

The Anatomy of Rebuilding & Recovery

A CEO LOUNGE INITIATIVE

A Bohemian Rhapsody

The epiphany of finding purpose in work and life

In conversation with



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A Bohemian Rhapsody



As the world and its business landscape continue to evolve, there is a growing need and want to dive deeper into the realm of mindfulness and purpose. Why we are doing something has taken the stead over what we are doing daily. This crossover to a value-addition approach that aligns with an individual's source of purpose is dominating work and life landscapes beyond paychecks. Does purpose matter, or is it simply another noble textbook value? CEO Lounge brings together industry's best to explore the power of purpose.

Words by **Divya Sista**

"There are two novels that can change a bookish fourteen-year old's life: *The Lord of the Rings* and *Atlas Shrugged*. One is a childish fantasy that often engenders a lifelong obsession with its unbelievable heroes, leading to an emotionally stunted, socially crippled adulthood, unable to deal with the real world. The other, of course, involves orcs."

- John Rogers

Humans, as a species, are wired to scour for meaning. The demographic transition of age in the world's population pyramid has brought opportunities and challenges alike. As countries began to prosper economically, social trends and mindsets, too, witnessed transformations. Baby boomers (the post-World War II generation) and Generation X's (those born between 1965 and 1980) idea of a great life was being honest and hardworking — no questions asked. Millennials (those born between 1980 and 1996) and Generation Z's (ones born post-1997)¹ view of the world is

all about smart work, valuing personal space and pursuing a personal purpose. Perhaps this shift towards a fulfilling, empowering and purpose-driven everything — work, personal relationships and interests outside work — is progress in the hierarchy of Maslow's pyramid², towards self-actualisation. If life is truly a journey, the purpose would be a rudder or a steering wheel, depending on a person's conception of purpose and how he chooses to travel.

LIVING VS EXISTING — THE WHY OF PURPOSE

"What is man? He's just a collection of chemicals with delusions of grandeur."

— Ayn Rand, Atlas Shrugged

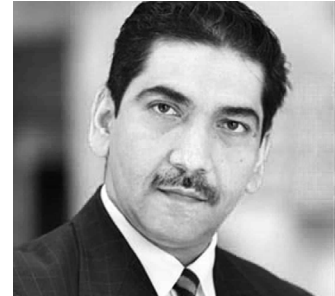
Over the last few years, we have seen the world embrace the idea of purpose. From organisations finding their purpose beyond profits to employees seeking purpose in their jobs, the idea of purpose has turned into a lever that redefines existence. Finding oneself is not as easy as it seems, and it is precisely in this pursuit that man has turned to various faiths, religious and

secular schools of thought.

"The idea of self, who am I, and why am I (in existence) has an inside-out and outside-in view. While the inside-out view is of who I view myself to be, the outside-in view is that the world around me perceives me to be. These two views need to come to a confluence," explains Amrita Sapre, Country Head - Devices (Surface), Microsoft India.

Perception is key. Maintaining a delicate balance between transcendental philosophy that provides contentment through answers and the realm of the real world that puts food on our plates and pays our bills is empowering for many. It is like having the best of both worlds, and this mental shift in perception of life and work is driving the rise of purpose-driven action.

"Honesty of purpose is the biggest purpose in itself," quips Narayan Devanathan, President - Strategy & Integration, Dentsu India and APAC Head, Strategy & Consulting, Dentsu Creative, as he recalls how perceptions of the 'self' change over time with experiences and age.



"Purpose is an audacious word in itself. You get different answers from different people. The purpose is not important, finding it is"

Shashank Sinha

Chief Transformation Officer & Head, Strategic Marketing, Eureka Forbes





“One must be like the lotus leaf in water. Attached yet detached. There is no benchmark to success. It cannot be truer... to realise that success is incomparable, that someone else's journey is a very personal discovery”

Amrita Sapre

Country Head - Devices (Surface),
Microsoft India

Cultural norms, social expectations, work and family, are often the biggest drivers of purpose. Often these very drivers also don the role of wingmen while actively seeking purpose.

“Purpose is an audacious word in itself. You get different answers from different people. The purpose is not important, finding it is,” says Shashank Sinha, Chief Transformation Officer & Head, Strategic Marketing, Eureka Forbes.

The science of psychology has an interesting take on the idea of purpose. Research in this field, which began in Nazi concentration camps showed that prisoners who had a sense of purpose exhibited more resilience to heart-wrenching atrocities they were subjected to³. This subsequently led to the formulation of a “purpose in life” framework by Viktor Frankl that was set in stone, the idea that a sense of purpose was central to a human being’s idea of self and happiness.

“How does one find purpose? Arjun found his in a battlefield, while Gandhi found it when he was thrown off a train. A

body at rest continues to be in rest unless a force acts upon it is a universal law. This applies to the idea of purpose too. It needs a trigger. The force that sets one on this path of purpose can be internal or external. It may or may not come at one shot,” explains Ajay Krishnan, Director - Commercial, ISS India.

This explains the many ‘aha’ moments one finds when reading a quote or drawing inspiration from an experience — from teenagers who connect to the lyrics of a Pink Floyd number, young adults who romanticise ideas in works of fiction, middle-aged folk finding happiness in family, to elders seeking answers in religious texts.

IS PURPOSE A PRIVILEGE?

“Where there's life there's hope, and need of vittles.”

— JRR Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*

The idea of being human is to get lost to a cause so that he gives himself to someone or something — a constant benign intention that is both meaningful and results in productive endeavours

giving a sense of accomplishment.

"The trajectory of finding purpose is also transient. When one is young, in college and is carefree, having mindless fun, it may seem pointless to have a sense of purpose outlined. We ask, does purpose matter? The idea of purpose sounds great once we have made money. Is that a sign of privilege? Just being able to think about purpose. Would someone who does not have access, and is out there to survive, still view purpose through the same lens?" questions Devanathan.

Preaching purpose, the greater good and how finding a purpose could unlock life's immense potential to a greenhorn or a child is tricky.

Quoting Einstein, Krishnan says, "God does not create dice. Even if it initially seems hazy, you know there is a goal out there. You have set out for something, and you should truly be excited about whatever you do and do it well. Everything in this universe has a purpose. We just need to find it. Things you see today have evolved over millennia of adapting to everything thrown at them. Else, they would have perished. This is Darwin's

theory of natural selection. They are the two truths you need to keep in mind. And maybe everything else will fall into place."

When avenues that defined financial success were limited, the idea of purpose was secondary. However, with the rise of the gig economy, the internet aiding monetisation of off-beat professions, purpose has manifested itself into a right.

"When you are young, have just joined your first job, or a few years into your career, it is natural to have monetary goals. We must not confuse purpose with a goal. Purpose is a large word. The purpose may start on a micro-scale, and slowly embed itself into things you do with and for the people around you and grow over time. These are some things you refer to as your first principles. Your signature in everything you do or take on," says Sinha.

The purpose is something that dictates juxtaposed behaviours, which makes it important. It is a means to an end rather than an end in itself.

"You could take one step at a time, while not losing sight of the destination," surmises Rajeev Tanna, Head - Risk Management & Internal Compliance,



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Narayan Devanathan

President - Strategy & Integration, Dentsu India and APAC Head, Strategy & Consulting, Dentsu Creative





How does one find purpose? A body at rest continues to be in rest unless a force acts upon it is a universal law. Purpose needs a trigger"

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Director - Commercial, ISS India

Tata Consulting Engineers. "Today, we increasingly see an overlap between what one loves and what one does. Finding that overlap can be a journey in itself. You cannot afford to be deterred by the speed breakers in this journey. Once you find that interjection, there is no looking back," he adds.

CONSCIOUS CAPITALISM — THE HOW OF PURPOSE

"If one's actions are honest, one does not need the predated confidence of others."

- Ayn Rand, Atlas Shrugged

The spillover effect that the sense of purpose brings is largely welcome. People want to understand what they are doing, and if it aligns with their ideology on the whole. It gives them a sense of fulfilment that they are accomplishing something extra, beyond pleasing organisational shareholders.

"This movement has redefined business ideas. It has even pushed the idea of being good by doing good," says Devanathan.

Corporates and organisations are perceptibly talking about how their products and services are making a

positive difference in the world — be it underprivileged lives or rainforests. They are constantly putting out stories that constructively capture their humane connection and showing how this resonates with their mission statement.

"You need to earn money to give up money. You need to have something to give it away. Conscious capitalism is the way to go. We saw some of the biggest names in India come together during the oxygen crisis (during India's second Covid-19 wave) for the larger good. Capitalism drives purpose too," explains Krishnan.

If there is much more to a job than a paycheck, the next generation, as it readies itself to brace the vicious world are increasingly finding meaning in their work by choosing whom to work with and wearing it like a badge. But does having a purpose guarantee success is a pressing question.

"One must be like the lotus leaf in water. Attached yet detached. There is no benchmark to success. It may sound eclectic. But it cannot be truer... to realise that success is incomparable, that someone else's journey is a very personal discovery," says Sapre.

PASSION VS PURPOSE — THE WHAT OF PURPOSE

"It's the job that's never started as takes longest to finish."

- JRR Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*

The purpose is the prompt that helps identify things around us and improvise them. Intertwined with a sense of identity, pursuing interests, building upon skills help build a definite purpose. Somewhere along the journey to this discovery, it is easy to confuse passion with purpose.

"Think of it as an EMI (equated monthly instalment) that you pay over 10 years. You are paying a fixed amount, of which each month some portion goes to the principal and the other portion goes towards the interest. The rate at which you want to allocate funds towards repayment is up to you. If you repay it at a slower pace, you end up paying more and vice versa. There is a clear trade-off between time spent and the amount paid. Similarly, you have to figure out what is your priority, and what is turning into a second priority while setting a goal," says Tanna.

Actively figuring out the purpose of one's life may seem like an adventure or a disgruntled chore as time passes by. Our social support system plays a crucial role here. Studies show that purpose can be cultivated, and nurtured through

positive experiences, staying curious and practising gratitude.⁴ This motivates morality, altruism and drives reciprocity to give back what you have got.

"We always try and position ourselves at a place where we want people to view us, in the version we view ourselves. Purpose, too, is adaptive. It helps us collectively and individually achieve common goals together and is gratifying," says Sinha.

While having a definite purpose makes what we do meaningful, it is so much more. This very idea of greater good resonates into purposeful work and mindfulness, which heightens engagement beyond targets and results.

"Life is a 2x2 matrix of hard work and intelligence. The top-right quadrant is where you ideally want to be. That is the goal. All you need to do is figure out where you lie and push yourself towards the goal. Intelligence may be God-given. But hard work is yours to do — it can be nurtured," summarises Krishnan.

The purpose may be a duty towards the self or a privilege of circumstances. But it is a definite step beyond the philosophy of making the world pleasant and bearable. It is a direction to build a culture that actively delivers and is conscious about being good in doing good.



"We increasingly see an overlap between what one loves and what one does. Finding that overlap can be a journey in itself. Once you find that interjection, there is no looking back"

Rajeev Tanna

Head - Risk Management & Internal Compliance, Tata Consulting Engineers

TAKEAWAYS

- 1 The discovery of one's purpose is a journey and must not be confused with life goals.
- 2 The purpose is your signature that appears in everything you do in some way. Finding purpose is as important as the idea of purpose itself.
- 3 People with a strong sense of purpose are happier, more hopeful and are known to be better at strategy, leadership and creative pursuits.
- 4 Perceptions mould purpose. Positive experiences, morality and emotions can shape a strong sense of purpose.



¹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2015/09/03/the-whys-and-hows-of-generations-research/>

² <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>

³ <https://www.templeton.org/discoveries/the-psychology-of-purpose>

⁴ https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why_a_grateful_brain_is_a_giving_one

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