

THE BIG IDEAS

URGENT!

Build more life into each day.

Purpose 2.0

Micro-moments of meaning.

Connecting What You Do

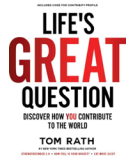
With who your work serves.

Undivided Attention

Our new secret weapon.

Energy to Be Your Best

Energy --> Work + Love.



Life's Great Question

Discover How You Contribute To The World

BY TOM RATH · SILICON GUILD © 2020 · 160 PAGES

“Knowing who you are—and who you are not—is essential. But it is only the starting point. All the talent, motivation, and hard work in the world will not be valued or remembered if it does not help another human being. ... Real growth is the product of following your contributions more than your passions. Simply asking, ‘What can I contribute?’ leads to a better path and result than starting with yourself. This applies far beyond the realm of careers.

A growing body of evidence suggests that the single greatest driver of both achievement and wellbeing is understanding how your daily efforts enhance the lives of others. Scientists have determined that we human beings are innately other-directed, which they refer to as being ‘prosocial.’ According to top researchers who reviewed hundreds of studies on the subject, the defining features of a meaningful life are ‘connecting and contributing to something beyond the self.’

Knowing that we’re making meaningful contributions to others’ lives leads not only to improved work outcomes but also to enhanced health and wellbeing. Even small acts of generosity trigger changes in our brains that make us happier. With each prosocial act at work, energy is created that measurably benefits ‘the giver, the receiver, and the whole organization.’

Think about that. Work can actually *improve* your health and wellbeing every day. Work can also be about doing something each day that improves your relationship with your family and friends. I believe that we all inherently know this—which makes the gap between what we’re currently contributing and what we have the ability to contribute all the more frustrating.”

~ Tom Rath from *Life's Great Question*

“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is: What are you doing for others?”

~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

I’m a big fan of Tom Rath and his work.

And... I’m not alone. His 10 books have sold over 10 million copies. Dan Pink (author of [Drive](#) and [When](#)) calls him “*One of the most successful nonfiction writers of his generation.*”

We featured two of his earlier books: [Eat Move Sleep](#) and [Are You Fully Charged?](#) Plus: His children’s book called *The Rechargeables* remains one of my all-time favorites.

So... When I saw that this book was coming out, I was eagerly looking forward to reading it. Like his others, it’s fantastic—super-quick reading and equally inspiring.

“Life’s Great Question” that beckons all of us (“What can I contribute?”) is beautifully framed by the Martin Luther King, Jr. quote that kicks off the book: “*Life’s most persistent and urgent question is: What are you doing for others?*”

This book, of course, is a field manual to help us go about answering that question so we can, as per the subtitle of the book: “Discover How You Contribute to the World.”

"The key is to invest more time where your talents will yield the greatest return for others."

~ Tom Rath

(btw: Note the present-tense of that statement. It's not "Discover How You CAN Contribute to the World." It's implicitly pointing to how you ALREADY ARE contributing. Helping us appreciate all the ways we're ALREADY contributing is a big part of the book.)

The book also comes with a code for a web site to help you walk through the wisdom and get more clarity on how you can make your contribution at an even deeper level. Get a copy of the book [here](#) and check out the site at contribify.com.

Of course, it's packed with Big Ideas. I'm excited to share a few of my favorites we can apply to our lives TODAY, so let's jump straight in!

BUILDING MORE LIFE INTO EACH DAY

"I mention this personal background for two reasons. The first is that my condition gave me a sense of urgency to make the best use of my time, which proved to be deeply meaningful and rewarding. I want to help you foster a similar sense of urgency.

None of us truly knows how much more time we have. After living more than 25 years since my diagnosis, on what some see as borrowed time, I've learned that time is *more valuable* when you can see your mortality on the horizon. Recent research found that kids who battle cancer somehow emerge *stronger* when compared to peers who have *not* faced a similar challenge. In particular, when people after the age of 12 battle cancer and survive, they are more likely to experience what scientists call post-traumatic *growth*.

Why does this occur? A review of 18 studies suggests that the prospect of death leads to greater appreciation of life, more rapid formulation of values, more thought about the meaning of life, and stronger social connections. As I have learned from experience, when you consider how short life can be, you create more meaning in the world.

Initially, I did not think I would live as long as I have. Now, I do not believe it is in anyone's best interest to live like they have forever. When you view your time as finite, you build more life into each day."

That's from chapter #1. In fact, those are some of the very first words of the book. They come right after we read about a family reunion Tom attended where a distant, older relative came up to him and said she was so happy to see him and his family.

Then she said, "To tell you the truth, most of us didn't expect you to live this long." <- Eek.

As we discussed in our other Notes, at 16 years old Tom was diagnosed with "a rare and catastrophic genetic mutation, one that would lead to cancers in multiple organs."

Within a year, he lost sight in one of his eyes due to a large tumor. The doctors had no idea how long he would live as he battled cancer on multiple fronts. He did his own research. The life expectancy for someone with his mutation was 40 years.

Imagine the sense of urgency THAT awareness created.

Tom tells us that we ALL need to bring a deep sense of urgency to our lives and that recognizing and honoring our own mortality is a powerful way to create more meaning. TODAY.

Tom is now 41 and has successfully battled pancreatic cancer, adrenal tumors, kidney cancer, and several spinal tumors. (In large part, btw, due to his incredible focus on Optimizing his Energy—which is a big part of this book and, of course, *Eat Move Sleep*.)

So...

We've talked about this theme many times—from our Stoic reminder of Memento Mori to Todd Henry's "Today's the Day!" admonition in *Die Empty* and Stephen Covey's Eulogy Exercise (beginning with the ULTIMATE end in mind!) in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.

"The secret of getting ahead is getting started."

~ Mark Twain

"How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world."

~ Anne Frank

And...

We JUST talked about the scientifically-proven power of reflecting on our mortality in our Notes on [Gratitude Works!](#) by Robert Emmons. He tells us about the research demonstrating a boost in one's appreciation for life that follows a "death" scenario. Then says: "*Confronting the possibility of dying may lead a person to realize the accuracy of the British writer G.K. Chesterton's insight that 'life is not only a pleasure but a kind of eccentric privilege.'*"

So...

Let's remember: We're not going to live forever. TODAY's the day to live our ideals and strive to show up as our best in service to our families, communities and world.

P.S. For whatever reason, THIS reflection creates an extraordinarily humbling level of urgency for me as well: "*Someone once told me the definition of Hell: The last day you have on earth, the person you became will meet the person you could have become.*"

PURPOSE 2.0

"The idea that we should have one defined purpose is inadequate; that is a grand but impractical take on what we can expect from our work. And most discussion about purpose tends to downplay the actual value of the work people are currently doing. It almost suggests that if we really want to feel a sense of purpose in life, we have to either find a new job or look beyond work to engage in more meaningful ways to spend our time. ...

In every job, there are opportunities to have a positive influence on the wellbeing of other people. Most of us are doing far more for others than we fully appreciate. We also have many opportunities to optimize the contributions we're making and align them with what we find most fulfilling."

As I mentioned in the intro, the sub-title of the book "Discover How You Contribute to the World" implies an active, PRESENT-TENSE contribution we're ALREADY making.

Tom makes the powerful point that we need to step back from the abstract, "one defined purpose" approach to purpose which is "grand but impractical."

We'd be wise to step RIGHT INTO our current reality (and jobs!) and mine it for all its worth—recognizing just how much we're ALREADY contributing as we more deliberately make the connection between our current work and our ability to serve individuals in meaningful ways.

We'll talk more about *how* to do this in a moment. For now, quick reflection.

As I read this section, I wrote "Purpose 2.0" at the top of the page.

I imagined mashing up Barbara Fredrickson's research on micro-moments of positivity resonance that form the basis of her wisdom in [Love 2.0](#) with Teresa Amabile's research on small wins that form the basis of her wisdom in [The Progress Principle](#).

Fredrickson tells us that EACH moment of interaction offers surprisingly potent opportunities for Love (and all its benefits).

"Always be a first-rate version of yourself, instead of a second-rate version of somebody else."

~ Judy Garland

Amabile tells us that we don't need to wait for the HUGE gains at work to feel great. In fact, she says, it's the *daily* sense of making progress via *small wins* that leads to the highest level of satisfaction at work (and in life!).

Put them together and run them through the lens of purpose and we have Purpose 2.0: Micro-moments (and micro-wins!) of positive contributions.

All that to say: With the right mindset, we can feel the joy of living on purpose pretty much all day every day. Starting TODAY.

"Most people do not serendipitously fall into a perfect job on their first attempt. It usually takes decades of ups and downs and learnings to find a job you love that makes a difference for others. What matters more than finding a winning lottery ticket is making a little bit of forward progress right now."

~ Tom Rath

P.S. Here's another way Tom puts it later in the book: *"Most people do not serendipitously fall into a perfect job on their first attempt. It usually takes decades of ups and downs and learnings to find a job you love that makes a difference for others. What matters more than finding a winning lottery ticket is making a little bit of forward progress right now."*

This means that creating a more meaningful job does not have to be about leaving the one you have today. Even the most substantive careers follow winding paths."

CONNECTING WHAT YOU DO WITH WHO YOUR WORK SERVES

"You can begin by connecting your daily efforts to the way they contribute to specific people's lives—connecting what you do with who your work serves. There are now countless examples of how connecting your work to the meaning it creates for specific people leads to better results, as well as to more enjoyment in and satisfaction from one's work."

In food service, for example, when a cook or someone preparing food can literally see the people they serve, it increases that customer's satisfaction with the meal by 10%. If the cook and customer can both see one another, satisfaction with meal quality goes up 17% and service is 13% faster. You see a similar result across other professions.

When lifeguards read stories of people's lives being saved, they are more vigilant on the job. When telephone-based fund-raisers hear from the beneficiaries of their work, they are more motivated and raise far more funds for their cause. Even when the only people you serve are internal customers or colleagues, connecting the work you do with the direct contribution it makes has tangible benefits.

In a Harvard study, field workers who harvested tomatoes watched videos of the way their contribution helped colleagues in the factory another step down the supply chain. In comparison to a control group, the workers who watched this short video experienced a 7% increase in productivity, as measured by tons of tomatoes harvested per hour. My takeaway from all this research is that people experience a far greater sense of belonging and more sustainable wellbeing when they connect their efforts in the moment with a larger influence on others."

Immediately after typing that, my 1,000-second timer went off.

I got up and did a quick set of 11 leg-up-ab-crunch kinda thingies hanging on the rings that hang off my office ceiling.

I now do those sets (and all my burpees!) facing in a new direction—toward my chalkboard. On that chalkboard, I've taped up pictures of some of our Optimize Coaches who came out to LA as part of our graduation/Spartan Race weekend.

I love and appreciate a different Optimizer (by name) as I dedicate each rep of that set to them.

Then...

Inspired by the passage above, [I rewatched THIS video](#) in which we captured some inspiring stories from the beautiful humans we're blessed to serve.

It's AWESOME to read about the research proving the power of connecting our work to SPECIFIC individuals who benefit from our work.

I had a VISCERAL feeling of connection *before* reading that passage. Now, I have an *even deeper intellectual* understanding of just how powerful it is to "connect what you do with who your work serves."

So...

Spotlight on YOU.

What do you do? Who do you SERVE when you do what you do?

"You create meaning when your motivators, abilities, and purpose meet to serve the world."

~ Tom Rath

"A commonality I have observed, across professions, is that your contributions come into clearest view as you get closer to the source.

The more you can learn about a person who directly benefits from your time and effort, the more motivation you will have to improve that person's life in the future. Learning as much as you can about the people you serve can also push you to leverage your talents in entirely new ways."

~ Tom Rath

Take a moment and actually identify a SPECIFIC person who you KNOW benefits from the day-to-day things you do.

Seriously.

One person.

Could be a colleague. A customer. Whoever.

ONE PERSON you *know* benefits from what you do.

Got it?

Fantastic.

Do that often.

Remember: "People experience a far greater sense of belonging and more sustainable wellbeing when they connect their efforts in the moment with a larger influence on others."

+1 micro-moments of service +1 micro-moments of service +1 micro-moments of service.

All day every day for the Purpose 2.0 meaning-filled life TODAY.

P.S. My 1,000-second timer went off again RIGHT when I finished typing that. (Time flies when you're having fun.) I got up, and banged out that set with my eyes closed. Thinking of one person I am blessed to serve. YOU. I'm honored to be a part of your life. LOVE!!! And let's do this! :)

UNDIVIDED ATTENTION: YOUR SECRET WEAPON

"Make undivided attention your secret weapon at work and life. Be the one who does not have a smartphone out and who genuinely listens to every word when someone needs it. Simply doing this for 20 minutes is more of an investment in another person than you might realize."

Part I of the book is all about "Life's Great Question." It features six chapters on high-level ideas ranging from "Who You Are Meets What the World Needs" to "A Map for Creating Meaning."

Part II of the book is all about "The 12 Contributions." Tom and his research team (he's a senior scientist at Gallup) have identified 12 different ways we can all contribute.

Within each of those potential contribution domains, he gives us practical tips on how to "Contribute to Teams" with whom we work and how to "Contribute to Others" in general.

I love pretty much all of those tips but that just might be my favorite.

Our new secret weapon?

UNDIVIDED ATTENTION.

Let's give it.

TODAY.

And, let's remember: Our #1 kryptonite that gets in the way of that superpower?

Smartphones.

So, let's put it away for moments of connection.

TODAY.

P.S. Each of the micro-chapters for the contributions is preceded by an epic quote. Here's a good one from Mahatma Gandhi: "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in service to others."

"People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

~ Maya Angelou

"Without continual growth and progress, such words as improvement, achievement, and success have no meaning."

~ Benjamin Franklin

THE ENERGY TO BE YOUR BEST

"Help people see how optimizing their physical energy levels is the key to having fun and achieving greater wellbeing each moment, each day. The more they prioritize sleep and the better their food choices in the morning, the more active they are likely to be throughout the day, and this creates upward spirals of better health and wellbeing."

I mentioned that each of the 12 micro-chapters on different ways to contribute has tips on how to contribute to the teams we're on at work and to others in general.

Well... EVERY SINGLE contribution ALSO has a section called "The Energy to Be Your Best."

Why? Because Tom KNOWS that we need to Optimize our Energy if we want to have the best shot at contributing to our Work and our Love. (In fact, he tells us that helping people Optimize their Energy via encouragement, wisdom and being a radiant exemplar is quite possibly THE greatest way we can contribute to their wellbeing.)

Practically speaking: *"Think about a few health choices you could make that would offer you an immediate return. Would a brief morning run pick up your mood for the rest of the day? If you went to sleep 30 minutes earlier, would you have a bit more energy when you need it midday? See if you can draw a few direct connections between the choices you make and your energy that same day."*

<- What can YOU do TODAY?

Here's to keeping our light bulbs screwed in so we can shine brightly and contribute to the beautiful people in our lives and answer Life's Great Question with one big "YES!!"

B

Brian Johnson,
Philosopher in Residence

If you liked this Note, you'll probably like...

[Eat Move Sleep](#)

[Are You Fully Charged?](#)

[The Path to Purpose](#)

[The Great Work of Your Life](#)

[Love 2.0](#)

[The Progress Principle](#)

[The Second Mountain](#)

[Falling Upward](#)

About the Author of "Life's Great Question"

TOM RATH



Tom Rath is an author and researcher who has spent the past two decades studying how work can improve human health and well-being. His 10 books have sold more than 10 million copies and made hundreds of appearances on global bestseller lists. Tom's first book, *How Full Is Your Bucket?*, was an instant #1 *New York Times* bestseller and led to a series of books and activities for kids that are used in classrooms around the world. His book *StrengthsFinder 2.0* is Amazon's top-selling non-fiction book of all time. Tom has served for the past five years as a Gallup Senior Scientist and was Vice-Chair of the VHL cancer research organization. Most recently, Tom co-founded a publishing company; he is also an advisor, investor, and partner in several startups. Tom holds degrees from the University of Michigan and the University of Pennsylvania and lives in Arlington, Virginia with his wife, Ashley, and their two children.

About the Author of This Note

BRIAN JOHNSON



Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives so they can actualize their potential as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + practical tools. Learn more and optimize your life at optimize.me.