

BY THE COAUTHOR OF THE BESTSELLING BOOKS
Repacking Your Bags AND *Whistle While You Work*

RICHARD J. LEIDER

the power of purpose

CREATING MEANING
IN YOUR LIFE AND WORK



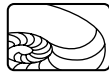
an excerpt from

***The Power of Purpose:
Creating Meaning in Your Life and Work***

by Richard J. Leider

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THE PURPOSE QUEST

Purpose.

Your aim.

Your reason for being.

Your reason for getting up in the morning.

Every one of us needs a reason to get up in the morning.

This book is about that reason. Its purpose is to help you discover the purpose for your life. Each life has a natural reason for being. Purpose is the reason a person was born. From birth to death, each of us is on a quest to discover that reason. Many never do. Yet, our world is incomplete until each one of us discovers our purpose.

Purpose is that deepest dimension within us—our central core or essence—where we have a profound sense of who we are, where we came from, and where we're going. Purpose is the quality we choose to shape our lives around. Purpose is a source of energy and direction.

Nothing shapes our lives as much as the questions we ask, or refuse to ask, throughout our lives. Purpose, however, is not a question that we can answer once and be done with it. We typically bring up the question of purpose about every ten years throughout our lives. At those times and during major life transitions, we ask questions like:

Who am I?

What am I meant to do here?

What am I trying to do with my life?

In the power of these questions lies the power of purpose. Of all the questions we might ask ourselves, these three are the most difficult to answer.

This book is for you if you're asking those three or questions such as:

- I feel that I've missed my calling in life. How do I find it?
- I've successfully reached midlife. Is that all there is? What's next?
- I've been growing spiritually. How do I connect my spiritual growth to my work?
- I'm in a major transition (divorce, job loss, retirement, graduation, death of a loved one, illness). How do I find meaning and direction?
- I have enough material success. How do I find fulfillment?

This book was developed by interviewing older adults (over age 65) about such deep questions and combining their wisdom with my studies in the fields of adult development and counseling psychology. Specifically, I asked a cross section of older adults this question: "If you could live your life over again, what would you do differently?"

Three themes wove their way through all the interviews. The older adults consistently said that if they could live their lives over again, they would:

Be more reflective.

Be more courageous.

Be clear earlier about purpose.

From these interviews, I concluded that purpose naturally resides deep inside the human soul. I observed that all people seemed to have a natural desire and capacity to contribute to life. Every one of us, somehow, wants to leave footprints. Purpose is unique to each of us, alone. Each of us is an experiment of one. We can learn from but not adopt the purpose of another. We must each discover our own.

This book builds on my earlier book *The Power of Purpose*, a paperback published by Ballantine Books in 1985, and expands and deepens the conversation. It is based on many interviews over a ten-year period with people of all ages engaged in the purpose quest. Through their input, I included many stories about people on purpose. I also included an Appendix for the many people who asked me how to use the book in their classes, book clubs, and spiritual or study groups. I chose to write this book based on my deepened personal belief that we live in a spiritual world and that every individual in that world has been created in God's image with unique gifts and a purpose to use those gifts to contribute value to the world.

Purpose is already within us. It is there waiting to be discovered. If we open ourselves up to what's inside us, we'll discover it. And once we discover it, we will have to try to live it, even if it seems totally impractical.

Purpose depends on our intuition. Intuition is that almost imperceptible voice that leads us to our purpose. Intuition is our sixth sense—the sense for the unknowable. It is independent of conscious reasoning. Sometimes we cannot explain how we know something; we just know it. To discover our purpose, we must trust our intuition.

The key to acting on purpose is to bring together the needs of the world with our unique gifts in a vocation—a calling. Calling is our way of actively contributing to our world, however we define that

world. This book contains many stories of people who have acted on their calling.

Working on purpose gives us a sense of direction. Without purpose, we eventually lose our way. We live without the true joy in life and work. Until we make peace with our purpose, we will never discover fulfillment in our work or contentment with what we have.

Purpose is a way of life—a discipline to be practiced day in and day out. It requires a steady commitment to face every new workday with the question, “Why do I get up in the morning?” The wisdom to ask and the courage to answer this simple question is the essence of working on purpose.

Spirit touches and moves our lives through the mystery of purpose. That is the starting point where I begin my work of helping people discover their calling. In a pluralistic society, not everyone would agree with my starting point. That’s all right. My objective, however, is not intended to express a religious or denominational belief. I do not wish to use my work as a basis for excluding people who don’t believe as I do. It is, instead, the very reason for my acceptance of the many differences among people. Because of my starting point—my calling, if you will—I believe that all people have a spiritual reason for being and that our world is incomplete until each one of us discovers it.

I hope that you will discover your calling, for if I have found mine, this book will be a catalyst for finding yours.

Richard J. Leider
Minneapolis, Minnesota

PART I



THE PURPOSE OF PURPOSE

HAVE YOU MISSED YOUR CALLING?

This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrap heap; the being a force of Nature instead of a feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.

—GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

Inspiring words from George Bernard Shaw, but how easy it would be to dismiss them as having no meaning for us. And yet, most of us want to know that there is a purpose to life—that our being here does mean something—that what we do does matter.

Most of us want to be somebody. The search to be somebody is basic to us all. However, we often become deeply concerned about it only when some crisis forces us to pay attention—an illness, a death, a divorce, or a loss of job. We take life for granted until a crisis wakes us up and forces us to ask: “Who am I?” “What am I meant to do here?” “What am I trying to do with my life?” Crisis is the mirror of purpose. Crisis brings us face to face with the big questions.

It's difficult to feel a clarity of purpose in the busyness of daily life. Yet, this is the first step. We must ask ourselves, "What is my busyness all about?"

One of the chief requisites for feeling the true joy in life is purpose. A constant in the lives of people who experience a sense of day-to-day aliveness is the discovery of their purpose. We need at our very core to be somebody. We need evidence to believe that we are good people and are growing or becoming as much as we can be. Clarifying our purpose helps us satisfy a basic need that we're being used for a purpose recognized by ourselves as a mighty one.

Rollie Larson, a 75-year-old retired psychologist, embodies George Bernard Shaw's "true joy in life." He lives as a whole person, integrated in mind, body, and spirit, with the natural curiosity and enthusiasm for life usually reserved for a child.

Rollie claims, "I've discovered my purpose without even thinking about it; it was a natural evolution. My purpose is 'to find my own path and help others find their path.'" This purpose gives Rollie true joy. It gives him a reason to get up in the morning. He says, "Helping others find their path has become a big thing for me. It gives me a spiritual connection in working with other people—sharing, caring, listening, loving. Part of my prayers each night are that I can make a difference in someone's life tomorrow." Rollie states, "Purpose, for me, boils down to relationships. What goes on with me and other people, that's what gives joy to me. I tried seventeen different jobs before I found that my calling was working with people!"

Growing up during World War II, Rollie's purpose was to survive, to get married someday, and to have a family. During the war his purpose was to get back into life—alive!

In the navy, Rollie's best friend told him about school counseling. "That perspective opened up a whole new world," Rollie said.

“It was like a budding flower opening up; it was a slow evolution to counseling, but it was a quick opening of the bud.”

Rollie’s long, esteemed counseling career took him down many paths, including founding a school counseling department, training corporate executives, opening a private practice with his wife, Doris, and writing several books. What distinguishes Rollie is his special gift and genuine capacity to listen deeply to others. His credo, “Listen to someone today,” is well known to the hundreds of lives he has touched over the years. He counsels people, “If you have to go through seventeen jobs to find your calling—do it! Start opening some other windows in your areas of interest. Ultimately, your work must be a turn on; it must feel passionate.”

Rollie has blended the spirit and curiosity of the child with the maturity and wisdom of age. He has discovered his purpose.

For David Shapiro, the process of discovering his purpose has been, and continues to be, an ongoing adventure from a somewhat desperate attempt to try to become someone else to a far more natural and effortless expression of who he really is.

For the first 30 years or so of his life, he struggled to adopt what he imagined to be the personal purpose of certain authors he admired, such as Woody Allen, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and others. And although this strategy made for some interesting (as well as embarrassing) moments, it was fraught with a number of problems.

David states, “I was always one step removed from myself. I was forever checking myself against an ideal (and moreover one that I had fabricated) to make life decisions that, had I been more in touch with my own calling, would have been a more authentic expression of my real self. Woody didn’t finish college; neither would I. Scott went to Paris and got depressed in cafes; me too.”

The whole thing was a setup that David could never win. There was no way to stack up to his heroes. No way he could ever hope to

be as good at being them as they were. He could never really fully express his purpose because it wasn't his.

At some magic point, however, a change in David began taking place by almost imperceptible degrees. He says, "I found I was no longer checking the biographical notes on the blurbs of books to find out if their writers were younger or older than me when they were written. I even stopped worrying about whether my outfit was something that might be worn by one of those people whose purpose I was trying to put on, as well."

The effect of David's purpose quest, though not extremely dramatic in terms of his actual day-to-day activities, has been dramatically liberating—and radically empowering. In David's terms, "I'm no longer trying to attain someone else's purpose; I'm simply trying to express my own."

David's purpose today is captured in this statement: "Helping people to communicate with themselves and others as honestly and courageously as possible." And David is discovering his calling through his teaching and writing (my co-author!) of such works as the best-selling *Repacking Your Bags: Lighten Your Load for the Rest of Your Life*. His purpose is a beacon that lights his way. But these days, it's no longer a beacon in the distance. As he sums it up, "The light now comes from within."

Andrew Greeley, quoted in Phillip Berman's book *The Courage of Conviction*, said:

It seems to me that in the last analysis there are only two choices: MacBeth's contention that life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury and signifying nothing, and Pierre Teilhard's "something is afoot in the universe, something that looks like gestation and birth." Either there is a plan and purpose—and that plan and purpose can best be expressed by the words "life" and "love"—or we live in a

cruel, arbitrary, and deceptive cosmos in which our lives are a brief transition between two oblivions.

Purpose is the quality we want to center our work around—the way we orient ourselves toward life and work. It is the way we make sense or meaning out of our lives. People like Rollie Larson and David Shapiro choose to center their lives around the assumption that “something is afoot in the universe, something that looks like gestation and birth.”

Purpose is the recognition of the presence of the sacred within us and the choice of work that is consistent with that presence. Purpose defines our contribution to life. It may find expression through family, community, relationship, work, and spiritual activities. We receive from life what we give, and in the process we understand more of what it means to discover our purpose.

Look ahead. How old do you think you’ll live to be? Imagine you’re that age. As you look back on your life, what would you like to be able to say is your legacy—how you became the somebody you were destined to be? What might you do with your remaining time so that you can look back over your life with no regrets?

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