



Reveal your authentic self

From the day we are born until the day we die, we encounter a seemingly endless series of wanted and unwanted changes in our lives. How can we discover and develop the resilience we need to live our lives to the fullest, continue making our unique contribution to the world around us and shape our calling amidst constant change?

In a series of interviews, Klaartje van Gasteren, Marnix Reijmerink and Jakob van Wielink talk to international thinkers, all of whom demonstrate that discovering and recognizing our vulnerability allows us to uncover our talent and potential. These are the stories of people who dare to show themselves and invite and challenge readers to do the same.

In this interview, Nick Craig talks about the quest for purpose: everyone's unique gift to the world that becomes visible and tangible because we are all invited to utilize our talents to benefit the world around us. He tells us how purpose is connected to the work he does with leaders and organizations worldwide.

In conversation with Nick Craig about leadership and purpose

It is the film that counts, not the title

“Living your purpose is a ‘soul contract’. It is not about money, it is about an inner yearning to make a difference in the world. Your challenge as a human being and as a leader – when you know what your purpose is and when you have awoken as it were – is to seek ways to awaken others around you. That way, they can also discover what their unique gift to the world is.”

Auteurs: Klaartje van Gasteren, Marnix Reijmerink & Jakob van Wielink

It was mid-March when we met Nick Craig online, the American author of the bestseller entitled *Leading from Purpose* and chairman of the Core Leadership Institute. Coronavirus had just emerged in a number of countries and we spoke, amongst others, about the initial deaths of dozens of people. We were – as would become clear later – on the verge of a global health crisis. But at that point, we did not yet have any idea of the impact the virus and the corona measures would soon have on society and the world.

Direction

“Purpose helps us get through any crisis”, says Craig. “A crisis invites us to step forward.” Purpose acts like a compass in this sense. “If we know what our purpose is, we know how to stay on track in all circumstances. That way, we give direction and remain focused on the future. In times of crisis, and with any complex issues, we need people who are bold enough to

make major, impactful decisions. It requires leaders be in touch with that inner compass of purpose. They can then bring calm and focus, and that way, get others on board to do what is necessary in the crisis together.”

Meaning

“Purpose is what distinguishes you from others; it is that one unique element that people miss most when you are no longer there. The best thing about purpose is that it stays with you beyond the end of your life. In life, we can easily be impressed by everything someone has achieved, by what is visible externally. This fades into the background after death. If we look back about two years after someone’s death, we can see their unique contribution. We realize what we miss. What we see then is purpose. This is an invitation to explore our own purpose too.”

It is incredible to feel the life energy in our conversation with Nick Craig, partly

because death features so strongly in the events surrounding corona. The passion with which Craig speaks about purpose – the theme that is the crux of his work with leaders – says something about his own purpose.

According to him, purpose is the unique gift everyone has to give to the world based on their talents. You could regard your purpose as the specific brand by which people recognize you. It is not what you do, but how and why you do it.

Finding your purpose requires self-examination. For example, reflection on what brought you joy as a child. Craig connects these moments of joy to so-called ‘*crucibles*’; the severe trials in your life. The question is what we experienced and learned during those important events. How did they shape you? A third building

About Nick Craig...

Nick Craig is the author of *Leading from Purpose* and chairman of the Core Leadership Institute, a consultancy dedicated to awakening people worldwide, so that they in turn can awaken others in respect of finding their purpose, and equipping them to lead authentically.

Over the past 25 years, Craig has carried out research into the power of purpose and authentic leadership in both an educational and corporate context in collaboration with leading lecturers in the field of leadership and leadership development. He discovered that people, organizations and their leaders benefit from gaining access to their purpose so they can express who they are and make an impact on the world around them.

block for finding your purpose is to explore what is driving you at this point in your life. What gives you a sense of meaning and purpose? Craig challenges the readers of his book and participants in his programs to capture the essence of this quest in one sentence: a ‘*purpose statement*’. Like the title of the film of your life.

“People do not walk around on this earth without purpose. They walk around without (yet) knowing their purpose.” We feel our purpose the strongest at critical times in our life and can then seek out what our purpose really is.

Journey

Craig tells us about his difficult youth. He lived with his family in a basement apartment in a bad neighborhood in South Carolina. His parents argued a great deal. He had a difficult relationship with his father. In primary school, he was taught by a teacher who had low expectations of him and who did not encourage young Nick. She beat him with a ruler on a weekly basis. “I never told anyone at home. I learned to conceal an important part of myself.” He withdrew emotionally and tried to prove himself by working hard and getting good grades. He describes achieving good grades as the best way to finally prove himself.

“I discovered a bookshop around the age of fifteen. This is where I was first exposed to books about great leaders.” The books became a source of inspiration. In the life stories of Gandhi, Lincoln and Churchill, amongst others, he read about the impactful events they experienced in their lives and above all, how they became the leaders they were, not despite, but because of these experiences. These stories marked a turning point in his life. “From that point on, my life was about discovering who people could be despite the setbacks they experience in their lives.”

That led to an examination of his own life. "Only then, well beyond the age of forty, I realized that reading those books when I was fifteen was the point at which I discovered my purpose. I awoke, so to speak, and now found words to describe my purpose: *to wake you up and have you finally be home.*"

Craig describes another important catalyst in his quest for purpose. Together with Bill George (former CEO of Medtronic and professor in Leadership at Harvard Business School), he researched the power of purpose amongst students. They did that during their leadership lectures. Contrary to their expectations, they obtained no clear picture of the power of purpose. He decided to seek his own purpose. "If I myself do not seek, I cannot teach anyone else to seek."

Awake

Craig says being awake and knowing what your purpose is, is not the solution to all your problems. "If you know your purpose, you can no longer be naïve." The bonus is that you finally know what choices you need to make. The challenge is that those choices are inescapable. That means it is not articulating your purpose that is the most important, but how you express it. "It is the film itself and not just the title that counts."

Craig explains that without knowing our purpose, we are only capable of reacting to what happens around us. Purpose helps us progress from reacting to making conscious choices. It makes us more resilient. It enables us to navigate any situation and then be successful (again). "It is a kind of extra resilience, an extra oxygen tank we can tap into. A tank filled with experiences."

"Once we have awoken, we are keen to tell our story, to tell others what it is like to

be awake, to enthuse them and invite them to awaken too. In this woken state, we can easily see who is awake and who has not yet awoken."

Stress

We have many inner voices. These voices sometimes disturb our balance. If we ignore the voice of purpose for a long time, we become disconnected from ourselves. Sometimes our ego takes over, for example. Then we make choices that are not in line with our purpose: a promotion, a nice car, a bigger house. Choices that do not bring us the satisfaction we desire in the long term.

Craig emphasizes that these are the moments during which we receive signs from within that let us know our actions are in conflict with our purpose. Our bodies will beckon us to go in search of our purpose (again) and how to live it. The ability to listen to the voice of purpose leads to psychological security. The security we need to take risks with others based on trust and with the expectation that others will respond constructively. It enables us to experiment, to reflect and to learn to the fullest extent.

Stress requires an unnatural action; not moving away from the stress, but actually moving towards it. "Looking for meaning in what we do is healthier than avoiding the

When we are awake,
we want
to awaken others

discomfort of stress”, says Kelly McGonigal in her famous *TED Talk* about stress in 2013. Purpose gives us access to the challenge response instead of the primary fight or flight response. If you believe you have what you need within you, you can make other choices. Purpose gives you additional resources to act during this time; an anchor on which to rely.

Coaching

Many issues with which we are confronted as leaders and coaches are connected to purpose: the leader who struggles to make decisive choices in times of crisis, the young woman who experiences burn-out, the pastor who doubts his life choice, the man who gets no satisfaction from the work he does. These are just a few examples we encounter in practice and which are deeply connected to purpose. The examination and (re)discovery of their purpose will direct these people to meaningful expression of their lives.

The question ‘What is your purpose?’ is a difficult – and sometimes seemingly impossible – question for many to answer. As a coach, it requires you to give some slack. The answer to this question already exists and need not be conceived, but to be found. We can do this by, amongst others, exploring, reflecting and identifying joyful moments in our youth, passions and crucibles.

The power of purpose does not lie in words, but in deeds that flow from an inner knowing. ■

Klaartje van Gasteren is an international trainer and supervisor in (personal) leadership. She helps directors, their teams and individuals become a secure base for themselves and the people they live and work with.

Marnix Reijmerink is an international trainer who assists teams and their leaders. He instils a sense of love and adventure in people’s hearts. In doing so, he helps translate the themes of attachment, transition and signification into sustainable development and growth.

Jakob van Wielink helps leaders and their organizations live based on their calling. Jakob serves as executive coach for the (Advanced) High Performance Leadership Program of the IMD Business School (Switzerland and Singapore) and is a faculty mentor for the Portland Institute for Loss and Transition (USA).

Klaartje, Marnix and Jakob are partners at De School voor Transitie www.deschoolvoortransitie.nl

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