

PURPOSE IGNITED

How Inspiring Leaders Unleash
Passion and Elevate Cause

ALISE CORTEZ, PHD



The ultimate source of human fulfillment, positive impact and lasting legacy is an inspired and inspiring purpose. That is the rocket fuel we need to propel us individually and collectively to new heights. Alise Cortez has drawn on her extensive experience and research to write a comprehensive, insightful and highly readable guide to living a life of meaning and purpose. I strongly recommend it!

Raj Sisodia, FW Olin Distinguished Professor of Global Business, Babson College, and Co-founder & Co-Chairman, Conscious Capitalism Inc.

To reach your highest purpose in life and work you could travel the globe to talk to the world's greatest teachers and leaders and dedicate many years to implementing their advice. Or you could achieve a similar outcome far more quickly and with considerably less expense by committing to this highly practical guide and applying the lessons that it makes available in a single integrated pathway to transformation.

Paul Skinner, Author of Collaborative Advantage: How collaboration beats competition as a strategy for success

Alise Cortez is the go-to guru for discovering one's purpose and putting it into action. *Purpose Ignited* is equal parts inspiration and information for those who are ready to put their purpose to work.

Sandra Duhé, Ph.D., MBA, Chair, Division of Corporate Communication and Public Affairs, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX

We at DSM, in the private sector and the community need optimistic, self-aware, purpose led people now more than ever. The challenges we collectively confront cannot be met without them. This potential lives within all of us and *Purpose Ignited* brings insight and tools that enable this potential to be realized.

Hugh Welsh, President at DSM North America

Purpose Ignited offers very real, relevant and relatable content. So many books talk about theory while Alise ensures you have insights, information and inspiration that can be applied immediately.

Adrienne Court, Chief HR Officer, Alkami, and Principal, Conscious Culture

Dr Alise Cortez has written a most insightful book that takes leaders and everyday workers on a most important journey to enliven our spirit, uncover our passion, find our meaning while elevating our self-care to live the most balanced life possible. Read this book slowly, digest the wisdom on every page and you will not regret the effort you made as the result is a most satisfying personal and professional life.

Arthur P. Ciaramicoli, Ed.D., Ph.D. Author of The Triumph of Diversity and The Soulful Leader.

Great leaders are driven, but what drives them goes beyond just self-interest. Values and larger purposes in life are just as important as economic incentives in motivating behavior, and in this insightful book Alise Cortez shows how “working on purpose” can unleash leadership potential. Taking her advice can make you a better leader—and a better person!

Ted Fischer, Professor of Anthropology

As a life-long lover of learning and meaningful connection, here I've found a treasure trove of tips and tools to playfully engage with life, make the most of every moment, and fully bring yourself to the sport of life and leadership.

Kimo Kippen, Aloha Learning Advisors, and former VP, Global Workforce Initiatives, and Chief Learning Officer at Hilton.

Inspired organizations not only perform, but excel towards their strategic goals. The insights Dr. Alise Cortez shares in *Purpose Ignited* are accessible tools to help you authentically lead from inspiration and purpose to unleash the potential of your organization and yourself!

Miranda McKinnon, Manager at Major Consumer Packaged Goods Company

If you want to be a great leader, you have a few options: you can either read through decades of research yourself, or personally track down great leaders and convince them to share their insights with you. Luckily for all of us, Dr. Cortez has already done both, and she presents her findings in a clear, easy-to-apply format. I recommend this book to anyone who wants to lead with purpose.

Dr. Michael Kannisto, MindemicLab

Excellent resource and inspirational guide on how to move from success to significance and find your true purpose and passion. Purpose and passion harnessed can change the world.

Charmaine Solomon, Founder and Chairman of the Board, My Possibilities

Purpose Ignited is a must read for leaders, both experienced and aspirational, that want to lead with purpose and desire to make a lasting positive impact in this world. Alise sets out in detail how to identify your purpose and then pursue it. She challenges readers to understand who they are and then provides a number of tools and stories to enable and inspire your own personal purpose journey. After reading *Purpose Ignited*, I am more inspired and equipped to live my own unique life in service to others.

Ron K. Barger, Serviam Investors

In *Purpose Ignited*, Alise Cortez creates fresh and encouraging perspectives for the reader by drawing upon the best that science and psychology have to offer. She shows you a wide array of practical tools that work and work quickly while drawing back the curtain to reveal *why* and *how* they've worked so well for others. I recommend this book to any thoughtful reader who wants to reach further by building upon a well-informed foundation.

Marilyn Montgomery, PhD, LMHC, BCC, Founder of Wellspring Development

Dr. Alise Cortez has written a “must read” insightful book that will enrich you in becoming a better leader and person! She provides thoughtful ideas, critical examples, and creates pathways for new thinking. This book is truly transformative and inspirational!

Cary A. Israel, J.D., Executive Advisory Board CampusWorks, Inc; Chair of Jewish Community Relations Council Springfield, Illinois; and District President Emeritus of Collin College

Purpose Ignited is a timely invitation to reflect on how much of our well being is tied to our work, and therefore our entire lives. The depth and originality of Dr. Cortez's reflections on finding passion and energy in the work we do, and her insights into how everyone can discover a sense of purpose makes this a genuinely motivating read - let it inspire you!

Linda Crompton, President and CEO, Leadership Women, Inc.

Be a “Moment Hunter”... from meaning to purpose! *Purpose Ignited* activates the heart, mind, and soul to help us look through a different lens to create more joy in our career and in life. This book is the fuel needed to drive in “the lane of fulfillment” on this amazing journey. It’s intentional, it’s purposeful, and it’s inspiring! Highly recommended!”

Bruce W. Waller, Armstrong Relocation Executive; Author of Find Your Lane and Milemarkers; and host of Life in the Leadership Lane podcast

What the world needs now, more than ever, is for each one of us to be aligned with our unique meaning and purpose. If you know you’re ready to play a bigger game and leave this world better than you found it, *Purpose Ignited* is the obvious next step! By masterfully weaving decades of experienced as a corporate consultant with the wisdom of countless conversations with world thought leaders as a radio show host, Alise Cortez reveals how to get back on track to what matters most!

Neha Sangwan, MD, author of TalkRx: Five Steps to Conversations to Create Connection, Health & Happiness

I cannot think of anyone more capable or able to inspire others. Dr. Cortez’s engaging book is full of practical advice, researched best practices, and thoughtful and deeply meaningful messages to enhance and deepen both personal and professional purpose.

Paul Scott, M.A., Learning and Development Professional, Dallas, Texas

One doesn’t have to look far in any direction or in any walk of life to see the absence of leadership in our world. This book challenges us to fill that void by pointing out that we each have the capacity to do that and shows us how to ignite those unique passions that drive us to fill that leadership vacuum regardless of the role we fill. This is a book that I will keep close by and will turn to time and again when I need to re-ignite those things that drive me to be the leader I was meant to be.

Mark Snyder, Retired Information Technology Executive and Investor

Serving the public as a police officer is a calling. That calling requires passion, purpose, and emotional intelligence to navigate the challenges facing police officers daily. This book keeps me grounded and inspired to serve others. I highly recommend this book to anyone wanting to take their own best versions of themselves to a higher level.

Danny Barton, Chief of Police, Coppell Police Department

Purpose Ignited

**How Inspiring Leaders Unleash
Passion and Elevate Cause**

Alise Cortez, PhD

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Other works by this author:

Passionately Striving in “Why”: An Anthology of Women Who Persevere Mightily to Live Their Purpose, 2021

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Introduction



I wrote this book to turn you ON – to ignite you from the core of your being and radically alter your molecules! It is designed to help you discover much more deeply the unique gift you are in order to better the world through the contributions of your passion and purpose. The world is crying out for effective leaders who inspire people to realize their own greatness and elevate business to address the innumerable ails of the world. It starts with *you*. Your transformation into this inspirational leader igniting the impassioned contributions of everyone you touch awaits.

The contents are designed to vitally inspire you to cultivate meaning, passion, and purpose in the everyday moments, unleashing the very best version of you, every day. Then, *bring it* – and bring it *strong* to everything you do to make the contribution worthy of your one, precious life. And please ... bring that passionate, inspired person to work and insist that it informs your leadership, whether you are currently in such a capacity or working to get there. People are motivated at their highest levels when they can connect their work contributions to a greater purpose and mission. The world desperately needs a sea change in an otherwise soul-sucking workplace that is draining the life out of its members. I am asking *you* to be that force, standing tall in inspiration and purpose, that casts the vitalizing ripple through your team and through your organization. Work and the way business are done can be such profoundly powerful contributions that elevate humanity – your stewardship forward is what we need.

More specifically, this book is for two kinds of people. It is for existing leaders serious about their role in impacting the lives of their team and the direction of their company,

and who always strive for ongoing growth, development, and improvement – never settling for ‘good enough.’ It is also for the man or woman aspiring to develop the capacity to live with passion, work with purpose, and step into leadership. Consider it your invitation to officially quit ‘the walking dead’ – a phrase I use to describe people who are unmindfully going through the motions in life – running the hamster wheel, dropping into bed at night exhausted, only to repeat the same experience the next day.

When you look back on your life, what mark will you have made on others’ lives? What will be the value of the relationships you cultivated? Will you have made the world a better place? Will you be missed? How so? (Think about that one a little.) People want to know they *matter*, that their lives have meant something to others. I can’t imagine the person who secretly hopes, ‘Gee, I hope I can fly under the radar and no one will notice I’ve been here on the planet.’ When people believe they matter, they are fulfilled and have a full tank to take good care of themselves and help others realize their talents and potential.

In my work as a management consultant developing leaders and organizations, I have witnessed people daily ‘mailing it in,’ giving only a portion of themselves and their talents and receiving little fulfillment, apart from the paycheck. When speaking to audiences, I often ask them what they’re passionate about and am astounded at the quiet and confused response: ‘I don’t know.’ So many people seem to be leading quiet lives of desperation; they are exhausted and have given up on ever having the relationships they want with their kids and significant others, feeling passionate about their lives or going for the next level in their career. The alarming increase in opioid addiction and suicide are testimony that society’s ills need to be addressed urgently. I offer that learning to find meaning, passion, and purpose in life and work, in service to others, is key to avoiding these pitfalls, living your best life and realizing your potential.

Leaders in organizations are apathetic about their workforce and many have succumbed to the belief their employees only want a paycheck in exchange for as little output as they can get away with. Yet leaders and organizations have a tremendous capacity – and, I argue, responsibility – to profoundly and positively impact the wellbeing of the people whose lives they touch. That includes those in their workforce and the communities in which they live. Business in the capitalist system can be such a force for good; it just takes being mindful and conscientious about the cascading operational effects on all stakeholders – customers, employees, suppliers, investors, collaborating partners, community, and certainly the surrounding environment.

As a previous card-carrying member of the ‘walking dead,’ this book is my own roadmap out of apathy and resignation, to living with passion and working on purpose. I share what I have learned through this journey, which is heavily informed by an education grounded in positivist and existential psychology and logotherapy – Viktor Frankl’s optimistic approach to life based on the belief that meaning is humankind’s principal concern. You will become acquainted with key concepts from these foundational psychological elements through this book. If you wish to take a deeper dive, I highly encourage you to read Dr Martin Seligman’s work on positivist psychology¹ and Dr Viktor Frankl’s various works on existential psychology and logotherapy, starting with his seminal work *Man’s Search for Meaning*.²

This book is also a reflection of the program I created called *Vitally Inspired – Living and Leading from Purpose*. That content is drawn from two decades working in management consulting and employee engagement, the meaning in work and identity research launched in my PhD program, and the

¹ M. Seligman, *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Wellbeing*, 2011.

² V. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, 1959.

Working on Purpose radio program I have hosted each week since February 2015, which affords me ongoing ‘continuing education.’ I source as guests specific subject matter experts and business leaders who I believe advance the conversation and practice of living with passion, working on purpose, and elevating cause in the way they do business. The work I’ve done over the last decade has convinced me that work is *not* working for a lot of people and that there is a better way forward.

This book is designed to equip you to live with passion, work with purpose, and lead with inspiration to take your team and business to completely new heights while generating healthy profits and having a positive societal impact. The first six chapters of this book (Part 1) contain the necessary components you will need to develop in yourself to become an inspirational leader working from purpose. Starting with *meaning* and finishing with *purpose*, each chapter builds on the previous one and offers exercises or poses questions that you can use as your laboratory to continually nurture and develop competency in that area.

In Chapter 1, we will distinguish meaning as an infinite source of motivation and enrichment to your life, help you recognize the extreme creative control you have over this precious resource, and take a tour of ways in which you can cultivate it to power your life. Chapter 2 takes a deep dive into identity and the importance of fully knowing *who you are* and *who you are striving to become*, and guides you through some practices to help you get much better acquainted with yourself to enable you to fully unleash your purpose. You will need to take extreme care of yourself along this journey, which is why key elements of wellbeing that help generate vitality are covered in Chapter 3.

Creating a fulfilling life and becoming an inspirational leader require giving deeply of yourself, unleashing your very best effort and creativity through the cultivation and expression of your passions, which is the focus of Chapter 4.

You will learn how to find avenues through which to resurrect and nurture lost and yet-to-be-discovered passions. Chapter 5 describes how your life will be exponentially expanded and enriched when you learn to be fully present to the myriad inspirations available to you – if only you can learn to ‘look’ and be open to their gift. That will involve letting down the protective guards that you’ve learned to use to steel yourself against guilt, shame, pain, and disappointment. You can make such a profound difference to the world when you live and work from purpose, in genuine service to others, as discussed in Chapter 6.

The last three chapters (Part 2) address work, your leadership, and the promise of doing business mindfully as a stakeholder capitalist within your organization. Chapter 7 focuses on the domain of work, as it is such a profoundly orientating or anchoring aspect of life. Work can span the spectrum of dismal drain to fantastic playground in which to realize your potential, and it is well worth the effort involved to optimize it for yourself and your team members. Chapter 8 covers purpose-inspired leadership and teaches you to cultivate it in a way that is uniquely authentic to yourself. You will become acquainted with the tremendous good that can be unleashed in the world when inspirational leaders working from purpose steward organizations that provide a meaningful experience that elicits passion and inspired performance while brightly coloring what according to purpose and leadership expert Zach Mercurio amounts to an estimated 40% of employees’ lives.³

Finally, in Chapter 9 you will take a tour of the landscape of new and fresh ways in which business is being done to honor purpose and entice people to want to come to work and give their best. Work takes up at least a third of our lives, and according to the Gallup Organization (www.gallup.com).

³ Mercurio, Z., *The invisible leader: Transform your life, work and organization with the power of authentic purpose*, 2017.

com), about 85% of the global workforce does not want to face it on Monday morning (or whenever their official work week begins). That's a travesty that I stand to correct, and I am asking you to join me in force. Life is just too precious to spend it slogging through a work day or work week.

This is your journey into passion, inspiration, and purpose – and I ask you to lean in, read closely and do the exercises, radio listening, and video viewing in order to facilitate the transformation that beckons you. To illustrate key concepts, I have added stories from my own life, consulting, and speaking, and from the *Working on Purpose* radio program. *Working on Purpose* is syndicated on more than 28 online platforms, though the dates I reference for the podcast correspond with those on the host page on VoiceAmerica.⁴ I encourage you listen to those highlighted episodes that most resonate with you. Each chapter includes a set of exercises to help you apply or further think through the ideas, with templates to download and videos to watch that illustrate further how to apply the concepts. You'll find them at www.gusto-now.com and www.alisecortez.com. Get a new journal and use it as your guide to capture key takeaways and track your own transformation as you read through the book. Roll up your sleeves and let's get to *living and working from purpose!*

⁴ www.voiceamerica.com/show/2429/working-on-purpose

Part 1

**Getting You
Fit for Life and
Leadership**

1

Meaning: Your Ultimate Source of Energy



It is virtually impossible not to encounter the word ‘meaning’ in the course of everyday life. It is everywhere and yet nowhere at the same time. But make no mistake about it – meaning is not far adrift from your survival needs of air, water, and food. Meaning is your ultimate motivator. When you think of the word ‘meaning’, what you’re really referring to is that which is significant to you, matters to you, and resonates with your core essence. Meaning is how you make sense of the world and your place in it. Meaning is registered in the limbic brain alongside attention, emotions, and memory. Cultivating meaning in and across your life ought to exist on the same level as brushing your teeth, taking vitamins, sleeping, and exercising. Basic. Fundamental. Foundational.

People want meaningful work. They want meaningful relationships. And distinguishing what meaning actually is and how to access it in life and work is critically important to health and wellbeing – and, I would add, effectiveness – in today’s world. This chapter will take you on an odyssey into the adventures of meaning that will give you access to painting colors across the canvas of your life and leadership in ways you never thought you could create.

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Here you will become much more acquainted with the word ‘meaning’ in order to distinguish it for yourself and others you care about. First, you’ll be introduced further to logotherapy and learn how to fold its optimistic approach to living into your own life. I’ll ask you to seriously take stock of what you are doing with the precious existence you’ve been granted. We’ll gaze from inside your brain at what calls your attention in the world, which becomes the lens through which you tend to look at most of life. And that exercise will help you lay the groundwork for discovering your general operational mindset so you can get access to upgrading it if useful, or building on it if it is already in a good state. Next, you’ll get to see how adversity and the way you greet its entry into your life give you access to another level of meaning that distinguishes you and offers the opportunity to elevate yourself above everyday life. Cultivating and expressing gratitude is your last stop in this chapter; it is a practice that, when done well, will likely lower your blood pressure while increasing your serotonin levels in the brain. Roll up your sleeves, get to work, and enjoy the journey.

Logotherapy as a Way of Life

You were briefly acquainted with Dr Viktor Frankl and logotherapy in the introduction of this book, and here you will take a deeper dive to start your journey into the transformation this book intends for you. Dr Frankl was a physician specializing in neurology and psychology. He initially worked in the late 1920s to help address the alarming teen suicide rate in Vienna. He developed his meaning-centered approach toward psychological wellbeing before surviving three years in the Nazi concentration camps during World War II and actually entered the camps with his precious manuscript, describing it as his only important possession

(which was later destroyed by the guards and recreated during his incarceration). He considered his personal experience an affirmation of the theory he conceived about meaning serving as the central driver of human motivation. He witnessed countless fellow victims of the Holocaust lose their ability to conjure meaning, then their will to live, and soon succumb to death.

Frankl lost his wife and parents in the Holocaust and emerged as a philosopher further convicted of his own work. In fact, he earned a PhD in 1948 as he further investigated and solidified his theory on existential psychology, a testament to his dedication to the field, having already earned an MD in 1930.

I initially became acquainted with logotherapy in the late 1990s, when I began my PhD program, as I delved deeply into the psychology and sociology that informed my human development studies. Over the past decade or so, Frankl's work has taken on a more central prominence in both my own life and the consulting and speaking I do. I can't help but consistently notice clients and speaking audiences articulating that they want something *more*, but don't know what it is. I've come to understand that they are articulating the absence of meaning. They want more from life. They want to matter. Logotherapy is a way to access all those things, which is why I personally practice it and fold its tenets into my programs, consulting, and speaking.

The word 'logotherapy' is based on *logos* (meaning) and therapy (the application of), and as a philosophy and application of psychology holds three core assumptions:

1. Life has meaning under all circumstances, even the most miserable ones.
2. Our main motivation for living is our will to find meaning in life.

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3. We have freedom to find meaning in what we do and what we experience, or at least in the stand we take when faced with a situation of unchangeable suffering.¹

My attraction to logotherapy is due to its optimism, focus on wellbeing, and the central tenet that meaning is the prime motivation in life. Life is not a quest for pleasure or power, but rather a quest for meaning. Logotherapy teaches that there are no tragic or negative aspects that cannot be transmuted into positive accomplishments by the attitudinal approach one takes to them. Logotherapy and the Franklian psychology that informs it hold there are three principal ways of finding meaning – both in the moment and as ultimate meaning:

1. *Creative* – what you give to the world in terms of creations
2. *Experiential* – what you take from the world in the way of encounters and experiences
3. *Attitudinal* – the stand you take to all predicaments when you face a fate you cannot change.

I have come to associate these ways of meaning with specific terms that speak to my messaging, as follows:

1. *Creative*: what we give to the world in terms of creations = PASSION.
2. *Experiential*: what we take from the world in the way of encounters and experiences = INSPIRATION.
3. *Attitudinal*: the stand we take to all predicaments when we face a fate we cannot change, whatever it might be = MINDSET.

¹ Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*.

A crisis of meaning is occurring on a global scale, which is draining the life out of people and the organizations that employ them. People hunger for meaningful connection with others, work that is purposeful and to enjoy a bigger, more beautiful life. The absence of meaning shows up in the escalating rates of opioid use and suicide as people seek to numb the vacuousness of their lives. In that space of emptiness, people seek *something* more without knowing why and often end up getting divorced or changing jobs, unknowingly looking for meaning.

Yet, on the work front where you spend such a significant portion of your life, there is so much that you, other leaders and organizations can do to shift this tide of meaninglessness and humanize the workplace. A number of meaning (and purpose) crusaders have set out to change the way work is experienced. One of the most prominent I've encountered is Dr Alex Pattakos, aka 'Dr Meaning'.² Alongside his wife and business partner Elaine Dundon, he works with business and governmental organizations to help members access life-giving meaning to their work. This is done through their discipline called 'MEANINGology', which is designed to advance the human quest for meaning in life, work, and society. My own approach starts with this book and the Vitality Inspired – Living and Leading Through Purpose programs and consulting I have created.

Your invitation awaits. By incorporating logotherapy into your life and your practice of leadership, you can gain infinite access to the deep well of meaning that will fill your tank with high-octane fuel. Once you accept that meaning is everywhere and your opportunity is to discover it for the rest of your life, you will charter an irreversible path and enroll eager followers along the way whose lives and journeys will be enriched by your touch. This is where you open your fresh journal and start to record your thoughts and responses to what you are

² *Working on Purpose* episode 231, Voice America, 7/10/2019.

reading. You are officially on the path to take on life in a more meaningful way than before you encountered this book.

What Will You Do with Your One, Precious Life?

Let's now turn this conversation into a much more personal one. I often challenge my speaking audiences with this question, and I'll do the same for you: What will you do with your *one, precious life*? I believe this famous question is often attributed to Marianne Williamson and has certainly been uttered by countless other notables. Simple and yet direct, the inquiry forces a certain sobriety. At its heart, this question concerns what you will make your life *mean* and how it will *count*. Getting serious and intentional about what your life looks like is critical. No more sleep-walking through life, okay? How many days – or *summers*, as my South African friend Henda Salmeron says – do you have, and what will you do with them?³

Unavoidably, living with an unknown expiration date comes with existence. We all know we have a finite amount of time on the planet but don't know the length of our stay. This can produce a great urgency *when you become attuned to it*. I beg *you* to take up that torch for yourself; the rest of the book will give you an approach to just how to do so. In your acceptance of this finite nature of life, you will come to see it as good for your health, fulfillment, and wellbeing, and also how everyone you encounter across your life benefits.

Another, perhaps more sobering, question is how you will answer for the one life you have been given. Have you ever considered just how incredible it is that *you* exist? I'm asking you to consider this question *before* life prompts you with a

³ Henda Salmeron's website, <https://hendasalmeron.com>.

severe inquiry or incident – like a major illness or catastrophic event. I’ve met a number of people through my *Working on Purpose* radio show who have begun living radically only after life whacked them hard with major adversity. One such person who has indelibly left a reminder on me about fully living our one, precious life is Gwen Rich.⁴ Gwen is a wife and mother of four, an accredited image-stylist, small business owner, philanthropist, and author of *Stop Complaining – Make Your Own Luck*. After eight years and eight misdiagnoses, Gwen was ultimately diagnosed with incurable metastatic breast cancer in 2012. It isn’t a question of if, but rather when for her.

Gwen has managed to live several years beyond her ‘expiration date,’ as she calls it. Struggling to decide what to do with the time she had left, she launched The Gwen Marie Collection *Purses with a Purpose* in 2014. This quality luxury handbag collection is 100% made in America and portions of the proceeds are donated to the University of Chicago Medicine for cancer research. Her *Legacy-on-the-Go* is the development of an online teaching community called The Rich Solution. It is a place where people in her known community and the extended community she is building can come and learn from her journey. The Rich Solution online community will also help to raise money for cancer research as well as fuel the passions of others who dare to turn their worst nightmares into their most meaningful life experiences.

Before her diagnosis, Gwen told me she struggled with her purpose. She had a great life, but something was missing. It took some events and getting cancer for her to find her purpose and begin feeling truly fulfilled by her life. Gwen took a stand when she received her diagnosis and did not feel sorry for herself. Her passion gave her the energy to feel good about getting up every day. The legacy she is working to leave behind is to inspire people to take action and not

⁴ *Working on Purpose* episode 186, Voice America, 8/29/2018.

have to go through trauma or cancer like she has. Gwen is a reminder to avoid filling life with material things and instead find your passion, because experiencing those strong emotions really fuels purpose. For me, Gwen will always be my reminder to be mindful of just what it is I'm doing with my own one, precious life.

Your Lens: Your Unique Vantage Point

At its simplest, meaning can be thought of as the unique lens through which you see the world, interpret it, and make sense of it. Think of your lens as your very own kaleidoscope that filters and fashions your every observation and interaction with the world. Only *you* can see the world as you do. You are the ultimate prescribing doctor that determines the lens you use to experience life and make meaning of the innumerable events and interactions that happen in your precious existence. It is *your* choice, your declaration and, upon close examination, an expression of your unique being in the world. Your lens is also incredibly malleable, a reflection of the limitless potential bestowed on you as a human being, and it will change focus as you continue to unfold and transform yourself over time.

What's your personal lens prescription? My lens sees the world as a beautiful place that nonetheless needs my energy, passion, and the exercise of my purpose to keep it moving on an upward, growing trajectory. Your opportunity is to identify your specific lens on the world that is uniquely you – and very likely, an expression of your purpose. Becoming aware of your unique lens helps you understand why some things matter much more than others, why you probably do the work you do, and why you are connected with the particular significant other you are. Your lens dictates what you pay attention to and give yourself over to. Your lens makes it *obvious* to you what you pour yourself into, although when you gain a deeper

understanding of why that particular focal point matters to you, you are able to distinguish your contribution and can seek ongoing ways to further refine your perspective.

What if you could distinguish your work lens the way Dr Mary Howard does?⁵ She sees the world through a lens something like this: Everything is about education and work is a way of life. Dr Howard does her work with complete passion and joy, thoroughly reveling in her efforts with educators to help them increase their impact in the classroom. She loves helping them recapture the passion for their work that they may have lost at some point along the way. Dr Howard has spent more than four decades in her education career and sees an opportunity to constantly improve education and increase the joy connected with it.

At the time of our conversation in mid-2016, Dr Howard proclaimed that she had no plan to retire. Why would she, when she's having so much fun?! When I asked Dr Howard why she was so passionate about her work, she replied thoughtfully:

I get to spend the bulk of my time – and I'm choosing that word on purpose – with educators who make a difference in the lives of children; I get to spend time with children who give our work wings and heart; and I get to do the work that still makes me excited to get out of bed every morning. I get to do what makes my heart sing every day.

She went on to say that she does not wait for passion to tap her on the shoulder, but rather works 'daily to *feed* her passion and hold on to it for dear life'. Hang on to that bit about passion – it will be covered in depth in Chapter 4. Meanwhile, let's take a step back to see the bigger picture framed by your lens and talk about your mindset.

⁵ *Working on Purpose* episode 66, Voice America, 5/4/2016.

Mindset: Your Governing Star

Mindset is a collection of attitudes informed by the lens you use to interpret the world and your experience in it. It can be thought of as an operating system and an overarching network connecting many prescriptive filters. Thus, if your filters include looking for details and data, looking for what's missing in an argument, and listening for how succinctly someone narrates a story, your mindset could be described as evaluative or analytical. Someone who sees meeting new people as play, looks for synergies between disparate people or companies, and takes delight in bringing people together to see what unfolds may be working from a possibilities mindset.

The underlying assumptions you have about yourself and the world are powerful governing forces. Yet the vast number of people do not understand – or are not aware or conscious of – the mindset that governs their way of thinking, feeling, and behaving. That mindset must be brought to the surface level of consciousness in order to enjoy the fullest expression of life and alter results where they may be lacking. Only by becoming conscious and aware of the mindset that governs you can you begin to intervene and create new ways of seeing the world and your place in it. Everyone makes all manner of assumptions about what is possible for them physically, professionally, socially, and mentally across life. The opportunity exists to become more frequently and fully attuned to the mindset that governs you.

You will learn more about why understanding your mindset is important in Chapter 3 when you learn about self-efficacy beliefs. By way of illustration, if you assume or believe you can't possibly run a marathon, you likely won't put in the effort to train, so your assumption will be confirmed. Believing you 'are' at whatever career level you're currently stationed at is a limiting belief that dramatically determines how far your career can progress.

Think of how you approach your everyday life. Which of these statements do you tend to employ?

- This is overwhelming! OR I got this!
- I failed. OR I learned what did not work.
- I can't. OR I'll find a way.
- I don't have any current/useful skills. OR I can learn what I set my mind to.
- I'm not worthy of this relationship. OR I have much to offer someone.
- I can only ask for X (minimum) salary. OR I'm worth Y (larger) salary and I need to ask for what I want and what I'm worth.

Over the years, I have coached men and women who are completely unaware of the aspects of their mindset that serve them well and those that are very limiting or destructive. Perhaps the most common limiting mindset is 'I can't.' I can't reach that leadership level. I can't go to college. I can't take a job that requires travel. I can't speak in public – I'm no good at it. The list of these limiting beliefs – which usually snuck into your consciousness at a previous, now inapplicable time – goes on and on. Where did they come from and how do you get rid of them or replace them with something else that will contribute better results?

How can you gain conscious access to your mindset? It helps to talk to others about what you believe about the world. Have them question where those beliefs come from and how those beliefs are serving you. You will probably be very surprised that many of the beliefs you hold as completely factual actually arose from a tender period in your childhood, as you formed a response from a stressful experience. In short, having conversations about your mindset with others helps you to hold up a mirror of yourself to yourself. An experienced coach can help tremendously, and so can friends, family, and colleagues. The key is to dialogue in curious interaction with

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your conversational partner in search for understanding, without defensively clinging to the past, history, or way of being that is manifested in your mindset.

Your leadership journey will provide you with a constant stream of opportunities to develop a healthy growth mindset, just as it did for Donald Thompson.⁶ Referring to himself as ‘the unlikely CEO,’ because ‘if one looks at my picture, if one looks at my pedigree, if one looks at my background, it doesn’t seem likely some of the successes that I’ve had,’ Donald credits much of his success in life to the way he sees the world and approaches its opportunities. He says:

In my mind, every single day that the sun comes up gives me the opportunity to be better, to do better, and to serve. And that mindset, in a very, very sincere way, means that I’m more passionate, I’m more committed, than most of the people that I’m competing with. So the motivation to do well was because I didn’t want to squander any opportunity ... and I didn’t believe someone else was responsible for my success. I believed that, as long as I had a reasonable opportunity – not even a fair opportunity, but a reasonable opportunity – to make it, it was up to me to turn that motivation into meaningful monetary gain for me and my family.⁷

Donald went to college but did not finish his degree. He had his heart set on a career in the National Football League (NFL), but the world apparently had other plans for him. As he set out in his early days to navigate his career, prospective employers asked him, ‘Why should I hire you when you didn’t even finish college?’ His response is indictive of the power of mindset: ‘I’m gonna sell a million-dollars of software next year for someone. Either it will be you or your competitor. You choose. And, my college degree will have

⁶ *Working on Purpose* episode 118, Voice America, 5/13/2015.

⁷ *Working on Purpose* episode 118, Voice America, 5/13/2015.

very little to do with whether that money comes into your company or someone else's.' He invariably got the job. He has since gone on to found a number of companies, author a book, and own a soccer team in India. And he does so with a spirit of reaching out to people he encounters to encourage the upward trajectory of their lives and careers.

Hugging Your Adversity to Stake a Claim to Yourself

Building on mindset, your attitude toward adversity and what you face in life is nothing short of – well, *everything*. From a logotherapeutic perspective, the way you make sense of inescapable hardship and difficulty is one of the three principal ways you create meaning in life. The other two are your creations, or what you give of yourself to the world (your passion), and your experiences and encounters, or what the world gives you (your inspirations). The meaning *you* give to adversity in your life is uniquely of your own creation – it does not just exist as a fact. No, your mindset and the way you make sense of difficult, harrowing or flat-out ‘who does this stuff *happen to* in life?’ events are completely of your own creation and under your control, and can absolutely be modified to improve mental wellbeing and functioning. Framed through an opportunistic growth lens, there’s even better news: adversity helps us become the people we’re *meant* to become, a perspective I completely share with radio guest Steve Gavatorra,⁸ who wrote *In Defense of Adversity: Turning Your Greatest Challenges into Your Greatest Success*.⁹

⁸ *Working on Purpose* episode 178, Voice America, 7/3/2018.

⁹ S. Gavatorra, *In Defense of Adversity: Turning Your Greatest Challenges into Your Greatest Successes*, 2017.

Adversity comes in many shapes and sizes, and can come in the form of emotional, physical, professional, personal, social, financial, or spiritual challenges. Recall Viktor Frankl's words that the one thing you always have available is your choice of the attitude you take when confronted with a fate you cannot change. No one can ever take that choice away from you – although you can momentarily convince yourself that you do not have such an option. Never doubt the magnificence of the human spirit to persevere – it is truly breathtaking. Here's another perspective on adversity and the way you navigate through it: When you confront adversity and take it on as a worthy adversary, you will likely feel a sense of pride in yourself as you rise to the occasion. Furthermore, others who witness your handling of adversity will be inspired and emboldened by it, which only serves to catalyze their own courageous approach to challenges.

I have had the privilege of meeting countless people whose stories of overcoming adversity inspire me. It is likely that you have too, and I ask that you let that inspiration wash over you and be the wind beneath your wings as you navigate through your own challenges. If Staff Sergeant (Ret.) Jason Morgan's story, which I learned on air, does not illustrate the magnificence of the human spirit and the ability to use adversity to lean into and become who one is meant to be, I don't know whose does.¹⁰ His story is a walking billboard for the efficacy of adversity in life and the unique way it is construed as meaningful.

Having enlisted in the US Air Force at the age of 22, Staff Sergeant Morgan served as a member of an elite unit that provided meteorological and combat support for special operations missions for almost ten years. In 1999, at age 29 and with just a few days left in his deployment in Ecuador with the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment on an undercover mission, Staff Sergeant Morgan came under fire by a militant terrorist group and suffered a broken back that left him paralyzed and in

¹⁰ *Working on Purpose* episode 126, Voice America, 6/28/2017.

a coma for two months. That's just the beginning of his story, which is replete with one setback and adversity after another. He spent several years after his injury in the hospital in dozens of surgeries and treatments, often in debilitating pain, experiencing infections and later a leg amputation. Soon after leaving the Air Force, Staff Sergeant Morgan became a single parent when he and his wife divorced.

At the time of writing, Staff Sergeant Morgan has been in a wheelchair for 21 years. He has raised his three boys as a single dad, started a foundation to help others, and says giving back to others is the greatest thing he's ever done. He is a speaker and the author of *A Dog Called Hope: The Special Forces Wounded Warrior and the Dog Who Dared to Love Him*.¹¹ He told me he has many days when he feels significant pain and goes days without sleeping. But he also knows that there are men and women so much worse off than him. He chooses to focus on others, which takes the attention off himself. Staff Sergeant Morgan has chosen to impose a certain meaning on adversity, and he taught me that the best way to handle it is to start by expecting it. That way, when it does happen it's not so debilitating, and you'll be less likely to get down about it but will instead look for ways to improve the situation.

A couple of months after the episode aired, I invited Staff Sergeant Morgan to lunch, as we both live in the Dallas area. He had told me on air that one of the perks of being paralyzed in a wheelchair with a guide dog was that it put him in the enviable position of attracting women. At the restaurant, as he predicted, we were approached by numerous people – admittedly mostly women – who offered a treat or water for the dog and generally fawned over him. With an irrepressible wink and incorrigible flirtatiousness, Staff Sergeant Morgan turned to me and said, 'See what I mean?'

¹¹ J. Morgan and D. Lewis, *A Dog Called Hope: The Special Forces Wounded Warrior and the Dog Who Dared to Love Him*, 2017.

Could you handle this kind of ongoing adversity the way Staff Sergeant Morgan did? I hope you never have to, although you can be certain you will encounter your own set of adversities in life and along your leadership journey. Standing in Staff Sergeant Morgan's example, when those adversities do come calling, remember them for the gift they are, and see them as an opportunity to become who you're meant to be through your response. Definitely try to keep your sense of humor along the way.

On the Hunt for Gratitude: Be a 'Moment Hunter'

Gratitude is generated from the meaning you give to experiences and interactions. It's also a core ingredient of wellbeing, living with passion, and being an inspirational leader that people yearn to follow. By gratitude, I mean both the state of *being* grateful as well as the *act* of expressing gratitude. Learning to incorporate continuous gratitude in your life also contributes to better physical health, as people tend to report fewer aches and pains and instead focus on exercise. Psychologically, experiencing gratitude reduces the presence of toxic emotions like anger, frustration, and resentment, and is positively linked with happiness and reduced depression. Gratitude also helps to cultivate empathy while reducing aggression. Consider that empathy is also linked to increased self-esteem, in part because living with empathy reduces the tendency to make social comparisons. When you live with gratitude, you can appreciate the accomplishments of others without feeling inferior to them. Finally, cultivating gratitude is linked with increased mental strength and resilience. We learned from Staff Sergeant Morgan – who repeatedly said others had it worse than he did and expressed how grateful he was for having the chance

to be of service to veterans and others who needed a dose of inspiration.

Cultivating a sense of gratitude – being more grateful – is an easy practice to add to your life, generating greater meaning. It can be as simple as vowing to observe one special moment or interaction a day and just appreciate it, letting that goodness wash over you. I heartily recommend incorporating the Japanese concept of *ichigo ichie* into your everyday life, as Hector Garcia taught me on air and in reading his book *The Book of Ichigo Ichie: The Art of Making the Most of Every Moment, the Japanese Way*.¹² *Ichigo ichie* can be translated as ‘in this moment, an opportunity’, which means roughly ‘what we are experiencing right now will never happen again so we must treat it like a special treasure.’ The call, then, is to participate wholeheartedly in every moment and become a ‘moment hunter.’

One way to add another level of intentionality of gratitude and thus enjoy its accompanying psychological benefits is simply to keep a journal that captures three things for which you’re grateful each day. This kind of reflection can be a nice way to send yourself off to sleep. In fact, gratitude is linked to good sleep. You can also make it a practice to ruminate on things for which you continue to be grateful. As an example, I will be forever grateful to my boss Roland Haertl who fired me at age 19. Although it was a shocking, sad, and uprooting experience at the time, Roland saw something much bigger in me than I could see for myself. Getting fired forced me out into the bigger world to pursue my formal education, travel, and professional evolution. He opened the door of possibility so wide and set me on a path toward self-development, ever seeking my own potential – which eventually helped me to identify that as a calling to help others do the same.

¹² *Working on Purpose* episode 270, Voice America, 4/8/2020.

That brings us to the expression of gratitude. I often tell Roland how much I appreciate him for what he has done for me in my life. For most of the past 17 years, I've visited him in person as I've passed through Portland, Oregon to see my family in the eastern side of the state, and we correspond through email and phone calls in between visits. Similarly, when my maternal grandmother was alive, I used to write her love letters addressed on the envelope to 'The Greatest Grandma on the Planet,' followed by her actual delivery address, and detail in the enclosed letter how much her kind and generous actions and my many memories of her had so beautifully contributed to my life. When we spoke on the phone, she would remark about the letters and their content with, 'You sure know how to make a little 'ole lady feel special.' I'd always reply, 'Good, 'cause that's how you always made me feel.' When practiced and expressed, gratitude makes everyone a little bigger. Learning to incorporate an ongoing expression of gratitude for your team's contributions is an essential practice as an inspirational leader. People *ache* to know they matter, and when you tell them how much they do, you elevate them and create a powerful contribution to their meaning tank.

***Ikigai*: A Framework for a Meaningful Life**

In a world where so many people are desperately seeking greater meaning and a path to their purpose, the Japanese concept of *ikigai* (pronounced 'eek-e-guy') just might be the holy grail. *Ikigai* can be thought of as a framework for understanding who you really are while providing a way to live a more meaningful life. *Ikigai* is an interesting Japanese concept used to describe one's reason for the source of value in one's life, beyond anything financial. *Ikigai* is, above all else, a lifestyle that strives to balance the spiritual with the practical.

Ikigai comprises four aspects, and to pursue one's *ikigai* is to look for where these four aspects overlap. They are: what you love (your passion); what you are good at (your vocation); what you can get paid for (your profession); and what the world needs (your mission). This balance is found at the intersection where your passions and talents converge with the things that the world needs and is willing to pay for.

Justyn Barnes'¹³ book, *Ikigai: Discovering Your Reason for Being*¹⁴ is a well-organized, easy read with beautiful illustrations that complement the concepts described. I asked Justyn why he thought *ikigai* was such an important concept today. He echoed my thoughts that there seems to be an increasing move toward secular answers in the search for a meaningful life. He went on to say that with life today intermingled with automation, artificial intelligence, and robotics, humans are increasingly looking for where they fit in. He also reminded me that in today's fast-paced world, people struggle to find a work-life harmony and *ikigai* offers a way to harmonize our lives across the four important spheres or aspects of our lives: our passion, profession, vocation, and mission.

Justyn and I talked about the benefits of pursuing our *ikigai*. It was delightful to hear him, a British man, compare the American Declaration of Independence that deems the pursuit of happiness an inalienable right, with the Japanese context, where *ikigai* is a more highly valued aspiration. In Japan, *ikigai* offers a more nuanced, realistic view of wellbeing that invites us to find meaning and fulfillment not just in the occasional highs of life, but the lows and the humdrum of each moment too, allowing us to see each day as alive with meaning. Pursuing your *ikigai* gives you the space and practice to be present to all these glorious moments that make up your day and let the meaning you derive from them wash over you. *Ikigai* offers a framework to thread critical aspects

¹³ *Working on Purpose* episode 241, Voice America, 9/18/2019.

¹⁴ J. Barnes, *Ikigai: Discover Your Reason for Being*, 2018.

of your life and fold them all together neatly into one unified way to pursue your life meaningfully and with purpose.

Final Thoughts on Meaning

As a human being, you are a master of meaning-making. Your ability to make meaning from what you invest of yourself and encounter in the course of your life has been key to your survival. Becoming present to the reality that you really have just one, precious life helps ground you in the moment while enabling you to strive for a future of fulfilment and flourishing. The opportunity you have for your own growth and ongoing evolution is to become very attuned to your filters to the world and how you make sense of it – that is, to become attuned to your mindset. Becoming present to the mindset that governs you and intervening to transform it to one that enables you to exercise more human agency is a priceless opportunity. The way you allow yourself to see the world contributes heavily to your happiness, success, and the quality of your relationships.

You can count on challenges and problems as you navigate your life. It is your response to this adversity, what you learn from it, and how you grow that makes all the difference. As you do, summoning gratitude not only gives more meaning to the moment but is also an incredibly effective way to elicit wellbeing and peace. Practicing these activities in a way that cultivates meaning across your life represents an optimistic way of journeying through life, which is the essence of embracing logotherapy as a way of life, as Dr Pattakos, aka ‘Dr Meaning,’ reminds us.

As an incessant meaning-maker, you literally have total editorial control over the meaning you assign each and every interaction, every day, every hour, every moment. While that may sound daunting, I hope you will see it as quite liberating and empowering, and as a place from which to create the

life you most desire. The power you have to ascribe meaning to your life, to play with it, hold it dear, and grow from it, is bottomless. One significant way to discover and cultivate meaning comes through what you give of yourself to the world – that is, your passions, the topic of Chapter 4. To situate yourself and get you thinking holistically, sketching the components of your *ikigai* is a way to start to frame meaning as considered from a Venn diagram, where passion, vocation, profession, and mission intersect. But first, let's get much better acquainted with you.

Key Points and Exercises

Logotherapy as a Way of Life

In your journal, brainstorm at least three ways in which you can start to fold a logotherapeutic approach and perspective to your life. Do the same with your leadership practice – how can adding a logotherapeutic perspective enrich your followers by giving them greater access to meaning?

What Will You Do with Your One, Precious Life?

Ask yourself these questions and write down your thoughts.

1) What would you do with your life if you knew you had a sooner-rather-than-later expiration date? 2) What if, say, you were told you have three months to live? 3) How would facing that finality alter the direction of your life? 4) Would it at all? 5) Wouldn't it be amazing if you lived in Gwen's example and worked on purpose to leave a legacy, even without a terminal diagnosis prompting the urgency?

Your Lens

What is the unique way you see the world – what is your lens on it? How is it distinguished from that of others? What do people exclaim about your perspective on things ('Wow, I never thought of that way!' Or, 'Hmm, you seem to take a very strategic approach to solving problems')? Look for what this lens indicates about the way you make meaning across your life and the way you see yourself.

Mindset

Download the Mapping Your Mindset template from www.alisecortez.com or www.gusto-now.com and use it to derive your values and attitude. Think about how they inform your mindset. In your journal, consider how this

current mindset supports you to live with passion, work on purpose, and live a fulfilled life. How does it support being an effective leader, and enable you to carry the brand of a leader with which you desire to be associated. How does it work against you?

Hugging Your Adversity

Download the Adversity Gift template from www.alisecortez.com or www.gusto-now.com. It will enable you to make a list of situations or events that have happened in your life, which may have knocked you to your knees and made you wonder what you ever did to deserve them or how you ever survived beyond them. You'll capture your response or reaction to them, then acknowledge who you became as a result and finally consider who you *could* become with a reframing of those same circumstances in a new light – how have they helped you become who you were meant to be?

On the Hunt for Gratitude

For 21 days – the time some say is required to develop a habit – before retiring to sleep each night, write down three things for which you are grateful for from that day. Record them in your journal, which you should keep by your bedside. Also jot down daily even just one descriptive word about how you are feeling. Re-read the journal at the end of the 21 days and see what you notice about the experience, your reaction to doing it, and how you are interacting with others in life.

Bonus Gratitude Exercise

Call to mind someone who once did something that changed your life for the better. Write 300 words, call and schedule a call or visit, read every word aloud, discuss content and how you each felt. Do this – *it will change your life!*

Video: *Meaning as the Ultimate Motivator*

Watch this video at www.alisecortez.com or www.gustonow.com to reinforce the learnings in this chapter.