

# Coaching from the Inside Out

The power of purpose

By Patrick Williams, EdD, MCC

**L**ife Purpose...the elusive answer to the musical question, “What’s it all about?” (from the movie *Alfie*). As a clinical psychologist, the clients who came to see me rarely brought up the subject of life purpose. As psychotherapy clients, they were seeking to make their lives more satisfactory, more functional. Coaching clients, who presumably are mostly healthy individuals wanting to make some life changes, are more apt to respond to questions and conversations about life purpose, calling or meaning.

Psychological theorists Williams James, Carl Jung, Roberto Assagioli, Abraham Maslow, Alfred Adler, Viktor Frankl and others did write about life purpose and did cite many examples of the topic in their work with patients. Carl Jung is probably best known for his theories of ages and stages of life, noting that midlife and beyond (after age 40) most humans begin to search for spiritual meaning, and heed callings for some shift in discovering and then living their life purpose.

I have found that much of my coaching soon gets into the life purpose discussion, and clients who get more clarity about their purpose and unique calling for their life, then make decisions and choices that fit with that new understanding.

Since I started using the phrase *Inside Out* in 1998, it has become much more common in the personal and



professional development arena. But the concept remains valid, if not unique. This work in the human arena demands that the coach have experience in learning, growing, and living from the *Inside Out*. As a rule, people are taught instead to live from the *Outside In*. They are *not* taught how to examine their own lives through the lens of fulfillment.

Coaches need to be *models* for their clients. It increases coaches’ authenticity, which is key to life coaching. Coaches ask clients to probe deeply into

**“Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?”**

—*The Summer Day*, by Mary Oliver

their lives — their values, priorities, goals, and obstacles to fulfillment. Coaches must have done — and continue to do — the same work themselves.

Great coaches know that coaching is as much an art as it is a skill. They have committed themselves to fully mastering the *way of being* that they coach their clients to attain. They are models of what it means to fully learn, to be fully effective, and to create a fulfilling life.

As a coach, you are committed to modeling how it is to either be living a fulfilling life or be on the path to creating that for yourself. Your *way of being* is as critical to the way you coach as are your skills. This is the responsibility you carry — to model what you coach others to do and to be. Living this commitment will stretch you, which is why coaching is *inter-developmental*. It develops and grows both you and the client.

### What is life purpose?

Each of us looks for fulfillment and authentic happiness in our own way. Sometimes the yearning for fulfillment becomes a call so loud and so intense at midlife that we cannot help but step off the path we are on and devote ourselves to the search for fulfillment. As many midlife questers discover, fulfillment often means returning to deep sources of satisfaction that we may have had glimpses of many years ago. At that earlier time, we may have lacked the courage to follow the call, or we may have allowed life's stresses

Zondervan 2002) has become the biggest selling self-help book of all time.

### The importance of knowing life purpose

In industrialized countries, 21st-century culture has become obsessed with accumulating just for the sake of accumulating: information, goods, material objects, and more.

The paradoxes of our time have been summed up well by His Holiness the Dalai Lama:

- “We have more conveniences, but less time. We have more degrees, but less sense...more knowledge but less judgment. More experts, but more problems. More medicines, but less healthiness.
- We have been all the way to the moon and back but have trouble crossing the street to meet the new neighbor.
- We build more computers to hold more information that produce more copies than ever before, but have less communication.
- We have become long on quantity, but short on quality.
- These are the times of fast foods but weak digestion.
- It is a time when there is much in the window but nothing in the room.”

As we live with these paradoxes, we have lost sight of the importance of *being* in life. Many people in the United States and throughout the industrialized nations misguidedly believe that the only way to have what we want is to work hard and long.

There is an alternative: *Be* who you are first. When you focus on being first, this lets you *do* what you want to do, which lets you *have* what you need. We need to allow ourselves to *be* first; the rest will follow. Discovering our life purpose focuses our attention on the essence of who we are — our *be*-ing. As some wise person said, if we were designed to be human *do*-ings, we would have been called that. •

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*This essay is adapted from Pat's newest book, co-authored with Diane Menendez, Becoming a Professional Life Coach: Lessons from the Institute for Life Coach Training. Norton Professional Books, 2007.*

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*Patrick Williams, EdD, MCC, is Chief Energizing Officer of the Institute for Life Coach Training.*

“Most of us get to our graves with our music still within us.”

—Oliver Wendell Holmes

and serious pursuits to cover up the glimmer of what we knew to be true.

This pattern takes place in the lives of so many people because each of us has a life purpose that has, we believe, been with us since we were very young. At moments when we experienced a profound sense of being in the flow — being in the right place, at the right time, using our gifts — we are likely to be living out our life purpose. Life purpose *calls us forth*. It may be a calling we answer, something larger than our small selves, that deeply connects us with others, with what is larger than ourselves.

Gregg Levoy in his book *Callings* (Three Rivers Press 1998), eloquently illustrates how discovering one's life purpose often begins with a sense of experiencing a calling. Bookstore shelves are filled with information about our contemporary search for meaning. We know that life purpose has become an important focus for many people; *The Purpose Driven Life* (New York: