

ON *PURPOSE*

Finding Your Place in the World

by Richard J. Leider

We live in an age where we have raced to the moon, but often failed to discover our place in the world. We have faster technology but emptier lives. Many of us don't discover our place in the world until near the end of our lives. When we are younger, we spend our days building busy lives. We struggle to keep pace with our economic needs. We're in a hurry.

Singer and songwriter, Mary Chapin Carpenter in the poignant lyrics of *A Place in the World* sings:

“What I'm looking for, after all this time
Keeps me moving forward, trying to find it
Since I learned to walk all I've done is run
Ready, on my mark, doesn't everyone
Need a place in the world.”

A place in the world is not a place we find but a life we create. It comes when we live on purpose; when we commit ourselves to something larger than ourselves. When all the running is slowed down in our lives, its true purpose becomes clear: the purpose of life is a life of purpose!

When I ask people, “Who do you most admire?” the people who keep coming up are not necessarily celebrities, but ordinary people—people who have found their place in the world. People who have discovered that the purpose of their lives is a life of purpose.

In an early issue of *Fast Company* magazine, Xerox PARC guru, John Seely Brown said a profound truth: “The job of leadership today is not just to make money, it's to make meaning.” In the past, many of us were content to have work that paid the

bills. Period. But now we want our work to be a place in the world that gives us a sense of meaning, a feeling that we are doing something important with our lives.

One of the few things I treasure about long airplane flights is the time it affords for reflection. Having spent a good deal of my professional life crisscrossing the globe, it has been my experience that some of my clearest thoughts often come in the idle moments trapped in seat 2-B. Experience has taught me to keep my pad and pen handy.

On a recent flight from Minneapolis to San Francisco, it dawned on me just how far I have moved since my days growing up on the edge of Highland Park in St. Paul. In no way could I have envisioned my current place in the world. In his song, *Beautiful Boy (Darling Boy)*, John Lennon sings, “Life is what happens when you're busy making other plans.” True.

When I began college I was clueless, like many, about what would be my place in the world. What was a clear dream in high school—being a camp director—had been replaced by uncertainty, doubt and fear. In sheer frustration, I tried several majors only to discover that they took me further off course. I had no direction whatsoever that made sense to me, no sense of my possible place in the world.

Life is like that at many ages and stages, not just in our late teens. Even our most well conceived life plans can crumble or change course. At those times, we can feel hopelessly lost and alone in the

world. Yet, lost may be what we need to clarify our place in the world. We must leave our place of comfort and step into the unknown.

We find our place the minute we decide that the purpose of our lives is a life of purpose. Mary Chapin Carpenter again gets to the heart of the matter with her lyrics:

“Could be one more mile, or just one step back
In a lover’s smile, down a darkened path
Friends will take our side, enemies will curse us
But to be alive is to know your purpose
It’s your place in the world. . .”

The best life decision we can make is the one to live our lives on purpose. As Mary Chapin Carpenter puts it: “. . .to be alive is to know your purpose.”

Paul Tillich, the famous Protestant theologian, defined religion as our “ultimate concern.” Purpose is whatever concerns us most. And, that opens the question of whether money, or power and status or our work itself could become our purpose. One way to clarify our “ultimate concern” is to answer these three questions:

- “Does my work utilize my God-given gifts?”
- “Who ultimately benefits from the products and services my work offers?”
- What difference does my work make in people’s lives ?”

By digging down into these three questions, we can gain a sense, of our place in the world.

Rudolph Otto wrote a small classic entitled, *The Idea of the Holy*. He coined a new word—the idea of “numinous.” The numinous dimension deals with a sense of mystery. Place is a mystery. The mysteriousness of our place in the world is that innate sense of something more, something we cannot see. We sense that we’re here on earth for a purpose, a specific reason that only we alone can fulfill.

When I trek in Africa, there is that feeling of mystery. It is one of the greatest attractions of the African bush for me. There’s the stealth of furtive animals, the hidden sounds as nighttime comes alive. No matter how much I learn, it just doesn’t come out totally explained. The mystery of “what’s out there” in the African night parallels the mystery of finding my place in the world. And it’s that mystery that makes the risks in Africa and my life worth taking.

The mystery of finding out, “what’s out there” drives us to be adventurers and “inventurers.” We go to our edge. We go a little farther, a little deeper. We discover our aliveness in the mystery. Edges have always drawn us toward them. We are almost fatally attracted. We want to be near them. We want to embrace them. See what’s there. We want to feel totally alive, now.

Living in the question of, “What’s my place in the world?” gives us a feeling of aliveness. Eventually we find how we fit into the whole.

Richard J. Leider is a founder and partner of The Inventure Group and editor of the On Purpose Journal. A nationally recognized speaker, author and executive coach, he has just published his fifth book, Whistle While You Work: Heeding Your Life’s Calling.

Now, Take One More Step

by Phil Sandahl

Standing on the edge of the precipice I could feel the wind in my ears. I could feel my heart pounding. In an instant that stretched in time, I heard bits of gravel crunch under my feet and heard them skitter over the edge and fall on the cliff below me. On a perfect fall day I lifted my eyes to see the blazing yellow aspen stand out against the green pines across the valley.

I leaned out over the edge of the cliff, raising my face to the clouds and spreading my arms to fly. I

felt myself cross the threshold of stability. I know I couldn't bring myself back. I felt my breath catch in my throat, and felt the harness catch me from falling.

I've done riskier things in my life. What made this experience so different was the intention that I took with me to the edge and the commitment of the people I was there to share the experience with. I didn't go to the edge alone. I went with others, our coaching community. It was a powerful moment for me and I know for others too. Each of us finding our edge in this exercise and in other experiences throughout the time we spent together.

For me, what made the whole *Edges* retreat work was the place we started. On the evening of the first night we declared our intention. We looked inside for a look at our own personal edge. The questions on that night kept echoing back for the next four and a half days as we moved from experience to experience. What is my edge in my coaching, in my personal growth, in my relationships? What do I need to let go of? Where do I hold back? What is the new territory I'm stepping into? What is it like, here on the brink of new life—because that's always what's at stake?

There was another question that emerged over our time together and that was, "what would it be like if a community of 25 or 30 people really made the commitment to support each other in going to the edge? What kind of intimacy and change could that create?"

No surprise, being on our edges was often challenging, but challenging in very different ways for different people. It was also one of the most physically active learning experiences I've participated in. Dancing and using the space for movement, the outdoor events, interactive exercises with each other. We got the learning in our bodies. There was thoughtful, provocative discussion to be sure, and time for introspection in one of the most beautiful spots in the country. But mostly this was a time when I learned, literally, from the inside out. From the cells outward.

The learning from that time together is still unfolding for me. I'm grateful for the excellent leadership of the presenters—although "contributor" might be a better word. Each one brought his or her own unique expertise, and yet they fit together, strength for strength into a common pathway, leading to the edge. And it was a different style of leadership—a participatory, working together—as if they brought the materials and we brought the tools of our lives and we built something together. I'm also grateful for the leadership of each of my participants; I learned from them too, often in the silent wisdom of a shared experience.

It was inspiring, sometimes scary, and sometimes wild and completely outrageous. The final night party will live on in memory. You just had to be there I guess. Creativity on the spot, taken to the edge, and then some. Durango, Colorado will never be the same.

The theme was "Edges." We were led to the edge, we went to the edge, and we flew. I can hardly wait to see what we get to do next year.*

[Editor's Note: *Now, Take One More Step* is about Phil Sandahl's experience during an advanced coaching seminar held in Durango, Colorado. The Edges 2001 workshop will be held September 16th through September 20th in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The theme is "Spirit in Action." For more information contact Dan Petersen at dan@frontier.net or call 970-259-1223.]

Phil Sandahl currently lives in Japan, on purpose. He is an international coach and trainer for the Coaches Training Institute and co-author of Co-Active Coaching: New Skills for Coaching People Toward Success in Work and Life. In his private practice, The Inspired Life, Phil works with clients to find and live fully at the growing edge of their lives.

On Purpose: The Journey Continues

by Kevin Winge

Four years ago I wrote an article for *On Purpose* called “Life’s Snooze Alarm.” In it I described my journey to discover fulfilling, “on purpose” work for me. At that time, I was self-employed, I was making good money and I had achieved a part of the American dream. I was also miserable. I was slumbering through my days, only half awake to my potential. I was ready for a change. It was time for me to stop hitting life’s “snooze alarm” and get on with my life.

Spurred by The Inventure Group’s Working on Purpose quiz, I realized that I needed to make some drastic changes. I created my personal purpose statement: “To do work that matters with people I like.” Within weeks of creating my purpose statement, I learned that Open Arms of Minnesota, a non-profit, social service organization which prepares and delivers food to people with HIV and AIDS, was searching for an administrative director. My resume got me the interview; my passionate desire to make a contribution in the lives of people with AIDS got me the job.

During the past four years, my work with Open Arms has continued to expand and grow. In 2000 Open Arms delivered over 57,000 meals to people with HIV/AIDS in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area. This April we will set an all-time record for deliveries, so the need continues to be strong. I have also developed relationships with clients, volunteers, board members and community activists who share my purpose and passion for the work we do.

And now my work with Open Arms has also extended beyond the Twin Cities. A year ago I attended the International AIDS Conference in Durban, South Africa. This was the first time the conference had ever been held in a developing country. The journey to South Africa broadened my awareness of the truly global pandemic AIDS has become. And it awakened in me a new challenge for expanding my purpose. Could I do

work that matters with people I like in a broader scope? How could I step up to the new challenge before me—the need for helping AIDS/HIV sufferers in Africa?

Since the advances in drugs and other treatments here in the United States have prolonged the lives of many with HIV, a certain complacency has developed. How could I bring home the story of the impact that this disease is having in other parts of the world?

The statistical realities of this problem are staggering.

- 17 million people in Africa have already died from HIV.
- Over 33 1/2 million people are affected with AIDS/HIV worldwide.
- Of those, 25 million are in sub-Saharan Africa.
- By the year 2010, there will be 12 million AIDS orphans.
- The *New York Times* and *National Public Radio* both recently reported that 25 percent of the adult population in South Africa have HIV.

But somehow, those millions of people in these statistics are just numbers; they don’t seem real to us here in America. How could I put a human face to the statistics, to engage people in the need to do this “work that matters” in South Africa?

With supporters and friends of Open Arms, I returned to South Africa in February to explore how Open Arms might assist with the terrible toll that AIDS is taking on Africa. And during that trip, for those of us traveling together, the impact of AIDS became very real. Through journal writing, I hoped to put the much-needed human face to the ravages of HIV/AIDS in South Africa.

*Guguletu, South Africa
February 4, 2001*

With a sweep of her hand a friend discounted our last visit to South Africa in July of 2000 by saying, "People there just don't respect life the same way we do." I wish she could have been with us today.

We began the morning in Guguletu, a township of 350,000 people located outside of Cape Town. We went to Guguletu this Sunday to attend services in Rev. Spiwo Xapile's Presbyterian Church. Minutes after the service began it was disrupted by the sudden explosive wailing of a woman who was quickly led from the church, sobbing all the way. Two hours later the service would end and we would discover that the distraught woman had just learned that a family member had died of AIDS earlier in the day. Another two hours would find us sitting in the room where the woman had died.

Rev. Spiwo drove us around Guguletu following the service in his church this morning. Eventually he stopped in front of a home where people literally overflowed from the house, into the yard and street. We had come, Spiwo said, to make a "bereavement call." The Americans all told Spiwo that he should pay his respects and we would wait in the car, but Spiwo would hear none of it.

We got out of the car and followed the minister as he snaked his way through the mourners, into the house and the tiny, sweltering bedroom where the young woman had died. The deceased woman's mother slouched on a mattress on the floor, surrounded and supported by other women, covered with blankets in the summer heat, a box of tissues on her lap.

We extended our condolences to the women on the bed and the other mourners who sat on benches that lined the walls of the bedroom. The other mourners offered us their chairs or spots on the benches and we sat and listened as Spiwo spoke and prayed in Xhosa with the family. After Spiwo finished his prayer, the dead woman's father rose from his seat and thanked us—the minister and these strangers

from America—for coming to their home to be with them. He then began to talk about his daughter.

Rochelle was 23 when she died twelve hours before in the very room where we now gathered. The youngest of five children, her father didn't mention HIV/AIDS. He said Rochelle died of a "swollen heart." Her mother's favorite, Rochelle had matriculated and continued her education studying computers. The family could find only two photos of Rochelle to show us, one as a young girl in public school and one taken much more recently, but before Rochelle became visibly ill.

Rochelle's father said that he hoped the funeral could be in a week, but it might have to wait for two weeks. Rochelle's sister, who lives in Port Elizabeth, won't be paid for two weeks so she won't have the money until then to travel to Guguletu for the funeral. Rochelle's father doesn't want to wait that long because the family doesn't have the money for the funeral, let alone an extended bereavement period. The funeral could cost 5,000 Rand, a little more than \$700 American. But the family must also pay for food and drink for all the mourners who stop by the house, and mourners will come every day until Rochelle is buried.

During our visit we were served homemade ginger beer. Our refreshments would be added to the costs of a death that the family already could not afford. Later, Spiwo would tell us that casual acquaintances will often call on bereaved families because they have no food in their homes. And people know that there will always be food at a house in mourning.

Rev. Spiwo summed up our day: "You ask me what AIDS does to families—it destroys them. By the time they die, the family is finished. By the time they die, all that they worked for is gone. And if the family suffers, the community suffers. With the absence of food, they go very fast. No one in Guguletu could afford the drugs. There is no morphine at the end of life. There are pain tablets. Aspirin. What destroys me as a pastor is this—it's a very lonely death."

I've read that, "Purpose is a direction like West. No matter how far West you go, there is still more West to travel." In this purposeful work that I do, there is still "West" for me to go. But when you travel "on purpose" the journey isn't tiring. I wake up each day feeling new energy for the journey ahead.

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Dear Inventure Coach:

I am a recent college graduate and am working on finding the right work for me. I'm searching for the whistle in my work! That has led me to try several different jobs. How do I deal with those people around me who want me to find one job and stick with it? It's frustrating to hear comments like, "What's your job today, Vicky?" What can I tell them?

*Sincerely,
Searching for the Whistle*

Dear Searching,

It's wise, in fact, when people are searching for their right livelihood, to try several options before they discover what makes them whistle while they work. Studies show that only about one in five people have found what they consider to be the right work for them—work that truly plays to their strengths and fulfills their passions. So the journey

that you've chosen for yourself can sometimes feel lonely. One of the keys in finding the right work is to develop a strong support system. Surround yourself with people who understand your goals and will encourage and challenge you.

I recommend that you develop your own "Board of Advisors." Just as an organization has a board of directors, you can "elect" your own group of trusted people to offer you counsel and support. Your board of advisors may only have one thing in common—you. But they often share some common traits. Great advisors:

- are interested (versus interesting)
- care (versus cure)
- ask great questions
- listen
- hold you to your commitments and promises

People you might include are your spouse/partner, friends, relatives, colleagues, models and mentors, etc. Ask these people to play various roles—listeners, encouragers, wisdom holders, problem-solvers, integrity checkers.

Who will you ask to be on your board of advisors? Make a list today! Then talk with the people on your list and ask them how they would like to contribute to your board. Take advantage of the support they can provide and the expertise they bring. And they will be flattered to know you think so highly of them!

You don't need to go it alone. The path to finding right work for you is a rewarding journey—and one you can share with others to help you!

Working on Purpose Quiz

The following quiz inspired Kevin Winge to reinvent his work life to make it more fulfilling and “on purpose.” It is designed to help you evaluate the level of satisfaction you feel about your current work. Answer each question by filling in the percentage of time you feel each of the following applies in your current work.

10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

1. I use my knowledge in my area/field. _____
2. I use my most enjoyed talents. _____
3. I feel passionate about my work. _____
4. I feel a personal sense of purpose in my work. _____
5. I feel like I’m growing and developing my talents. _____
6. I am participating in the critical decisions about my work. _____
7. I feel like I’m relating well with my leader or manager. _____
8. I feel like I’m relating well with the people I work with. _____
9. I feel genuinely motivated to get up and go to work. _____
10. I feel I have a healthy future in this organization. _____

In what areas have you given yourself a high score? Where are the gaps between the present and your ideal self?

These questions are not the only ones you should be asking yourself. Whether or not your answers indicate a need for growth or change, it’s a good idea to periodically ask the questions of yourself.

To learn more about purposeful work, visit The Inventure Group’s Web site at www.inventuregroup.com. An on-line version of the quiz is available. The Web site also includes resources for you to define and develop what “on purpose” work is for you.

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