



From Success to Significance

But one day in 2006, Niewolny looked out of his office window from a skyscraper with a view of Lake Michigan and said to himself, “There has to be more to life than this.” Despite his success, he felt empty inside. The thought occurred to him: “If I died today, so what?” He realized he wouldn’t leave a legacy that mattered.

During that period, which he calls the season of “smoldering discontent,” Niewolny reevaluated his life, searching for new passions and ways to give back. He used ideas outlined by Bob Buford in his book *Halftime: Moving from Success to Significance*. Buford founded the Halftime Institute, a nonprofit organization that helps successful men and women create new lives defined by joy, impact, and balance.

As part of his journey to creating a lasting legacy, Niewolny went on a church mission trip to Africa, where he saw people who had very little but were far happier than he was. When he came back, he and his wife decided to sell their boat, plane, several houses, and other luxuries that he thought would bring him joy and happiness but gave him more headaches than anything else.

The couple used some of the proceeds to start an orphanage in South Africa. “So much joy came out of that,” he says. “That was the first time I realized when I took the focus off myself and put the focus on others, I had incredible joy and balance in my life.”

Niewolny says the purpose and passion for the second half of his life is giving back to those in need and making a difference in other people’s lives. At 54, he’s chief executive officer of the Halftime Institute and author of the new book, *Trade Up: How to Move from Just Making Money to Making a Difference*.



Finding Purpose

Psychologists say many people hit the pause button at some point during their lives to search for a deeper meaning and purpose. Despite the stereotypes about midlife crises, this pause-and-reset can happen at any age, from a person's early 20s to retirement, and beyond. And it can be a challenging phase to move through.

The good news is that reevaluation often leads to a better life. In fact, studies show that meaningful activities—things that demonstrate and develop your abilities while also making a positive difference to others—can contribute significantly to your overall sense of happiness.

But what role does money play in happiness? Additional research suggests that money correlates with satisfaction only up to a point. Beyond that threshold, the correlation falls apart, and additional income no longer means additional happiness, says Frank Farley, a psychologist with Temple University in Philadelphia and a former president of the American Psychological Association.

"If you've been doing the same gig for decades, and you are highly successful, you may want to ask yourself: How many more money mountains are there to climb? How many successes do I need to chalk up?" It may be time to look for new venues in your life," Farley says. That's where generosity comes in.

The G Factor

When reevaluating their life's purpose, many folks decide they want to give back. "I have been studying human motivation for decades, and I'm often asked what is on the top of the list of great human motives," says Farley. "I answer generosity, which I call the G factor." Generosity—the giving instinct—is so profound."

Janet Karzmark, a life coach in San Jose, California, echoes Farley's point. Giving goes hand in hand with compassion, she says, and most people feel a strong sense of compassion for those in need.

Successful people who have been busy striving and accomplishing things for most of their lives may not have had time to explore the compassionate part of their personalities. But if they volunteer for a humanitarian crisis or get involved in other important causes, their lives feel more complete and more purposeful, she says.

"You don't want to face your death and think, 'Oh, I missed that part of my life. I never got around to that.' You don't want to face that regret," says Karzmark.

Giving back or serving others doesn't mean you have to quit your job though. There are plenty of ways to make a difference with only an hour or two a week. For instance, Niewolny says he knew an executive colleague who volunteered to rock newborn babies of drug-addicted parents and found great meaning and joy in that simple act.



Organizations like [VolunteerMatch](#) and [Charity Navigator](#) make it easier than ever to find volunteer opportunities in your local community.

For many people, using their time and talents in their own sphere of influence is key to finding personal significance. That was the case for Alan Smith, president and chief executive officer of Rockcliff Energy, an oil and gas company in Houston, Texas. For years, Smith says, “I was so busy that I felt like I was drowning.”

To change his trajectory, Smith carved out more time in his life by stepping off several charity and industry boards. He also decided to narrow his focus to helping only a few organizations and a few other people in his network reach their full potential.

Now, Smith is a mentor and serves on the board of directors for the Texas Hearing Institute, a nonprofit pediatric hearing loss organization that provides therapy, education, and support services to children and families affected by hearing loss.

This cause has a special place in his heart because one of his daughters was born deaf. However, after receiving cochlear implants and help from the center, she is now able to hear. “The center had a huge impact on her life,” Smith says. Working on their board is one of the ways he gives back.

For Smith, reevaluating his lifetime legacy meant reprioritizing and staying focused. “You have a finite amount of time on earth, and you’ve been given many gifts and talents,” he says. “It’s a matter of being more intentional and figuring out how you are going to use them.”

How to Restart

There are several ways to begin the journey toward finding your purpose and creating a legacy you are proud of, says Niewolny. First, he says, start with the end in mind.

To do that, Niewolny describes an exercise he calls “the 80th birthday party.” Here’s how it works. Imagine you’re having a big birthday party with all your friends and family in attendance. Using a microphone in the room, the guests will recap your role in their lives. Write down what you hope they’ll say.

Also, write down the answer to these questions:

- What is your pursuit of success costing you?
- What in your life has the greatest value, and what are you doing to protect it?
- If you were to reorder your priorities in life to finish well, what evidence would confirm that you were on the right track?

Another approach is to ask yourself: If you were living a perfect life two years from now, what would that look like? Not what would you be doing, but what would it look like? Describe the scene in vivid detail.



For Niewolny, he wants his wife to flourish and for their marriage to be a priority. He wants his children to have high self-esteem. And he'd like everyone in his family to be in good health.

While it's common for people to desire change, it's difficult to shift the course of your legacy all on your own, says Niewolny. Some people benefit from an accountability partner, whether that means a certified life coach, spouse, mentor, friend, neighbor, or colleague. You might also consider multiple coaches.

Tell these people what you want from your life and let them hold you accountable for progress. "There is a reason why the best athletes in the world have coaches even though they may be at the top of their game," says Niewolny. Coaches provide motivation and support when you need it most.

On a Mission

Figuring out your personal mission in life and acting on it can be life-changing, says Fielding Miller, CAPTRUST co-founder and chief executive officer. He speaks from experience.

During the first half of his life, Miller says he set a hectic pace, trying to raise a family, build a business, stay involved in the community, and maintain an active social life. "My time was overly weighted toward work. I was a complete workaholic," he says.

Like Niewolny, at age 40, Miller discovered *Halftime*, which prompted him to reassess his values, aspirations, talents, and relationships. He started thinking about what he wanted for his family and what he wanted from his own life. One idea from the book especially resonated with him: "What will I do about what I believe?"

The result of that period of introspection was "a total heart change, an epiphany moment," Miller says. He reevaluated why he was working and reprioritized the things that matter most to him, focusing on his personal endgame—what would matter when his career was over.

It didn't take long for this new mentality to bear fruit. Gradually, Miller says, he began to look at everything through a new lens. He made decisions and approached relationships differently.

"My personal mission is to live a life that is pleasing to God by being significant in the lives I touch," Miller says. "I would like to be remembered for fulfilling my mission."

And it's never too late, or too early, to decide what that mission will be.

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