

Organizational Life Purpose

By Patrick Harbula

Virtually all organizations recognize that extending practical support to employees makes for better business and an increased bottom line. As an executive at Sage Publications, I was instrumental in growing the company from 32 million in annual revenues to over 100 million in about 10 years. Perhaps the most important strategy among many that contributed to such a large increase was a system for empowering employees to do their best work out of loyalty and gratitude.

So what were these employees grateful for? They felt supported not only in the work they were doing for Sage but in the fulfillment of their purpose and in their long-term goals, even beyond their commitment to working for Sage. In addition, I had a feedback system in place to ensure that each employee was getting the guidance they need to meet organizational goals as well as personal ones.

It is crucial that every employee has a clear sense of the long-term vision of the company, so they can support that vision. It is just as important for management to have a clear sense of the employee's long-term vision. This reciprocal understanding and commitment to long-term visions and goals creates a bond of intention between the employee and the organization.

To take this a step further, I found it exceptionally motivating to connect the purpose of the employee to the purpose or mission of the company. This would give the employee the opportunity to see how their unique life purpose fit in with the mission of the organization. I would do this often in meetings by asking my group of managers, or the entire employee base during annual meetings, to close their eyes and become aware of their own life purpose. I would ask them to intuit the purpose of the organization. I might also read the company mission statement as well. Then I would ask them to envision how their purpose can be fulfilled through the organizational mission and how the organizational mission could support their individual purpose.

I asked each of the managers that reported to me to connect the long-term goals of the employee to their performance evaluations. If an individual was interested in management, then their leadership and people skills needed to be developed as part of their mentoring. My direct management team all had an understanding of each other's purpose and visions.

I required that all managers and supervisors have regular one-on-one meetings that lasted an hour. Some managers or supervisors resisted this in the beginning because of the time commitment. But the efficiency and employee loyalty that would result from these meetings proved to be more than ample compensation for the time investment.

In the meetings, the manager or supervisor would address employee performance and the employee would communicate what he or she needed from management to better perform his or her job. I would ask managers and supervisors to consistently discuss job

performance within the context of the employee's long-term vision and relate it to the fulfillment of his or her purpose in relation to the team and one's relationship to co-workers, the team, and the larger company.

The time requirement of one hour is an essential element. Once the discussion around practical issues was over, the remainder of the time would often bear the greatest fruit. When the agenda is complete, employees would often share on a more personal nature and the opportunity for greater mentoring would come into play.

Shortly after I was promoted to director and handed two additional departments to manage (which brought the total number of employees under my management to 75), the manager of one of the newly acquired departments had a conversation with another manager who I had been supervising for about six years. The conversation went something like this: "So who is this Patrick Harbula and what is this stuff about 'growing your people' that he is always talking about " Tom asked. "Is he for real? I mean what is his angle?"

"What, you mean you don't believe him?" Janet replied. "I have worked with him for six years, and I know that he is on the level. He really cares about the people who work for him and he wants them to succeed. Not only in business and for Sage, but in their lives as people."

Janet told me of their conversation later. It was interesting that the idea of someone truly interested in the well being of his employees inspired suspicion. I found this to be true of most employees. In the beginning they would question the motives of a manager who truly cared about the welfare of his employees. At the point that the employee recognized that the concern was on the level, almost all employees would develop a greater dedication to their job and the company.

There is no greater motivator for employees than to know that their life purpose and greatest dream for success is supported. There is no more effective way to create loyalty and commitment to the company and its goals. But, the most important reason to adopt this strategy, at least in my opinion, is not to increase the profitability of the company, but to serve the individuals who work for it. With such an intention, the success of the company cannot help but grow exponentially assuming that effective bottom-line business strategies are being employed while the increased production and creativity from staff is harnessed and directed toward greater success.

Nearly every person who I managed directly made a point of saying to me that as a result of what he or she had learned from me in business, it had improved his or her life in other areas. This is the greatest compliment a manager can receive in my opinion. Those who I trained in this strategy have continued to apply it at the company I work for and many more who have gone on to other opportunities and become successful as a result of this simple yet profound business practice.

Every business that is successful, is so because they are fulfilling a need—serving society in some way. When employers serve employees in the deepest ways possible, it cannot help but exponentially increase the success of the company. Success is always equal to the degree of need that is fulfilled. When management deeply fulfills the needs of employees while fulfilling a need in society, then management is simply using time more

efficiently. And the result is that employees work harder, with greater joy and creatively to advance the fulfillment of the company's service.

When focusing on life purpose recognize that it is not a job or activity but an intention that can be fulfilled through any job or vocation and at any moment in time. If you can't fulfill the purpose standing in line at the supermarket, then make it more general. Once the life purpose definition has been created it can be used as a motivation for an employee to help others in the organization by fulfilling their purpose while doing their job.

In this way, employees will have deeper meaning, greater creativity, and a higher degree of passion in their work. It can be periodically reinforced to consistently fulfill one's purpose on the job. For example: if some kind of conflict comes up, each employee can be asked, how would you have handled this situation if you were fulfilling your purpose in the situation.

Use these four (five counting the Alternate question 2) to help your partner clarify life purpose. The goal is to come up with a concise (preferably 7 words or less), powerful definition that can be affirmed in any moment to maximize passionate living. Write down your partner's answers on his or her sheet.

Anyone can employ this system in management. If you are a skilled enough facilitator and want to help those you influence (in business, coaching, or otherwise) to deepen their understanding of life purpose, you may use the simple formula below that thousands of people have found invaluable for clarifying life purpose.

Question 1: What do you love to do that makes the world a better place?

Question 2: (If the purpose is a general one that can be used in any situation, then move on to question 3). If the answer is an activity through which a purpose could be fulfilled, such as "writing," then ask: What is the most profound experience or feeling you like someone to receive from a conversation or any interaction with you?

Alternate question 2: What is the most profound experience, you would like someone to receive from a conversation or any interaction with you?

Question 3: What is the quality or guidance that you did not receive enough of as a child that you wish you had more of, the most important thing?

Question 4: How does it feel when you give others _____ (what he or she didn't get)

Life Purpose Definition: Brainstorm a short definition of life purpose based on the answers. Then ask: Is that most meaningful or is it more meaningful to create the experience of _____ (what he or she didn't get enough of) for others? One's passion is found in the emotional hit. Look for the emotional hit and use their response to formulate the definition. Try different phrasings. The uniqueness of wording is important.