



READING GUIDE

Purpose, Meaning, and Passion

HBR Emotional Intelligence Series

The **HBR Emotional Intelligence Series** features smart, essential reading on the human side of professional life from the pages of *Harvard Business Review*. In an ideal world, our work lives would be completely fulfilling and intrinsically motivating. But what if you're stuck in a job and your heart isn't in it anymore? Or what if your company's mission seems unrelated to the work you do day in and day out? This book showcases the power of passion—and how you and your team can find it at work.

Here are some key lessons and takeaways to get you started and guide your reading.

Everything you need to know about purpose, meaning, and passion in 65 words:

The sources of meaningful experiences at work include contributing beyond yourself, learning, accomplishment, prestige, status, power, belonging to a community, agency, and autonomy. You don't always need to *find* your purpose at work—you can *build it*. You can discover meaning in a job that isn't your true calling. The best way to motivate employees is to help them take a step forward every day.

Purpose-Driven Leadership emphasizes a leader's role in stewarding the organization's purpose, enhancing performance, and promoting well-being. First you must find your purpose, then put it into action.

- **Finding Your Purpose.** Explore your childhood passions and significant life experiences to identify your core strengths, values, and passions. Craft a clear, personal purpose statement that resonates with your essence and calls you to action. Engage in reflective group discussions to gain insights and clarity, as self-discovery often requires external perspectives.

- **Putting Purpose into Action:** Develop a purpose-to-impact plan, envisioning long-term aspirations and setting specific goals aligned with your purpose. Embrace holistic development, incorporating personal and professional life aspects into the plan. Establish critical next steps and nurture key relationships to realize your purpose, fostering courage, commitment, and focus on leadership endeavors.

Guiding Employees Toward Purpose

While corporate values and mission statements are essential, employees crave personal meaning in their work to feel engaged and satisfied. You can help them foster purpose through conversations. Help employees perceive their tasks at higher levels, finding significance even in mundane activities. Conduct regular check-ins using five areas of inquiry:

- Identifying strengths and recognizing contributions.
- Rediscovering what employees enjoy about their work.
- Highlighting the value of certain tasks and outcomes.
- Illustrating how current work contributes to future goals.
- Encouraging meaningful relationships and collaboration in the workplace.

Understanding Misconceptions About Purpose

- **Misconception 1: Purpose is only a thing you find.** Purpose isn't solely discovered; it's constructed through meaningful engagement with work.
- **Misconception 2: Purpose is a single thing.** Purpose isn't singular but multifaceted, stemming from various aspects of life such as family, faith, and community.
- **Misconception 3: Purpose is stable over time.** Our sources of purpose evolve with career changes and life stages, reflecting natural growth and development.

EXPLORE PURPOSE, MEANING, AND PASSION ON HBR.ORG

Article: [“Don’t Let Passion Lead to Burnout on Your Team”](#) by Joy Bredehorst, Kai Krautter, Jirs Meuris, and Jon M. Jachimowicz

Audio: [“How Etsy Became Profitable—Without Sacrificing Its Purpose”](#) HBR on Leadership podcast

Video: “[Create a Life with Purpose](#)” with Clayton M. Christensen

Article: “[Striking a Balance Between Your Passion and Your Paycheck](#)” by Erin A. Cech

Audio: “[Best Buy’s Hubert Joly on Redefining Your Company’s Purpose](#)” *HBR on Strategy* podcast

Article: “[To Craft a Purpose That Motivates Your Team, Balance Pragmatism and Idealism](#)” by Darren Ashby and Atif Sheikh

The HBR Emotional Intelligence Series

The HBR Emotional Intelligence Series features smart, essential reading on the human side of professional life from the pages of *Harvard Business Review*.

Each book in the series offers proven research showing how our emotions impact our work lives, practical advice for managing difficult people and situations, and inspiring essays on what it means to tend to our emotional well-being at work.



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