

2018

Purpose (Chapter Two of My Best Advice: Proven Rules for Effective Leadership)

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Recommended Citation

Rahschulte, Tim; Halley, Ryan; and Martinelli, Russ, "Purpose (Chapter Two of My Best Advice: Proven Rules for Effective Leadership)" (2018). *Faculty Publications - School of Business*. 96.

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Purpose

Rule 5. Don't forget why you do what you do.

Think about how you spent the past day, week, or even month. Why did you spend it that way? Why did you invest your time the way you did? Did you go to work? Why do you go to work every day? Did you go to your daughter's recital or your son's play? Why? Did you get some exercise? Did you take your partner to lunch? Did you go to the neighborhood barbecue? Why?

On the surface, our answers to these questions may be simple: I go to work to make money so I can pay my bills and support a certain lifestyle for my family. I go to my kids' events to support them. I love my partner. I enjoy spending time with my neighbors. There may be deeper drivers for each of these decisions as well.

What did you do at work today? And why? Do you believe in what you're doing? Why? Do you care about the well-being, growth, and fulfillment of your coworkers, team, and colleagues? What about your customers and, beyond them, their families and communities?

If you don't know why you do what you do, then what you do will have limited purpose and limited fulfillment. Not knowing why you do what you do increases the possibility that you may be persuaded to do just about anything, for anyone, and for any reason.

Knowing your “why” is knowing your purpose. Knowing your why is knowing your cause. Knowing your why is knowing your point of view and perspective. Your why gives clarity in meaning to what you do. It’s for this reason—at least in part—that the author and motivational speaker Simon Sinek wrote the books *Start with Why* and *Find Your Why* and the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche once said, “He who has a why can endure any how.”

So what’s your why? Why are you doing what you’re doing?

As you think about your why, don’t fall into the temptation of mediocrity or ease into the comfort of “good enough” due to any perceived constraints. In other words, don’t settle for what seems like the obvious answer. You won’t find your why there anyway. Rather, dive into the possibilities of abundance and full-potential performance to uncover the root of why you do what you do.

Again, think about how you spent your day. Why? Ask and answer the question *why* five times to get to the real reason. You may say:

“I spent my day working to make money.” *Why?*

“Because I have bills to pay and a lifestyle to uphold for my family.” *Why?*

“Because I want to be a good provider to them.” *Why?*

“Because I want them to enjoy a good life.” *Why?*

“Because I care for and love them.” *Why?*

“Because when I see joy in them, I also have joy in who I am.”

Now you know why you spend your days the way you do. And you probably already know the next logical question. Is that how you want to show up every day? If so, great! If that’s the case for you, you’ve probably had an awesome day. If not, change it. Start now.

The best leaders live out their reason why every day. To know *what* you’re doing is important, to know *how* you’re going to do

something is also important, but to know *why* you're doing something is most important. The best leaders understand that and share it with others on their teams and those they care for so they know why as well.

Rule 6. If you don't care, no one else will either.

Tim Callahan is a vice president at Aflac, a Fortune 500 insurance company. While he shuns bumper sticker philosophies, he believes the foundation of leadership is understanding that "people do not care what you know until they know how much you care." He understands that effective leadership requires an ability to care and a willingness to do so.

But an ability and willingness to care about *what*? The answer to this question is twofold: care about purpose and care about people. As a leader, you have to demonstrate that you care about what you're trying to achieve *and* about the people who are investing their time and effort to help you succeed.

Caring about what you're trying to achieve as a leader starts with demonstrating your passion for purpose and showing those who follow you that you care deeply about the realization of your ideas, mission, and goals. People may be intrigued with *what* you're trying to accomplish regardless of whether they actually believe in it themselves. Being intrigued by your ideas, however, won't guarantee that others will follow you and provide actionable support. In order to get that level of buy-in, those you wish to lead need to understand *why* you believe your ideas, mission, and goals are worth working for. In other words, they need to understand the purpose of what you're trying to accomplish. This requires you to be able to clearly communicate your why.

However, even a well-defined purpose is insufficient to fully enact buy-in and action. Through demonstration of passion, or deep caring for purpose, a leader can successfully convert *personal*

purpose to common purpose. Passion motivates people and gives them a sense of belonging. Most importantly, passion for purpose gets a leader's team excited and motivated to take action. If team members are willing to commit their time and effort to take action without being commanded to do so, it indicates that they're truly committed to a common purpose.

Without commitment from his or her team, a leader's ideas, mission, and goals won't be realized. Success is a team sport, and because of this, showing you care about the people on your team is the second important aspect of caring leadership. Author and leadership guru Dale Carnegie said, "You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you." The point Carnegie makes here is that showing you care for the people on your team inspires loyalty. That loyalty, in turn, leads to increased productivity, increased team morale, and decreased turnover—all important variables needed to achieve goals and accomplish a common purpose.

When leaders demonstrate a sincere caring for the people they lead, they're creating a culture of support for their teams, organizations, and enterprises. In creating a culture of support, caring for people becomes about ensuring individual perspectives and contributions are supported and team members are empowered to positively influence their work and work environment. Team members see that their leader not only supports their ideas but also takes action to do something with those ideas. As a result, team members will take ownership of their actions relative to the expected outcomes. This is what it really means to have alignment and commitment to a common purpose.

If you know an effective leader, the odds are good that you've found someone with the ability and willingness to demonstrate that he or she cares and why. You've also found someone who understands the true power of caring when it comes to both purpose and people.

Rule 7. Know what you're willing to give.

Important things get done only when capital is spent. Therefore, if you're going to get anything important done, you're going to invest capital. Think about it. If you're going to realize a financial return, you've got to invest sweat equity (personal capital of time and muscle) or financial equity (money capital). If you're going to build a lasting friendship, you've got to invest emotional capital and time. If you're going to build a strong partnership, you've got to invest in mutual-gains capital. Whatever it is that you aim to accomplish, you've got to invest. You've got to give something, and that something will be of value.

Think about that the next time you say, "I don't have enough time to have my one-on-one with John today because I have to get this status report turned in," or "I don't have the resources necessary to invest in that person or that other person or even myself." In all situations, you're making decisions about what you're going to give and why.

It's not by accident that this rule—*know what you're willing to give*—comes after *don't forget why you do what you do and if you don't care, no one else will either*. It's about knowing purpose, prioritizing the most important over someone else's urgent, and knowing your investment and expected return. Your time spent throughout the day should be viewed the same way. If you want to realize a positive gain in something, you're going to have to invest. Your biggest chore or challenge may be determining what to invest in, or it may be what *not* to invest time and energy in. It's for this reason that H. L. Hunt, the Texas oil tycoon and political activist, said, "Decide what you want, decide what you are willing to exchange for it. Establish your priorities and go to work." That's good advice.

Know what's important, and invest in only those things. This sentiment and this rule remind us of the old Cherokee story "Two Wolves," which illustrates the battle we engage in every day. The story is told by an old Cherokee who was teaching his grandson

about life. “A fight is going on inside me,” he said to the boy. “It is a terrible fight, and it is between two wolves. One is evil—he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.” He continued, “The other is good—he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you—and inside every other person, too.”

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, “Which wolf will win?”

The old Cherokee replied simply, “The one you feed.”

Like everyone, your capital is limited. So know what you want to do, why, what you’re willing to give, what you’re going to invest in, and what you’re *not* going to invest in. Know what you’re going to feed. When you know what’s important to feed, your capital is more likely to be invested in your purpose—and rightfully so.

Rule 8. The purpose of business is people serving people.

Tom Peters is known for a lot of things. He’s a former partner of McKinsey & Company’s organizational effectiveness practice. He’s written a number of books, of which our favorite is *In Search of Excellence*. He’s a dynamic speaker who leverages keen observations, research, and experiences to help make leaders better. He’s a genuine leadership guru, and he gets it right more often than not. We’re big fans, especially when it comes to his perspective on the purpose of business. It’s “people serving people, period.”

Rosabeth Moss Kanter is the author of *Supercorp: How Vanguard Companies Create Innovation, Profits, Growth, and Social Good*. Her research supports Peters’s claim and our belief. She found that a company’s core purpose is more than just making money; it’s about accomplishing a societal purpose. The best organizations,

and the leaders within them, know that to be successful at serving people at a societal level requires being great at serving one another at the organizational level.

At the core of any business is a theoretical hypothesis of people helping people. Whether with a product or a service, businesses are organized with people serving other people.

Not everyone immediately appreciates this concept. Some believe organizations are formed simply to maximize shareholder wealth. This philosophy wasn't developed from the creative mind of a Hollywood writer on assignment to craft one-liners for the greed-obsessed Gordon Gekko character in the movie *Wall Street*. It was actually a court ruling. In 1919, the Michigan State Supreme Court argued that the primary purpose of an organization was profit for shareholders. This decision informed the actions of many executives when it came to either paying or withholding shareholders' stock dividends. It's also from this case that "shareholder maximization" and "maximization of shareholder wealth" became widely known phrases and accepted as the purpose of business. However, the core of maximization of shareholder value is people (resources within a business) serving other people (stockholders, stakeholders, coworkers, and customers) to maximize their benefit. Tom Peters and Rosabeth Moss Kanter got it right again.

Great leaders know that the purpose of business has an even greater responsibility than just investor gain. It's a responsibility beyond the business itself. It's a responsibility relative to being part of a greater system. Sure, there are employees, customers, and shareholders, but then there are their families, friends, and communities that stretch far beyond the core of any business.

As you think about your business, think beyond the office walls. Think beyond shareholders. Think to those consuming your goods and services. Think to the connections your employees have in the community, their families, and their even farther-reaching connections. The purpose of any business is relative to all of them,

a larger system, and is grounded in the act of people serving people, period.

Rule 9. The purpose of people is finding meaning in work.

It's one thing to know the purpose of business—people serving people—but to be fully effective as a leader, you have to know the purpose of people. Every individual wants to be part of an awesome team and the products and reputations that go along with that. To realize this, you have to focus the impact you have on people.

The most effective leaders give people a sense of purpose. They empower people to do their best work, and they have a bias of action toward making positive experiences happen for the people around them with each and every interaction—from an e-mail to a phone call to a hallway conversation. Their aim is to instill a sense of meaning in people by being engaged with something truly exceptional.

So what's the best advice we've learned? Amy Messersmith, the chief people officer at TDIndustries, said, "My best advice is to err on the side of treating people like people." Agreed! To do so, you've got to know people. The best way to do that, according to David Bray, the chief information officer at the Federal Communications Commission, is to "seek to understand what brings people joy." Gary Warzala, a senior vice president at PNC Financial Services Group, says, "Your relationships are personal and because of that you've got to make sure people know that you sincerely care." To do this, Dave Estlick, a senior vice president at Starbucks, says to "lead through the lens of humanity; respect the individual and protect the individual." This is the core of what leadership is and what great leaders do: they make work personal because they create purpose for people in their work.

Ryan Russell is the director of human-centered design at Amazon. He has a unique and effective way to set this tone among his team. During new-employee orientation, he meets with each member of his team individually. Doing so is certainly not a unique practice, but what he says and asks during these meetings are. He says, “I’d like to address the elephant in the room. You and I both know that this is not going to be your last job or the last company that you’re going to work for, but I am committed to making it the best. It’s up to us to make it the best. What can I do to make it the best?” We each can have similar conversations with our employees, and as it does for Ryan and his team, it can set the tone for employees to find meaning in their work and know they have their leader’s support to make their time there awesome, while also preparing them for their next move.

Additionally, the best leaders ask, listen to, and thank the people around them. They, like Ryan and the others we’ve mentioned, create opportunities and experiences in which people can succeed. Cathie Brow, the senior vice president of human resources at Revera, explains it this way: “People are people, and the same things motivate them everywhere. It’s understanding their role, feeling like they make a difference, feeling appreciated by their boss, and reporting to a great leader who inspires them.” The purpose of people is to find meaning in their work, dedicate their time to doing great work, and see their work as valuable to others. Your role as a leader is to enable that experience.

Rule 10. Leadership is art, and you sign your name to it every day.

Perhaps the best definition of leadership we’ve ever heard came from Colin Powell. He defined it this way: “Leadership is the art of getting more accomplished from a team of people than the science

of management says is possible.” That’s eloquent, insightful, and accurate.

First of all, leadership is art. You may have heard that before. Think about how many decisions leaders make every day. Answers to most of those decisions can’t be found in some textbook or field guide. Think about all the decisions made where swinging too far one way or the other is problematic. Consider all the situations where a cookie-cutter approach doesn’t work because people are unique and must be addressed uniquely. Unlike many aspects of management, there’s no scientific formula for leadership. Leadership is art and therefore involves artistic maneuvers and creative thinking.

Colton Janes, the director of operations at Aqua America, explained the importance of thinking of leadership as art to us. He said, “Knowing that leadership is an art makes you—the leader—an artist. Just like all artists, you sign your name to your work in every meeting, in every product design, in everything you do every day. Your name is attached to what you do.” Veresh Sita, the chief information officer at Alaska Airlines, expressed a similar sentiment: “Take so much pride in what you do that you’re willing to carve your initials into it every day.”

Have you ever thought of your leadership in that way? It’s a rather powerful way to consider your role as a leader. You’re an artist. Your management work is based in science. It’s about head stuff, intellectual quotient (or IQ) stuff. Your leadership work, on the other hand, is art. It’s about heart stuff, emotional quotient (or EQ) stuff. Daniel Goleman wasn’t the first to study the power of EQ, but he did popularize it with his best-selling book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*.

While IQ focuses largely on academic abilities and measures cognitive capacity, EQ is a reflection of one's ability to empathize with others; express and control emotions, especially in difficult or stressful situations; and understand others' emotional meaning. It's EQ, not IQ, that enables us to connect with others and lead effectively.

It's important to know that regardless of whether you sign your name to your work every day, people do it on your behalf based on their connection with you. You influence everyone who sees and hears you every day. They attach your name to what they perceive. So whether you want to sign your name to your work every day (and throughout every day) or not, it's there. It's the art you've created based on the impact you've had on others, and your initials are carved into it for everyone to see. Keep this in mind as you go about your day. Keep in mind that every action you take is accompanied by your signature; it's a reflection of your leadership and ultimately a reflection of who you are as a colleague and a person.

As you power down your computer after each day's work or as you make your commute home, think about your work of art for that day. Did you get more from your team than the science of management says is possible? Did you inspire the team members to accomplish more than they thought was possible? Did you create a lasting, positive impact on each of your team members? Did you help them understand their roles and let them know they make a difference and are appreciated? Are you proud to sign your work of art?

You sign your name to the work you do as a leader every day. Be a proud artist. Be a great leader!

Purpose: Reflect, Review, and Commit

- Think about why you do what you do. What's the meaning in your work? In short, what's the purpose in what you do? What's the significance in it for you? Perform the five-why exercise described in rule 5 by first asking, "Why do I spend my day the way I do?" Ask and answer the question "Why?" five times to uncover the root of why. Once that's complete, consider how you might take this personal meaning from your work and help others to see the purpose in their work. How can you better enable people to find meaning in the work they do?
- List three things you did during the past week. Briefly describe the "why" behind each of these activities. Does the prioritization of these activities change after considering the why? Using this logic, reprioritize the things currently on your to-do list to assure the most important items are ranked appropriately.
- Think about the business you're in and the company you work for. How would you describe the purpose of your work? Does it involve people serving people? If not, can you think of ways to include service to people within that purpose? In your specific role, what people do you serve, and what are some steps you can take to serve with even greater impact?
- How might seeing your leadership as a work of art change the way you go about it? Are there a few things that happened this past week that you're really glad your name is signed to? What caused those things to happen? Equally, what happened this week that you wish your name weren't signed to? What caused those things to happen? What might you do differently going forward, now that you know you're an artist and sign your name to your work every day?