

Life Purpose Exercise

We say that people are born with a life purpose. Some people never look for their purpose, and so it remains unspoken their whole lives. But it is there. The life purpose is the reason we are on this planet. It is the thing we are meant to accomplish, the gift we are meant to bring. Life purpose is not about a job or even an avocation. It is the round-the-clock, twenty-four-hour, every-day-of-your-life expression of who you are when you are reaching your full potential.

When clients are “on purpose,” they are fulfilled. They are contributing and making a difference. When they are not on purpose, they feel discontented and unfulfilled. Even if a client doesn’t have a life purpose statement, the life purpose is still there. Even if clients can’t articulate a life purpose statement to their satisfaction, they can tell the difference between when they are on purpose and when they are not on purpose. It is very challenging for them to not act on this purpose. It feels terrible, dead, disconnected.

The coach’s job is to work with clients to design a life purpose statement they can use as they clarify their purpose in the world. Such a statement allows them to connect with their life purpose easily and quickly. The life purpose statement is like a big neon sign that will help them find their way out of the swamp when they get stuck. Because it is a personal statement for the client’s own use, it can be as grand and sweeping or as transformational as the client can handle. It is not open to the ridicule or judgment of others.

The process we use for finding and articulating a life purpose statement follows a series of steps.

1. The coach presents a visualization or exercise that generates impressions and allows clients to gather insight about their life purpose. (Four visualizations are included in this section.)
2. Coach and client debrief the visualization(s), looking for the impact the client wants to create. Client and coach brainstorm and collaborate. Here, the coach’s job is to listen and keep encouraging all the words that come out of the visualizations. The coach listens for any repeated words or common themes. The coach also uses his or her intuition to sense the impact words or phrases. Life purpose coaching is extraordinarily intuitive. The client and coach keep listening for the words that have the strongest resonance for the client. The coach compiles these words and replays them for the client so the client can hear them and see which ones have the strongest feeling. This forms the beginning of an impact statement.

The initial impact statement is likely to be general: “I want people to be happy,” “I want people to be in better relationships.” The problem with a general impact statement like this is that it is too vague to motivate the client to action. So the coaching then focuses on taking the client deeper into the impact so that it is more specific and the client has something to grab on to. The impact statement needs to be clear enough and strong enough so that the client can access it when he or she is off course. It describes the impact the client wants to have, such as to have people embrace life, act authentically, see their true selves, find their personal power, discover their creativity, experience their magnificence, or return to aliveness.

CO-ACTIVE COACHING TOOLKIT

3. Once the impact statement is found, the next step is to find a metaphor that captures the essential quality of the life purpose. For example, “I am the magician,” “I am the lighthouse,” “I am the dynamite,” “I am the rock in the shoe,” “I am the alarm clock.”

The metaphor can also be an action: “I wake people up,” “I explode the lies,” “I uncover the inner truth,” “I call people home.”

Note that finding a metaphor generally is not easy for clients. It is often hard for them to see themselves in the form of a metaphor or an image. Also note that finding a life purpose statement takes time. It is a process of peeling back the layers to get at the essence of a person’s purpose. In this initial coaching session on life purpose, the client will likely find one version that is rough but workable.

It may take months or years to refine the statement. The metaphor also may change over time. The goal is to find a version that rings true for the client, knowing that there is more work to be done.

The metaphor and impact statement should be concise and should create maximum impact for the client—in general, not more than fifteen words. The life purpose statement should follow this general format:

I am the _____ (metaphor) so that people
_____ (impact statement).

The following are examples of life purpose statements:

- I am the lighthouse that guides people to their dreams.
- I am the dynamite that transforms people’s lives.
- I am the rock in the shoe that causes people to remember to be alive.
- I am the alarm clock that awakens people to their magnificence.

Note that life purpose statements can be corny, grandiose, and flowery. All of that is okay. These are not for publication. They are for you and your clients to use so that they can fully feel the power of the life purpose in them. The coach needs to champion and encourage clients to create a truly big life purpose statement. The life purpose is not something they will necessarily accomplish in this lifetime, but it should have tremendous, compelling power to motivate them to be in action in their lives and to be on purpose. The visualizations are just the beginning—a place to start to collect the raw material. There are lots of additional ways to have clients envision their life purpose. They can draw pictures of their life purpose or find a piece of music to use as their theme song. Encourage clients to be creative and look for whatever inspiration they can find to help them articulate their life purpose.

The coach’s role is to encourage, to continue ongoing coaching in order to clarify the statement, and, of course, to use life purpose in the coaching as clients look at what will be fulfilling for them in their lives.

CO-ACTIVE COACHING TOOLKIT

Visualization 1

Imagine that you're in a large group of people milling about in front of a stage. Up on the stage is your future self. Your future self begins to speak to this large group of people. Suddenly you become aware of a shift that has happened to you and the entire audience. Your future self has in some way had a profound impact on you and on the rest of the people in the audience. You are all altered or changed in some fundamental way. Aware of this impact on yourself and others, you leave the room altered for the rest of your life.

Questions: What was the impact your future self had on you and the others? How were you and the others transformed? Who was your future self being to have such an impact?

Visualization 2

Turn the clock back and look at a time in your life when you felt your full power—a time when your spine, arms, and fingertips were tingling with excitement, a time when you didn't care what anyone thought of you. You were absolutely alive! (Pause)

Questions: Where were you? What were you doing? Who was around you? What was occurring in them at that time? What was your impact on them?

Visualization 3

Return to the auditorium once more. The stage is there, and a large group of people is milling about. There is a buzz in the room. Everything is the same as before except this time you are on the stage. Look out over the crowd. Feel the feelings you have as you are about to address the gathering. Just as you step up to the microphone, time freezes for an instant, and you hear a voice in your ear that says your name and then says, "In the next thirty seconds, you will have a chance to have any impact you want on this entire group. It will be only one chance, one impact, but all of these people will be changed in some way; they will have a different life because of the impact you have had on them. Thirty seconds. 15 . . . 10-9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1."

Question: What impact did you have? What happened to the people?

Visualization 4

You are getting into a rocket ship. The rocket ship takes off. You are on your way to an undeveloped planet in the universe. It's a fine planet in every way, but it's uninhabited. You have the power to create this planet to be whatever you want it to be. When you land, what is it that you're going to make happen—what's the impact you want to have, that's going to create the planet the way you want it to be? (Pause) The ship is landing on the planet. The door opens. You touch the planet and say, "It's going to be this way." What is "this way"?