

The **MEANINGFUL** **LIFE**

**HOW TO FIND YOUR LIFE PURPOSE SO YOU CAN
LIVE A LIFE OF SIGNIFICANCE**



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Introduction



Do you ever feel as though you are just going through the motions? Do you ever feel as though you're drifting through life without ever really getting any sense of inspiration, engagement, or excitement?

Does life sometimes feel like a series of uninteresting chores?

Or perhaps you're perfectly happy and comfortable but you rarely feel challenged or excited. Maybe you spend most of your evenings on the sofa watching TV. Or even out at the pub with friends. Maybe you spend your whole life picking up after your children.

What will you be leaving behind when you're gone? What is your great impact?

Look at people like Albert Einstein, like Newton, like Picasso, like Mozart, like the Beatles, like Usain Bolt, like Winston Churchill, like Neil Armstrong, like Nelson Mandela, like Shakespeare, like Mother Teresa.

Now look at your own life. Is there a bit of a stark difference?

Now you might argue that of course you're no Einstein. You're not a musical prodigy or a record breaking athlete. It would be overblown to think that you could ever approach the success of any of these historical figures or world-class celebrities.

But does that really mean you need to spend your time just... *passing time*?

And are you *really* happy that way? Or do you feel on some level as though there are better uses of your time?

Whether you're happy or you feel in a funk, the truth is that life gets a *whole* lot better as soon as you fill it with *meaning*.

That means finding your life's purpose. Finding the thing that you're passionate about. And then focussing on that.

As soon as you do this, you will unlock entirely different levels of focus, of inspiration, of engagement, of charisma. Life suddenly has structure, it makes sense, and you become far more alive. You stop daydreaming and sleepwalking through life and you instead begin to forge your own meaningful path.

You'll get more out of the time you have on this Earth, and truly there is little that is more worthwhile than that.

When you find your purpose, you'll even become healthier... even become *more attractive*.

It won't matter whether success follows because you'll be content to spend your days pursuing this thing *without* any kind of financial reward.

But success very likely *will* come. Read on and discover why that is and why finding your purpose is what you need in order to change *everything*.

Chapter 1: Why Finding Your Purpose Changes Everything



So, why is it that finding your purpose can change everything? How does this help you to truly come alive? Why is this the *key* to success?

Have you ever heard someone tell you that they find passion to be a turn on? *Many* women say that they love seeing men who speak passionately about a subject, or busy at work doing whatever it is that they do. Why do you think that rock stars get so many groupies? It's not just about the fame: if you go to a rock concert with a *relative unknown* they will still almost always have their pick of several women to go home with that night! The simple fact is that they're doing what they love, they're demonstrating skill and passion on stage and to the adulation of countless others. That's a turn on! Women reading this: ask yourself when your guy is at his sexiest. Is it when he's talking

about something he finds absolutely fascinating? Or when he's hard at work programming, or working out at the gym?

And the same works for men. Men might be a little less emotionally switched on sometimes and they may be unaware of just what it is they find attractive in their partners. But one thing that is *always* a turn on is seeing a woman who is passionate and driven. It exudes confidence. Think of that sexy violinist all in black, who is taken away by the music and who has the crowd eating out of her hand. Or an incredible dancer.

In fact, finding passion can actually be a trick for bringing more romance and excitement back into your relationship. The sexist thing is the other. The unknown. It is seeing someone who is highly motivated and driven, who is passionate about what they do. When you spend all day on the couch with someone, the magic goes. You become too close. It's hard to *want* what you already have.

Get some distance. All each other to grow. Explore your own individual passions and hobbies and let them do the same. And you'll suddenly find that you both become more interesting to one another again. And for those of you who are single? Stop focussing *outward* by trying to impress people. Start focussing on yourself and what you love, and you'll become endless more magnetic.

But that's just a little bonus incentive. There's far more to it than that.

Tapping Into Creative Flow

We don't just become sexually more attractive when we're focussing on our passion: we become more attractive in the visceral most basic way. Attractive in the sense that people want to be around us, to listen to us, to follow us. We become leaders, inspirers, beacons.

The reason is that we enter what is known as a flow state. A flow state occurs when you are focussed on something 100%. When you are so engaged with whatever you are doing, that all other distractions fall aside. More importantly, the part of your brain associated with your sense of self and with your self *regulation* shuts down. This is the dorsal-lateral prefrontal cortex.

This removes the parts of our brain that usually holds us back and that prevents us from being 100% in the moment. In other words, we are no longer worrying about our finances or about what other people think. Instead, we are highly focussed and 100% of our mental and energy resources are directed toward that event.

And what happens when you direct 100% of your resources toward one activity? Well, it should come as no shock to hear that you become *better* at that one activity!

In sports, flow states can cause time to almost seem to slow down and dilate, giving us more time to react to things that are happening around us. When we're writing an essay or painting a masterpiece, we see increased activity in the medial prefrontal cortex, giving us better focus on what's happening inside our own mind and almost seeming to *shut out* the rest of the world.

These are different kinds of flow states but they both represent the same thing: being highly focussed and highly engaged with whatever it is that you're doing and therefore performing your best.

And this is actually a highly exhilarating experience. Many people describe it as almost euphoric and enlightening: they feel so switched on and so alive because they're forgetting all of their worries and all of their concerns for that brief amount of time: it's almost as if they are in a meditative state. They love the thing they're doing *so much* that nothing else seems to matter, at least for a time.

And from a neurochemical standpoint, this makes sense too: the brain floods itself with not only focus neurotransmitters (similar to hormones) but also endorphins to make us feel good.

And this is also the state you need to be in if you want to be highly successful. Because countless studies show us that great things happen when you're in flow. It has been suggested that the vast majority of world records have been broken by people who were in flow states at the time. And it has also been suggested that all the most successful start-ups are in flow too.

Getting to Flow

Getting to this point is *all about* being highly engaged with what you're doing and it's all about *loving* that thing.

Because flow is triggered by the salience network. This is the part of the brain (the anterior cingulate cortex and other connected areas) which tells us what's important and what we should be focussed on. It does this via the release of dopamine – the

‘reward hormone’ – which our brains produce in anticipation of reward.

In other words, dopamine tells us that something is important and that it requires our attention. This directs the salience network – the attention network – toward the relevant brain areas. That in turn ensures that we remain focussed on those things and allows our sense of ‘self’ to fade away.

Flow states *can* occur when we’re in danger. This is why we often enjoy split-second reflexes when we’re snowboarding down the side of a mountain at break-neck speed. When this happens our brain comes alive and says ‘I REALLY need to pay attention to this’.

But when you LOVE what you do, the same thing happens. When you love what you do, the brain says ‘I REALLY need to pay attention’. This time it’s because you’re so engaged with that task and so enraptured by it, that nothing else seems to share the same importance.

Magnetism and Passion

Others can sense this passion and this focus and it sends powerful signals that you are someone highly capable, highly exciting to be around and highly engaging.

Have you ever noticed how some people seem to be highly charismatic? Have you ever met someone who you just instantly wanted to like you? Someone who just won you over and was highly persuasive and interesting?

These are people we consider to be highly charismatic. And where does charisma come from?

Studies show us that charisma is positively correlated with gesticulation: when someone moves around a lot while they talk, when they make lots of hand gestures as they explain someone, when they seem more *animated*. That's when they become charismatic, charming and engaging.

Why? Because we interpret this as someone being 100% behind what they're saying. When they move around and gesticulate, their bodylanguage is *congruent* with what they're saying. They appear to really believe it!

And therefore, they become far more engaging and magnetic. We interpret this as: 'Well if *they* seem that excited by what they're saying, maybe I should listen too!'

This could even be explained by mirror neurons: neurons that fire when we witness someone doing or saying something and the same neurons fire in our own brains as though we were doing that thing. When we see someone come alive with passion and enthusiasm, we *literally* feel that passion and enthusiasm ourselves to some degree!

The Journey

And there's one more BIG reason that life gets so much better when you find your passion or your drive. That is because you'll this way discover what it is that you're really want to accomplish, you'll have a goal and you'll have an end point. And when you

have that, you'll know precisely what you need to do. You'll be able to prioritize and you'll be able to shoot for the stars.

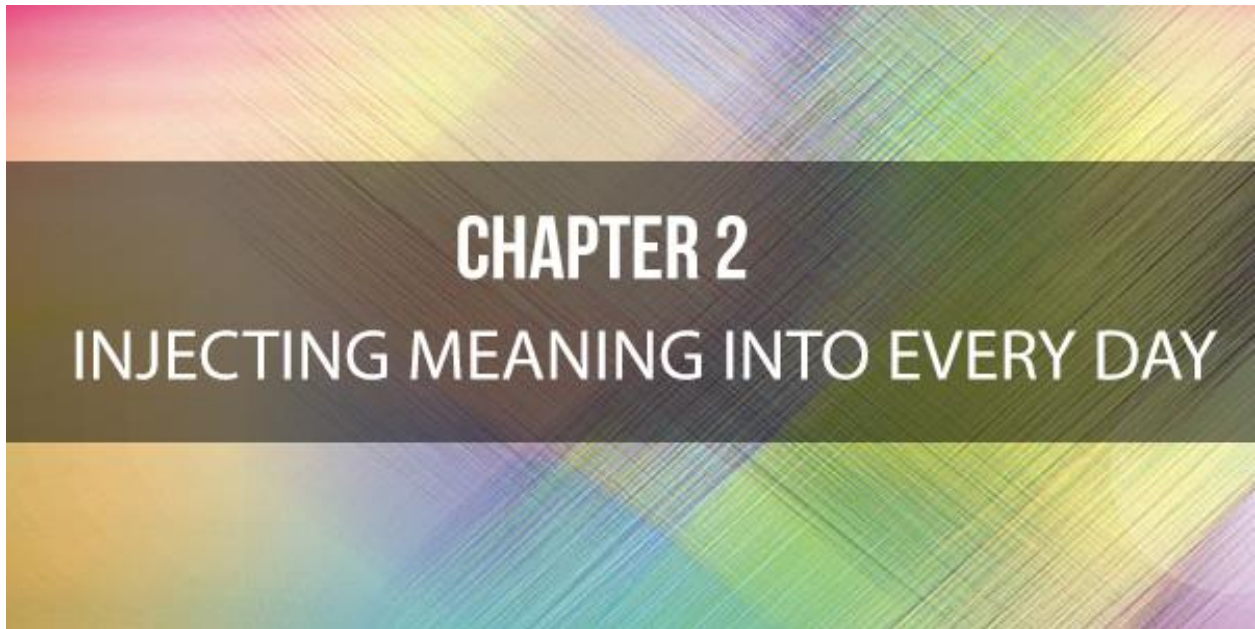
The human brain loves challenge, it loves growth and it loves forward momentum. When we feel like we've achieved a goal – even a small one – we release neurotransmitters and hormones that make us feel good. And this helps the brain to change shape and grow and develop.

But conversely, when we spend every day doing the same thing, it leaves us with no incentive for change. And when you don't grow, you remain static. And then you decay. This is literally what happens in the brain: if you don't use your brain to its fullest potential, then it *will* start to atrophy. It becomes less plastic. And the chemical balance makes us more prone to depression and indifference.

Having something we love to do gives us a goal and a purpose. This gives us a trajectory. And this stops every day from feeling the same. It stops every day from being a slog toward... nothing in particular. And simply having that journey makes us so much happier and more fulfilled.

It doesn't even matter if you manage to turn your passion into your career. It doesn't matter if you ever get acknowledgement for it. Simply HAVING that passion and having a goal and a journey... it puts everything else into perspective and it gives life meaning.

Chapter 2: Injecting Meaning Into Every Day



So, our goal is to find a life's purpose. And hopefully, you've already understood a little bit about why this is such a worthwhile and meaningful endeavour and such a good use of your time.

But this takes a lot of work. You're not going to get there overnight. In the meantime, there's a lot more you need to try and accomplish.

It starts by injecting more meaning into every day. The aim is not only to find a purpose and a goal to work toward, but also to make those more mundane parts of your life more important, impactful and rewarding.

Because in reality, most of us aren't going to be able to give up our other endeavors. You're unlikely to have the option any time soon to give up your job and embrace a career doing whatever it

is you love full time. You're still going to need to clean the dishes, you'll still want to spend time with friends.

You'll still need to go to the shops to get bread, and you'll need to stick with your day job.

If you find your purpose and then give yourself only a few hours in the week to focus on it, this can actually be even more distressing in some ways.

Once you know what it is that you really want to be doing, how you really want to be spending your time... it can become torturous to find yourself stuck in an office 9-5, or to have to spend your evenings tidying, all the while knowing precisely what you'd rather be doing.

So, you need to find ways to make everything that little bit more meaningful. To start putting color back into your life.

Finding More Meaning and Immortality

Finding more meaning in your life can make you immortal.

Okay, that's a little bit of an exaggeration...

It can make you seemingly live for MUCH longer.

No seriously.

I want you to think back over the past few weeks and months.

What is it that you have achieved? What is it that you have done?

What are your fondest memories?

Or how about this: just what did you have for dinner last Tuesday?

Hmm... can't remember right?

Okay, well how about this: what did you watch on TV? What happened in that show?

What time did you get home? Did you have any interesting conversations that day?

Chances are, you're drawing blanks at this point. Chances are that you don't know what you did because you can't remember.

And that's because what you did had no meaning.

When you go through the same routines every day, when you do the same things... your life doesn't have much meaning or much impact. *Why would* you remember a night where you watched the same show and ate the same thing that you do *every* night? It all blends into one.

And there's actually a logical reason why all this happens.

Remember that dopamine that is released when our brains think we're doing something highly important? Well, that very same chemical is also partly responsible for encouraging the formation of memories. More specifically, an increase in dopamine is correlated with an increase in BDNF – Brain Derived Neurotrophic Factor. This in turn is responsible for increasing our 'brain plasticity', which in short means that our neurons form more connections and we gain new knowledge and memories.

When nothing important or exciting happens, no new connections are formed. When something important happens, *far* more connections are formed.

And the most extreme example of this is the 'Flashbulb Memory'. A flashbulb memory is a phenomenon that is studied in neuroscience. It occurs when something of seemingly great importance happens and it causes us to form an incredibly vivid and detailed memory.

Let me ask you this: where were you when you learned of the terrorist attacks on 9/11?

Or if you're in the UK, where were you when you heard that Diana had died?

Younger than that? Okay, then when were you when you learned that Michael Jackson passed away?

Personal events are far more impactful still: you probably have a precise and detailed picture of where you were when you learned your parents died, when you proposed/were proposed to, when your children were born.

This is the result of a huge release of neurochemicals.

And why does it happen? Because those events are *meaningful* and our brains recognize the need to store more information about those events.

So, the more meaning you have in your life, the more you will find you remember. If you have a life where every day is an adventure, where every day brings new excitement, then you will fill your brain with countless detailed memories.

And when you look back over your recent weeks and years they will seem full and nearly endless.

Our perception of time is entirely reliant on our memories. That's why a day can seem longer when you do lots of things.

So, the more you do, the more memories you have, the longer your life will have seemed to be! In that way, by putting life in your years, you LITERALLY put years in your life.

If you spend every day doing the same thing, you'll look back on your life and have no new memories, no excitement. It will all blur into one nothingness and your life will seem to move faster, to be shorter.

So, is it any wonder that a life without meaning leads to depression and that feeling of claustrophobia and funk?

Novel, New and Exciting

So now the question to ask is: what makes for a meaningful and impactful day? What can you do to ensure that you create new memories? What does it take to have an exciting and meaningful time?

The answer starts with novelty.

To understand this, you need to understand how the brain and its memory systems work. Or more importantly, you need to understand *why* they are there in the first place. What are they for?

The answer is that your brain stores memories that it thinks are going to be useful for your survival. That it thinks will help you to avoid danger in future, or to pursue valuable goals and valuable achievements.

And the perfect example of this is novelty.

When you go through the same routine every single day, you activate the precise same neural networks. These become more and more deeply ingrained, more and more highly myelinated and insulated. Thus, signals will travel much more quickly and effectively through those neural connections and you will become better at doing that one thing. But there's no need for new neurons and new memories. And you can almost do those things on autopilot!

But when you put yourself in an entirely new environment, or when you challenge yourself with an entirely new task, you need to pay attention. Your current skill set is not equipped to deal with this situation. Thus, your brain needs to pay attention and it needs to *learn* fast.

If you are someone who never exposes themselves to anything new, then this can almost be overwhelming for the brain. You might find yourself feeling intimidated, stressed and scared and not in a good way! This is why some people will seldom *ever* step outside their comfort zones. But you need to go through with it anyway – and repeatedly – if you are to eventually overcome this and make your brain more plastic and adaptable again.

So, in short, you need to subject yourself to new things. You need to subject yourself to new experiences. And you need to be brave and bold.

Then your life will be more challenging, more adventurous, and ultimately *far* more memorable.

How to Inject the Novel

Now I know what you're thinking: I'm a busy Mum/Dad! I work 9-5! I have chores to do!

I get it. Not every day can be spent abseiling down the side of a mountain in a beautiful setting in some far-flung corner of the world.

But you don't need to travel, to spend money, or to put yourself in harm's way in order to experience the novel. The other. You can experience new things easily at home on an almost daily basis.

How?

- Try new foods
- Watch new programs on TV
- Read new books
- Try new hobbies
 - Swimming
 - Crossfit
 - Sewing
 - Astrophotography
 - Japanese painting
 - Martial arts
 - Dance

- Writing poetry
- Drawing
- Composing music
- Speak to new people – try striking up conversations in coffee shops or on the train
- Take different routes home
- Go for a quick drive
- Play a new computer game
- Make a small new purchase
- Learn something new
 - A language
 - Programming
 - Mechanical engineering

There is so much to see and do, to try and to experiment with that you can try right now. How about you go to Planet4.org and try looking through *never before seen* photos of the red planet to help Nasa look for signs of extra-terrestrial life or geographical anomalies? Yes, you can do that right now. Nothing is stopping you. How is that for an incredible evening?

How about you try building a Google Cardboard VR headset (it costs nothing) and then experience some of the awe-inspiring things this will offer you through your smartphone?

Even small things will help to make your life richer and more interesting life. Now when someone asks you how your day is, you'll actually have something interesting to say in response!

The Benefits of Computer Games

This is just a small aside, but the reason that computer games are so interesting to us is that they help us to achieve many of these things.

A computer game provides us with a novel input and set of movements to learn. It then lets us explore a new world – albeit imaginary – to solve puzzles, to find secrets and to take on incredible challenges.

Computer games trick your brain into thinking it is doing something incredible, even when you're just sitting at home in bed.

You can use this to keep your brain more limber and plastic. But better yet: recognize what it is *about* those games that makes you feel alive and then try to introduce that to your real life. The fact that we love exploring new worlds and challenging opponents in our spare time *shows us* what we should really be doing. It shows us what our brain wants.

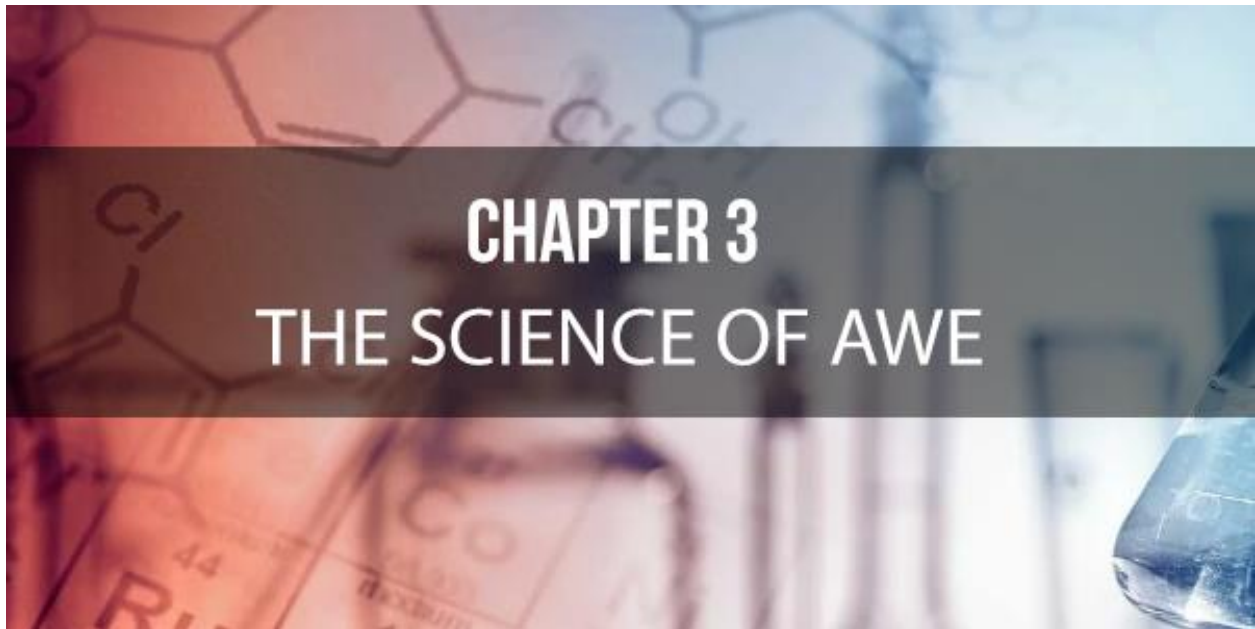
And think about it this way: this is also precisely what you would be doing in the wild where your emotions and your brain evolved. In the wild, we would have needed to explore new lands in order to discover new resources and new opportunities. Likewise, we would have been constantly running from predators, chasing prey and competing with our peers.

In short, we wouldn't have spent much time sitting down and seeing the same environments day after day.

Our brain assigns meaning to adventure for this reason. And without adventure, we are left feeling a sense of emptiness.

And one more key takeaway here is the movement. Our lack of movement and our being confined to one spot *literally* causes our bodies and our minds to waste away. Get out there. Get exploring. Try new things. Otherwise, you doom yourself to a very slow but very certain demise.

Chapter 3: The Science of Awe



Let's take a moment to engage in a little experiment. I want you to stop what you're doing and then picture the most *meaningful* thing you can picture. What is the 'archetypal' meaningful experience? If you had to paint an inspiring and meaningful image, what would you paint?

I can almost guarantee that in thinking about this, your mind will have turned at least momentarily to a sunset, a mountain, or some other kind of vista. These images are powerful and moving and they are what we associated strongly with meaningful experiences and existence.

In fact, there is even a growing practice of 'awe cultivation'. Awe cultivation means the practice of seeking out and inciting awe-inspiring moments in order to fill your life with more meaning.

Now, while you can spend evenings learning about Japanese culture, or trying haggis, awe cultivation is something that takes a little longer and that isn't so readily available.

But what is it and why is it so important?

According to studies (here is one:

<http://pss.sagepub.com/content/early/2012/08/10/0956797612438731>), awe cultivation is a practice that helps to increase well-being and happiness. Observing awe even seems to reduce cytokines – in other words, inflammation.

These are moments when our breath is taken away by the scope of a scene, by the scale of natural beauty, or by a living creature so alien and magnificent that we can't handle it.

What is happening during these moments?

Scientists are not entirely sure, but one of the most popular theories is that awe is caused by a huge shift in perception or perspective.

Human beings are inherently ego-centric and self-centered. We care only about ourselves and about our own petty concerns.

But when we are faced with a valley that is so magnificent in scope that we feel absolutely microscopic, this forces us to reassess the importance of our own lives. It forces us to recognize our place in the universe.

The same thing happens when we watch a documentary and learn something that completely changes the way we see things.

Of course, this has a similarly positive effect of helping us to let go of our own concerns for a moment – just like being highly engaged with what we're doing. And it has also been explained as being so positive because it helps us to overcome the feeling of not having enough time, because the world seems so vast and impossible.

Let's try it:

If you're familiar with Einstein's theory of relativity, then you'll know that space and time are really just one thing. This is why travelling fast enough can actually slow down the way we experience time.

Einstein unified the idea of time and space into a single 4 dimensional structure that we know as space time. This led to an incredibly mind-bending realization: our perception of past, present and future is entirely illusionary and arbitrary.

In our daily lives, we experience time in a continuous flow. But we can also think of it as a series of snapshots – like the cells in a movie reel. As time progresses, we are simply unfolding these snapshots or moments. And if we picture them all lined up – every single moment throughout the entire universe – then we would see every single event that has ever happened and that *will* ever happen. Every moment in time and every location in space. From the birth of the universe to where you are sitting right now.

If you think of space-time in this way, then you can understand Einstein's realizations. Your concept of 'right now' might include your sitting on the sofa, the ticking of a

clock and perhaps your partner on the way home from work on the train. It might also include other things you can speculate on – like an important business meeting happening simultaneously elsewhere.

This is the concept of ‘now’ and we can imagine these all lined up on a single slice of space time – one of those moments that we described earlier. And you might assume that everyone else would agree with you on precisely what is happening ‘now’.

But if you take motion into account, then this shared understanding of ‘now’ gets completely broken down. Imagine time as being like a loaf of bread. You can cut bread into individual slices by cutting it in a straight line. But if that line is diagonal, then you can create differently shaped slices.

And in effect, when someone is moving, it actually slightly ‘changes’ the angle of that knife.

Imagine an alien on one side of the universe and a man on the other. If they’re both stationary and we take a slice of ‘now’, then it will be a straight line and their perception of what is happening ‘now’ in the moment, will be the same. But if the alien is riding on a bike away from Earth, its motion will slow down the passage of time. Their clocks will no longer be in sync.

Suddenly, the slice takes on a different angle. And because the distance is so great, even just a tiny amount of speed would result in a *huge* difference. So, what the alien

considers to be now would likely be greater than 200 years different from what we consider to be now.

And if the alien changes direction? Then what it considers to be *now* will be 200 years in the future of what our man on the bench considers to be now.

This is not theory. This is scientific fact, proven by countless different studies.

Of course, in practice, we have never been able to witness two things happening 'now' at this kind of distance. But we have proven it at a much smaller scale and the laws of physics dictate that this *must* hold up at a greater scale as well.

Likewise, of course the alien is always moving differently to us – it's whole planet is likely on a different kind of orbit. It's hypothetical to say the least but the simple fact of the matter is that the past is not gone: it is still there. Likewise, the future is equally 'real' already. Just as we think of all of space as being 'out there', so too is all of time out there. Right now.

Maybe I just blew your mind. Maybe I didn't. But there's a small chance that this new perspective on the universe has created some kind of awe. And if it has, then the reason for this is that it has forced

But it may also trigger *massive* restructuring in the brain. Because it has changed the way that you think of everything that has ever happened and the very nature of the future. And this forces you to

rethink countless previous events. To reshape *existent* memories and your perspective of the future.

And this is truly life changing.

For religious individuals, the same thing might happen if they feel that they have had an interaction with their god.

And for someone like Einstein it probably happened at the moment of that realization and discovery.

This is neurochemical bliss because it *literally* expands your mind. It *forces* you into new perceptions of reality.

I personally find those moments of awe by stepping outside with my telescope and looking at the moon. For a moment, it feels so close I could reach out and touch it.

So, take some time to chase that awe and to feel the true scope, beauty and wonder of the world around you. You can do it by travelling to incredible locations, but you can also do it by just looking up at the stars for a moment and really *feeling* your tiny size. And you can do it by reading about space, humanity, the animal kingdom, the sea, history, your religion, art.

Spend some time trying to have your mind *blown*.

Awe happens when we can barely comprehend. When our brains just say: does not compute.

Speaking of which...

The Computer Game Metaphor

I've talked about the benefits of computer games for your sense of novelty, challenge, adventure and experience.

And there's a way you can get genuine awe from a computer game too. Try virtual reality.

If you have never tried VR before, then I implore you to put on an Oculus Rift or a HTC Vive, plugged into a high-powered PC and with full room-scale tracking on. Then load up a game like Lone Echo.

And see if you feel a little awe. Not only at the incredible locations it *tricks* your brain into thinking it's in. But also at the simple fact that this is possible. That technology has gotten to this point. Incredible.

But computer games are also the perfect metaphor for what's wrong with modern humanity.

Game designers know all too well, then players will always seek out the easiest way to win. *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* had a novel and controversial gameplay mechanic in place which was for every weapon to be degradable. Eventually, every weapon in that game will break and stop working.

Some players hated this, but the reason for it is simple. This being a completely open world game, players would *otherwise* have been able to run to Hyrule Castle, grab the most powerful weapons, and then trounce the rest of the game. The game would have ceased to be fun any more because the challenge would be gone. The sense of *awe* would be gone. The sense of danger would be gone.

But even with the game having been ruined, very few players would abandon the overkill weapon and continue playing at a harder difficulty. This is just human nature.

As weapons break, they are only a temporary advantage. And the player is kept on their toes throughout.

Players always look for the easy way out and that's precisely what we humans have done: we've found a 'hack'. We've found the most powerful weapons in the game: the industrial revolution. And now we have no incentive to explore, to challenge ourselves or to discover those moments of awe. Everything is too easy, we rely on reliable habits.

You need to put the challenge back in in order to keep changing your brain and body and in order to keep that awe going.

My Backflip Story

Right now my heart is racing. Life feels scary and I am about to face a challenge that I absolutely want to overcome but that scares me a whole lot. That challenge is that I'm trying to build up to a backflip. I have set my sights on this goal and now simply by knowing that this is what I want to do, I find myself feeling a lot of fear.

As I write this, I'm watching people perform backflips on silent on YouTube. And my heart is racing. I feel excited and alive.

You see, you don't need anything crazy to happen in order to feel this kind of excitement and challenge. You can create it all for yourself.

THE MEANINGFUL LIFE

Chapter 4: The Hero's Journey



Here's another way to find out whether or not your life has meaning and to see what the difference between a meaningful life and mundane, uninspiring one is.

And that is to ask yourself this question: would your life make a good book?

If your life were a film, would you watch it?

And would your character be an inspiring hero, or a dullard?

If your life is not interesting enough to make for a good story, then how can it possibly be considered an exciting or interesting one?

And so, we can use this to work backwards. What is it that makes these stories so interesting? How can we turn our lives into one of these epic stories?

Well, one way to start out, is by looking at the basics of narrative structure. By assessing how an author might go about approaching a story.

And this will often mean using a proven structure that is known as 'The Hero's Journey'.

The hero has been around since story telling began, and is featured in almost every story and religion from the ancient world to current Sci Fi blockbusters. But unbeknownst to most of us, those heroes are actually all one and the same and follow a very predictable pattern and character progression in all these different mediums. Today this is just as relevant for fans of computer games whose characters again follow this same trajectory. For fans of role playing games, where the story of the lead character and hero is central to the gameplay, this is even more the case.

Cloud from Final Fantasy, the hero from Fable, the characters you play in World of Warcraft or Dark Swords, they all come from the same mould; and the same mould as Luke Skywalker, Superman and even Jesus. This one character in the many different guises is referred to as 'the hero with a thousand faces', which comes from the book of the same name by Eric Campbell.

This theory came about through studying the similarities in storytelling even across cultures (where it couldn't be a matter of copying or being inspired by stories that had gone before). Here the hero would follow a 'journey' that would include several different stages and characters regardless of the set up.

Normally the story begins with the hero being sent on some sort of quest. The background of the hero is normally that they're

something of an outsider and maybe have adopted parents or deceased parents (and often this is what triggers their leaving to embark on the journey). This stage is known as 'crossing the threshold' and it is the point at which the rules of their world are turned upside down, or they physically journey to a new land. Think of Neo exiting the Matrix, think of Dorothy landing in Oz, think of Frodo leaving the Shire, or think even of something less obvious – like Shallow Hal gaining his new sight.

In many ways, this is similar to that moment of 'awe' that completely changes our perception.

During this journey they will meet an old mentor near the beginning (/surrogate Father figure) who will train them in some of their abilities. They will also likely be given an important gift by this mentor that will help them on their quest (originally a sword though this varies). They will likely also encounter a side kick who will help them on their journey and meet a 'trickster' who will be neither friend nor foe but act as another foil for our protagonist (though the trickster is often eventually allied to the hero and can be pivotal in taking down the main enemy). Along the journey the hero will also take on several smaller challenges each bringing them closer to their final objective and their nemesis. Once these smaller challenges are completed they will encounter the architect of their troubles – the overbearing nemesis who will likely hold a damsel captive.

This often involves entering a dark and foreboding place, which is often referred to as 'the belly of the beast' or the 'innermost cave'. There, they do battle in what is known as 'the ordeal'.

At this point the hero is often seemingly killed but undergoes a 'rebirth' coming back stronger and more powerful to slay the captor (also often portrayed as a dragon), save the damsel, win the gold and return to their village a hero. This transformation is the apotheosis.

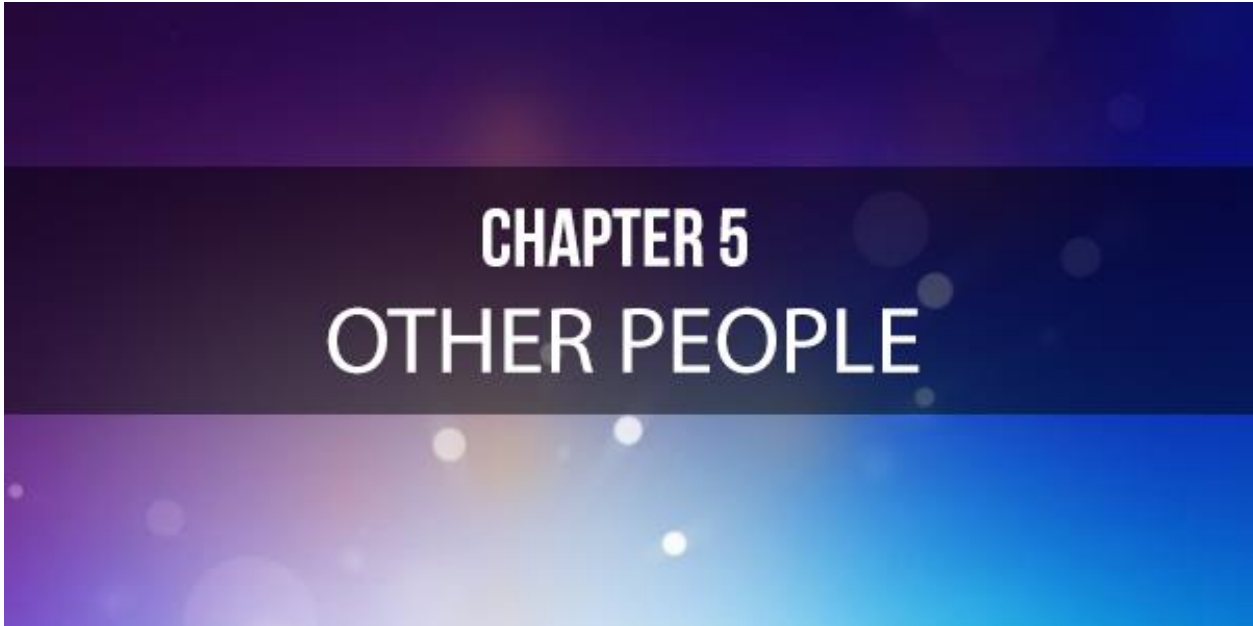
So just who is this character that we see in so many guises? And just where does he come from? Well Freud and later Jung have theorised that the hero is in fact an underlying set of emotions and troubles that we unconsciously face in our day to day lives expressed through art. The hero's journey is in fact our 'journey'. The damsel our partner, their captor often based on their Father and the rebirth representing our entrance into manhood or womanhood. Next time you read a book or play an RPG think about this and you should be able to get a whole new enjoyment from it.

The Hero's Journey in Your Own Life

So how do you go about making sure you have your own hero's journey? How do you make your life less about pushing pencils and more about discovering incredible things, going to incredible places, taking on amazing challenges?

The answer is to adventure to new places, meet new people and to make sure that you grow. Cross thresholds, change and seek out new treasures – all the things we've discussed so far!

Chapter 5: Other People



So, discovering new things, trying new things, using your body, challenging yourself... these are all things that will help you to feel alive and to add meaning to your life.

But there is another way to add meaning. And that is to spend more time with others. To do more things with other people.

This is incredibly important. Why? Because spending time with others is another thing that adds meaning to what we do.

Earlier we discussed how filling your days with novel experiences would help you to almost feel a sense of immortality – simply by filling your days with new experiences and new memories that you can reflect on.

Well, doing things with other people *genuinely* creates a kind of immortality – not just a trick of perception.

Why is this? Simple: when we spend time with other people, they *remember* that time you spent together. This in turn means that you are affecting something other than yourself, so that when you are gone, your echoes will still be felt.

What we do now, echoes through eternity...

Look at it this way, if you were to spend all of your time alone at home and never speak to anyone, then you could die and no one would know until the smell disturbed the neighbors. This is a sad thought indeed but it's also unfortunately entirely true.

And therefore, *nothing* you do will have any lasting impact. If you were to have the most incredible day – if you were to look at Planet4.org and *find* alien life – but not report it – you would die having made no change to the world.

This underscores the importance of our interactions with others. If we have no one to share our experiences with, then they can have no real meaning and no impact that extends past our own lives.

Creating lasting works is another way to achieve a similar form of immortality of course, but that's something that you can't guarantee. Not all of us have it in us to create something that will change the world. But we can *all* make friends and do things that will help them to feel happier and that will help them to remember us when we're gone.

Who knows: maybe by inspiring a friend's son, you will help them to go on to do something incredible? Maybe by striking up a conversation in that pub, you'll improve someone's day and *they*

will go on to cheer someone else up, which will prevent them from committing suicide.

Sure, that's a needlessly dramatic and unlikely example. *But you get my point.* The point is that you can have incredible impact on the world around you without even knowing it: just by making the effort to interact with people around you and to spend time with friends.

The Neurological Impact of Social Interactions

We've discussed a fair amount of neuroscience throughout this book so far. And the reason for that, is that neuroscience is what gives us our senses.

Let's be honest: meaning is arbitrary. What has meaning is entirely down to us. We don't know the reason we're put on this planet, so we can't say that any one thing is more important than any other thing.

So, it comes down to emotion. And our emotions are all based on our brain and our neuroscience – as well as our evolution.

And from an evolutionary standpoint, there are few things more important than social interaction. Our social interactions keep us safe, they provide us with access to resources and they provide us with the opportunity to learn and to find mates and friends.

And they are also fantastic for our brain. Social interactions trigger the release of endorphins and of hormones. And they help us to form new neural connections. And what is more, is they are one of the key things that help us to develop our brain.

It was once thought that our brains developed to the point that they did because of our use of technology. But if we look to our closest relatives, the great apes, we can see that they have all the necessary dexterity and resources to use tools in this way and yet they have not. Meanwhile, dolphins actually seem to have more developed brain areas in the regions that matter. So, what is the difference?

Well one theory, is that dolphins have managed to develop to this point because they have more developed social interactions. Dolphins have cultures, they have individual names for each other and recent research even suggests that dolphins will even talk about each other when they aren't present – they have *gossip!*

This takes a huge amount of brain power to manage the mental models necessary for these kinds of social interactions.

When we think of how we would have lived in the wild, it would have been in large groups. We would have spent time in small tribes where our relatives and friends would have been just outside our own tents. We'd always have had social interaction to stimulate us, to share information about our days and to help us through troubling times.

Today, we spend time with a small family group, we meet people at work, but we otherwise spend almost all our time alone or in twos and threes. And it's not so healthy for us.

Finding Passion and Time for Others

There will be times when your purpose is at odds with other people. How about when you are spending all your time painting

or spending all your money developing your business plan and your wife or husband misses you or is worried about finances?

This is why one of THE most important things to do, is to explain yourself to your partner. To let them know what's important to you, who you are. You owe them your honesty. Hopefully they'll be on the same page as you. But if they're not? As Tim Ferriss says: ask for forgiveness, not permission. If you let someone else clip your wings, then you'll only end up resenting them. Show them the beauty of your passion and enjoy it together.

Altruism and Meaning

What's even better for creating meaning in our lives is helping others. When we help others, this actually creates one of the *biggest* neurochemical hits there is. This helps us to feel far more confident in who we are. It helps us to get a sense of having done something worthwhile and of having made a lasting impact on the world. This is called the 'helper's high' and it is actually considered another 'flow trigger'.

And interestingly, awe cultivation has actually been shown to *make us* more likely to be altruistic and giving. It's all coming together!

MANY people say that they get the most satisfaction out of helping others and giving back.

So, if you're looking for that meaning, if you want to feel as though you're contributing something, then consider charity work. That might mean giving some money but better yet is to get out there and help. That could mean spending time with lonely elderly

people, it could mean working as a Samaritan and answer phone calls to people who may be considering suicide.

Chapter 6: What do You Stand for?



Similar to helping others, is the power of joining a cause. Of standing for something, of having a sense of allegiance.

Of course, the need for belonging is one of the most fundamental aspects of the human condition. But it's even more meaningful when that belonging brings with it a cause. When we feel that we are standing for something worthwhile. That we are helping not just one person, but our entire race.

We live in a very shallow age, and although it's no one's fault, it's really a terrible shame that most of us don't stand for anything real or important anymore. Sure, we all have hobbies and interests, and we all probably have goals and beliefs, but how many of us actually use our beliefs to inform our big decisions in life? And how many of us actively try to make a difference in our chosen area of interest so that we can go to bed feeling as though we've touched the lives of others in a real and impactful way?

The fact is that most of us just don't give much thought to what we stand for, or how we can make that stand and have the strength to follow our convictions. And when you don't know what you stand for, it makes it hard to know what's important. This is another reason that we can get very stressed and very upset about something petty – like our number of Instagram likes.

Not only that, but not having any beliefs in this sense actually makes you vulnerable in terms of being more easily led. If you don't know what you stand for, what's to stop someone from convincing you that their way is right?

As XZibit and Alice Cooper sang: if you don't stand for something, you will fall for anything.

Here then we'll look at how you can decide what you do stand for, and how you should go about making a real difference.

How to Choose What to 'Stand For'

We all stand for lots of things. If you love football a lot for instance then you might stand for Man United, while at the same time if you're a graphic designer in your day job you could also stand for the importance of 'good design'.

But when someone asks what you stand for overall you are unlikely to answer with either of these ideas. Rather we generally tend to assume that the thing we stand for first and foremost will be something more fundamental and that will have wider implications on the world. So how do you decide on that?

One way to decide what to stand for is to look at what's central to all your other beliefs and interests. For me, I love travelling, I love

computer games and I love coming up with unique and interesting ideas. In my spare time I enjoy free running and I enjoy bodybuilding, and for my day job I work online as someone who's self employed. So, what's the common thread here? It's freedom - it's not being tied down and it's being able to make the most of life as a result. I also find self-improvement very important, and I believe that this is what enables you to gain more freedom.

My wife is different. She's Catholic which dictates a lot of what she believes and does, she enjoys reading period novels and playing music, she takes her friends and family very seriously and she's recently taken up a job as an admin assistant at a University after working in admin at a charity for a year. Again, let's look at the common threads that seem to be driving her - could it be that 'duty' is what's important to her? And family?

By looking at the things that are most important to you and that drive the various areas of your life, you should be able to find common threads that give you your 'purpose'. What brings you joy and happiness? What is stopping others from feeling that way?

Likewise, what brings you sadness? When have you been hurt or mistreated? And how can you help others to *avoid* that same fate?

Likewise, ask what gets you riled up. When are you most angry? My Mum hates 'injustice' as she puts it. I hate seeing others having their freedom ignored. When you feel that rage bubbling up, go with it. Let it move you.

How to Take a Stand

So, once you've decided what you stand for, how do you go about living that life? Well of course you can donate to charities, you can talk to others about your beliefs and spread the word, and you can live your life in accordance with your values which is most important of all. If your job, your passions and the way you conduct your relationships all are in accordance with the things that drive you, then you will be sure to lead a fulfilled life and help others at the same time.

And most importantly, don't let anyone make you compromise on those beliefs and principles. This pride and passion will help to guide you.

Chapter 7: How to Begin the Journey of Finding Your Purpose



Finding meaning in everything you do will bring you greater happiness and purpose and will make your life far more fulfilling. You'll be happier and all your petty troubles will seem so much less important.

But if you cast your mind back to our discussion on flow states and purposes, you'll know that it's still ideal if you can try to find a central purpose or passion to pursue. Perhaps this might be a hobby that you love, or a mission that you feel you should accomplish. Maybe it means dedicating your life to a particular belief or cause, or maybe it means creating something that could change the world.

Whatever the case, finding this purpose is what will give you many of the other things we've discussed.

Not only will you gain that focus and commitment that comes from knowing what you want from life, but you'll also provide yourself with the stimulus, the growth, the purpose and the forward momentum that you need to keep on pushing forward.

Having a goal and a purpose gives you a direction and that helps you to make sense of everything else.

So how do you find it?

Doing What You Love

Often, the key comes down to what you love to do. We can sometimes struggle even to answer this seemingly simple question though, so here are a few exercises to help you find the answer:

- Ask when the last time you were truly happy was
- Ask when you were *at your happiest*
- If you had to spend a week doing one thing, what would it be?
- If you visualize your perfect future, what does it look like?
- What would you do right now, if you could do anything?
- What did you love doing when you were younger, before you become old and jaded?

These questions can help to start to uncover your true callings and your passions.

What Are You 'Meant' To Do?

At the same time, you should also think about what you are good at and you should think in terms of everything we've discussed so far about meaning.

In other words, what are you really good at? Have you had a lot of success in any area of your life or career? Do you find that certain things come very easily to you? Do you find that you've kind of been swept up by the current?

Now think back to the things that you stand for and that make you feel most passionate. Now think about the people you love to spend time with.

And when was the last time you felt *awe*?

What is a worthy challenge for you?

The question starts to take on a shape. It starts to become: what is it that you have to OFFER?

As the old question goes: don't ask what the world can do for you, ask what you can do for the world. And that, cheesy though it might be, is the key.

Because that is *inherently* going to mean you follow your gifts and your callings. And it means you'll inherently be doing things that are difficult and that have lasting impact for others.

So, am I telling you to go and become a saint? Not at all. This advice doesn't necessarily mean you need to be purely altruistic – although it might seem that way at first.

No, all I'm saying is that you should be motivated by more than just money and more than just entertainment. Let's face it, if we really were only motivated by what we'd like to be doing right now, then we'd all say that 'eating, sleeping and sex' were pretty much our passions (maybe even in that order).

Instead, ask as well:

- What are you not happy with?
- What power do you have to change the world for the better?
- Who can you influence?
- How do you want to be remembered?

Writing your eulogy as you would like to hear it can help you to think about how you want to be remembered. So, what do you want people to say about you after you're gone? Once you've done this you can then think about how you need to live your life in order to ensure that is how you'd be remembered.

The Golden Circle

Looking to business can help to explain this a little better. Specifically, I'm going to refer to a talk by Simon Sinek on the 'Golden Circle'. He describes how the most successful businesses are the ones that focus on the most important question: why.

He talks about a circle with three layers. On the outer layer is what. A company will ask what it is that it does: i.e. sell technology.

The second layer is how: how will the company do that? How will it be different? So, the company might say it's going to do it by

‘investing into the features consumers care about’ or ‘by outsourcing to Chinese manufacturing plants with only the best QA’.

Okay great. But neither of these things are inspiring. Neither of these things make for those kinds of exciting start-ups in flow states that we discussed earlier.

But then there’s the middle question: the ‘why’.

Why do you want to do this? Who is it for? What drives you?

And the best companies answer this. Look at Google, it’s not just about selling products – it’s about a vision to organize all the world’s information. This informs *all* of its products: from the Pixel Phone, to Google Home to Google Search.

Apple was at its peak when it focused on doing things differently: on being more personal, more stylish, more simple and more user-centric than the big technology firms like IBM.

Even companies like Red Bull are more successful because they have found a calling – Red Bull is all about performance and sports and amazing world records.

These are the companies that have *fans*. You are unlikely to be a fan of B&Q because it’s just a store that sells products for DIY. But look at Ikea – the ‘wonderful everyday’. It has a mission statement, it has a set of principles that guide everything it does. And so it has *actual fans*. People will be loyal to that brand because they like it.

Be Completely Honest

One of the most important tips of all is that you should be *completely* honest with yourself.

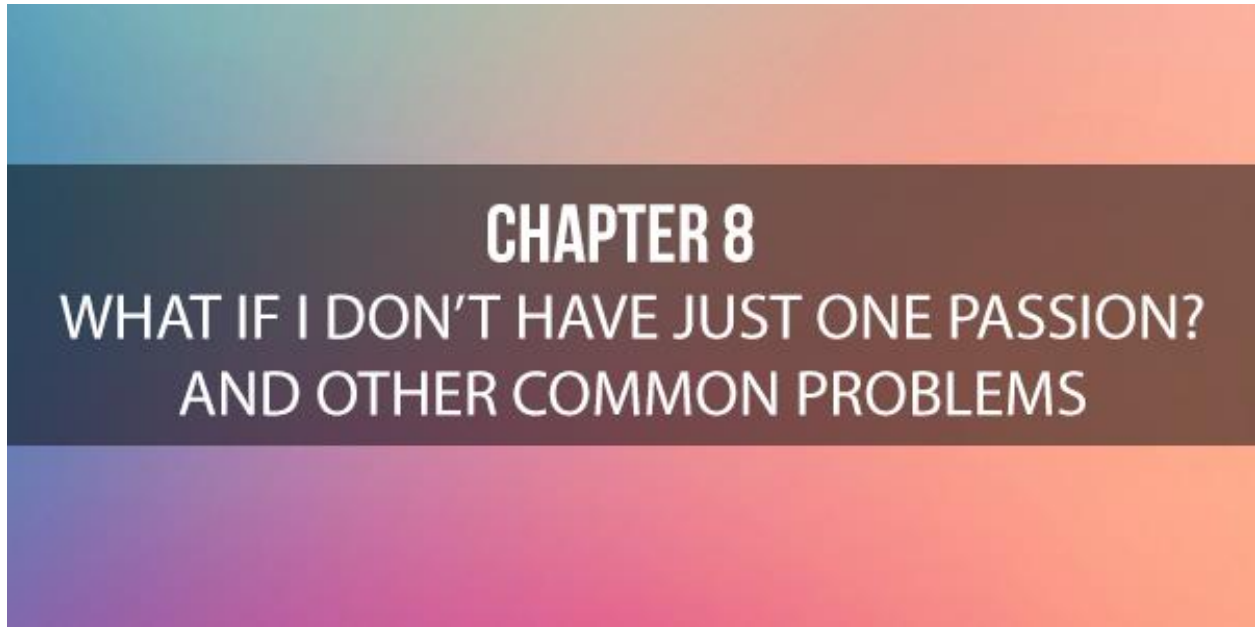
In other words, don't say what you *think* you should say. Don't say you want to help other people and give money to charity if you don't really.

Don't say you want to be the ethical lawyer because you love the thrill of the chase if *really* you love anime.

Your calling might not be noble, or honorable, or exciting. It might be lame. It might be highly inconvenient. But all of this only works when you follow your heart and your intuition.

Likewise, don't be trapped by the things you once said. If you change your mind then embrace it – don't keep forcing forward with something once the love has gone. Otherwise, you're just a slave to your superego.

Chapter 8: What if I Don't Have Just One Passion? And Other Common Problems



I knew people growing up who *always* knew what they wanted to be. A girl I dated wanted to be a physiotherapist, so she had the luxury of knowing which subjects to take at school and of knowing how to plan her whole life ahead of her.

I knew someone else who wanted to be a marine biologist.

I admired these people because they knew what they wanted and they were original, real desires. They weren't just going with what everyone else wanted, or following the crowd. And they were *realistic* goals.

But what if you don't have realistic passions? What if your life's mission is to be a rock star?

What if you're really old?

Or what if, like many people, you don't have one overriding passion but rather lots of interests and things that amuse you?

You can still follow all this advice. The key is just to find your mission statement.

In other words, take a look at the things that inspire you. Take a look at your *multiple* passions or the absurd things you wish you could build your life around.

And then ask this: what do all those things have in common? What is it that you want to take from all of them?

Let's say you want to be an astronaut. Impossible, right? Maybe. But what if it's not really about being an astronaut? What if it's about being able to discover new things? Or if it's about space?

In that case, you might find that astronomy is just as rewarding for you.

What if you want to be a rock star, but you're too old now for that to be possible? Well, it might be that you just want to perform music and get feedback for it. In which case, how about setting up your own YouTube channel?

And by the way: you are *never* too old to be what you've always wanted to be!

Mission Statements and Mood Boards

Or, what if the things you are passionate about are seemingly random and unrelated? What if you love sewing, your family and travel?

Again, the key might be to look at the underlying connections between those things, but in this case I recommend writing yourself a 'mission statement'. This is a little statement that just says what you're about – it says your what, your how and your why in a concise way.

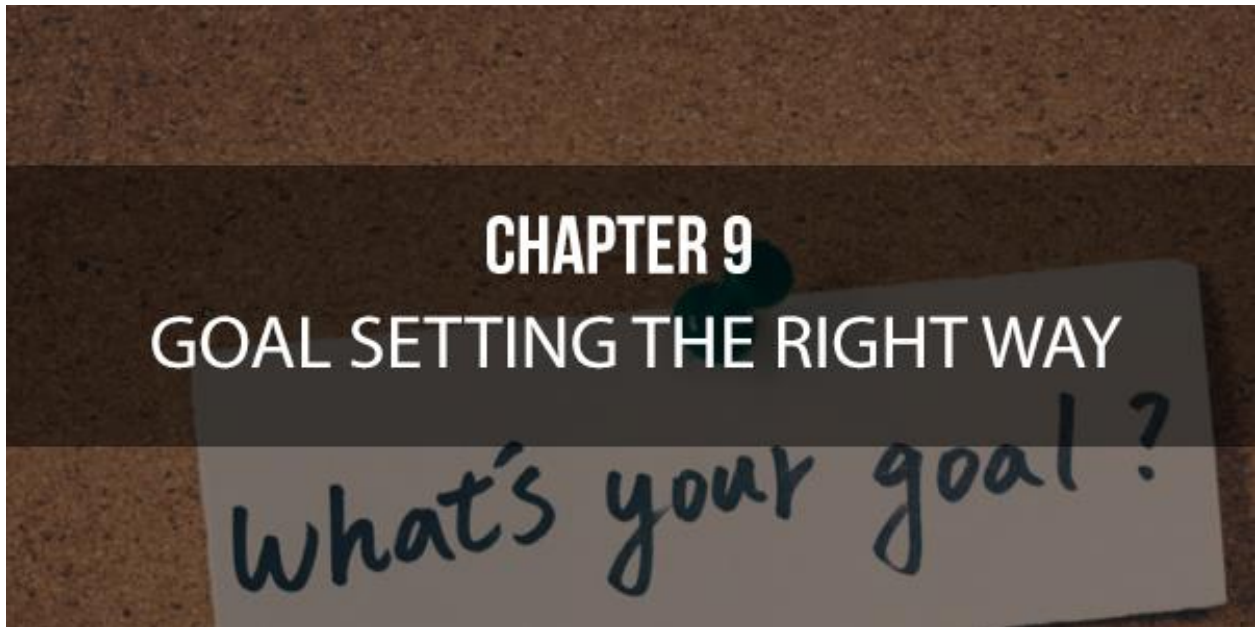
In this case, you might say that your mission statement is to:

“Bring beauty, color and laughter through friendship, embroidery and sewing. To capture beautiful things whether it's a laugh, a sunset or a perfectly quilted pillow.”

That's a pretty good purpose and passion! So, it doesn't *have* to be just one thing.

Another way of approaching this is to create a moodboard – get all your things together as a kind of collage and then take a step back. What do all these things together tell you about who you are and what your mission should be?

Chapter 9: Goal Setting the Right Way



I've already touched on the idea that your passion and your job don't have to be the same thing. That conventional success has nothing to do with being passionate and driven.

But let's be honest: many of us would love to be acknowledged for whatever it is we do. And this certainly *would* add meaning. So how do you turn your passion into a success? How do you be successful at what you love?

If you want to be highly successful in life, then one of the most important things to develop is good goal setting skills. You see without goal setting, you won't be able to know what aims you wish to go after – and without knowing what your aims are, you can hardly hope to achieve them. So, you can consider this the very first step on your path to success – finding out what it is that you really want from life so that you can then go about getting it.

The first step to success then is to turn inwards and take a good look at yourself and the things you want to accomplish.

Fortunately, there are some psychological techniques and strategies that exist to help you do this. Here we will look at what those are. Of course, you can also use goal setting software and goal setting worksheets to help you, but these strategies can help you to use those too.

Think of What You Don't Want: Sometimes thinking of what you don't want from life can be much easier than thinking of what would make you happy. A great solution then is to look at your life as it is now and to think about all the things that you would ideally change.

Of course, sometimes this can be tricky too and it can be hard to know what it is in life that's making you feel less than happy. That's where you can use another psychological technique then called the 'empty chair' in which you talk to a chair as though there was someone sitting in it and the off load all of your troubles on them. This way you can shed new light on the things that are making you unhappy and you can gain new insight into the ways your own mind works.

But another option is just to reflect on everything we've discussed in this book. You've seen how life is all about the challenge, the adventure, the things you create, the people you share with and the way you help others. Life is not about going to work every day, cleaning every day and watching junk TV.

So now ask yourself what is scarier: failing at your goals? Or never achieving any of the things you dream about? Always

staying stuck in a dead-end job and growing more and more resentful with each passing year?

Draw an Image: Sometimes it's just hard to talk about the things you want and to put them into words, even if you have a rough feeling of what you want your future to look like. Another good strategy then is to just draw your ideal future onto a piece of paper and then look at the individual elements in there and decide how you are going to accomplish them and make them a reality.

When reading about goal setting and general self-help. You'll sometimes find that writers and 'gurus' describe a key distinction between goals and visions. Sometimes you'll hear people say that you should have 'visions' and not goals. Other times, you're told that goals are the key to success. Both are relevant and the key is to break them down logically.

A vision is the end destination. A goal is part of a plan – a milestone on the way to that destination.

So consider your vision and always let that motivate you. But meanwhile, write goals as a plan by looking at the smallest possible steps that you need to follow every day to reach that goal.

For instance, don't focus on writing a best-selling novel as that is outside of your hands. That's the vision and it's the motivation.

But the GOAL is to write 5 pages every night. That is tightly in your control, completely down to you and something you can succeed at every day. Most crucially, it will *get* you to the end point.

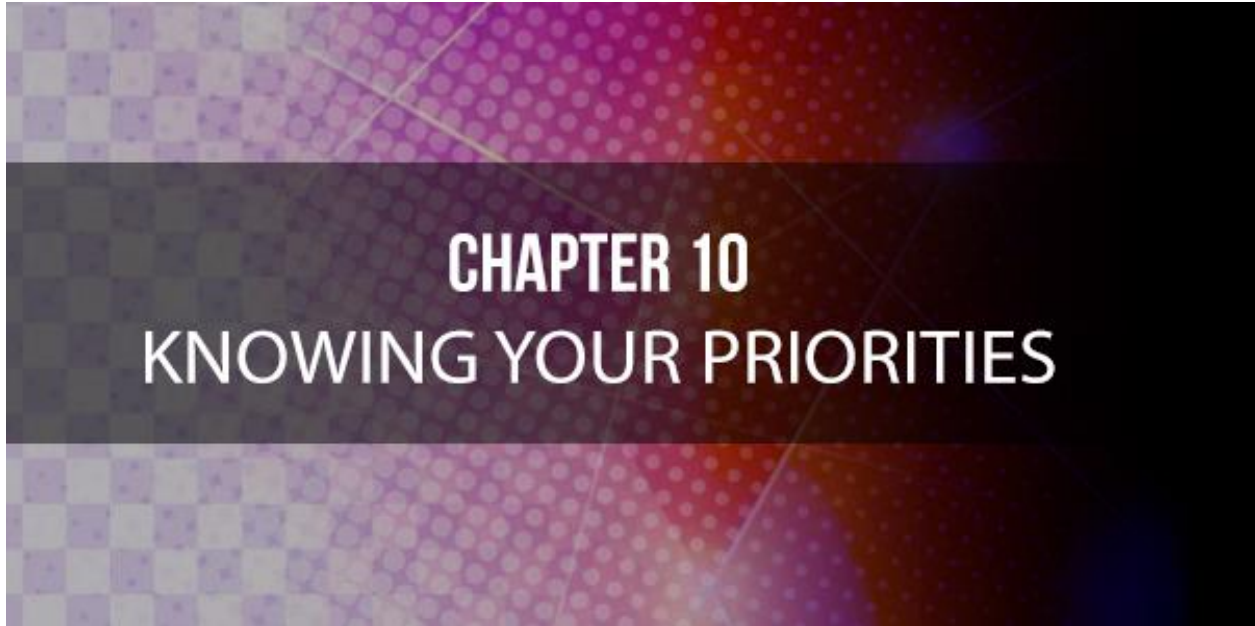
Your Role Models: By definition we all want to be more like our role models and this means that we will often look up to them and the way they live their lives. Thus, a good way to work out the future you want, is to just look at all those role models and ask yourself how they got there. What path did they take to make the impossible, possible.

I always think of one of my heroes here: Sylvester Stallone. Sylvester Stallone wanted to be an actor and thus he attended countless auditions to that end. Sadly, he found himself turned away more often than not due to his bulky physique and his slurred speech (Stallone had nerve damage during his birth, giving him the now iconic snarl).

So Sly tried a different method: he wrote scrips and ended up showing them to producers. One was such a hit that he was offered huge sums of money to sell it. He turned down every offer until he was able to star in the role as Rocky Balboa.

There are two things to take from this: 1) sometimes the route to the top is less straightforward than you imagined 2) don't worry if it doesn't happen right away – just keep on dreaming and trying.

Chapter 10: Knowing Your Priorities



One last consideration then, is that it is absolutely essential that you know your priorities. That is the key aim of having a passion like this.

In other words, now you know what makes you come alive, the most important step is to *make time* for that thing. This might mean taking the chance to give up your job and invest in that big business. And that is going to involve taking a terrible risk.

But that's the thing: if this is *truly* your passion and your calling, then that is a risk that **SHOULD** feel worthwhile. You have one shot in life to do the thing you truly love, to feel your best as a result, and to make a real impact on the world because of it. If you don't take the chance, you'll be stuck living a life without meaning or trajectory.

But remember that your passion in life and your life's meaning doesn't always have to be the same as your job. In fact, in some ways, it may be better that it isn't. The thing is that when you're paid for doing something, it often becomes *instantly less rewarding*. Being paid to do something can truly sap the joy out of that thing.

My sister got around this by simply viewing her job as a way to *fund* her passion – which was creating works of art. Without the pressure of needing to make money, she's free to create whatever amazing masterpieces she likes and share them online and in galleries. And she has all that meaning and passion without needing to even touch her job!

Conclusion



Whatever you do though, the key is to make your passion, the things you stand for, *being true to yourself* your priority. That might mean shifting around *all* the other factors in your life in order to get there. That might mean choosing a job that lets you work unusual hours, just so you can spend more time doing the things you love.

And you'll now have a tool to help you make every difficult decision in life. Whenever you are faced with multiple options, just ask yourself: which of these things best serves my passion? That will be the meaningful answer.

Where should you move home? That depends on what best suits your goals and your passion. Should you take that job offer or stay where you are? Just ask which lets you follow your passions.

Follow your passion and you'll always know which way you need to go and what you need to do. EVERYTHING will be truly more meaningful and impactful and you will feel alive in ways that you never thought possible. And when you put all of your heart into something, when you create something of true meaning and value because you're 100% committed to that thing, you will in fact end up living forever.