

FREE TO GROW

Bring Purpose and Meaning to Work



*The meaning of life is to find your gift.
The purpose of life is to give it away.*

Pablo Picasso



Life is never made unbearable by circumstances, but only by lack of meaning and purpose.

Victor Frankl



Purpose and meaning at work

Bringing purpose to work has been a hot topic in organisations over the past few years. This morning when I googled it, I got 9,140,000,000 results. 'No wonder.'

People on average, spend about 90,000 hours at work during their lifetime. No-one wants to see this time as having no more value than putting food on the table and putting a roof over their heads.

There is a deep desire within each of us to make a difference. We want to know that we have a purpose, and that we contribute to something bigger than ourselves. Work can provide that purpose, and increasingly work is where people seek it.

Why then did I choose to add 'meaning' to the title of this short series of posts?

I have been using the two terms more or less interchangeably for many years. But recently it started to bother me.

- Are purpose and meaning the same... or not?
- If there is a difference, how important is this difference?
- What is the role each plays in an employee's experience of work and the contribution they will be prepared to make?
- If they are different, what can leaders do to strengthen both?

In this series I will explore these questions.





**There is no greater agony
than bearing an untold story
inside you.**

Maya Angelou



Purpose is the root

To me, Purpose is the roots. Behaviour and Success that sprout from this, the fruits.

Purpose is “the reason for which something is done or created, or for which something exists.”

Purposeful work involves having a clear sense of direction and feeling a deep connection to the work we perform.

It is about having a strong ‘WHY’.

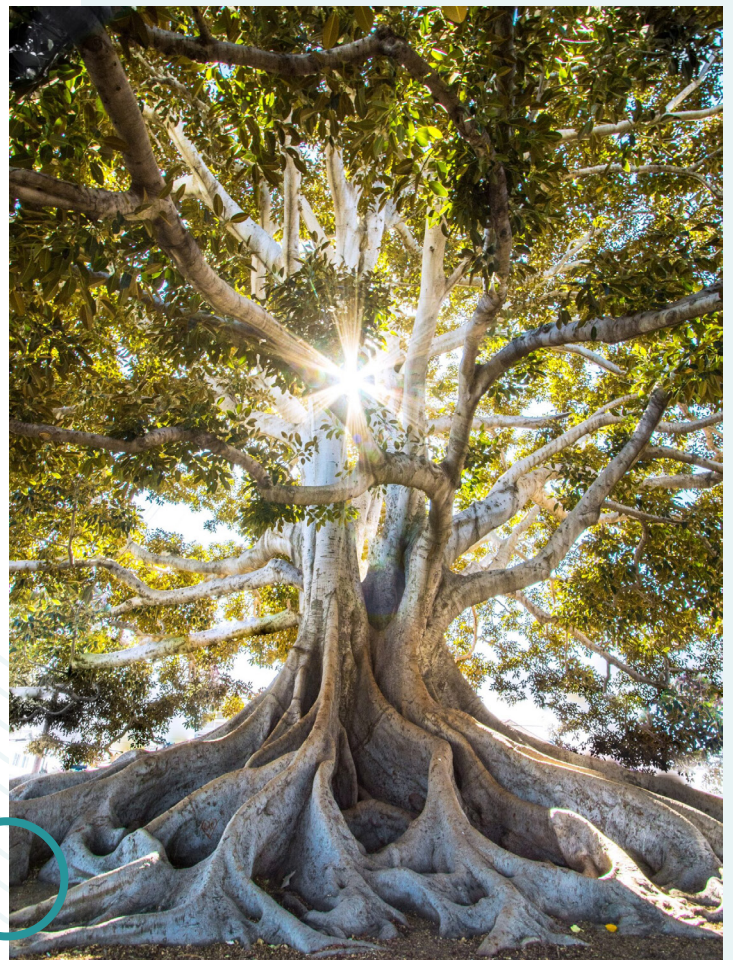
Our WHY inspires motivation and commitment, it creates an inner drive that is stronger and more sustainable than money or force can ever be.

That leaves us with two questions:

1. If we are not satisfied with the fruit we see in our lives or work, how strongly aligned are what we are currently doing in these areas, with our deep personal purpose?
2. If we are not satisfied with the fruit we see in our teams, the contribution they are making, is their WHY strong enough? And what can we do to strengthen this?

**Purpose is the root,
contribution the fruit.**

Alinda Nortje
CEO of Free To Grow





**The most important days in life are
the day you are born and the day you
discover the reason why.**

Mark Twain



Is your purpose survival?

I read that “pay is called ‘compensation’ because it compensates the worker for being somewhere they would rather not be, doing something they would rather not be doing.”

How sad if that is your reality... as you spend 35% of your awake time at work. And how sad if that is the reality of the people who work for your organisation, as they will be putting in their time, but not their full focus and full effort.

Of course, there are people who do the work that they dreamed of and specially qualified for, work that is interesting and stimulating in itself, and that offer rich financial rewards. But for every one of these employees, there are thousands who mop floors, operate machines, work on assembly lines, move stock and drive trucks. They greet customers, operate cash registers, answer calls, enter data and provide information.

The purpose of their work is often survival – to put bread on the table. Apart for this, work is pointless to them.

I believe that human beings are ‘wired’ to search for a way to find daily meaning, not merely daily bread.

What if a higher purpose than survival could become the magnet that pulls them to bring their best to work every day?

When purpose is embedded into an organisation’s culture, it constantly reorients people to focus on contribution. This is powerful because neuroscientists find that human beings are hard-wired for altruism.

When we think about how our work benefits others and tie our everyday tasks to a bigger purpose, we get a boost of the “happiness trifecta” of neurotransmitters: oxytocin, dopamine, and serotonin. Oxytocin supports empathy and social bonding. Dopamine plays a major role in motivation and movement. Serotonin regulates mood. The results are a desirable individual and organisational outcomes like increased engagement, motivation, and fulfillment.

Research also shows that purpose is a key predictor of grit, the ability to be resilient and push through.

So bringing more purpose to work benefits the employee who goes home at night, fulfilled, as well as the organisation that gets the best from their people.

Compliance pushes people on the short term. Purpose pulls them on the long term.





**The purpose of life is a life
of purpose.**

Robert Byrn



Purpose defines organisations

The purpose of an organisation is the reason for its existence beyond making a profit. It defines the organisation's core values, goals, and the positive impact it aims to create in the world.

Why the intense focus on purpose lately?

1. **Purpose Pays:** studies show that purpose-driven organisations perform better. This no longer needs to be debated.
2. **Rising Aspirations and Shifting Priorities.** In recent years, leaders have increasingly committed to delivering on the triple bottom line—people, planet, and profit. Similarly, growing numbers of employees are seeking more from their work than just their pay cheque. Employees want to know that what they do matters.
3. **The Limits of Carrots and Sticks.** Experience has shown that the power of 'extrinsic' motivators to inspire people to bring their best to work is limited. Extrinsic motivators focus on individuals' desire to be rewarded for their contributions. Intrinsic motivators include employees' desire for meaning, connection, and joy in their work, as well as the desire to contribute, develop, and achieve. Purpose is one of the most powerful intrinsic motivators because it speaks to both the head (as the compass that guides and aligns behaviors) and the heart.

66% of those surveyed stated that a higher purpose would motivate them to go the extra mile in their jobs

15% would take a pay cut just to work for an organisation that had an inspiring purpose.

Purpose matters. According to Harvard Business Review

Three questions related to this:

- Does your organisation have a purpose that is not only well articulated, but also active and embedded in the organisation?
- Is your organisation's purpose strong enough to attract and retain the best talent?
- Is it alive enough to inspire employees from the 'shopfloor' to the 'topfloor' to bring their best to work every day?

Is your organisation's purpose strong and active enough to create the desired ripples?



**We are products of our past,
but we don't have to be prisoners
of it.**

Rick Warren



What is your purpose?

Organisational purpose is important. So is individual purpose. When these two align, we experience the gift of living our purpose through our work.

When we do not know what our purpose is, life – and work – can become pointless. Some people go their whole lives never truly knowing what their purpose is. They never know, because they never seek. And because they never seek, their days are often casually lived out lacking depth and experiencing feelings of emptiness.

I believe that creating a space for people to reflect on their purpose, and inspiring them to intentionally shape their path to align to this purpose, is one of the most valuable gifts one can give someone.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, **“The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.”** I agree.

What is the point of the path you are walking?

What a gift this work has been

- To those who have experienced our programmes
- To those who have implemented in their organisations
- To everyone in Free To Grow, and
- To me personally.





What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others.

Nelson Mandela



Ikigai – purpose definition

A Japanese concept that means ‘A reason for being.’

When I first stumbled upon the Japanese concept of Ikigai a few years ago, I was stunned by the simplicity and richness that this framework holds.

The term combines two words: *iki*, which means “life” and *kai* (pronounced as *gai*), which means “worth”. It pertains to the source of value in someone’s life, the reason for being.

I love the concept of the 4 elements, the clear difference between them and their importance and contribution to experiencing ikigai, and what the those intersections between two circles are about.

I regularly return to Ikigai, asking myself:

- What is the reality of each of these 4 circles at the moment in my life, my work and my organisation?
- How well balanced are the 4 circles now? Any that I have been neglecting or ignoring?
- How much of the intersections between the circles am I experiencing? Am I running on empty in some of these areas?
- How can I help create greater awareness and alignment between these 4 circles in the people I work with and the work I do, enabling Ikigai in others?



May your
choices reflect
your hopes and
not your fears.

Nelson Mandela



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Pablo Picasso



The Human Deal

Work should have purpose. Without it, work becomes pointless, a burden we have to endure to put food on the table.

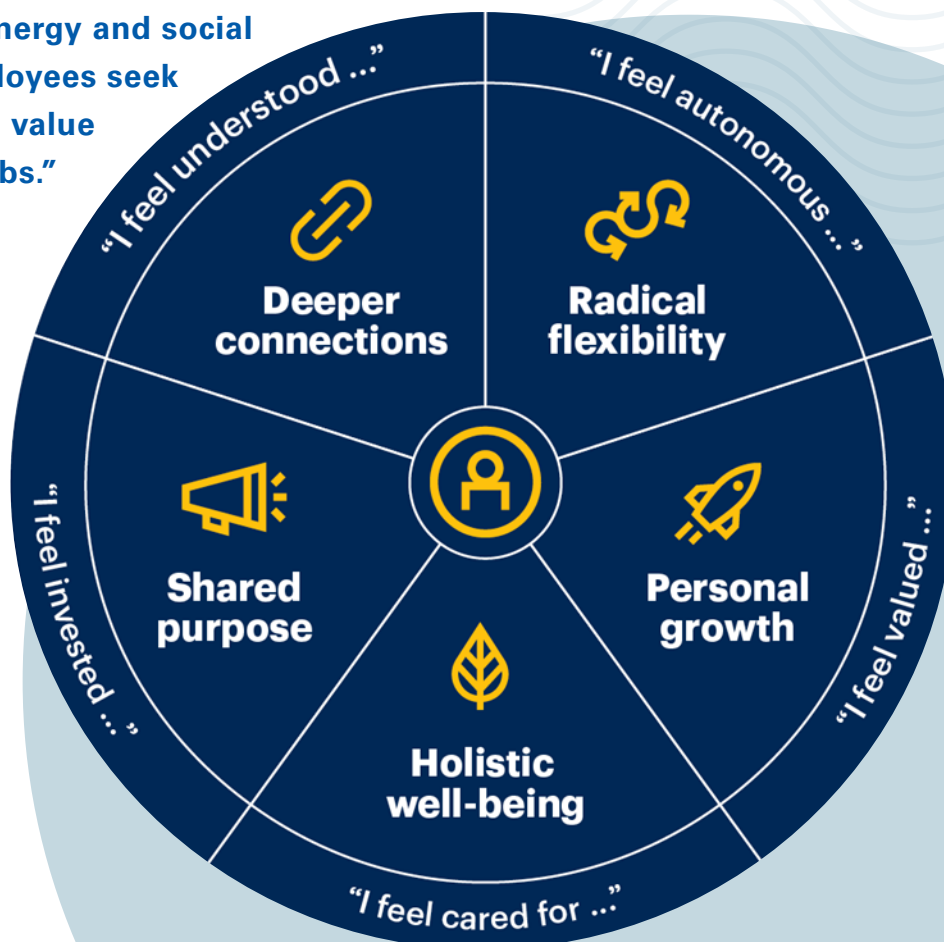
But our work needs more than purpose to make us experience it as meaningful.

Purpose is about the WHY behind our contribution. Meaning is about what we need to get/receive.

In a recent article Gartner says **“The pandemic and subsequent economic and political volatility has forced everyone to examine their choices about how they spend their time, energy and social capital. Employees seek to gain more value from their jobs.”**

I resonate with the ‘Human Deal’ Gartner has developed to reflect this. The need behind the “I feel...” of the five components reflects the voices of thousands of employees across industries we are working with at the moment.

Leaders have a huge impact in making work meaningful. Leaders are, indeed, meaning makers.



About the author



Alinda Nortje

Boosting employee well-being, growth and engagement by shifting behaviour through learning experiences that touch hearts and open minds

I design programmes that assist organisations to improve the wellbeing of their staff, grow the potential of their people, develop their leaders so that they can inspire their people to perform at their peak and grow the emotional connection employees have with the organisation so that they care enough to go the extra mile.

Nature and gardening restore me. Connecting with close friends and family brings me endless joy and feeds me emotionally.

I love exploring new locations and cultures.

Reach out to me to explore how we could make growth happen together

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Alinda has a background in social work and community work. Her passion for bringing healing, hope and growth to people led her to create FreeTo Grow as vehicle for this in 1994.

Today Alinda is the CEO of the organisation, which has evolved into specialising in employee wellbeing, growth and engagement. Under her leadership FreeTo Grow has grown to become a significant roleplayer in this field, with a 30-year track record spanning more than 1,500 organisations across 36 countries.

Alinda is an expert in the field of developing learning programmes that touch hearts, shape minds and shift behaviour to support organisational values and strategies. Examples of organisations who have partnered with FreeTo Grow in this journey are RCL Foods, Distell, Woolworths, Coca-Cola, Western Cape Government Health and Unicef.

Alinda has personally presented programmes in countries as diverse as Vietnam, South Sudan, Dubai and Jordan and has a special skill to make programmes culture and context-specific.

For the past 25 years Alinda has been regularly sharing her knowledge at national and international forums. She is regarded as an inspirational speaker who brings across her message in a fresh and engaging manner and a facilitator who connects deeply with people, creating a safe space for them to connect in new ways.



Thank you

Helping people live and work purposefully is a golden thread through all the FreeTo Grow programmes. It is part of our purpose. We have been doing this for 30 years. In 36 countries. Across more than 1,500 organisations.

FREE TO GROW

Boosting employee wellbeing, growth and engagement

www.freetogrow.com

30 *Years*
of inspiring growth

