
INFLUENCE

STARTS WITH "I"

**A Woman's Guide for
Unleashing the Power of
Leading from Within**

and effecting change around you



JEANNE PORTER KING

foreword by Debbye Turner Bell

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FOREWORD BY
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Know Your Purpose

The purpose of leadership is not to make the present bearable. The purpose of leadership is to make the future possible.

~JOAN D. CHITTISER

JOI WAS A MID-LEVEL Chinese American manager in a large health care system. She managed a large department and took pride in developing the men and women who reported to her. One day she shared this with me: “I develop people well and give them great exposure—from which a number of my direct reports have been promoted and given their next opportunity.” She went on to say, “Sadly, no one is doing that for me.”

How many of us as women have felt similarly? We hunker down and do the work, taking care of tasks and projects like “dutiful daughters,” exceeding expectations, expecting decision makers to recognize our efforts and promote us. We cannot relegate our career success or our influence into the hands of others. Each of us must be clear on our individual purpose and prepared to move forward purposefully.

When Joi had first come to me, she seemed to think she was constrained by her cultural values. She said, “Jeanne, the things you teach about speaking up and sharing my successes with people in my organization go against my cultural values.” Of course, I assured her I would never want her to do anything that violated her cultural values. So I explored more with her, wanting to get a better sense of her cultural values. That’s when she shared with me that no

one in her organization seemed to do for her what she was doing for members of her team—helping them to advance and succeed.

Not wanting to assume I knew the values of her culture, I asked her what were the cultural values that informed her work. Without hesitating, she emphatically replied, “I’m Catholic!” Imagine my surprise to hear that, as I was thinking it was the values of her ethnic culture that were driving her consternation. Joi’s story reminds us not to stereotype people based on our own assumptions and to also be sensitive to the intersecting identities that comprise who we are.

So I asked her to consider that she had a set of values and also worked in an organization that had a culture and values that defined and promoted a set of leaders that exhibited those values and advanced the cause of the institution. I asked her to think about whether or not she could adapt to the organization’s cultural values without violating her own. “For instance,” I asked her, “if you travelled to another country whose culture was different than your own, would you not find ways to adapt without abandoning your own values?”

At that moment, a light bulb must have gone off inside her imagination because she animatedly exclaimed, “*Oh, I get it! If I believe I am in my organization to help people, then the higher I go, the more people I can help!*” What an insight.

What Joi was grappling with was a lack of clarity of purpose. Once she articulated and framed her purpose in terms that made sense to her, it released her to adopt strategies that apprised organizational leaders of her accomplishments. Her newly articulated sense of purpose freed her to advance in order to help others become the best they could be—all in a corporate health-care system dedicated to helping people become and remain healthy.

A clear sense of purpose provides the overarching umbrella, or the why of your leadership, and helps provide focus to your influence. Purpose articulates why you do what you do the way you do it.

What Purpose Is Not

At any time in our careers, each of us has worked in specific jobs for a variety of reasons not necessarily related to our overall purpose, including the following:

- To pay bills
- To meet expectations of others (e.g., parents, spouse, partner, etc.)
- To gain needed skills
- To make a living

All of these are necessary reasons for working, yet they are transactional reasons. They help you complete the transaction of a job or position, but they don't provide an overarching reason that transforms a job into a career and calling or a role into true leadership. For that you need purpose—specifically leadership purpose.

I believe because each of us was created for a purpose, we are programmed for purpose. Consequently, humans have a need to find meaning in what we do because of that ingrained desire for purpose.

Hermina Ibarra and her research partners wrote about leadership purpose and its role in women's leadership development. According to Ibarra and her partners, people become leaders by internalizing a leadership identity and developing a sense of purpose. “A person asserts leadership by taking purposeful action.”¹

Noted leadership coach and author Kevin Cashman defines purpose as “your unique meaningful contribution” that serves “the needs of others.”² For me purpose is how what you do from your passion and values helps meet the needs of others. Purpose is your mission on earth and in your corner of the world.

Purpose is greater than the sum of your daily tasks. Purpose is more than your job title, role, or position in the company or organization you work for. Purpose helps to align all the various

1. Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb, *Women Rising*, 3.

2. Cashman, *Leadership from the Inside Out*, 67.

components of your life (work, home, community) into an integrated whole that provides coherence to what you do in any given context at any given time. Your purpose is the reason you exist and lead the way you do.

I was facilitating a cohort of emerging leaders in my WIELD™ (Women's Initiative for Emerging Leaders' Development) program. To be in the program, each woman had been selected and supported by her executive leader as an up-and-coming leader. Each had significant responsibility, leading sizable departments and teams. As part of developing their talent pipeline in the technology organization they worked for, these women were being groomed and given opportunities to compete for senior leadership roles. Some entered the program with the notions that, in their current role, their purpose was either to make their boss look good or eventually to take over their boss's job.

Both of these notions are commendable but too narrow and myopic to help women advance to more senior roles or garner the influence they need to make an impact on their part of the world. To begin to get them thinking more broadly about what they did and why, I helped each of them develop a leadership purpose statement.

A leadership purpose statement is nothing more than a purpose statement for leaders. It is a statement that clarifies why a person leads, and it integrates a leader's sense of leadership across various domains of her life. At work it provides grounding for one's leadership role. Ultimately, it opens possibilities for leading that transcend merely advancing up the designated corporate or institutional ladder.

This statement expresses your why for doing what you do the way you do it. Your leadership purpose transcends any one given position or organization, but it frames the thing to which you are connected—even called to—in order to serve and help others. Your leadership purpose may be fulfilled in your organization. When you come to articulate that purpose, your thinking around roles that you fit or can fulfill shifts.

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After going through the reflection work to write out her leadership purpose, one emerging leader in that WIELD™ cohort admitted that “it was certainly jolting but empowering to find this purpose within me.” She was a manager for a global technology firm, and her responsibility was to oversee the management of the hardware and software assets. Yet when she took the time to reflect on and write out her purpose statement, she wrote:

My leadership purpose is “to strategize, prioritize, and plan for growth, evolution and success of the organization, to guide and support others and to act with honesty, integrity amid transparency for the greater good.”

As you see, this purpose transcends her current role or even the goal of achieving the next level in the organization. This purpose focuses this leader toward strategizing and prioritizing growth for the greater good as her values of honesty, integrity, and transparency drive her. This purpose can be lived out at work or at home, and in any organization or institution. It is fundamental to who this person is and what she does as a leader. And because she is clear on her purpose, her current leadership assignment is a vital place for living her purpose.

Another emerging leader in the cohort who was working as a technical support manager saw her leadership purpose as the following: *to offer a vision of what’s possible, unleash potential, and empower people so they can thrive.* What struck her was how consistent her purpose had been throughout her life and career. She wrote to me, “From being a big sister, to leadership roles in school, to D&I efforts at all my organizations and volunteer work, that purpose has been a guiding star.”

She went on to share with me, “The exercise with its guiding questions was extremely valuable because it forced us to take the sometimes-vague feelings that we have about who we are and what we do into a clear, articulate message we can remind ourselves and articulate to others.” That, my friend, is the power of knowing your purpose. The ability to coalesce your passion,

values, and identity into a coherent statement enables you to influence from a place of purpose.

The Leadership Purpose Statement

In the work I do with emerging women leaders, I take them through a series of exercises to write out their leadership purpose statement.

First and foremost, a leadership purpose is need-directed. Purpose reflects a reason for meeting a need that exists. A leadership purpose statement then will reflect meeting some need. People have needs; and you have skills, abilities, gifts, and experiences to meet some of those needs. Though purpose transcends the workplace, surely it is a place to bring your purpose to bear in addressing needs where you work. Therefore, a leadership purpose statement conveys that some group or population is helped by your leadership. At its heart leadership is about relationship, and influence is the power of leaders to effect change through relationships. Knowing the types of needs you are called to address keeps you focused.

Next, a leadership purpose statement will be values-based. A leadership purpose statement is fueled by passion and reflects your core values. You bring core values to work every day, and these values give life to your leadership and influence. Finally, leadership purpose is active. Influencers are often agents of change—actively working toward the greater good. A leadership purpose statement reflects the actions provided by your leadership.

At the end of this chapter, I provide you with a template to write out your leadership purpose statement. But there are a few things you need to do before you get started.

Preparing for Purpose

Make an appointment with yourself. Schedule time on your calendar to sit with your thoughts and reflect on your passions, values,

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and purpose. Block out the time. If you are like too many leaders I work with, your organizations are hyper busy and offer little time for reflection or even strategic thinking. You must make this a priority. Your ability to influence depends on it. It depends on you finding the “I” within you and articulating the driving passions and purpose that transcend a role or job.

Take a notebook or journal and write out the common themes of your leadership in a variety of contexts over the past three to five years. In addition to your leadership at work, think about your home life, your volunteer work in the community, and your service in your faith community. Identify the common themes.

I remember shortly after completing my doctoral studies and working as a tenure-track professor at a local university, I pulled out a stenographer’s notebook and started writing. I didn’t have a fancy journal. The word that kept coming to me was *development*. Developing was a common thread of what I had done up to that point—whether at work as an organizational development consultant helping professionals grow, as a minister guiding others toward faith development, or working with community groups on personal and team development. A basic study of development led me to see that my purpose was to help people, teams, and organizations grow, mature, and ultimately become more effective. Growth was a core value; as an influencer, catalyzing others to grow or develop was an action I embraced. My leadership purpose was to move people and systems to higher levels of effectiveness. I live that out through my company as that purpose statement is our tagline, but I live it out personally also. That purpose statement freed me to use my skills and gifts in diverse contexts. Even now it helps me focus my energies and does not limit me to any one place or cause.

Now it’s your turn. It is time for you to get started. Know your purpose so you influence authentically, passionately, and clearly.

KNOW YOUR PURPOSE

Put It into Action

Elements of a Leadership Purpose Statement

- Need-directed—a leadership purpose statement conveys that some group or population is helped by your leadership. What is your why for doing what you do the way you do it?
- Values-based: a leadership purpose statement is fueled by passion and reflects your core values. What core values do you bring to work every day that give life to your leadership?
- Active—a leadership purpose statement reflects the distinct action or activities provided by your leadership. What action words reflect your leadership?

My leadership purpose is to

(action word(s) that reflect your leadership)

(your core values)

to, for, or with

(a group or population)

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Pull it Together:

In the space below, craft your leadership purpose statement by connecting the above three sections. You may rewrite and tweak the wording of the statement to suit your style.

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. As you look at this statement, what strikes you or particularly catches your attention about the statement?
2. What feelings does this statement evoke in you?
3. In what ways does it reflect themes from throughout your life?
4. How does this statement convey who you are and what you stand for? How does it frame your current leadership? And potentially your future leadership?