

## Balance with Grace

A monthly newsletter by Grace Durfee, personal coach  
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I'm saddened by how often I hear people say that the reason they are in their current field is because of parental pressure. These comments usually come from people who are miserable at work and who long to make a career change. As parents of a high school junior just beginning the college search process, my husband and I don't want to bombard our son with expectations that corral him into a particular course of study. We are encouraging him to investigate a number of colleges and universities and to keep his options open. We'd love him to explore a range of subjects so he can discover what interests him the most and follow his passion.

From my career coaching clients, I've learned how often career decisions are made by default rather than with intention. When people explain why they took a certain job, it's frequently because they stumbled upon an opening at a time when they needed a new job. The more desperate their financial situation, the more likely they were to leap at the first offer, even if that meant settling for a position that didn't quite feel like a fit. What's scary is the number of times that the less-than-ideal match perpetuates into a decades-long career path.

Whether you are choosing a college major or are at a pivotal juncture in your career, I'd like to share a tool that can help clarify your life purpose and enable you to be intentional about your choices. I believe that we are all blessed with a unique mix of strengths and interests that make us particularly well-suited to meeting some need in the world. This life purpose is our *raison d'être*, what we are put on this earth to do. It usually involves contributing to others or making a difference in a meaningful way. When you aren't sure what your purpose is, it can feel as if you are adrift at sea without a rudder. You may make a lot of false starts, striking out in one direction only to switch to another and yet another direction that you feel holds greater promise. You may eventually find yourself going around in circles, never truly moving forward. Knowing your purpose, on the other hand, can help you set a course and confidently steer in the right direction, with the occasional check to confirm that you are making progress.

On the Resources page of my website, you can download a PDF file of the Life Purpose Venn Diagram to use in this exercise. A Venn Diagram, named for John Venn, the man who invented them in the 1880's, shows the relations between things. If you prefer not to download the form, draw three large circles that overlap in the middle. In each of the big circles, list what you feel is true for that items—your interests, your strengths, and the needs you perceive in the world. In the intersection where the circles overlap, write what the two topics have in common. Here are some questions to consider as you fill up the big circles:

Interests: If a team of detectives sleuthed around your living space, what clues would they pick up about your interests from books, magazines, photos, Internet activity, and the like?

Strengths: What ability/abilities of yours are others in awe of? What makes people say, “Wow, you are so good at fill in the blank”? What traits have you always been complimented on, in report cards, performance appraisals, and informal feedback?

Need: As you look around you and pay attention to the media, what do you think the world needs now? What are many of your friends, neighbors, and colleagues seeking? What’s high in demand?

Now let’s explore the intersections. What you are both interested in and good at are your areas of passion. The overlap between your strengths and what the world needs are areas where you can make contributions. When you are highly interested in a subject that there’s a high demand for, you are often struck by inspiration and are flooded with bright ideas. Here are some questions to help you fill out these overlapping areas.

Passion: What brings you joy? What makes time seem to stand still?

Contribution: Where do you long to make a difference? What causes do you contribute to, either monetarily or through volunteer efforts? What do people come to you for?

Inspiration: What categories do most of your “bright ideas” or inspiration tend to be in? Where do you experience the most creative flow?

Where the intersections of passion, contribution, and inspiration converge is the sweet spot—your purpose or calling. What’s the word or phrase that encompasses all three for you?

Purpose: What has your whole life been about so far? What’s the common theme that may have been right in front of you, yet ignored until now?

Good job! Now that your purpose has become clear or clearer, keep it in mind as you make choices. A powerful way to begin your day is to ask “How can I live on purpose today?” See what a difference it can make when you align your actions with your purpose.

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