

The Importance of Purpose



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In addition to running Kenja as CEO, I have the fortune of teaching MBA students part time on Leadership, Marketing, and Strategy. For my classes and as a CEO, I think the most important place to start is with the “Why” - what is your Purpose as an Leader and as a Company.

Purpose as a Leader

As a leader, the first place to start is with you. If you cannot lead yourself then how can you lead others? The first thing to know about a leader is their Passion and the values that led them to put importance on those passions. With an understanding of Passion, people can develop their Life’s Purpose. Purpose is your North Star; it is your unwavering unchanging goal which your daily actions will lead you to. Upon setting your own Purpose, you will need a Plan to take concrete steps towards the Purpose, Partners to benefit and to help you achieve your Purpose, and finally Persistence to help you with the very difficult task of staying focused on your Purpose.

Passion, Purpose, Plan, Partners, and Persistence are the “5Ps of Life” - a workshop that I do with students to help them figure out their Life’s Purpose. 95% of people do not have a concrete Purpose in life - they let events and daily to-dos determine their activities. I do not think that

Purpose is something that can be discovered in a day or even a month - often it will take time to think about this and reflect on it. The point of the exercise is simply to begin the very important self-dialogue to get to your Life Purpose. It does not matter how fast you go if you have not figured out what direction you want to run first.

In Kenja, every person in our company knows that although I had C level experience in companies like Vodafone, Verizon Wireless, and Fidelity Investments, I have always had a dream to found a different kind of company - one that valued Innovation and Ideas over Politics and the sole focus on Quarterly Profits. My passion is for solving problems in innovative ways and for implementing very difficult projects.

I was fortunate that I started with good co-founders, people that shared my vision and could contribute complementary skills. The plan is usually a natural outcome of a strong purpose and Persistence is usually achieved by knowing what works for you on a daily basis. For me Persistence is for refusing to consider a return to large company executive jobs and by daily using the “Pomodoro” technique. (Using 30 minute interval of focused effort followed by a short break)

Purpose as a Company

Just as with Individual Leaders, a company will need to develop its own clear Purpose. A Clear Purpose gives motivation to people, clarity to strategy, and a clear branding for Marketing.

If we are honest with most companies, the Purpose easily devolves into meeting the Monthly or Yearly Targets. The Purpose is not merely the result of your actions - the Purpose describes WHY you are pursuing your goals. The Clear Purpose is lived by company members so it becomes a reflection of why people join and stay with your company.

Company Strategy is strongly guided by Purpose. Things that lead you off the Strategic Path are rejected and you can find further value and differentiation in the area of your chosen competition. Small changes in your Purpose drive big results in the marketplace. Although Facebook and MySpace are both Social Networks, Facebook’s focus on connecting your friends resulted in many small innovations that MySpace with their focus on creating cool personal spaces did not.

If you are clear on your Purpose, then the Brand is not a just a slogan on a TV Commercial. It is lived by

employees, reflected in your products and services, and felt by your customers. It is far more enduring than any single campaign message or even a business plan for a year.

Kenja’s purpose is to revolutionize the way that mid to large companies collaborate to get work done through software. In the beginning it was difficult since larger companies tend to buy from other larger companies but we have now achieved something not easily copied. After 7 years in Business, we now have larger organizations like Mitsui and Company, Randstad, and JICA (the Japanese Peace Corp) and many mid-sized companies using us. If we had started with consumers and small companies only, then the functionality, security, and ease to use (for older employees as well) would be far different.

Starting with Purpose is not always the easy or obvious choice. There are many obstacles in the way and it is too easy just to focus on Profit or KPIs of the company. However, a focus on Purpose will automatically keep Employee Engagement, Strategy, and your Branding on track. [i2](#)