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A Leadership Field Guide

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# Purpose

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# Plate Management

Take time to write down the following items. This can be a pretty lengthy processes because some people's lists run rather long. Often, one realizes that many of the things that vie for attention and obscure focus are unrelated to key purposes. It transforms the overwhelm into a clearer focus.

1. Articulate the various roles you play and your purpose(s) for each: Some examples of roles: parent, spouse, employee, student, friend, pet owner, volunteer, etc. For each one, describe the purpose you fulfill in that role. You can think of that purpose from the perspective of those who rely on you in that role and/or the purpose you have for being in that role.
2. Prioritize roles: Rank the roles in terms of importance to you and place the number of that ranking next to the role.
3. List all of the activities on your plate. You can either put aside your list of roles for a moment and start on a blank sheet. Or, you can list the activities under the corresponding role. List all the tasks/activities that occupy your time. Estimate the amount of time per week each activity requires. If it's something you do once a month, then divide by 4. If it's something you do daily then multiply by 7. Try to be as exhaustive and detailed as possible. The more thorough you are the more useful this will be.
4. Consider each listed activity in light of your most important purposes. Give each item one of the following ratings: A = highly important/ must be done by you, B= important but someone else could do it if they had the skills/time, C = not a priority/someone else could do it right now.

The result is you should have an accurate inventory that tells you what you should be spending more time on or less time on.

# Aligning Purpose, Outcomes and Methods

Too often, organizations do what they've always done. At one time those methods may have been the most appropriate and the outcomes were the best that could be hoped for, but over time, situations change to reveal new opportunities or threats. It is the job of leaders to attune an organization's methods and outcomes to its purpose. Choose one focus of your leadership (family, club, department, organization, etc.) and use the following steps to conduct your own purpose quest:

Step 1 (Purpose): Define the purpose. If it's been previously defined, make sure it's accurate.

Step 2 (Outcomes): Based on the purpose, articulate the specific outcomes that would indicate the purpose has been fulfilled. The more detailed and quantifiable you can be the better.

Step 3 (Methods): List the activities toward which most of the resources (time, people, money) currently go and evaluate if those activities will produce the stated outcomes from step 2. If so, are there even better methods? If not, what new methods could you replace the current ones with?

Step 4 (Actions): Based on your assessment, identify at least three upgrades to the methods and outcomes that could be made under your leadership. Maybe it's doing new things or to cease doing current things or doing current things in a different or better way.

# Purpose Road Maps

When all members of a community understand the purpose then coordination and engagement increase. Conflict and waste decline. Effective leaders take steps to ensure every member of an organization understands and is committed to a shared purpose. Using the following ideas, build your own plan for creating purpose road maps.

At a staff meeting, make the senior agenda item: Our Organizational Purpose and what it means.

Using internal communication tools (i.e. newsletter, intranet, staff memo, etc.), focus on the history and rationale of your organization's purpose.

Survey members to gauge perceptions of the fidelity between current activities and organizational purpose. Circulate the results and plan for adjustment as needed.

Ensure that team member evaluations include items that connect their performance criteria to the organization's purpose.

# Personal Purpose

Answer the following questions:

Even if you had no time, for what could you not resist volunteering?

What describes the personal touch you add to everything you do?

What about you would survive any change in physical or financial condition?

In what areas do you tend to have higher standards than most other people?

If you could only be known for one thing, what would that be? Describe it in as much detail as possible: what you would specifically be known for, why people value it, why it gives you satisfaction, etc.

Make a list of activities that fit the following 3 criteria for you: Easy, Effortless and Enjoyable. It doesn't matter what others would think of this list so it can be normal or quirky, mundane or ambitious.

## Golden thread

Starting from your childhood and working your way to present day, list the things (no matter how large or small) that gave you a sense of fulfillment. Once you feel your timeline is complete, try to find the golden thread— the one common theme that seems to tie them all together.

## “Dear Personal Purpose:”

Start a letter with the above three words and write an apology letter to your personal purpose. What are you apologizing for? That’s to be determined as soon as you quit telling yourself how hokey this idea sounds. Just give it a try and see what comes out.



## Event-by-Event Intention

Every day can be broken down into smaller segments, or events: waking up, morning preparations, driving to work, going to a meeting, taking lunch, attending an evening event, etc. For one day, set a specific intention for each upcoming event. For example, if you are about to head into a meeting ask yourself “What is this most important thing that needs to happen during this meeting?” Feel free to use the space below to jot different events for the day and your intention for each segment.

# 10 basic questions

This is a great exercise for many situations, especially for ones that are not currently to your liking. Try this out for one of those situations and see if it produces greater clarity/purpose. The questions are adapted from *Creativity in Business* by Ray & Meyers

1. a) What is the goal you would like to achieve?  
  
b) What solutions have you attempted so far?  
  
c) What was it about these attempts that didn't work?
2. What is your feeling regarding the situation? (emotional state— i.e. excitement, anger, curiosity, concern, etc.)
3. What is your attitude regarding the situation? (state of mind— positive, negative, open-minded, closed-minded, etc.)
4. What is the reality of the situation?
5. What benefits do you receive from having the situation as it currently is?
6. What would you like to see happen?
7. What else would you like to see happen?
8. What do you need to do at this time?
9. How would your life be different if this situation were changed?
10. What one thing are you willing to change to make this be what you would like it to be?

# Clarity through Contrast

Any time you experience a situation that is frustrating, unsatisfying or unpleasant ask yourself this question: “If I don’t want this, then what do I want?”

Try it with something you are currently experiencing. Make the negativity work in the favor of purpose, the way a swimmer uses the pool’s wall to flip kick in the other direction. The contrast (what you don’t want) can be a potent doorway to what you do want.

1. Describe a situation that creates feelings of contrast (frustration, anxiety, boredom, etc.)
2. What are the aspects of that situation that you do not want?
3. For each item you listed in question #2, what does that indicate that you do want?
4. What actions can you take to minimize what you don’t want and maximize what you do want?

## Quit Your Job or Fix Your Job

This exercise is a specific application of Clarity through Contrast. At various times in our lives, many of us have experienced a less than ideal work situation. We may also have seen people who stay in those circumstances and, instead of making a change, they make everyone else miserable as well.

I very much like the choice this exercise offers. Instead of wallowing, it's empowering. If we can align our jobs more with our purpose we will fix our job but if we can not then we might be better off creating a transition plan.

Below, list the 5 things about your current job that seem to conflict with your personal purpose. For each one, come up with at least one fix you can try.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

# Purposeful Change

Change is more likely to succeed when we have strong reasons for making that change. This is common sense backed by research. Below are 3 suggestions for articulating powerful reasons to support your change. For this exercise, select one area where you'd like to experience change. Use the insights and questions below to help increase your likelihood for success.

1. People who make changes because they want a better future are better off than people who want to change to escape a present or past condition.

What is the “better future” you want to create as a result of making a specific change?

2. People who are motivated to change because of their inner desires are better off than people who want to change because of external circumstances (i.e. someone else requiring the change)

What inner desire do you have for making the change?

3. There may be an additional advantage if the change you want to make includes interpersonal growth— better interactions with others— as opposed to purely individual goals.

How will this change improve interpersonal relations with someone important to you?

## Don't get Sidetracked (by people who are off track)

We all know the experience of going through wasted efforts because someone who was not clear about their purpose asked us to do something only to find it was unnecessary. This helps us realize that it's not just important for us to clarify our own purpose(s) but to associate ourselves with others who are similarly purposeful.

The exercise: pay attention to the people around you who impact your day-to-day. Practice evaluating how clear they are on their purpose. This is more an exercise of observation. It may also be useful to jot down notes. Perhaps you could diplomatically inquire into why someone does something in a way that helps them clarify their own purpose.

# Start with Why—Video/Book by Simon Sinek

One of the most frequently viewed TED talks is this one by writer Simon Sinek. The title is “How Great Leaders Inspire Action.” He presents a model he calls the “Golden Circle.” Essentially, his engaging presentation is describing purpose, outcomes, methods and is full of practical examples. His follow up book is called *Start with Why*. In other words... start with purpose. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qp0HIF3Sfl4>