

Set Your Life Purpose Even Amidst the Pandemic

The pandemic has thrown people off course, and many feel a loss of purpose or meaning. That's natural, experts say. The important step now is to refocus and find your purpose for your life and career. Taking time to find your purpose can get you back on track, and companies can help too.

People Lost Their Purpose Amidst the Pandemic

While the pandemic created many types of disruptions in people's lives, one has indeed been a loss of purpose for living and working. A survey by the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) in Singapore, for example, found that about 31 percent of respondents aged 21 to 29 were worried about losing their purpose for living.

The changes are also causing people to reconsider their careers. In the UK, according to a survey by KPMG, the coronavirus pandemic caused 44 percent of workers in the finance industry to consider moving jobs. And a recent Microsoft survey showed that more than 40 percent of workers globally were considering leaving their jobs.

As Careershifters founder Richard Alderson told the BBC, the jolt of the pandemic caused many more of us to ask fundamental questions about our life choices and whether or not these align with our core values. "A shock to the system often causes people to reassess things in their lives."

Purpose is More than Travel

In explaining the reasons for the loss of purpose among Gen Z or millennials in Singapore, lead IPS researcher Mathew Mathews said the disruptions caused by the pandemic resulted in a loss of what gives them purpose, including travelling for leisure and work, training and socialising.

While some people may feel that travel and socialising is important, purpose is bigger. Philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson put it well, saying, "the purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honourable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well."

As Atlantic writer Arthur Brooks also noted, we rarely get the chance to consider the big drivers of our happiness and our sense of purpose. Many of us go about our lives desperately trying to achieve higher levels of satisfaction by increasing what we have by working, spending, working, spending, and on and on. A key finding in happiness literature, he added, is the centrality of productive human endeavour in creating a sense of purpose. "What makes work meaningful is not the kind of work it is, but the sense it gives you that you are earning your success and serving others."

While individuals need to figure out their purpose themselves, employers can help. What companies need to do, consulting giant McKinsey suggests, is to "help employees find purpose - or watch them leave." In the United States, nearly two-thirds of employees surveyed said that COVID-19 caused them to reflect on their purpose in life. And even though 70 percent said their sense of purpose is defined by their work, only 15 percent of frontline managers and employees said that they are living their purpose at work.

How to Find your Purpose

There are clear steps each of us can take to gain or regain a sense of purpose for our lives.

As one example, University of Michigan professor Vic Strecher said that when he decided to re-examine his purpose in life, the first thing he did was to write down the things that matter most. "I wrote 'my students.' I wrote the names of my family members and other people, causes and things I cared about. To build a new purpose around these things, it was important to be more focused and directed toward those things that matter most and to live life in alignment with that purpose.

Strecher also offers a free online course, "Finding Purpose and Meaning in Life: Living for What Matters Most". More than 100,000 people from around the world enrolled in

2020. Reading Simon Sinek's book *Start with Why*, which Carlson Communications CEO Rich Carlson said motivated him to reflect on "what is *my why*", could also be beneficial.

15-year-old Time magazine Kid of the Year Gitanjali Rao told Time that her mission to create a global community of young innovators to solve problems the world over. Her method for deciding what to do is "observe, brainstorm, research, build and communicate." She uses that framework to tackle issues ranging from contaminated drinking water to cyberbullying.

Other ways to figure out your purpose include reading to learn about how others found their purpose, listening to what people tell you, and writing about your life.

At work, McKinsey suggests, companies need to help employees understand their own purpose and work toward something personally meaningful. For executives, they said, "this applies to you, too. The more purposeful, open, and empathetic the leader, the more likely that he or she can instill the trust necessary to encourage people to explore how their purpose might be better met at work."

Reinforcing the need for action by executives, a study by the World Economic Forum found that younger employees desire purposeful leaders with more emotion and intuition who drive strong organisational performance and have a positive impact on society.

While the pandemic did indeed change how we live and work, it gives us a chance to re-examine our lives and get back on track towards a purpose that is meaningful. Taking the time to find our true north, our real purpose, is essential.