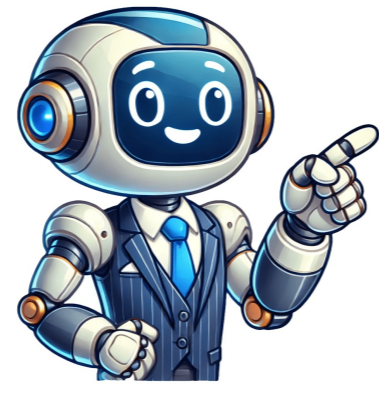


I'm not a bot



and she toiled for years as a writer and social-justice activist in Santa Rosa, California. But when wildfires swept through her community, Dani discovered that her strengths were needed in a new way: I've found that my networking and emergency response skills have been really helpful to my community, my students, and to firefighters! Although there is no research that directly explores how being thanked might fuel a sense of purpose, we do know that gratitude strengthens relationships and those are often the source of our purpose, as many of these stories suggest. 5. Find and build community As we see in Dani's case, we can often find our sense of purpose in the people around us. Many people told me about finding purpose in family. In tandem with his reading, Art McGee found purpose working for social and racial justice in love and respect for my hardworking father, he says. Working people like him deserved so much better. Environmental and social-justice organizer Jodi Sugerman-Brozán feels driven to leave the world in a better place than I found it. Becoming a mom strengthened that purpose (its going to be their world, and their kids world), she says. It definitely influences how I parent (wanting to raise anti-racist, feminist, radical kids who will want to continue the fight and be leaders). Of course, our kids may not embrace our purpose. Amber Cantorna was raised by purpose-driven parents who were right-wing Christians. My mom had us involved in stuff all the time, all within that conservative Christian bubble, she says. This family and community fueled a strong sense of purpose in Amber: To be a good Christian and role model. To be a blessing to other people. The trouble is that this underlying purpose involved making other people more like them. When she came out as a lesbian at age 27, Ambers family and community swiftly and suddenly cast her out. This triggered a deep crisis of purpose one that she resolved by finding a new faith community that helped shape me and gave me a sense of belonging, she says. Often, the nobility of our purpose reflects the company we keep. The purpose that came from Ambers parents was based on exclusion, as she discovered. There was no place and no purpose for her in that community once she embraced an identity they couldnt accept. A new sense of purpose came with the new community and identity she helped to build, of gay and lesbian Christians. If youre having trouble remembering your purpose, take a look at the people around you. What do you have in common with them? What are they trying to be? What impact do you see them having on the world? Is that impact a positive one? Can you join with them in making that impact? What do they need? Can you give it them? If the answers to those questions dont inspire you, then you might need to find a new community and with that, a new purpose may come. 6. Tell your story Amber Cantorna Reading can help you find your purpose but so can writing. Purpose often arises from curiosity about your own life. What obstacles have you encountered? What strengths helped you to overcome them? How did other people help you? How did your strengths help make life better for others? We all have the ability to make a narrative out of our own lives, says Emily Esfahani Smith, author of the 2017 book The Power of Meaning. It gives us clarity on our own lives, how to understand ourselves, and gives us a framework that goes beyond the day-to-day and basically helps us make sense of our experiences. Thats why Amber Cantorna wrote her memoir, Refocusing My Family: Coming Out, Being Cast Out, and Discovering the True Love of God. At first depressed after losing everyone she loved, Amber soon discovered new strengths in herself and she is using her book to help build a nonprofit organization called Beyond to support gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Christians in their coming-out process. One 2008 study found that those who see meaning and purpose in their lives are able to tell a story of change and growth, where they managed to overcome the obstacles they encountered. In other words, creating a narrative like Ambers can help us to see our own strengths and how applying those strengths can make a difference in the world, which increases our sense of self-efficacy. This is a valuable reflective process to all people, but Amber took it one step further, by publishing her autobiography and turning it into a tool for social change. Today, Ambers purpose is to help people like her feel less alone. 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