



PURPOSE

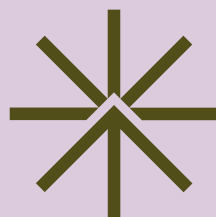
THE FIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF PURPOSE

A SHORT ARTICLE

“WE NEED A PARADIGM TO
FUNCTION AT ALL, TO KNOW
OUR WAY ABOUT IN THE WORLD.
BUT THE DANGER IS THAT WE CAN
GET TRAPPED INSIDE OUR PARADIGM.
WE GET USED TO THINGS AS THEY
ARE AND THINK THAT’S JUST THE
WAY IT IS.

NEW THINKING BECOMES IMPOSSIBLE.
WE BECOME PEOPLE OF A SINGLE VISION,
A SINGLE OUTLOOK....TO CHANGE THE
RULES OF THE GAME, WE HAVE TO STEP
OUTSIDE THE GAME AS WE KNOW IT.”

Danah Zohar





When a leader decides to lead from the place of purpose, it's likely that they will notice some characteristics, or features, of purpose emerge that are birthed from this decision.

Discovering purpose requires the ground in your life to be tilled and turned, and for seeds to be sown and nurtured, however, what might this produce? These five characteristics are the fruit or product of all that effort. These characteristics are:

1. **Positive Disruption**
2. **Resilience**
3. **Pushback**
4. **Reputation**
5. **Peace**

Positive Disruption

We have talked earlier about the role of positive disruption with regard to purpose (this is discussed in the article entitled 'The Impact of Purpose' and in the video entitled 'What is Purpose?'). It is good to note that by discovering and committing to your purpose, you are engaging with something that is positively or helpfully disruptive. This disruption might be something that's experienced by others around you, for example, they may notice your priorities or focus change, they may experience different behaviours that you display, or you may emit a different type of energy. However, the disruption might also be experienced by yourself. As you discover your purpose, a deeper internal enquiry might unfold, and this may feel disruptive as you start to ask different questions of yourself, or begin to reevaluate things differently. This type of positive disruption is part of the process of discovering and committing to your purpose; it's a characteristic of purpose, and with that in mind, it isn't necessarily something to cause significant concern (as long as you've considered the needs of those around you also - your loved ones and significant peers).

Resilience

As you discover and commit to your purpose, you will become increasingly resilient in life. This is another characteristic of purpose. Resilience is often described as ‘bouncebackability’ and refers to how you respond to setbacks, stressors and disappointment. It is a mindset that can be developed with time and experience, rather than something that you are born with. Resilience is also connected to a series of positive attributes noted in the literature about the topic. However, what is the relationship between purpose and resilience? Purpose develops resilience in four ways:

1. Purpose builds perspective

Discovering and committing to a clear purpose fundamentally shifts your perspective by providing a future-focused lens through which to view life. Rather than being deterred by immediate obstacles, a Purposeful Leader sees these ‘walls’ simply as temporary barriers to navigate on the way to a much larger, committed goal. By looking ahead and considering the unique contributions an older version of yourself will have made to the world, everyday challenges are contextualised as part of a broader, more meaningful journey. This forward-looking mindset is like a boat leaving a harbour with a specific destination already charted. When storms or stressful events arise, they are not seen as the final destination, but rather as transient occurrences that must be adapted to whilst remaining focused on the ultimate endpoint.

2. Purpose builds optimism

Many leaders operate using an “Away From” or avoidance motivation, expending their energy on dodging perceived threats and negative experiences. This perpetual survival mode breeds a pessimistic outlook alongside stressful, cortisol-driven behaviours and self-talk focused purely on avoiding failure. Consequently, this constant focus on danger can cause leaders to miss out on growth and, ironically, bring about the exact negative outcomes they are trying to avoid. Conversely, purpose relies on a “Toward” motivation that fundamentally asks the question, “what do you want?”. By focusing on future possibilities rather than past fears, individuals develop a more optimistic mindset and a flexible partnership with the world around them. This positive orientation replaces exhausting, fear-based internal monologues with encouraging, dopamine-releasing self-talk. Ultimately, embracing this positive script cultivates true “bouncebackability”, drawing leaders purposefully toward their future commitments rather than simply pushing them away from their pasts.

3. Purpose builds empathy

Just as Japanese skyscrapers use flexible foundations to absorb seismic waves and avoid collapse, human resilience also relies on a high degree of flexibility. This flexibility is cultivated through empathy by developing a sense of purpose that looks outward to the wider world. Although prioritising self-compassion is important, true purpose is fundamentally about other people; as Viktor Frankl suggests, meaning is found by dedicating oneself to a cause or to others, rather than remaining closed off within one's own mind. Therefore, empathy is absolutely critical to discovering and fulfilling your purpose. In times of stress or difficulty, empathy further builds resilience by helping you shift focus away from your own troubles and towards the experiences of others who may also be suffering. This outward perspective acts as a vast "data pool", allowing you to identify with the thoughts, feelings, and attitudes of your wider community. By gathering this rich information, you unlock significantly more options for how you choose to respond to situations. Instead of rigidly imposing your own will or reality upon the world, empathy gives you the crucial flexibility to adapt to challenges, much like the flexible skyscrapers surviving an earthquake.

4. Purpose build agency

Developing a clear sense of purpose awakens your personal agency, effectively putting you firmly behind the wheel of your own life rather than simply drifting and allowing others to dictate your path. This concept is closely linked to the academic field of 'Mental Toughness', which Dr Peter Clough and Doug Strycharczyk define as the ability to effectively manage challenges, stressors, and pressure regardless of prevailing circumstances. They evaluate mental toughness across four pillars: challenge, confidence, commitment, and control. The control pillar specifically recognises that individuals who feel they can influence their environment and are in control of their lives are far more likely to be mentally tough. Therefore, by engaging deeply with your purpose, identity, and values, you reject the notion of powerlessly accepting whatever happens to you and instead actively demonstrate a desire to take charge. Ultimately, this deliberate commitment to your purpose prevents you from outsourcing your existence and directly correlates with becoming a more mentally tough and resilient individual.

Pushback

Committing to a purpose inherently drives change, which disrupts the status quo and often elicits emotional “pushback” from those around you. This resistance occurs because your actions force others to expend energy rather than conserve it, highlights their own inaction, and threatens established systems where benefactors want to protect their power, status, or financial rewards. Rather than overt aggression, this pushback typically manifests as cynicism, mocking, the withdrawal of support, or the covert undermining of your efforts. When faced with this resistance, it is crucial to understand your own limitations and boundaries to determine if the personal cost you are willing to pay aligns with the scale of your purpose.

Despite the challenges it presents, pushback should be viewed positively as an opportunity to build perseverance and as a catalyst for releasing new ideas and realities. To effectively navigate this resistance, leaders must remember to show some self-compassion and cognitive flexibility. Techniques like breathwork and physical movement can help manage the body’s natural fight, flight, or freeze response and maintain clear thinking. Furthermore, successfully managing pushback involves building rapport with others before challenging them, actively seeking “win:win” solutions, and connecting with supportive allies who can share the burden of your purpose and provide essential encouragement.

Reputation

The relationship between purpose and reputation is highly delicate, particularly because individuals and organisations often fall into the trap of using purpose merely as a tool to elevate their brand. When purpose is adopted primarily as a marketing tactic to improve reputation or drive profits, it lacks authenticity and remains disconnected from genuine culture and day-to-day decisions. These tokenistic efforts are ultimately exposed, damaging the leader’s reputation by making them appear disrespectful, foolish, or deceitful. Authentic purpose inherently involves sacrifice and cannot be pursued solely for self-serving ends. If an individual prioritises their brand over actual purpose, they risk sacrificing their integrity, disassociating from themselves, and ultimately being uncovered as a fraud.

Conversely, a healthy and authentic reputation naturally develops as an ‘overflow of the heart’, meaning it accurately reflects an individual’s internal purpose and commitments. Because people are constantly forming assessments based on the information leaders emit, a strong reputation requires the internal world to align with external behaviour. Successfully navigating the intersection of purpose and reputation also requires wisdom and flexibility; aggressively imposing a newfound purpose onto an organisation can alienate colleagues and provoke a backlash that damages one’s standing. Therefore, managing one’s reputation authentically involves carefully introducing purposeful

commitments, adapting appropriately to different professional environments, and investing in genuine self-acceptance rather than participating in superficial politics.

Peace

Internal peace is not merely the absence of stress or a temporary moment of relaxation; rather, it is a sustained, internal mindset cultivated through the lifelong pursuit of purpose. Instead of avoiding difficulties, this kind of peace emerges from committing to a meaningful challenge or a “life’s work” that requires the application of your skills, your compassion and your energy. When you dedicate yourself to a purpose greater than your own ego, you discover a profound, soulful peace that accompanies a well-lived life. Ultimately, whilst temporary happiness may be a fleeting byproduct of this pursuit, it is the unwavering commitment to a meaningful purpose that generates long-lasting internal peace.

Paradoxically, the peace derived from purpose is also provocative and does not equate to perfect harmony. Because purpose inherently disrupts the status quo, this form of peace comfortably coexists with discomfort, uncertainty, and internal contradictions. In fact, mental well-being actually relies on the productive tension between what you have already achieved and what you still aim to accomplish. Therefore, rather than being an idyllic state of bliss, authentic peace is a byproduct of the disruption, humility, and ongoing growth that a purposeful life inevitably demands.

Conclusion

There are five characteristics of a purposeful life that are discussed above. When you choose to discover and commit to your purpose, it is likely that you will notice or experience some, or all, of these characteristics emerging in your life. This is a positive indicator that you are on the right path.

 THE
PURPOSEFUL
LEADER

Delivered by: **TOWARD>**