

Members Quarterly

Winter 2016 Edition

Feature

Aspire to Something

Instill a sense of purpose



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When we aspire to something, we have a strong desire, even a longing, to bring into being a goal that is meaningful to us. Meaning is the cornerstone of passion.

To light a fire in the hearts and minds of your team, you need to instill in them a sense of purpose. It's impossible to be fired up as individuals or as a team without a deep sense of why it all matters. As a leader, it starts with you. Begin by aspiring to greatness yourself.

What are aspirations? Why should you care about them? Let's look into the term and its roots. According to Merriam-Webster.com, to aspire means "to seek to attain or accomplish a particular goal; ascend, soar." Looking at the origins of *aspire* and *aspiration* reconnects us to their true nature. The verb *aspire* comes from the Middle French *aspirer* and from the Latin *aspirare* (which means, literally, to "breathe upon") and *spirare*, "to breathe."

When we connect the roots of the word *aspire* to our modern definition of aspiration, the importance of purpose-filled goals to help us lead inspired lives becomes crystal clear. Breathing enables life; breath itself is life-giving. As newborns, the first thing we must do to survive is to breathe.

Aspirations give us a sense of purpose and inspire us to take action in service of them. They are the starting point for motivation.

Human beings are designed to create and through the act of creating, to lead purposeful lives. When we get in touch with our true aspirations and desires and conceive goals based on these, we tap directly into our life force and breathe more energy into it. Through the act of realizing goals that represent our purpose and aspirations, we fully engage in life—we become players rather than spectators in our own existence. When we aspire, we are "breathfully" alive!

To attain a true sense of fulfillment at work, it is essential to see how our personal aspirations align with what we do—that is to say, your personal aspirations and your role at work must be congruent. If your current work does not support your long-term aspirations, you will lack a sense of purposeful direction and therefore passion for what you are doing.

Here are two real-life examples to show what living one's purpose looks like.

Fatima is a learning and development professional. Fatima strives to create more diversified workplaces. She seeks opportunities to support this goal through all of her assignments and over time, she has seen results. She helped a women's network blossom, she facilitates powerful conversations about race and gender issues within leadership workshops and she lobbies executives advocating for a workforce that reflects local demographics. Every day, she works toward the goal of diversity in the workplace. Her actions are modest or bold. Small or large, Fatima takes a daily step forward and in the process experiences huge personal fulfillment in her life.

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Roland wants to ensure people in his community feel supported through their work relationships. Employees at Roland's insurance company know the company will "be there" for them. He nurtures a culture that encourages colleagues to treat each other as family. For example, whenever an employee goes through a personally difficult time, he offers comfort and support. I have known him to attend a funeral wake and sit with the family evening after evening. He has entertained the children of his overseas executives to make sure they felt connected to the community. He is a member of the community first and a CEO second.

How can you make sure you are living an aspirational life? How do you know if you're "aligned to your purpose?" The first step is to check in with yourself and take stock of where you are vis-à-vis where you want to be. Your purpose need not be grandiose; it can be modest. Meaning is not about magnitude. Small can be significant; big can be irrelevant. Don't think size. Think: "Does it matter?"

When you as a leader feel grounded in a true sense of purpose, you are in turn able to support your team members to achieve that to which they aspire. In fact, helping your team members realize their goals in life is one of the most important aspects of your leadership role. When you are clear about your own aspirations, you will be better able to help your employees connect with their own.

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