



How Discovering My Purpose Came to Be

Hey, thanks for being interested in my story. I am 48 years old and live in Atlanta, GA. I was raised in upstate NY. I am married to a great guy and if you can believe it, I am mom to a 27 year old and an 8 year old. Not sure what that is – bravery or insanity.

I have always loved all things international. I was an exchange student to Japan when I was 15. I worked at Walt Disney World when I was 19 as an interpreter and tour guide. That is where I met my first husband who was super handsome and French! I mean, jackpot, right?

By 20 years old, I was married with a kid and living in France. Hey, go big or go home.

We came back to the States for me to get my degree and I graduated from University of Albany with a degree in East Asian studies. From there we made the move to Atlanta and I got a job at a nonprofit focused on providing professional development to financial planners. I was in charge of their international relations.

I worked with them for just shy of 20 years, which still blows my mind. In some ways it feels like it flew by and in some ways it feels like it lasted forever.

While I was there I helped crafted ISO standards for financial planning, created a mentoring program, took over community development and got to know the top planners from all over the world.

It was a great gig. I literally traveled the world, hitting every continent but Antarctica. It was great but I always knew that this wasn't my purpose in life. I just felt it, you know? So around year 17, I was like, ok, I am really ready for a change.

2006 was a banner year for me. I got married again - I didn't mention that I had gotten divorced, did I? That happened in 2001 which definitely was not a banner year for me.

And In 2006 I became a yoga teacher. It's my habit to go to Kripalu once a year. If you are not familiar with Kripalu, man you have got to check it out. It is an amazing wellness center in Lenox, Massachusetts.

Anyway, around the same time that I was getting an itch to do something new, Kripalu was promoting the Certificate in Positive Psychology, which is also called CiPP. This class was a big commitment of time and money, so I probably played with the idea for a year or so before making the leap.

If you are not familiar with positive psychology, it is the study of how human beings thrive. When I took CiPP in 2015 and 16, it was a year-long class including two week-long immersions. Their new version has been streamlined a bit, so it runs a little shorter now.

CiPP was co-created between Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar and Megan McDonough. Tal is a Harvard trained psychologist. He used his extensive knowledge of positive psychology to build out the content for this class.

Megan used her creative genius to frame the learning experience. The thing that I loved about the class is that it provided a sampling of the many different things that help us thrive. Growing strong relationships, mindfulness, increasing resilience, shifting your perspective, and more. It was a true smorgasbord experience.

Of all the things that we studied, purpose was the thing that resonated most with me. As I mentioned, I have always had a sense that I had a purpose within me, but I didn't know what it was. And that always made me a little bit off – like maybe my skin was just a bit too tight. Or I had an itch that I couldn't quite scratch. It was always there in the background, ranging from mildly annoying to truly uncomfortable.

So of course when we studied about purpose, I was like “I need to know more about this.” Even before I graduated from CiPP, it was becoming clear that my purpose was to help other people find their purpose.

This was fueled by a few different things. First, I knew what it felt like to want to live a life of purpose but not be sure how to get there. And if I can help people navigate this journey so it doesn't take them the 25 years it took me, sign me up.

Second, I love to teach and I love to learn new things. So the research I have put into this class has been such fun.

Lastly, when I was 18 years old, I lost a good friend to suicide. I talk about Adam a bit more in module 2. Because of this life experience, I have always had a desire to help teens but I didn't know how.

The 2015 CDC suicide data sheet reported that suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for people aged 15 – 34 years old. Even more alarming, in June 2018 the CDC said that suicide rates continue to rise in nearly every state in the US. This is the overall number, which includes all age groups. Ok, that is the challenge and it's a big one.

Now I don't want to make it out like purpose is a silver bullet. But when it comes down to the tools we have in our toolbox, it is one of the best things that we have to fight our really tough challenges. Research has shown that people with purpose are less likely to be depressed, less

likely to be anxious, less likely to have issues with substance abuse, and less likely to feel suicidal. That's a whole lotta good less- likely's!

It makes sense, right? We all want to have our lives matter. We all want to contribute to the world. When we have purpose, it gives us a way to do this and grounds us emotionally. It gives our days meaning.

I graduated from CiPP in October 2016 and we held our first board meeting for Discovering My Purpose a month later. I was like "it's taken me 25 years to get here, so let's get going already!"

With my background in nonprofits, of course my immediate thought was to make Discovering My Purpose a charitable organization. It's a 501c3 and you can check out our gold status on Guidestar. That's an organization that rates nonprofit organizations.

Our mission is to help youth ages 14 – 24 years old live happier, more meaningful lives. Why this particular decade? Because that's a time when it's easier to make big, far reaching changes, right? With that said, In Pursuit of Purpose totally works for all ages.

Its foundational elements come from the best and brightest thought leaders in positive psychology, who have studied or worked at Yale, U Penn, Stanford, UCLA and beyond.

In 2017 and 2018, In Pursuit of Purpose has been taught as an in-person class and the feedback has been awesome.

I am currently teaching a group of teens living in a homeless shelter and we have been having a blast. Here's a picture of the meditation bottles that we made a couple of weeks ago.

We want to get the program out to a broader group of people, so that's the reason we have gotten it online. We are talking with high schools and colleges about ways that it can help improve student success. And we are also exploring providing it to youth coming out of the judicial and foster system. If you have ideas for where it could benefit people, talk to us! We have a pool of sponsorship dollars, so depending on the opportunity, we might be able to offer the program at a discounted rate or for free.

Ok, so now you know about me and you know about Discovering My Purpose. I would love to have the opportunity to learn about you. If you are registered for the class, jump into the class forum to introduce yourself and share your experiences.

I love the Ken Blanchard quote "None of us is as smart as all of us." I hope that you choose to enrich our community by taking part. You will do us a favor if you do.