

Tips to create a life that matters

By Pete Bissonette

Are you doing what matters most to you?

Does your work give your life meaning?

I'm not asking whether you are happy, but whether your life has meaning.

A study in the *Journal of Positive Psychology* examined attitudes toward happiness and meaning. It showed a meaningful life and a happy life overlap in certain ways, but are ultimately different.

"While happiness is an emotion felt in the here and now, it ultimately fades away, just as all emotions do," wrote Emily Esfahani Smith about the study in *The Atlantic*. "The amount of time people report feeling good or bad correlates with happiness but not at all with meaning. Meaning, on the other hand, is enduring. It connects the past to the present to the future."

Another study confirmed this, she said, "People who have meaning in their lives, in the form of a clearly defined purpose, rate their satisfaction with life higher even when they were feeling bad than those who did not have a clearly defined purpose."

Giving your work meaning can be a simple shift in perspective, as it was for me.

Back in the 1990s the focus of our company, Learning Strategies, was to sell more audio programs and enrollments. We were sales oriented as were most companies.

Then we switched our mindset from selling to helping more people experience their potential, and two things happened. First, I felt more fulfilled and happier, and second, our business grew significantly. The level of meaning in my life increased considerably as did the success we enjoyed.

My colleague Stewart Emery and his co-authors of the book *Success Built to Last* interviewed two hundred of the world's most successful people and uncovered the same experiences.

"Above all else, no matter where they have chosen to excel—in business, the arts, sports, social service, community, or family—each has achieved success by focusing on the things that matter most to them," he said.

"Enduringly successful people follow their hearts, aligning their thoughts and actions with their passions," said Stewart. "They become energized by their work and stay on purpose and committed in the face of setbacks and challenges."

I couldn't agree with him more. During our company's long-term success, there have been some extremely difficult times. But as long as we held fast to our vision to serve others, we really never had to worry. It fueled everything we did.

To create a life that matters to you, consider the following:

- What gives your life meaning? What brings you the greatest joy? Loving what you do and who you are is the greatest motivator for building lasting success. Just shifting our company focus from sales to impacting people, gave me and our staff meaning, and it continues twenty years later. Is there a shift like that you can make?
- Are your thoughts toxic or supportive? Are negative thoughts and self-doubt or the criticism of others drowning out that voice inside of your head—that whisper or "silent scream" telling you what really matters? Learn to responsibly manage your thoughts in ways that

keep you on track to your goals, despite obstacles or burdens you will undoubtedly face.

- Are you taking action? What are you doing to bring you closer to your goals or attract into your life people and activities that will support you? While meaning drives success, meaning without action will get you nowhere.

When you align your thoughts and actions with what gives your life meaning, you magnify your passion and impart greater clarity to your purpose than ever before.

Pete Bissonette is author of the forthcoming novel "Breakfast Tea & Bourbon", where living a meaningful and joyous life weaves through the story. He is the president of Minneapolis-based Learning Strategies, a personal development training and publishing company founded in 1981.