

# FOREWORD

I loved this book and read it in one sitting, give or take a few tea and coffee breaks. Karen James has written about business in a fresh and beguiling way and it is understood from the beginning that she loves both business and education as I do. She just wants them to be better and her manifesto offers advice about how we might change.

These are not changes that require regulation by government but changes in how we play the game and take personal responsibility for change. She reminds us that values statements hanging on the company walls or coming up on the screen matter not a toss if people do not live them.

*On Purpose* is a cleverly constructed book, as we might expect from its engineer author. Each section can stand alone or be connected—a sublime literary and engineering feat.

The Fable evoked powerful memories for me as I reflected on my first classroom experience. Planning a career as a secondary school teacher I was surprised to be assigned to a primary school for my first practice teaching my postgraduate year. My supervisor considered that exposure and early practice with 8–12 year olds offered the best experience for a teaching career. He was right.

More than five decades later I work in different classrooms and boardrooms but how I loved being thrown back into Ms Molloy's

classroom in Glen Fark County with a group of 8-year-olds whose first project of the year is to build a bank.

They go back to basics as they ask: What does a bank do? What is its purpose? Does it have values? Would we want to work there?

Ms Molloy suggests the children include their parents in the project and the outcomes are surprising but you need to read that for yourself.

*On Purpose* is a contemporary cautionary ethical tale, a fable we can all understand. It reminds us we should never underestimate the capacity of 8-year-olds to manage complexity with purpose, ethics and humanity, all the big words they were asked to consider as they followed the PLOT methodology. It was sad to leave Ms Molloy's classroom. It was an exciting learning place.

In the Manifesto our author writes of her central thesis that there must be a meaningful purpose at the core of our lives and our organisations. We need to keep our heads and hearts connected in order to live purpose-filled lives.

It is hard to disagree but for many of us we need to know how to achieve that.

The PLOT framework—Purpose, Leadership, Operations and Technology—is offered as a methodology to facilitate discussion, raise questions, challenge, gauge and monitor attainment of an on-purpose organisation.

This book could become the new black for business.

How could you not aspire to be on-purpose personally or professionally?

**Wendy McCarthy AO**

**Educator, Mentor, Non-executive Director**

# INTRODUCTION

A business book with a fable; why read it?

‘Interesting’, you may think (or not!)—‘what’s that all about?’. Let me introduce you to *On Purpose*, a book of three parts: The Fable (Back to School); the Manifesto; and PLOT, the business book.

Sometimes going back and seeing things the way we did when we were children helps us to clarify what’s really important and why. The fable takes you on the journey of a teacher setting her Grade 3 students the assignment of building a bank. Along the way a diverse group of eight-year-olds learn important lessons about ethics and humanity and how these values need to be woven into the organisations of our future.

The second part of the book is the bridge between the fictitious and the future. Aptly titled, the Manifesto is a declaration of intentions. It unpacks the intentions of *On Purpose* and its fable in preparation for practical application in your business, and potentially your life—bringing intentions to the front of the classroom.

The third part of the book is the practical application—showing how great businesses PLOT their success by linking **P**urpose, **L**eadership, **O**perations and **T**echnology. At the end of this book you will understand the importance of making purpose the driver of your organisation, and be able to practically monitor your progress through the purpose-led PLOT Framework.

*On Purpose* is a book to act on.

# The Fable (Back to School)

Many years ago I realised that I was a storyteller—at home, at work, at play. At work it seemed that there were many stories: it was the story of the customer, the story of the employee, the story of the vision, the story of success that always hit the mark much faster than the documents, PowerPoint presentations and reports. These stories connected us all through our humanity. So it seemed natural to begin with a fable to interpret the context of the book through the eyes of a child, and through the subtle lessons of life that are so readily seen when we are young.

My life has been shaped by my ‘teachers’: my school teachers; my mother; my grandmother Bebe; my great-aunts; my cousins; and my ‘family’ (friends who have become family). We need teachers. Without teachers we believe the rhetoric, and when we believe the rhetoric we start behaving as though it is the truth.

There is something very humbling about being a student, being open to learning and being open to change—and opportunity often lies in the shadow of change. The fable introduces the purpose-led PLOT Framework through innocence, creativity, opportunity, a dash of humour and connection. I hope you connect with one or more of the characters. It is connection with the characters of our world that binds us and creates the magic.

I don’t want to spoil the fable so I shall leave you to read on. Look for the subtle leadership lessons—they are fast and furious.

## Manifesto

Engineers are taught early on the importance of the simple truss when building bridges—that beautiful structural frame based on the geometric strength of the triangle. This book’s bridge, the Manifesto, binds (or trusses) the fable to the world of business by outlining the importance of intentions. It is a passage out of the fable and into the business book, simplifying and strengthening

the message of the importance of being and acting on-purpose in today's changing world.

## PLOT

The third part of the book, PLOT, provides a framework for organisational and business application of **P**urpose, **L**eadership, **O**perations and **T**echnology and, most importantly, explains how to instil and ingrain these into our lives— at home and at work. Our purpose (the thing that really matters) and meaning (the reason it matters to us) are foundational, but without action it is just a story. We need to know *how* to do this. Practically. *On purpose*. I don't mean the idiom that gets thrown at you when you are a child. I'm talking about compelling purposes you live and work by, and the ability to turn those intentions into actions.

The Action chapter introduces three tools to bring it all to life. The PLOT Framework acts as a gauge to track how your purpose and leadership are integrated into your operations and technology. The customisable mobile app brings the message alive by sharing purpose, leadership, what you are doing and how you are doing things—creating a storyboard that celebrates your success, chronicles your journey and connects everyone along the way. The presentation templates (PowerPoint and Prezi) are included in the event that you are a bit like me and enjoy the story but not the documentation.

\* \* \*

Linking and threading purpose seamlessly through leadership, operations and technology is hard work and is a relentless pursuit. Pull one thread out and you start to unravel the possibility of greatness and success. This is the key point of the book and the PLOT Framework—all four matter in our unpredictable, digitised future.

My hope for you is that you enjoy and are transformed by this book, one page at a time.

## CHAPTER 2

# PURPOSE

In the words of Mark Twain, ‘The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why’.

The idea of purpose being at the heart of your life and organisation is not new. But experience and observation over 25 years shows me that where there is clear and meaningful purpose—backed with a cause—success follows.

Simply stated, having a compelling purpose defines your cause; why you exist. Purpose should have an effect on everything you do. It should be omnipresent.

It is tempting to consider purpose and meaning as pillars that are relevant only to the do-gooders of our world, the people who traditionally don’t prioritise profit. These wonderful do-gooders, largely speaking, are the people who work for organisations defined by a cause. Nothing makes purpose clearer than a good dose of social injustice. So the people working to end injustice? Well, of course they have purpose and meaning.

It is easy to see how purpose is important for these organisations. Meaning oozes out of their every pore, so you would have to work hard *not* to connect with their purpose and meaning. Easy. But why, you might ask, is it so important for business, government, entrepreneurs and (dare I say) regulators to have a compelling purpose? Can purpose be made meaningful to the majority?

There is always meaning when you are doing the right thing by your constituents, whether you are working to deliver widgets, washing machines or water filtration. Meaning should be easy to identify when a moral framework is in place and a compelling purpose is present. No organisation is exempt from this paradigm.

It is tempting to think you don't need anything other than your stated purpose, but you do. Without a robust plan to operate from, you are merely stating an intention; there's no scaffolding to hold it up. Intentions without correlating actions make for lovely conversations but will not produce a measurable result. We need to move from purposeful intentions to purposeful action.

## The core

Where to start? Always start at the top! (Says my inner Dr Seuss.)

A leader without a purpose is a lost leader. As Yogi Berra once said, 'If you don't know where you're going, you'll end up some place else'.

We cannot afford to have leaders whose purpose is not clear, or leaders who have a wobbly ethical and moral framework.

To create a purpose-led organisation, leaders at every level need to believe in its compelling purpose. That's how they develop a sense of ownership, frame an effective vision, build capacity and, most importantly, foster and enable a supportive environment.

What gets really exciting is when we understand that a shared purpose creates consequences that go beyond the individual—

and, in a world of growing self-interest and individualism, we need all the help we can get. It is hard to make everyone feel like they belong; it is hard to make everyone feel connected. But when you have a purpose that's demonstrated through honest humanity and that stands on a strong ethical foundation, you will create trust.

People value trust over information. As such, a community will naturally build around your leaders, with your shared purpose at its centre.

Our purpose, be it personal or organisational, must answer key questions—the *whys*. We must ask the tough *why* questions to distil a purpose down to its purest and noblest goal.

Your purpose should:

- define your reason to exist
- pervade vision and strategy
- provide intrinsic measures of success.

## Your reason to exist

A well-written purpose should define your cause, as well as the character of people you need to work with as a purposeful collective to achieve it

Note the choice of words: 'work with'. In our connected world, the definition of 'internal' is blurring fast, so include everyone who contributes to your customer's experience—starting with your supply chain. Working in community with your supply chain (rather than just exchanging invoices) will elevate your level of engagement and enable you to move from the transactional to the relational. And if the forces within your supply chain do not relate to your purpose, what *do* they relate to—just a price point?



Consider the collective impact of working with people of consistent character. It's the greatest input to your overall culture (after all, people are your cultural fuel). What do I mean by 'consistent character'? I am referring to your values and principles in action. Not a room full of people like you (PLU)—the dreaded PLU culture is one of the last things I would encourage!

Consistent character does *not* exclude diversity—it should actually enhance it. No decent organisation thinks that hiring 'people like us' will help them beat their competitors. At every level of your organisation, a diversity of thought, gender, ethnicity and circumstance will give depth and richness to your purpose—and, as an added bonus, your team will most likely reflect the diversity of your customer base.

The reason I include circumstance as a specific area of diversity is that I often wonder about the bias against the single parent, the not-partnered, or those without children. If you're in one of these categories, I think you know what I mean. Inclusiveness is so much more than a buzzword, and we should be mindful of this in a very real and practical way: we all benefit when true diversity is brought into action.

To build our organisations' character and culture, to embed the values and principles underpinning our purpose, we need to move from the 'to have' to the more simple and heartfelt 'to be'.

---

*We need to be the sum of who we are, not what we have.*

---

When we move from having to being, we create a culture that expresses creativity, engenders relationships and shares openly. Intangible shared values become tangible through culture.