

The Key to a Meaningful, Purposeful, and Successful Life

A meaningful, purposeful, and successful life cannot be measured by money, title, or power, although some people try to measure it that way. People start and grow companies, build buildings, pass laws, write books, make sales, earn straight A's, craft art, engineer products, uphold the law, manage, lead, become famous, powerful, and influential, and do all kinds of activities and have all types of "successes." But these things do not necessarily make someone's life meaningful and purposeful. This is why some people who look to be extraordinarily successful, at some point, feel they have not led meaningful and purposeful lives.

I have interviewed people as they stripped away all the external measures of success, or lack of them, and looked at what they have accomplished and how they went about those accomplishments. I have interviewed people as they wrestled with their lives — sometimes while they were running hard and more often when they were near the end and looking back.

It is at these moments, when they were searching, unguarded and receptive to their own hearts, that a realization often unfolded. That when they used their natural talent/giftedness to benefit not only themselves, but others, they felt that their lives were more meaningful, purposeful, and successful; and, when they didn't, they looked back — sometimes with regret. — feeling that they could have and should have done more.

There are two pieces to this. The first is not dissimilar to what athletes often refer to as being in a "zone." When you are in a "zone," success seems to build upon itself, and you feel a sense of congruence and fit. This is what it's like when you are consumed by an activity that fully engages your natural talent/giftedness. Your senses are keen. You're operating at full gear. You're enjoying yourself. Time flies by quickly. You're successful and can't believe life could be so good.

The second piece is where you apply your natural talent/giftedness and how self-focused, self-absorbed, and self-serving you are with it. There is nothing wrong with taking care of yourself and extracting the most that you can. But if this is where you remain; if the natural talent/giftedness that you have been given is not used with appropriate stewardship, then feeling that you have led a meaningful and purposeful life will likely elude you.

There are many paths and opportunities that lie before you. The key to feeling that you are living or have lived a meaningful and purposeful life; one that produces feelings of success and satisfaction is to put yourself in positions that allow you to use your natural talent/giftedness, particularly in giving ways.

Adapted from *Managing Yourself Managing Others: Learn How to Improve, Effectiveness, Productivity, and Work Satisfaction* by Steven Darter