

PURPOSE:

An aerial photograph of a vast mountain range, likely the Himalayas, with numerous peaks and valleys. The valleys are filled with mist or low clouds, creating a layered, ethereal effect. The overall color palette is muted, consisting of various shades of grey, green, and brown.

WHAT IS
IT?

A POINT OF VIEW ON PURPOSE
FROM THE GLOBAL PURPOSE LEADERS

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Introduction

It is time to take a stand for purpose and protect it. Purpose has never been more popular and en vogue. It is used to describe a growing number of things from [beer](#) to [technology](#) to [pop music](#) to [spirituality](#). If a word can mean anything, it effectively means nothing.

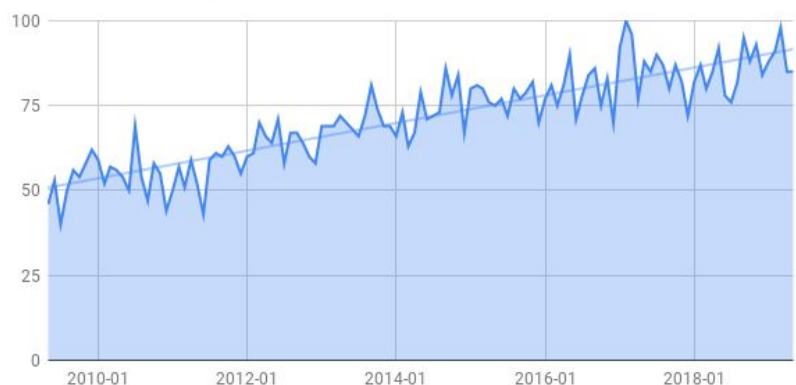
As a group of purpose practitioners (professionals who help individuals, groups and organizations discover and live their purpose), the Global Purpose Leaders (GPL) believe words matter. We believe truth matters. We believe the word “purpose” is one of the most important words in the English language, and it deserves to be protected.

In an era of political double-speak,
In an age in which meaning is increasingly subjective and personal,
Where science and religion are called down upon both sides of many arguments,
Where trust in our institutions and authority figures is eroding,
Where our democracies, economies, ecosystems, and cultures are in a freefall,

The three largest generations on the planet (Millennials, Gen X and Baby Boomers) are trying to understand who they are in the face of this chaos, discover their purpose in life, and activate it.

It is therefore critical that we understand what purpose is and what it is not. Although there is broad use of the word “purpose” and definitions have been offered by

Google Trends: "purpose in life" WW search relevance (May 2009 - May 2019)



[Merriam-Webster](#) and [Cambridge](#), as well as numerous individual purpose practitioners, up until now, there has been no voice from the field as a whole.

The Global Purpose Leaders is a worldwide community of practice, a diverse group of practitioners who help individuals, groups and organizations discover and align themselves with their unique purpose in life. We have written many books on the subject, convened several gatherings and summits, and debated countless issues related to the practice of our craft. In this paper, we summarize nearly three years of this intense and sustained conversation. It should be noted that this paper does not represent a full consensus of all our members, but does represent the majority view.

As we began to articulate our point of view on what the word “purpose” means (the WHAT), we also discovered that we needed to offer guidance in regards to the process by which one discovers their purpose (the HOW: “purpose work”) and in regards to those who facilitate the process (the WHO: “purpose practitioner”).

Our hope is that this point of view provides clarity on what purpose is, strengthens our growing community, adds coherence to the purpose movement, and serves each human being as we discover our unique purpose and bring it to life.

In service,

[Global Purpose Leaders](#)

November 4, 2019

Background

Given,

- the overwhelming amount of [research](#) that suggests purpose is at the heart of individual and collective flourishing,
- the rise of people, organizations and events using the word “purpose” in a variety of ways,
- the proliferation of media organizations chronicling and advocating for the purpose movement, such as the Business Roundtable, Forbes, Fortune, The Financial Times, The Economist, and FastCompany,



- the skepticism about purpose being just another term used by consultants and marketers to turn a profit,
- the cross-cultural, [global origins](#) of purpose and the [modern history of purpose in the West](#),
- the training of GPL’s members at leading institutions such as the [True Purpose Institute](#), the [Purpose Guides Institute](#) and the [Animas Valley Institute](#), and the depth of our leadership within these schools:

- TPI: Audrey Seymour, Beth Scanzani
- PGI: Brody Hartman, Aftab Omer, Zohara Rotem
- AVI: Dustin Timmons
- The collective depth of scholarship in our community of practice, e.g.,
 - [Anamaria Aristizabal: Life Re-Vision Process](#)
 - [Andy Swindler: Metamodel](#)
 - [Beverly Barnes: Soul Calling Academy Roadmap](#)
 - [Brandon Peele: Four Truths of Purpose, Purpose Tree, Four Stages of Purpose](#)
 - [Michael Tertes: Superhero Process](#)
 - [Rikk Hansen: Nature's Reinvention Map](#)

We believe that our diverse, global community of practice has an important role in shaping this conversation. As this conversation continues, these descriptions will be revisited and updated periodically. If you have feedback or questions on this matter, please reach out to us.

Description of “Purpose”

The kind of purpose that the community of practitioners in GPL stands for is “deep purpose” or “higher purpose”.

1. Deep purpose is a unique and compelling sense of identity that is sourced from the essence of an individual or group (going beyond known personalities and externally-derived meaning from family, culture, religion, and marketplace).
2. Deep purpose is innate and revealed. It is not “figured out”, created, chosen or decided upon (although, once discovered, we choose to live it or not). Its origin is not cognitive in nature but emerges from the most essential part of a person or group.
3. From a functional perspective, deep purpose reveals, aligns, guides and fulfills. Deep purpose **reveals** the themes of one’s life, the contours of one’s craft, legacy, vision for the world, mission, and values. Once one becomes aware of their purpose, one **aligns** behaviors, key relationships, health and career with their purpose. Purpose is a GPS that **guides** key life decisions, such as who to partner with, work with, train with, as well as where and how to live. Purpose **fulfills** us, as it is the deepest sense of identity and place, providing one lasting psychological sustenance and belonging, whether in motion or at rest.
4. From a developmental perspective, deep purpose is evolutionary in nature. Although parts of our purpose may have always been present inside each of us, other parts may develop over time, through wounding and trauma in our youth, and conscious development later in life. There are layers to, and depths of, knowing and fulfilling deep purpose that are continually revealed over time. It can be said that our relationship to our purpose constantly evolves and reveals itself. In this sense, purpose is as much a “who” as a “what”, requiring care and curiosity. Often the work of revealing and embodying purpose accelerates our growth as a person.

5. From an impact or action perspective, deep purpose includes a generative impulse, moving toward making a difference beyond self-interest, such as through service, creativity and leadership.
6. From a species perspective, we hold the discovery, embodiment and activation of our unique deep purpose to be a birthright, a right of every human being to discovery, embody and live. At the heart of virtually every problem on the planet is this disconnection from purpose, our inability to inhabit our deepest identity, resulting in being unable to see, value and bless the deepest identity and innate dignity in every human. As such, we regard the move towards purpose as one of the most important issues our species faces.

It is our commitment that every human has the opportunity to discover their deep purpose in life and live it. As such, we suggest only using the word “purpose” in a dignified, sacred and reverent way. When purpose is not intended to be used in such a manner, we suggest using alternative term like “meaning”, “intention”, “reason”, “objective” or “goal.”

Description of “Purpose Work”

Purpose work is embarked upon by individuals who sense that there is more to life than surface-level pleasures, social approval and material gain.

- Perhaps they are aware there is something missing in their life - a deeper sense of aliveness, excitement, belonging, meaning and contribution that feels out of reach.
- Perhaps these individuals are in transition in their careers or love life and seek the guidance of their purpose to regenerate.
- Perhaps they feel the need to be in action in the face of the overwhelming incompetence, injustice and suffering in the world, but aren't sure what to do, how to do it or where to start.
- Perhaps they stumbled on a book about purpose, or were inspired by scientifically-validated [benefits of purpose](#) and decided to see for themselves what purpose feels like.
- Perhaps their employer has offered them the opportunity to discover their purpose, become a better leader and craft a purpose-led career path.

Regardless of how they came into the question, once they choose to discover their purpose, they then select a purpose program or practitioner to guide them on their journey.

There are many ways to discover, embody and activate deep purpose, and our view is that for a process to be considered “purpose work”, it should include the following elements:

- **Discovery** – a pathway or a series of exercises designed to reveal the contours of one’s unique purpose. Numerous models have been offered to explain and discover the various aspects of purpose (see a few in the ‘Background’ section above). GPL welcomes practitioners who follow established models, as well as those who create new pathways for discovering purpose.

- **Ego transformation** – a pathway or series of exercises to reveal the nature of one’s limiting beliefs / ego / personality structure AND methods and tools for creating a partnership between one’s ego and one’s purpose. We recognize that our egos form in reaction to the circumstances of our upbringing, and as such, we take into consideration that people have unique purpose journeys that move through trauma and into systemic injustices. Many purpose paths result in people being called to transform these systemic injustices. Numerous models have been offered to reconcile the relationship between wounding, culture, personality and purpose. GPL welcomes practitioners who follow these models as well as those who create new ones. See the ‘Appendix’ for information on the function of the ego.
- **Integration, embodiment and activation** – a pathway or series of exercises that to empower a person to create a cohesive expression of their purpose in every area of their life, and develop an offering that is an impactful and fulfilling contribution to others. Numerous models have been offered to empower people to bring their life, career and contribution into alignment with their purpose. GPL welcomes practitioners who follow these models as well as those who create new ones.

If a process is lacking in any of these elements, our view is that the process is incomplete and insufficient to enable a lasting purpose transformation. Further, the results are likely to be misleading and the process itself could be dangerous for both the participant and facilitator.

Description of “Purpose Practitioner”

A purpose practitioner is someone who guides individuals, groups and/or organizations through purpose work (see above). Before someone can become a purpose practitioner, we recommend they complete their own purpose work, facilitated by a seasoned / certified purpose practitioner.

After completing their purpose work, their purpose reveals or confirms that their path is to guide / empower others to discover their purpose in some manner. Frequently, they then get trained as counselors, shamans, clergy, or as a purpose coach / soul guide by organizations such as [TPI](#), [AVI](#), [PGI](#), [SLB](#), and [Martha Beck](#).

Given the stakes (the financial, physical and psychological well-being of participants) and the skill required to guide effectively, we highly recommend that all practitioners first experience purpose work as participants, and then if it is their purpose to do so, become trained and certified, before guiding others.

Purpose practitioners also lead by example, creating rituals to anchor themselves in their purpose, holding themselves and others accountable to their purpose and values, periodically exploring deeper expressions of their purpose, and often engaging in a variety of transformation programs and communities to support them in living their purpose.

Examples of the roles in which purpose practitioners engage with the world include, but are not limited to:

- **Educators and counselors** guiding young adults to find clarity of purpose for charting education/life/work direction
- **Coaches** supporting clients to tap into purpose as a foundation for navigating a vast array of dreams and challenges – relationships, livelihood, business startups

- **Consultants, entrepreneurs and technologists** who utilize coaching, programs or technology to awaken the purpose of employees or whole organizations
- **Coaches and consultants** supporting leaders to access purpose for new levels of leadership mastery and impact
- **Authors** who explore perspectives on purpose and support individuals and groups in clarifying and activating their deeper purpose
- **Change agents** working in nonprofits and social enterprises who activate purpose to effect social and cultural changes
- **Religious leaders and guides** (e.g. pastors, priests, ministers, rabbis, imams, spiritual counselors, deacons) who employ purpose work in their preaching and counseling of their communities
- **Psychological professionals** (therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, social workers) who incorporate purpose work into their therapy and counseling
- **Financial advisors** who use purpose work to help their clients set life goals and create meaning and impact with their financial resources
- **Hospice workers and grief counselors** who use purpose work in end-of-life situations with the dying and their survivors
- **Career counselors**, outplacement specialists, headhunters and occupational specialists who employ purpose work to help adults navigate career changes and unemployment

If this describes the work you do or intend to do, and you'd like to connect with an international community that shares your commitment, you are invited to explore the Global Purpose Leaders. You can learn more and apply at <http://GlobalPurposeLeaders.org>.

Appendix: The Function of the Ego

From Tim Kelley, Founder of the True Purpose Institute:

“...the ego has three principal responsibilities: 1) to establish and preserve your identity, 2) to keep you safe, and 3) to meet your needs as best as it can. In most people, the ego performs these duties quite well, and they are able to function in society and make the best of their circumstances.

“The ego system does have several disadvantages, too. One is that it resists growth and transformation. Since you filter and interpret all information based on what you already believe to be true, it can be challenging to change anything about yourself. Often, attempts at new behavior feel ‘wrong,’ at least at first. This is why New Year’s resolutions are so notoriously short lived. A desire for improvement alone cannot stand up to the ego’s pervasive and persistent process of self-reinforcement...

“Notice that I am *not* saying that the ego is a bad thing. A healthy fully formed ego is a prerequisite for getting anything done and functioning in the world. The cry of ‘death to the ego’ coming from many psychological and spiritual traditions does nothing but offer disrespect to the hardest working part of the psyche.”

(Kelley, *True Purpose*, 2009, pp. 8-9)

From Bill Plotkin, Founder of the Animas Valley Institute:

“What all the subpersonalities... have in common is that they strive to protect us from circumstances they deem to be threatening to our psychological, social, or physical well-being. They do this whether or not their efforts *really* protect us, whether or not some other form of protection would be more

effective, and, for that matter, whether or not we really need protection. ...in childhood we really did need these forms of protection, and these strategies worked well enough. But at some point in life, most people, even if they would still appreciate this wholeness-diminishing security in some ways, no longer truly need it, and their lives are unnecessarily restricted and dulled because of it. ...learning to grow beyond these protected zones later in life enables us to become fully human.

“...What we lose in authentic wildness, we gain in psychosocial safety.”

“...Achieving liberation from our... survival strategies is one of the most challenging and long-lasting tasks of the individuation process, requiring a good deal of courage, discernment, and endurance even into genuine adulthood and elderhood.

“Our juvenile survival strategies of self-diminishment form the core of our most self-defeating patterns: those that disparage our dreams, our potentials, and our healthy wildness, or that aggravate low self-esteem and troubles with intimacy. And, most irksome, these strategies are often on automatic pilot, launched outside our awareness and without our consent or control. ... we feel victimized by our own psyche.”

(Ploktin, *Wild Mind*, 2013, pp. 125-133)