



## FINDING YOUR PERSONAL WHY

The goal of this process is to be able to distill your WHY into a simple purpose statement that can be depicted like this:

**To [YOUR CONTRIBUTION] so that [YOUR INTENDED IMPACT].**

This is essentially your purpose statement, your reason for getting out of bed in the morning in the deepest sense. There are many other ways to express this, but this is a simple one that I like.

For example, my Personal WHY is:

***To be a catalyst in people's development  
so that they may live their deepest purpose.***

My contribution, or what I can do, is to be a *catalyst in people's development*, My intended impact is *so that they can live their deepest purpose*. I intend to do this in life no matter what I do for a living. You'll notice I stayed away from exactly *HOW* I do this. That will change over time for all of us.

I also happen to lead a company that serves organizational leaders, mostly in business. My Company WHY is informed by my personal WHY, but it is expressed in a slightly different way.

***To awaken the highest potential in leaders so they  
can cultivate organizations that are good for people and the world.***

You can see how these are interdependent, consistent, but also distinct. It always starts with your Personal WHY. These steps can help you find and articulate yours. I introduce a different set of techniques for groups, teams, or organizations.

Some ground rules. Your WHY...

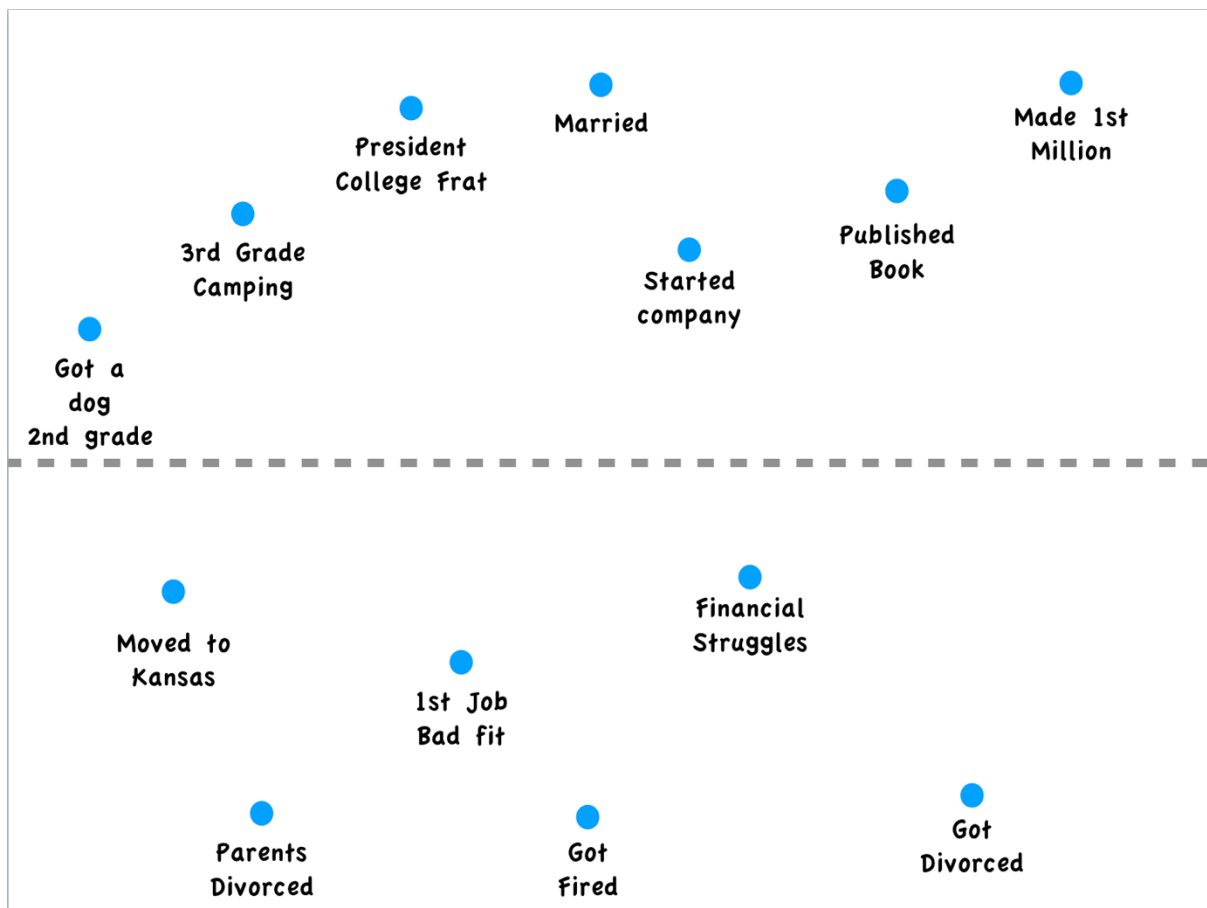
- 1) Will include more than just making money

- 2) Isn't your family. As important as your family is, that is one of your responsibilities. Your WHY is with you whether you have a family or not.
- 3) Will evolve in the way it gets expressed or articulated over time, but the fundamental thread will be consistent over your life.
- 4) Is ultimately about a feeling, more than the statement you create, so don't get too caught up in semantics.

## STEP 1: IDENTIFY YOUR STORIES

Start at 40,000 feet by creating the diagram below for yourself. Draw a horizontal line across the middle of the page, and plot stories above the line that are happy memories, and stories below the line that are challenging or difficult.

The higher you plot, the more fulfilling, the lower you plot the worse the experience. Write a few words to encapsulate that story. You can go back in time as far as you want all the way up to the present.



Once you've plotted a number of them, choose the three that are highest, and the three that are lowest on the chart and move to step 2.

## STEP 2: MINE YOUR STORIES FOR THEMES

On a new page, draw a line down the middle. On the left side note "What happened." These are the facts, not the meaning not the emotion. On the right side, note "The experience." These are the internal feelings that were evoked, the meaning you gave to the experiences.

DO NOT skip this step. The experiences, feelings, and meanings are the path to your WHY. This is the domain of the heart, not the mind.

What happened	What you experienced
1. I became president of my fraternity	1. I felt elated and frightened all at the same time. This was my first experience in leadership and I found I came alive. I loved being able to shape the direction of a group.
2. I spoke at a conference	2. I loved helping people learn. I was lit up whenever I saw the lightbulb go on in their head and they were ushered into a new experience
3. My dog died	3. I was young but it was my first experience with death. I realized after he was gone just how much I felt a connection to him. He was always a comfort to me when I was down. I realized how much I liked to pet him. Something about contact is important to me

Using the format above, answer the following questions:

- 1.** Describe the three highest moments of your life. What was it about these times that made them so positive?

- 2. Describe the three most difficult times in your life. What was it about these that made them so challenging?*
- 3.** Take a moment to identify themes that emerged. Here you are using your intuition, your gut reaction, not your reasoning. Just circle words and phrases that seem to have the most energy or jump off the page.

If you have difficulty finding themes, it may mean you don't have enough data. Consider two options:

1. Either spend time free-writing about each experience. This means setting a timer for 5 minutes and writing without stopping. Don't worry about repeating yourself. Just keep writing about the internal experience and feelings the event evoked in you until the time is up.
2. Or you can select more events to mine for emotional content and experiences. The point is to generate enough content that you will begin to see repeating or reoccurring themes emerge.

### **STEP 3: DRAFT A STATEMENT**

Finally, take a crack at drafting a handful of statements using different words and see which one feels better to you. This is something you will share with others, but it doesn't have to be perfect.

To \_\_\_[Contribution]\_\_\_ so that \_\_\_[Impact]\_\_\_.

Using the themes you identified from your stories, begin to draft five or six statements that express or reflect some aspect of those themes. You are looking for themes in the two basic areas. What contributions did you most enjoy making? What kinds of impact were you most excited about?

### **STEP 4: CHECK YOUR STATEMENT**

Your purpose won't be a reasoned argument with rational data points. It is born of the intelligence of the heart and will be expressed in a longing for something more and a desire to participate in it, to help bring it about.

If when you read it, you feel lighter, animated, lit up, or excited, then you know you're on the right track.

If you are wondering what other people might think, or trying to adjust it to be understood, more realistic, defensible, or accepted by others, you're not there yet.

At the end of the day, the heart is the realm of NO JUDGMENT. That is the domain of the mind. So release all judgment about whether your statement is realistic, or how you will do it, or whether you are qualified. None of this matters. The only thing that matters is your own sense of emotional connection to it.

## **RESOURCES FOR A DEEPER DIVE:**

The steps above are the simplest distillation for people who don't want to spend a lot of time working through this, or feel they already have a pretty good idea. In reality this process often requires quite a bit more exploration and excavation. For more support consider these two books:

[\*Cats Don't Bark: A Guide to Knowing Who You Are, Accepting Who You Are Not, and Living Your Unique Purpose\*](#) By Shane Hipps

[\*Find Your Why: A Practical Guide for Discovering Purpose For You and Your Team\*](#)  
By David Mead and Peter Docker