

THE **PURPOSE MYTH**

Change the World,
Not Your Job



CHARLOTTE CRAMER



The Purpose Myth

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By Charlotte Cramer

12-minute read

Synopsis

The Purpose Myth (2020) dispels the idea that what you do to earn a living should also be your life's driving purpose. Although many job offers are posted as fulfilling opportunities, the reality of office life remains banal. This book offers clear guidance on how to find the joy and satisfaction that's too often lacking at work.

Who is it for?

- People looking to put some purpose back into their lives
- Aspiring entrepreneurs on the hunt for inspiration
- Anyone who finds their day job unfulfilling

About the author

Charlotte Cramer is a neuroscience researcher, speaker, and cofounder of CRACK + CIDER, a nonprofit that helps people struggling with homelessness. As a strategy consultant, Cramer has worked with Google, Facebook, and VICE. Her work has been featured in the *Guardian*, *Fast Company*, and on BBC News.

What's in it for me? Discover your life's true purpose.

It's easy to feel like our lives lack purpose. And it's no wonder. In recent decades, we've been disconnected from traditional hubs of community – like church and family – and we've filled the void with endless scrolling and mindless consumerism.

Research shows that people will take a pay cut and work longer hours just to feel like their vocation has some meaning. But 70 percent of millennials say they want to quit their jobs because they lack purpose.

The journey to intellectual and emotional fulfillment begins by acknowledging that your job is not your life's work. But there *are* other ways you can contribute to a better world. In these blinks, you'll learn how to discover what's truly meaningful to you and how you can make a difference.

In these blinks, you'll learn

- why your job isn't fulfilling;
- how to begin to find purpose in your life; and
- how this journey will reveal what's truly meaningful to you.

The idea that your job must fulfill you is a myth.

"Hi, so what do you do?"

You've likely had a dinner party moment like this. And unless you're lucky enough to have your dream job, your answer may feel somewhat embarrassing. Somehow it can feel like you're being judged. That's because it's a widespread— yet false— belief that what we do is who we are.

In previous generations, jobs actually did reflect who you were. Whether you were a baker or a builder, what you did was understood by your community – especially if they liked your bread. But as much as these jobs might have been part of someone's identity, purpose was found in other places, like at church or at home.

Nowadays, we're more disconnected from religion and family; on top of that, our jobs are a little more vague. And yet, most job postings promise meaningful and fulfilling opportunities. Well, that's because HR departments have figured out that the language of purpose is a great way to reel in promising applicants.

The key message here is: The idea that your job must fulfill you is a myth.

And the idea that your job is an expression of your identity, that it can truly give your life meaning, is driven by market capitalism. That's because when people see hard work and spending money as a part of

who they are, they're more likely to do those things. But, ultimately, these activities aren't fulfilling.

So what *do* we need in order to feel fulfilled?

The author, Charlotte Cramer, interviewed over a hundred people and identified three core needs. First, we need to *survive* – to have our material needs met. Next, to feel emotionally and spiritually fulfilled, we need to *strive* and feel like we're making a difference in the world. And last, we need to *thrive* by learning new things and satisfying our curiosity.

Unfortunately, most jobs only satisfy the first need – allowing us to survive by giving us a paycheck. Rarely do our jobs allow us to strive or thrive. It was only when Cramer started her Purpose Project that she was finally able to experience the feeling of doing meaningful work. Not only was she able to strive toward making the world better, but the work also helped her to thrive by taking her outside of her comfort zone.

Purpose Projects are fulfilling because they're driven by passion.

So, your job might be unfulfilling. But how is a Purpose Project supposed to help?

A Purpose Project is a side hustle – something you can do to fulfill your need to strive and thrive while keeping your day job. When your actions line up with your core values, you tap into intrinsic motivation – the internal spirit that inspires and drives you.

And as you dive into your Purpose Project, you're going to need to be inspired. That's because you'll be giving up your free time, staying dedicated when the going gets tough, and probably not getting paid for your efforts. But, as Dan Pink noted in his book *Drive*, studies have shown that intrinsic motivation not only helps people work harder – it allows them to enjoy the work.

The key message here is: Purpose Projects are fulfilling because they're driven by passion.

But how do you tap into your intrinsic motivation? Start with an hour of honest self-reflection. Think about your values, morals, and beliefs to help you identify your "why" – the underlying reason driving your Purpose Project.

Once you pinpoint your purpose, immediately take action to reinforce it. Picking up a pen and beginning to draft your novel *now* is way more powerful than saying you'll start tomorrow. That's because your sense of self is influenced by what you do – so the more you actually tackle the goals you've set, the more you grow to believe in yourself.

Soon, you'll find yourself striving – feeling fulfilled by making a difference. But in order to thrive, you'll also have to push yourself. Consider doing something you've never done before – like learning a new task, working

with an ambitious team, or delivering against a tight deadline.

All this hard work will pay off; it sets the foundation for lifelong confidence. By challenging yourself and thriving, you'll not only earn the respect of others but also strengthen your belief in yourself. Behavioral psychologists cite this as the prime factor when it comes to accomplishing goals.

At this point, it's natural to feel a little afraid. You probably have an idea percolating in your brain – something truly meaningful to you. But it's also scary. What if you fail? It's true that you can't fail if you never try. But imagine for a second how good it would feel if you tried and succeeded.

The most successful ideas are surprising and simple.

OK, so you're brimming with enthusiasm and are ready to start – RIGHT NOW! But what exactly are you starting?

In 2015, Cramer launched her own Purpose Project called CRACK + CIDER. She created an online marketplace where people could buy essentials, like socks and jackets, for people experiencing homelessness. This simple idea took years to bring to fruition, but the hard work paid off. Ultimately, CRACK + CIDER raised over \$100,000, helped over 40,000 people, and led to speaking engagements at TEDx and SXSW.

The key message here is: The most successful ideas are surprising and simple.

Here's how you can get started with your idea. First, find a problem that you're truly passionate about solving. Not only will your passion attract others to help you, but it'll allow you to remain flexible about the solution. You'll be working toward a particular goal and not just the creation of some nifty product.

Once you've found the problem, try asking yourself the "Five Whys." This is an exercise that'll help you explore why the problem exists. Start with your problem, and ask why it's happening – each subsequent answer is met with another why until you get to the root of the problem. With CRACK + CIDER, the Five Whys revealed that people don't want to give money directly to the homeless because they don't know if the money will go to items that homeless people actually need. This insight allowed Cramer to understand the human motivation behind the problem and helped her design an effective solution.

Ultimately, what you're going for is an idea that's surprising and simple – something that makes people wonder, *Why didn't I think of that?* Again, it's time to brainstorm! Set aside at least two hours to concentrate, either alone or with a team. Quantity is more important

than quality at this point, so write everything down. There's no such thing as a bad idea. So, as you collect ideas, practice saying "Yes, and . . ." for each. Doing so won't only improve the idea; it'll also help pinpoint how to make it real.

In the end, you'll probably have a bunch of pretty good ideas that you may be tempted to merge. Don't. This will overcomplicate things – and you're going for simple, remember? The simpler it is, the greater the chance of success. And don't forget, your idea can't just be cool – it has to solve your problem. Because while having fun is great, you won't be striving and thriving unless you're actually working toward a solution.

Find a memorable name that captures the essence of your project.

When Cramer was trying to come up with a name for her own project, she and her partner decided on CRACK + CIDER precisely because it's edgy, and highlights the widespread assumption that homeless people would only buy intoxicants if they were given money directly. Cramer felt that a provocative name would help their project garner attention and spark a little debate.

A really great name can do a lot of work for you: it can provoke, inspire, and make your project stick in people's minds. So make sure you end up with something memorable.

The name of your project is the most condensed expression of your idea. It's also the aspect of your project that's going to travel the furthest. This is why you need a name that resonates with people enough to get them to click or share it.

The key message here is: Find a memorable name that captures the essence of your project.

However, to start with, simply look for something that has potential. You're still early on in the process; at this point, there really aren't any *great* names. Just imagine you decided to call your project Nike. Sure, it's kinda catchy, but without a full-fledged brand identity, it's just something pulled from Greek mythology.

Begin by considering what kind of name you want. Descriptive names do just that: describe. Suggestive names, like CRACK + CIDER, use metaphors or association to hint at what the project is doing. They're also the most common type of name because they're unique and functional while also being creative. Last, blank-canvas names, like Apple or Google, are totally unrelated to the product they provide – but over time they begin to become a synonym for that product.

Now start asking random questions: Where did your idea come from? What inspired you? Who does this problem affect? Try explaining your answers in two or three words. Hit the thesaurus and see if the synonyms strike you. Write down any other associations that come

to mind. Once you have around 100 words, circle the ones that excite you, and play around with putting them together.

Finding the right name is the beginning of building your brand – your project’s personality – and it’s created through a combination of language, tone, and actions. All of these things add up to emotional value for your audience, making them more likely to engage and get excited about your project.

To win people over, you'll need a pitch-perfect pitch.

Once you’ve come up with your idea, you have to sell it. In the early stages, you probably won’t have much to sell, but you’ll still need help – either with logistics or to simply spread the word about your project. And to get it, you’ll need to come up with a concise and memorable pitch.

To explain why this is so important, Cramer recounts how she once attended the launch of a social networking platform. The CEO gave an impassioned speech, but by the end, Cramer still had no clue what his company did. Without a good pitch, the CEO missed the opportunity of having all the party-goers talking about his product the next day.

Maybe you’re thinking this sounds like shallow marketing talk – with a truly moving and profound idea, won’t people automatically want to join in and offer their support? Well, the short answer is no. In a world where everything is constantly vying for your audience’s attention, your pitch is what’ll sell them on your awesome idea.

The key message here is: To win people over, you'll need a pitch-perfect pitch.

For your pitch to be effective, it’s got to be short and surprising.

Start by drafting a pitch and putting it up on your wall. Look at it every day, and ask how you can simplify it. Can you get it down to one breath? Can you explain it to a ten-year-old?

Next, you need to prepare different versions. Your first floor pitch is the single sentence elevator pitch – the basic essence of your idea. Your fifth floor pitch builds on that essence by providing context – perhaps a bit about how the idea works. And your top floor pitch highlights the wins you’ve already achieved, providing hard data that your idea actually works.

But no matter what pitch you use, you need to focus on engagement: get people to either buy something, contribute to your project, or simply check out your website. To help get their support, situate your project in their day-to-day life. For instance, when pitching CRACK + CIDER, Cramer would ask her audience if

they ever saw homeless people while going to work. She’d then offer her project as a way to help them.

Over time, you’ll find that the more you pitch, the better you’ll get at both explaining your idea and learning who your true audience is. And if you’ve found the pitch-perfect pitch, it’s sure to spark real interest – people will want to help you and share your project with others.

To begin changing your life, set clear goals and use your time effectively.

Life is busy. So while a Purpose Project sounds great in theory, you might already be getting stressed-out and thinking, *This isn’t the right time.*

Cramer struggled to find time to write her book. For years, she told herself that she had to save enough money so she could quit her job and focus on writing. When she finally did that, she found that she only spent two hours a day writing – something she could have easily accomplished in the mornings and evenings while still working at her job.

While there are many forces conspiring to hold you back from pursuing your Purpose Project – like procrastination or fear of failure – the time is there. You just have to use it better.

The key message here is: To begin changing your life, set clear goals and use your time effectively.

Start by getting your priorities straight. Take a suggestion from billionaire investor Warren Buffet: make a list of 25 goals, circle the top five, and forget about the rest until those top five are complete.

Next, start fighting back against the attention economy. Apps like Instagram and Facebook were engineered to grab your attention, so put your phone out of sight and turn off all your notifications – that’s right, *all of them*. Worried that you’ll miss an important message? Don’t be – you won’t. In fact, try to do most of your work offline. Write in Word or use Google Docs offline, draft emails in Notes, or even dust off that old paper notebook. The point is to minimize distractions; this time is *your life*.

Last, we need to talk about resistance. In *The War of Art*, Steven Pressfield describes resistance as the force that thwarts you when you have a real goal. The more important the goal, the more vulnerable you are, so the more resistance kicks in – and kicks your ass. Procrastination, perfectionism, and fear of failure are all forms of resistance. Unfortunately, the only cure is to face your fear and just start working.

We all have a tendency to put things off because we hold false beliefs about our future selves. We think that in the future we’ll be smarter, stronger, or at least better rested. But it’s more likely that our future selves will be like our current selves – procrastinating the start of a

project that could forever change our lives. So don't wait; the time to start is now!

Final summary

The key message in these blinks is that:

Your job isn't your be-all and end-all when it comes to fulfillment; your Purpose Project, a side hustle you're passionate about, will prove to you that life can be so much more. So set aside any worries and procrastination tendencies, and start working on it – like, right now! While there are going to be further challenges down the road, you have all you need to get going. As you set about achieving this dream, keep in mind why you got started in the first place: you only have one life to live, and it'd be a shame to spend it doing something meaningless.

And here's some more actionable advice:

Avoid perfectionism at all costs!

Perfectionism is a fool's errand that typically results in procrastination or anxiety. Instead, look to the greats for inspiration. Picasso made thousands of pieces of art but is known for just a handful of them. Edison had thousands of patents but went down in history for the light bulb. In other words, extraordinary people often produce crap and failure before they get to the idea that works. So instead of trying to be perfect, simply ask yourself how you can make your work better.

Got feedback?

We'd love to hear what you think about our content! Just drop an email to remember@blinkist.com with *The Purpose Myth* as the subject line and share your thoughts!