

Video Transcript

Winter Session Intrinsic Motivation Series

1.3 December 16 - How can defining my purpose help me on a day-to-day basis?

This week's installment of the Notre Dame Research Winter Session Intrinsic Motivation Series will explore answers to the question: How can defining my purpose help me on a day-to-day basis?

There are a myriad of ways to answer this question but I'm going to give you a couple of answers to think about up front.

1. When you define your purpose, it gives you the strength to adjust your actions or change your behaviors to align with your values and goals
And
2. When you define your purpose, it opens your eyes to how best allocate your most valuable resource: Time

Now let's go a little deeper with these ideas...

In a 2013 talk, Daniel Pink, author of *Drive*, gives a powerful example of how connecting with purpose—the yearning to do what we do in the service of something larger than ourselves—can positively impact behavior. This example comes from healthcare. Hospital-acquired infections or HAIs are a BIG deal. These are illnesses that were not present when a patient was admitted to the hospital. They put vulnerable patients' lives at stake, *and*, cost healthcare facilities a lot of money in terms of extra treatment and penalties. Hand hygiene is one of the most effective ways to reduce HAIs. Hospitals have tried different tactics to increase compliance with hand hygiene protocols, including financial incentives and surveillance cameras (sounds an awful lot like those extrinsic motivators, carrots and sticks). According to Pink, two researchers tried a different approach. They wrote 3 different slogans to post at hand hygiene stations around one hospital. There were 66 stations, which meant 22 of each sign. These were the sign slogans.

1. Hand hygiene prevents you from catching diseases.
2. Hand hygiene prevents patients from catching diseases.
3. Gel in, Wash Out

Two signs had no impact on compliance with hand hygiene protocols. But one sign had as much impact as any other tactic that's been employed (and it's FREE and easy to implement). Which sign actually changed people's behaviors?

If you guessed #2, you're right! Hand hygiene prevents patients from catching diseases. Why did this message work? Well, because it appeals to purpose, the reason why healthcare workers got into the profession in the first place: People. To take care of people. And to make the world a little bit better place.

At Notre Dame we excel at "Purpose" with a capital "P." We have those amazing "What Would You Fight For?" ads that give you the chills while watching them. And we're all familiar with Fr. Sorin's famous words: *This College will be one of the most powerful means for doing good in this country.* And we can all recite part of Fr. Jenkin's inaugural address from 2005, expressing his hope that Notre Dame be a "healing, unifying, enlightening force for a world deeply in need." When you hit a wall at work, take time to think about why we're all working at Notre Dame. Zoom out and think about the big picture for a bit and see if it gives you the motivation to find a way around that wall.

Another way to connect with purpose in your day-to-day life is to go more granular. Take a look at what Pink calls purpose with a lowercase “p,” that is, the unique contribution you make to your organization. If you stopped doing your job, what would happen? Think about what would fall through the cracks. Who would be affected? Explore those questions. See if they help you prioritize your daily activities. See if they help you say “no” to things that fall outside of your primary purpose when you have no time to spare.

I highly recommend the HR training titled, StrengthsFinder: Identifying and Capitalizing on Your Talents. As part of the class, you take an assessment and get a thematized big picture view of some of the things you’re good at. It shifts focus away from fixing your flaws to what comes most naturally to you, to what you enjoy, *which* should provide some major clues for defining your purpose and discerning how you can best contribute to your work team and Notre Dame as a whole.

This brings us to my second point: defining your purpose can help you allocate your time.

The easiest way to explain what I mean is with an illustration: You may already be familiar with this tool: it’s called the Eisenhower Method or Eisenhower Box or Time Management Matrix that was popularized by Stephen Covey in his book, *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, first published in 1989.



This structure provides a framework for evaluating your tasks according to how urgent they are and how important they are. The sweet spot for purpose is quadrant (the dark purple one in the upper right-hand corner), Quality Time, or the Important but Not Urgent tasks—these are the things that are so easy to put off but give the direction to our lives. These are the things that support our purpose and help us meet our goals. If we ignore these, we are in danger of being unsatisfied, burned out, losing sight of our goals, and demolishing our motivation. That said, during a crisis like a pandemic, we may not have much of a choice but to live within that heightened, “fire fighting” state in quadrant 1. But remember the pandemic, too, will pass, and we’ll all need to re-envision our purpose—both at work and at home.

Allow me to linger for just a moment on this matrix. I think we need to be careful when considering quadrant 4, so-called “time wasters.” It’s a myth that we need to be productive or improving ourselves 24 hours a day. That’s the lifestyle that a lot of consultants and life hackers seem to be advocating. But I would argue time wasting is in the eye of the beholder. Many of us need some time each day to zone out! Turn off our analytical/productive sides and enjoy a new TV program, play phone games, or read mystery novels. If an activity is restorative and helps make you ready for the next day, I say, “enjoy it guilt-free.” If you are feeling guilty about binging on the streaming

service of your choice, then you are likely to feel more drained than restored. So, make it intentional and turn it into Q2 time--Quality Time.

Author and consulting company CEO, Peter Bregman, writes in a Harvard Business Review article that busy-ness can prevent us from taking the risky step of trying new things that will help us reach our goals. He argues that when we try new things, we're probably bad at them, and they'll probably feel unproductive. But if we don't spend time on them, we'll never improve. We'll never reach our goals. We won't have the opportunity to craft the purpose we envision for ourselves.

Sociologist, Dr. Christine Carter, writes that we need to be willing to be bad at our desired behavior, the ones that will get us where we want to go. For her it was exercising, specifically getting back into running after many years away. To get started again, she committed to running for just 60 seconds a day. Eventually she got to the point where she WANTED to run longer. It simply felt more natural to keep going. Now she typically runs for 15-20 minutes a day. But if time is tight, she still just runs for 60 seconds. Maybe instead of a New Year's resolution you should consider what you want to spend time being bad at in 2021.

In closing, please remember that your purpose isn't something you'll miss if you don't look. Rather it's something that can give you the strength and motivation to create the life you want by directing your path and bringing your values into focus.

Thanks for watching!

Resources

- [You Need to Practice Being Your Future Self](#) -- Peter Bregman, Harvard Business Review, Mar. 28, 2016
- [Purpose—Why We Do What We Do](#) --Daniel Pink, Keynote [video, 19 min]
- [What Stephen Covey Taught Me About Prioritizing](#) -- Hélène Tragos Stelian, Huffpost, Oct. 12, 2016
- [The Dangerous Approach of Living Without Purpose](#) -- Thomas Oppong, Medium, May 18, 2017
- [Here's how I finally got myself to start exercising](#) -- Christine Carter, PhD, Ideas.Ted.Com, Nov. 2, 2020

Read about HR's StrengthsFinder: <https://hr.nd.edu/career-development/learning-programs/>

Watch in SkillPort

- Prioritizing Purpose -- Amy Jen Su [2020] Library ID 150101 [video, 2 min]
- Habit 3: Put First Things First -- Stephen Covey [2008] Library ID: 25029 [video, 4 min]