

TAKE AIM.



A Focused Approach to
Achieving a Meaningful Career

STEVE RICCIO

To my mother, Norma. Thank you for your
relentless encouragement.

To my father, Tony. Thank you for instilling in me
a work ethic to serve others.

While you have both moved on from this world,
your legacy still lives on.

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INTRODUCTION

“The more you try to do,
the less you actually accomplish.”

Chris McChesney & Sean Covey, *The Four Disciplines of Execution*

I have the fortune to work with two primary groups of individuals, undergraduate students and working professionals. As a professor in the International Business and Management department at Dickinson College, I am blessed with the opportunity to teach, advise, and mentor young individuals as they grapple with possible professions that align with their passion and skill set. On the opposite end of the career spectrum are the working professionals. As a consultant and coach, I have had the pleasure to support the development of teams and organizations through workshops, retreats, and group coaching. I have also presented at national conferences working with current and aspiring leaders to navigate interpersonal and cultural challenges while looking for strategies to motivate their teams. In addition, I have also spent hundreds of hours coaching from recent college graduates in the early stages of their professions to business executives who wish to leave a legacy as they approach the end of the careers.

What is one thing all of these individuals have in common?

They are all busy.



“It’s not enough to be busy.
So are the ants. The question is,
“What are we busy about?”

Henry David Thoreau

Thoreau wrote the passage above to a friend back in 1857 but the quote has stood the test of time and one can argue is more relevant now given the pace of today’s frantic lifestyle. The continuous introduction of new technology is designed to make our lives more “productive”. Can we honestly say that this has happened? If you, in fact, believe this to be the case, then what do we do with the additional time that we supposedly gain? That’s right...we find more things to occupy our time. It is a vicious cycle very few have been able to break. At the end of each day, we find ourselves exhausted by the work we have completed. However, more and more of us are feeling unfulfilled in the professions we occupy.

Whenever I have the opportunity, I like to share with my students the alarming level of disengagement among employees, not only in the United States but also around the world. The Gallup Organization’s most recent State of the Global Workplace report, reveals that 85% of global employees are either “not engaged” or “actively disengaged” in their work. Yes, 85%! At your next meeting, look across the room. Only 1 in 7 of those around you truly enjoy what they do. They might be busy but don’t mistaken this for one moment as being fulfilled.

While, I would argue, it is the responsibility of employers to provide jobs that offer opportunity, development, and a sense of purpose, tragically very few do so. As a human resource and organizational development professional, I find this to be the #1 travesty in today’s workplace and is what provides the fuel to write this book. This fuel is based on my own personal frustrations from the first half of my own career as well a mission to help others not make the same mistakes that I made.

THE ORIGINS OF TAKE AIM.

Listen, I have been there. In the first 20 years of my career, I recall what seems like an endless list of assignments that I had to complete although I know it added little to no value to the organization I was working for at the time. Before beginning my career in higher education, I spent several years working in the management consulting field. In many ways, I still felt like a student learning about the nuances of various workplace cultures and challenges of the clients I served. Some of the engagements I was involved in were so large involving several people and locations over an extended period of time. My days were filled with being busy yet lacked a real purpose. I was working up to 70 hours a week barricaded in make-shift workspaces at client locations. I recall being asked to join a project for a short period of time and my desk was a Dell computer box. Unfortunately, I did not have coaches or

mentors to help me view my career from a different perspective. Instead, I surrounded myself with “insiders” within my profession that advised me to just keep doing what you are doing and good things will happen.

Think of the number of people that you know that talk about their career as “a necessary evil.” I once spoke with a former colleague who said “I work to live, I don’t live to work.” I have to tell you I was troubled by this comment. I could tell by the remark and his body language that he was not at all engaged in his work. Busy...yes; engaged...no. In fact, within three months, he left the organization.

As my students ponder their futures after completing their undergraduate studies, I challenge them to identify a vocation that is going to provide for them a sense of purpose. This is much different from a sense of accomplishment. We can all accomplish tasks. We do so everyday from writing and responding to email, creating reports, and attending meetings. However, accomplishment alone does not provide us a meaningful career.

I consider myself lucky in many ways. While I did not identify a purpose until several years into my career, I now have one and for that, I am forever grateful I now have one which has dramatically changed my life. Sadly, many people never find purpose in their work which is quite troublesome. Please don’t let that be you. Whether you are 25 or 65, the time to begin working with purpose starts today!

While I am grateful for the many authors who I have researched to write this book, one thing that I noticed is that few share their own personal stories. They may share stories of clients or interview subjects, but few discuss their own personal struggles. This is a missing element. I feel it is important for authors to be vulnerable and to share the challenges they face in the topic in which they are the “expert”. In *Take Aim*, I want to share my own personal strife, briefly in this section and throughout the book. By doing so, this does not make me an expert. In fact, I would be lying if I said that I have this area of my life mastered. Far from it. I think it will always be a challenge. A challenge I will embrace with both arms. By sharing our personal experiences, it makes us seem human which I hope, in this instance, provides a deeper connection to the reader. In addition to my own experiences, I will share stories of clients that I have coached who have struggled in searching meaning in their career and life in general.

LESSONS FROM A FATHER

Our personalities, of course, are shaped in many ways by our experiences. You might be several years (or decades – like me) removed from your childhood, but I’m sure some images are lasting as if the experience occurred a week ago. I will share my own image with you nearly forty years later.

I grew up in a small town in central Pennsylvania where the winters are long but not typically harsh. Growing up, however, we had a stretch of three winters in four years that were downright brutal. Schools were closed for weeks at a time and everyone was stuck in their houses because of travel restrictions. Back then, there was no Internet or unlimited streaming options to keep us entertained.

My father, Tony Riccio, was self-employed. He owned a mobile home service business providing general contracting, electrical, plumbing, and heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC)

services to name a few. Mobile homes were very common in our area. Let's just say I did not grow up in a booming economic region. Therefore, people lived quite modestly.

My dad fixed things. That is what gave him joy. This is what gave him purpose. Heck, he would even hang your ceiling fan for you. My dad was also never one to turn down a buck. On one occasion, a customer said to my father that he would give him five dollars to put together this intricate toy for his grandson. My dad put the toy in his truck, outsourced it to my older brother, and paid him \$2.00. My brother learned about this years later and quickly understood the concept of the middle man.

My father was always busy. He would leave the house most days at 7am and finish at 5pm. My mother, Norma, a brilliant woman and valedictorian of her high school class, worked in our school cafeteria by day and performed the bookkeeping for the business. After dinner, they would go over the payables and the invoices that were to be sent to customers. My father would also go down in the basement, affectionally known as the "dungeon", to make sure enough supplies were on hand for the next big job. This was life between April and December. Rarely, did we go on a summer vacation. For my father, that was a waste. Not only were we spending money, but this time was preventing him from making money. One year, we went to the beach for vacation. We were supposed to stay the whole week, but we stayed just one night. I remember sitting in the living room where we stayed watching a TV show and I hear, "OK, let's start packing up!" "Huh?" was all I could say. My dad complained that the bed was uncomfortable, but years later I realized what was his actual source of discomfort.

January, February, and March were a different story. No one was calling unless a pipe under their home was frozen or their furnace was not functioning. I knew at an early age that this had a major impact on my father. One day I went down to the "dungeon" to see what he was up to. He was sweeping the basement floor for what seemed like the tenth time that day. I knew something was up. "What's wrong, Pop?", I asked. He looked at me with tears in his eyes and said he is looking to get a second job. His statement shook me and still does as I write these words. Essentially, my father's whole persona was his business; for better or worse. As a child, I always felt a sense of security until that single moment.

Reflecting back on his comment, I realized how interconnected my father's sense of being busy was to his self-worth. My father died in 2003 from kidney cancer at the age of 60. Shortly before he was diagnosed with the disease, he was contemplating "slowing down" and even gave thought to selling his business. Sadly, his terminal condition made the decision for him. It certainly wasn't the end that any of us could imagine.

I think often of whether he felt he lived "a good life". If I had the chance to ask him, I truly feel his answer would be "yes". Not simply because he was busy, but he had a purpose. This included a passion to make people's lives better, and the ability to use his skills to perform a variety of mechanical tasks. Most importantly, he saw a need in his community that he was able to fulfill. I saw this firsthand working for his business throughout high school and college. Nothing made him happier than seeing a customer smile after a job was completed. What I witnessed almost every day of my childhood has been engrained into me as a person and as a professional.

At my father's funeral, so many of his customers came to see us telling stories of how my father helped them in a time of need whether it was sweeping thousands of pounds of snow off their home to prevent their roofs from collapsing or fixing a broken air conditioner for an elderly customer during

a sweltering summer day.

Now think of your own funeral. While not the most pleasant thought, we both know it is event that is guaranteed to occur. When people talk about you to the surviving members of your family, what will they say? What do you want them to say? For me, I don't want someone telling my family that I was busy; constantly on the go. I hope they will be able to tell stories of how I supported them in my work as a professor, coach, and consultant. That I made a difference in my community and church. Simply stated, that I receive similar accolades that were bestowed upon my father several years ago. If that were to happen, then I would have lived a good life.

WHEN WILL YOU BE CONTENT?!?! ---

As I became an adult, I struggled to find meaning in my life for the first twenty-plus years of my career. Looking back, I wish there were resources that could have offered support. Maybe there were, but I grew up believing you just worked. There was no talk about meaning or purpose. Why was I not happy with who I was? I am a first-generation college student and truly grateful for all the blessings and opportunities that have been bestowed upon me. Like many of us, I listed goals and achieved them only to sit down to begin another list. I still wasn't happy despite those recent achievements...only anxious about what I had not achieved. Looking back, I realize there was something so foundational missing.

This pursuit of happiness came in all shapes and sizes, literally. One of my first goals was not professional, but personal. I wanted to lose fifty pounds, nagging weight that accumulated in college and continued post-graduation. It certainly made me physically healthier, but my happiness was short-lived. I wanted something else. Something more. I wanted to be promoted at my firm. I eventually was able to check that box as well. Not happier. And then I wanted to pursue a doctoral degree (NOTE: I was a bit obsessed by this. Not only did I set this as a goal, but I created a plan using Microsoft Project to achieve it). We are told that continuous education leads to growth and opportunity. While true, it doesn't guarantee happiness.

Fast forward several years later on the campus of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln after defending my dissertation in front of my committee members. I recall leaving the academic hall to a level of humidity that early June afternoon that was unmatched.

"I made it," I said to myself. This was the ultimate achievement that was finally going to provide happiness.

Hung up in all my self-praise (and a sport jacket now drenched in perspiration), I remember calling my mother who had always been my "rock" during the difficult times of my life including the loss of my father and spouse during a four-year period of time. Throughout my life, she made sure I always kept an even balance not letting the good or the bad change me as a person. Whether it was winning tennis tournaments or being bullied every day during the 7th grade.

I'm not sure what I was expecting to hear on the other end of the call, but let's just say my euphoria was tempered a bit after we said our "goodbyes". Of course, she was happy for me and understood the mental and emotional struggles I endured during the six-year experience. However, my mother

said something towards the end of our call which was so painful but also so correct which sticks with me to this day.

"You are happy for now." As I hung up the phone, I was disheartened. Walking back to my hotel room with my moist sport jacket and dissertation notes in hand, I reflected on my mother's words. Leading up to this moment, my mother had said to me at some point during each of my recent visits to my childhood home, *"When will you be content?!?!"* This was usually after I came through the back door and began a conversation on a recent project I completed, a promotion, or something extrinsically-related. This was my *"good life"*.

"I made it!" What does that even mean? Why did I work towards a terminal degree? Why was I so interested in being promoted? And why did I really lose the fifty pounds? Looking at my life from 30,000 feet, I realize now I never asked myself "Why?" before engaging in all of these pursuits.

There was this burning desire to achieve. It didn't matter what it was. In fact, after finishing my dissertation, I went through a marathon phase in my life. Did I do this simply for the exercise? I assure you I didn't. 5Ks, 10Ks, and even half-marathons fall under the "Exercise" category. At the risk of offending the avid running community, I believe people register for marathons because something is missing in their lives. I know something was missing from mine. I was running toward happiness...at least I thought.

Phil Knight, founder and chairman of Nike, stated in his popular memoir, *Shoe Dog* that we run because we are afraid to stop. I see his point. I was afraid to stop pursuing things that provided a sense of accomplishment. I figured one of these accomplishments would trigger some form of happiness... eventually. Right?

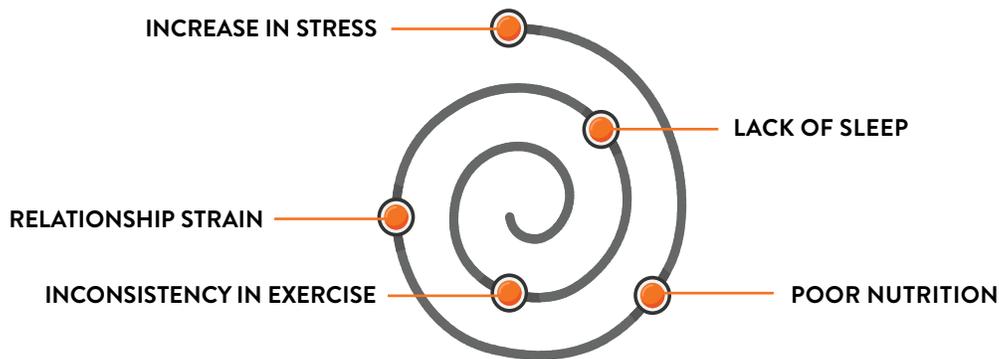
As I was preparing for another marathon in the spring of 2012, my training and short-lived marathon career came to an abrupt end. I was informed that my mother had suddenly passed away. I kept training thinking this would provide some comfort during this difficult time, but the emotional and physical toll became too much. I recall my last long-distance run when I experienced a sharp pain in my foot. Physically, I was in the best shape of my life. Emotionally, probably the worst. To this day, I believe it was my mother telling me that this pursuit, along with all the others, was also not going to provide me with the happiness I sought for so long.

After traveling the proverbial hamster wheel of being busy for the first twenty years of my life, I recalled a day when I was driving home from work in 2015. At the time I was the associate vice president for our human resources department at the college where I now teach. A couple of years earlier, I was promoted to oversee our human resources department. Every day was about simply surviving. I remember many times when I would be constantly checking my email just waiting for the

next “emergency” to arise. While this was a leadership role, I was not in a leadership position. I wasn’t strategic. I was stuck in a tactical, unfulfilled role.

The wear and tear from this method of working was beginning to show. My family saw it and so did my co-workers. A professor I highly respect stopped me one day and asked, “Is everything OK?” She continued, “You used to always smile, and I haven’t seen that for a while.” She was absolute right. The strange thing is I was the last to know. We typically are the last ones to know because we are continually living inside our heads. I see this with clients all the time. However, despite the warning signals I was sending to others, I continued to push through. Why not? This is what I was promoted to do, and I didn’t want to let anyone down. Eventually the stress manifested into a lack of sleep, poor nutrition, and an inconsistent (at best) exercise regime. Other signs included a short temper towards my wife and children. In addition, I would always have a glass of wine when I got home while making dinner. It was my form of relaxing and unwinding from the day. Eventually, the glass of wine multiplied to two. Something wasn’t right, and I was clearly trying to escape something.

My work had little value. Therefore, my life had little value as well.



THE EVENTUAL PATH TO MEANING

One day, I entered my supervisor’s office for our biweekly meeting. I always prepared an agenda for the meeting to discuss successes, challenges, and information that I feel she should know. Shortly after I started the conversation, she interrupted, “Are you happy?” As you can imagine, I was completely caught off guard by her question. How should you answer when your supervisor asks you such a question? You say “Yes”, which is what I did. Let’s just say she wasn’t buying what I was selling. She then asked a different question, “Where do you want to be in five years?” I was now getting a bit defensive. Was she trying to push me out of my job? I responded abruptly, “Why do you ask?” Her response will stick with me until the day I take my last breath.

She told me how she believed that I was not myself in my role. At the time, I was also an adjunct professor teaching one class per year in our International Business & Management department, where I now teach full-time. She continued, “I notice how excited you are when you discuss your teaching, but that is not the case as the head of HR. It feels like a grind for you.” I was still questioning my supervisor’s motive after our conversation. Did she not have confidence in me to do

the job? Also, she was new to the college. Maybe she wanted to appoint her own HR person. My initial response was to double-down and work harder to prove her wrong.

A week later she called me into her office. “What now?” I remember asking myself. Almost knowing that I was questioning her intentions, she said, “I want my people to be happy. I want you to be happy.” She told me that our Provost was interested in talking with me about a teaching position that opened in the department where I was an adjunct. Several dynamics including an increase in student demand led to this opening.

What if the Provost offered me the position? Would this be admitting defeat? How would it look to others that an associate vice president is now a member of the faculty? Would it be considered a demotion? As I was thinking in advance of my conversation with our Provost, I gratefully was offered a moment of clarity that changed my life.

“My work wasn’t about a position title, money, or any other extrinsic motivator. It was about doing what I love and making a difference in the lives of others.”

Sure, people were going to wonder what happened and make assumptions. And they did. I remember hearing comments including, “Most people move from faculty to administration, not the other way around.” Those comments were out of my control and would have been foolish to have that consume my attention. A bigger concern was the reality of a reduced salary. While I had a twenty year career, I was still considered a new faculty member. This required more financial discipline than ever before with a family of five.

WHO SHOULD READ TAKE AIM?

If you have read the introduction and can relate to the personal experiences that I shared, I would encourage you to continue. Certainly, the book is for anyone who has struggled to find meaning in their life, regardless of age. If we are fortunate enough, we will be given the gift to share our passion and skill with the world to make a difference. Whatever life stage you currently occupy now, *Take Aim*. will provide you with a map to take you down the road to significance.

Tomorrow is our “Day 1” which reminds me of a lyric in Matthew West’s song with the same title:

*See my hourglass is upside down
My someday soon is here and now*

CHAPTER 1

THE PERILS OF BUSYNESS

“Have you noticed that even the busiest people are never too busy to take time to tell you how busy they are?”

One of my favorite episodes of the sitcom Seinfeld was when George Costanza was working for the New York Yankees and used the tactic of looking annoyed to indicate to his co-workers that he was busy when he really wasn't. I think back to that episode when I see how people communicate, verbally and non-verbally, when they are busy. They look annoyed, flustered, and overwhelmed. Unlike George, they actually are quite busy. But why? Below, I will share two, all too common exchanges I have had. One involves a student. The other is with a client.



THE BUSYNESS STUDENT

In my role as a professor, I advise more than fifty undergraduate students at a time coaching them along the way as they complete their degree requirements. In most instances, the conversations are much deeper and involve potential locations to study abroad, internship opportunities, and potential career paths. My advisees and I talk about a wide variety of topics. However, one thing we will not discuss is how busy they are. Let me explain by sharing the following story.

There is a student that I advised who recently graduated from our International Business & Management program. I will refer to him as Justin. To Justin's credit, he regularly scheduled meetings during my office hours to discuss his classes, challenges, and goals. I always look forward to meeting with students who have their "eye on the prize" reflecting on their experiences while articulating their future aspirations. Justin was no different. As you can imagine, he excelled academically and is involved (probably too involved) in several co-curricular activities. When he arrived to my office for his scheduled appointment, I would ask him how he has been since our last conversation.

The response I typically receive is either, *"I am super busy"* or *"Things are crazy."* What then followed was the litany of tasks and pursuits which filled up his day and evenings which supported his busyness and craziness. Quite frankly, he was all over the place lacking intentionality in any one activity.

During his last week on campus, Justin came to see me one last time before his graduation. By this time, finals concluded and papers were submitted. All that was left for Justin was to pick up his cap and gown and literally and figuratively pack up his four-year experience. I expected a different tone to our conversation. One of relief, satisfaction, and happiness. Instead, he began with a similar introduction to our previous conversations. What followed was his updated list from making sure his family had graduation tickets to his series of job interviews in the upcoming weeks. Once again, I kept hearing "I'm super busy" and "Things are crazy."

I will admit, I did not practice my active listening skills during that conversation. In fact, I recall "tuning out" and asking if I should provide Justin one more life lesson before receiving his diploma. I reentered our conversation when Justin said, "I'm also busy with..." Right then, without hesitation, I said, "Justin please stop for a second." What followed was an awkward moment of silence.

I can tell by the look on his face that he was stunned, and I wasn't sure where I was going to go with our conversation. Might I offend Justin? Of course. However, my motive not to offend. It was to help Justin as he makes his transition to the working world. Then I began, "Justin, you know I have always enjoyed our conversations." With illustrating a half-smile, he knew someone else was about to follow. I continued, "However, I feel like every time we have met, you began by telling me how busy you have been." I could tell simply by his non-verbal reaction that he was unaware what implications this could have on him both personally and professionally. Feeling in some way that he offended me, he offered an apology while at the same time justifying his action. "I'm sorry," he said. "I just wanted to share with you everything I was experiencing." I told him I was not looking for an apology. Instead, I wanted him to gain an awareness of how he was presenting himself to others. If Justin continues to instill this busy narrative to future employers, he could miss out on rewarding career opportunities and be viewed as someone who is easily stressed.

You might be thinking, “Is this guy really this heartless?” or “Is this how he supports his students?” Before explaining my rationale, I want to transition to the second tale of a coaching client I have had the opportunity to work with for several months. What you will notice is the similarities between the two despite being at two very separate stages in their lives.

THE BUSYNESS EXECUTIVE

One of my clients, we will call her Beth, has been a successful, small business owner for more than twenty years. After working in sales and marketing for ten years following graduation, she decided to create her own marketing firm. Throughout the years, both Beth and her company have built a solid reputation in her community and has served as a trusted partner to several clients. Yet, Beth, like any business owner, can begin to feel burned out from experiences both inside and outside of her company.

Inside the firm, Beth has had to deal with turnover of a few of her best staff members while continuing to offer her clients the best service with the most up-to-date marketing strategies. In addition, Beth is trying to still provide a competitive benefits package for her employees despite the rising cost of healthcare. She is also noticing that many businesses are now using in-house resources to support their marketing efforts which has created an added strain. In her personal life, Beth and her husband have two daughters (ages 14 and 11). Anyone who can relate to the challenges of running a business and family can empathize with Beth. In addition, she serves on the board of a local non-profit, volunteers regularly at her church, and makes time to help with school functions in which her daughters are involved.

I could tell by the first few minutes of our initial meeting that Beth was tired. Not that she was ready to lie down and take a long nap (although she may have taken me up if the offer was made). Her expression said it all. I could also tell by the questionnaire I asked her to complete before we met that she was burning the candles at both ends. In fact, the candle itself was on fire as well.

When I first meet with clients, I want to learn more about them asking questions that go a bit deeper than the inventory I ask them to complete. This was an opportunity for Beth to lay out everything that was going on in her life. And sadly, she reflected on her experiences, both personally and professionally, negatively. Even her experiences with her daughters. Of course, Beth loves her daughters very much but their after school activities and other commitments were becoming checkboxes within Beth’s massive to-do list. She was overcommitted and lacked the ability to determine what was important.

After Beth finished with her introduction, there was a sense of relief and despair. I appreciated her degree of openness because in order to make effective change, there had to be a foundation of trust established. However, I know Beth wanted more than a cheerleader telling her that she is “doing great” and to keep on fighting. She wanted to change.

“May I make a couple of observations?”, I asked. “Of course,” Beth replied. She seemed excited yet unsure of what was to follow. I began first by telling her how she looked exhausted. Immediately Beth became emotional as if she was waiting for someone acknowledge how she felt. I also validated

and legitimized why she felt the way she did. She had every right to feel this way at this moment.

My second observation was more direct. While I appreciated Beth’s vulnerability the moment we met, I was concerned how she was just showing up for all of her relationships in her life including her family, staff, and clients. I said, “You seem to have the mindset of a firefighter with an extinguisher in hand ready to put out any flames that you see.” Beth found this humorous, yet all too true. She replied, “I know my husband and girls know that I’m stressed.” She also has acknowledged how the culture in her office has changed but never really was able to pinpoint the root cause. “Things are just really busy lately,” she added.

DON’T LET BUSYNESS BE YOUR BRAND

Justin and Beth. Thirty years apart from one another but having the same sense of feeling overwhelmed and scattered. In both instances, I shared with them the perception that were projecting when they said they were busy. To me, and I am sure to others, they are casting this image that they cannot possibly take on one more responsibility. In both instances, they were a “house of cards” ready to collapse. I could see it in their body language with their eyes giving me this helpless gaze while their shoulders slumped.

Regardless of the stage of life you currently occupy, when you work with a purpose your energy is used toward accomplishing great things that align with your passion, skillset, and a drive to making a difference in your local or even larger community. When you are void of purpose, you simply just try to get through the day. There is never an end to the “lather, rinse, repeat” lifestyle.

MISTAKING BUSY FOR PRODUCTIVE

In 2002, Harvard Business Review published the results of a groundbreaking ten-year study titled “Beware the Busy Manager” examining manager behavior within several well-known, organizations including LG Electronics, Lufthansa, and Sony. The authors of the study, Heike Bruch and Sumantra Ghoshal, examined both focus and energy as two core components needed to successfully manage organizations.

Through their research and observations, Bruch and Sumantra divided the managers involved in the study into one of four categories:

I. The Procrastinators (Low Energy, Low Focus)

This group of employees complied with the basic requirements of their position in terms of communicating, attending meetings, and managing day-to-day responsibilities. However, they were known more for their inaction than action. Authors believed this inaction was a result of fear, insecurity, or a lack of confidence due to personality traits, organizational culture, or a combination of the two. **The Procrastinators comprised 30 percent of the managers in the study.**

2. The Disengaged (Low Energy, High Focus)

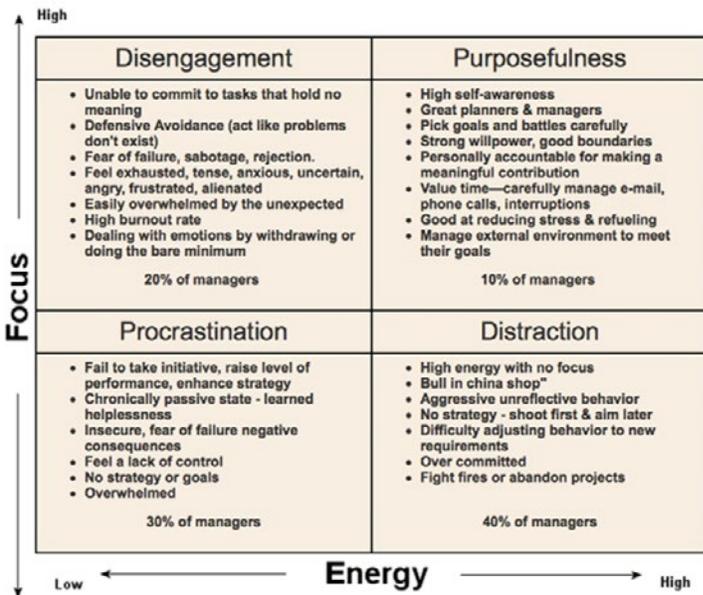
These managers possessed a concentrated attention to get a task completed. However, while their focus was high, they were exhausted by the organization culture and felt the jobs they were asked to perform offered very little meaning to them. **The Disengaged comprised 20 percent of the managers in the study.**

3. The Distracted (High Energy, Low Focus)

Managers in this category lack a deep focus and concentration on any one project. They are in “high transactional” mode moving continuously from one priority to another. This “ready, fire, aim” approach has a lasting effect on their wellbeing as well as their direct reports. **The Distracted comprised a whopping 40 percent of the managers in the study.**

4. The Purposeful (High Energy, High Focus)

Managers in this exclusive category find great meaning in their work. They tend to not get bogged down in workplace politics and have little appetite for trivial activities that add little to no value. Furthermore, they think ahead planning their days and weeks allowing them to be proactive about how they spend their precious time. **The Purposeful comprised of only 10 percent of the managers in the study.**



Only 1 in 10 managers in the study were operating in a state of “Purposefulness”! While the study occurred nearly twenty years ago, I feel it is safe to say that not much has changed. In fact, if anything, it has gotten worse. Think of the negative impact on organizations and all the human resources that fall into the remaining ninety percent. In the latest Gallup poll, sixty percent of respondents were dissatisfied with the current state of businesses.

EXERCISE – DISENGAGED, PROCRASTINATOR, DISTRACTED, OR PURPOSEFUL?



In the diagram on the previous page, circle the descriptions within each of the four quadrants if it accurately describes the current state of how you perform your work. As with any exercise, be honest with yourself. After completing, answer the following questions below:

1. Based on the descriptions you circled, which category best describes you currently?

2. Does this surprise you? Why? Why not?

3. Based on the results, what actions can you take to operate in more of a Purposefulness state in your work. NOTE: Even if you placed yourself in the Purposefulness category, consider actions that can increase your effectiveness even more.

OUR “QUICK FIX MENTALITY”

I have started a coaching and consulting firm that focuses on purposeful living, both personally and professionally. I facilitate national conferences and workshops to help professionals finding more meaning in their work. Sadly, I encounter too many individuals looking for a quick fix or a “hack” to becoming more efficient. I remember receiving a survey response prior to a higher education conference where I asked participants to share one thing they would like to take away from their experience. One respondent stated,

“I want to be able to do things faster, better and cheaper.”

I had to double check to make sure I wasn’t teaching a conference to a bunch of manufacturing supervisors.

When *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* was first published in 1989, Stephen Covey challenged the reader to abandon the “quick fix” approach to personal development, or the Personality Ethic. Unfortunately, as a society, I feel we have doubled-down on our “results-now mindset” now more than ever. This, of course, has been compounded by the creation and evolution (many may argue this) of the Internet, social media, and other communication technologies that were designed to improve our lives and relationships.

THE PHYSIOLOGICAL IMPACT OF BEING BUSY

In July 2018, a research study was posted in The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) which studied the digital media habits of more than 2,500 high school students. It is important to note that no student had symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) when the research began. Researchers included 14 digital media activities which included texting, checking or posting on social media, streaming/downloading music, browsing images/videos online, liking or commenting on posts, chatting online, streaming shows or movies, playing games (alone or with others), online shopping, video chatting, and reading blogs or articles online. Students were asked how often they participated in the 14 activities from “never” to “many times a day.”

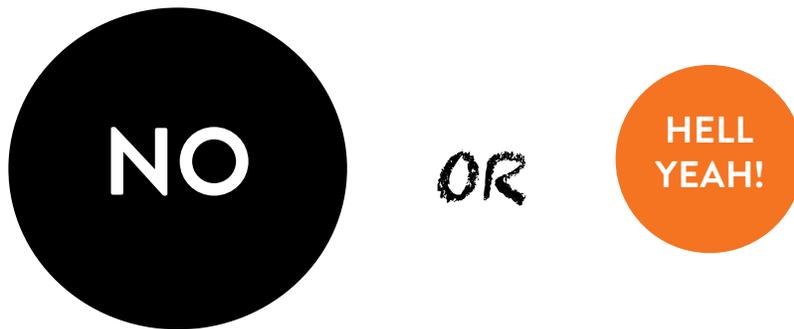
Throughout a period of two years, researchers corresponded with the students regularly to receive updates on their digital media use while observing for symptoms of ADHD. Their results were quite interesting. 4.6 percent of the teens that didn’t report any high-frequency use of digital media had ADHD symptoms by the conclusion of the study. The number increased to 9.5 percent of students who reported seven high-frequency activities and 10.5 percent of those who admitted high frequency in all fourteen activities. The researchers concluded that frequent digital media exposure increased the risk of ADHD systems by 10%.

One can argue that the exposure to digital media among adults rivals that of teenagers. According to the National Institute on Mental Health, 4.4 percent of adults (around 8 million) have ADHD but only 1 in 5 seek treatment. Signs of ADHD include forgetfulness, a lack of focus, disorganization, time management issues, a lack of motivation, anxiety, and relationship issues. While most health experts stop short of blaming our personal devices for causing ADHD, they acknowledge that their overuse can result in many of its symptoms.

In the process of writing the book, my family and I visited Niagara Falls for a few days. Those that have visited would probably agree that the Falls are on the short list of natural beauties in North America. However, as we were there simply watching the falls, I found my attention waning looking for the next experience. How sad! Now, I never have been diagnosed with ADHD, but I realized at the moment the harsh reality of how superficial our attention span can be.

DECISION MAKING 101

A number of years ago, a colleague who I deeply respect offered some great advice as I was struggling at the time saying “No” to requests both inside and outside of work. In other words, my attention was being divided into small pieces because I naturally want to please other people. He told me that we either say “Yes!” if we are excited about an opportunity or “Sure, I guess so” if the opportunity doesn’t excite us but we don’t want to disappoint the person who asked us. He said, when presented with such opportunities, see if it elicits a “Hell, yeah!” response that aligns with your passion. If you are not sure, ask the person if you can get back to them instead of deciding on the spot. However, if you know it doesn’t interest you, say “No.” You can simply say it is not the right time. The person may be disappointed but should understand. We all have been there. You may also recommend someone else who might be a better fit and would potentially have an interest in the opportunity. A win-win for all!



Also, look at the size of the circles above. There should be plenty more “No’s” than “Hell Yeah’s!”.

THE ROLE AUDIT

Another culprit of stealing our attention is the number of roles we play in our lives. A couple of years ago, I was working with a client who, as they say, had her hand in everything. She was not working full-time but had a part-time job, served on the board of a local non-profit, was on committees for three other boards, and served her church in multiple capacities. One child was in college and the other was in high school. My client traveled all over the east coast to support her youngest who played his sport at the highest level for his age-group. In addition to this, she was dealing with the difficulties of caring for an aging parent.

I asked my client to complete the same activity I will ask you to complete in a moment. I provided her with a sheet of paper and asked her to describe all the roles that she currently performed in her life on the left side of the paper. After five minutes, she finished having listed thirteen different roles in her life. Since then, I have had clients and students complete this exercise but thirteen remains the record for the number of roles performed by one individual.

The exercise does not conclude there. I now ask individuals to perform the following:

Place a next to roles that currently serve them. I then provide the following prompt, “*Why does this role provide meaning?*”

Place a next to roles that do not currently serve them. I then provide the following prompt, “*Why does this role not give you meaning?*” After they answer the question, I ask if they have any control to change their role. If the answer is “Yes”, I ask how this might happen. If the answer is “No”, I ask them to seriously consider an exit strategy

(NOTE: Categories clients label with an relate to mainly work or volunteer service. Of course roles such as “parent” or “son/daughter” are considered non-negotiables).

At the end of this list of roles, I ask clients to add any roles they don't currently perform but the possibility provides some excitement. My prompt for them is, "What might be missing in your life?" I have had clients include roles such as parent, board member, and mission volunteer. I then invite them to envision when they might assume each of the roles and build an action plan to turn this dream into a reality.

EXERCISE: YOUR ROLE AUDIT



Now it is your turn!

1. List all the roles that you currently perform (e.g. son/daughter, spouse, parent, employee, volunteer, etc.)

- a. -----
- b. -----
- c. -----
- d. -----
- e. -----
- f. -----
- g. -----
- h. -----
- i. -----
- j. -----

2. Place a next to roles that currently serve you. Then answer the following question for each of these roles, "Why does this role provide meaning?"

3. Place a next to roles that do not currently serve you. Then answer the following questions for each of these roles, "Why does this role not give you meaning?", "What might you be able to change about this role to better serve you?", and "What can't you change?" After you answer these questions honestly, you should have clarity on whether or not you should continue in this role.

4. Add any additional roles that you currently do not perform but the possibility of doing so excites you. To assist you, answer the following question, “What might be missing in my life?” After you identified a new possible role or roles, consider the steps that you would need to take.

LOOKING AHEAD

In this next chapter, we are going to follow Ben who is living the life that most of us will find all too common. Instead of thriving, Ben is simply trying to survive each day. Ben finds very little meaning in his work and it shows. What’s worse, this lack of meaning carries into his personal life adding to his state of unfulfillment. At the end of the chapter, I present you with a short quiz, “Are You a Weekend Warrior?”, to measure how intentional you are with living a purposeful life. Regardless of the results, the quiz will offer you a baseline and suggested strategies on how you make improvements over time.

CHAPTER 2

THE WEEKDAY WARRIOR

“Your focus should be on creating an environment where growth can occur and then letting nature take its course.”

Patrick Lencioni, author

Many of you reading this book would categorize yourselves as a “Weekend Warrior”. Usually this individual is ill-prepared for the physical competition that is about to take place at the end of a week such as flag football, basketball, or tennis. You may have “worked out” a few times during the week but the most physical energy you will expend (by far) is during this particular activity. Before each event, you can typically hear the sound of Velcro as middle-aged participants assemble protective braces from one or more of their limbs.

Unfortunately, there was a time when physical, playful exercise during the week was common in everyday life. However, our busy lifestyles have relegated such competitive fun to the weekends, if at all. Our busy schedules prevent us from engaging in daily, fun activities. When we do exercise, we are more susceptible to injuries due to our mostly sedentary lifestyle.

I use the term “Weekday Warrior” in a similar vain as the “Weekend Warrior”. This individual constitutes a significant portion of the 128 million people in the United States that walk out their front doors each day (or night) to a job they may or may not like working for a supervisor they also may or may not like. Like most Weekend Warriors, the Weekday Warrior is also ill-prepared for the events that are about to take place. Instead of protective braces, they come to their work with their phones, coffee, and organizers hoping to get through each day unscathed. Weekday Warriors take part in a “lather, rinse, and repeat” process arriving at work only to look forward to the day’s end.



A DAY IN THE LIFE

Let me introduce you to Ben who epitomizes the Weekday Warrior. As you read about Ben's typical day, see how much you can relate to him through your own experiences.

5:48am



Ben's alarm sounds off for the third time this Monday morning which he set for 5:30am the night before. He has now pressed the "Snooze" button for a third time despite having every intention of starting his week off on the right foot by going to the gym on his way to work. Still half asleep, Ben justifies why it is better to sleep longer than exercise since he was up past 11pm watching the season finale of one of his many favorite Netflix series.

6:30am

Having reset his alarm, Ben finally gets out of bed feeling more tired than before. He stumbles to the shower to get ready for work before going downstairs to briefly see his daughter (Emily) before she walks to the school bus stop.

Seeing the inviting box of sugary cereal his daughter left on the counter, his next move is to get the biggest bowl in the kitchen cabinet, a size which aligns well with his 16 oz. #1 Dad coffee mug the kids gave to him for Father's Day that he puts to good use each morning. With a spoon in one hand and his smart phone in another, he suddenly panics. He forgets that his supervisor called the team together for an 8am meeting. Quickly Ben pours the remainder of his coffee in his travel mug and kisses his wife (Megan) who just arrived home from her 5:30am spin class. Ben rushes out the door just hoping the rush hour traffic will be a little lighter than usual.



8:04am

Ben enters the conference room interrupting his supervisor with a, "So sorry I'm late" greeting blaming his misfortunes on the traffic. Other meeting attendees raise their eyebrows to one another as if to say this is business as usual for Ben. Ben's supervisor frustratingly rewinds the conversation back to the

reason of the meeting for Ben's benefit. Ben sheepishly nods his head in appreciation and participates little in the subsequent discussion. As Ben gets up to leave the meeting, his supervisor asks him to conduct research for a prospective client meeting that will be occurring the following week.

9:05am

Ben arrives in his office and begins to check emails that came in during the weekend along with scanning posts from his social media feeds. He then decides it's time for another cup of coffee. The thought of performing research for yet another potential client does not interest Ben in the least. In fact, it reinforces how much he doesn't enjoy much about his job. However, the position pays well helping to provide Ben and his family with financial security.



12:05pm

After spending the rest of the morning returning email and completing items on his daily "to-do" list void of any true meaningful work, Ben and his colleagues decide to go to the pizzeria across the street which they visit at least once every week.

1:30pm

Fresh off from polishing the daily special (Chicken Parmesan Sub with French fries and a soft drink), Ben returns to his email with his root beer refill in hand to get him through his afternoon. Looking at his watch, Ben begins to think about the meeting he will be leading at the top of the hour. He begins to jot down potential agenda notes in on a notepad.



2:45pm

Ben wraps up the meeting to the delight of his co-workers. If Ben was a smart phone, his screen would be dim indicating he has less than five percent of power remaining due to his lack of engagement in his work as well as the aftermath of his lunch special. Ben checks his phone to find a text message from Megan reminding him to pick up their son, Justin, from basketball practice since she needed to stay late at the school where she teaches.

Like the meeting to start his day, Ben completely forgot that Megan asked him the night before. Ben walks by his supervisor's desk quickly explaining the circumstances while assuring his supervisor he will be working on the project he assigned to him in the evening. Ironically, as Ben pulls out of the parking lot to pick up his son, the song "Another Day" by Paul McCartney is playing on the radio:

*At the office where the papers grow she takes a break
Drinks another coffee and she finds it hard to stay awake
It's just another day
Do do do do do do, it's just another day
Do do do do do do, it's just another day*

5:00pm

With Megan not expected home for another hour and Emily needing to be at her piano lesson for 6pm, Ben performs the modern-day version of hunting and gathering by digging in the bottom of the freezer to find some kind of frozen dinner to heat up.

7:30pm

With everyone now home, Ben's hope for any exercise this day has completely vanished. He powers up his laptop to begin working on the project his boss assigned to him. He's irritated because he has no enthusiasm for this assignment. He also knows he could have worked on this earlier in the day had he managed his day more effectively. Soon Justin comes over to see him. They turn on a cartoon and Ben soon nods off ending his day.



EXERCISE – ARE YOU A WEEKDAY WARRIOR?



Do you find many similarities between Ben’s daily routine and your own? To explore this further, take a moment to complete the following assessment. Rate each of the statements from “1” (Strongly Disagree) to “5” (Strongly Agree).

- I eat a healthy breakfast/lunch/dinner at least 80 percent of the time.
- I exercise (including purposeful walking) at least 30 minutes a day.
- I sleep a minimum of seven hours each night.
- I manage my stress effectively.
- I make time outside of work to participate in enjoyable activities regularly.
- I prioritize my work so time is spent on the most important issues.
- I am punctual for meetings, appointments, etc.
- I plan ahead to avoid working in crisis mode.
- I stay focused and do not allow other people’s urgencies and interruptions dominate my day.
- I feel my work provides personal fulfillment.
- TOTAL SCORE**

45-50 Congratulations! Your work is important to you, but so are other areas of your life including your health and relationships. I would encourage you to continue the practices and periodically complete this exercise again to ensure a healthy balance.

36-44 While you may be proactive in planning your personal and professional obligations, you find yourself spending a considerable amount of time reacting to events and other people’s priorities. Focus on identifying your key priorities and planning ahead accordingly.

35 or Less First, bonus points for being honest with yourself. The good news is that this is a starting point with plenty of opportunity for growth. It will be important for you to find your purpose, values, and goals that will allow you to stay focus on what is most important to you. In addition, always find opportunities for self-care (e.g. meditation, exercise, reading).

LOOKING AHEAD

In this next chapter, I will share my reasoning as to why each of us need a one-page manifesto now more than ever. You will be asked to be honest with yourself to examine how you spend your time throughout the workday. Many of my clients feel they are getting a great deal accomplished each day but question why they aren't as fulfilled in their careers as they would like to be. After the assessment, you will be asked to envision how you might manage your time differently that will allow you to focus on more meaningful projects. Also, the chapter will offer strategies on how to create an environment that limits outside distractions allowing you to engage deeply in important work.

FLAVOR OF THE MONTH

In Chapter 1, I shared findings in which researchers concluded how frequent digital media exposure increased the risk of ADHD symptoms by 10%. Let's go beyond technology for a moment and consider today's workplace in general. Certainly our smartphones play a significant role in our careers, but it is only part of the issue. Thinking in broader terms, reflect for a moment on the mixed messages we receive from our leadership regarding what is a priority. What I like to call "the organizational flavor of the month." One month it might be a relentless dedication to customer service. The following month is a focus on quality. Later, you notice a shift toward being more innovative. Our main form of communication continues to be the low-richness methods of email or instant messaging. In today's service-driven economy, we consider everything a priority impacting the time we spend on activities that will truly bring meaning to our work.

Cal Newport is a computer science professor at Georgetown University and author of the book, *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World*. The main premise of the book is how the vast majority of us subscribe to the shallow work mentality which prevents us from working purposefully. To guide the reader, Newport offers a working definition of both **Shallow Work** and **Deep Work** which are stated below:

Shallow Work: Noncognitively demanding, logistical-style tasks, often performed while distracted. These efforts tend to not create much new value in the world and are easy to replicate.

 Before going any further, I would like you to pause for a moment, read his definition again, and reflect on how often this type of work permeates your own day. Consider how often you check your email, text messages, and social media. Let's put aside technology for a moment as that is not the only culprit. Think of the transactional work that you do on a day-in, day-out basis. Sure, it is still important work, but we have a tendency to gravitate towards this work because either someone else thinks it is a priority or we feel it a low-risk activity that offers some form of job protection. Maybe it is developing that weekly report for your supervisor which you are not even sure if it is still being read. Or maybe you are a small business owner tracking the financials in your organization but seldom give yourself the time to really think about transforming your business to the next level.

In reviewing the definition above, what are your Shallow Work activities?

If you were honest with yourself, how many hours of your work day (on average) do you think you devote to Shallow Work?

In contrast, Newport provides a working definition of Deep Work below:

Deep Work: Professional activities performed in a state of distraction-free concentration that push your cognitive capabilities to their limit. These efforts create new value, improve your skill, and are hard to replicate.

Now, you might feel exhausted by just looking at the first definition while the second definition might offer some excitement and energy. See how Newport characterizes Shallow Work as “tasks” and Deep Work as “activities”. The term “task” conjures up mundane work where you are looking at the clock just waiting to “punch out”. On the other hand, “activities” offer a sense of enthusiasm that can provide meaning to your work. I ask you to again reflect on your “typical day” to identify the types of projects or activities that are fulfilling to you.

In reviewing the definition above, what are your Deep Work activities that you should be focusing on right now?

If you were honest with yourself, how many hours of your work day (on average) do you think you devote to Deep Work activities?

And finally, what circumstances prevent you from spending more time on Deep Work activities?

MAKE TIME FOR MEANINGFUL WORK

When I visit organizations, I am amazed how some can even accomplish the most basic functions in an efficient and effective manner. It is either a mass of cubicles or employees are back-to-back with one another. Many have headphones to limit the disruptions which closes them off from many forms of collaboration. Their physical environment is certainly not distraction-free.

Now let's say you have your own office. Of the hundreds of leaders that I have coached, I would estimate that around 25 percent want to discuss strategies to limit distractions. I once was on a video call with a client who wanted to identify such strategies. As we were having our conversation, I could hear her email notification "pinging" every couple of minutes which followed with her eyes gravitating toward the bottom right part of her computer monitor to check the sender and subject of the email. After fifteen minutes of this, I finally offered, "I have one strategy that you can incorporate right away." We both had a laugh at that moment.

Also, my clients say they want to have an open-door policy for their staff, but feel they are interrupted constantly with questions or requests from their colleagues. Therefore, they conclude that they will not complete any "real work" at the office. They then either use their precious leisure time to attempt to work on longer-term projects or those projects never get completed.

Here is where I challenge my clients. Whether you have your own office or not, you can carve out the time to work on those more meaningful projects. Meaningful projects are those that not only advance your organization but align directly to your purpose (NOTE: We will be developing your purpose statement in the next chapter). When you are engaged in meaningful work, you are exercising your passion and skill while helping a community of people in some way.

To essentially "make time", it starts with having conversation. The first is with your supervisor. Inform him or her of the challenges you face in getting projects completed. Any good supervisor will be empathic and want to listen to your concerns. However, explain not only the challenge but potential solutions. I am seeing more and more supervisors being flexible in terms of where work gets completed. Maybe you are able to work from home for a day a week or find a remote location (e.g. coffee house) near your office. Your supervisor may also make recommendations that you hadn't considered.

Now, let's say you supervise one or more employees. You have already gained support from your supervisor to allow some level of flexibility. Now you have the ability to do the same. This is an opportunity to be honest with your staff letting them know the struggles you face while showing empathy for them as well. As a team, maybe the only thing that changes is to add "Do Not Disturb" time on your individual schedules. However, I don't find this very effective. Instead, encourage your staff to spend at least an hour a day, if possible, to get away from the same environment. Research shows that simply getting up and physically moving has its benefits. In addition, working in a fresh space for a time can give you energy and examine a challenge or idea in a different light.

I certainly understand that not all jobs are designed to get up and walk away for a time. The first that comes to mind is customer service, whether an employee is meeting face-to-face, by phone, or online with a client. Yet, we ask our employees to think outside the box all the time. How can we ask that of them when they are kept in the box all day? Consider job rotation that will allow even the most customer-centered employee to get away and be distraction-free for a period of time. It is an investment that can have serious payoffs in terms of morale and creativity.

WHERE DO YOU SPEND YOUR TIME?

Early in the book, I mentioned the influence Stephen Covey’s work had on my own life (and the lives of so many). In *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Habit 3 is titled *Put First Things First* which asks readers to identify their highest priorities (Covey refers to these as “Big Rocks”) and design their days and weeks accordingly. To help us better understand where we spend our time, he introduces us to his time matrix inviting us to perform an inventory of how we use our most precious commodity.

In the matrix below, you will notice the four quadrants where we have a choice to spend our time along examples of activities in each:

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Quadrant I</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crisis • Pressing problems • Deadline driven projects 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Quadrant II</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship building • Finding new opportunities • Long-term planning • Preventive activities • Personal growth • Recreation
Not Important	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Quadrant III</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interruptions • Emails, calls, meetings • Popular activities • Proximate, pressing matters 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Quadrant IV</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trivia, busy work • Time wasters • Some calls and emails • Pleasant activities

I. Quadrant I (Quadrant of Necessity)

Activities in this quadrant are both urgent and important. As most of you reading this book are in the service industry, this is where we spend the bulk of our day. If you don’t spend much time here, chances are you will be out of a job. For example, we must take care of our customers and meet deadlines in which others are relying on us. However, we can also be too consumed with Quadrant I activities.

2. Quadrant II (Quadrant of Effectiveness)

Similar to Quadrant I, activities in this quadrant are important. However, you will notice in the diagram above that the activities don't have the urgency required of the Quadrant of Necessity. Unfortunately, because there is not this immediate pull, we tend to put off these important activities to a later date, if at all.

3. Quadrant III (Quadrant of Deception)

This category includes activities that are urgent, but not important. Simply put, it is focusing on other people's priorities. Examples could include being on a task force because someone thought you would be a good addition. However, the role lacks fulfillment. It could also include subtle activities including being on an email string that is requiring your attention but you feel lacks the importance that others give the issue. This also includes the "pop in" of colleagues that distract you from working purposefully.

4. Quadrant IV (Quadrant of Waste)

This includes any activity that is both not-urgent and not-important. I have seen some of the most productive people fall victim to Quadrant IV. Covey explains that most people spend their days in Quadrants I and III to the point of exhaustion. Any free moment is then spent on wasteful activities that don't require deep thought such as processing email, web browsing, and checking social media.

EXERCISE – YOUR PERSONAL TIME MATRIX



Using the matrix above, think of your "typical workday" and write the percentage of time that you spend in each of the four categories below (equaling 100%):

Quadrant I	<input type="text"/>
Quadrant II	<input type="text"/>
Quadrant III	<input type="text"/>
Quadrant IV	<input type="text"/>
Total:	100%

Covey's sage advice for us is to live "north of the line", the line that separates QI & II from QIII & IV. If you are spending 75% or more of your time here, fantastic! If it is less, what changes can you make to shift your time to the first two quadrants. Maybe it is opting out of meetings that you feel add little to no value or simply unsubscribing to emails that only serve the purpose of distracting you from meaningful work.

I'd like to make one additional point about Quadrant I, Necessity. We are living in a service economy in which most of us must, well...serve. However, I would argue that some of the urgency that is created can be prevented but spending additional time in Quadrant II, Effectiveness. In other words, by being proactive, we can limit the reactivity that can dominate our day.

To conclude this chapter, I want to refer back to Cal Newport's *Deep Work* for a moment. In addition to offering the definitions above to contrast Deep Work for Shallow Work, he also provides the reader with a hypothesis to illustrate the troubling state of today's workplace:

The Deep Work Hypothesis: The ability to perform deep work is becoming increasingly rare at exactly the same time it is becoming increasingly valuable in our economy. As a consequence, the few who cultivate this skill, and then make it the core of their working life, will thrive.

QUESTION FOR REFLECTION

Newport's premise articulates the theme of this book. So my question for you at this stage is, "How is the way you are going about your work now serving you?"

If your response is, "Not very well," then let's continue and begin to create your manifesto that will not only allow you to take control of your day but, more importantly, will help you have a meaningful career.

LOOKING AHEAD

As we continue to move forward, we now transition to actually putting together the first, and most essential piece of your Meaning Manifesto, your purpose statement. There is not a more important QI activity than this. A word of caution before we begin. Developing a purpose statement is not something to add to your "to do" list like picking up your laundry. This will require time and focused concentration. No worries, I will provide you with exercises to help you through this process. Regardless of how busy you are, I urge you to find some space in your schedule, even if it is just fifteen minutes at a time, to work on your purpose statement. Be persistent. Share your experience with someone close to help you gain clarity. Let's get started.

CHAPTER 4

PURPOSE

“The heart of human excellence often begins to beat when you discover a pursuit that absorbs you, frees you, challenges you, or gives you a sense of meaning, joy, or passion.”

Terry Orlick, professor, author

Since becoming a full-time professor in 2015, I have had multiple opportunities to teach a first-year seminar to incoming students titled, “Finding Meaning: An Introspective Examination of Life’s Purpose and Beyond.” Early in the semester, I invited students to create an initial purpose statement they could reflect on by journaling throughout the course of a week. As you can imagine, this was no easy task for eighteen-year olds, most only days removed from leaving the comfort of their childhood homes. Some gave the standard, but elusive “be happy”, a natural response among late teens as well as individuals who are well into their professional careers. Other students listed a goal that they wanted to accomplish as their purpose, not knowing the difference between the two. However, there was one response unlike any other from a student from Seoul, South Korea that I will not forget any time soon.

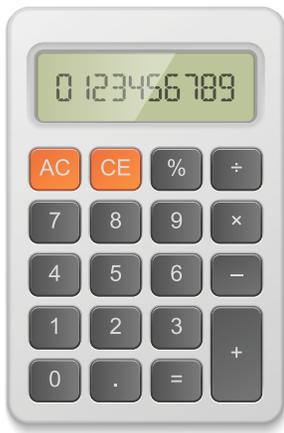
His purpose? “Eat breakfast every day.” Once he said this, I paused and said nothing creating this awkward moment for all of us in class. Some giggled while others had a similar reaction to mine. Like me, they stared waiting for more. Did he simply not like the activity? The course? The professor? Was he simply testing me to see how I would react early in the semester? Actually, if this was an exam, the answer would be “E - none of the above”.

Later that day he came to see me during my office hours to explain his rationale. I could tell he just needed to respond to the bewilderment I displayed in class earlier that day. He said, “If I eat breakfast every day, this will help me start my day right.” After hearing this, I knew we still had some work to do, but I could tell he was onto something.

A SOBERING CALCULATION

When I am asked by organizations, teams, and professional groups to speak on topics related to purpose, goal setting, and even time management, I typically begin each workshop with an activity to engage the learner early in the process while also driving home the point that our time on this earth is finite. This is a adaption of an exercise that I first learned from Richard Leider in his book, *The Power of Purpose*.

In my workshops, I ask participants to take out their smart phones and open the calculator app and perform a simple calculation. I will ask you to do the same and follow the instructions below:



STEP 1 – Multiply Your Current Age x 365 (Days in a Year)

STEP 2 – 29,000* – (Step One Calculation)

*The average lifespan in the US is approximately 79 years of age which equates to 28,835 days.

Therefore, if you are 50 years old, you would multiple 50 x 365 to equal 18,250. That is the approximate number of days that you have lived. This step is sobering enough for most. Once they subtract that number from 29,000, they realize they have 10,750 days to live in using the average lifespan.

My point in this exercise is not to depress my audience which would not be a smart tactic for any presenter. I also don't wish to be overly morbid. The point is, in the case of this 50 year old who may have less than 11,000 days left on this earth, he or she is playing in the 3rd quarter to borrow a sports reference. Leider says this calculation is the total number of days you have left to live your purpose.

A couple of points to make. Certainly, we are not guaranteed our next breath, so this number can be much less. Of course, if you are blessed with great health and genetics, the number can be definitely higher. Also, even when I present to a group of young professionals in their 20s, they are even shocked by the calculation.

The goal of this exercise is to point out that regardless of the journey you have taken throughout your life, you have the power to determine your destiny. Certainly there will be days in which you struggle to find meaning. However, if you seek clarity as you continue in your journey, that is create your purpose statement, in time you will discover the meaning of your life.

THE MISSING LINK

Since transitioning to teaching, I have made it a priority to speak with students identifying a purpose that combines their skills and passion that will help others along the way. I have also been fortunate enough to teach a first year seminar on two separate occasions titled, “Finding Meaning: An Introspective Examination of Life’s Purpose in College and Beyond” to expose students to this concept of living a meaningful life early in life.



Despite all goals and accomplishments that I mentioned in the introduction, I never asked myself one fundamental question that we all need to ask ourselves, *“What is my true purpose?”* My life changed dramatically when I answered the question. It unleashed a passion I never experienced before in my life.

How do we create a state of peaceful happiness? By defining clearly the reason why we were put on this earth. Only then can we set and achieve goals.

Purpose is not something we can simply bypass or leapfrog to get to happiness. Purpose is a required prerequisite. We are required to spend significant time and energy discovering ourselves, our talents, and our passions in order to attain lasting happiness.

Author Tom Rath in his excellent book, “Are You Fully Charged?” asks us to abandon our pursuit of happiness despite its inclusion in our Declaration of Independence. I agree with this notion. In fact, we can only pursue happiness once we have identified our meaning in life.

PURPOSE → HAPPINESS

THE THREE WHAT’S TO FINDING PURPOSE

What #1: What are your talents?

Whether you are reading this as a college student or are currently in the mid-career phase, this shouldn’t be difficult. Maybe it’s public speaking, a knack for social media, or you are a “numbers person”. If you find this to be difficult, ask those who you trust to provide you with feedback. As a consultant, I remember a manager telling me after a workshop I facilitated that I was “a natural” in that role.

Whether or not that was the case, that was said to me nearly twenty years ago and stays with me today. If you haven't already, establish your "inner circle", a group of trusted individuals who will give you direct, sincere feedback on your overall strengths as well as any limitations.

What #2: What is your passion?

Maybe you have already discovered your talents, but they don't align with your career goals. That's both understandable and quite common yet challenging. What are you passionate about? If this question is somewhat uncomfortable, walk over to your bookshelf and browse the titles to find a theme. Where do you spend much of your time outside of work and family? I have a friend who has a passion for fitness where he spent much of his time outside his job either working out or learning about the profession. The owner of the gym he belonged to saw this and offered him a job as manager. He then purchased the gym a year later.

What #3: What need is not being met?

After you discover your talents and passion, find out how they can contribute to the greater good. Here is where we move from an internal to an external focus. One of the biggest mistakes we make is to be consumed in trying to find meaning without looking beyond ourselves. When we move from a selfish place to a selfless place, amazing things begin to occur. When you contribute to a broader need within your local or global community, you are making meaning in your life. This is a "game changer" for most people.

THE DISCOVERY PROCESS

I have shared the three "What's" with clients, colleagues, and students during the past couple of years. They are amazed that it isn't some magic formula that I stumbled upon like an early morning infomercial. It truly isn't. In fact, these are questions I asked myself long before I discovered my true purpose, but I still struggled. Even after I answered my own "What's". Why was this?

What I came to realize was that I didn't give myself the time and space needed to make the discovery. It wasn't a priority. My priority was to only find happiness. As Stephen Covey reminded us, seldom do we make the Important, Not Urgent things in our lives a priority. It wasn't until I made "discovering my purpose" my highest priority above all else that this overwhelming sense of clarity began to occur. The "How?" refers to "How do I create my purpose statement?" Similar to a personal mission statement, I needed a statement that was going to ground me and provide direction for all the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. Without this, I would continue to be in goal-seeking mode as I was for years. My purpose statement would focus my priorities saying "yes" to projects that would provide meaning and "no" to those that didn't.

Creating a statement seems rather simple and straightforward, but it isn't. Keep in mind this is a statement that will serve as your internal compass directing you toward a life of meaning. Something so powerful requires both time and space.

FORTY MILES TO PURPOSE

If you commit both time and space to finding your purpose, I promise you will remember the physical location where you make your discovery. Personally, by making this my highest priority, I committed to hiking around a beautiful lake near my home every day until I “found” a purpose statement that would guide my existence. Besides the beautiful terrain, I knew I was going to be free from any distractions that often prevent us from making meaningful discoveries.

Over the course of that time, I used my smartphone only to record notes that came to mind as I made my journey. No email, no Internet, no text messaging. My discovery didn't happen on Day 1, Day 2, or even Day 7. However, on the tenth day, approximately forty miles into my search, there it was. So clear. So real. Like any prized possession, I grabbed hold of it and haven't let it go ever since. Here it is:

“Serving others to take action and lead purposeful lives.”

At first glance, the statement above might appear overly simple. “It took you forty miles to come up with this!” I would agree with you. It's simple, yet powerful. It shouldn't be complex. We find reasons to make too many things in life too cumbersome, which creates stress and a lack of follow through. You don't have to go any further than our workout routines and diets to realize this.

Find a purpose that speaks to you. Make it your own. Place it somewhere where you will see it multiple times each day. Memorize it, share it with others, and let them know how it has transformed your life. Then watch how others react.

Now I'm not saying that you need to find a lake and begin hiking in order to find your purpose. However, you need to commit blocks of time to truly immerse yourself in the experience. This could be an hour in the morning before the kids get up or any time in the day at a location that you will be distraction free (this means leaving your smartphone behind if it will be a distraction). If you are thinking you don't have the time or the space, you are not ready to make this a priority in your life. Most likely, it just doesn't hurt as much right now to make a change.

EXERCISE – CREATING YOUR PURPOSE STATEMENT



Stop and reflect for a moment. Imagine a world if everyone answered the “Three What's” to discover their talents, their passion, and a societal need that is not being met while providing themselves the time and space (“The How”) to discover their purpose statement. It's our obligation to ourselves and one another to make this discovery.

Like most, you may have a tendency to put off creating a purpose. Maybe it will be difficult for you to see the inherent value of developing your own purpose statement. My message to you is don't put it off like a senior thesis. Embrace the process to begin living your own purposeful life.

If you have a similar experience to my own, it will take some time before you feel comfortable adopting your purpose statement. That is understandable and to be expected. However, you don't have to postpone the process of living your purpose.

1. Try out a Default Purpose Statement – Take a 3x5 index card and write the following question, “How will I grow and give both personally and professionally today?”
2. Place that card somewhere where you will see it both first thing in the morning and before you retire for the evening.
3. In the morning, simply read the question, “How will I grow and give both personally and professionally today?” You then can plan your day accordingly. More on that in the subsequent chapters.
4. In the evening before bed, read the question again but this time reflecting on the day, “How did I grow and give both personally and professionally today?”

Some follow this up with a few moments of journaling capturing both the highlights and the struggles they faced. This is a great exercise to engage in as your reflections can help build a foundation for successful, purposeful days that lie ahead for you.

I recommend that you draft your own purpose statement within the next three weeks. Don't agonize over the process. Keep asking:

- What are my strengths?**
- What are my skills?**
- What am I most passionate about?**
- How can I contribute to support others?**

My purpose statement: _____

THIS IS NOT AN INDIVIDUAL SPORT



Creating your purpose statement is going to be a very personal, reflective experience. It will take stretches of isolated time that we seldom grant ourselves. This is absolutely essential. However, you will experience a sense of excitement once you feel you have discovered your purpose. Maybe this discovery occurs while taking your own hike or driving into work one day. After you write down your purpose and reflect on how this simple statement will serve as a guide to your life, share it with people closest to you in life. Explain how you made this discovery and encourage them to engage in a similar process to create their own purpose statement. Imagine a world in which every person was directed by their own purpose statement.

IT'S NEVER A FINISHED PRODUCT

In my consulting role, I work with organizations who engage in strategic planning in which they come to the realization that they must be guided by a new mission statement. They understand that the organization is taking a new direction requiring a shift in their focus of who they are, who they serve, and how they serve.

It is similar for individuals. Life circumstances can change requiring a new purpose statement. Maybe you got married, started a family, or started a new career. You will know when it is time to change. After reading the statement each day and night, you may notice a lack of connection with the statement you once had. That is perfectly fine. We evolve as humans and this is natural.

Personally, since discovering my purpose four years ago, my statement has changed once. It was not a complete rewrite. However, I felt I needed to broaden the statement to capture those who I serve.

“It is not that we have a short time to live, but that we waste a lot of it. Life is long if you know how to use it.”

Seneca, from *One Shortness of Life*

BEYOND BREAKFAST

Let me go back to the student I introduced at the beginning of the chapter who proposed “Eat breakfast every day” as his purpose statement. At the end of the fall semester, each student submitted final papers reflecting on the semester while sharing the final version of their purpose statement. His statement lifted off his paper when I read it:

“Contribute to make the world a better place through creativity and imagination.”

How did he make this transformation? By knowing his talents, passion, and a societal need to fulfill. He spoke of his experience volunteering in Seoul when he was younger at a center that offers rehabilitation services for children diagnosed with cerebral palsy. He said through this exercise of discovering his purpose, he decided to major in Computer Science that will position him to provide exceptional services to children who will experience similar physical challenges.

LOOKING AHEAD

Excellent! You developed a draft of your purpose statement that you are going to take with you and will serve as your primary guide to living a purposeful life, both in and out of the workplace. It’s now time to bring in the reinforcements. A purpose by itself, while powerful, needs support. This brings us to developing a core list of values. While the purpose statement is an overall guide, values help us to decide what truly is important to us.

CHAPTER 5

VALUES

“When your values are clear to you, making decisions becomes easier.”

Roy E. Disney

One of my closest friends is a physician who is very close to finishing his studies to be a deacon for our parish. He is also a husband and father of two which, as you can imagine, keeps him quite busy. We met at a church function and learned we both share a love for tennis. This interest in the sport provided the opportunity to play regularly. We both enjoy the competition and physical exercise. However, another benefit is to be able to talk about a variety of different topics from family to faith. He serves as my spiritual advisor, and I feel smarter each time we finish playing having been blessed by being able to tap into his wisdom.

Recently, my friend made a major life decision to reduce his work schedule by 30 percent! When I asked him to take me through his decision making, he didn't describe this as some kind of an early retirement strategy. Instead, it was all about reprioritizing his life. He would admit that knowing how much money he was saying “no” to affected him in the beginning. But now, he is at peace with his decision. I asked him what his values are that supported this change. Without hesitating he said Family, Faith, and Service.



A LACK OF VALUES

How many of us can recite our core personal values like my friend let alone know what they even are? In workshops I teach, I ask people to raise their hands if they have a personal purpose or mission statement. Very few hands are raised. When I ask how many have a set of personal values, I get the “half-raise” by a few more people. That is where you raise your hand but the top half of your arm does not go beyond parallel to the floor. This tells me they think they know, but they really don’t know. This chapter is about really knowing your personal values and living your life each day aligned to those values. Your values should also build off your purpose statement that you drafted in the previous chapter.

In speaking of values, Brett McKay, creator of the Art of Manliness website, recalls looking at photos of people from previous generations and observing their steely-eyed focus. He said, and I would strongly agree, that this focus, to a large extent, has been eroded given our surface-level engagement in our daily activities. Much of this can be blamed on the role technology plays in our everyday lives as well as all other stimulation that seeks our attention. Now, more than ever, it is important for us to create a list of values that will help guide our decision-making while resisting the external stimuli that does not serve us.

Simply stated, our values are who we are because they serve as inner guides for our choices and actions.

Just like organizations should have values to help decide important decisions for the future, individuals must do the same. The more you make choices that are aligned with your values, the more satisfying and fulfilling your life becomes and the more effective you can become. Values also provide the necessary structure in our lives to do battle with the everyday chaos we experience.

EXERCISE – ESTABLISHING YOUR VALUE SYSTEM



To discover your values, consider the following questions:

- What do I stand for?**
- What do I believe in?**
- What am I passionate about?**
- Just what is it that I really care about?**
- What is important to me?**

While I recommend you take time to identify values on your own, many of my clients benefit from a starting list of possible values. However, I would encourage you to identify values that may not be on the list provided. The values you select must be unique to you that will support you in making decisions that align to your overall purpose.

POTENTIAL LIST OF VALUES

- Acceptance
- Accomplishment
- Achievement
- Acknowledgment
- Adventure
- Advancement
- Aesthetics
- Authenticity
- Autonomy
- Balance
- Beauty
- Challenge
- Clarity
- Collaboration
- Communication
- Community
- Compassion
- Connection
- Contribution
- Courage
- Creativity
- Culture
- Education
- Empathy
- Empowerment
- Excellence
- Expertise
- Exploration
- Fairness
- Family
- Fitness
- Financial Security
- Freedom
- Friendship
- Fulfillment
- Full Self-Expression
- Fun
- Generosity
- Harmony
- Health / Well-Being
- Helpfulness
- Heroism
- Honesty
- Humor
- Imagination
- Independence
- Integrity
- Intimacy
- Joy
- Knowledge
- Love
- Leadership
- Loyalty
- Money
- Mastery
- Nature
- Order
- Peace
- Personal Growth
- Philanthropy
- Power
- Practicality
- Precision
- Presence
- Prestige
- Recognition
- Relationship
- Resilience
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Risk Taking
- Romance
- Security
- Service
- Spirituality
- Spontaneity
- Stability
- Status
- Success
- Teamwork
- Trust
- Truth
- Variety
- Volunteerism
- Wealth
- Winning
- Wisdom
- Work

How many values should you select?

I would say no more than five. Any more and you run the risk of too many things being important. You can start with identifying a larger list (say ten values) before getting to a list of five that will truly serve you.

While identifying your values follows developing your purpose, it does not have to happen in a linear fashion. In other words, you can determine your values while you reflect on an overall purpose statement. Unlike your purpose statement that will take some time to create, selecting your list of core values should take under one hour if you devote your undivided attention to the task.

LOOKING AHEAD

You now completed the first two sections of the puzzle: a purpose statement and list of core values. We now can shift our attention to setting goals. As I have explained earlier in the book, too many of us set goals without asking “The Why”. In other words, we need to define our purpose and values before we can entertain goal setting. Now that you completed this, you should have more clarity to allow you to set goals that are aligned with who you are and your beliefs.

CHAPTER 6

GOALS

“Our goals can only be reached through a vehicle of a plan, in which we must fervently believe, and upon which we must vigorously act. There is no other route to success.”

Pablo Picasso

During a recent session, I met with a young man in his late 20s. I didn't know much about him before our conversation. He introduced himself after a presentation I gave and said he would be interested in learning more about coaching.

About ten minutes into our discovery session, I wasn't sure if he could benefit from coaching. He seemed very driven and focused. Being single, he didn't have the joy (and challenges) of being a spouse and father. However, about ten minutes into our conversation, I could get the sense that something was missing.

I asked him, so what are your goals? He responded immediately, “I want to run a Tough Mudder.” For those that are unfamiliar, a Tough Mudder is an endurance event that is 10-12 miles in length that includes obstacles throughout the course, and yes, lots of mud. The first obvious question for me to ask was, “Why?” If you recall from an earlier chapter, I believe you need to ask yourself why you have decided to go through any former of physical hardship whether it is a marathon, Cross-Fit program, or Tough Mudder. His initial response was “I think it will be fun.” While that might have been part of his reasoning, I decided to push him a bit. “I feel there is more you want to say,” I added. What followed was an awkward pause as he looked at the table separating us. I wasn't sure if I offended him. If I did, it would have marked the shortest discovery session in my coaching career. He then looked back at me and I saw he became emotional. He then proceeded to say, “I don't finish anything! When things get tough, I usually quit because I have been so used to having a comfortable life.” Wow! Now we were getting somewhere.

WHERE'S THE WHY?

Over the years of reading countless books on the topic of goal setting, there certainly isn't a universal approach to the topic. Some even suggest that the process of setting and completing goals is fruitless. Others wholeheartedly believe in goal setting and offer very detailed approaches to support readers in their pursuits. One thing that I feel is missing from much of the literature is the "why" behind the goal.

Like my Tough Mudder client, I was also missing the "why" behind my own endurance experiences. As I mentioned at the beginning of the book, during the time of my mother's passing, I was in the late-stages of training for my second marathon. As you can imagine, the emotional toll was significant. The physical toll was a close second. However, I thought that continuing on would be a "healthy" way of coping with my sorrow.

Returning home from the funeral, I was scheduled for a 21-mile training run, one of the last long runs before I was scheduled to compete in the marathon. I decided I was going to run at a local rail trail to be more isolated. From the first few steps I took, I knew it would not be a good run. I was compensating due to a lingering foot issue which then caused knee pain around the sixth mile. Halfway through, I began to feel dizzy which was something new but I continued to push through. By Mile 18, I just decided to stop. I didn't know it at the time, but that moment marked the official end of my competitive running days.

I still had four-miles to walk back to my vehicle which took about an hour. During that time, I found myself deep in thought.

Why was I training for this marathon? Why did I run my first marathon? Why did I set and achieve any goals, whether personally or professionally throughout the course of my life?

WORKING BACKWARDS

I certainly encourage you to set goals but not without first asking yourself "why". If you want to seek a promotion at work, why? If you want to write a book, why? If you want to travel to Europe, why?

Let's dig deeper into one of these examples, writing a book. I never thought that I would write a book. Not that I couldn't, but I felt society is filled with personal development authors. My feeling was that I didn't want to take time away from helping clients by writing. However, the internal drive to write increased slowly over time. Before typing my first word, I asked myself "**why**" should I do this? I thought about my interactions with both my students and clients and envisioned how capturing my experiences could help readers.

However, I didn't stop there. I looked at my list of values. The two that jumped off the page at me were Service and Action. At that moment, I completely shifted my mindset about writing.

Let's first examine the value of Service. Before my paradigm about authors was that it was more about them than their audience. I now see writing as providing a service to others. The second value that caught my attention was Action. I see too many people continue to wallow in self-pity but for whatever reason decide that taking action would be too hard. Therefore, they continue to live a less than ideal life. I wanted to write a book that would help the reader take initiative through exercises and other accountability tools.

This leads me to my final point.

After examining my values, I reflected on my purpose statement:

“Serving others to take action and lead purposeful lives.”

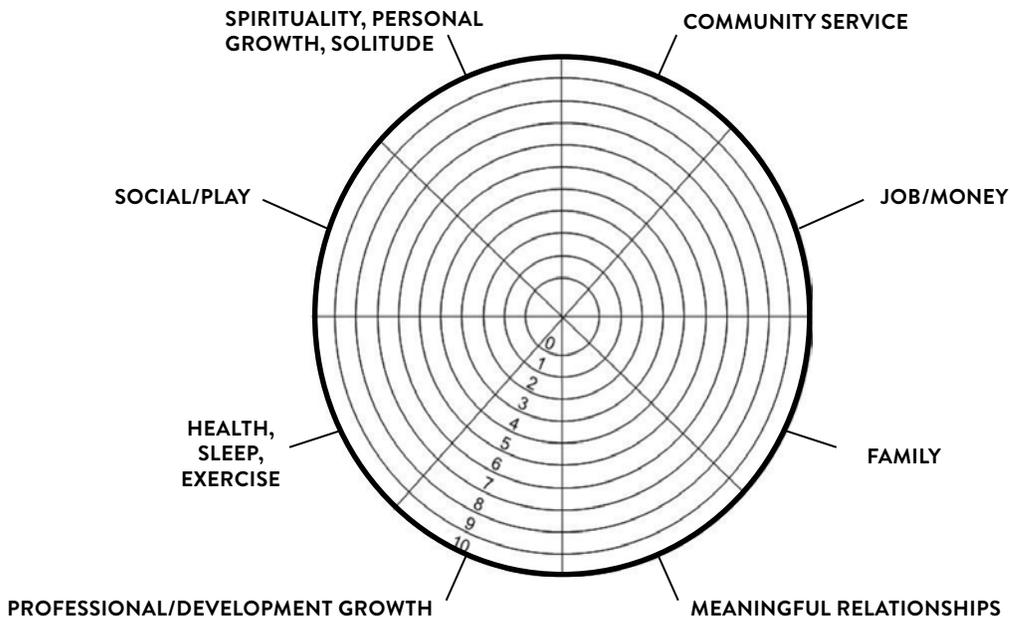
By completing this final step, I felt an overwhelming sense of clarity that not only supported my decision to write but provided the motivation to make this one of my top professional priorities.

EXERCISE - IDENTIFYING YOUR GOALS



Directions:

1. Review the purpose statement draft that you completed in Chapter 4 along with the list of values you identified in Chapter 5. This is very important as it will help you focus on what is most meaningful for you.
2. The diagram below indicates the various categories of our life. For each section of the wheel, place a dot on the line that indicates your current level of satisfaction. The higher the number, the more you are satisfied in that area.



Now that you completed the assessment, identify up to four (4) areas that you feel require your attention. The areas are _____, _____, _____, and _____.

Finally, identify a goal in each of the four (4) areas that you feel will lead to greater satisfaction.

Area	Goal	Why?

BE SMART-ER

If you are reading this book, chances are you are quite familiar with setting SMART goals. SMART being the acronym for:

- S** SPECIFIC
- M** MEASURABLE
- A** ACTIONABLE
- R** RELEVANT/REALISTIC
- T** TIMELY

You will notice the inclusion of both Relevant and Realistic. That is because they are both used when referring to SMART goals. Instead of including just one term while leaving the other out, I think they are both important considerations.

Now, authors such as Michael Hyatt in his book, *Your Best Year Ever*, refer to setting **SMARTER** goals. I like this concept because it allows us to have even a greater sense of focus when establishing our goals. Therefore, your goals should also be:

- E** EXCITING
- R** RISKY

- **[EXCITING]** How many times you set goals that did not excite you? They may have been exciting at first but, for whatever reason, they lost some steam over time. What should you do? Double down, refocus, and grind until you complete the goal because you committed to

it initially. Absolutely not! Especially if the goal doesn't serve you, your purpose and your values. For example, I used to set a goal on the number of books that I would read in a given year. It made sense. Everyone did it. It met the SMART criteria for sure. However, I found myself reading books that, quite frankly, were not exciting, beyond the title. I asked myself is reading a particular number of books really going help me serve my purpose? Also, admittedly, I have a difficult time sitting still for long periods of time. This is where podcasts and articles enter into the picture. I still read books but only those that I feel will directly contribute to my growth and development.

- **[RISKY]** A majority of the time, we want to work towards goals that are safe because we fear failure. I am guilty of this as well. For example, I remember setting an income goal when I first started my business that was very conservative. I look back at that saying to myself, "What was I thinking?" In other words, I may not have stretched myself because I was too concerned about falling short of that mark. Now, I can give myself a pass because I was just starting my business and beginning to grow my professional network.

Goals without stretching yourself just become a longer-term to-do list. In other words, you know you will get it completed, it is just a matter of time. To increase the risk of your goals, you can increase the size of goal or limit the time to complete the goal itself. For example, if your goal is to complete a 10K in one hour, might you be able to complete in 55 minutes? Or I will ask clients interested in participating in an endurance event when this will take place. Many times, people's fears take over and say, "Oh, by next year." I'll gently reply, "How about in six months?" Nine times out of 10 they will say "yes". It was their safety regulator inside that was telling them to not take a risk.

This process also might stir up the "I can't's" in your life (e.g. "I can't do this. I'm too busy."). Yet we find plenty of time to attend meetings every day that add little to no value or routinely check our email dozens of times each day. This is called resistance and it can completely control our lives to a point of constant stagnation. To learn more about resistance and the methods to overcome its power, I would encourage you to read Steven Pressfield's, *The War of Art* as well as [Resisting Happiness](#) by Matthew Kelly.

TAKE AIM

We can take the concept of SMARTER goals even a step further. During my coaching certification training through the Institute for Professional Excellence in Coaching (iPEC), I was introduced to the concept of AIM SMART in which the achievement of a goal is not predicated on a specific outcome.

Let's return to my 10K example. If my client sets a goal of completing the race in under one hour but does not achieve that time, it can very well be looked at as a failure on his or her part. To prevent this from happening, I will guide clients through the AIM SMART process, particularly if it is a goal they are looking to achieve for the first time. If someone is well seasoned in 10K races, he or she should have a better sense of the target to reach. However, if it is a person's first race,

AIM SMART can be beneficial.

AIM stands for:

- A** **ACCEPTABLE** (the bare minimum that you will accept for yourself)
- I** **IDEAL** (the goal that would exceed an individual's wildest expectations)
- M** **MIDDLE** (this is a realistic, but stretch goal)

So my 10K runner who knows he or she can finish the race in 1:00:00 (one hour) has already identified the Acceptable goal. We then identify what would be an Ideal goal if training leading up to the race when very well and race day conditions were perfect. If the runner might feel 50:00 would be ideal. Finally, we then identify the Middle goal. Many times, clients simply split the difference between the Acceptable and Ideal. In this case it would be 55:00. Therefore, in preparing for the race, the client has the following goals (not goal) established:

- A** 1:00:00
- I** 50:00
- M** 55:00

Do you see how this can be less intimidating compared to having just one overall goal? In this case, if the runner simply set a goal of 55:00 and came in at 58:30, it is probable that the runner would be quite disappointed in his or her performance. With AIM, you identify a range for your outcome while stretching yourself in the process. This can work for any goal that you set for yourself. Give it a try!

EXERCISE – AIM SMARTER



I. Set a goal for yourself that fulfills each of the seven components of the SMARTER criteria.

- S** _____
- M** _____
- A** _____
- R** _____
- T** _____
- E** _____
- R** _____

2. Now having satisfied the SMARTER criteria, write out your goal:

3. Take AIM identifying Acceptable, Ideal, and Middle goals:

ACCEPTABLE: -----

IDEAL: -----

MIDDLE: -----



4. Repeat the process for the remaining three goals.

5. Get to work!

LOOKING AHEAD

Rules?! Who needs rules? They just stifle our creativity and innovation. This might be true but I am going to argue that having rules can serve a valuable purpose, particularly when as it relates to helping us to focus. In the next chapter, you are going to develop a list of rules that will help you stay on track by developing a personal code of conduct. This code of conduct will serve to integrate healthy behaviors that can, if followed, set you up for a sustained level of success.

CHAPTER 7

CREATING A PERSONAL CODE OF CONDUCT

“It’s your game: make up your own rules.”

Barbara Corcoran

I would bet that each of you reading this book now would agree that smartphones, while adding benefits to our everyday lives in so many ways, has become the single biggest reason for our increase in distraction over the past decade-plus. Americans, on average, touch their phones an astounding 2,617 times a day, according to market researcher Dscout. Checking phones has become so prevalent that more than 40 percent of consumers said they look at the devices within five minutes of waking up, according to a recent survey by Deloitte. Fifty percent said they check them in the middle of the night. In a study at Boston College, people in a room with a TV and a computer switched their eyes back and forth every 14 seconds – 120 times in 27.5 minutes.

With these alarming statistics, it is a wonder how any of us get anything accomplished. By now, I hope you have already developed your purpose statement, identified your core values, and set SMARTER goals which take AIM and align to our purpose and values.

What do we do about the distractions in our lives? I’m not just talking about smartphones. There are plenty of other distractions that are either self-induced or involve others. The most common distractor outside of our smartphones is accessing the same applications via our computers or laptops including email, social media, blogs, and websites. We can also get distracted by other people’s priorities. They may “pop-in” your office for a quick question that lasts a half an hour or more. We also can be distracted by processing the tactical, everyday tasks. That’s OK if that is your primary job, but I work with people who are at the executive level who occupy this space much too frequently. I notice that they just want to get something accomplished or fear acting strategically for whatever reason.

AN ARGUMENT FOR RULES

As young children, we were always told to follow the rules. Pre-school children are asked to stay in a straight line when taking a walk around town for obvious safety reasons. We establish a bed time for our children to help ensure a good night sleep. At some point in our adolescence, we begin to rebel against the rules. Kids ask for an additional hour to their curfew or look to “bend” the rule of no smartphone use after a certain time.

Our society has also reinforced this notion that we should not follow rules. Doing so will make you a “rebel” and allow you to exercise your individuality. Even countless book titles exist that challenge us to “break the rules”.

Sorry if I come across as a dark cloud but rules in society and business exist for a reason. I work with several small business owners. When owners complain about how employees act in the workplace, I ask if they have a “code of conduct” in their organization. If they do, it is not being followed. If they don’t, it is time to create one. I even do this with my own classes. It is not because I have classroom management issues. Instead, I want my students to act in a way that supports an effective learning environment, respects one another, and creates an element of focus.

Several years ago, Craig Ballantyne, author of [The Perfect Day Formula: How to Own the Day and Control Your Life](#), caught my attention with a blog that he wrote called “The 12 Rules To Live By”. In the blog, he refers to this list as his personal philosophy and helps in his decision making to “reduce guilt, stress, and wasted emotional energy”. I adopted this approach for several years after the blog was published. In fact, I felt my life needed so much structure at the time that I doubled Ballantyne’s list. Also, 24 happens to be my favorite number. Yes “24 Rules to Live By”. As you can imagine, that became too restrictive and found it nearly impossible to be even somewhat compliant to all 24. In other words, I set myself up for failure.

While I really see value in Ballantyne’s overall approach, I have felt that his rules were standing by themselves and needed to be anchored to something deeper to have greater meaning. I certainly learned that having 24 rules was not a viable method. However, I also feel 12 can be a bit unwieldy, especially if this concept is new to you.

THE GOALS/RULES CONNECTION

Early in my coaching career, I would work with clients to see SMARTER goals and even use the AIM SMART approach where applicable. However, too often despite holding client’s accountable, they would fall short in making significant progress and eventually did not achieve the goal they set for themselves. This was unsettling prompted me to think deeply about what was missing. Over time, I realized they didn’t set themselves up for success. In other words, goals by themselves lack any type of supportive structure which I feel is why so many of us fall short. Think

of rock climbers who are attempting to climb a difficult mountain for the first time. Most, if they are of sound mind, would not stand at the base of the mountain in your everyday workout clothes and nothing else hoping for the best. Of course, such an endeavor takes a lot of preparation, planning, and support (e.g. equipment). In other words, they would need structure. They would need rules.

WHY RULES AND NOT HABITS

Some of the popular literature wants us to believe that we can form a new, positive habit within 21 days. However, this is a myth that has been debunked several times. This began when researchers would see how long it would take individuals who experienced an amputation to adjust to some level of normalcy. On average, the length of this adjustment was 21 days. However, there are two problems with this. First, this study is quite dated since it took place in the 1960s. More importantly, the study does not have a direct correlation to habit forming. Instead, the study looked at adjusting to a “new normal” following a loss.

Recent books including *Atomic Habits* (James Clear) and *The ONE Thing* (Gary Keller and Jay Papasan) point to 66 being the magical number of days to form a habit. 21 vs. 66 days. That is a six week difference! They point to a study by Phillippa Lally from the University College London in the *European Journal of Social Psychology*. The study included 96 participants and Lally and her colleagues witnessed that it took the participants between 18 and 254 days to form a new habit. You might notice that 18 days is even shorter than the 21 days that has become so popular. However, this was an extreme outlier in this instance. On the other hand, it took more than eight months (254 days). The researchers concluded that, on average, it takes 66 days to form a new habit.

What does this mean for us? Most of us have goals that we either want to achieve or make significant progress within that 66 day time period. In other words, we don't have the time to struggle with building habits while trying to conquer our goals. Rules, on the other hand, can begin on Day 1.

Also, let's briefly examine how we describe habits versus rules using a simple example.

Habit: I want to exercise five times a week.

Rule: Before work, I will run Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and strength train Tuesday and Thursday.

Habit: I will write everyday.

Rule: I will write 500 words every day by noon.

Habit: I will use cash for a majority of my purchases.

Rule: I will use cash for groceries, house supplies, restaurants, and entertainment.

Do you see the difference? With habits, there lacks a sense of urgency. Sure, anyone who commits to a habit wants to see a behavioral change. However, habits lack accountability. Yes, you can track if you were compliant with particular habits. But what if you weren't? What is the consequence. Plus, now knowing it can take at least three months to have habits "stick" gives us too much of a grace period.

This entire book has been about regaining focus to help you take aim and create a meaningful life. Rules are another vital component to this formula. Rules are either followed or they are broken. There is no "gray area" with rules. With habits we can say, "Yeah, I'm doing pretty well." With rules, we either followed them or we broke them. This process starts on Day 1, not Day 66.

You might be saying, "Steve, this is stressful. I need a little more flexibility here! Do you know how busy I am?" In response, first let me answer the question. No, I don't know how busy you are. I can only empathize because I too have been there. In fact, I still find times throughout the year where I am trying to balance multiple plates in the air. Hopefully you have took the time to complete the Role Audit from Chapter 1 to assist you in "lightening your load" and committing to pursuits that will give your life more meaning. Also, when I feel overwhelmed, I reflect on Thoreau's quote I shared in Chapter 1:

"It's not enough to be busy. So are the ants.
The question is, "What are we busy about?"

Henry David Thoreau

Yes, rules can seem to present a degree of inflexibility. However, I feel so many of us have given ourselves too much flexibility. We lack a true focus and then wonder why we don't feel fulfilled. Bottom line, we are too easy on ourselves.

Let's say your goal is to increase the revenue of your business by 20% in the next year. You have established a rule related to this goal which states, "I will reach out to a minimum of five current or potential clients each week." If you commit to this rule, you are building momentum to set yourself up for success. You still need to win the work and serve your client, but your actions have

significantly increased your chances of achieving the goal.

On the other hand, let's say, for whatever reason, you don't commit to the rule. Your inaction doesn't not leave you where you started. In fact, the behavior is pulling you even further away from the goal than before. In other words, you are still taking action but not taking action. Never do we stay in the same place.

Rules can also prevent us from getting involved in other people's priorities. Behavioral economist Dan Ariely argues that when you establish rules, you are creating a standard to be adhered to by not only yourself but by others as well. He uses an example of speaking engagements. If he has set a rule of no more than ten engagements per year, the organizer of the eleventh event, most likely, will not ask him to break his rule. Rules, therefore, are a strategy to protect us and our time.

Examples:

1. Check email three times a day (10am, 3pm and 8pm)
2. Sleep a minimum of 7.5 hours per night
3. Write 500 words every day
4. Pray and meditate first thing every morning.

EXERCISE – CREATING YOUR CODE OF CONDUCT



Review the list of goals that you have established in the previous chapter. Below, list no more than eight (8) rules that you are able to commit to in support of those goals.

- I. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

LOOKING AHEAD

Congratulations! If you followed the plan outlined in the Introduction, you have been reading and completing the exercises throughout the book one chapter at a time. As I mentioned earlier, the purpose of the exercises was to allow you to get into a focused mindset identifying what is most important to you. You completed exercises including the Role Audit, Where Do You Spend Your Time?, and the Values Inventory. You also developed a list of goals based on the areas of life you feel need the most attention along with your personal code of conduct to help you remain focused along the way. Most importantly, you developed a draft of a purpose statement that you are reviewing at the beginning and end of each day that grounds you and lets you know what is most important based on your passion and skills along with what you feel is needed within the greater community. Now it is time for the Capstone Project! Your opportunity to bring your new life from concept to reality. Let's do it!

CHAPTER 8

CAPSTONE PROJECT

“A clear vision, backed by definite plans, gives you a tremendous feeling of confidence and personal power.”

Brian Tracy, author, speaker

Before completing your capstone project, *The Meaning Manifesto*, take a moment to complete the following checklist. It is important that you answer “Yes” to each of the questions before going any further:

Yes / No

Have you read each of the chapters and completed each of the exercises?

Yes / No

Have you given yourself time to reflect on each of the activities, what they mean to you, and how life might be different based on the results?

Yes / No

Have you given yourself adequate time to draft a purpose statement, reflect on the statement at the beginning and end of each day, and live life through that statement for at least a couple of weeks?

Yes / No

Have you shared your experience with at least one other person?

Again, if you answered “No” to any of the questions, you owe it to yourself to go back to complete the activity. Trust me, it will benefit you in the long run. This process is not a quick fix. However, if you answered “Yes” to all of the questions, great work! You are now invited to complete your Capstone project.

MEANING MANIFESTO

PURPOSE STATEMENT

VALUES (list up to five)

-----, -----, -----, -----, & -----

GOALS (list no more than four at a time, think SMARTER & AIM)

- Goal #1

- Goal #2

- Goal #3

- Goal #4

PERSONAL CODE OF CONDUCT (your rules to help you live your purpose and achieve your goals):

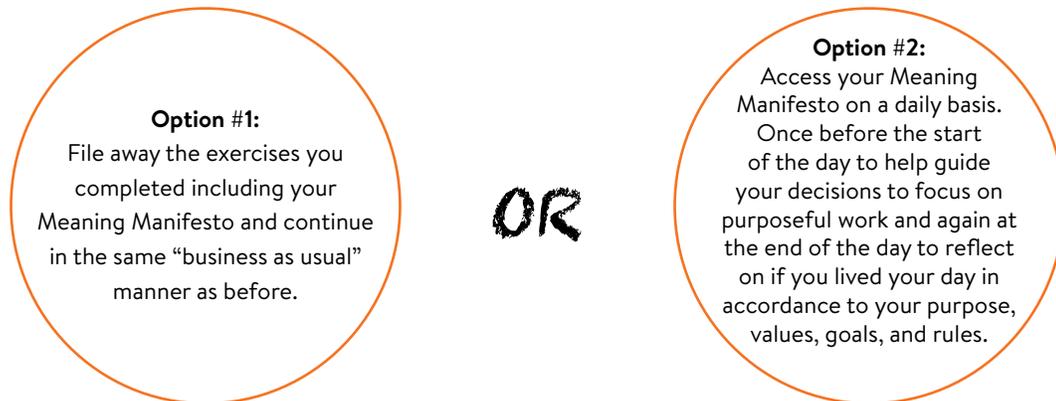
1. -----
2. -----
3. -----
4. -----
5. -----
6. -----
7. -----
8. -----

SUSTAINING MOMENTUM

If you have followed the directions throughout the book, you have read one chapter at a time and completed the exercises within each. You have also reflected on what you read and completed. After finishing the first seven chapters, you then spent a minimum of two weeks going about your work with this new-found outlook on your career. Finally, you decided it was time to complete your capstone project and drafted your Meaning Manifesto.

Now take a moment (or two) and bask in your accomplishment. You may not realize it but going through the process you just completed is A Big Deal! Based on clients and audiences that I come across, I would say less than five percent have even a personal purpose statement. In front of you, you have this statement as well as a list of values, goals, and a personal code of conduct to keep you focused. Needless to say, you are in rarified air!

Alright, enough self-praise. The real important work is what lies ahead. You have two options:



SCHEDULING YOUR CHECK-UP

We schedule our physicals annually, have eye exams every two years, and dentist appointments every six months. Like other areas of your life, you should schedule an appointment with yourself and update your manifesto accordingly. Similar to your dentist, I would recommend scheduling appointments every six months. Put it on your calendar like any other meeting. When you go to your appointment, give yourself at least one, three-hour time period to complete this exercise. If possible, find a location away from your normal surroundings. I’d suggest a quiet place like a park or wooded area or even a library.

You may be asking how much your manifesto can actually change in a matter of six, short months. You might be surprised. If you commit to reviewing your manifesto twice a day, you will be more open to the possibilities that reflect on who you are and who you serve. Also, life has a funny way of shifting us away from our everyday complacency.

A WORD OF THANKS

Thank you for investing your time and energy to complete the book. I hope, through this process, you have a greater sense of focus and clarity than before. More importantly, you are living true to your purpose which benefits not only you but those around you. I encourage you to share the book and the accompanying resources with family, friends, and colleagues who may benefit.

Also, I would love to hear from you. If you are struggling with the Take Aim process or simply wish to share how your life has changed since reading the book, please reach out. I can be reached out steve@stevericcio.com.

I wish you nothing but the best!

MEET STEVE RICCIO



Steve's passion is working with individuals and teams to create purpose that leads to lasting fulfillment. He believes that each of us possess unique talents and strengths that need to be utilized for the greater good to society.

Steve is a lecturer in the International Business & Management department at Dickinson College teaching courses including Human Resource Management, International Organizational Behavior, and Business Ethics. Recently, he created a seminar for first-year students titled, Finding Meaning: An Introspective Examination of Life's Purpose in College and Beyond. Prior to teaching, Steve served as the associate vice president of human resources at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania where his focus was on developing talent and creating stronger engagement among faculty and staff. Before coming to Dickinson, Steve worked for ten years as a human resource and change management consultant with clients ranging from Fortune 500 to state and local non-profit organizations.

Steve earned his doctoral degree from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in Educational Leadership in Higher Education. He holds both the Associate Certified Coach (ACC) and Energy Leadership Index – Master Practitioner certifications from the Institute for Professional Excellence in Coaching (iPEC). In addition, he earned the Senior Professional of Human Resource (SPHR) certification through the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). Steve has facilitated leadership and team development programs throughout the country and is a certified facilitator of DiSC, Crucial Conversations, Crucial Accountability, and The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. Steve supports his local community offering guidance on human resource strategy and coaching services to teams and leaders.

