

ALIGNING OURSELVES TO

ACHIEVE OUR TRUE POTENTIAL

By Lori L. Silverman



Our work in organizations causes us to have a keen sense of what is meant by the term “alignment.”

Often we are catalysts for encouraging enterprises to discover and align their mission, vision, and values to their strategies, processes, policies, leadership decisions and human resource plans. There is, however, another view of alignment; one that is more personal in nature. It is centered on our approach to life—our source of energy, our greatest lessons in life, our gifts, our needs and desires, our personal values, and our life purpose. Here, too, we must work actively inside ourselves to discover, align and integrate. This work is also ongoing; it is the journey to consciously connect with our inner selves. It is my contention that only when we connect with our personal authenticity will we be able to enjoy our true potential—at work, at home, and in life. Let's take a brief look at three of these dimensions: our needs and desires, our personal values and our purpose in life.

OUR NEEDS AND DESIRES

How do you define personal success? What brings you internal happiness? What do you want most out of life? The answers to these questions will help you to realize your most basic needs and desires. Over the years I have asked leaders who I coach to keep a personal journal. In it they record actual experiences, images, ideas, feelings/emotions, pictures, cartoons, intuitions, reactions, upsets or disconnects, hopes and fears. I encourage you to do the same. If you journal daily, for a few minutes, and then, later on, review these entries, you may start to uncover your true needs and desires. In addition, there is medical

evidence to show that journaling, which is often a cathartic experience, can significantly reduce mental, physical and emotional stress.

OUR PERSONAL VALUES

Values are fundamental ideals that define the boundaries of acceptable behaviors and decisions. They are enduring over time and build upon our needs and desires. To identify those values which are most important to you, ask: What values can't I live without? Which three of these values define me as a person? What single value is at the core of who I am?

My most important value in life is personal and professional integrity. It was something I learned from my father, who was an entrepreneur in the real estate and construction industry. I watched him turn down jobs that would have caused him to act unethically and heard him speak to contractors about doing work according to “code.” While our values may be shaped by early life experiences, they can be defined by more recent events. With friends, family and colleagues, listen in conversations to what you communicate as acceptable behaviors and the rationale for your decisions. These are clues to what you hold as fundamental ideals.

OUR PURPOSE IN LIFE

Our life purpose is an overarching statement of what we are truly meant to do with the time we've been given on this

planet. It permeates everything we do. My purpose in life, which made itself apparent in a fax I received several years ago, is “to connect people to possibilities and to each other.” This life purpose has resulted in: introducing colleagues who started a new business venture, helping a business to put together a plan for an IPO, connecting people to new jobs/careers both inside and outside of where they work, working with small business owners to grow their firm's potential, and linking people to the resources they need to resolve issues or realize a dream.

One way of discovering your life purpose is to create a list of the most satisfying and fulfilling experiences in your life. You can also do this by creating a map that documents these experiences in chronological order. By reviewing them to identify “hidden” themes you will receive insights to your purpose. Also engage in conversations with others about what they perceive as your greatest gifts—and look at how these interface with your experiences. Sometimes others are able to identify our life purpose more easily than we can!

THE NEED FOR THIS WORK

The alignment work that we do in organizational settings calls forth a need for us to do the same sort of work for ourselves. Having a greater grasp on our authentic self and how our personal needs and desires, values, and purpose in life connect to each other can help us to be better coaches in this regard. It frees us to challenge organizations to dig deeper,

teaches us the most critical questions that need to be asked, and helps us see disconnects in alignment more clearly when they happen. Personally, it will also help you connect what is most important to you in life with how you can best help your organization to achieve its dreams.

Article appeared in the November 2001 issue (Vol. 16, No. 1) of *The Business Improvement Journal*. All uses, including reprints, require advance permission from the author.

Lori L. Silverman is the owner of Partners for Progress, a management consulting firm dedicated to helping organizations achieve and maintain a sustainable competitive advantage. She is also the co-author of *Critical SHIFT: The Future of Quality in Organizational Performance* and *Stories Trainers Tell: 55 Ready-to-Use Stories to Make Training Stick*. Lori can be reached by e-mail at lori@partnersforprogress.com.

For additional free articles, check out www.partnersforprogress.com and www.sayitwithastory.com.
