

Purpose Principle

It frames all life and career experiences.



by Kevin Cashman

THE SECRET OF SUCCESS is constancy of purpose, noted Benjamin Disraeli. Purpose has the potential to elevate people and organizations from crisis to contribution. While crisis tends to restrict our vision into the immediate, purpose expands possibilities into a meaning-filled future. *Crisis is the stuff of management; purpose is the stuff of leadership.* How often do we focus on solving an urgent problem and lose touch with higher-order values and longer-term perspectives that could create more enduring contribution?

What determines or defines a crisis in your firm? A financial crash, a loss of a key person or crucial customer or key investor, a Board out-of-step with the CEO and marketplace? All can send chills through a CEO. What leadership characteristic most bridges us from ambiguity to clarity, from fear to hope, from despair to meaning? *Purpose is the bridge of authentic leadership.*

Purpose is also the transformational force of value-creating significance that is only satisfied with contribution and service. Using our leadership talents to serve something bigger than ourselves is the fuel for individual and collective purpose. Purpose is not a goal to be set; it is not something we create; it is not a slogan or a great idea we promote. It is something that is honed in the losses and privileges of our business and lives. It is *the thing* we know for sure and for which it is worth dedicating our lives. The creative, boundary-breaking powerhouse, Apple, has purpose pulsing through its performance: you can feel it when you are there, see it in their products and hear it in Steven Job's passion.

Codify Purpose in a Credo

Your *Credo* should guide how your business relates to all of its constituencies. As history attests, your *Credo* becomes even more relevant and purposeful during crises. Purpose inspires us to do something of enduring significance. Purpose elevates us, reminds us what is really at risk. *The intellect in the mind of leadership, purpose is the*

heart of leadership. When things look bleak, purpose quickens the pulse to provide a meaningful vision.

After 9-11 and the Gulf Crisis, many people lost their bearings. Those who remained grounded were clear about their purpose and contribution. Since the *Wall Street Meltdown* and *cascading revelations of corruption and greed*, many leaders struggle to connect their strategy and purpose to a clear vision. Amid betrayal, people are laboring to trust. *The opportunity of leadership is to step into the turbulence, define a clear vision and align it with clear purpose, while providing constant communication and authentic actions with customers, employees, shareholders, and other constituents.*

Bob Eichinger and Michael Lombardo, co-founders of Lominger International, report that "Sound and inspiring mis-



sions and visions motivate and guide people on how to allot their time and how to make choices." In *Good to Great*, **Jim Collins** explains that the preservation of "core ideology," a combination of Core Values and Core Purpose, is characteristic of enduring companies that go "from good to great to built to last." Collins explains that there are not necessarily any "right" or "wrong" values, but there is the need to have them and to align with them. *Core Purpose*, a "reason for being beyond making money," is the partner of *Core Values*. "Enduring great companies preserve their core values and purpose while their business strategies and operating practices endlessly adapt to a changing world."

However, to stay connected to their rock-solid values and purpose, leaders must comprehend and articulate, on a moment's notice, their *Core Purpose*. A leader with purpose gives people a reason to connect to something bigger than themselves; a leader without purpose

may have positional power but lack people with the desire to go the extra mile. *Core Purpose* is the deep impulse we all have to make a difference. When we align with our purpose, our voice is strong, our energy is optimal, our gifts are shared, and our service passionate.

Core Purpose frames all our life and career experiences into a meaningful whole. When we understand purpose, all the challenging experiences of our lives serve to forge identity, character, and meaning. Although life may be challenging, every experience becomes our teacher, and every challenge a chance to learn and live more purposefully. When we lack purpose, circumstances dominate our awareness and overshadow our reason for being. Life tends to lose connection with its true nature. Teilhard de Chardin wrote, "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience." Purpose is the impulse of life seeking expression; awareness of it allows us to see our lives more clearly and lead more powerfully from the inside-out.

Core Purpose may be *the most practical lever for impactful leadership*, and an effective life, because *purpose is transformational*. It converts average-performing teams into highly spirited, effective ones. It transforms employees, team members and customers into partners; managers into leaders; and *leaders of organizations into leaders of life.*

During a crisis, purpose comes to the pragmatic forefront to bring us to a new way of living, leading, and contributing. As leaders, we often try to miraculously (and usually hopelessly) avoid crises with plans detailed from A-Z. A leader of purpose does not fear crisis, but accelerates into it so he/she can drive meaningful change. *Managers aspire to manage change; leaders of purpose step forward to accelerate change.*

Embracing the purposeful change of our lives is the key to creating more dynamic, life enriching futures. In his book, *Beyond the White House*, Jimmy Carter writes: "My best years are those I'm enjoying now." I am struck by his sense of purpose-in-the-present versus living-in-the-past, and his personal identification with *human contribution* versus *elevated position*. The Carters are examples of value-driven people, who live their lives authentically and deeply connected to their purpose—regardless of title, position, or recognition. LE

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ACTION: Identify your core purpose.