

Your Vocáre Compass:

One Way to Soul-Search and Self-Coach Over Time

To journey without being changed is to be a nomad. To change without journeying is to be a chameleon. To journey and be transformed by the journey is to be a pilgrim. —Mark Nepo

The big break for me was deciding that this was my life. —Jon Stewart

I quite like that I haven't done 'good enough' yet. —Sir Paul McCartney (at age 78)

I insist on a lot of time being spent, almost every day, to just sit and think. —Warren Buffett

Experience is a hard teacher because she gives the test first, the lesson afterward. —Vern Law, a pitcher for the Pittsburgh Pirates in the 1950s and 1960s

I think midlife is when the universe gently places her hands upon your shoulders, pulls you close, and whispers in your ear: I'm not screwing around. It's time. —Brené Brown

I've noticed through the years that the thoughtful people I know and love seem to always be curious about a few questions, each of which can seem pretty fresh:

- How do I attend to my journey so that my gifts, strengths, training and values and legacy are maximized?
- In my few decades on the planet, how do pay attention to my unfolding sense of purpose?
- And, other than money, how do I like to be compensated?

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, as an apprentice, 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 in 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. Like checking the heading on a compass. Like keeping an eye on your personal North Star.

For decades, those thoughtful people I know and love seem to see their lives as a deep stewardship (another old word), they are people who are very serious about examining their gifts and abilities and motivations--and the question of their “calling.” From thoughtful millennials to reflective mid-career professionals, to the wise elders who regularly tell me, “I'm not done yet!” they are very serious about finding and refining their path for the limited number of years they have left on the planet.

Your Vocáre Compass is an exercise that might be key to your own continuous contentment in life. Maybe it reflects your on evolving True North.

What I started to notice . . .

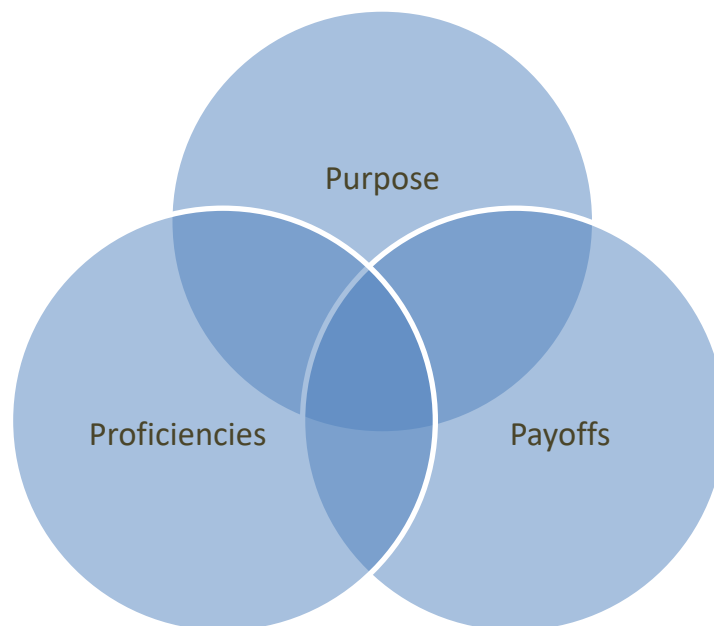
Through the years, restless coachees kept showing up in my offices at Lake Union. Each was ready for a course correction. And I started to notice patterns.

Some had been paid well, for years, for their world-class expertise. But many had just experienced a birthday that ends in a zero, and, though they were grateful for their hard-won expertise, and for their financial stability, they had begun thinking about their sense of purpose and legacy.

Others were world-class in their artistic abilities or in non-profit work. These people already had a deep sense of purpose and legacy, and they too were grateful for their hard-won expertise. But having also experienced a birthday that ends in a zero (midlife does to seem to focus the mind), it had come to their attention that they were broke.

Each one of these coachees was satisfied with only two of the following three core incentives. Each one sensed that it was time to check their contentment—their personal compass heading.

Think of Your Vocáre Compass as having three core incentives—and a True North 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 or coaching leader? How will you use your SME 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. Maybe you don’t follow your bliss, but you do 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? **And other than money, how do you like to be compensated?**

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 are 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).

Now look at the circles again. Start with the one that is most personally compelling.

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**, 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 addition 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 in your corner. Try asking them to talk with you about the following questions:

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

The idea, of course, is to listen to your life—and to your continuous personal appreciative inquiry . . .

Contentment has its own iterative magnetic pull. Your strengths, opportunities, aspirations, results—and even your restlessness—will help you to know how to listen—to your own life, and as a coach.

You will become increasingly clear about where the circles get most vivid and complementary—and to make a habit of listening for the rest of your life.

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

And [click here](#) to listen to one very creative SeattleCoach as she tells the story of her own Vocáre Compass.

Read more about it . . .

Goleman, Daniel. 2013. *Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence*. Harper Collins.