

**THE PATH TO PURPOSE:
HELPING OUR CHILDREN
FIND THEIR CALLING
IN LIFE**

by William Damon

Summary & Worksheet

The Book In Three Or More Sentences:

This is madness! According to the text, over 45% of undergraduates display serious signs of depression. The reason? Lack of purpose and direction. Thankfully, we have *The Path to Purpose* by William Damon. This short book aims to give parents the tools and the vocabulary to help their kids find meaning in life. The studies, and the in-depth interviews shared inside, will encourage students (and not only) to successfully discover, define, and pursue purposeful missions in their own lives.

The Core Idea:

Finding a worthy goal in life is essential for achieving happiness and satisfaction. Infect your child with a desire to pursue a life aimed towards a noble purpose. A life aimed towards solving problems, not wandering without a clear agenda. And while professor Damon targets mainly students, the insights in this book can be beneficial for everyone feeling a sense of emptiness in their soul and mind.

Highlights:

- *Kids lacking purpose live longer with their parents and don't move forward in life.*
- *Parents should offer support and expose their kids to a variety of options.*
- *The easiest way to find direction in life is to engage in solving a worthy problem.*

5 Key Lessons from The Path to Purpose:

- *Lesson #1: Life Without Purpose Leads to Emptiness*
- *Lesson #2: Why kids lack purpose? Outside Pressure, Absence of Support and Goals*
- *Lesson #3: People Are Divided Into Several Categories In Terms Of Purpose In Life*
- *Lesson #4: There are Seven Steps To Find a Purposeful Quest*
- *Lesson #5: The Long-Term Path You're Going To Pursue Must Be Chosen by You*

Lesson #1: Life Without Purpose Leads to Emptiness

Guess what? If you don't have a clear direction in your life, you're slowly drowning in a sea of confusion. Self-doubt and anxiety are taking over – gaining full control of your body and mind.

This leads?

People start to feel disappointed and discouraged. Motivation is lacking and the spark to do something, anything, starts to fade.

But instead of acknowledging the missing piece and searching for a solution, most youngsters fall under one of the following 3 categories of despair:

- Anxiety: "I'm so stressed out!"
- Cynicism: "Like I should care?"
- Apathy: "Whatever!"

This phenomenon is observed in countries around the world.

According to the findings in the book, the British government was the first to acknowledge the lack of purpose in teens. The desire to move forward is apparently missing. That's why they coined the term Young NEETs. This stands for Not in Education, Employment, or Training.

Instead of striving to get better and to find a meaningful job. Students are more likely to move back home with their parents without regret.

This directionless is not only a burden for the parents but it's also destructive for young people.

William Damon argues that the only way teens can transition from adulthood is by committing to a career, starting a family, or begin solving a worthy problem.

Lesson #2: Why kids lack purpose? Outside Pressure, Absence of Support and Goals

The investigation conducted by the author identified three main reasons people are not capable of forming a sense of direction in their lives:

1. Outside pressure

When parents put too much pressure on their children to study something not aligned with their interests, kids usually rebel.

Instead of listening to their kids, mothers and fathers are pushing them towards paths they don't find interesting. The outcome is disengaged kids who just want to sit and do nothing.

“My mom “wants me to have my own choices, but she wants my choices to be math and science.” Ben, age twelve

2. Lack of help from parents

Some folks are ambitious and do want to achieve worthy goals. But since they lack experience, they can't formulate a plan for reaching their desired goals. And sadly, often parents fail to realize that their kids need support.

This inadequacy leads to frustration and alienation from their desired goals and most probably from their parents.

“Many parents do not see it as their responsibility to actively help their adolescents form plans for their futures.” Barbara Schneider

3. Absence of a worthy goal

Some people are just lacking motivation. They want to travel the world. To explore. To rest.

They are careless and proud.

Some people will say that these folks are simply lazy. But the author argues that the real problem is “the lack of a source of motivation.”

Again, this puts a spotlight on the parents. Probably they failed to transmit a sense of direction to their kids. Thus, they now seek easy and laid back life.

“I don’t know what I’m going to take next term. They make you pick some courses. I’ll just say ‘what the hell’ and flip a coin or something.” Tommy, an eighteen-year-old from Pennsylvania

Lesson #3: People Are Divided Into Several Categories In Terms Of Purpose In Life

It’s vital to involve yourself, and inspire others around you, in pursuing a path that can lead to a better future. But not only for yourself, but also for humanity as a whole.

In the book, William Damon defines four different groups of people based on how they approach meaningful pursuit.

The disengaged

Careless, inactive people who don’t participate in any additional activities. Sadly, they don’t even show signs of interest to involve themselves in something extra to do. It seems like, beyond their mundane desires, nothing else exists.

The dreamers

They dream big. They talk loud and they can explain for hours how their acts will change the world. Alas, they rarely do what they talk about and have made little progress on their ideas.

The dabblers

Dabblers have an idea about what they want to do and usually are putting the work. The main problem is that they engage in far too many pursuits. The lack of serious commitment leads to short-lived goals that are quickly replaced with new ones. Thus, tasks are always unfinished.

The purposeful

The A students in terms of pursuing something meaningful. This group of people is dedicated to their long-term goals. They know why they are

doing what they are doing and are taking daily steps to achieve their ambitions.

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Based on the researches in the group, unfortunately, only 20 percent of young people interviewed were tagged purposeful. The other 80 percent of people fall into one of the other groups.

“If we do not provide our young people with positive guidance to inspire their behavior, they may well seek guidance of a less positive sort.” William Damon

Lesson #4: There are Seven Steps To Find a Purposeful Quest

Getting in trouble? Drifting through life without a clear sense of direction? Laughing at people who talk about goals and life-long missions?

It's not entirely your fault.

A lot of folks feel the same way as you do – living to survive and focusing solely on earning money.

While self-motivated people can easily find their direction in the world, it's rarely so obvious for the rest of us.

What can be done?

William Damon identified several steps that are essential for finding a purposeful path in your life.

Here's a summary of the process with short comments:

1. Conversations with people outside your family: If your parents are not pushing you towards finding a worthy task in life, talk with other people to find inspiration.
2. Observing what other purposeful people do: See what others are doing. Watch what they do and how their efforts are helping society.
3. First moment of revelation: There's a problem in the world and it should/can be corrected: At some point, you'll start to see problems in the world other people accepted.
4. Second moment of revelation: There's a problem in the world and I can help to make things better: The “Aha” moment in terms of find-

ing purpose. The moment you realize that you can do something to solve the problem that's keeping you awake.

5. Defining the purpose and initial attempts to solve the problem: Your early attempts probably won't work but that's not important. The important thing is to spot your flaws and to continue getting better.
6. Get support from family members: Getting support from parents and other people is essential. At some point, you'll feel exhausted. Fortunately, these days is relatively easy to find a support group – just search online.
7. Acquiring the needed skills and making a lasting commitment: Once you know what you want to do, upgrade your skills and commit to this task.

In essence, a challenging purpose that's worth committing to is usually in response to a problem you see in the world.

For example, you want to raise money to provide clean drinking water for families in Africa. Or, you're fed up with the pollution and you want to raise awareness for climate change.

The problem is so big, that most people think it's impossible - that's why they don't try.

But not you!

And that's the beauty of having a noble mission in life. You know it can't be solved for a year or two. You probably realize that it won't be solved even during the time you are alive. But you still do it because you want your efforts to inspire generations to come.

Lesson #5: The Long-Term Path You're Going To Pursue Must Be Chosen By You

Purpose is not something you can assign to others. You cannot force others to be interested in something. Every person needs to figure out, on their own, a sense of purpose in what they're doing.

If you're a parent, don't try too hard. Listen closely to what your kids are saying, watch what they're doing, and introduce different options.

As the author writes:

“Children must have a sense that they are finding their way toward purposes of their own choosing, and parents cannot make

these choices for them.” William Damon

Your job as a parent is to find the spark of interest buried somewhere deep inside your kid. Once you can identify it, to assist in letting it out.

“But how? I’m not a psychotherapist,” I hear you say.

Worry not.

The final chapter in the book offers a series of questions – actually a whole script – that will help you steer your kid towards something worthy.

Here are a couple of the questions mentioned in the book. They can surely be of assistance:

- What kinds of things do you really care about? Why do you care about these things?
- What’s most important to you in your life? Why is that important to you?
- What are you learning that seems important to you?
- If you were looking back on your life, how would you want to be remembered? What would you want to be remembered for? Why?
- Earlier you talked about [x] being important to you. Can you tell me how and why this became important? When did it become important to you?
- Summing up, what do you think matters most to you at this time? Will that still matter most to you as you get older? Why/Why not?

As you can note, asking why all the time is vital.

This questionnaire is not only useful for interviewing others. It can also help you, find your calling.

Just sit, and answer the questions yourself.

Actionable Notes:

- Face more problems: How people approach problems? They avoid them. But if you’re clueless and if you don’t know what to do in life, you need to face more problems. That’s how you can find purpose. If you’re mostly hanging around the same people, it’s a good idea to find new connections. New friendships will introduce you to new problems. New problems lead to the following revelation: “This

seems wrong. It needs correction or improvement. I can probably do something about it.”

- Everything in the world matters: Even if no one is watching, everything you do matters. Actually, the things you do when there’s no one around matter most. If you’re a parent, you need to communicate this with your children from an early age. After all, you can’t be around them all the time to bring order. You need to teach your kids that their actions have consequences – good and bad. After that’s done, ask your kids, “What matters most to you? And why do you think it matters?”
- What you’re doing to help people? When you feel down. When it seems like nothing matters, remind yourself why you’re doing what you’re doing. Your purpose will drive you in life and help you overcome the daily challenges that a lot of times seem boring or are quite hard to execute. So, when times are hard, remind yourself why you started. Think about your job beyond the mundane tasks. Ask yourself, “What am I doing to help people?”
- Introduce options, don’t make the choice for them: Forcing your child to commit to a certain task, school, job is a dead-end street. Your kid will either rebel or feel uninspired. As a parent, what you can do to help your teenager find direction in life is to introduce different options. To help them sort through the different choices and based on your child’s talent, help them decide where to go. Remember, you’re not the one to tell which path is the correct one for them, you’re only there to listen and give support.
- Find the buried spark: Everyone has a “spark” of interest buried somewhere. You simply need to find it. If you’re a parent, encourage your kid to explore the world. To try different things and to question their importance. The following questions in the book can be of assistance: “What’s most important to you in your life? Why do you care about those things? Do you have any long-term goals? Why are these goals important to you? What does it mean to have a good life?”

Commentary and My Personal Takeaway

I highly recommend this book to parents with kids who feel lost in the world. And not only!

If you, yourself, feel unmotivated and uninspired, read this book. It will help you shape a noble goal. Challenge you with difficult questions that will allow you to look at problems from a different perspective.

I consider Life of Purpose a useful guide that can help you turn your inexperienced youngsters into eager-to-learn risk-takers with a clear

mission and agenda.

Key takeaway?

Find a meaningful purpose in your life.

Without a purpose, you will feel unworthy. Demotivated. Traumatized.

Purpose is the driving force. The key motivator. The thing that will get you out of bed and aid you in accomplishing seemingly boring tasks.

But when you're on a lookout to involve yourself in a task, don't just pick any project. Grab a noble one. Let it be something that can cause good to the surrounding people.

Notable Quotes:

“If we do not provide our young people with positive guidance to inspire their behavior, they may well seek guidance of a less positive sort.” William Damon

“Purpose reaches out to the world beyond the self. It implies a desire to make a difference in the world, perhaps to contribute something to others, or create something new, or accomplish something of one's own.” William Damon

“Most important, children must not develop the habit of avoiding difficulties out of fear that they will not be able to deal with them.” William Damon

What to read next:

- Actionable [Book Summary: Barking Up the Wrong Tree](#) by Eric Barker
- Actionable [Book Summary: Personality: What Makes You the Way You Are](#) by Daniel Nettle
- Actionable [Book Summary: Mindset: The New Psychology of Success](#) by Carol S. Dweck

INTERACTIVE SHEET FOR NOTE-TAKING

Reading alone won't help you understand the actionable notes. You need to engage with the content. Answer the question below (just type inside the boxes) to outline your future steps:

1. Face more problems and think about what you can do to fix things:

2. What matters most to you? And why do you think it matters?

3. What you're doing to help people?

4. Introduce more purposeful options to your children:

5. What's the most important thing in your life? Why do you care about it?

Don't forget to save your changes.