

YOU ARE A CHANGEMAKER!

WEEK ONE: CONNECTING TO YOUR PURPOSE

... And if we do act, in however small a way,
we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future.
The future is an infinite succession of presents,
and to live now as we think human beings should live,
in defiance of all that is bad around us,
is itself a marvelous victory.
-Howard Zinn

INTRODUCTION

When people work together, rooted in their sense of purpose, they are capable of amazing, world-changing feats. From [Ella Baker](#) behind the scenes of the civil rights movement to [Lois Gibbs](#) taking on the toxic polluters who made her kids sick to [Cole Rassenberger](#) protecting the West Virginian forests he loves to [Shweta Narayan](#) organizing citizen scientists to hold polluters accountable in India, changemakers are at their best, and most powerful, when they're working from a personal sense of purpose.

Connecting to your purpose will help you figure out the change you'd like to make happen in the world. It will also underscore the fact that you—yes, you!—are exactly the right person to make that change real.

We've adapted the following exercise from our friends over at the [Rockwood Leadership Institute](#). Rockwood runs a leadership development program that has trained thousands of changemakers improving the well-being of our communities and world.



LET'S BUILD OUR CITIZEN MUSCLES!

This exercise is designed to get you thinking about your purpose. It will winnow in on your unique skills, abilities, and passions to generate a Purpose Statement.

A Purpose Statement is one or two sentences about what motivates you to make change and how you use your particular talents to make change. Having a clear Purpose Statement can help you focus and stay connected to your passions—which otherwise may get forgotten in the day to day tasks of making change.

Here are just some of the reasons why connecting to your purpose is important when you're flexing your citizen muscle:

Gives you staying power

- Figuring out your purpose will give you a touchstone to turn back to when things feel hard or you begin to wonder, "Why on earth am I doing this?" Whether you're working to get a composting program in your kids' school or get corporate money out of politics, doing world-changing work is hard. Doing the work from a place deeply rooted in yourself and your strengths and vision is going to make it a lot easier. It'll make you more resilient—able to bounce back when things don't go as planned. After all, you're not doing this because you ought to, you're doing it because you have to. It's your purpose.

Creates Connection

- There is something undeniably magnetic about someone who is passionate and moves through the world from an authentic and grounded place. We are naturally drawn to people like that. When you're tapped into your purpose and speaking your truth, it will be easier for you to connect with others and enroll more people in your cause.

Makes Us Happy

- Lucky for us, behavioral science suggests that the very things that strengthen our citizen muscles are also the things that make us happy: a strong sense of purpose, a vibrant community and meaningful work. So it turns out working to make the world a better place not only makes the world a better place, it also makes us happier in the process. That's a win-win situation!

Everyone has been made for some particular work,
and the desire for that work has been put in every heart...

Let yourself be silently drawn by the stronger pull of what you really love.

–Rumi

EXERCISE: PURPOSE STATEMENT

Use the following five-step exercise to develop a purpose statement that will serve as a grounding force throughout the six weeks of the Citizen Muscle Boot Camp.

Developing Your Purpose Statement

Step 1: Thinking Through Your Purpose

To get started, fill in the blanks on the following statements to highlight your natural strengths, skills and passions.

This portion of the exercise will be most helpful if you're genuine, so fill in these blanks as honestly as possible.

Complete the following statements with one or two words.

I frequently have friends say to me: You are SO...

If I could work for free, I would spend my time:

If I made a how-to video on YouTube it would be on:

When my friends need help, I am their go-to person for:

If I submitted myself in a talent contest, it would be for:

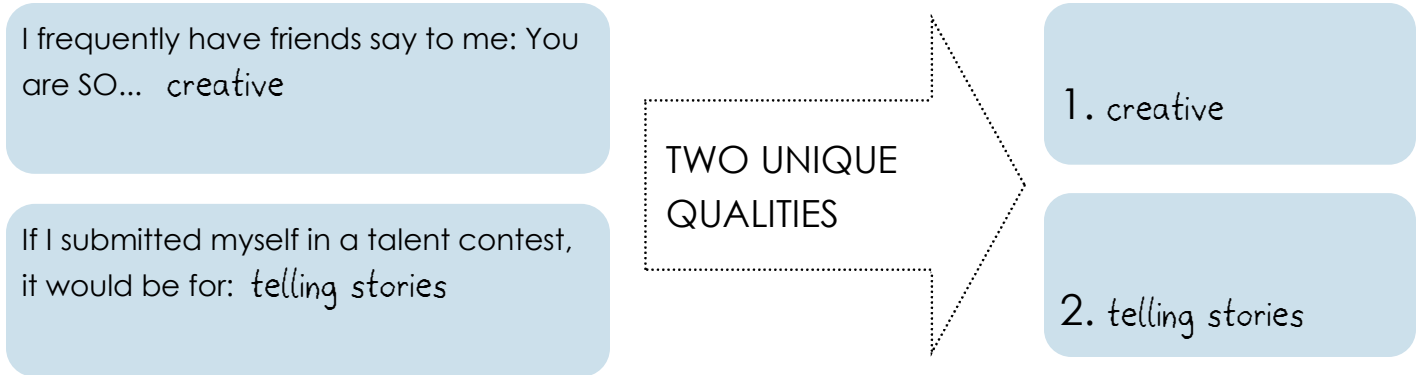
Growing up, I dreamed I would be:

I totally lose track of time (in a good way) when I am:

Step 2: Your Unique Qualities

Hopefully that got you a little more in touch with what you're good at and what lights a fire in you. Reflecting on your answers, pick two responses from Step 1 that you feel highlight your unique personal qualities- the things that make you *you*.

For example:



Don't limit yourself to the examples above. You can pick any two answers from Step 1 that best represent your special skills, talents, and passions.

Your Two Unique Qualities

1.

2.

Step 3: Acting with Others

Fill in the blanks in the sentences below with the qualities you chose in Step 3 and two verbs that describe ways you like to see those qualities in action in yourself and when you're with other people.

Take a look at the “World Changing Word Bank” below to generate some ideas for possible verbs that fit the bill.

For example:

I feel energized, when I use my creativity to inspire others.

I shine, when I tell stories to engage people.

I feel energized when I use my _____ to _____ others.
(unique quality #1) (verb)

I shine when I _____ to _____ people.
(unique quality #2) (verb)

World Changing Word Bank

- Inspire
- Create
- Redesign
- Engage
- Build
- Energize
- Convene
- Connect
- Network
- Collaborate
- Coordinate
- Instill
- Spark
- Galvanize
- Grow
- Motivate
- Produce
- Reinforce
- Support
- Nurture
- Invigorate
- Enliven
- Resist
- Change
- Investigate
- Communicate
- Align
- Express

Step 4: Where You Want to Make Change

The next step is to reflect on where you want to make change. You know what some of your unique qualities are, you know how you might contribute, so where do you want to plug in? What issues get you fired up and ready to make change?

Use the questions below to generate some ideas about what issues most resonate with you. At the Story of Stuff we are obviously excited about changing the way that we make, use, and throw away Stuff, but don't let that limit you in think about your Purpose.

To get started, answer the following questions:

You were just given law-making powers and can instantly pass one piece of national legislation. What kind of law would you create?

You have a voracious appetite for news stories and documentaries about what topics?

You were just brought on (as a volunteer or as a paid staff person) to join an amazing team of changemakers. What organization do you work with? What issues are you working on?

It breaks your heart (or gets you steaming mad) when you see _____? Fill in the blank with an issue that really gets under your skin.

You just received a million dollars to spend, give away or invest. The only stipulation is you have to use it in a way that will make the world a better place. What do you do with it?

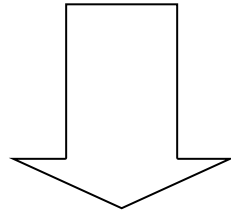
What would your friends say you are most passionate about?

Now, focus in on one or two of your answers that you feel most accurately represent the issues you are most passionate about. Use these responses to help you focus in on where you want to make change.

For example:

You have a voracious appetite for news stories and documentaries about what topics?
The declining state of our oceans and especially the Pacific Garbage Patch.

You just received a million dollars to spend, give away or invest. The only stipulation is you have to use it in a way that will make the world a better place. What do you do with it?
I would give it to an organization working on a campaign to ban plastic bags across the state of California.



I want to make change by:
Protecting our oceans by fighting plastics!

Now try it for yourself!

I want to make change by:

Step 5: Your Purpose Statement

Now, bring together the three elements (your unique skills, your actions with others, and where you want to make change) together into one sentence. This is your Purpose Statement.

Here is a sample purpose statement:

My purpose is... to use my creativity and storytelling skills to engage and inspire others to protect our oceans by fighting plastics!

My purpose is...

TIPS

Quiz Yourself

Take our Changemaker Personality Quiz to see how you show up in the world and what role you might play in the Story of Stuff Community and beyond. Everyone plays a different role in making big change happen. Some people are on the front lines of a protest, others in a lab doing research, others are making sure there is childcare for a local meeting. What role will you play?

[Take the quiz HERE.](#) Whatever you have to offer, a better future needs it!

Phone a Friend...

Sometimes it can be hard to see yourself clearly. If you're getting stuck on what your strengths are, feel free to get an outside perspective. Ask a friend what they would say about you if they were completing the exercise for you. Ask a couple people! You might even want to ask friends who know you in different contexts, like a friend from work and a family member.

Inspiration Station

Changemakers who transform the world around them are deeply connected to their sense of purpose. Take a few minutes to brainstorm a short list of changemakers who inspire you—it can be a teacher you had as a kid, someone who stands out in our amazing history of changemakers like Rachel Carson, Howard Zinn, Harriet Tubman, Mahatma Gandhi, or someone in your local community, or even your mom. Then make a companion list of what you think their purpose is or was.

This simple act can help remind you that you are part of a giant community of changemakers who are flexing their citizen muscles, making a difference, and working from a sense of purpose. It's a biological reality that you're only one person, but remember that you're part of something much, much bigger.

Need a little more inspiration? Check out some biographies from the library or scout out some of the great documentaries about moments when big change has happened. Not only can these movies and books inject you with a little inspiration, but there is so much to learn from how other people in other communities have made change- what worked, what didn't and why.

Extra Resources

Here are some great books and movies that we find inspiring and wanted to share.

Books

- *Healing the Heart of Democracy: The Courage to Create a Politics Worthy of the Human Spirit*, by Parker Palmer
 - A beautiful and thoughtful book that tackles the personal and emotional aspects of engaging in the sometimes harsh realities of the political realm.
- *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Social Movement in History Is Restoring Grace, Justice, and Beauty to the World* by Paul Hawken
 - Based on over a decade of research, Blessed Unrest is an enriching exploration of the diverse, broad and beautiful environmental and social justice movements that span the globe.
- *Living Downstream: An Ecologist's Personal Investigation of Cancer and the Environment* by Sandra Steingraber
 - From her unique vantage point as both scientist and cancer-survivor, Steingraber documents the linkages between environmental toxins and cancer from the personal perspective as well examining the larger picture issues.

Movies

- *A Fierce Green Fire: The Battle for a Living Planet* by Mark and Celia Kitchell
 - A visually stunning and powerfully told history of the environmental movement in the United States and beyond.
- *Blue Vinyl* by Judith Helfand
 - The charming and hilarious personal story of one women's obsession with the environmental and health impacts of vinyl.