

How I Express My Personal Purpose

By Jim Clemmer



"To give life meaning one must have a purpose larger than one's self." — Will Durant, early 20th century author of historical and philosophical epics. His fascinating and sweeping book, *The Story of Philosophy*, sold millions.

Continually peeling back the layers of who we are is a lifelong effort. It's the leadership process of becoming. Our own inner space is as vast as outer space. Like the many generations of Star Trekkers who "boldly go where no one has gone before", we continue to unravel the frontier of self-knowledge. If we're going to continue to deepen and grow, it's our own never ending discovery trek.

Developing a personal mission statement is a discovery and a learning process, not a problem to be solved. It takes a lot of time and thoughtful reflection to sort out what's most important. Our purpose is intertwined with our vision and values. Defining it is part of that same process.

- What does my "dream list" reveal about my inner desires and purpose?
- What sorts of work or activities really excite and energize me? When do I feel the most vibrant and alive?
- What special talents or strengths do I have?
- What insight does my "blessings and brag list" offer to these questions?
Thinking about death can produce a passion for life. The personal effectiveness and leadership development author, Charlie Jones, wrote in his book, *Life is Tremendous*, "You're not ready to live your life until you know what you want written on your tombstone". That's a powerful thought. It forces us to boil away all our goals, plans, and activities to get at the core reason we exist. Stephen Covey calls this "beginning with the end in mind". It's the second of the habits he outlines in his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*.
- What kind of account would I like to be able to give for my life?
- What would I want my family, friends, community or church members to say about me at my death?
- How about the team members, business associates, people in the organizations I have led, customers I have served, or other external partners I have worked with?
- In the end, was I a contributor to society?

Around the time Charlie Jones got me thinking, I heard someone repeat Oliver Wendall Holmes' comment that "most of us die with our music still in us." What a tragedy. How many people die with the book they were always going to write buried in their head? Or the love they always meant to express still in their hearts? How many innovations and businesses that might have made a real difference went to a grave and perished? Just how many unrealized dreams have died with their dreamers?

The determination to live out my purpose and dreams has been a strong personal motivator. When I need a push to counteract my lazy, sloppy, or "that's good enough" tendencies, the picture of my preferred future and my purpose have been a powerful energy source.

My biggest struggle has been how to articulate my purpose. Reducing deeply felt inner convictions and thoughts to mere words has been a difficult and somewhat frustrating experience. But the struggle of 'wordsmithing' is well worth the effort. It has clarified and intensified the emotions and convictions of my purpose.

I now express it in two parts. First is what I call my "life theme." That's "loving, laughing, learning, and leading." You've probably guessed that I like alliterations —and living life "just for the L of it! "

The second part of my purpose is my "reason for being". This basic thought and focus has remained the same for over fifteen years. But the way I've tried to express it has evolved from a full page of points and statements to this phrase—"building a better world by helping others grow and develop." It's doesn't do justice to what I feel, but it's getting close.

Once I defined my personal purpose, I used affirmations as a powerful way to "magnetize" my purpose to focus on fulfilling my reason for being. I personally use inspiring quotations to illustrate and energize my affirmations.

Here are some other points for you to consider while undertaking this task.

Align with Work

How well is your personal purpose aligned with your team or organization? If it's not close, look for ways to live out your purpose within your current work. Search within your organization or team before going out and looking elsewhere. Consider having a mission alignment discussion with your manager. Begin by listing the positive, energizing points about your work. Review it frequently. Keep a running list of all the mission alignment opportunities that exist in your job, team, or organization. It's surprising how many good things you notice when you look for them.

Align with Family

Talk to your family members and write a statement of family values and mission. This involves having everyone describe their picture of the ideal family future. Develop common themes and a composite vision of what your family life together could be.

Not Goal Setting

It's easy to confuse goal setting with picturing your preferred future, clarifying principles, and identifying your purpose. Goals are the mileposts along the way. Setting and reaching goals is a critical part of fulfilling purpose and moving toward your vision. Goals are the means not the end. Goals have a beginning and completion and this process being discussed is an unending, continuous process.

Be authentic

Ensure your purpose is yours, not a role others want us to play. Purpose statements should not be written to inspire or impress anyone else. It's designed only to inspire and impress you. You can avoid that problem by not showing it to anyone else.

Continuous Process

You need to keep working at clarifying and articulating your vision, values, and reason for being. This is an ongoing, continuous process. Just like milking the cows on the farm I was raised on—it never stays done.

Quiet Time

Cultivate the habit of setting aside some quiet, contemplative time for inner reflection, meditation, and spiritual renewal. This is time to do your vision, values, and mission clarification work. It's the time to discover and listen to your inner music.

Over the years, I've found that investing about 30-45 minutes per day has paid huge dividends in energy and focus. It's a tiny price to pay to ensure that the other 16 hours of your day don't compound into a life of regrets.

About the author:

Jim Clemmer's practical leadership books, keynote presentations, workshops, and team retreats have helped hundreds of thousands of people worldwide improve personal, team, and organizational leadership. You can visit his web site, www.clemmer.net, for a huge selection of free practical resources. His latest book is [*Moose on the Table: A Novel Approach to Communications @ Work*](#).

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