out to your band-mates and clear the garage for a regular Thursday night jam.

*Continued on next page*

## Purpose Map

Relationships									
Purpose Generators	At work					Outside of Work			
	Direct Supervisor	Other Leaders	Peers	Teams that Report to You	Customers, Clients, Users	Spouse, Partner	Family	Friends	Interest Groups
<b>Fulfilling life roles and priorities</b> <i>Fulfilling a set of personal roles and priorities you feel are important to a life well-lived.</i>									
<b>Giving to others</b> <i>Using your time and talents to help others.</i>									
<b>Seeing purpose in everyday life</b> <i>Opening the "aperture" to see greater possibilities or higher purpose in what you do.</i>									
<b>Co-creating</b> <i>Working together with synchrony (a deep sense of trust, commitment, and rapport) and scaffolding (building on each others' ideas)</i>									
<b>Living shared values</b> <i>Putting shared values into practice with friends, family or co-workers.</i>									

Continued on next page



## EXAMPLE: Robin's discovery of co-creating

Robin, a high-level media executive we spoke to, initially told us that the primary purpose in her life came from her role at work (as a manager) and in her family (as a mother, a wife, and a daughter). Those roles were clear and fundamental to her self-definition. But when we asked her to work through this grid to identify her sources of purpose — or purpose-draining activities — she found new insights.

- ❑ **Extend existing activities to additional sources of purpose.** Though she was clear in her formal role at work, she had given less thought to the informal ones, such as being a mentor to the people on her team. Robin started approaching this role with a higher level of consciousness, placing more deliberate effort into understanding the needs and aspirations of her team members, and even changing her perspective on things she found draining, such as performance reviews, by seeing them as opportunities to engage with more junior employees around their lives as a whole.
- ❑ **Broaden your relational touch points.** Robin derived a great deal of satisfaction from the volunteer work she did, teaching graphic design as part of a local job retraining program. But she often felt like it came at a price to her friendships. Between work, family and her volunteer work, there was no time left for hanging out with friends — which the grid clearly showed as a big white space in the “Friends” column. So Robin decided to see if she could engage some friends in what she was already doing, recruiting one friend to work with her on a graphic animation module and another to bring in the element of copy writing. Conversations around graphic design spilled over into pep talks around parenting and philosophizing about life in general. As Robin described, “I no longer felt like I was missing out on an important part of life, and the volunteer work became all the more satisfying.”
- ❑ **Alter a low-purpose activity.** The one part of her job that Robin wasn't keen on was client relations. She loved the creative end of the work and seeing how ideas come to fruition but all of the selling and negotiating with clients left her cold. The higher she rose in the organization, however, the more client relations became an important part of her job. If she wanted to stay enthused about her work, she needed to change how she approached client relations. After talking it through with some colleagues, Robin decided to change her target client mix. She began reaching out to non-profits and other

Purpose Generators	Relationships								
	At work					Outside of Work			
	Direct Supervisor	Other Leaders	Peers	Teams that Report to You	Customers, Clients, Users	Spouse, Partner	Family	Friends	Interest Groups
<b>Fulfilling life roles and priorities</b> <i>Fulfilling a set of personal roles and priorities you feel are important to a life well-lived.</i>				Mentor team	Client Relations				
<b>Giving to others</b> <i>Using your time and talents to help others.</i>		Extend existing activities to additional sources of purpose		+ purpose	+ purpose			+ ties	Teach Graphic Design
<b>Seeing purpose in everyday life</b> <i>Opening the “aperture” to see greater possibilities or higher purpose in what you do.</i>				+ purpose	+ purpose	Alter a low-purpose activity		Broaden relational touch points	
<b>Co-creating</b> <i>Working together with synchrony (a deep sense of trust, commitment, and rapport) and scaffolding (building on each others' ideas)</i>					+ purpose	Family Tree project			
<b>Living shared values</b> <i>Putting shared values into practice with friends, family or co-workers.</i>					+ purpose	Add a purposeful activity			

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organizations whose work aligned with her values, opting for lower margin projects in order to feel more of a kinship with her clients. What had previously felt like straight selling became a process of using her creative talents to help others.

- **Add a Purposeful Activity.** Perhaps most notably, Robin told us she had never really clicked on how much she enjoyed co-creating. As she analyzed her sources of purpose, she realized that she had not been conscious of that and she needed to ensure that she continually found appropriate chances to collaborate in this way with colleagues. But the joy in co-creating extended to family and friends. Simply having a project to work on together created a bond. Together with her extended family, for example, she decided to create an elaborate family tree. Various family members took leadership roles at different points and by building off each other's work and conversations, together they cobbled together a detailed family history that included finally providing definitive answers on some family lore, such as whether the family had native American blood (not much), did anyone from the family actually fight in the revolutionary war (more likely the Civil War), and so on.

After using that grid for self-analysis, Robin began to see her collaborative activities not just as "nice to have" but rather "need to have" because they were so important to fulfilling her sense of purpose. She made a point of taking time to formally interview each of her parents about their own childhood, for example, recording the interviews. Another family member turned those interviews into Ken Burns' style documentaries for the family. And she set up shared google drives, for example, within her extended family, to ensure that everyone was up to date on the family tree. "I recognized that the sources of purpose I had focused on for so long were only part of the picture for me," she said. "It was actually liberating to recognize the good that could come from pursuing some of these other activities, with people I care about. It wasn't simply taking time away from my primary 'roles' but extending them to be more inclusive and helping me see purpose in other areas as well."

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# Practices to Build Purpose *Through Relationships*

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Building purpose into your life is not a mysterious process. According to researcher Vic Strecher, having purpose is a matter of first caring about something and then setting goals around the things that matter most in your life.<sup>19</sup> The key that we found in our research is remembering that we don't create purpose in isolation; relationships with others play a central role. Our relationships add dimensionality and perspective, helping us to see the world more broadly and crystallize what really matters to us — and often they *are* what matters most to us. Things worth doing become more purposeful when they are carried out in collaboration with others who share common values around working together. In family, friends and co-workers, we find role models of our higher aspirations, and we often find purpose in being role models for them as well. And when we share our goals with the people in our lives, they help us to stick with it, embedding purposeful routines into our day, reminding us of who we are at our best, and reflecting back admiration or appreciation for the things we do.

After Marco, from our opening story, had his moment of awakening, he reached back to a sport from his youth — basketball — to slingshot into a network of purposeful relationships. He went looking for a group of people who wanted to play basketball on a regular basis but who had kids and were constrained in how often they could do it. He found one in a local church. They set up a game Thursdays 9-11 pm, a time when they could get the kids down and then “play together as a bunch of old guys.” That time slot became sacred. Marco would say to his coordinator, “You can fly me wherever we need to go for business but have me home on Thursday nights. Do that so that I can make basketball.”

Once he broke loose of the mindset that that life held no room for anything but work and family, Marco actually became better at his family role. He exemplified the family creed of staying in shape, encouraged his kids to enjoy sports as much as he did, and ended up coaching some basketball teams for them. He created friendships with parents who had kids the same ages as his, and so outings with his buddies served as family time as well.

Marco's wife helped him stick with the Thursday night regimen, making sure nothing else was planned for those evenings and reminding him of what makes him happy. She would tell him, “When you get out of shape you're grumpy. Go fix it.” And his basketball teammates wouldn't let him off the hook. If he was tired after a long day at work, they'd rib him and say, “Well, that's great. But you can still come out. Stop being a baby.”

Marco also took a step back in terms of career to work at an organization where he could build a legacy. The company he chose had a mission that felt revolutionary to him, and he felt at home with how they operated, setting basic principles and then giving people utter freedom to go accomplish things. He feels happy and excited each morning to go to work, and more balanced and purposeful in his roles beyond.

Our interviewees showed us five steps you can take to create purpose-generating relationships in your life.

## 1. Identify the life roles and priorities that anchor you.

We all have roles and priorities that are important to us but if someone asked you right now, could you say what they are? People who devote time and attention to defining their most important roles and priorities are then able to use them as a North Star for their decisions, whether major life decisions or day-to-day choices, and can continually orient back to them to ensure they're on course for the life they want to lead.

Researchers have found that a life anchored in personal values that transcend the self relates positively to psychological health. Christopher Niemiec and colleagues followed a group of graduating college students to see how their aspirations

ultimately influenced their well-being. Not surprisingly, they found that the goals you focus on are likely to predict what you achieve. Participants with hedonic goals such as money, fame and image, were more likely to achieve those ends and likewise, participants with eudaimonic goals such as personal growth, relationships and community were more likely to attain those. But the different aspirations led to different levels of well-being. Hedonic goals were associated with greater anxiety and symptoms of poor health while eudaimonic goals were associated with more positive feelings, better self-esteem and greater life satisfaction.<sup>25</sup>

So think about the self-transcending roles in life that are most important to you. What and whom do you care about? Friedrich Nietzsche put it poetically: “Let the young soul survey its own life with a view of the following question: ‘What have you truly loved thus far? What has ever uplifted your soul, what has dominated and delighted it at the same time?’ Assemble these revered objects in a row before you and perhaps they will reveal a law by their nature and their order: the fundamental law of your very self.”<sup>26</sup> In other words, look to the past and see what you were doing and who you were with when you felt a sense of purpose and meaning.

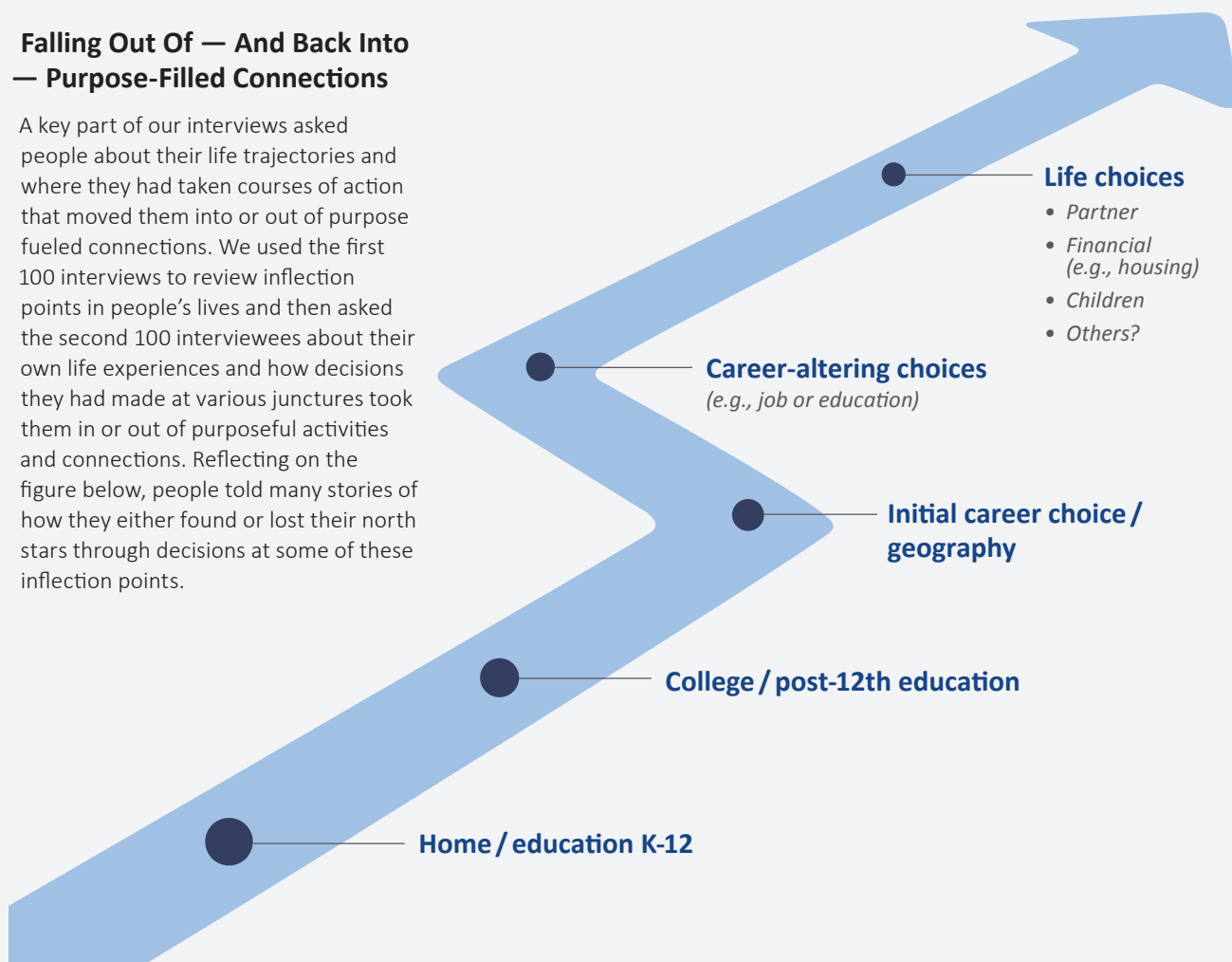
As you explore these questions, focus on your aspirational self and relationships. Be aware of socially defined goals or historical conventions that may have shaped you until this point but that are limited to the more superficial or transient (hedonic) forms of happiness. Consider what would create for you a deeper, more enduring (eudaimonic) state of well-being. Role models are helpful. Think about the people you admire, who have lived life on a higher plane. And think about the

people you *don’t* want to turn out like. Tomas, for example, who was an up-and-coming investment banker, turned down a high-flying job because he did not want to be the kind of executive who says, “My wife is in Singapore while I’m here in London. My kids are in boarding school in South Africa. And you’re going to meet my girlfriend later tonight.” The absentee father was a role model he purposefully rejected.

Make your sources of purpose explicit to yourself (write them down) and part of an ongoing dialogue with others. In this way, you can better dictate how you want to live your life. Recall Louis, who defined his six most important roles as healthy person, spiritual being, organizational thought leader, concerned citizen, family member, and friend. He continually talked about these roles with his spouse, friends and co-workers. By doing so, he created guard rails that kept him from straying too far from his ideals. Stating them publicly solidified his commitment to the roles and recruited others to support him in carrying them out.

## Falling Out Of — And Back Into — Purpose-Filled Connections

A key part of our interviews asked people about their life trajectories and where they had taken courses of action that moved them into or out of purpose fueled connections. We used the first 100 interviews to review inflection points in people’s lives and then asked the second 100 interviewees about their own life experiences and how decisions they had made at various junctures took them in or out of purposeful activities and connections. Reflecting on the figure below, people told many stories of how they either found or lost their north stars through decisions at some of these inflection points.



Take a moment to reflect on your own trajectory to date. Consider two important ideas:

- Can you pinpoint ways that experiences or activities at different points in your career have shaped the connections in your life now? For example, people often mentioned pursuing socially desirable and high income careers that took them **out of** activities and communities that kept them physically healthy or spiritually whole. In contrast, many also described inflection points like graduate school, marriage or leaving a demanding job as critical to **moving into** activities or communities that gave them purpose.
- Can you see ways to reignite past activities or dormant relations to add dimensionality and purpose to life? A common strategy for most people to re-ignite a sense of purpose lay with reaching back to passions or people they had been close to. Consider:
  - Re-engaging in activities like sports, volunteering, religion, music or intellectual pursuits that could slingshot you into a new group of like-minded colleagues.
  - Re-connecting with old friends, extended family members or past work colleagues to rejuvenate “dormant” ties. Look back in time to do this but also look to expand existing connections in ways that might add dimensionality to your network.

The table below provides an easy way to systemically identify ways to rejuvenate purpose through passion and past relations.

LIFE PHASE/INFLUENCE	NETWORK DEFINING	NETWORK ENHANCING
<i>The different stages of life and the decision points that shape your network.</i>	<i>How have your decisions and circumstances in each of the stages on the left influenced the relationships and interactions you have today?</i>	<i>How could you reach back to activities, passions or contacts that could add purpose-generating relationships and interactions to your life?</i>
Home and education through 12th grade		
College or other ctivities post-12th grade		
Initial career choice and geography		
Career altering choices (e.g., job or education)		
Life choices: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life partner</li> <li>• Financial choices (e.g., home)</li> <li>• Children</li> <li>• Others?</li> </ul>		

## 2. Act with intentionality to connect with activities and relationships that create purpose for you.

Staying the course of a purposeful life takes intentional effort. As Marco discovered, the world can capture you in its invisible currents towards societally defined expectations rather than your personal values, unless you take deliberate steps in the directions of your choice. And if you wait until the perfect time in the future, when you have complete financial security or the kids are grown, to give yourself the “luxury” of a purposeful existence, you may find that you’ve lost out on years of opportunities to re-set direction or build the relationships that lie at the core of a sense of purpose.

Our interviewees used several key strategies to help swim against the tide. One is to be methodical with your time. Use your calendar with discipline to make time for sources of purpose outside of work. As one busy executive described, “My calendar is my bible. I try to do as much with intention as I can. I’ve got all my son’s events, school- and sports-related, and then I’m blocking off time for things like leaving work early so that I can make his baseball game. Even on the weekends, the things I want to make happen, like fun or social events, they go on the calendar.” Others used their calendar to make sure they had periodic social events scheduled, such as a monthly dinner



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## Purpose Killers

Our interviewees described the situations below as ones that drained them of purpose. If you're finding these in your life, think about how you might draw on your relationships with others to alter them.

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### ***You can't see how what you do makes a difference; the "why" of your work is missing.***

We were sometimes amazed at how our interviewees could find purpose in just about anything. But often it relied on reaching out to others and gaining a wholly different perspective. A sales rep might get a different take on her job after hearing from customers about how she adds value, or a wife might reframe her husband's work challenges in ways that show his positive contributions more expansively. Start a conversation with colleagues, customers or people close to you, and you may be surprised at how much value they see in what you do.

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### ***The company's values are out of sync with your own. While management talks about higher aspirations, their decisions show that it's just the bottom line that counts.***

You're not going to be able to change the company culture single-handedly. And you might not have the option of leaving for another organization whose priorities are more in line with your own. But company culture usually exists in "micro-environments" with variations across different groups. Seek out and find those pockets where peoples' values align more with your own, by means such as working on projects that introduce you to people outside your own group or taking fitness classes that attract a cross-section of employees. Another approach we saw taken by some of our interviewees was to create a counter-balance to their work lives in volunteer activities outside of work, and that helped them to feel purposeful overall.

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### ***You feel like nobody knows you beyond the work you do or cares about you about a person.***

Sometimes, we are cautious about being vulnerable with work colleagues or bringing personal aspects of our lives into the professional sphere. But our interviewees often found "safe" ways to get people — and themselves — to show their different dimensionality. For example, one manager started each team meeting with two songs, one that appealed to the younger generation and one that appealed to the older. It prompted people to start talking about the songs and sharing more about themselves.

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### ***There's a lack of trust or you feel like you can't be your authentic self.***

While trust sometimes emerges organically, there are also systematic ways to build it. Earlier research by Rob Cross identified ten behaviors that build trust, such as matching words and deeds, highlighting your knowledge boundaries, giving something away such as knowledge or networks, and acting with discretion by not revealing confidential or sensitive information. Sharing these trust behaviors as a group can act as a first step towards building them.

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or Sunday soccer, or volunteering on a weekend once a month. Rituals and routines help to hard-wire purposeful interactions in your life. Marco's regimen of basketball every Thursday night is the perfect example. By letting everyone in on the plan, Marco created "stickiness" — a system of support from people like his coordinator and his wife that enabled him to adhere to his priorities. These systems are particularly important to prioritize non-work activities and relationships against the press of work-related demands.

Our interviewees showed how you can vote with your feet by declining jobs or "opportunities" that would steer you away from your priorities. We heard over and over again stories of people saying "no", whether to working with teams that didn't

### 3. Lean in to micro-moments

A surprising number of really pivotal events in people's lives were born in small moments, times where if they had not stopped to lean in, they would have missed out. Leaning into micro-moments means being as present as possible and aware of how your experience is meaningful for yourself and others. Simply demonstrating to others in small moments that you believe in them, or lifting them up, or helping them do the right thing will help you to feel a sense of purpose. Rita, a leader in a technology company, deliberately heightens her awareness when she interacts with her team. She asks herself, "Do you believe in your people? Do they know that? Do you empower them? Are we all just trying in the moment to do the right thing? These are

### 4. Lose the zero-sum perspective

When Marco realized he had no connections outside of work and family, the first thing he did was return to basketball, a passion of his from his high school and college years. Others in similar situations have activated dormant relationships, reaching out to old friends, relatives or colleagues from the past. Both are ways to connect ourselves with relationships that add dimensionality to our networks and, as we mentioned earlier, open ourselves to perspectives and opportunities for purposeful interactions that we wouldn't otherwise have.

You may read this and say "That's great but I don't have time to add activities or relationships to my life. The cup is already overflowing." You're not alone. It's a pervasive belief that purposeful activities are a zero-sum game and adding one will detract from another. But it doesn't have to work that way. People who successfully add dimensionality to their lives often do so by "getting two for one": choosing one activity that feeds into two or more relational sources of purpose. When Alicia, for example, volunteered in the library at her kids' school, she felt like she was serving a higher aim and giving to others. At the same time, she got to see her kids at school and role model values of community service and education. She

share their values, jobs that would have made them more money but robbed them of time with family, or roles in which they felt obliged to work in marginally ethical ways. In some cases, they took existing roles and re-shaped them to be more purposeful. Joaquin, for example, was in charge of leadership development for his organization. He created a model entirely based on mobilizing leaders to teach each other. "It wouldn't be as rewarding to me if I just ran the program myself," explained Joaquin, "so I've reshaped it to what I'd like it to be." Sometimes, people took on work they didn't need to but wanted to, such as a volunteer program around meditation, because it added meaning to their work day and ended up connecting them with people sharing a similar passion.

the moments that actually matter every single day." Others described micro-moments spent with kids, especially after being away on business travel; in a conversation over a cup of coffee; or aspiring to be as present as possible all through the day. Joaquin described serendipitous moments with neighbors around his cherry tree. "My neighbors were out so I walked over and gave them extra cherries and that sparked a conversation. The little moments like that, when you get involved, solidify the neighborhood network and bond." Simply altering the way we engage with others can fuel a sense of purpose, as in the way Joaquin let his relationships with neighbors flow but was highly aware in the moment of his sense of belonging with others.

scheduled her hours to coincide with transporting the kids home from school. And the real bonus was camaraderie and friendship bonds she formed with other parents who were also volunteering. According to Alicia, it turned out that "These are the people that I like to hang out with socially anyway." She was able to hit three of her purpose anchors — volunteerism, family values, and friendship — with one activity.

While some people such as Alicia add dimensionality to their networks in deliberate, planful ways, others take a more free-flowing, emergent approach. Joaquin, for example, has an annual barbeque and simply invites everyone he knows, then will "add alcohol, shake and see what happens." Or, he might post on Facebook to whomever wants to come that he's going to a band concert, and see friends from 15 years ago show up. Whether planful or emergent, the key is avoiding the zero sum mentality and seeing opportunities to integrate sources of purpose in your life. As Joaquin puts it, "I'm much happier at work because I do have this balance and a sense of purpose outside of work. Both dimensions give me energy and each recharges me for the other."

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## 5. Boldly lean into times of transition

Often we see transition times as threats to stability, and circle the wagons rather than reaching for the opportunities they offer. Transitions create openings that we can use to discover new and better versions of ourselves. They help us to notice and unplug from things that are draining purpose and reinvest in activities and groups that build a purposeful identity. When things are in a state of flux, reflect on how socially defined goals may be influencing you or how historical conventions may have shaped activities and relationships around you. Focus on your aspirational self and relationships, using the transition to invest in work or activities you want to be doing and that would add breadth and dimensionality to your life. It may seem scary at the time, but the key is sticking it out.

Patricia, for example, worked throughout her early career in a string of positions — all of which made her miserable. She came from humble beginnings and dinnertime conversations were not around how to follow your dreams but how to get a job and attain financial security. Patricia really wanted to study art but, job prospects being lean in the art field, she decided to study finance. When she graduated into the recession of the 80s, job prospects were nonetheless bleak so she went to law school. As Patricia puts it, “I practiced law just long enough to know I had made a very expensive mistake.” A string of positions in the corporate world followed and she ended up in the Sales department of a large manufacturing firm.

The transition point for Patricia came when her father died. It was a deep, dark period of mourning and she decided that she needed to lower her visibility and find a space to heal. Patricia took that time to reflect on all the ways that her job was incompatible with her life roles and priorities. The department was run like a military regiment and the hours were incompatible with her childcare arrangements. She had no interest in sales and marketing. She didn’t click with the boss who was becoming increasingly hostile towards her, and no one appreciated her skills or contributions. Fortuitously, her boss said, “You have to get out” and Patricia went looking elsewhere. She took advantage of the transition point to finally allow herself to look for a role that was compatible with her interests and gave her a sense of purpose. Taking a leap of faith, she landed in the company’s research department. Her new team embodied flexibility and innovation, and it was an environment in which Patricia thrived. Her new colleagues were in awe of her work ethic. Everyone from her former department saw the move as a fall from grace and assumed that after having kids, she had lost her motivation and drive for work. But that’s not how Patricia saw it. In the new position, Patricia found identity as an innovator and a group of colleagues she looked to with endearment and respect. The transition ended up being the best thing that ever happened to her.

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## Connection matters

We all want to live a life filled with purpose, one that lets us be our best selves and fulfill our higher aspirations. What many people miss, however, is the powerful role that relationships play in helping us to build a purposeful life course. It’s not just *what* we do but *how* we do it *with others*. You can find purpose in all corners of your life by nurturing the interactions that help you to fulfill your north star roles and priorities, enable you to give to others, let you co-create and work together with shared values, and that simply help you see the purpose that is already there.

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