

Purpose and Resilience in Graduate Education

What Matters Most and How to Make It Happen

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Languishing
+ less social
support



Pandemic
Fatigue +
Learning Loss



Situational + Clinical
Mental Health
Challenges



It's tough out there right now, amiright?

Applied learnings for today

1. In tough times, we often ask WHY.

Thinking about purpose is important for everyone at all ages and stages of the life course... and for graduate students it may be essential. (The **problem**)

2. How does purpose make us happier?

Having a sense of purpose (a sense of WHY it matters) increases your sense of agency (a sense that the HOW is possible) and increases your life satisfaction (a sense that you are thriving as a result of meaningful success) (The **promise**)

3. What do I do next?

Practical small-steps exercises can take daunting concepts and turn them into pleasurable explorations of possibility that you can use yourself, and with your students, your academic teams, your family. (The **program**)

Part I: The Problem

Graduate students can be an unhappy bunch, especially in a global pandemic. But research tells us that students who are satisfied with life do better in graduate school. How can we help folks stay on track?



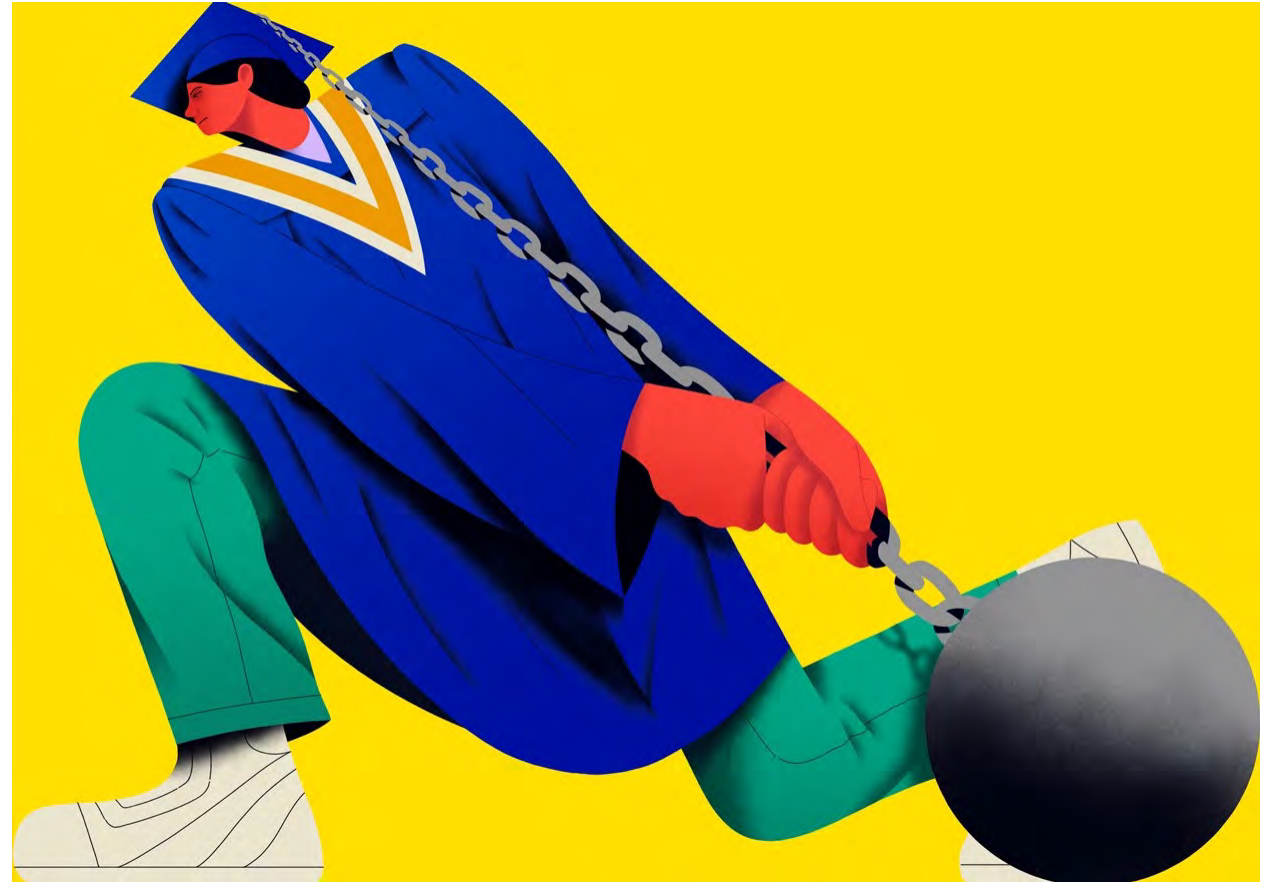
nature

COVID contributed to a **worldwide decline in graduate student satisfaction.**

- In 2022, only 62% of graduate students were satisfied with their graduate program, down from 71% in 2019
- 65% say pandemic negatively impacted the quality of their program

CAREER FEATURE | 24 October 2022

Stress and uncertainty drag down graduate students' satisfaction

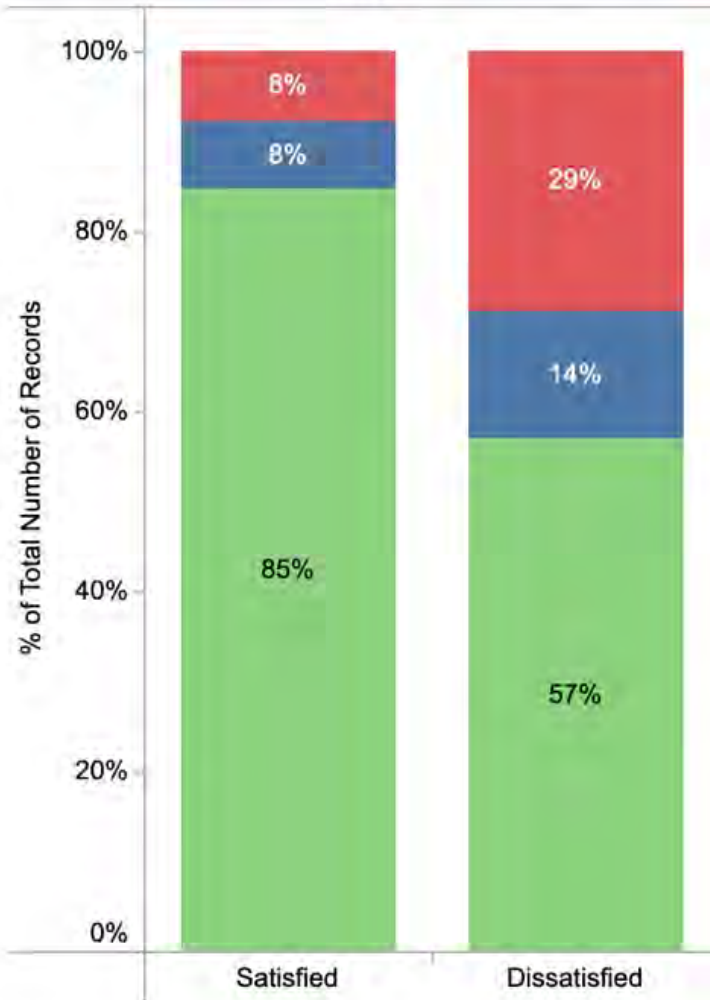


Is there such
thing as a happy
graduate
student?



Effect of life satisfaction on academic success

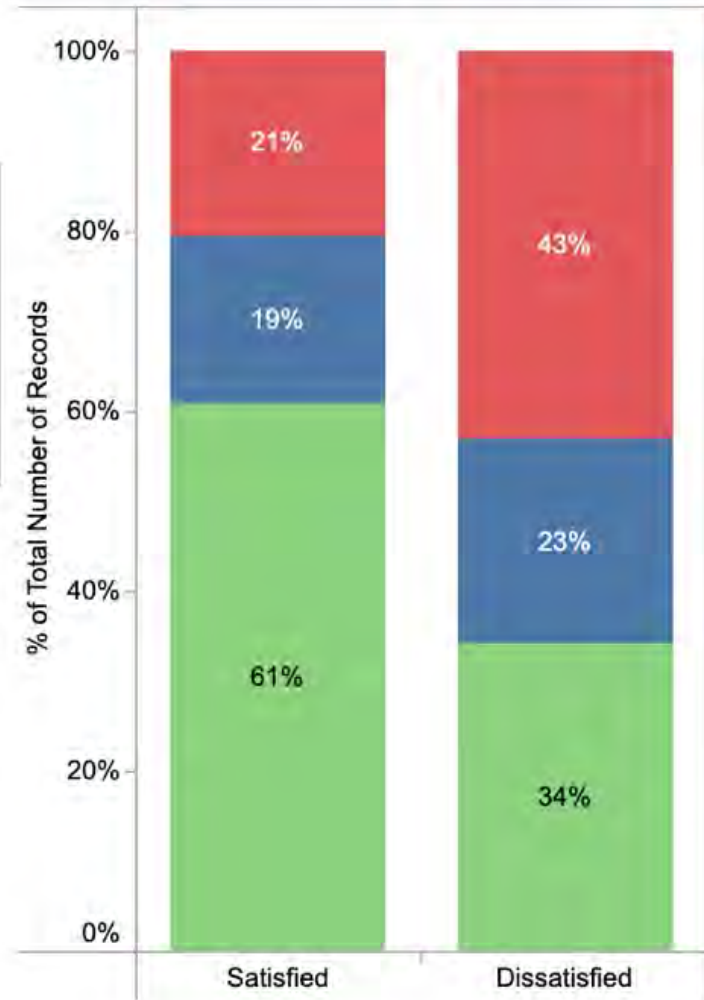
On track to complete degree program on time



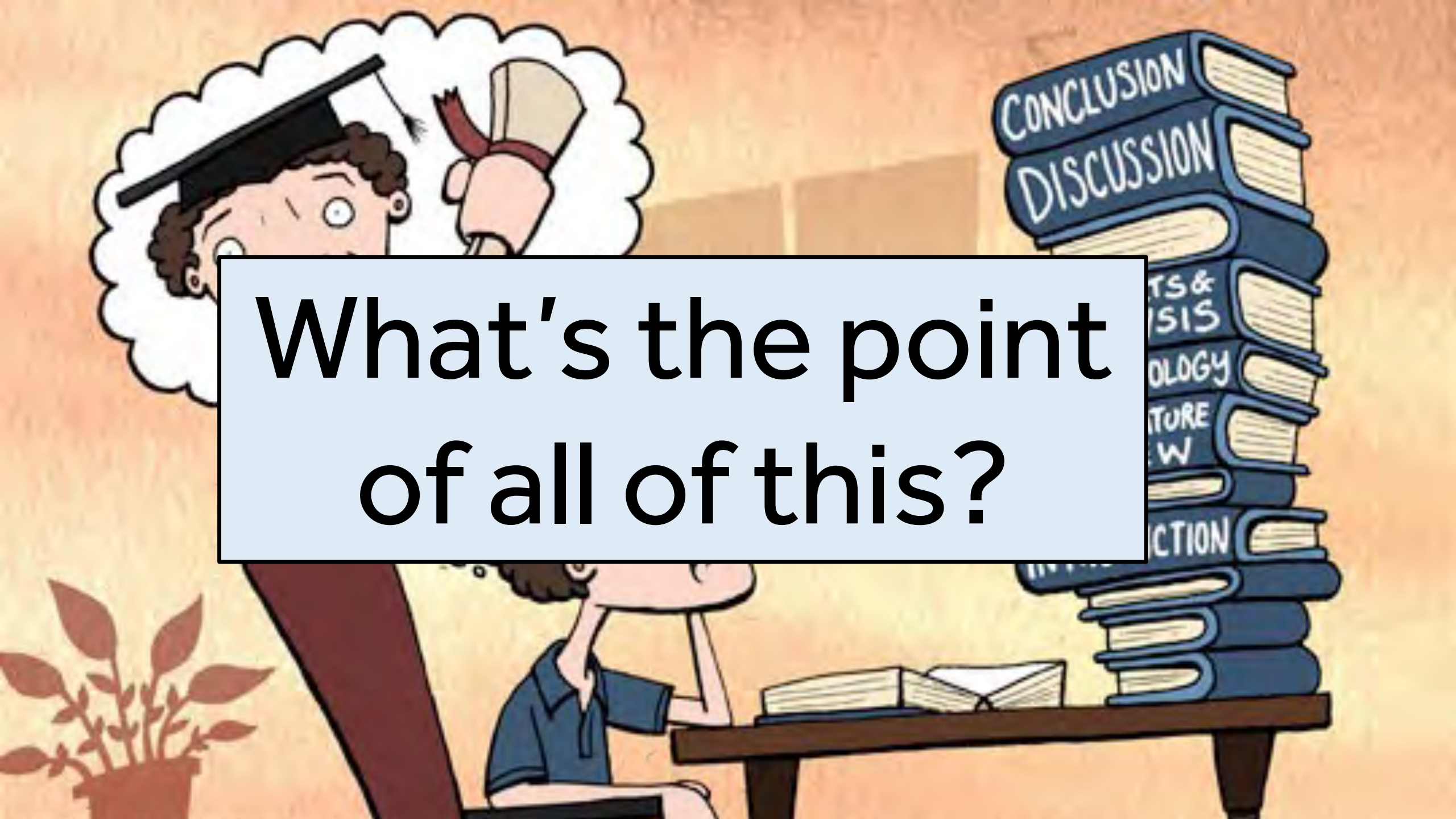
On track
Neutral
Not on track

Satisfaction with life was highly correlated to academic progress and engagement. Among respondents who were satisfied with life, 85% were on track to complete their degree program on time and 61% were engaged with their day-to-day work.

Engagement in day-to-day work



Engaged
Neutral
Not engaged



A cartoon illustration of a student sitting at a desk, looking thoughtful. On the desk are several open books. To the right, a tall stack of books is visible, with titles like 'CONCLUSION', 'DISCUSSION', 'TS & SIS', 'OLOGY', 'TURE', 'W', and 'CTION'. Above the student's head is a thought bubble showing a graduation cap and a diploma. The background is a simple orange wall with a potted plant on the left.

What's the point
of all of this?

Purpose: Possible Definitions

a. singular life aim
– the why behind
everything you do

b. self-organizing
life aim that
stimulates goals



Purpose Mindset:

Using your gifts,
in keeping with your values,
to make a positive impact
on the lives of others.



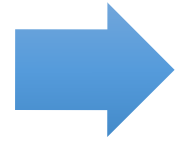
Part II: The Promise

More than 15 years of research shows us that greater sense of purpose in life is correlated with better educational, health, financial and social outcomes.



Purpose

A sense of why
it matters



Agency

A sense that
I can do it



Life Satisfaction

A sense
that I'm
succeeding



Purpose is linked to positive educational outcomes:

- ✓ Increased ability to identify and pursue new goals
- ✓ Boosts resilience in the face of hardship
- ✓ Higher GPAs and graduation rates
- ✓ Positive identity formation and individuation



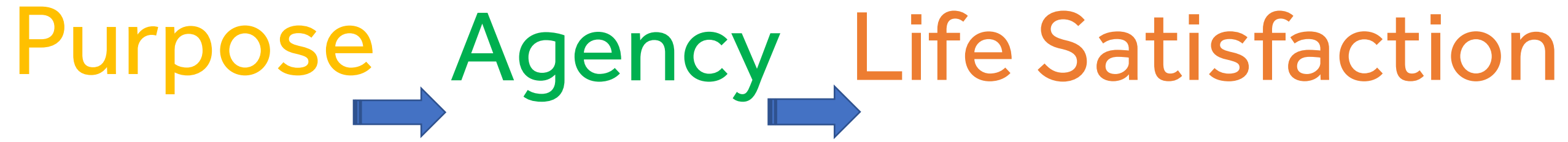
Purpose is linked to positive health outcomes:

- ✓ Better sleep
- ✓ Fewer strokes & heart attacks
- ✓ Lower risk of dementia
- ✓ Lower risk of premature death



Purpose is linked to preventative health measures:

- ✓ More likely to embrace preventative health services (mammograms, flu shots)
- ✓ Lower levels of pro-inflammatory gene expression



Purpose is linked to financial + personal success:

- ✓ Higher incomes
- ✓ Healthier, longer-lasting relationships
- ✓ Less tumultuous lifestyles

Purpose → Agency



Life Satisfaction



**What is asked of me?
How hard will it be?
Am I up to the task?**

Purpose can shape how we
see our environment, and
how we perceive the
challenges in front of us.

Burrow, Hill et al 2015

**NOT FOR SCHOOL
BUT FOR LIFE**

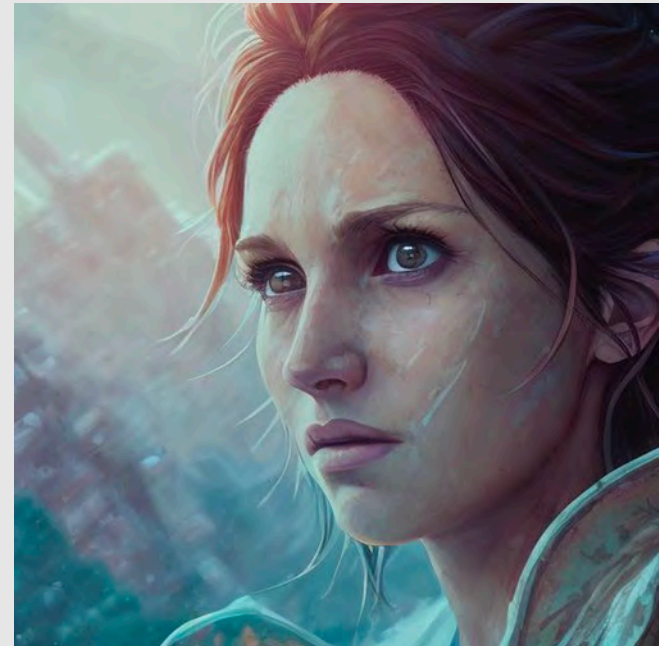
We learn

- Seneca

Part III: The Program

Small-steps programs boost self-efficacy by turning daunting concepts into pleasurable explorations of possibility. Play along...

(If you made an AI selfie avatar this week, you can do this.)





**Let's make
it personal:**

**Strengthen your
sense of**

purpose

**on a daily basis,
starting today**

Try it for yourself

Three Core Values

Authority	Varied life	Peace	Friendship	National security
Leadership	Exciting life	Beauty	Accepting one's	Stability of
Dominance	Creativity	Unity with	portion in life	social order
Success	Freedom	nature	Humility	Reciprocation
Capability	Independence	Protecting the	Devoutness	of favors
Ambition	Curiosity	environment	Respect for	Health
Influence	Choosing your	Inner harmony	tradition	Sense of
Intelligence	own goals	Helpfulness	Moderation	belonging
Self-respect	Broadmindedness	Honesty	Self-discipline	Spirituality
Pleasure	Wisdom	Forgiveness	Obedience	Love
Enjoying life	Social justice	Loyalty	Cleanliness	
Daring activities	Equality	Responsibility	Family security	

Three Key Strengths/Gifts

Adding Humor	Doing the Numbers	Instructing People	Researching Things
Advancing Ideas	Empowering Others	Investigating Things	Resolving Disputes
Analyzing Information	Exploring the Way	Making Connections	Seeing Possibilities
Awakening Spirit	Facilitating Change	Making Deals	Seeing the Big Picture
Breaking Molds	Fixing Things	Making Things Work	Selling Intangibles
Bringing Joy	Getting Participation	Managing Things	Shaping Environments
Bringing out Potential	Getting Things Right	Moving Physically	Solving Problems
Building Relationships	Getting to the	Opening Doors	Starting Things
Building Things	Heart of Matters	Operating Things	Straightening
Composing things	Giving Care	Organizing Things	Things Up
Creating Dialogue	Growing Things	Performing Events	Translating Things
Creating things	Healing Wounds	Persuading People	Writing Things
Creating Trust	Helping Overcome	Processing Things	
Designing Things	Obstacles	Putting the Pieces	
Discovering Resources		Together	

Three Impact Groups

Children and youth

Local commerce

My clients

My family

My friends

My work

The climate

The planet

Animals

Retirees

Veterans

My spiritual group

The environment

My community

My country

The global community

The less fortunate

The marginalized

My personal growth

Fellow citizens

My school/alma mater

My team

Because I value _____,

_____ and _____

I will use my gifts for

_____, _____ and

_____ to positively

impact _____,

_____ and _____

Because I value relationships ,
perseverance and creativity

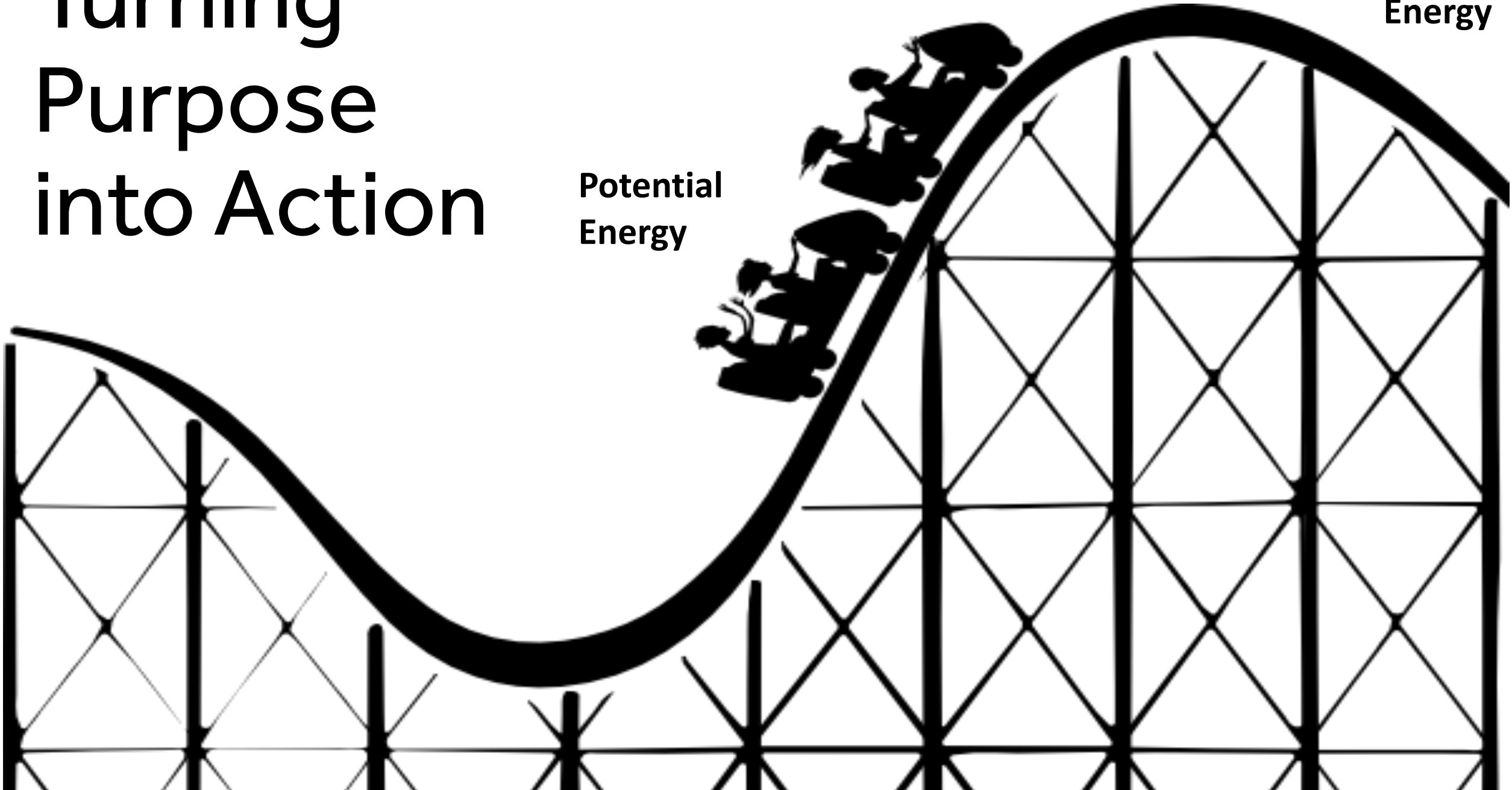
I will use my gifts for translating
research, making connections and
organization

to positively impact the lives of my
children, my students and the
broader public.

Turning Purpose into Action

Potential
Energy

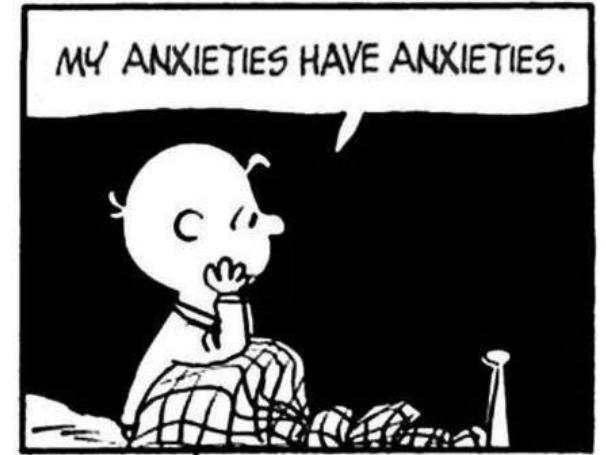
Kinetic
Energy





Anxieties and fears that hold us back

- Public speaking
- Making a mistake
- Never being content
- Failure
- Not being successful
- Being ridiculed
- Meeting new people
- Looking dumb
- Being trapped
- Being invisible
- Not finding a job
- Disappointing people
- Illness/pain
- Being alone
- Not belonging anywhere
- Not being loved
- Making the wrong decision
- Poverty
- Authority
- Death



Yeah-Buts that stop us in our tracks

- I'm too young, too old, too smart or not smart enough.
- I'm not a risk-taker.
- I'm not persuasive enough.
- My ideas aren't captivating enough.
- I'm not committed enough.
- It's just so difficult to decide what to do.
- I'm really trying. It's not my fault. Really!
- I don't have enough talent.
- It takes too much work, and that's not my style.
- I should have been born earlier.
- I'm afraid, and that must be telling me something.
- I don't have enough money.

**I accept my fears and
anxieties about....**

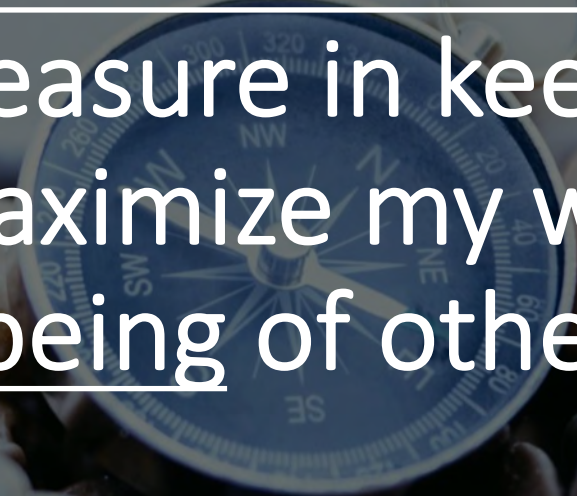


Purpose-Based Commitments:

Stepping Stones to
Purposeful Living

SPENDING = VALUES

How can I spend my limited resources of time, talent and treasure in keeping with my values to maximize my well-being and the well-being of others?



What are three purpose based commitments you can make right now to live your purpose statement?

“PURPOSE
IS THE PLACE
WHERE YOUR DEEP
GLADNESS
MEETS THE
WORLD’S NEEDS.”

~ FREDERICK BUECHNER



Christine's Daily Purpose Statement December 10, 2022

Because I value relationships, perseverance and creativity, I will use my gifts for translating research, making connections and organization to positively impact the lives of my children, my students and the broader public. I accept my fears and anxieties about not being perfect enough, imposter syndrome and financial concerns for the future and still today make conscious, purpose-based commitments to deliver a great plenary lecture, plan out the next few weeks of holiday hosting and check in with my students on their final projects. **#dailypurposestatement**

**Now, every time I witness
a strong person,
I want to know:
What dark did you *embrace*
in your story ?
Mountains do not rise
without earthquakes.**

– Katherine MacKennett

Applied Learnings

Learn more in my 10-lecture series, free with an Audible trial. It made the AP Bestseller List!!

- **Purpose matters for grad students!** This is the time to be asking what matters most, why does it matter and how to make it happen—because intrinsic motivation and meaning-making is key to life satisfaction in graduate school and beyond.
- **Purpose is a verb, not a noun.** Live your purpose today by taking small steps to use your gifts, in keeping with your values, to make a positive impact on the lives of others.
- **Try a daily purpose statements for you, your team and your students.** Visit <http://www.christinewhelan.com> to download free worksheets.

