

How Finding Your “Why” Leads to Success



Your most basic needs for survival are food, water and shelter. While survival is the bare minimum, humans crave and are capable of much more. You seek to provide for yourself and your loved ones. Making money, learning new things, helping others, pursuing happiness, staying healthy, creating relationships, the list goes on. Without a clear sense of why you seek these things however, you're susceptible to disengagement, despair and shame. To cope, it's easy to turn to drugs, alcohol and other unhealthy habits. It's not surprising that dependence on antidepressant medication, suicide and depression is on the rise.

Disengagement in the workplace is at an all-time high as well. While we're the wealthiest we've ever been, there is a distinct disconnect between being well-off and well-being. Without a clear sense of purpose - or a why - this cycle is sure to continue. The first step to achieving your career aspirations and breaking out of the rut of complacency and indifference is defining your why. Having a why gives you motivation, energy, courage to take risks, and drive to keep going when times get tough.

Five Why Questions

A good place to start when finding your why is having someone you know and trust, and that knows you, ask you the five why questions. Each question in this exercise is based off the answer to the previous and is designed to dig a little deeper. An example of what this conversation might look like is below.

Q: "Why do you come to work every day?"

A: *“So I can make money to support my family.”*

Q: *“Why do you want you support your family?”*

A: *“Because I love and care for them deeply.”*

Q: *“Why do you love and care for them deeply?”*

A: *“Because they enrich my life and bring me joy.”*

Q: *“Why do they enrich your life and bring you joy?”*

A: *“Because seeing them happy and successful make me happy?”*

Q: *“Why does seeing them happy and successful make you happy?”*

A: *“Because I care about others and when I see them doing well it motivates me to pursue my goals and dreams too.”*

As you can see, this simple exercise can quickly get you thinking about what your true motivations are. And the best part is, it is not limited just to just five questions. Keep asking “why” until you have some answers you’re satisfied with. Doing this exercise with someone that knows you pretty well can also give you a different perspective on some of your answers that you might not have even considered.

Now that you’ve entered a mindset that has you thinking about your life beyond the daily grind, Forbes contributor and award-winning author Margie Warrell suggests contemplating four questions that will help you identify the crossroads between your work, talents, expertise, passions and values. It is here that you can truly define your why.

What Makes You Come Alive?

The immediate answers for you might be sailing in Greece, seeing your favorite band in concert or vacationing in New England during the fall. If you think a little deeper however, you’ll probably come up with some different answers. Instead of being about you, these answers will be about something bigger than you. They will let you connect with what you’re passionate about. Writes Warrel, “when you focus your attention on endeavors that put a fire in your belly, you grow your impact and influence in ways that nothing else can.”

What are Your Natural Strengths?

When you're in an environment that lets your strengths shine through, you're bound to find increased personal and professional success. Are you the calming voice amidst chaos? Do you easily inspire or persuade people? Do your problem-solving skills set you apart? Do you find you're most successful going against the grain? By taking the necessary time to identify your strengths, you'll be better positioned to make an actionable plan to achieve your greatest ambitions.

Where do you Add the Most Value?

Maybe you excel at your job. Others come to for help, you get promoted more quickly than your colleagues and your superiors recognize the contributions you make. This is all good and well but if your heart isn't fully committed to what you do, chances are you aren't living out your why.

By knowing in what types of environments you add the most value and are most fulfilled, you're able to identify opportunities and career paths that allow you to make meaningful contributions and afford the greatest sense of accomplishment. Thinking about where you can best solve problems that you enjoy is a great way to focus solely on your strengths instead of eliminating weaknesses.

How Will You Measure your Life?

Here again, your surface-level answers might be divergent from those derived if you think a little deeper. Perhaps making money is your immediate primary goal that you see as a means to an end allowing you to live the life you want. Perhaps a more thoughtful answer might be having an impeccable reputation for honesty or helping as many people as you can become homeowners. As Warrel writes, "the things that matter most are rarely things... deciding how you want to measure your life means making a stand for something and then living your life in alignment with it."

While the reality for most people is that they can't trade in making money for living a life based just on passion. If you look at this reality in the right way however, making money and following your heart don't have to be mutually exclusive. By focusing on how you go about your job instead of what your job is,

you're likely to find more meaningful purpose.

Finding your why personally or professionally isn't something that happens overnight. It takes a lot of work and involves having some tough conversations with yourself. If you're willing to put in the effort though, the rewards can be unimaginable. If you feel like you're stuck in a rut or not progressing toward your goals as quickly as you'd like, asking yourself some of the questions discussed here is a good place to start.