

Your Vocáre Compass

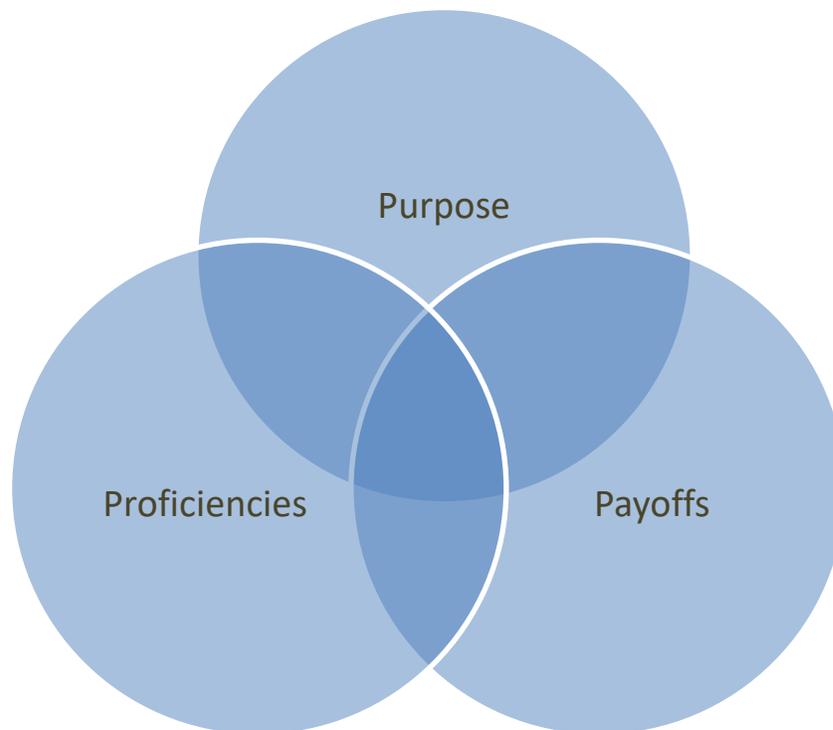
How do you figure out what you were made to do? And how do you attend to your journey so that your gifts and values and legacy are maximized? The English word “vocation” has grown a little coolly practical, but through the centuries, the Latin verb that inspired it, “vocáre,” has carried the essential meaning of being called to a specific kind of work, to a craft or maybe to a master. For some, a sense of calling is a spiritual aspiration. For others it’s about “fit” and the paradox you’ve probably experienced at times of effortless hard work.

Theories abound about how one succeeds at this treasure hunt: Is it a divine epiphany? Or logging “10,000 hours?” Or “following your bliss?”

My theory is that it’s mostly about paying attention to your life and getting useful feedback from good people. It’s an iterative process.

For decades, I’ve worked with people who see their lives as a deep stewardship, people who are very serious about examining their gifts and abilities and motivations--and the question of their “calling.” From thoughtful millennials to mid-career professionals, the people I work with are very serious about finding a good path for their limited number of years on the planet.

It helps to think of three core incentives and of the places where they intersect:



Proficiencies. What is the work that, up to this point in your career you’ve gotten pretty good at? Maybe you love it, maybe you love parts of it. What is the craft, the subject matter expertise (SME) for which you are already known even as you begin to embrace your identity as a professional coach? How will you use it as a coach? How does your SME inform the niche you might want to serve? How does your SME inform your level III questioning and listening? Could your SME be something around which you’d build a workshop--where you introduce, explain and illustrate a bite-sized chunk of great content and then coach a group or a team as they metabolize it?

Purpose. If Circle #1 is about your “What,” Circle #2 is about your future-focused “Why”. Maybe you notice it at the end of a very satisfying day in which you know you have contributed, served and lived out your big values. You lost track of time a little. Maybe you know deeply that you have developed or championed greater efficiency or order or delight or a team that works well and happily together. Maybe you lead an organization that employs hundreds of people who love what they do and act like its owners. If you have a spiritual tradition or practice, your sense of purpose will feel aligned with it. There is almost always a connection between prosperity and having a clear sense of purpose or even calling. Don’t follow your bliss, but keep it in sight.

Payoffs. Speaking of prosperity, along the way, you begin to notice opportunities that appear. What might people pay you to do--gladly and even generously? What could you be one of the best in town at? And what does great compensation look like for you?

Each circle is crucial, interdependent and, by itself, not enough.

As we explore and attend to each one in the moves we make, the compass works, and our sense of fit begins to resonate: Satisfaction, contribution, service and prosperity. As with following any compass, where you start is not where you’ll land, and course corrections are continuous: Your intuition gets restless; you stop and check, and maybe backtrack or sprint or stop to savor a spectacular vista.

I work with leaders and coaches who ready to check their heading. Usually they’re restless. Maybe they are paid well to do something that they’re not getting better at, or enjoying very much. Maybe they want to find a way to make a living at what does give them a sense of satisfaction and contribution. Maybe they are ready to cultivate an area of potential mastery with which they’ve only experimented (but for which they’ve usually been thanked).

Checking your heading (or, if you prefer, your signal strength): Start with your most personally compelling “circle”:

Circle #1: Proficiencies

Again, the top circle represents the work that you know you do well. After a decade or so of work, most of us are starting to think about what we want more of and less of. As you think through the abilities, assets, education, experience, personal traits and gifts that belong to you, some will inspire you more than others. Pay attention to stories you love to tell about how you’ve gotten to know what you know. How’d you do that?

Circle #2: Purpose

The lower-left circle represents what you feel strongly about, or why you work so hard. Maybe your attention turns to where you’ve always had a sense of special satisfaction or contribution in your work or because of your work. You provide an income and an example that matters. You do the work and you don’t cheat. If you have a sense of spirituality about your time on the planet, maybe that comes to your attention. *What are the compliments that mean the most to you? Who do they come from?*

Circle #3: Payoffs

The final circle speaks to what spells freedom to you: A number probably comes to mind. Write it down. But also ask yourself, “What would people pay me to do?” And “Once the money is ok, how else do I like to be compensated?” It’s probably about being able to have choices and autonomy and the ability to explore and produce: Maybe you like a strong team with an affirming leader, or being your own boss, or traveling a lot, or not, or being acknowledged publicly for your craftsmanship, or making innovation practical, or being trusted

with a flexible work schedule. Write down some very clear specifics. Notice answers that integrate your life and your work.

Daniel Goleman says in his book, Focus (2013), that the much-heralded 10,000 hours' rule is *“only half true. If you are a duffer at golf, say, and make the same mistakes every time you try a certain swing or putt, 10,000 hours of practicing that error will not improve your game. You'll still be a duffer, albeit an older one.”* And I would add that if you like the work so much that in additions to the hours, you add focus, tolerance for failure, tweaking and the risk required to increase your limits, your true north begins to emerge.

Bonus Points: Your Personal 360

As you use these questions to listen to your life, you may want to bring in a few consultants—people who know you well and are committed to your growth, personally and professionally. Try asking them to talk with you about the following questions:

- *Where do you see me getting most focused and enthusiastic?*
- *What do you see as my main skills and areas of expertise?*
- *What do you think the world would gladly pay me to do more of?*
- *Or simply ask them to talk to you about a time when they saw you at your best.*

The area of greatest overlap will help you to evaluate your restlessness and your potential next steps, your obstacles, your opportunities--and your evolving True North.

The idea, of course, is for you to become increasingly clear about where the circles get most vivid and complementary—and to keep listening for the rest of your life.

[Click here](#) to listen to my three-minute audio file and blog post about building your Vocaré Compass.