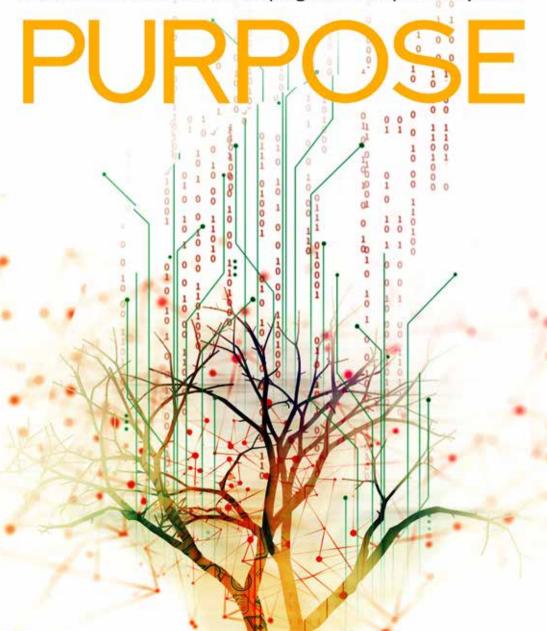
How Decisions in Life are Shaping Leadership Journeys with



Impact, Influence & Positive Transformation

22 Authentic and Bold Stories
by a Global Collective of Leadership Consultants

Curated by Eve Simon

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#### Introduction

# **The Spark**

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There's a saying that 7 people around the world have the same brilliant idea at the same time. Only those who are crazy enough and brave enough to act on this spark while including others in the process are innovative enough to bring their ideas to reality. This was certainly the case in the creation of this book.

I was inspired to bring people around the world together to share their deep authentic stories about how purpose became their driver in life and business.

My vision was to create a book that empowers, encourages and invites leaders – and by leaders I mean everyone, not just by position but by mindset – to look beyond the obvious, to drive change for the greater good and, last but not least, to live an authentic and self-actualized life.

There was no question about who I wanted to do this with: my colleagues and friends of the Oxford Leadership community. I'm grateful beyond words that many of them said yes to my crazy idea and started creating with me.

The book you are holding in your hands is not meant to be a lecturing book nor a sales pitch. Rather, it's a collection of authentic, bold and often vulnerable personal stories – all with an individual perspective and experience.

Herein you'll find 22 personal stories – some you may relate to more than others. Perhaps some of the stories will inspire you to reflect in ways that are surprising. Our intention was to move you through the sharing of our individual personal stories – regardless of the direction in which it takes you.

#### The book might help you find answers to questions you may have such as:

- » What impact can a purpose have on me and society?
- » Why do purpose-driven companies perform better?
- » Where does purpose come from?
- » How does purpose influence my life?
- » How do I even find my purpose?
- » Why do we as leaders need to reflect on purpose anyway?

You might feel inspired and uplifted. You may even find answers to questions you never considered before.

What unites us within the Oxford Leadership community is that we don't think of ourselves as working for a 'company' just to earn a paycheck – rather, a purpose to be aligned with. We all share a common purpose at Oxford Leadership to 'Transform Leaders for Good'. And even though we are all independent, this is what brought us together through the years for clients all over the world.

Throughout our personal development and growth journeys, we've all experienced the power to start within. Self-mastery of emotions, thoughts, vision, values, barriers, and purpose is the key to greater impact. This is what the world needs – leaders who become conscious and alive to powerfully use their influence to make an impact for the greater good – for the people they lead and the society they touch.

Staying true to your purpose and bringing a vision into the world isn't always easy. Sometimes you need to lean in even further, face the shadows, describe an outcome you don't even know yet, or convince people beyond some present context.

My personal vision became our vision and thus it came alive. I am deeply grateful for every contribution ... for every one of the dearest authors, muses, vision givers and storytellers who said yes and went the extra mile to put their purpose into writing.

Ecosystems such as the one from Oxford Leadership are more likely to survive the future because they share, contribute, support, expand, adapt and cherish their relationships. They fly freely, connected by a deeper purpose. Isn't this the superpower of the 21st century?

I believe in the collective, with each individual making the whole complete. The world will be healthier with individuals and companies who are driven by a purpose higher than themselves. Leaders are not those who are defined by their titles but rather by a mindset that will challenge the status quo to create new solutions. I believe business is the driving force for creating a society where everyone can thrive. Purpose is giving us an innate superpower to go this extra mile, not for personal benefit but for the greater good.

May you gain great insights inspired by our stories and the love between the lines.

In gratitude,

Eve Simon Curator of the PURPOSE book



# Making the Most Out of this Book

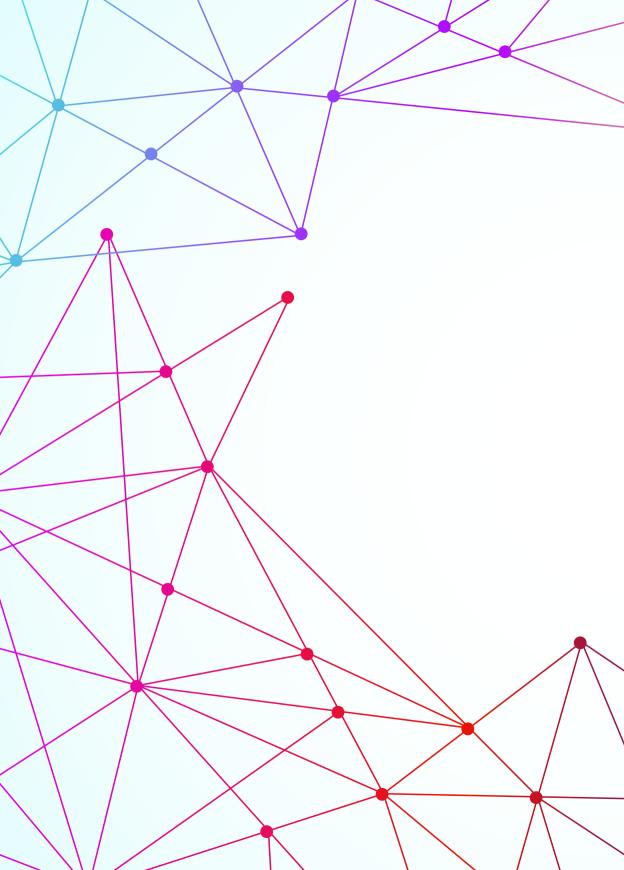
As you dive into the following 22 chapters, we invite you to take some time inbetween reading to reflect on your own journey toward your unique purpose. Above all, we hope you will get inspired by our authors' stories.

The following six questions will support you to learn more about what brings meaning to you in order to live a life in which your purpose can have more impact for you and others:

- 1. What are you most passionate about?
- 2. What would others say is your unique contribution?
- 3. What do you most enjoy doing when you tap into skills or talents that come naturally to you?
- 4. What did you love doing as a child before anyone had an opinion about it?
- 5. What would you do if you had no fear?
- 6. When you reflect upon your experiences and the competencies you have, what has life prepared you to give?

Life is a journey, and purpose ignites the path. Our awareness and the decisions we make influence how wisely we use our time on earth.

Enjoy!





defined by the strength of purposeful networks and their connectivity.

# **My Journey Towards My True Self**

#### by Agneta Dieden

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In 2011, I was recommended a three-day leadership program, the Self Managing Leadership, run by Oxford Leadership. I was very reluctant. Looking at the framework for the course, I could see that part of the process was defining an inner compass with values, purpose, and a vision – working with barriers. With a bit of arrogance, I thought I had done all that and it was part of my work as a coach.

The program immediately broke my hesitation and pulled me in. This was different from all the other leadership programs I attended. In three days it provided a solid process that enabled depth and clarity. Context setting with storytelling invited reflection. When we finished, I walked up to the trainer, who happened to be Brian Bacon, the founder of Oxford Leadership, and said "I found my purpose. This is what I want to do. I want to deliver these programs."

I met with other colleagues of Oxford Leadership and found something new. I found diversity, people from different countries with different backgrounds and personalities whose self-awareness was bigger than their ego. People who were not driven by money but by love for what they can give and contribute to in leadership and business. I put my own business on a pause button and started to deliver and design programs for Oxford Leadership. For the first time in my professional life, I felt belonging. I found my tribe.

Since then, almost nine years have passed. I have focused all my energy on Oxford Leadership, building business, designing and delivering programs as a facilitator and coach. It has been quite a ride.

I am mentored by my wholehearted colleagues. We give each other constant feedback and in addition to the evaluations we get from the groups, it can be quite tough. If we don't grow and evolve, we cannot bring that quality to our groups. We give of our whole selves and if we are not authentic, people sense it.

If I step into the overachiever and over-prepare, I lose my heart and soul. I need to dare to be vulnerable and true and at the same time have focus.

What works for me is to have a clear intention, presence and then let go. Every time is different and that is the beauty of the programs we deliver at Oxford Leadership. It's blissful to be a catalyst for people connecting to their purpose and to do what I'm passionate about. It is the grace I called for during a vision quest to Death Valley in 2008.

One thing I have learned through my purpose journey is the impact of setting an intention. I set my daily intention early in the morning and it affects the outcome of the day. I set my intention before I step into a meeting and it affects the outcome. The intention is about what quality I want to bring and how things are going to work out. When I set the intention of "effortlessly," meaning no struggle, and open up to the possibility of everything working out seamlessly, it somehow does. I have not stopped being surprised by the magic and simplicity that setting intention brings to life.

### Starting the journey toward my true self

A dragonfly lands on my chest.

I see its trembling wings with the colors that the light brings forward. What does it want to say to me?

It says life is fragile and we shall take good care of it. Each of us brings meaning to life. You do not need to be big and strong to start a journey. I'm sitting in the April afternoon sun gathering light after the long, dark Swedish winter. Yes, I have done an inner journey, many journeys. It has been strenuous, at times painful, but enormously enriching.

I will share some of my experiences from an open and personal point of view, starting at the age of 16 until now, my late 50s. Everyone's journey is different. In essence, we all search for meaning and we all have a history that shaped us. We bring meaning to life and it is done by being true to ourselves, using our gifts and experiences in a meaningful way. Most of us grow up and try to fit in and then at some point some of us, including myself, start to reflect upon who we really are. Who am I really? And the journey starts towards something that feels truer. Swedish economist and former United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld once said, "The longest journey is the journey inwards." Sometimes I have wondered Does it never end? The answer is no. It's eternal. I take myself to new levels of awareness, to something which is more in alignment

with my inner core. There is no one recipe for this. It's a quest that continues through life. It's like peeling the skin of an onion and discovering a new layer underneath. Once you start peeling, you cannot put the skin back. Instead, you peel the next layer, and then the next, and you see and understand more. That does not always make life easier. Being truer to myself involves making conscious choices and those choices can bring me outside my comfort zone. The reward is happiness coming from a greater sense of belonging and meaning.

#### An existential crisis: Who am I in all this?

I'm in the dining room of my childhood home working on embroidery homework from school. Embroidery requires focused attention. I'm 16 years old and my mind easily drifts away in all kinds of thoughts.

My parents have guests coming over and while passing the dining room they greet me. One of them looks me in the eyes and says, "So, you are 16 now. I remember it's not always easy to be that age." His eyes are kind and a bit sad. I'm instantly connected to the sadness inside me. Yes, I find life challenging, trying to understand my role in the world. What is life about? Who am I in all this? Why do I have this feeling of not belonging?

I grew up in a middle-class family. Both my parents were hard-working people. Careful about how they spent their money, my father moved up the social ladder in order to make a career. The internalized message I have from my father is, life is hard work. From my mother it was, It's important to fit into a social context, and good enough is exceeding expectations.

These messages contributed to the struggles and the successes I had in my life. It took some time before I became aware of how living these beliefs took me away from love and joy. Life became hard work and doing the right thing was something seen from the outside. It took therapy, meditation, travels, a deep dive into different spiritual practices, and inspirational, caring colleagues in order to break the patterns created from these beliefs.

I had my first existential crises as a 16-year-old. An existential crisis can be a window of opportunity. Either we open the window and leave some habits behind in order for something new to enter, or we close it until the next crisis comes. I chose to open it a bit.

I needed to find something to address the confusion inside. Watching the world from the eyes of a 16-year-old, I felt as if I was detached from the feeling of belonging in a group which I assumed everyone else was experiencing. What came my way was TM, transcendental meditation, which uses a silent mantra as a meditation technique. I was starting to dip my toe into the spiritual realm where being present with the unknown and the silence on the inside brought me calmness and trust. Life is beautiful the way it is. It might not be the way I want it to be, and I might not understand in the moment why certain things happen. Later in life, when I connect the dots, it will all come out fine.

#### Imperfection creates happiness. Not perfection.

The only thing that is perfect in life is the beauty of nature. Finding peace on the inside through the chattering mind helped me to see this. It's not that the chatter stopped. I don't think it ever will. By noticing it, I became better and better at coming back to what really mattered. It helped me find my inner center. Today when I meditate, I also feel love and enormous gratitude for what life brings. This feeling brings light into my day.

# Loneliness: Where do I belong?

I now understand the difference between belonging and fitting in. What I was trying to do was to accommodate to norms and wishes, to push myself into a form that was not truly mine. I achieved good grades at school, went to UCSC (University of California Santa Cruz) for a year, took my master 's in Science, MSc, in Sweden and started to work in sales as an account manager at IBM.

I achieved my sales quotas and made it to the 100% club. I could walk around with a 100% needle and join rewarding conventions abroad. On the outside it looked good, still, I had this insecure and fake feeling.

Working at IBM at the age of 26, I got the feedback from a colleague that he perceived me as secure, confident and successful. On the inside, I felt like I was not good enough, like a fraud trying to play an imposter role.

I could not pinpoint exactly what this was about since I did meet expectations. Real belonging happens when we are in touch with our authentic selves. Somehow, I had a taste of the authenticity, the real me, and I knew there was something more than the over-achieving person I had become. My approach to getting there was by pushing myself harder instead of letting go of my own inner critic who always push more. Letting go is trusting that good enough will do and help will come if needed. It is paradoxical how the effect of letting go can bring success rather than trying to control life. However, I did not understand that quite yet. Letting go also is leaving space for miracles and the unexpected in life.

### Become who you are

At the age of 38, I had two sons, aged 7 and 4. I left IBM after nine years. In my last position at IBM, I was part of the management team of IBM Financial Services where we focused on financing IBM solutions. I had felt a pull towards the area of human resources.

During my maternity leave, I started to study psychology at the University of Stockholm and that opened possibilities for a career change. I was now working for an international executive search firm as one of the few female partners globally. My husband and I were juggling double careers and the wish to be emotionally present with our kids as much as possible.

We had a high school girl picking them up from day care. My golden moment of the day was to come home in time to read them a good night story. Lying in our big bed with a child on each side. I still miss those moments of bliss when everything around me stopped and I was embraced by their love and curiosity.

Studying psychology was interesting, but not what I was searching for in terms of my purpose. I wanted something deeper, something that brought me closer to understand myself from the inside out. With kids and a husband and a demanding job, my life became like a project, organized in detail. I lost touch with myself.

Life was pulling me towards my second existential crisis when I received a copy of "Become who you are" by Piero Ferrucci. Piero's teachings stem from psychosynthesis. He was a student of Roberto Assagioli who developed psychosynthesis, a discipline known as psychology with a soul. I felt it was something special. I had an urge to do something that broke my habitual patterns. I decided right then to study it. I did not even need to read the book.

It happened to be a four-year therapist training curriculum. It ran into weekend studying, so I could still do my job as an executive search consultant. My main reason to join the training was to learn more about myself. Five years later, after being in therapy with three different therapists, trying to outsmart the first one, finding the second one too soft, and sort of giving up on the third one, I had better self-awareness. I still felt as if there was something blocking me. I realized: I´m not my mind, I´m not my feelings, I´m not my body, I´m so much more."

## A step into the unknown: What is the more?

This period in my life was disruptive. The psychosynthesis training and the therapy started a process in myself. Being a person who throws myself into work wholeheartedly with passion and commitment, I was not recognizing myself. I was not happy and had lost my energy. One day I found myself crying. It was a burnout reaction, the doctor called it stress-related depression. I saw it as a kind of spiritual break down. I was not aligned with my true self and my entire body was revolting against me. The cost of conforming and sticking to the fact that I had a wonderful life with good pay, a great husband and lovely kids, did not work any longer. I had to start from a clean slate.

After six years of enjoying my work, it feels heavier and heavier to walk in through the door of the firm. Entering the office, I meet one of my partner colleagues. He looks at me and asks, "How are you, Agneta?" I give my usual answer with a bit of a strained smile, "Good, thanks." He looks at me again and asks, "How are you really?"

That question takes me off guard and I hear myself answer, "You know what? I think I'm going to quit!" It's not the answer he expects to get. We walk into my office and seat ourselves in my comfortable armchairs. I feel totally convinced. I am going to quit.

Energy bubbled up inside me. It happened to be my birthday and I was leaving life as a search consultant behind and stepping into the unknown.

When you stand up for your truth, you might get a bloody nose. For most people, it's crazy to quit a good job without knowing anything about the next step. People questioned my choice. There is something about going against the

mainstream that creates reactions. It did not take courage to decide to leave my job, yet afterward, I can see that it was an act of courage. Courage comes from the French word *coeur* which means heart. I was following my heart. I did not know how I was going to earn my living but I believed in myself. I always managed through dedicated work, persistence, and discipline. These qualities were my allies.

I moved away from the insecure overachiever at IBM. Through studies of psychology and therapy, I peeled off some layers of patterns that did not serve me. I was ready for a new chapter, a chapter that would bring me closer to my purpose. It was a lot to deal with – unworthiness, fear of failure and feelings of not belonging. I increased my self-awareness. There was still more to do on self-love and I felt a pull to continue to explore within contexts that were out of the ordinary.

When we speak about purpose at Oxford Leadership, we use the model of the harmonic triangle where the three corners are Self, Others, and Truth. The explanation is that when we connect to our "truth," our purpose, we want to give from that place. When we give unconditionally to others, we get something back in return. Somehow, synchronicities or meaningful coincidences, came my way.

I'm back at the Psychosynthesis Academy in Stockholm where I did my training. I'm there for a seminar. Diana Whitmore, one of the founders of the Psychosynthesis Trust in London is visiting Stockholm. She takes us into a visualization, "Remember the time you decided to become a therapist." I hear her words and my whole inside reacts. I never decided to become a therapist. My purpose is something else. I walk up to Diana afterward and tell her that. I'm too results oriented. She looks at me, smiles, and says "Maybe coaching? My husband is John Whitmore. He has introduced the GROW model in coaching and has a training in two weeks."

The gift of synchronicity showed up. Two weeks later, I'm sitting in another circle at a college outside London. Someone pulls out of the coaching training and I get the seat. Coaching assignments start to present themselves. Previous search clients call, and I find myself coaching people in a friend's paint studio. I listened to my inner voice telling me I should move on and I was on a new path.

## Searching for my true self

At age 44 I started building my own coaching business which was a challenge in itself. Coaching was not yet mainstream and I had to justify and explain when initiating sales calls. It was a struggle. I found an office to share with some other people and slowly business started to build. Since I was a partner of the search firm, I had some money. I could survive by making a lot less than I ever made. I was on a deeper quest for purpose and connection both inside and outside and tried different things in parallel to my job. My quest took me to India, Peru, and Death Valley.

#### **India and Osho**

I had friends who went to the Osho center in Pune, India and came back feeling grateful and happy. I decided to try it out over a three-week Christmas break and signed up for an artistic painting class. Our teacher sparkled. When she felt we became too addicted to form, she walked by and splashed some color on our painting. Always smiling, she said things like, "Wow, what is emerging now?" It was amazing.

Letting go of control. I can see even more today how I can benefit from practicing this attitude in many situations. Being in the moment, being curious about how human beings, like a piece of precious art, can unfold. The Osho guru thing, however, was not for me. I learned that I had to treat myself gently and break the rules if they go against my inner well-being. That is self-love. I did not follow the rituals of the Osho center. I did my painting and went my own way. It was a good lesson for me since I have a tendency to conform too much in order to secure belonging.

#### Peru and the Shamans

I'm hiking a five-day trail to the Choquequirao Ruins in the Sacred Valley of the Incas near Cusco at 3000 meters above the sea level. We are a group of fifteen people walking with three wisdom keepers, shamans. We are walking one step at a time, one breath at a time. The air is thin and crisp and I'm looking with awe at the donkeys and native people who easily make their way up the mountain. Every morning our helpers come to our tent with hot tea from the coca plant to give us an energy boost and to help prevent altitude sickness. When I drink my tea, my breath creates smoke in the cold air. During the day it gets warmer. It's beautiful. With the stunning deep canyons and the snow on the peaks, the

scenery helps to pull me forward, to stop and see the beauty as it is, to put sore feet into a stream and feel how it cleans and brings clarity. I get even more convinced. Nature gives us our answers.

The next step on my search for a deeper connection from the inside out became an energy-healing training in the tradition of the native Indians in Peru. By coincidence, I walked into a lecture in Stockholm with Alberto Villoldo from the Four Winds. This was in June 2005. There and then I decided to sign up for a week of training in England. It happened to be a six-week shamanic training that lasted for more than a year. I was not aware of this but felt I was onto something important that could take me further than the therapy. I had the same feeling as when I joined the psychosynthesis training, I just had to do it. I needed to continue to clear out patterns that prevented me from happiness with an approach that was beyond my mind, surrendering to a deeper intuitive knowing.

#### **Death Valley Vision Quest**

Nature continued to call me, and in 2008 I decided to go for a nine-day vision quest in Death Valley led by a man named Sparrow Heart. Vision quests are part of a Native American tradition. The quest is vision time spent in nature in solitude.

Part of my vision is bringing leaders into nature for a deeper connection to themselves and all that is. Everything is connected. With more collective wisdom we will have a better world. In order to bring vision quest elements into the corporate world, I knew I had to do the real thing myself. I needed to go first and learn from that experience.

In March 2008, we are a group of eight people who meet up with Sparrow Heart in the desert of Death Valley outside Las Vegas. We are starting a three-day prequest where we prepare ourselves mentally and emotionally.

The first night, I'm lying in my tent listening to the sound of the wind and the blowing sand. The canvas is fluttering, making me afraid of it breaking apart. I turn on my flashlight and scribble my intentions in my notebook. On one page I write with big letters "GRACE – less struggle." Underneath I write, "To step into my female power and wisdom becoming who I already am at the deepest level of my being, staying in the awareness of my essential nature." Maybe a bit pretentious but this vision resonates with me.

Three days later, all eight of us step over a line of stones, a threshold ritual, pronouncing our intention and what we want to leave behind. Through the hike, we find our individual power places far away from each other in the wilderness. I'm excited, determined and a bit afraid of the unknown. What if I meet a mountain lion, a rattlesnake, or even worse, inner shadows I don't want to deal with at all.

I'm alone in a canyon in Death Valley listening to the silence with no other gear but my sleeping bag and a too-small sleeping pad. It is the fourth and last night of my solo vision quest. The body is weak from fasting, drinking only water. I'm sitting in a circle of stones that the native American Indians call a "purpose circle." I have put out stones representing all my relations, my allies, who can possibly support me in connecting to my purpose. I'm going to stay here all night. Awake. The sun is setting over the sand dunes and coloring the sky red. In a few minutes, it will be pitch dark. I wonder how I'm going to manage to stay awake. At this moment, I see a scorpion crawl under one of the stones one meter away from me. I feel how fear gets a grip on me. I breathe and imagine the support coming from the stones. I'm not going to give up my intention. If I act from fear, I will call it in. All is connected. My purpose is related to love and wisdom. Agneta be it. Be your purpose. I breathe from my heart and choose to trust. The darkness of the night settles.

We are all earth keepers. We all have a responsibility and we all have a purpose that can serve the greater good. Each one of us adds value in our own context. The vision quest confirmed my path and helped me to connect to my inner wisdom, accepting it as a gift that I can bring forward. I also started making friends with loneliness.

At our innermost center, we are both alone and whole. A few years later I talked to a Buddhist monk who put words to my thoughts about loneliness and belonging when he said, "The way out of loneliness is to love yourself deeply. Let go of the concept that there is something out there. Once you love yourself deeply, you will be happy and also love others more deeply inside."

There are two key elements from these experiences that I hold onto as I move forward in life: to be gentle with myself by practicing loving myself deeply and to connect to nature. When I feel lost, nature is always there for me and can help me to connect to my true self. I can ask for help while walking in the woods.

I give myself space and wait for the answer, connecting to the feeling of gratitude and love.

Help will come but we need to ask for it.

### My purpose

My purpose is to spread light and love and be a catalyst for people connecting to their inner wisdom and freedom which is ever-present. I want to inspire the steady flow of life force that flows from the depth of our souls. I wish to open doors where people can see more dimensions and thus inspire transformation enabling acts from love and compassion instead of from fear.

I do not give up when something doesn't feel true to me. I tried new things and learned what works and what doesn't. It is important to be open to new experiences and not to get stuck in anything as being the one way or the one truth. Different experiences give me different perspectives. I always learn something. Even if some things have not appealed to me, there is a gem in these experiences. I know I don't need to search for a guru. I need other wise people around me who can inspire me. I feel in my body when something is not working for me, even if my rational mind tells me something different, I have learned to listen to these signals.

I still find myself in stressful situations where I lose my center. I become quicker at regaining my inner alignment. It takes yet practice. Meditation and mindfulness make a difference. Our struggles and failures are gifts. They can bring us closer to the love of ourselves and others since they remind us that we are human.

Difficulties in life can help us to understand that love is more than something that comes from the outside. Love is who we are.

Our mission in life is to connect to that love and from that place. We can spread our wings and walk in purpose. We feel free when we are in touch with what we want to give and serve the world. It is not so much about doing. It is being. When I am authentic, others become authentic. When I am in my power, I empower others to be in their power. When I connect to my purpose it is a form of being. I feel the energy of contribution and from there it is natural to serve, bringing the talents that are truly mine to the greater good of this world.

What is the next step? I'm in touch with my purpose and it is not the end destination for my expression. My purpose continues to evolve as I get to the next level of awareness and the next. Awareness is about knowing myself, listening to myself and making decisions that enable me to be true to myself. I might not be doing the same thing in five years. It can be in a different context. The essence of my purpose will be the same.



## **Agneta Dieden**

Authentic Leadership I Leadership development I Executive Coaching

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Agneta has worked within marketing and sales at IBM, she has been a partner of Ray & Berndtson, a global executive search firm, and since 2001 she has been working with leadership development and executive coaching. She joined Oxford Leadership in 2011.

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"Talking about purpose is easy. Sure, we all want it – but how do we actually find ours? Be inspired by the 22 deeply personal stories of how finding a purpose transformed the authors' lives. Find yourself in their stories. Read this gem of a book, and you will instantly look at your own purpose through a fresh lens. Powerful!"

Achim Nowack, Author/Business Thinker/C-Suite Success Coach

"We climb highest when we have let go of what we do not need. From these authors' examples, we learn how to discard our misconceptions, travel light and reach our goal."

Michael Pockley, Zen priest, Head of Religious Studies, Devon





"Where is the energy coming from to do the extraordinary? To lead your team to reach the targets and go further when things get challenging? I've learned what a powerful enabler purpose is. This book allows you to see the multitude of solutions, showcased by various viewpoints and experiences."

Roland Meyer, Managing Director, Germany



"PURPOSE is a refreshing book containing resonating stories – illuminating thought-provoking and heartfelt transformative experiences around reaching that place where one can align core beliefs with the workplace for a better fit and emotional happiness. Moreover, it reminds us as leaders to be conscious of those around us to ensure they're able to be in that place as well."

Russell Corvese, Silicon Valley Executive

"This book is full of honest, heart-revealing, and powerful stories about people who have found gifts to share out of their own personal challenges and grief. I am so grateful that I listened in to their voices. As a writer, I will reflect on their wisdom and courage for a long time to come."

Alexandria Giardino, Translator and author of books for children, including Ode to an Onion (Ode à un oignon), The Good Song, and Me + Tree.





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Dietmar Bochert, Senior Vice President Corporate Communications at Franz Haniel & Cie. GmbH, Germany