A 24-DAY CONVERSATION

The TRUE Purpose Guidebook

What is your life building?

Examine what matters. Recognize what you can contribute. Choose a direction you can put into practice.

> 24 daily readings and exercises to help you choose a contribution and give it a place in your life.

KIRBY S. INGLES

Faith / Discipline / Family / Execution

BEGIN HERE

Give the question a place to land.

You can be dependable, busy and respected while wondering what your life is building. Perhaps a role is ending. Perhaps the work that once gave you direction no longer answers the question. Perhaps you keep doing what is expected while setting aside work you want to explore.

I began thinking seriously about life after the military when former Sergeant Major of the Army Jack Tilley visited Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall. As I remember his message, he urged us to be intentional about the choices we made during service and the life those choices would support afterward. I began asking: What is my next move? What will I do with the rest of my life? What purpose will I serve?

Those questions did not produce an instant answer. They gave me a reason to examine the experiences, gifts and responsibilities already shaping my life. That is the work I invite you into here.

This guide offers 24 days of reading, reflection and action. Work at a pace that lets you complete the exercises. You will gather clues from your experience, put a contribution into practice and review what happens. Bring those notes together in a Direction Record: one page naming whom you want to serve, what you can contribute and why that work matters in this season. Use it to choose what deserves your effort, then make a Seven-Day Commitment and review what you learn.

My Christian faith shapes how I understand purpose, duty, providence and service. This guide speaks from that conviction. Faithful work can matter deeply even when it is difficult or its results remain out of sight.

I can offer questions, teaching and examples. The answers and choices are yours. Bring your actual life to the page: the people you love, the work you carry and the contribution you hope to make.

THE PRACTICE

Read. Write. Act. Review.

READ

Take one day at a time. Read the lesson before writing. Notice the concrete question it asks rather than searching for a perfect answer.

WRITE

Use the workshop page or your own notebook. Give specific examples. Keep facts, interpretations and hopes distinct. You do not have to submit or share your notes to use this guide.

ACT

Try the day's practice in your actual life. Give it enough attention to learn something, and keep it small enough to fit the responsibilities you already carry.

REVIEW

Record what happened. Keep your notes together. Days 13 and 24 bring the earlier work into focus. Finish with your Direction Record and Seven-Day Commitment, then use the Review Record after the attempt.

> Use the writing space or a separate notebook. Set your own dates. Each example marked hypothetical is an illustration to help you use the exercise.

A note on the personal material

Day 10 includes non-graphic references to trauma, self-harm and bereavement. You may pause or skip that reflection. You do not need to share private experiences to use this guide.

24 DAYS

From clues to a contribution.

Introduction / 2

Use the guide / 3

01–06 / Gather the clues

Question, support, timing, identity, gifts and evidence.

01 The question worth asking / 5

02 Your life has a purpose / 7

03 Find a beginning that fits this season / 9

04 It boils down to who you are / 11

05 You are designed for a purpose / 13

06 Find your place in the puzzle / 15

07–12 / Turn outward

Responsibility, vision, service, time, resources and preparation.

07 Take your place in the work / 17

08 Let your vision serve others / 19

09 Purpose becomes service / 21

10 Give your limited time a direction / 23

11 Notice what makes you useful / 25

12 Prepare for the difficult part / 27

13–18 / Choose and begin

Working direction, ownership, a first attempt, risk, fear and development.

13 Explore, reflect and choose / 29

14 Respond to the responsibility / 31

15 The clues are there. Will you begin? / 33

16 Choose a responsible next step / 35

17 Step into your fear / 37

18 Answer insecurity with preparation / 39

19–24 / Build and carry forward

Resourcefulness, ordinary influence, legacy, focus, rest and commitment.

19 Wake up the pioneering spirit / 41

20 Make the next ripple count / 43

21 Leave something worth carrying forward / 45

22 Keep your eyes on the destination / 47

23 There is virtue in rest / 49

24 What narrative will you ink into history? / 51

KEEP AND USE

Direction Record / 53

Review Record / 55

Seven-Day Commitment / 54

Carry it forward / 56

DAY 01 / GATHER THE CLUES

The question worth asking

What is my purpose? You can carry that question for years while doing everything expected of you. You work, provide, meet deadlines and keep moving. Then a quiet moment arrives, and you realize you have been answering everyone else's questions without giving your own direction much attention.

I remember learning at Patriot Boot Camp in September 2019 how seriously a person has to take the work he wants to pursue. Wanting something matters. Being willing to work for it matters too. The question is what deserves that effort, and whom it will serve.

You may have wanted to counsel, write, teach or address a problem in your community. Then the questions arrived: Do I have the credentials? Could this support my responsibilities? Where would I begin? Some questions point to genuine requirements. Others need closer examination. Write them down and look for evidence before deciding which is which.

I believe we are placed in this time and place for a reason. That conviction asks something of us. It calls us to pay attention to the people, gifts and responsibilities already in our lives. Passion can be a clue. It is not permission to abandon a duty or assume that desire alone makes a plan sound.

Today you are opening an inquiry. You do not need a polished life mission. Name the question you want to examine and the person who might benefit from the work. Use the coming days to explore that direction through action and reflection.

A CONCRETE EXAMPLE

> Hypothetical worked example, not a client story: “I want to write” is a starting interest. “I want to help new supervisors prepare for their first difficult conversation” names a person and a useful contribution. The second statement gives you something to investigate.

DAY 01 / YOUR WORK

Open the question

The contribution I keep returning to, even when I set it aside:

The person or problem that makes this matter:

My strongest objection, and what evidence would tell me whether it is a real requirement:

> Write a working question: 'How could I use [an ability or experience] to help [a person or group] with [a real need]?' Keep it in view for the next six days. For now, give yourself room to explore the question.

CARRY FORWARD

Bring the question forward. Tomorrow, identify the support you need to pursue it honestly.

DAY 02 / GATHER THE CLUES

Your life has a purpose

You do not always like what happens to you. Some experiences leave you wondering whether you have the knowledge, skills or strength to do anything useful with what comes next. I am not asking you to call a painful experience good. I am asking you to consider what you can do with the life before you.

When I first faced my own mission, I was afraid. It took me three years to make the first move. Guidance and support helped me begin. I remember standing to speak one evening and hearing people say that I commanded the room. Five years earlier, I could not have done that. The hesitation can be hard to see once someone is standing in front of you.

We were not designed to live alone. Purpose has a personal dimension, but the work usually brings us into relationship. A mentor can see a pattern we overlook. A friend can ask a question we would rather avoid. Someone who knows the work can distinguish the part we must learn from the part we are simply afraid to attempt.

Choose those people carefully. A companion is not someone who agrees with every idea. The right person respects you enough to ask what your decision will cost, who it affects and whether your conduct matches your convictions. Encouragement without truth leaves you exposed. Criticism without care can leave you stuck.

You still own the choice. Another person's confidence cannot do the work for you, and another person's uncertainty does not settle the decision. Consider the advice, examine the evidence and take responsibility for your next step. If you have been carrying the question alone, identify one person whose judgment you trust.

A CONCRETE EXAMPLE

> Hypothetical example: Suppose you want to help younger men find direction. One friend knows your character; another has led a mentoring group. Ask the first what he has seen you do well. Ask the second what the work actually requires. Those are different kinds of support.

DAY 02 / YOUR WORK

Build a small circle

A person who knows my character, and why I trust that judgment:

A person who understands the work, and the question I need answered:

What I am willing to own after I receive their advice:

> Choose one suitable person and prepare one specific question. If you speak, record what the person actually says rather than what you hoped to hear.

CARRY FORWARD

Keep the advice beside your question. Tomorrow, separate a late beginning from a lost opportunity.

DAY 03 / GATHER THE CLUES

Find a beginning that fits this season

Years can pass before you can name the work you want to do. Looking backward, it can feel obvious. Living forward, it rarely feels that clean. You were learning, meeting obligations, making choices and carrying experiences you could not yet explain.

There is a temptation to turn those years into a verdict: I should have started sooner, so there is no point starting now. That may describe a real loss. It may also leave a useful question unanswered: What can I responsibly begin with what I know today?

Timing also involves other people. A story may belong partly to a child, spouse, colleague or friend. Being ready to speak does not erase their privacy. Some work becomes possible only after consent, preparation or a change in responsibility. Identify the requirement and what meeting it would involve. If you keep moving the starting line after the requirement is met, examine why.

The work before you may be smaller than the dream you once pictured. Smaller can be more honest. Perhaps you cannot enter a new profession this year, but you can understand its qualifications. Perhaps you cannot tell a family story publicly, but you can write a private account of your own conduct and what you learned. You can make progress without taking what belongs to someone else.

You cannot recover a decade with one reckless decision. You can examine the next step available to you. Name what has changed: your ability, time, responsibilities, permission or understanding. Then choose a beginning that fits this season.

A CONCRETE EXAMPLE

> Hypothetical example: a man wants to mentor teenagers but has not completed the organization’s screening. His next step is to learn and meet its requirements. “I am too old” and “I need screening” are not the same obstacle; only one describes the work before him.

DAY 03 / YOUR WORK

Make a present-season decision

What I understand now that I could not have named earlier:

The real requirement or responsibility I must respect:

A beginning I can make in this season without bypassing that requirement:

> Complete one preparation step that has a visible result: a list of requirements, a private outline or an appropriate conversation. Name what is now clearer.

CARRY FORWARD

Tomorrow we turn from timing to identity: who are you beyond the role you have held?

DAY 04 / GATHER THE CLUES

It boils down to who you are

Who am I? That question can be harder than asking what you do. A job title gives you a quick answer. So does a family role, rank or achievement. Those things matter, but none of them contains the whole person.

Consider the words after “I am.” Examine that language. Listen for inherited labels, careless self-condemnation and claims you cannot support. Then ask what your choices show. A strong sentence is useful when it leads to honest conduct.

If you say you are courageous, where will courage be needed today? If you say you are a servant, whom will you serve when nobody notices? If you say faith shapes your life, what responsibility will you bring before God rather than manage through appearance alone?

My Christian faith places identity under God's authority. A statement about myself does not make it true or give me control over another person's response. It can remind me of a conviction I need to practice. 'I am learning to tell the truth when it costs me' names work I can do. Declaring myself a success does not do that work.

You are more than a title and more than a bad season. You are also responsible for what you do next. Do not use a hopeful identity to excuse conduct that contradicts it. Name the quality, choose the action and let your life supply evidence. Tomorrow we will ask where your gifts can serve.

A CONCRETE EXAMPLE

> Hypothetical example: “I am dependable” becomes concrete when you call before a deadline you cannot meet, explain the actual problem and make a realistic commitment. It does not require pretending you never struggle.

DAY 04 / YOUR WORK

Give identity evidence

A role or label I have mistaken for my whole identity:

A conviction I want my life to express:

One observable choice that would express it today:

> Write one honest “I am” statement. Under it, write the action that would support it and the behavior that would contradict it. Practice the action.

CARRY FORWARD

Carry the conviction into tomorrow’s inventory. Gifts need a direction worthy of the person using them.

DAY 05 / GATHER THE CLUES

You are designed for a purpose

Your life is a gift, and gifts bring responsibility. You have a particular combination of abilities, experiences, relationships and opportunities. The question is how you will put that combination to work.

As a father, I have had to examine my own motives. I brought my children into the world with purposes of my own. As I matured, I came to recognize more clearly that my children have lives and purposes beyond my ambitions for them. Wanting their security does not entitle me to decide every part of their future.

That lesson reaches beyond parenting. We can mistake leadership for shaping people into versions of ourselves. We can push a person toward a respectable title while ignoring the gifts and responsibilities already taking shape in that person's life. Service requires enough humility to listen.

Now apply that same care to yourself. Which expectations have you inherited without examining them? Which responsibilities are yours even if they are difficult? Which ability could make a practical difference to someone nearby? A useful direction has to make room for all three questions.

You have choices about how you use what you have been given. You can develop a skill, form a trustworthy relationship, improve a piece of work or meet a neglected need. Those choices may seem ordinary beside a dramatic calling. They are where a calling becomes visible. Begin with the resources in your hands and the people within reach.

A CONCRETE EXAMPLE

> Hypothetical example: a parent wants a child to choose a prestigious career. A better conversation asks what work the child understands, what preparation it requires and what responsibilities the choice must support. The parent can offer wisdom without claiming ownership of the answer.

DAY 05 / YOUR WORK

Separate gift, expectation and duty

A gift or ability I can name with a real example:

An expectation I need to examine rather than obey automatically:

A duty I must preserve while exploring a new direction:

> Choose one way to use the named ability in service this week. Keep the scale small enough that you can observe whether it is useful.

CARRY FORWARD

Tomorrow we compare your interests with evidence of ability and other people’s experience of your contribution.

DAY 06 / GATHER THE CLUES

Find your place in the puzzle

A purpose can feel like a puzzle because you are looking at pieces before you can see the picture. Start with three questions: What draws your interest? What do you do well? What do wise people praise you for?

An interest gets your attention. Ability helps you do the work. Feedback tells you something about how your work affects people. None is sufficient alone. You can enjoy a subject without being ready to teach it. You can become skilled at work that no longer fits your responsibilities. You can receive praise for being agreeable rather than useful.

Look for concrete scenes. Remember the last time someone trusted you with a difficult problem. What did you actually do? Did you clarify confusion, organize the work, listen without rushing, teach a skill or make a fair decision under pressure? What part of that contribution could you repeat?

I have benefited from mentors and coaches who helped clear the path. For your own inquiry, ask for feedback specific enough to use: what did the person see you do, what helped and what needs work? Encouragement matters, and a concrete observation gives you something to develop.

The picture does not have to be complete today. You are looking for a plausible overlap worth testing. A strength becomes more useful when you practice it against a real need and remain willing to learn. Treat your first answer as a direction to investigate, not a permanent label.

A CONCRETE EXAMPLE

> Hypothetical worked example: you enjoy repairing things, can explain a simple household repair clearly and have helped a neighbor understand the steps. You might teach that repair at a community workshop, then ask which part people still need help with.

DAY 06 / YOUR WORK

Create an evidence map

INTEREST: A subject or need I willingly return to:

ABILITY: A specific thing I can do, with one scene as evidence:

FEEDBACK: What someone actually relied on me for:

OVERLAP: A contribution these three clues suggest:

> Choose the overlap with the strongest evidence. Write one small way to test it and one question that will reveal whether it helped.

CARRY FORWARD

Keep this map. Day 7 brings the people who already depend on you into the picture.

DAY 07 / TURN OUTWARD

Take your place in the work

A chair is made to support someone. A lamp makes it possible to see. Those ordinary objects raise a direct question: What purpose do you serve?

You are a person, not a tool with one function. Still, the question interrupts a habit worth confronting. We can become so focused on discovering an impressive assignment that we neglect the useful work immediately before us. Someone needs a fair answer, an honest handoff, a finished task or a patient explanation. We keep looking elsewhere.

Your place in the work may involve service that receives little attention. Doing it well does not make your broader questions disappear. It gives those questions a place to meet reality. You learn whether you will serve when the contribution is inconvenient and whether your stated values survive an ordinary day.

Do not turn this into taking on everything. Dependability includes saying what you can do and following through. If work is shared, agree on who will carry each part. A useful contribution fits alongside the responsibilities already yours.

Today, name the people who already depend on you and the responsibility that needs attention. Put that beside yesterday's strengths map. Where can your ability meet a real need without violating another commitment? Start there. A meaningful life is built partly through work so familiar that you stopped seeing its importance.

A CONCRETE EXAMPLE

> Hypothetical example: a capable organizer keeps dreaming about community leadership while leaving the family’s shared commitments unclear. Preparing a simple agreed plan for the coming week can be useful service. It is evidence of leadership practiced close to home.

DAY 07 / YOUR WORK

Draw the responsibility circle

MINE: A responsibility I have agreed to carry:

SHARED: A responsibility that needs a clear conversation:

NOT MINE: Something I am taking over instead of addressing my own work:

NEARBY NEED: A specific contribution I can make without neglecting my duty:

> Finish one neglected piece of your own work. If the responsibility is shared, clarify the next step rather than silently taking control.

CARRY FORWARD

Tomorrow, widen the view from the duty in front of you to the change you hope to help create.

DAY 08 / TURN OUTWARD

Let your vision serve others

What kind of footprint will I leave? How will people remember me? Is there something more I can contribute? Those questions move us beyond getting through the day, but they can become another way of centering ourselves.

A vision becomes more useful when it describes a change you hope to help someone make. Who might understand something, receive help, practice a skill or face a problem with better support? If you cannot yet name the people served, keep exploring the need before assuming the idea will help.

Think of a person as a point of light in the community. Keep that image grounded. A light helps someone see. Your contribution must make something clearer or more possible. It does not require becoming the center of the room.

Explain your direction in plain language. Then listen to someone who understands the need. They may affirm part of it and challenge another part. That is useful. A vision that cannot tolerate correction will have trouble serving real people whose needs differ from the picture in your head.

You may need partners. Invite them into a clear contribution, with respect for their own responsibilities. Do not assume that your excitement creates their obligation. Today you are learning to make your direction understandable enough that another person can respond honestly. Tomorrow we will look at the value of the person beyond the task.

A CONCRETE EXAMPLE

> Hypothetical worked example: 'I want to strengthen my community' is a starting hope. 'I want to help neighbors grow a small vegetable garden so they can share food and learn together' names people, work and an intended benefit. A conversation with those neighbors can show whether the idea fits.

DAY 08 / YOUR WORK

Write a three-sentence vision

The people I want to serve and the situation they face:

The contribution I can make and the change they should be able to notice:

What I need to learn from those people before I assume the idea fits:

> Read your three sentences to yourself. Remove any phrase you could not explain to a stranger. If you discuss it, ask “What is unclear or missing?”

CARRY FORWARD

Keep the people visible. Day 9 asks what service looks like when recognition is absent.

DAY 09 / TURN OUTWARD

Purpose becomes service

Your journey is not about becoming flawless or arranging a life without difficulty. Ask how your purpose can shape useful work, truthful conduct and attention to the people already in your life. Your worth is not a score of how much you produce.

If you have lost someone close, you may know the ache of wishing you had visited, called or let a small dispute rest. You do not have to revisit a bereavement to use this lesson. You can also consider a living relationship you want to give more attention.

People are more than opportunities to advance your mission. They have dignity apart from what they can do for you. If your vision makes you too important to listen, repair a wrong or keep a promise, examine the vision. Service should deepen your regard for the person in front of you.

Begin with your conduct. Where are you pretending, comparing or waiting for applause? What useful action could you take without attaching your name to it? You may discover that the next step is less dramatic than you expected: follow through, listen fully, tell the truth or give someone credit.

This is work on yourself in relation to others. You cannot control their response, and you do not need to force a relationship that requires a boundary. You can choose what faithfulness looks like within your responsibility today. That choice gives purpose a form someone else can experience.

A CONCRETE EXAMPLE

> Hypothetical example: a team member is confused after your hurried explanation. Quiet service means returning, asking what was unclear and explaining again. You need not turn the correction into a speech about being a caring leader.

DAY 09 / YOUR WORK

Move from appearance to service

A person whose need I have overlooked:

What would actually help, rather than make me look helpful:

A boundary or permission I need to respect:

> Make one specific contribution that does not depend on public credit. Notice what you did and what the other person says or does in response.

CARRY FORWARD

Tomorrow’s reflection is more personal: what deserves your limited time? You may pause before it if needed.

DAY 10 / TURN OUTWARD

Give your limited time a direction

Finding meaning in painful parts of my life made this question personal. I have written about trauma, thoughts of self-harm and the death of my grandfather. Those are not decorations for a lesson. They are part of why I take connection, purpose and the use of our time seriously.

I also described keeping a skull near my desk as a reminder of mortality. The phrase is memento mori: remember that you must die. It brought the question of how I was living closer. Remembering mortality does not mean every fear is imaginary or that you must face difficulty without help.

For much of my life, I followed what other people wanted me to do. There can be care behind those expectations, but I still have to examine the direction I choose. Looking at my experiences, skills and interests helped lead me toward coaching and training. That gave me work to develop, rather than a reason to stop asking questions.

Pleasure, passion and purpose are worth examining without turning them into a formula for happiness. Pleasure can be brief. Passion can energize work. Purpose asks what deserves a sustained contribution when the feeling changes. Look at your calendar: where are you giving time to what you say matters?

Today, bring your choices into view. What keeps receiving your best attention? What do you say matters but repeatedly postpone? Remembering mortality can sharpen a choice without turning it into recklessness. The people who depend on you still matter. Choose a piece of meaningful work you can do while honoring those responsibilities.

A CONCRETE EXAMPLE

> Hypothetical worked example: “My family matters most” and “I will be present sometime” do not tell you what to do. “I will put the phone away during our agreed meal and listen” is a practice you can carry out and review.

DAY 10 / YOUR WORK

Conduct a time-and-value review

What has occupied my best attention recently:

What I say matters, and the evidence of whether I have made room for it:

One thing I will reduce to make room for a specific meaningful action:

> Make that tradeoff once, deliberately. If this lesson brings distress, pause the exercise and seek appropriate personal or professional support; a purpose exercise is not treatment.

CARRY FORWARD

Carry the chosen priority forward. Tomorrow’s inventory asks what you already have available to serve it.

DAY 11 / TURN OUTWARD

Notice what makes you useful

No one else has lived your exact history. Think of the world as a puzzle, with people making different contributions. Rather than trying to calculate how rare you are, ask what your experience helps you notice and what you can contribute.

Your perceptions, beliefs, creativity, relationships, habits, humor and goals influence how you approach a problem. Some help you. Others need examination. Experience gives you material to work with; it does not make every conclusion you draw correct.

Take inventory without ranking your worth against another person's. Someone else may have a credential you lack. You may understand a problem from the inside. Both facts can matter. Name the work you can offer now and the part you want to learn next.

There is also a trap in always trying to be different. You can spend so much energy distinguishing yourself that you stop asking whether your work is useful. Your reader, neighbor or teammate may need a clear explanation rather than a novel idea. Your contribution does not lose value because another person can help too.

Look backward for resources and forward for responsibility. Which experience helps you understand the people named on Day 8? Which skill could reduce their difficulty? Which assumption could cause harm if left unexamined? An honest inventory includes limits. Those limits give you a better place to begin.

A CONCRETE EXAMPLE

> Hypothetical worked example: after years of maintaining a household on a tight budget, you may know how to plan a useful week of meals. Sharing a menu, shopping list and one simple recipe with someone who asks gives that experience a practical use.

DAY 11 / YOUR WORK

Inventory resources and limits

EXPERIENCE: What I understand firsthand:

SKILL: Something I can demonstrate or explain:

RELATIONSHIP OR TOOL: A resource that could help:

LEARNING: What I need to understand or practice next:

> Match one resource to the need from Day 8. Name the part you can contribute now and what you want to learn next.

CARRY FORWARD

Day 12 turns those limits and obstacles into specific preparation.

DAY 12 / TURN OUTWARD

Prepare for the difficult part

A worthwhile direction may ask more of you than you expected. The task can expose a gap you did not know you had. Perhaps you need a skill, a difficult conversation or the humility to ask for help.

Difficulty can become information. It can also expose a poor plan or a genuine limit. Perseverance includes examining the result, changing the approach and deciding whether the work should continue.

People may encourage you, doubt you or leave. None of those responses proves your direction right or wrong. Listen carefully enough to distinguish a useful warning from someone else's preference. Then own the decision you make.

You also need companions who have walked parts of the road. Ask a specific question and listen carefully. Try what is useful, then let the person know what you learned. A mentor can help you prepare; you still have to do the work.

Choose one obstacle today. Describe it without exaggeration. “Everything is against me” cannot guide preparation. “I do not know how to lead the first meeting” can. Once the obstacle is clear, you can identify a skill to practice, information to verify or an appropriate person to consult. The purpose of preparation is to make the next faithful action possible.

A CONCRETE EXAMPLE

> Hypothetical worked example: you want to help at a community meal but have never cooked for a group. Ask an experienced volunteer to show you how they plan portions and use the kitchen. Practice one dish before taking on a larger part of the meal.

DAY 12 / YOUR WORK

Turn an obstacle into preparation

The obstacle, stated as one concrete problem:

What I know, what I assume and what I need to verify:

The preparation step that would make action possible:

What would show that preparation is sufficient for this attempt:

> Complete the preparation step and save its result. Avoid expanding it into a complete reinvention of your life.

CARRY FORWARD

Tomorrow is a review point. Bring your notes and the evidence from actions you have taken.

DAY 13 / CHOOSE AND BEGIN

Explore, reflect and choose

You can stay busy for years without becoming clearer about direction. Reflection interrupts that pattern. It asks you to notice what your actions are teaching you and what your repeated interests are pointing toward.

Return to your question from Day 1, support circle from Day 2, evidence map from Day 6, responsibility circle from Day 7 and vision from Day 8. Which people or needs keep appearing? Where have you made a useful contribution? Which part remains an assumption?

Be careful with the urge to make your notes sound impressive. You are writing a working statement, not a plaque. It should help you make a decision when two worthwhile things compete for your attention. If it can justify every possible choice, it is too broad to guide you.

My aim is to help you examine the route you choose each day. That examination includes the environment and people around you. Ask someone wise to challenge the statement. What is missing? What does it overlook? What duty would it make easier to neglect?

You do not need to discover an unchangeable sentence. You need a clear enough direction to test through service. Write what you understand now, the evidence that supports it and the question still open. Then let the next part of the guide put that direction under the pressure of actual choices.

A CONCRETE EXAMPLE

> Hypothetical worked example: “I exist to help everyone reach their potential” cannot guide this week. “In this season, I want to help first-time supervisors prepare clear expectation conversations, using my experience organizing work” identifies an audience, contribution and season. It is still a proposal to test.

DAY 13 / YOUR WORK

Write a working direction

In this season, I want to serve…by…because…

The evidence from Days 1–12 that supports that direction:

The strongest unanswered question or conflicting duty:

> Read the statement aloud. Replace any phrase you would not use in an ordinary conversation. Keep the revised version for the coming decisions.

CARRY FORWARD

Tomorrow asks whether a responsibility is calling you to act before you feel comfortable.

DAY 14 / CHOOSE AND BEGIN

Respond to the responsibility

Have you ever reached a leadership role and begun to feel secure? The title is yours. The routine is familiar. Then a problem puts the team under scrutiny, and you have to decide whether the position is a privilege to protect or a responsibility to carry.

Here is a hard question: how will you represent the people you lead while telling the truth about what happened? Owning your part can threaten comfort and reputation. Blame can feel safer for a moment. Your response shows people how you lead under pressure.

Responsible leadership requires a truthful account. Say what happened, where your instructions or choices contributed and what needs to change. Address the work clearly without making a person's whole character the problem.

Sometimes the most useful action comes before the situation becomes a crisis. You have seen the missed handoffs, unclear expectations or recurring confusion. There can be genuine surprises in life; still, we should not ignore the warning we already have.

Your working direction from yesterday should help you act here. A statement of purpose has little use if it leaves an acknowledged responsibility untouched. Name what belongs to you and choose a response that serves the people affected. You may not be able to solve the whole problem. Begin with what you know and what you have authority to do.

A CONCRETE EXAMPLE

> Hypothetical scene: a team misses a deadline after you gave unclear priorities. Begin with your part: clarify what you asked, identify the conflicting instructions and agree on a workable next step. Address each person’s actual responsibility without public humiliation or a performance of self-blame.

DAY 14 / YOUR WORK

Write the response before the defense

What happened, using observable facts:

My part, distinguished from what belongs to others:

Who is affected and what they need next:

The response I can make within my authority:

> Have the conversation or take the first step that the situation calls for. Be clear about your part and what needs to happen next.

CARRY FORWARD

Tomorrow’s story turns from a duty you avoid to a contribution you keep postponing.

DAY 15 / CHOOSE AND BEGIN

The clues are there. Will you begin?

> I knew Ben Killoy online before we spent a weekend together. He had interviewed me on his podcast. We had spoken, followed each other and engaged with one another's work. Then he asked a straightforward question: when was I going to start my own podcast?

> For the next day, I made excuses. Conversations about podcasting kept circling back. Eventually I stopped defending the delay and began discussing the possibility. What was the vision? What was the purpose? Why do it? How often? What kind of show? What would it be called? Then I made the commitment. I remember Ben's excitement when I finally said I would begin.

The conversation moved from reasons not to begin toward choices that could support a beginning. We discussed the purpose and shape of the podcast. I still had to decide what to do. Encouragement can help you begin, but it cannot make the commitment for you.

You may know the feeling of an idea you cannot quite put down. Give it a serious look. What would beginning require? What have you already prepared? What can you learn from a first attempt? If a real qualification or permission is missing, make that your next step rather than adding another reason to delay.

Keep the destination in view and choose a first attempt that will teach you something. You may have a part in beginning work that someone else develops further. You need not own the whole future before making a useful contribution. The question today is specific: which conversation would move your idea from an excuse toward a decision?

A CONCRETE EXAMPLE

> Hypothetical worked example: instead of “I need to figure out a whole show,” prepare a private pilot outline: one audience, one question, one example and one useful ending. Read it to a trusted person. That attempt can reveal confusion without committing you to a public release.

DAY 15 / YOUR WORK

Move the conversation toward a decision

The contribution I keep postponing:

A genuine requirement I must meet:

A condition I keep adding, and the evidence for whether it is necessary:

A small private or permitted attempt that would teach me something:

> Make the attempt, or take the preparation step it needs. Write down what you learned and the question you can answer next.

CARRY FORWARD

Tomorrow, examine the tradeoff between protecting comfort and taking a responsible risk.

DAY 16 / CHOOSE AND BEGIN

Choose a responsible next step

Consider the choice before you. You might prepare, make a small attempt, reduce the scope or decide the idea does not fit. The useful next step brings your question into contact with evidence while respecting your responsibilities.

I know we do not all begin with safety, support or equal opportunity. A difficult start can leave real constraints. Name those constraints clearly. Then ask what choices remain available, what support is needed and whether this is the right season for the work.

Step forward with courage and purpose so other people might have better opportunities. Keep the people served in view. Taking a risk merely to prove you are bold can become another form of self-concern. Courage should serve something worth doing.

A responsible step has boundaries. Decide how much time, money or attention you can give it and which commitment you will protect. Those choices help you act with care for the people who share your life.

Every first attempt will leave some uncertainty. Decide what you can learn only by doing. Then choose the step and carry it out. You are not promising the outcome. You are accepting responsibility for an honest attempt and the review that follows.

A CONCRETE EXAMPLE

> Hypothetical example: you want to turn a love of woodworking into useful work. Make one small piece for someone with a clear need, keep track of the time and materials, and ask how it serves them. That gives you more to consider than enthusiasm alone.

DAY 16 / YOUR WORK

Make a bounded decision

ATTEMPT: The specific action and whom it will serve:

BOUNDARY: Time/resources available, and the duty I will protect:

STOP OR ADJUST: The evidence that would require a change:

REVIEW: When and how I will examine the result:

Choose a small attempt that will help answer your question. Give it the time and care you agreed to, then review what happened.

CARRY FORWARD

Day 17 separates fear of judgment from a hazard that requires preparation.

DAY 17 / CHOOSE AND BEGIN

Step into your fear

You do not need to become fearless before doing work that matters. Fear can arrive with a useful warning, an old story or the discomfort of being seen learning. Before you decide what it means, name it.

“I am afraid” is real, but incomplete. Are you afraid of harming someone, failing a requirement, being rejected, looking inexperienced or discovering the idea does not work? Each calls for a different response. Treating every fear as cowardice is poor judgment. Treating every fear as a stop sign can keep you motionless.

Think back to the conversation about my podcast. I kept making excuses until we began discussing the vision, purpose and shape of the show. The useful question for you is which practical question comes next. You may be able to address it while fear is still present.

Make room for a truthful attempt. If you lack skill, practice. If there is a real hazard, address it. If permission is required, obtain it. If the task is appropriate and your main fear is being judged, consider whether you can accept that discomfort for the sake of the people served.

The useful comparison is between the prediction and what actually happens. You may discover that the response is mixed, that a skill needs work or that the feared event did not occur. Record the facts. You are learning to act with fear present rather than wait for a feeling that may never arrive.

A CONCRETE EXAMPLE

> Hypothetical worked example: you want to join a local choir but expect your voice to let everyone down. Ask about a rehearsal and try the practice they recommend. Afterwards, separate what happened from what you feared would happen.

DAY 17 / YOUR WORK

Separate prediction from evidence

FEAR: The exact thing I predict will happen:

TYPE: Real hazard, skill gap, permission issue or fear of judgment:

RESPONSE: The preparation or bounded step that fits:

OBSERVATION: What actually happened, and what remains unknown:

Make one appropriate attempt and compare the result with the prediction. Keep the difference visible.

CARRY FORWARD

Tomorrow, use insecurity to identify a specific development need rather than a verdict on your worth.

DAY 18 / CHOOSE AND BEGIN

Answer insecurity with preparation

Seeing a direction more clearly can expose how much you still need to learn. You see the work and the gap between it and your present ability. That can bring familiar doubts: I cannot do this. I am not good enough. Someone like me has no business trying.

Slow down and examine the claim. You may lack education, experience, money, maturity or a particular skill. Those are different problems. A vague judgment about yourself hides the actual work. Specificity gives you a way to prepare.

Believing you can grow includes being willing to learn, receive correction and change your approach. Confidence is more useful when it leads you into practice. The people you hope to serve need the care and skill you bring to the work.

Choose one development gap rather than trying to become a different person overnight. What practice would address it? Who can give informed feedback? What would a sufficient first attempt look like? A small standard that you can demonstrate is more useful than a declaration that nothing can stop you.

Your direction may need adjustment too. If the scope exceeds your present capacity, reduce the scope without discarding the contribution. Continue with a truthful account of where you are. Confidence has firmer ground when it rests on preparation you can point to.

A CONCRETE EXAMPLE

> Hypothetical worked example: you want to visit an older neighbor but worry you will not know what to say. Prepare one simple question and leave room to listen. After the visit, consider whether you listened well and what you would ask next time.

DAY 18 / YOUR WORK

Build a development step

A broad doubt I keep repeating:

The specific skill, resource or experience missing beneath it:

A practice or learning step I can complete:

The evidence or feedback that would show progress:

> Complete the step and record the feedback accurately. Name any improvement you can support and the part still requiring work.

CARRY FORWARD

Tomorrow, look at the resources and lessons already available in your history.

DAY 19 / BUILD AND CARRY FORWARD

Wake up the pioneering spirit

> I could listen to my grandfather and his siblings tell family stories for hours. Those accounts drew me into the history behind my own life. They also drew my attention to work: the ordinary labor required to keep a family moving.

> One account that stayed with me was of my grandfather losing his father when he was nine. There were fourteen children in that family. As I understood the family story, work was part of how they made a life in humble circumstances. I return to that memory as a reason to examine the resources and comforts I can take for granted.

The point is not to romanticize hardship. It is to notice what is in your grasp. You may have knowledge, tools, time, a relationship or a skill you overlook while wishing you had a different beginning. Take inventory before concluding that you have nothing to build with.

In a conversation with Ben Killoy on the True Success Podcast, we explored work and meaning. That raises a useful question here: is your activity serving a direction, or simply filling the day? Being busy does not tell you whether the work is helping.

Settle down long enough to practice. Improve the work in front of you. Respect the people involved. Seek proficiency rather than the appearance of constant expansion. A pioneering spirit can mean building something useful with what you already have, then making it better with patient effort.

A CONCRETE EXAMPLE

> Hypothetical worked example: a community garden needs a clearer plan for watering. List the tools and time already available, ask the volunteers what keeps being missed and try one simple change. Then see whether the beds receive the care they need.

DAY 19 / YOUR WORK

Take stock, then improve

TIME: A realistic period I can use without neglecting another duty:

TOOLS / KNOWLEDGE: What is already available:

PEOPLE: Someone whose permission or input I need:

IMPROVEMENT: One piece of work I can make more useful:

> Improve that piece of work. Compare the result with the original and describe the difference without inflating it.

CARRY FORWARD

Day 20 moves from work systems to the ordinary human moment that can carry your contribution.

DAY 20 / BUILD AND CARRY FORWARD

Make the next ripple count

> When I began working mostly from home, I started taking my young son to school. Just before the aide opened the car door, I would give him words of encouragement. It was a short moment before the day took over.

> He would get out, run toward the building, and I would drive away hoping that something good from those words would travel with him. Then I would ask myself what kind of impact I would have that day. The encouragement was for him, but the question came back to me.

The choice before me was simple: rush through the moment, or give my son my attention.

You have moments like that too. A greeting, a handoff, a difficult answer or a conversation before someone leaves. It is easy to dismiss them because they do not look like the important work. Often they are part of it.

Look at your day through the people you will encounter. What would be useful to them? What tone and attention will you bring? You do not need to manufacture a profound speech. Listen, encourage honestly, finish a promise or make one confusing thing clearer. Purpose can have a very ordinary voice.

A CONCRETE EXAMPLE

> Hypothetical example: before someone you love leaves for a demanding day, ask what is on their mind. Listen and offer the help you can give. A few attentive minutes may be the contribution available to you that morning.

DAY 20 / YOUR WORK

Choose an ordinary moment deliberately

The person and moment I am likely to encounter:

What might be useful to them:

The contribution I can make:

What I noticed afterward:

> Give that moment your attention. Afterwards, write a few lines about what you did and what you noticed.

CARRY FORWARD

Tomorrow, consider what you want to pass on beyond the immediate result.

DAY 21 / BUILD AND CARRY FORWARD

Leave something worth carrying forward

I believe our lives are under God's providence. I cannot see the whole plan. My responsibility is to be faithful in the work and relationships entrusted to me, without claiming to know why every event happened.

That belief gives me a reason to be faithful with my part. It does not give me control over every result. Some influence becomes visible later. Some may never become visible to us. We can still choose the quality of what we teach, record, build and model.

I am an author because I want my children and the generations after them to understand what I lived for. If other readers benefit, I am grateful. But I also think about the third and fourth generations: people who may need a record of the convictions, struggles and choices that shaped the family before them.

That is a different aim from securing applause today. It asks whether the work will remain understandable and truthful when you are no longer present to explain it. What are you passing on? Is it a useful practice, an honest account, a skill, an example of repair or a habit of service?

You cannot determine the size of every ripple. You can attend to the contribution that leaves your hands. Choose one lesson worth preserving and a form that helps someone use it. The future is not yours to command. Today's responsibility is yours to carry.

A CONCRETE EXAMPLE

> Hypothetical worked example: record how your family makes a familiar meal, including the small steps that make it work and why the meal matters to you. A recipe with a story gives someone more to carry forward than an instruction to remember the family.

DAY 21 / YOUR WORK

Preserve a useful lesson

The conviction, skill or lesson worth passing on:

A concrete experience that explains it, limited to what I can responsibly share:

The person or generation who could use it:

The form I will make: a private letter, demonstration, instructions or another useful record:

> Make a first version of the letter, lesson, recording or demonstration. Begin with the part of the story that is yours to tell.

CARRY FORWARD

Tomorrow we return to the destination you chose and examine what continued commitment requires.

DAY 22 / BUILD AND CARRY FORWARD

Keep your eyes on the destination

Beginning can bring energy. You can see possibilities, talk about the work and imagine how it will feel when it is done. Then friction arrives. The skill develops slowly. A person does not respond. The calendar fills. Another idea starts to look easier.

Return to the reason for your direction. Whom were you trying to serve? What need did you identify? What evidence has the work produced? Commitment should deepen your attention to those questions. It should not make you immune to correction.

A destination and a method are different. You may keep the contribution while changing the approach. Perhaps the people you hoped to help need a clearer explanation, a different setting or a smaller first step. Adjusting to that evidence can be faithful work.

There are times to stop as well. A duty may change. A qualification may be missing. Your proposed contribution may not fit the need. Honest review is part of responsibility. Do not keep an unsound plan alive merely to protect the identity of someone who never quits.

Today, reduce one avoidable distraction and complete the next useful piece of work. Then make a decision about the direction based on the evidence you have, with the unknowns still visible. Staying focused means knowing what you are choosing to continue and why.

A CONCRETE EXAMPLE

> Hypothetical worked example: you begin tutoring someone in reading, then find that the chosen material is frustrating them. Return to the purpose of the work, ask what is difficult and try material better suited to the learner. You can stay committed to helping while changing the approach.

DAY 22 / YOUR WORK

Decide: continue, adjust or stop

The destination I chose, and whom it serves:

Evidence that supports continuing:

Evidence that calls for adjustment or stopping:

My decision and the next concrete piece of work:

> Remove one distraction for the period needed to finish that piece. Record what was completed, not merely the time spent.

CARRY FORWARD

Tomorrow, protect the rest that will let you return to the work with attention.

DAY 23 / BUILD AND CARRY FORWARD

There is virtue in rest

You have to rest. A meaningful purpose does not remove that responsibility. Constant activity can become a way to avoid examining whether the work is sound or whether you are giving the people near you your remaining scraps of attention.

Rest belongs in this journey. You have been asked to act, persevere and develop. Now stop, breathe and replenish. The work is not improved by pretending you are without limits.

Rest also asks for trust. Do what is yours to do, then release the claim that everything depends on your continuous effort. My faith does not require me to act as though I govern every outcome. Responsibility includes knowing when the day's work should end.

A useful period of rest fits your obligations. You may need a handoff, an agreed boundary or a smaller scope. Make that arrangement clearly so someone else is not left carrying a duty they did not agree to take. Then allow yourself to rest.

Notice the difference between rest and avoidance. One helps you return with attention. The other keeps postponing the next clear responsibility. You do not need a complicated system to begin. Name what you will stop, how the duty will be covered and when you will return. Leave room for a life that includes faithful work and genuine rest.

A CONCRETE EXAMPLE

> Hypothetical example: agree with your household on a quiet evening and finish the one arrangement that needs your attention first. Put ordinary work away. Let the evening include a meal, conversation or time outside rather than filling every open minute.

DAY 23 / YOUR WORK

Make rest workable

What I want to put down for a while:

The arrangement that will help me rest:

When I will make room for it:

What I noticed after taking the pause:

> Take the pause you planned. Notice what made it restful and what you would arrange differently next time.

CARRY FORWARD

Day 24 brings the whole journey into a direction and a next-week commitment you can actually use.

DAY 24 / BUILD AND CARRY FORWARD

What narrative will you ink into history?

If you want a life of purpose and meaning, do things that matter regularly. You do not have to start a global movement. You have to bring your convictions, strengths and resources into the work and relationships you have been given.

This is about duty. It is about putting the human back into humanity: serving people, choosing your conduct and living intentionally. A life does not become significant because the sentence describing it sounds grand. The choices have to carry the meaning.

Return to the school morning. My words to my son were also a question for me. What kind of impact would I have that day? The scene is ordinary enough to repeat in many forms. It is also demanding enough to expose the difference between what we say and how we live.

If you have completed the exercises, your notes now hold clues, attempted contributions and reflections on responsibility. Some questions will remain open. Use what you have learned to name a direction with more honesty and choose the next step with more care.

You cannot command the full effect of a life. You can make a faithful contribution today. After the Day 24 workshop, complete the Direction Record: whom you want to serve, what you can offer and why it matters. Then choose a step you can carry into the coming week. Give the work a place in your life beyond these pages.

A CONCRETE EXAMPLE

> Hypothetical worked example: 'I want to make time for people who feel alone in our neighborhood' names a direction. 'This week I will invite one neighbor I know for coffee, listen and make time for the conversation' names a commitment. The first helps you choose what matters; the second gives it a place in your week.

DAY 24 / YOUR WORK

Bring the evidence together

The clearest pattern across my notes and actions:

The contribution I want to continue, and whom it serves:

What I learned that changed my original idea:

The open question I will carry without pretending it is settled:

> Bring your notes together in the Direction Record. Use it to choose your Seven-Day Commitment. After the week, return to the Review Record and decide what you want to carry forward.

CARRY FORWARD

The next pages turn the journey into a record you can revisit, revise and put to work.

KEEP THIS PAGE

Your Direction Record

Bring the patterns in your notes onto one page. Name whom you want to serve, what you can contribute and why it matters in this season. Keep this page nearby when you need to choose where to give your time and effort. Revise it as you learn.

In this season, I want to serve...

The contribution I can make is...

This matters to me because...

The experience and observations that point me in this direction:

The responsibility I will keep making room for:

The question I want to explore next:

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Your Seven-Day Commitment

Choose one action that puts your direction into practice. Give it a place in the coming week.

The action I will take:

The person or need it will serve:

The time or resources I will give it:

I will begin on... and review on...

The part I intend to finish:

> Choose work small enough to do and meaningful enough to learn from.

At the review, distinguish the action you took from the outcome you hoped for. An attempt can teach you something without producing the result you wanted.

AFTER THE ATTEMPT

Your Review Record

Come back after your attempt. Notice what the work taught you before choosing the next step.

What I did and noticed:

What surprised me, or what I still want to understand:

What became clearer about my direction:

What I will continue, change or put down:

The next contribution I want to make:

> Keep this page with your Direction Record. Let experience help you develop the direction rather than lock you into the first answer.

CONTINUE THE WORK

Let your choices carry the lesson.

Bring your Direction Record into the coming week. Let it remind you whom you want to serve, what you can contribute and why that matters. Choose the action you will take, then come back and consider what you learned.

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