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THIS IS

About Life, Joy,  
and Owning  
Your Purpose

THE

THING

## CHAPTER 11

# About Your Mantra

**A MANTRA IS A** word or sound that is repeated often to aid in concentration. Originating as a Hindu and Buddhist concept, mantras were thought to have spiritual power. I wouldn't subscribe to that theory but can attest to the power of having a mantra that helps me focus on something important.

You may prefer to call it a mission, a vision, or a purpose. I like the idea of a mantra because it feels actionable. Whatever you want to call it, having a statement that is clear, unambiguous, and easily recalled is a powerful tool in bringing decisions to the conscious level to assure you are living purposely.

This is your opportunity to actually do a little work. You may be tempted to rush through this chapter and go on to the next section, but I encourage you to resist that temptation and instead take the time to dive in. Even if you have done some of this before, it will be worth doing it again with a fresh perspective. At a minimum, I suggest you read through the exercises and consider what they are trying to bring out. By the end of this chapter, you are going to have a mantra through which you will be able to filter the many decisions of your life. It's worth doing.

## Exercises

As we have said, the ultimate question you are trying to answer to determine your purpose is, “How do I experience the most joyful version of my life?” The way you get there is by deciding how to make the innumerable choices that you face. Specifically, you must decide how you want to spend your time and energy in a way that gives you the most joy. The answer to that is your chosen purpose.

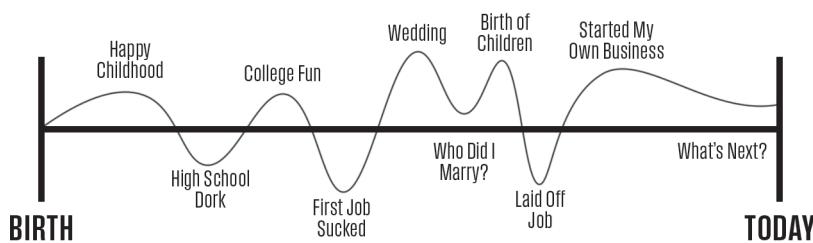
It would make no sense to say that you want to craft a purpose that results in you doing things that you aren’t passionate about. Conversely, if you can make choices that regularly connect you with things you are passionate about, you will have no problem making those decisions and following through.

Here are some exercises that I have found helpful in understanding what I am passionate about. To do them properly, you really should use a pen and paper. I would suggest you use a notebook or journal that you can keep and reference in the future. I like to redo these periodically to contemplate what has changed.

### Lifeline

Start on the left side of the following diagram and draw a solid line that ends on the right side. The left end represents your birth, and

as you go across the page you are getting older, finally ending at where you are today. Going up and down represents the highs and lows of your life. Think about and write in the events that were happening during that time that caused the line to be high or low. Here is an example:



## Stories

Write out the story of some events that have occurred during your life. The first category of stories should be about moments that gave you great joy—where you felt whole, complete, satisfied, or loved. The second category should be stories about moments of great sadness—times you felt loss, shame, defeat, or loneliness. You should have at least one story for each category, but if you take time to really reflect, you probably have more.

These may correspond with the major events you identified in your Lifeline but will also probably include experiences that didn't rise to that level. Maybe the story is something that didn't seem like that big of a deal at the time, but as you look back you think, "Wow, I was really happy then." Or maybe it wasn't something that greatly changed your life but made you sad at the time.

It is important that you actually write the narrative of what occurred. Pretend you are writing this so that someone who doesn't know you could fully understand what happened. Give the context, describe the people involved, and explain the emotions you felt while

it was going on. Perhaps even explain how the event impacted you later. Writing the story will help you relive it and help accomplish the purpose of this exercise—raising your awareness of things that created or stirred your passions.

### Interview Yourself

Conduct an interview of yourself and then write out the answers to your questions. Here are a few starter questions, but since you know yourself so well, you may also think of some questions that are especially powerful for you. Again, don't just think about the answers—write them out in detail!

- What breaks your heart?
- What gets you really excited?
- What makes you angry?
- If you could plan the perfect day, what would you do? Who would be there?
- Describe a day where you would have a hard time getting out of bed.
- What's the most valuable thing you learned from your parents? Your best boss? Your worst boss?

### Rule Book

This is an exercise I have used with business teams for years, but it can be even more powerful for an individual. The goal is to write down a rule book for your life. You are not creating new rules, but identifying the rules that you already live by. The following are the beginning of sentences. Finish them with as many answers as you can think of.

- I believe I should never . . .
- Every day, I should . . .
- A mistake I will never make again is . . .
- When it comes to money, I . . .
- Something I consider unforgivable is . . .

## Strengths

Let's spend some time identifying what you are really good at. Think through and write out answers to the following:

- Some things that come easily to me but seem to be difficult to others include . . .
- Things that others ask my opinion about or ask for my help with are . . .
- The parts of my job that I really enjoy are . . . The parts I just tolerate are . . .
- If you asked your spouse / significant other / best friend what you do that strengthens your relationship, what would they say? What would they say you do that harms the relationship?
- Pretend you are a scout who is evaluating your fitness for physical activity. Where would they rate you highly?

## Exploring Seasons

Let's move on to a new exercise. Write out the answers to the following questions.

- What is something you used to spend a lot of time doing but don't do anymore? Why?

- What is something you used to argue about but don't care much about anymore?
- If you had a free afternoon with absolutely no commitments and nothing needed from you, what would you choose to do? What would you have done ten years ago?

### Leaving a Legacy

Think through these scenarios and explain your desire for what will happen.

- A group of people has gathered to create a plaque that will be placed in your honor. Who are the people in the group? Where will they place the plaque? What will it say?
- You have hired a coach to help you in personal development. She starts by interviewing some key people in your life—family, friends, and colleagues. The first question she asks them is “How has s/he impacted you?” Who does she talk to and how does each of them answer?
- Toward the end of your life, a famous author decides to write a biography of your life. He spends a lot of time researching you and then you sit down with him for an interview. He asks you, “As you look back, what are the things that you are most glad you did?” and then, “What are the things you did that you most regret?”
- It’s your funeral and the time comes for the eulogy. The person speaking walks up to the podium and looks out at the crowd. Who is the speaker? Who do they see in the audience? What do they say?

## Putting It Together

Read back through all that you have written and circle or highlight key words that you see. Look especially at words or phrases that appear often. Think through your identified strengths and how those impact the things you want to do in your life. Consider the legacy you want to leave to your future self and others.

- Write a list of some of these key words and phrases.

Now, experiment by combining them into various sentence structures. Consider starting the sentence with one of the following phrases:

- I exist to . . .
- My purpose is to . . .
- I will live so that . . .
- I will experience joy when I . . .

Keep experimenting until you get to a sentence that resonates with you and is short enough for you to easily remember. Anything longer than fifteen words is probably too much!

Don't feel like it must be eloquent or perfect. You will continue to evolve this over time and maybe even before you finish this book! Just make sure it is something you can remember and that you understand what it means. The goal is that when you are facing a decision, you can say this phrase to yourself to remind you of your purpose—what will give you joy—and it will help you decide what to do.

Congratulations! You've got a mantra! Now, let's talk about how we can use it.

# About the Author

**SHANE JACKSON** leads Jackson Healthcare®, the parent company of more than twenty healthcare workforce businesses that serve over ten million patients each year. Championing its mission of improving the delivery of patient care and the lives of everyone it touches, he has led the organization through growth that has landed it on the *Forbes* list of America's Largest Private Companies; placement on the 100 Best Companies to Work For® and Best Workplaces in Health Care™ lists by *Fortune*; a spot on the Companies that Care list by *PEOPLE*®; and nearly a decade of Great Place To Work® certification.

The author of two books—*This Is the Thing: About Life, Joy, and Owning Your Purpose* (2025) and *Fostering Culture: A Leader's Guide to Purposefully Shaping Culture* (2018)—Shane also has written for *Fast Company* and *Forbes* on the topics of leadership, workplace culture, and living and leading with intention.

Shane serves on multiple boards, is co-founder of the leader-led goBeyondProfit business initiative, and has been named an Entrepreneur Of The Year® Southeast winner by Ernst & Young. In his spare time, he has competed in triathlon, acted in feature length films, and coached numerous youth sports teams, including at the highest levels of travel softball. He holds an MBA from Emory University and a business administration degree from Harding University. Married for a quarter century and counting, he and his wife are the proud parents of three. Learn more at [shanejackson.com](http://shanejackson.com).

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