

Discovering Your Purpose: A Values-based Approach to Changing Your Mindset About Work

Tip 1: Change Your Mindset

Finding purpose in your work can have a lot to do with your attitude. Happiness and meaning often result when you focus on something or someone other than yourself.

There's a classic story that illustrates this point rather well.

A man walks on a beach one day, and he sees another man up ahead acting strangely. As he gets closer, he realizes the other man is picking up starfish and throwing them back into the water. The starfish have been stranded on the sand by the tide change, and there are thousands of them on the beach.

"Don't you think you're wasting your time?" asks the first man. "You can't possibly pick up all these starfish. What you're doing isn't going to make any difference."

The second man just looks at him, then throws yet another starfish into the water. "I just made a difference for that one," he replies simply.

What does this story show us? One of our most basic human needs is to make a difference to someone else. We often fall into the trap that to "make a difference," our actions have to be huge or substantial. If we can't save the world, we think that we might as well do nothing.

The man throwing the starfish into the sea obviously couldn't save all of them, but he could save a few – and to those few, it made all the difference in the world. If we want to find purpose in our day-to-day work, then we can start by making a difference to the very people who we interact with every day.

Think of these situations:

- If one of your colleagues is struggling with a project, offer some advice or try to help the person complete it.
- If one of your co-workers is having a rough day or going through a bad time, do something small to cheer up the person. Take the co-worker to lunch, or just offer a hot cup of coffee and listen to his or her problems.

Practice small acts of kindness every day, even if no one will ever know that you're the one doing them. You might be surprised at how much these little things will impact your mindset and sense of purpose.

Tip 2: Examine Your Situation

It's very easy for us to get wrapped up in our day-to-day "to do" lists or the next big project. We tend to focus forward on what we have **not** yet done, and we rarely stop to look back at what we **have** done that's made a difference.

Keep a personal "boast book," either on your computer or in a special notebook. Use this book to keep track of "good" things that you've done. Mark your calendar, perhaps once a month, to spend five minutes adding what you've achieved since you last wrote in it. Try to express what you've done in terms of outcomes and results, rather than activities. For instance, you could write "Helped Helen with Project Beta seminars" rather than "Booked meeting rooms and took meeting minutes for Helen."

Within just a few months, you should build up an impressive list that will help you realize how much difference you've made.

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Tip 3: Rediscover What's Truly Important

When you try to rediscover purpose in your career, you need to understand what's truly important to you. Step back a little. It's possible to see that, no matter what you're doing, you can incorporate meaning into it.

Ask yourself these questions:

What are your values?

What task do you do that truly "lights you up?" What makes you feel alive and engaged?

This subtle shift, simply applying your values to what you do every day, can make a big difference in how you feel about your work.