



unclear purpose

Here's the truth about success: You don't have to be smarter than everyone else, or better looking, or more connected, or luckier to make it big in life. You just have to focus—really focus—on what you want and how you can get it.

The reality is that most people are really quite unclear about their desires for life. Sure, they want to be successful, sometimes very much, but when you ask them the how, what, who, and why of their purpose they are usually foggy about the details.

The average person has no clear purpose, and that's why people end up average. But very occasionally you'll find individuals who are not necessarily brighter than their competition but much more clear about what they desire, who they want to be and where they want to go. And they are the ones who make it in the game of life.

I went to a very academically oriented school—in fact, some of the most intelligent teenagers in the state were students there. But curiously, many of the best and brightest minds didn't end up excelling in later life. They were overtaken by other people who may not have been as

intellectually bright but who had a strong sense of where they were going, took daily small steps to get there, and ended up ahead.

It reminds me of that science experiment we used to do in school. Remember using a magnifying glass to burn paper? You could leave a piece of paper in the sun all day and it would be almost unaffected by the sun's rays. But concentrate the sun's rays with a magnifying glass and within a few seconds the paper would be on fire. That's the power of focus. People with a clear purpose are far more focused than the majority of the population, and the results show in every area of their lives.

There are three areas where you need to be absolutely clear about your purpose.

LIFE PURPOSE

If I asked you, "What is your life purpose?" what would you say?

Do you have an overall philosophy of life, a primary reason you get up every morning? Or are you just pulled along by current events, deadlines, and people asking you to do things?

Amazingly, most people can't articulate what their life purpose is. They literally have no reason that they are here on the planet. As a result there is little dynamism in how they live. They coast through life, looking for the next small pleasure and trying to avoid any possible pain. They are rudderless. Often not miserable, but not bursting with optimism either. If that describes you, let me give you a few ideas about what your purpose in life could be. Take a look at the following list and see if any of these possible life purposes strikes a chord with you.

Possible Life Purposes

To create a beautiful, happy family

To become an outstanding human

To be a master of my field

To have a series of enriching relationships

To make a major contribution to humankind

To change the world
To help as many people as possible
To be a great friend
To reach a high spiritual level
To have amazing adventures
To leave a legacy
To enjoy every day

If none of these fits your vision for your life, take a minute or two to write three possible life purposes that appeal to you.

It doesn't really matter what your life purpose is—it just matters that you have one. Why? Several reasons, actually.

A great life purpose inspires you. It gets you up in the morning. It excites you. It involves you in life. It enriches your existence and that of those around you. It makes life more interesting, more fun, more adventuresome. When times are tough, the inspiration you get from your life purpose pushes you to overcome any adversity in pursuit of your life goal.

A great life purpose makes you more effective. Instead of wandering around in a daze, having a strong life purpose clarifies your life, makes you focus on what you have to do and how to do it. It keeps you from being lazy and performing at a low level. It gets you up early in the morning, working on making the vision for your life a glorious and fulfilling reality.

A great life purpose makes you grow. Just attempting to fulfill your life mission unlocks many of your latent powers. It stretches you out of your comfort zone, encouraging you to go beyond what you may have thought you were capable of. It awakens you to your higher potential and makes you feel truly alive. A great life purpose can be the impetus for substantial self-improvement, even self-revolution.

With all these great things arising just from having a life purpose, isn't it absolutely extraordinary that so few people have one?

If you do only one thing suggested in this book, make it this. Decide what you want your life purpose to be, commit to it emotionally in your heart, then put up a reminder where you can see it every single day. As you begin focusing on your life purpose daily, you will see your life quickly transform and become simpler and more gratifying. You will have direction and unstoppable momentum. And believe me, the people around you will sense it.

After defining your life purpose, the second type of purpose you need to achieve clarity on is your job purpose.

JOB PURPOSE

Once again, it is astonishing how unclear most people are about exactly why they're employed.

In the next 30 seconds, please write below what your three most important tasks are at work. If you're a stay-at-home mom or dad, make it the top three at home.

Now number them in order of priority, 1, 2, and 3.

If you're typical of the majority of people I give this quiz to, the answer won't come immediately. You'll probably have to think for quite a while to work out what the correct order is, too.

However, if you immediately listed your most important job tasks, the ones you're really paid for, then congratulations—you've got a crystal-clear job purpose. If you couldn't do this, then it's definitely worth taking the time. Because once you're clear on your top job tasks, you'll immediately start doing your job better. You'll waste less time, finish tasks sooner, get better results more quickly. Such clarity creates extraordinary power and momentum and much greater vision. When you're absolutely clear about the three most important tasks in your work life, it shows. You won't accept time wasters, you'll work more effectively, you'll get things done with a minimum of fuss, and people will respect you for your inner centeredness.

Vagueness Leads to Failure

Compare staff members who have total clarity of purpose with those who have only a vague idea of what their job is. The latter will be less motivated, far easier to distract, less efficient, and less effective. They'll spend loads of time on unimportant tasks, as if they have nothing better to do. (In their view, they don't.) They'll be happy to attend trivial meetings and take long lunch breaks, because there's nothing in particular driving them to succeed.

Surely one of society's greatest diseases is the overwhelming number of tasks we must do every day. An avalanche of e-mails, a maelstrom of meetings, endless To Do lists—these days it never stops. Work life is more intense than ever. But because there is always so much that needs doing, the person who isn't clear on his or her top job priorities can easily get caught up doing the endless trivial tasks we are all bombarded with every day. That person majors in the minor things.

It's not unusual to see people working 12 hours a day and still not getting anything substantial done. Why? At the heart of it, their lack of clarity about the best use of their time leads them to work on what's urgent, not what's important. Time-management excellence (which we will cover at length in Chapter Three) begins with total clarity about your ideal outcomes. Foggy purpose always leads to mediocre results, no matter how intelligent you are. In fact, if I had to choose between a person of average intelligence who was working with a clear purpose and a brilliant one who had no clear purpose, I would bet on the average person to win every time.

Which brings us to the third level of purpose—being clear on what your weekly purpose is. This is such a simple idea, but it can revolutionize your level of achievement.

WEEKLY PURPOSE

All that your weekly purpose involves is being disciplined about sitting down once a week, often on a Sunday, and thinking about the

one or two most important tasks for the following seven days. It's a terrifically powerful exercise that takes only a few minutes but can lead to a sizable improvement in personal effectiveness. Very often, once the week begins we get caught up in all the activities of life. Then Friday evening comes and we look back and realize we haven't achieved anything of note. We've just done lots of unimportant things—sometimes to a high standard, but as investment guru Warren Buffett likes to say, "What is not worth doing, is not worth doing well."

But make the weekly purpose a habit and you'll be much more likely to achieve at a high level. Once you're really clear about the week's über-important task, your mind tends to return to it again and again until it gets done. You'll focus on any task that's related to it, while avoiding irrelevant jobs and trivial to-dos.

The weekly purpose is also a great barometer of whether you've had an effective week. Each weekend, simply ask yourself whether you got those top two jobs done. If you didn't, then to be brutal, you failed your week's mission. If you did, well then, congratulations. You're a top performer.

In some respects, high achievement is very easy. If you did just *one* important task each week you could achieve 52 important tasks a year. And you can make a lot of progress taking 52 big steps toward any goal, that's for certain.

Try the weekly purpose process this weekend, and I think you'll experience a quantum leap in your efficiency. Do all three purpose exercises and your speedy progress will astound you.

(To watch a free video where I discuss the Power of Purpose, visit www.whypeoplefail.org.)

THE REMARKABLE RAS

These techniques work so well because they help your brain process information far better than it can when you are not clear about your

key purposes in life. This is largely due to a part of your brain called the reticular activating system. To me the RAS, as scientists like to call it, is one of the most exciting parts of the brain. Let me explain why with this little three-step test.

Take 15 seconds and look around the room you're in at this moment. Now memorize the location of anything that is black in color. Do that now before reading the next step.

Right, now without looking around the room again, see how many objects you can remember that are blue, white, or brown.

You'll find it very hard to name any at all, even though your eyes passed over them several times. The reason you can't is largely because of your brain's RAS.

The RAS works like this: because there are billions of pieces of information in the world, your brain has to choose which of them are useful and which aren't. For instance, if you're a keen tennis player your RAS will pick out articles in the newspaper about tennis, notice advertisements for tennis matches, or spot tennis shows on TV, even out of the corner of your eye. Because you've programmed your brain's RAS that tennis is important to you, it dutifully goes to work to bring you tennis-related data.

But imagine if you had no clear purpose for your life, your job, or your week. How could the RAS help you spot opportunities and see stuff of relevance for you? It couldn't. A wishy-washy purpose prevents the awesome power of your brain's RAS from assisting you to achieve what you desire. It dramatically reduces your ability to move toward your ideal life.

Most people don't know about the RAS, so they miss out on using its incredible computing power to help them get what they want. Now that you do know about it, be sure to take the time to tell your RAS what you want clearly, so it can help you find what you're looking for in your life, job, and week.

YOUR BRAIN IS YOUR ALLY

Your brain is designed to assist you in the most extraordinarily powerful ways. But if you never give it clear instructions about what you're seeking in life, it will struggle to help you make progress. As the saying goes, "If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there."

Clarity leads to greatness. In fact, a clear purpose is an absolute prerequisite for excellence in any aspect of your life. I guarantee that if you are having long-term trouble in any area of your life, it is because of uncertainty about your real purpose in that area.

The power of clarity is absolutely stupendous. It really is one of the primary determinants of the level of success and happiness you'll reach in your life.

With that in mind, it pays to go even deeper with your life clarification. This won't be time-consuming, either. Just grab a clean sheet of paper and a pen and I'll show you how to get greater clarity on your life than you've probably ever had before, in just minutes.

I call these next exercises "The Three-Minute Masterplans," because in only three minutes you can take a good look at your life and get absolute clarity on what you want.

1. Ideal Person Clarity

Now, while you're on a roll, take three minutes to brainstorm your ideal person clarity. This one's all about you. What type of person would you really like to be? What's your ideal personality? Are you noble? Confident? Efficient? Relaxed? Spiritual? Joyful? Write down five character traits you wish you possessed. Remember: you don't have to think deeply about it, just jot some thoughts down. You can always change them later.

Now take a look at that list. You should find that ideal person inspiring. You should even feel a little excited at the possibility that you could become that type of human. Well, I can promise you this: if you read that list each morning and train yourself to think about those charac-

teristics several times throughout the day, you will inevitably begin to become that person. It is one of the great truisms of life that we become what we consistently think about. But you must first be clear about the type of human you wish to become.

2. Life Partner Clarity

If you're single but don't want to be, take three minutes to write down all the character traits you'd like in your ideal partner. Don't think too much about the traits, just write them down fast. Aim to list at least five. In no time at all, I bet, you'll be much clearer on what your ideal partner is like—his or her appearance and behavior, and what he or she stands for in life. Having that clarity in your mind will give you a much better chance at recognizing such a person when you meet him or her. It will also make clear who is not right for you.

3. Friendship Clarity

Finally we come to the third three-minute exercise, focusing on friendship clarity.

It's a fact that we become like the people we hang out with. As the saying goes, "You lie down with dogs, you get up with fleas." The people around you affect you in more ways than you may think at first. Slowly, subtly, almost imperceptibly, your attitudes start to become like theirs, your actions begin to be in accordance with their way of thinking. Then before you know it, you've adopted many of your friends' beliefs and ways of behaving.

That's why it's so imperative that you choose your friends carefully. Each of them should display at least several character traits that you admire. But what exactly are the traits you most admire in a friend? The truth is, most people have never thought about it. Their group of friends just happened—they didn't consciously choose them. As a result, the quality of some of those friendships is poor. And poor-quality friendships usually lead to a low-quality life.

Take three minutes now to write a list of five character traits you'd like your friends to have.

Once you review the list, you'll probably realize that a few of your friends don't really make the grade. They are lacking almost all of the traits you'd like in a good friend. Possibly you became friends almost by accident, and remained friends largely because of habit. Well, maybe it's time to cease the friendship.

Now don't get me wrong—I'm not suggesting you terminate important friendships just because your pals aren't "ideal people." The truth is, you may get along fantastically with them and greatly value your time together. But I am asking you to take an honest, hard look at your friends and ask yourself this question: are these the type of people I really want to spend the rest of my life hanging out with?

If the answer is no, then you should consider seeing less of them and spending more time each month looking for the kind of friends you know (deep down) you deserve.

TOUGH DECISIONS

These exercises present challenging issues, I'm sure you'll agree. But isn't it interesting that it was only when you got some clarity about your friendships that you even questioned your friends' qualities? Without getting clear about what we deserve in every area of our lives, we all tend to just put up with mediocrity.

So with that in mind, I have another question for you: is there any other area of your life that you're a bit foggy about? Even if you take just three minutes, get clear on what you want in that area. That's often all it takes. You'll be amazed at how quickly you can clear up any grey-ness you have about an issue when you consciously focus on it. This technique is simple and effective.

Once you've created all these lists, you must stay reminded of them. Otherwise, you'll end up slipping back into your old habitual ways of operating. A good way to keep them in mind is to write each of your Clarity List answers in a journal and spend a minute or two each day

reading through them and reflecting a little on whether what you're getting in these areas is what you're wanting.

The simple truth is this: the more clarity you have about what you want in every area of your life, the more likely you are to get what you want.

Clear?

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