

Resource 4: Your Unique Purpose(s)

ONLINE RESOURCES

To get you started, I spent time reviewing the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics's massive index of specific job codes and functions. I started by looking at all of the jobs with more than 1 million employees (across the United States labor force). After narrowing things down to this group, I did my best to describe the corresponding societal needs. Based on my analysis, these are some of the most common and practical job functions.

What follows is a list of what people actually do in their work that serves others. I assembled this in case it is helpful for thinking about a more pragmatic way to home in on the purpose your daily efforts serve. This list is simply meant to stimulate your thinking. What will matter most is the unique way in which you describe how your daily efforts benefit other people or society.

What People Do

- o Lead an organization.
- o Manage other people.
- o Manage processes or operations.
- o Manage finances for other people.
- o Ensure the quality of a product or service.
- o Develop software or program computers.
- o Create databases or mathematical models.
- o Make models of things to create or build.
- o Engineer better products or services.
- o Draw complex or technical things.
- o Study other living organisms.
- o Scientifically study other people, dead or alive.
- o Counsel other people who are in need.
- o Make sure people follow the law to ensure fairness.
- o Help people develop their faith or spirituality.
- o Teach students about a specific topic or subject.
- o Take care of younger children.
- o Maintain records or libraries of content.
- o Teach professionals in a classroom.
- o Coach professionals one-on-one.
- o Design art or imagery.

- o Design homes, clothes, or other material items.
- o Entertain others through singing, acting, dancing, athletics, or any other performance.
- o Communicate with wider audiences through writing or video.
- o Enable people to communicate more widely or efficiently.
- o Care for the health of another person directly.
- o Support health through technical means or lab work.
- o Help people recover or rehabilitate from illness or injury.
- o Protect people from accidents and injury.
- o Enforce laws and provide physical security.
- o Care for pets or animals.
- o Prepare food for other people.
- o Serve food or beverages.
- o Keep restaurants, schools, buildings, and other facilities clean.
- o Maintain grounds and keep public areas clean.
- o Interact with customers face-to-face and provide service.
- o Care for other people's hair, makeup, and physical appearance.
- o Sell complex products or services to people directly.
- o Provide service to people or sell items in a retail setting.
- o Supervise other people in a retail store.
- o Persuade people to buy something over the phone or internet.
- o Provide administrative support in an office setting.
- o Keep track of records or details.
- o Ensure goods or services make it to their destination.
- o Help others enjoy nature or spend more time outdoors.
- o Build physical structures or contribute to a construction project.
- o Create or improve the function of technical elements like plumbing and electrical.
- o Paint homes or structures.
- o Create, repair, or improve the function of vehicles.
- o Assemble or fabricate products.
- o Assist in the creation of food or food products.
- o Make or repair clothes or textiles.
- o Package and prepare things for distribution or transport.

LIFETIME PURPOSE(S)

While most meaning is created on a daily basis, it is also important to step back and evaluate your progress over the longer term. It helps to have another person, system, or both to ensure you continue to make forward progress and build momentum with each year. The other critical step is to find ways to measure and track your progress toward your longer-term purposes.

When you think about the purpose of your efforts across a lifetime, begin with what I call eulogy purposes. These are the first things that you would want people to think of if they were forced to write a eulogy describing why your life mattered most. Almost everyone I talk to gets what this means, yet they spend far too little time factoring these big-picture priorities into their days and years.

Start with what you want your identity to be over the span of a lifetime. In particular, what are the themes about who you are that you can be confident loved ones will remember forever? When you think of the things you hope people will say in hindsight, map back to how you can ensure that occurs as a product of your efforts.

As you define what a life well lived means to you personally, it can be helpful to start with the people you admire most. This may give you clues to how you want (and don't want) to be remembered. While more personal-, family-, and faith-oriented aims often end up at the top of this list of eulogy purposes, push yourself to determine what professional and community contributions would also belong on even the shortest of remembrances.

BEYOND YOUR LIFETIME

Out of all of the things I have learned about mission, purpose, and meaning, this one discovery rings most true: *The best investment of time is in what continues to grow when you're gone.* Focusing on what will outlast you is the ultimate catalyst for more meaningful work.

When you invest an hour in the development and growth of another person, the effect usually lasts well beyond the time you physically spent with that person, in some cases carrying forward for decades and branching out to help others. When you invest an hour in writing, reading, or creating works of art or new products, what you produce often has the opportunity to reach many more people in your absence and likely beyond your lifetime. Even the investment of your financial resources follows this general principle; it is almost always better to invest in things that can grow and pay dividends in your absence.

ALIGNING YOUR PURPOSE(S)

One of the key steps to doing more purposeful work, in your job and beyond, is aligning your daily efforts with your overarching missions and goals. If you have a long-term aim, for example, of improving the environment for the next generation of your family, yet you spend almost no daily time contributing to that endeavor, that would be an example of little to no alignment of purpose. My hunch is that many people find themselves in that situation today, yet all it takes is a bit more direct connection of the steps and dots to change that perspective.