

WELLNESSMONTHLY

Authentic Life Purpose Provides Healthy Foundation | January 2023



"The heart of human excellence often begins to beat when you discover a pursuit that absorbs you, frees you, challenges you, or gives you a sense of meaning, joy or passion."

- Terry Orlick, Ph.D., Founder, Zone of Excellence

Authentic Life Purpose Provides Healthy Foundation

The start of a new year often prompts people to reflect on their purpose in life.

Some people are clear about their purpose (or purposes) and find it relatively easy to pursue their goals. However, many of us periodically wonder about the meaning of life and ask ourselves, "Why am I here? What am I meant to contribute or accomplish? Am I making a difference?"

A purpose can rise out of a traumatic event or loss. It may be a byproduct of one's upbringing, faith, career aspirations, or passion for a social cause, music, art, science, adventure or discovery. People with purpose report having high life satisfaction, and when facing adversity, they tend to be resilient and have good coping skills.

A State of Well-being

In a [New York Times article](#), Dhruv Khullar, M.D., refers to two types of well-being – eudaimonic and hedonic. Purpose in life is connected to eudaimonic well-being, which the American Psychological Association defines as the "type of happiness or contentment that is achieved through self-actualization and having meaningful purpose in one's life." Hedonic well-being is described as a transitory "type of happiness or contentment that is achieved when pleasure is obtained and pain is avoided."

Eudaimonic well-being is linked to positive health outcomes, including better-quality sleep, lower incidence of stroke and heart attacks, and reduced risk for dementia, disability, inflammatory responses and premature death. In addition, people with a strong sense of purpose have been found to be more inclined to obtain preventive care such as annual physicals, mammograms, colonoscopies and immunizations.

In the workplace, a growing body of research on occupational health and employee engagement suggests that having a sense of purpose is an intrinsic motivator. Victor Strecher, Ph.D., M.P.H., chief purpose officer at [Kumanu](#), a well-being company that he founded, says employees with a sense of personal purpose help businesses thrive because they tend to have higher rates of retention, lower rates of burnout and depression, and less absence. (Refer to [Kumanu's Purposeful Culture Index](#)).

Looking Inward

Whatever the driving force may be, experts say introspection is a key to finding one's purpose. Introspection involves looking inward to observe thoughts, feelings, motives and intentions. While it is a self-directed activity, it may be facilitated with guidance from a therapist or other mental health professional.

An honest self-inventory provides insights that may be used to heal emotional wounds, consciously modify behaviors, and improve physical and mental health. A theory referred to as the [identity-value model](#) suggests that having a purpose, including [core values](#), is associated with the adoption of goal-directed behaviors that support self-regulation.

However, psychologists caution, there is an associated risk of "introspection illusion," a cognitive bias or false perception of oneself that can affect judgment, decision-making and relationships. Illusion can be an underlying reason for stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination. (Refer to [Advances in Experimental Social Psychology](#).) Consequently, a person with a subconscious need for self-validation may find that a purpose-driven path is a bumpy road.

Finding or Refining Your Purpose

To help you define or refine your "purpose statement," Dr. Strecher at Kumanu recommends asking yourself: "Who do I want to be, what do I want to do and what actions will I take?" Here are some other suggestions. You may want to write down your answers:

1. Can I clearly articulate my purpose?

If yes:

- What specific steps am I taking to fulfill my purpose?
- Am I overlooking anything else I can do to remain purpose-driven?
- What obstacles stand in the way of living my purpose?

If no:

- How can I better understand myself?
- What are the most meaningful aspects of my life?
- What would I like to change about my situation?



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2. When I do an honest self-assessment:
 - What are my strengths and weaknesses?
 - What am I afraid of and what holds me back?
 - Who or what brings out my best or worst qualities?
3. When I think about my current situation, am I:
 - Happy with my relationships (romantic, family, friends, co-workers)?
 - Satisfied with my living situation (housing, community, environment)?
 - Contented with my employment status? (job, salary, meaningfulness)
4. When I think about what I admire most about certain people:
 - Do they seem to have a life purpose; if they do, what is it?
 - Which characteristics do I think I share with them?
 - Is it feasible for me to emulate what I admire about them?
5. When I die:
 - What do I want to be remembered for?
 - What would I want my obituary to say?
 - What would I like people to say about me at my memorial service?

In finding or reinforcing your purpose, remember this truism: People won't recall your words or actions. They will remember how you made them feel.