



Know your role

What does life purpose, or organisational purpose mean to you? Does it sound appealing and practical to you or rather or do you see it as unnecessarily poetic? And if these are concepts that you aspire to, how can you define them for your context? How can you find that intersection where your passion and purpose meets a clear need in the world, as an individual or as an organisation? In this article we will look at what it means to Know Your Role and we will suggest one practical way to make a start.

As inspiring as the concepts such as Life Purpose, or Organisational Purpose can be, they can also be very overwhelming when misunderstood, and these words alone can be enough to put most people off considering them with any seriousness! **Do you need a purpose after all, in order to be successful?** Many organisations just emerged without first sitting down to analyse why they are here. And as individuals, we don't always know why we are heading in a particular direction. Some of the most successful people could not explain what bigger purpose was driving them.

But that does not take away the fact that when you do know your purpose, as an organisation or as an individual, life can become a lot simpler. For one thing, you have a guidance system to help you when making decisions. You can then communicate this and take steps to engage others in that purpose. A bigger purpose may help you or your organisation through tougher moments, or enable you to delay some of your goals until the timing is just right.

Take one example. Wendy Thomas runs a property news agency in Southern Germany. As she built up this successful venture, she has been mainly concerned with providing the excellent core service to her customers. She has a bigger vision however, for her company, which extends to how it can play a role in re-defining how property markets influence cities. This sense of purpose provides a guidance system when having to decide where to set her growth targets.

Take Rainer, a young man who set up a record label. He was clear that he wanted to provide young people with a place to be able to learn new talents. This bigger purpose is what has helped him to stay committed to making the record label work in those tougher earlier days of selling advertising space.

How to get to know your individual or organisational purpose?

You may already have a sense of what you are here for. Your organisation may already be headed in a particular direction. But can you know that it taps into the deeper motivations of your employees and awakens their commitment to it? Well if you are not sure, you could start by asking to see if you are on track! An organisational learning partner from my time spent in Germany, Konzept report how it is often surprising to management when they see which values are actually being reflected in the workplace. Konzept use a system licensed by Richard Barrett, (author of 'Liberating the Corporate Soul') to assess the values that are actually being modelled by an organisation's employees and compares these to the set of values that organisations think they are living by.

As an individual it is critical to ask the questions and to do the work to check that the purpose is truly your own. If you cannot describe it in a succinct way, which makes you feel alive and committed, you do not have it –you are not there yet!

Mood Boards- A way to start

In order to prepare the ground, one way to start would be by creating a mood board. This is a place (literally a board) where you gather imagery that inspires you and appeals to you in some way, often beyond your immediate understanding.

You can either leave the title completely open or define a focus and see what comes up when your mind is concentrated on that area. I have seen clients get the most incredible insights by working in this way. You will gradually get an essential sense of what is alive for you, of the things that have meaning and of how these connect to each other. For an organisation the important themes will emerge.

Here are some tips as to how to create and work with a Mood Board.

1. Set up an area where you can do this. Protect it.
2. Start to gather pictures/images that are meaningful to you or to the group. Each person in a group would be invited to contribute. (People would literally cut images out of magazines and stick them on the board.)
3. Invite Creativity. Allow yourself and encourage others to pick up images from all kinds of places and sources
4. Treat the process with respect. Do not discard strange ideas. Do not allow people to comment on the validity of other people's images.
5. Be clear about the theme; whether it is about the core organisational purpose or if it is about another activity that is emerging – a new direction or project.
6. Allow your mood board to speak for itself. You are not depending on your conscious mind to deliver the results. If you set up the right conditions, your mood board will tell its own story. Marketing Expert Gabriella Goddard describes how her mood board literally speaks to her, and tells her which brand needs to emerge next.
7. In your organisation, do not try to control this process, though you may want to focus the process by being clear about the theme. (Is this about the overall purpose or that of a temporary project? You may want to suggest a purpose and then invite people to express what that means to them). So long as ideas have a means by which they are allowed some airtime, if they are important, they will filter up through processes that encourage these.
8. This can be carried out in all the different organisational sections and then you will be able to spot the common themes and to what *extent* there is commonality. You will get a sense of the breadth and depth of your organisation's living purpose. The aim is eventually to arrive at something succinct. But that must not mean leaving out any of the real essentials. You want simplicity beyond complexity. The mood board is a place where anything essential has a place where its seed can be planted.
9. Allow time. Ideas need to make their way to the forefront of your mind. If you allow ideas to germinate, and filter up through your organisation, you will catch all the important ideas on the radar. This is a process, which may need to go slowly in order to go more quickly.

You will then have a fantastic set of information that describes the fabric of your organisation as is currently *lived* by the people that constitute it.

As an individual you will have the input of your whole self, not just your rational mind. By taking input from all areas of the system you will be better placed to draw out the most representative conclusions from this work.

You can then draw out your purpose and your values from this process. You will be mapping out the DNA of the organisation or of your own person. As an organisation you will need to facilitate this process very carefully and may need help from someone neutral. As an individual you may want to work with a professional. Or you may want to run your own efforts by such a person to check that you are on the right track.

When you have done this work, the communication process follows easily. This would be called your branding in an organisational setting. But more and more individuals are being encouraged to develop their own brand. Many individuals would shudder at the idea of having a personal brand. I did! But once I got over the resistance to using this marketing term, it became extremely useful to seeing how it was about understanding how I make a unique difference to the world and then communicating that to the people I feel moved to serve.

It meant that I was able to reach the illusory point of being able to define a clear role and persona, from a seemingly patchwork career. I could then step confidently into that role, without apologising or trying to fit into outdated career titles. Importantly, I also was able to support organisations and individuals in doing that. This work is immediately useful. My peers and colleagues know what it is they are getting when they engage me in anything from conversation to a piece of work.

Your purpose, and therefore your message may well change.

Turn Up the Courage's did. That is ok. If you are on the right track, you will see that it is most likely an evolution and the people you work with will see the connecting threads. It is very satisfying when you spot the connections that indicate maturing of the deeper purpose. Life is a series of stages, often with quite different temporary purposes. But there is something that will link all of those phases together.

As we navigate new landscapes, new structures will emerge and so will new roles in our society. Our labels should only serve the purpose of signposting. Once the labels no longer fit we should be ready to re-define them.

For help in defining your purpose or facilitating your team's purpose, feel free to get in touch at info@turnupthecourage.com

A note on the four principles to Turning Up the Courage. In which order to apply them?

They are not applied or performed in any particular order. They are necessarily iterative. You cannot know your role without knowing some aspect of the world and what it needs. You cannot truly know your world until you understand through what lenses you are seeing it. You cannot engage and collaborate without knowing what you bring to the table. You cannot find out what is needed until you engage and collaborate to some extent. So they are all intimately linked, and their existence just provides some structure to the process of turning up the courage to make a sustainable difference in the world.