

THE POWER OF PURPOSE

In Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us, best selling author Daniel Pink presents (in a very engaging and understandable way) the latest research in human motivation. One section, “The Good Life,” is particularly enlightening in regard to how we as individuals establish and pursue our life goals. Pink makes the point, and science confirms, that “satisfaction depends not merely on having goals, but on having the right goals.”

One of the studies that Pink cites asked a sample of soon-to-graduate college students about their life goals and then followed them early in their careers to assess their progress and well-being. The students’ goals were categorized as either “extrinsic aspirations” or “intrinsic aspirations.” Becoming wealthy or achieving fame are examples of extrinsic motivators and labeled “**profit goals**.” In contrast, learning, growing, and helping others are examples of intrinsic motivators and labeled “**purpose goals**.”

Within two years of graduating, the researchers found that the individuals with purpose goals felt they were achieving them, and also experienced higher levels of satisfaction and well-being than when they were in college. In addition, they reported having low levels of anxiety and depression.

In contrast, those who had profit goals (wealth and acclaim), and were achieving those goals, reported the same levels of satisfaction, self-esteem,

and positive affect as when they were students. In other words, they were achieving their goals, but that didn’t make them happier. And, even more striking, those achieving their profit goals reported higher levels of anxiety and depression.

Pink summarized the conclusions of the researchers in this way; “Even when we do get what we want, it’s not always what we need.” What this study and many others have revealed is that what we *really* need is a sense of purpose.

And, this need is not isolated to the idealism of young adults. Pink writes, “Baby boomers around the world—because of the stage of their lives and the size of their numbers—are nudging purpose closer to the cultural center.”

For example, the non-profit organization Civic Ventures claims, “The tarnished dream of the Golden Years as endless leisure is giving way to a new form of practical idealism; real jobs tackling real problems and making real impact.” Their research, conducted in collaboration with the MetLife Foundation, revealed that millions of people in the second half of life are choosing **purpose driven** “*encore careers*” that provide both income and meaning while addressing some of society’s biggest challenges.

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LIFE & LEARNING

Lifelong learning is not only possible, it is essential to our quality of life as we age. The old adage “use it or lose it” is especially relevant to our ability to retain a sharp and inquisitive mind.

For many years, scientists thought that the human brain simply deteriorated over time. But new research from neuroscientists and psychologists reveal that the middle aged brain actually reorganizes itself, improves important functions, and helps us to adopt a more optimistic outlook on life.

Barbara Strauch, science writer for *The New York Times* and author of *The Secret Life of the Grown Up Brain*, proclaims:

“If kept in good shape, the brain can continue to build pathways that help its owner recognize patterns and, as a consequence, see significance and even solutions much faster than a young person can. The trick is finding ways to keep brain connections in good condition and to grow more of them.”

Strauch goes on to refer the work of Kathleen Taylor, a professor at St. Mary’s College of California, who studies adult learning. Taylor has discovered that continued brain development and richer forms of learning require us to “bump up against people and ideas” that challenge our perceptions and our way of thinking on a wide variety of topics and issues.

In addition, intellectual stimulation can bring a new spark to the emotional and spiritual aspects of our lives. In her book, *I Could Do Anything If I Only Knew What It Was*, author Barbara Sher recommends that learning something new and doing something creative are sure-fire ways to overcome burnout and sorrow.

Fortunately, in our modern society, there are

limitless opportunities to expand our horizons and stretch our philosophical and intellectual comfort zones via the Internet. Here are four examples of web sites that offer free online lectures and courses:

- Ted.com— “Riveting talks by remarkable people”
- Forum-Network.org— “Thousands of lectures by some of the world’s foremost scholars, authors, artists, scientists, policy makers, and community leaders”
- Epicurious.com— “Around the World in 80 Dishes,” a video based series of cooking classes
- BBC.co.uk/languages— 12-week online courses for beginners in German, French, Italian, and Spanish

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YOUR LIFE PORTFOLIO

“By ‘how much is enough?’ I mean the amount that will allow you to stop driving so hard professionally should you choose to do so. I mean the amount that will allow you to feel safe, the amount that will compensate for risking hard-won relationships, the amount that will affirm your feeling good, smart, successful, accomplished, in control.

Pamela York Klainer
How Much is Enough?

How much is enough? Author Pamela York Klainer responds to this thought provoking query by writing, “The question is deceptively simple, but the answer is critical to integrating money with other aspects of your life and finding happiness.”

In similar fashion, financial planner Karen Ramsey commented in her book, *Everything You Know About Money is Wrong*, about the importance of making sure your financial life supports what is most important to you:

“Money will only improve the quality of your life when it is used with clarity. Only when you learn to spend money in concert with your underlying values—the things that you most deeply care about—will it become a tool for creating a more fulfilling life.”

In other words, money can help you achieve your goals, but financial resources alone cannot produce the essential ingredients of a satisfying and rewarding life such as good health, loving relationships, and meaningful activities. Keep in mind that the word “rich” has two meanings. It can be defined as “possessing great material wealth,” and it can also be defined

as “that which is abundant, meaningful, and significant.”

In his book *The Prosperous Retirement*, Michael Stein wrote:

“Just as a wagon wheel without spokes will not carry your wagon, money cannot, in itself bring joy, satisfaction, fulfillment, and a sense of balance into your life. In fact, money sometimes can get in the way of achieving these non-financial goals.”

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In addition, it is important to keep in mind that life is multifaceted and each facet contributes to the quality of life you will experience—now and in the future.

Think of each facet as an integral part of your total “life portfolio,” and remember it is your investment of time and energy that will make your portfolio grow. Once you have a clear definition of what “true wealth” means to you, then you can invest in each area of life in a meaningful and purposeful way.

As you consider your life portfolio, ask yourself, “Am I experiencing the ‘return’ that I want and need?” If not, it’s time to re-evaluate and re-balance how you allocate your limited and precious resources.

TRUE WEALTH

WORK AT MIDLIFE & BEYOND

“It is never too late to pursue the work that speaks to us from inside ourselves. Let’s look at that idea the other way around as well. We are called to recognize our strengths, and it is never too late to hear that call.”

Deborah P. Block & Lee J. Richmond
*Soul Work: Finding the Work You Love,
Loving the Work You Have*

“What you do for a living is often the topic of casual conversations. Facing your identity, beyond your career, will be one of the major challenges you face in retirement. How will you answer the question, ‘What do you do?’ after you retire?”

Elwood Chapman & Marion Haynes
Comfort Zones

“You’ll never be happy just amusing yourself... Even in retirement, even when you’re only looking to get off the fast track and ‘smell the roses,’ you should be pushing past what you merely enjoy into what has real meaning to you. When something really matters to you, you must bring it into your life.”

Barbara Sher
*I Could Do Anything
If I Only Knew What it Was*

“We are on a new frontier of how to live and work creatively and successfully until the last day we live. We must be pathfinders, leading the way on how to make significant changes in our work life at midlife and beyond.”

Helen Harkness
*Don’t Stop the Career Clock:
Rejecting the Myths of Aging for a
New Way to Work in the 21st Century*

ENCORE CAREERS

Sponsors of the MetLife Foundation/Civic Ventures “Encore Career Survey” estimate that between 5.3 and 8.4 million Americans, between the ages of 44 and 70, have already launched “encore careers”—positions that combine income and personal meaning with social impact.

This study helps to answer an important question with major implications for the American economy: What will 78 million baby boomers do as they continue to work into traditional retirement age? The final report indicates that a majority of Americans in this age bracket express a desire to use their skills and experience to help others.

Of those currently in encore careers, 84 percent report a high level of satisfaction and 94 percent say they see the positive results of their work and know they are making a difference.

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“The people who are pursuing encore careers are true pioneers,” said Sibyl Jacobson, president and CEO of MetLife Foundation. “They are blazing not only their own path but also one for those just behind them – workers who share their aspirations but have not yet taken the plunge. Their message is clear; social purpose careers are fulfilling and worthwhile.”

“Encore careers provide personal fulfillment, while also offering tremendous gains for society,” added Marc Freedman, founder and CEO of Civic Ventures, a think tank on boomers, work, and aging. “But to truly capitalize on this tremendous opportunity, we must open minds – and doors – to what is possible and needed.”