

Without a clear purpose, it's easy to get distracted by nonessential tasks or goals; you get pulled into whatever is going on or what other people are asking of you, rather than doing what you need to do to realize your vision and achieve your goals.

Focusing on productivity without having a clear purpose is like shooting at a target with a blindfold on. If you fire enough shots, you may eventually hit it, but it will take a lot longer and you'll waste a lot of ammunition in the process!

My purpose is to help people recover their health so they can live their dreams. This came directly out of my own experience healing from a complex, chronic illness. Once I recovered my own health, I knew that I wanted to use what I had learned in my own journey to help others to do the same.

But to translate purpose into action, it needs to take more specific form: a vision, and then a series of goals. Different people define these terms in different ways, but here's how I think of them. Your purpose is what you are ultimately trying to accomplish in the world; your vision is the way in which you plan to get there; and your goals are the specific steps you need to take to realize your vision.

My purpose has remained constant for many years, but my vision and goals have evolved and changed over time. For example, when I first decided to go back to school and get formal education in medicine, I chose to study acupuncture and integrative medicine. But as I went through school, I learned that I was much more passionate about functional medicine than I was about acupuncture, and by the time I graduated my vision had shifted away from being an acupuncturist and toward being a functional medicine practitioner.

Here's another example. When I first graduated from school, my vision was to create the number-one clinic and online resource for people interested in a functional medicine and ancestral nutrition approach. I still have both of those visions, but more recently I've added another: to create the most comprehensive and practical functional and evolutionary medicine training program in the world.

The beauty of clarifying your purpose, vision, and goals is that it then becomes easy to plan and measure your monthly, weekly, and daily activities. Your goals should always support your vision, and your vision should always support your purpose.

For example, right now my goals are to provide the highest quality of care that I can to my patients, to launch the first offering of the Kresser Institute training program, to continue producing high-quality content that helps people to transform their health (mostly through the blog and podcast), and to be the best father and husband I can be.

When I sit down to do my monthly, weekly, and daily planning, I prioritize tasks that get me close to these goals. And when a new opportunity comes my way, I decide whether to pursue it based on whether it fits with these goals.

Lately I've been saying no to a lot of projects because, although they are interesting, they don't get me closer to accomplishing these goals or realizing my visions. And one of the secrets of productivity that I've discovered is that you have to commit 100 percent to your goals and get very good about saying no, or you'll be pulled in a million different directions.

I've included a worksheet this week that will help you to clarify your own purpose, vision, and goals. For now, just think about the answers to these questions:

- What are the values that define you as a person and your work?
- What is the biggest impact that you'd like to make in the world?
- If you were on your deathbed looking back on your life, what accomplishments would you be most proud of?

It's important not to get too specific when define your purpose. It's the 30,000-foot view of what you want to accomplish in the world, and it needs to be flexible enough to accommodate the inevitable changes and shifts that you will experience both personally and professionally as you move through your life.

Your visions will be more specific than your purpose but should also remain somewhat flexible. You will end up having opportunities you can't imagine now, and those opportunities may take you to a place that is even better than what you had originally envisioned. And your vision should be mostly "qualitative." Focus less on exact details of your future and more on how you "feel" in that future and the qualitative aspects of your work and life.

For example, I enjoy working in different environments and I appreciate the flexibility that comes with not being in an office from nine to five every day. I also love to research, write, and create educational programs. For these reasons, I knew that being a full-time clinician working in an office every day each week was not something that would satisfy me. So I developed a vision that would accomplish my purpose—of helping people to recover their health—while also supporting the quality of life and experience I wanted to have.

Once you've created your vision, the next step is to identify concrete goals that will move you toward that vision. Your goals should be much more specific than your purpose and vision. If they're vague or poorly defined, you'll have a much more difficult time staying focused and realizing your vision.

But defining goals is not the stopping place. From there you need to get even more granular, by breaking your goals down further into discrete next steps or actions that you can take. And the truth is, what is next is what matters the most. You should have more detail and specificity in the short term and less and less the further out you go from today, since things are guaranteed to change between now and then.

Okay, that's it for now. Later this week I'll share my system for implementing this "purpose-vision-goals" productivity strategy. But first, you'll get a focus question to help you frame your work for the week, and then the worksheets for the week. Talk to you soon!