

## CHAPTER 16

# LIVE YOUR LIFE'S PURPOSE AND UNLEASH YOUR JOY!

BY PATRICE TANAKA

*The two most important days in your life are  
the day you are born and the day you find out why.*

~ Mark Twain

I can pinpoint the exact moment when my life really began. It was upon sharing my life's purpose with an executive coach I had sought out five months after 9/11 when I was depressed and in a malaise I couldn't shake. I was not alone among New Yorkers who lived through that terrible day. What haunted me most was the idea that nearly 3,000 people went to work that morning in the Twin Towers and didn't return home that evening. I wondered what they were thinking in their final moments. If it were me, I thought I'd be trying to convince myself that I'd done everything I most wanted to do in life and that, perhaps, I was "good to go." But, I knew that many of the people who died that day were young, in their 20's and 30's, and probably not thinking of their mortality and probably not "good to go." Like most of us, they lived as if they'd have a future long enough to do everything that was most important to them. Sadly, they did not.

Suzanne Levy, my executive coach, had insisted at our first session that I re-think my purpose in life as a starting point for our work together. I

was annoyed at her request because I was depressed and had little energy to envision a grand purpose for the rest of my life. But, Suzanne insisted that she couldn't help me until I could identify and articulate my life's purpose. Two weeks later at our next coaching session, I told Suzanne that my purpose in life was simply, "To choose joy in my life every day, to be mindful of that joy, and to share that joy with others." I told Suzanne that if I could live my life this way every single day that I think I could be "*good to go*" no matter how much or little time I had left.

### **"SO WHAT BRINGS YOU JOY?"**

When Suzanne asked me the natural follow-up question – "*So what brings you joy?*" – I was stunned because I had spent so much time rethinking a life's purpose that would allow me to be "*good to go*" whenever it was my time, that I hadn't thought about the answer to that question. Suzanne prodded me until I finally blurted out: "*Dancing.*" My response surprised me and only after some discussion with Suzanne did I remember my long-forgotten childhood dream of "dancing like Ginger Rogers." It's the reason I moved from Hawaii, where I was born and raised, to New York City where it seemed that Ginger and Fred, elegantly clad in flowing evening gown and tuxedo, were always dancing to a big band at some swank Manhattan supper club in their Hollywood films.

That longing to dance like Ginger Rogers brought me to the Big Apple, however, once I arrived I became laser-focused on my career and fulfilling an endless number of professional and personal obligations, including caring for a sick husband with a terminal brain tumor, and building a business with 12 colleagues after leading them in a management buyback from the hot, creative advertising agency, Chiat/Day, to start an independent, employee-owned PR firm. We were very successful and only eight years later PT&Co. was named the "*#1 Most Creative PR Agency in America.*" I was, however, totally stressed and burnt out from fulfilling commitments to everyone else but me. My childhood dream of dancing like Ginger Rogers had been long forgotten until that coaching session with Suzanne.

When Suzanne learned that I couldn't even remember the last time I went dancing, she gave me homework: book yourself a dance lesson. So, at age 50, I took my first-ever dance lesson at the Pierre Dulaine Dance Studio and quickly fell madly, passionately in love with ballroom dance. Soon, my dance lesson became the highlight of my week. I was

laughing and having fun again. I was living my life's purpose and "choosing joy" and joy came flooding back into my life.

This total "transformation" in both my personal and professional life was so profound that I felt compelled to write a book entitled, *Becoming Ginger Rogers...How Ballroom Dancing Made Me a Happier Woman, Better Partner and Smarter CEO*. I wrote *Becoming Ginger Rogers* to share how discovering and living your life's purpose can totally transform your life and take you places you never imagined nor dreamt possible. And, I don't use the word "transform" lightly. I am happier now than I've ever been in my life, I lost 25 pounds and my business is eight times bigger than it was BEFORE I took up ballroom dancing.

## FINDING YOUR LIFE'S PURPOSE

When you know your life's purpose, it is energizing! You can more quickly identify and choose those "actions" that support your purpose and bypass those that do not.

And, when you are living your purpose, you are at your most "confident" and "powerful." Exhibiting "leadership" comes naturally and easily because you know what you want, you know what you're willing to fight for, and when you fight for something you know what you stand for, and so do others. And, in the process, you define who you are.

It's a sad truth that most of us can more easily cite our organization's business "purpose" than we can articulate our own individual life's purpose. Many of us have read the growing body of research that "purpose-driven" vs. solely "profit-driven" companies outperform the S&P 500 significantly – 1681 percent growth over a 15-year period vs. 118 percent for all S&P 500 companies.<sup>1</sup> Being a purpose-driven organization, it seems, is definitely the way to *beat the curve*.

Extending the idea of being "purpose-driven" to individuals, especially leaders of organizations, it seems, would result in even more successful professional and personal lives. Yet fewer than 20 percent of leaders can distill their own individual life purpose into a concrete statement, according to the authors of *From Purpose to Impact* in the May 2014 issue of the Harvard Business Review. The authors go on to say that "the process of articulating your purpose and finding the courage to

1. *Firms of Endearment: How World-Class Companies Profit from Passion and Purpose*, Feb. 2014, Rajendra S. Sisodia David B. Wolfe & Jagdish N. Sheth

live it—what we call purpose to impact—is the single most important developmental task you can undertake as a leader.” Being a purpose-driven leader is the way that we, as leaders, can *beat the curve*. I know this to be true from first-hand experience.

## WHAT I LEARNED FROM LIVING MY LIFE’S PURPOSE

By living my life’s purpose and pursuing my joy, I learned some invaluable lessons that made me happier than I’d ever been. It transformed me from “Ayatollah Tanaka,” what one colleague once dubbed me, to “SambaGrl,” who is a much nicer person and a better colleague and business partner. Pursuing my joy of ballroom dancing taught me so many business and life lessons, including the importance of “close partnering,” which helped me in co-founding two other PR agencies, CRT/tanaka (2005) and PadillaCRT (2013), the largest, employee-owned PR agency in America, where I am “close partnering” with 200 other amazing employee-owners.

Other valuable lessons I learned from pursuing my joy of ballroom dancing, which have helped me to succeed on and off the dance floor, include:

- **The importance of being fully present in life.** Dancing well requires that you execute your “present step” full-out and fearlessly, because this is what “produces” your next step or your “future.” Moreover, beating yourself up over some misstep you just made is like being stuck in the past, which has the domino effect of messing up your present step and your future step. So, the only safe place to be when ballroom dancing is fully present, dancing full-out and fearlessly. I’ve found this to be a great metaphor for business and life.
- **Perfectionism is overrated and inhibiting to growth, the willingness to take risks and innovation.** Great dancing is not about executing each step perfectly so much as it’s about dancing full-out and fearlessly. Because of ballroom dancing, I try to focus on doing a task full-out and fearlessly rather than sapping my energy worrying about doing it perfectly and making myself and everyone I work with afraid to make a mistake.
- **Practice failing to succeed more quickly.** Learn what you can from each failure and apply it going forward to help you succeed. Professional dancers don’t view themselves as ever “failing.” For them, it’s all about continual improvement. Our Dyson vacuum client always

said he learned to succeed from producing 5,127 “failed” prototypes until he finally invented the DC01 vacuum, the world’s first bag-less vacuum, employing “cyclonic” technology.

- **Close partnering is key to success on and off the dance floor.** Being a strong and active follower – as women are in ballroom dancing – is as important a role as being the leader. Both are critical to the success of any team endeavor on or off the dance floor. My former partner, Frank de Falco, the one who dubbed me Ayatollah Tanaka, once said had it not been for ballroom dancing, I could never have sold my agency and let someone else take the lead. He astutely observed that because of ballroom dancing, I truly understood and appreciated the important role of follower. This is what enabled me to sell my first agency, PT&Co., to Carter Ryley Thomas and form a larger, mid-size, national agency, CRT/tanaka, and, more recently, to sell CRT/tanaka to create PadillaCRT, the largest, employee-owned PR firm in the U.S. My current agency is much bigger and more successful than my previous agencies because the “missteps” I made in my previous businesses helped me to better succeed today.
- **Visualizing your dreams is the first step in manifesting them.** Many professional dancers actually visualize themselves performing before they even step onto the ballroom floor. They see themselves executing every step, every figure, full out and fearlessly. They feel the excitement of the audience and hear the roar of the crowd. Now, I, too, visualize and set an intention for every outcome I want to achieve, beginning with a “subway meditation” on my commute to work to setting an intention for every meeting that I’m in and every initiative I undertake.

And finally,

- **Pursue your joy with a sense of urgency** because when it’s our time, we want to be “*good to go*,” having done everything we most wanted to do and knowing that we lived and loved full-out and fearlessly.

## **AMAZING THINGS HAPPEN WHEN YOU LIVE YOUR LIFE'S PURPOSE**

All of the amazing things that have happened to me since I began “pursuing my joy” would not have happened had I not first identified my “purpose in life.” Everything flowed from discovering my life’s

purpose: “To choose joy in my life every day, to be mindful of that joy, and to share that joy with others.”

Finding your purpose in life makes clear what’s most important to you. And, when you “take action” you begin to attract what you want in your life, including things you hadn’t even imagined or thought possible.

Taking action to live my life’s purpose has resulted in:

- Writing a book on the lessons I’ve learned from ballroom dancing.
- Being invited to serve on the board of a wonderful, global non-profit organization, Dancing Classrooms, which brings ballroom dance into public elementary schools. This non-profit is the “perfect marriage” of my passion for ballroom dancing and my personal mission of helping children become strong, confident, productive members of society.
- Creating Joyful Planet, a Business & Life Strategy Consultancy, to help people identify and live their life’s purpose and, in doing so, unleash all the success, fulfillment and joy available to them. I am doing what I love and what I do best, leveraging my creative problem-solving abilities to help individuals and organizations move forward more successfully and joyfully in business and life.

## **FINDING YOUR LIFE’S PURPOSE**

If you have not yet discovered your life’s purpose, here’s a brief instrument I developed to help you get started. It involves a series of questions. Don’t overthink when responding, just jot down the first things that come to mind.

1. What did your eight-year old self most love to do? What did you dream of becoming when you grew up?
2. What are you most passionate about? What makes your heart sing and soar?
3. What are your talents and special gifts? What do you love doing or feel supremely qualified to teach others?
4. What are your most heart-felt core values?
5. What is the one word/theme/character trait that captures who you are, your personal ethos and what is most important to you?

6. What is your biggest dream in life?

7. What is the unique way that you want to contribute to the world?  
And, what do you want your legacy to be?

After studying your responses to these questions, write in 5 to 20 words (or thereabouts) how you would leverage your greatest passion and talent to make a difference in the world. The most powerful life purpose statements are expressed in a way that is energizing, distinctive and memorable. Your purpose should not simply be a string of words (because they're not as galvanizing as a declarative statement) and it should contain words and ideas that delight, energize and excite you.

My life's purpose, as I mentioned earlier, is: *"To choose joy in my life every day, to be mindful of that joy, and to share that joy with others."* If I were to distill this down even further I would say: *"Bring joy to the world!"* My life's purpose is easy to remember and delights and excites me every time I recite it to myself and others. And, yes, I strongly recommend that you take every opportunity to state your life's purpose aloud and to share it with others, especially people who support you and want the best for you. Reciting your life's purpose is very affirming and can quickly communicate, even to perfect strangers, who you are, what's most important to you and what you are focused on achieving in life. It attracts those you want in your life and, conversely, helps filter out those you don't want to attract. It also helps people understand how they might most effectively engage with you.

Being able to identify and articulate your purpose is like having your own personal North Star, helping you navigate through life. Moreover, it's the ultimate calling card to introduce you in a way that is specific to you and deeply profound, memorable and succinct, which is essential in a time of sharply-decreasing attention spans.

To *beat the curve*, discover and live your life's purpose is the single most efficient thing you can do to unleash the joy of a more rewarding and fulfilling professional and personal life.



## About Patrice

Patrice Tanaka - *Chief Joy Officer, Joyful Planet LLC*

Patrice Tanaka is a serial entrepreneur, having co-founded three award-winning, PR and Marketing firms and, most recently, Joyful Planet, a Business and Life Strategy Consultancy to help people discover and live their life's purpose and, in so doing, unleash all the joy available to them. "Through Joyful Planet, I am doing what I love and what I do best, leveraging my creative problem-solving talent to help individuals and organizations move forward more successfully and joyfully in business and life," says Patrice.

Joyful Planet is the culmination of Patrice's experience and award-winning track record in creative problem solving for some of the most successful global brands. The only reason I started my first PR agency, PT&Co., was to avoid firing four talented colleagues when we lost our biggest account, explains Patrice. The best solution I could come up with was to lead my colleagues in a management buyback from advertising agency, Chiat/Day, to co-found an employee-owned PR agency in 1990. Within eight years, PT&Co. was recognized as the "*#1 Most Creative*" and the "*#2 Best Work Environment*" among all PR agencies in the U.S.

Prior to starting Joyful Planet, Patrice was Co-Founder, Chief Counselor and Creative Strategist for PadillaCRT, the largest employee-owned PR agency, and the 15th largest independent PR agency in America. "I am proud to have been part of co-founding a purpose-driven agency committed to helping clients achieve their business purpose," Patrice says. Previously, she was Co-Chair, Chief Creative Officer and *whatcanbe* Ambassador for CRT/tanaka, an entity she helped co-found in September 2005 with Richmond, Va.-based Carter Ryley Thomas.

Patrice has been honored by many PR, marketing, business and civic organizations, including the Public Relations Society of America ("Paul M. Lund Award for Public Service"), The Holmes Group ("Creativity All-Star" Award), New York Women in Communications ("Matrix" Award), Association for Women in Communications ("Headliner" Award), Girl Scouts of Greater New York ("Woman of Distinction" Award), *Working Mother Magazine* ("Mothering That Works" Award), Asian Women in Business ("Entrepreneurial Leadership Award"), University of Hawaii ("Distinguished Alumni" Award), among others.

Born and raised in Hawaii, Patrice graduated from the University of Hawaii in 1974, became an editor at Hawaii Press Newspapers and, following that, PR Director of the Hotel Inter-Continental Maui in Wailea. In 1979, she fulfilled a life-long dream of

moving to New York City. Patrice joined Jessica Dee Communications, a PR agency she helped to build, which was acquired by Chiat/Day Advertising in 1987.

A widow since 2003, Patrice lives in Manhattan. She devotes much of her free time to serving on the boards of non-profit organizations dedicated to helping women and children, including the Girl Scouts of Greater New York, Dancing Classrooms, and the American Friends of Phelophepa (the South African health care train). Patrice is also a ballroom dancer and author of *Becoming Ginger Rogers...How Ballroom Dancing Made Me a Happier Woman, a Better Partner and a Smarter CEO* (2011).