The founder of TOMS Shoes, Blake Mycoskie, and the late Apple cofounder and CEO, Steve Jobs, model the role of passion and purpose in leader developmental readiness.

The Role of Passion and Purpose in Leader Developmental Readiness

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Passion must be the driving force that moves vision into action.

(Davies, 2008)

In 2006, Blake Mycoskie needed a break (Mycoskie, 2012). A serial entrepreneur, he had already started several successful businesses, but he was exhausted. He decided to vacation in Argentina, where he met an American woman running a shoe drive to provide footwear to people in need. He learned that many children in Argentina and elsewhere around the world are unable to afford shoes, and that going without footwear not only leads to discomfort but can also leave people open to disease. Further, obtaining shoe donations is difficult, and even when shoes are available they are often the wrong style or size. Mycoskie tried to put this information out of his mind; he was on vacation, after all. But he could not. He felt compelled to do something about it.

Ultimately, he returned to the United States and founded TOMS Shoes and Friends of TOMS, a shoe company that provides a one-for-one deal where, for each pair of shoes sold, the company provides a free pair to someone in need. He felt “excited and energized” in his new role (Mycoskie, 2012, p. 6). He had discovered a purpose for his life and work that provided him a “sense of fulfillment unlike anything I’d ever felt before” (p. 16). His passion for the cause coupled with a clear and personally meaningful aim helped make him an inspiring and effective leader.

Like Mycoskie, Steve Jobs also led with passion and purpose. According to his authorized biography (Isaacson, 2011), in his 20s Jobs was
interested in electronics and art. He took classes in calligraphy and spent
hours working on computers, but he was not sure how these interests might
come together until he began building computers with his friend, Steve
Wozniak. While “Woz” was more interested in the technical side of things,
Jobs was captivated by the design element. Together they founded Apple;
Jobs became the company’s president and Woz the company’s vice president.

Unlike other electronics companies at the time, with Jobs at the helm
the organization was focused not just on functionality, but also on de-
sign. He wanted elegantly conceived typefaces, smoothly scrolling screens,
and quietly running computers (Isaacson, 2011). Many people consider
design to be the way something looks, but to Jobs, “design is the funda-
mental soul of a man-made creation that ends up expressing itself in suc-
cessive outer layers of the project or service” (Blumenthal, 2012, p. 199).
Jobs was captivated by simple, sleek designs, and this passion ignited
his purpose. He discovered a tremendous sense of meaning in bringing
“beauty and art” (p. 198) to the computers and ultimately the handheld
devices he helped create. “His first love was Apple and that was his calling”
(p. 233).

While his passion for design served as the driving force behind his pur-
pose, it also caused him problems. Colleagues complained that his obses-
sion with relatively minor design details often held up production and in-
creased costs. His fascination with design even made it difficult for him to
buy furniture for his home. He was so choosy that in spite of his tremen-
dous wealth, he reportedly spent years in a home with little more than a
card table and a mattress (Isaacson, 2011).

Ultimately, Jobs’s focus on design provided Apple with a direction that
set the company apart, and customers noticed. Today, in spite of their higher
prices, Apple’s products continue to sell incredibly well—so well in fact
that Forbes recently recognized Apple as the world’s most valuable brand
(Badenhausen, 2013).

The passion and purpose that made Blake Mycoskie and Steve Jobs
successful leaders also contributed to their leader developmental readiness.
Both identified personally meaningful aims about which they were passion-
ate, and their purposes inspired others to follow them. Accordingly, they
found themselves in leadership positions and in need of developing leader-
ship skills. Having a personally meaningful goal (purpose) provided them
with a reason to develop their leadership capacities, and caring about what
they hoped to achieve (being passionate) provided the motivation to make
it happen. As discussed by Reichard and Walker in Chapter 1, leader devel-
opmental readiness begins with passion and purpose.

In this chapter, we discuss the role of passion and purpose in leader de-
velopmental readiness. We define both terms individually first and explain
how they function together next. We also discuss empirically substantiated
advantages of incorporating passion and purpose into the work we do. We
start with a discussion of passion.
Passion

The word *passion* has been used to describe the best aspects of an individual's life (e.g., love, vitality, and joy) or a painful affliction (e.g., desire, suffering, and obsession). Plato (Plato & Anderson, trans. 2009) discussed this dualistic nature of passion using his famous chariot metaphor in the dialogue *Phaedrus*. The soul, Plato explains, is the combined effort of a charioteer, who represents the rational mind, and two winged horses that represent passion. One of these horses is described as “beautiful, good, and well bred; but the other is the exact opposite” (Plato, trans. 2009, p. 246). Passion has two natures: one under the control of the individual and one that can lead the individual astray. Both forms of passion provide the energy needed to drive the rational mind forward; however, each leads to a very different outcome. Recent empirical work supports this dualistic nature of passion (Vallerand et al., 2003).

Passion, according to the empirical definition, is a strong inclination toward something that is liked and is important to the individual, and in which time and energy have been invested (Vallerand et al., 2003). Individuals can develop a passion for people, activities, or causes. Because passion for a cause is most relevant to leadership and leader developmental readiness, this is the form of passion we discuss in this chapter. The development of passion occurs through the process of selection, valuation, and internalization. Selection is simply the initial process of identification; the cause must catch the individual’s attention in some way. Over time, the individual places value on the cause, which determines the amount of passion experienced. A highly valued cause can become incorporated into an individual’s self-concept, and thus become recognized as a passion.

The Development of Passion

The way in which an individual values a cause will differentiate how passion develops and how the passion will affect the individual's life. When the cause is valued for intrinsic reasons, such as personal interest, it will develop into harmonious passion. This form of passion can be equated to the good horse in Plato's metaphor. Harmonious passion is associated with increased positive affect, engagement (Vallerand et al., 2003), meaning in life (Vallerand, 2012), and enhanced performance-related outcomes (Vallerand et al., 2008). Conversely, obsessive passion results when the cause is valued for extrinsic motives, including material gains, power, or fame. When the cause is valued for these reasons, the passion eliminates an element of personal choice. Individuals who are obsessively passionate feel compelled to act to reap potential rewards. While obsessive passion has a negative valence in the passion literature, it should be noted that expert musicians score higher on harmonious and obsessive passion compared to passionate novices (Mageau et al., 2009).
Fostering harmonious passion and mitigating the negative aspects of obsessive passion may be best achieved by finding pleasure in the work one pursues. The experience of deep enjoyment is often called flow, which results when individuals apply highly developed skills to meet a challenging task (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Individuals in flow become unaware of themselves, and they often lose track of time (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). In passionate activities, flow is associated with harmonious passion, but not obsessive passion (Vallerand et al., 2003). Finding flow in one’s activity by seeking challenges and cultivating one’s skills may provide a viable way to increase harmonious passion and to lessen the egocentricity of obsessive passion.

Passion in Leader Developmental Readiness

Passion is a central component of leader developmental readiness. Individuals can be passionate about becoming leaders, or they may have something they are passionate about doing and they realize that, to effect the change that matters to them, they need to learn to lead. Either way, passion fosters a critical sense of motivation to grow as a leader, and without passion individuals are unlikely to benefit from leadership development opportunities.

Steve Jobs’s passion for design provided the requisite drive to cultivate and refine the skills he would need as a visionary of design. The calligraphy classes and design projects that a young Steve Jobs was so passionate about prepared him to engage in deliberate practice, and deliberate practice is required to develop expertise (Ericsson & Chamess, 1994). Once Jobs became a design expert, others began to follow and he had a reason to cultivate his leadership capacities.

Jobs was at times motivated by both harmonious and obsessive passions, but only harmonious passion prepared him to develop as a leader. Harmonious passion emerged around his consistent focus on design and allowed him to explore ideas that deviated from industry norms. Harmonious passion led him to innovate. It became a part of who he was as a person and as a leader, and ultimately it set Apple apart. Jobs’s intrinsic motivation to create new design features fostered a harmonious passion that was present from the outset of his leadership development. It was only after he was an established leader that pros and external pressures primed his obsessive passion. When people are obsessively passionate, they are no longer open-minded (Harmon-Jones, Gable, & Price, 2013), and open-mindedness is a critical component of leader developmental readiness.

As developed leaders, both Blake Mycoskie and Steve Jobs reveal that leading with passion contributes to effective management practices. Subordinates attribute charisma to a leader based on a leader’s expression of passion and emotion (Thanem, 2013). This high-energy passion energizes and motivates followers toward accomplishing a common goal. Passion goes beyond the affective experience to recognize the importance of enjoying the
complete nature of the work being conducted (Day, 2004). In this sense, being passionate for a cause is also a feature of transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Through passionate work, a leader is able to model behavior for followers, which can also be motivational (for critiques of charismatic and transformational leaderships, see Yukl, 1999). As developing leaders take and value leadership opportunities, their motivation to lead grows (see Chapter 4 of this volume). Over time, the leader identity may become an aspect of the individual’s self-conception (see Chapter 3 of this volume; Waldman, Galvin, & Walumbwa, 2012). Leadership itself may become a passion in addition to the passion that initiated leader developmental readiness.

**Purpose**

Returning to Plato’s charioteer analogy, whereas the two horses represent the two sides of passion, the driver represents purpose. Just as the charioteer determines the horses’ course, purpose provides a sense of ultimate direction. It orients the work we do, it guides the decisions we make, and it influences the way we allocate resources and effort. A purpose in life is a far-reaching and personally meaningful aim toward which we feel inspired to make progress.

Historically, definitions of purpose have varied, but over the past decade a consensus has emerged: A purpose in life is a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once personally meaningful and at the same time leads to productive engagement with some aspect of the world beyond the self (Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003). Based on this model of purpose, the construct refers to a far horizon aim, motivated by a desire to have a positive impact on the world beyond the self.

Blake Mycoskie was guided by a desire to provide shoes to people in need, whereas Steve Jobs was motivated by a desire to bring beautifully designed technologies to market. Having a purpose in life provides individuals with a personally meaningful direction toward which to direct their time and energy (Damon, 2008).

While a purpose in life comes from within, studies find that it can be fostered through relationships and experiences. In fact, a recent study determined that even relatively brief conversations with young people about the things that matter most to them can help cultivate growth in purpose (Bundick, 2011). The first author is currently conducting research designed to create and evaluate programs and activities teachers can use to encourage the development of purpose in the classroom.

This definition of purpose highlights several important aspects of the construct as it relates to leader developmental readiness. First, individuals guided by a purpose in life are committed to advancing a far-reaching, personally meaningful goal. The important part of such a goal is not its attainability—many purposes in life can never be fully achieved—but
instead the sense of direction it provides. Mycoskie’s socially minded vision provided him with a meaningful aim, and Jobs’s desire to found a company that created design-inspired technologies similarly presented him with a personally significant sense of direction.

Second, the nature of the purposeful goal is important. Purpose is shaped by an individual’s belief system. Personally meaningful values and beliefs serve as the very foundation of a purpose in life (Damon, 2008). The things we value (e.g., protecting the environment, providing a high-quality product, serving others in need) become the aims we seek, and the aims we seek are pursued through our roles and development as leaders.

Third, individuals with purpose are actively engaged in working toward the goals they value. They feel compelled to act in service of them, and consequently, rather than merely talking about these aims, they take responsibility for moving them forward (Damon & Bronk, 2007).

Finally, individuals with purpose identify long-term aims that not only are personally meaningful, but also contribute to the broader world in some way. Leaders may seek to advance their colleagues’ skills, provide a useful product or service to customers, or help the community in which the organization or company functions. Regardless of the specific level at which they contribute, the hallmark of individuals with purpose is a concern for contributing to the world beyond the self.

Taken together, these aspects of purpose position individuals to develop as leaders. Having a purpose in life provides individuals with a leadership goal. It prepares individuals to develop as leaders because it provides them with a far-reaching aim that is at once personally meaningful and at the same time contributes to the world beyond the self. Armed with such an aspiration, individuals bring a clear objective to their leadership developmental experience. They know what they want to achieve, and they know how developing leadership skills will help them do so. Having a clear sense of direction ensures that they will value leadership development opportunities and take them seriously. Individuals with purpose go above and beyond the required courses and exercises, and they remain committed even when the path to becoming a leader seems difficult and long. Knowing what they are working toward helps keep them focused on the task at hand.

The Development of Purpose

Identifying one’s purpose in life is a developmental task, typically associated with healthy identity formation (Erikson, 1968, 1980). Beginning in adolescence (Erikson, 1968, 1980), and increasing in emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000), young people become more aware of who they are and who they hope to become. Trying on different roles and exploring various personalities allow them to discover their identities and the aims about which
they care deeply. The search for identity represents a critical developmental task, the ideal result of which is a coherent, stable, and flexible sense of who one is and a commitment to a particular set of personally meaningful values and beliefs. These values and beliefs serve as the foundation of a purpose in life that is underscored by a deep sense of personal meaningfulness.

Moral purposes in particular stem from clearly articulated moral identities (Damon & Bronk, 2007). Some people see who they are as separate from what they believe, but individuals with a strong moral identity see who they are as synonymous with their personal beliefs (Colby & Damon, 1994). Their core values define who they are and what they aspire to accomplish in life. Not surprisingly, core values and purposes often drive career decisions.

Research finds that most people who discover a purpose for their lives do so in one of two ways. Individuals either proactively pursue their aspirations or discover purposes retrospectively (Hill, Sumner, & Burrow, 2014). Mycoskie provides a useful example of someone who proactively pursued his purpose. He knew he wanted to help provide shoes to people in need, and he set out to find a sustainable way of doing so. Jobs, on the other hand, exemplified retrospective purpose. He discovered that he could bring his fascination with design and technology together by creating new technologies, and only then did he discover a purpose for his life. Purpose developed as a result of the work he was doing. Whether proactively or retrospectively determined, the discovery of purpose is the result of recognizing special skills or talents that can be put to use to solve personally meaningful social problems (Damon, 2008).

**Purpose in Leader Developmental Readiness**

Individuals and organizations both benefit from moral purposes. Compared to others, individuals with a purpose in life report higher levels of psychological well-being (Ryff & Singer, 2008) and flourishing (Seligman, 2011). In particular, compared to others, individuals with purpose report higher levels of happiness (French & Joseph, 1999; Lewis, Lanigan, Joseph, & de Fockert, 1997); hope (Bronk, Hill, Lapsley, Talib & Finch, 2009); and life satisfaction (Gillham et al., 2011; Peterson, Parks, & Seligman, 2005). Given the close relationship between psychological and physical well-being (Ryff & Singer, 1998), it is not surprising that a growing body of research finds that purpose is also associated with physical health (Ryff, Singer, & Love, 2004).

Leading a life of purpose appears to be particularly beneficial to adolescents and emerging adults. During these stages, young people are presented with seemingly endless professional, relational, and social options. While this can feel exhilarating for some, it can feel overwhelming for others (Arnett, 2000). Young people, unsure of which path to pursue, can drift
from major to major, relationship to relationship, and even career to career. Finding a purpose in life can provide a meaningful and productive direction to pursue (Damon, 2008).

In addition to being associated with positive outcomes for individuals, purposes are also associated with positive outcomes for organizations. When leaders are inspired by a purpose that in turn inspires employees, team members, or other followers, organizations benefit from the unifying sense of direction that purpose can provide (Karlgaard, 2009). In this way, an individual's purpose may become an organization's mission. To help this happen, leaders need to make sure that those with whom they work are well acquainted with the organization's purpose, and that followers know how their particular roles contribute to it. One of the things Mycoskie (2012) did to ensure that his employees were aware of and inspired by his purpose was to pay for them to travel to Argentina, Ethiopia, or other such places to distribute shoes to people in need. This helped connect employees with the TOMS mission and with Mycoskie's purpose.

**Bringing Passion and Purpose Together**

Individuals with a strong sense of passion and purpose are more likely to seek out opportunities to develop as leaders. They are likely to be highly motivated to find mentors, take on challenging work assignments, and explore formal opportunities to develop leadership skills. In these ways, individuals with passion and purpose stand poised to develop as leaders.

When people are passionate and purposeful, they are also likely to find themselves in leadership positions, just as Jobs and Mycoskie did. Their missions inspired others to join them, and by proxy they became leaders. This is not uncommon. Consider Nelson Mandela, Mark Zuckerberg, and Oprah Winfrey. Each of these individuals discovered a personally meaningful aim about which he or she was passionate, and in the process they inspired followers. Whether or not they intended to become leaders, their passion and purpose required it of them and in so doing provided them with a reason to develop leadership capacities.

Passion and purpose can provide the impetus to develop as leaders in other ways as well. Some purposes in life require the work of many to be realized. Jobs could not have envisioned, built, and marketed his design-inspired technologies on his own. He needed others’ help and support. Similarly, Mycoskie could not have begun to make serious headway toward providing shoes to all the people who needed them on his own. In each case, making progress toward the individual’s purpose required assistance from others. To lead others toward one’s purpose requires development as a leader.

Whatever the path, passion serves as the driving force that moves one’s vision, or purpose, into action. In this way, passion and purpose represent critical components of leader developmental readiness.
References


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