

What do great leaders like Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi have in common? What are today's leaders against oppression, such as Aung San Suu Kyi, doing when they say "*we must be free from want and fear, not just the people of Burma but people all over the world*"¹? This phrase sums up the leader's purpose and expresses, without explaining in detail, just what keeps them going through challenging times.

There's a similar level of commitment that happens to our coaching clients that only they can reach, although they can be supported and encouraged by their coach, if needed. In the Professional Leadership Coaching Model¹ this is known as the 'Purpose Step': the very first in a coaching conversation.

Just to be clear about distinctions:

- Each coaching conversation may have a focus, and agreed potential outcomes which may be task-related or tactical
- 'Purpose' is about life direction; a more strategic element of the conversation

'Purpose' covers a range of personal commitments: our vision, values, our authentic self and a sense of 'drive' or purpose itself. The role of the coach in the Purpose Step is to connect clients to their purpose and, at various times, remind them of it.

Unlike actions or tasks, to which a coach can support their client by holding them to account (when they commit to undertaking an action or task), a coach can't hold a client to account around purpose. This is one area that the client has to hold themselves fully to account. The role of the coach is to ensure that the client's purpose statement is well-crafted: not one that your client

thinks they 'should' say; one that the client truly believes in and can personally commit to.

Different clients access and express 'purpose' in different ways. For me it's a combination of real purposefulness and my values. Whether it's a meeting, a task or even at times, fun activities, I'm always asking 'why am I doing this, what's the purpose?' Even more, I only commit truly to those things that have purpose within the context of my values – my family, for example. Other people may express 'purpose' differently; visual people may refer to their 'vision' or, like the late Martin Luther King, they 'have a dream'. One coaching client recently described her purpose as a combination of her authentic self and her values. Knowing your client's preferred orientation in terms of whether they connect visually, or are tactile, or aural, whether they learn by doing, thinking or talking, all help to establish how your client will connect with their purpose.

As a coach you'll know what your client has arrived at their meaning of 'purpose'; there's a fulfilment, motivation and energy is generated – in their voice, body language and typically, their shining eyes! Fulfilment is a sense of 'now I know what really (REALLY) motivates me'. 'Purpose' is more than just the words, what matters to coaching clients is that purpose in action. As a coach, once purpose has been expressed, I can enable my clients to make links back between future actions or goals they want to achieve and the motivation they find in their 'purpose'. Frankly, if there's no meaningful link, no inner connection, there's no real motivation and there won't be action – just empty words. Or, as the proverb has it:

*"Vision without action is a daydream.
Action without vision is a nightmare."*

Just as we, as individuals, need purpose, so do organisations. Coaches have a role here too – supporting organisations to create focus around their purpose – which may take the form of 'team coaching'. Often expressed as a 'vision' and/or

¹ Text of message from Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, presented by "Democracy and Rights 2000" at a rally in Hong Kong on 31st December 1999.

'mission' statement, it's important to be clear about these purpose statements, and who they're crafted for. If the vision/mission is to motivate and mobilise the employees, suppliers and sub-contractors to the organisation – and it's meaningful for those people – then it will have motivation and momentum behind it. If it's crafted as a marketing statement to appeal to potential customers, it runs the risk of looking and sounding like 'motherhood and apple pie'.

Leadership Coach Vadim Kotelnikovⁱⁱ defines vision as 'An image of the future we seek to create' and mission as 'purpose, reason for being'. Both definitions are forward thinking, orienting towards what leaders believe is possible, specific to the organisation (or team). Where team coaching can add value is to engage with people at their 'authentic' level – who they are being (as a team) and what values they share and will expect of each other, not just what they plan to do.

Again, just to be clear about distinctions: goals or objectives are more specific about how the vision/mission will be achieved, typically 'SMART' (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound), where a vision may not have a fixed endpoint and may cross generations, as Martin Luther King's 'dream' did.

Just as the Purpose Step for the individual coaching client is to connect them to what truly motivates them, so the corporate vision/mission statement needs to motivate people inside the organisation who craft it, and who will live by it. Ownership and engagement will be achieved by people contributing to the vision/mission statement; the good news is that digital technology allows everyone, however large or dispersed the organisation, an opportunity to engage and contribute to shaping it.

Mahatma Gandhi encouraged us to "be the change we want to see in the world". First we must, as individuals and in our organisations, really connect to what it is we want to achieve and then live that

purpose, live out our values, and live with authenticity.

So the purpose of 'Purpose' is to enable our clients to express and then link vision, values and their authentic selves into a meaningful purpose statement, such that they can profoundly connect with it and live it to the full. As a coach, I'd say there's no better job in the world.



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ⁱ The 'Professional Leadership Coaching Model' is used by The Forton Group in its coach training programme accredited by the International Coach Federation www.thefortongroup.com

ⁱⁱ Founder, Ten3 business coach; www.1000ventures.com