



# How Will You Measure Your Life?

## THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

In 2010, world-renowned innovation expert Clayton M. Christensen gave a powerful speech to the Harvard Business School's graduating class. Drawing upon his business research, he offered a series of guidelines for finding meaning and happiness in life. He used examples from his own experiences to explain how high achievers can all too often fall into traps that lead to unhappiness.

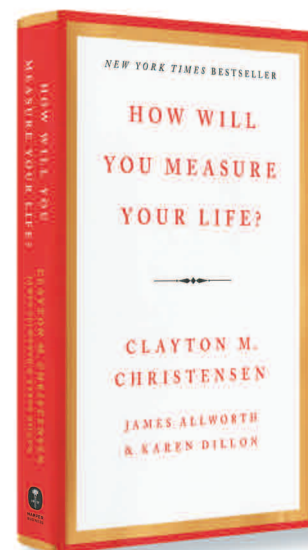
The speech was memorable not only because it was deeply revealing but also because it came at a time of intense personal reflection: Christensen had just overcome the same type of cancer that had taken his father's life. As Christensen struggled with the disease, the question, "How do you measure your life?" became more urgent and poignant, and he began to share his insights more widely with family, friends and students.

In this groundbreaking book, Christensen puts forth a series of questions: How can I be sure that I'll find satisfaction in my career? How can I be sure that my personal relationships become enduring sources of happiness? How can I avoid compromising my integrity — and stay out of jail? Using lessons from some of the world's greatest businesses, he provides incredible insights into these challenging questions.

*How Will You Measure Your Life?* is full of inspiration and wisdom and will help students, midcareer professionals and parents alike forge their own paths to fulfillment.

## IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to think about your life and purpose.
- How to get equipped to lead the type of life to which you aspire.
- What critical decisions can bring happiness and success in life.
- How to find happiness in your career.
- How to find happiness in your relationships.



by Clayton M. Christensen  
James Allworth  
and Karen Dillon

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# THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: HOW WILL YOU MEASURE YOUR LIFE?

by Clayton M. Christensen

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## SECTION ONE: FINDING HAPPINESS IN YOUR CAREER

### What Makes Us Tick

When you were 10 years old and someone asked you what you wanted to be when you grew up, anything seemed possible. Your answers then were guided simply by what you thought would make you really happy.

There are a determined few who never lose sight of aspiring to do something that's truly meaningful to them. But for many of us, as the years go by, we allow our dreams to be peeled away. We pick our jobs for the wrong reasons, and then we settle for them.

Too many of us who start down the path of compromise will never make it back. Considering the fact that you'll likely spend more of your waking hours at your job than in any other part of your life, it's a compromise that will always eat away at you. But you need not resign yourself to this fate.

When we find ourselves stuck in unhappy careers — and even unhappy lives — it is often the result of a fundamental misunderstanding of what really motivates us.

#### A Better Theory of Motivation

There are two broad camps on the question of how the concepts of incentives and motivation relate to each other.

Back in 1976, two economists, Michael Jensen and William Meckling, published a paper that has been committed to memory by those in the first camp. The paper, which has been one of the most widely cited of the past three decades, focused on a problem known as agency theory, or incentive theory: why don't managers

always behave in a way that is in the best interest of shareholders? The root cause, as Jensen and Meckling saw it, is that people work in accordance with how you pay them.

Well, there is a second school of thought — often called two-factor theory, or motivation theory — that turns the incentive theory on its head. It acknowledges that you can pay people to want what you want — over and over again. But incentives are not the same as motivation. True motivation is getting people to do something because they want to do it. This type of motivation continues in good times and in bad.

Frederick Herzberg, probably one of the most incisive writers on the topic of motivation theory, published a breakthrough article in the *Harvard Business Review* focusing on exactly this.

Herzberg notes that the common assumption that job satisfaction is one big continuous spectrum is not actually the way the mind works. Instead, satisfaction and dissatisfaction are separate, independent measures. This means, for example, that it's possible to love your job and hate it at the same time. This theory distinguishes between two different types of factors: hygiene factors and motivation factors.

On one side of the equation, there are the elements of work that if not done right will cause us to be dissatisfied. These are called hygiene factors. Hygiene factors are things like status, compensation, job security, work conditions, company policies and supervisory practices.

Interestingly, Herzberg asserts that compensation is a hygiene factor, not a motivator. Compensation is a hygiene factor. You need to get it right. But all you can



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aspire to is that employees will not be mad at the company and each other because of compensation.

This is an important insight from Herzberg's research: if you instantly improve the hygiene factors of your job, you're not going to suddenly love it. At best, you just won't hate it anymore. The opposite of job dissatisfaction isn't job satisfaction but rather an absence of job dissatisfaction. They're not the same thing at all.

### **The Balance of Motivators and Hygiene Factors**

So, what are the things that will truly, deeply satisfy us, the factors that will cause us to love our jobs? These are what Herzberg's research calls motivators. Motivation factors include challenging work, recognition, responsibility and personal growth. Feelings that you are making a meaningful contribution to work arise from intrinsic conditions of the work itself. Motivation is much less about external prodding or stimulation and much more about what's inside of you and inside of your work.

### **If You Find A Job You Love ...**

The theory of motivation — along with its description of the roles that incentives and hygiene factors will play — has given me better understanding of how people become successful and happy in their careers. If done well, management is among the most noble of professions. You are in a position where you have eight or ten hours every day from every person who works for you. I realized that if the theory of motivation applies to me, then I need to be sure that those who work for me have the motivators too. ●

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## **The Balance of Calculation and Serendipity**

Understanding what makes us tick is a critical step on the path to fulfillment. But that's only half the battle. You actually have to find a career that both motivates you and satisfies the hygiene factors. You have to balance the pursuit of aspirations and goals with taking advantage of unanticipated opportunities.

### **Balancing Emergent and Deliberate**

I'm always struck by how many of my students and the other young people I've worked with think they're supposed to have their careers planned out step by step for the next five years. High-achievers and aspiring high-achievers too often put pressure on themselves to do exactly this.

But having such a focused plan really only makes sense in certain circumstances.

In our lives and in our careers, whether we are aware of it or not, we are constantly navigating a path by deciding between our deliberate strategies and the unanticipated alternatives that emerge. Each approach is vying for our minds and our hearts, making its best case to become our actual strategy. Neither is inherently better or worse; rather, which you should choose depends on where you are on the journey. Understanding this — that strategy is made up of these two disparate elements and that your circumstances dictate which approach is best — will better enable you to sort through the choices that your career will constantly present.

If you have found an outlet in your career that provides both the requisite hygiene factors and motivators, then a deliberate approach makes sense. Your aspirations should be clear, and you know from your present experience that they are worth striving for. Rather than worrying about adjusting to unexpected opportunities, your frame of mind should be focused on how best to achieve the goals you have deliberately set.

But if you haven't reached the point of finding a career that does this for you, then, like a new company finding its way, you need to be emergent. This is another way of saying that if you are in these circumstances, experiment in life. As you learn from each experience, adjust. Then iterate quickly. Keep going through this process until your strategy begins to click. ●

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## **Your Strategy Is Not What You Say It Is**

You can talk all you want about having a strategy for your life, understanding motivation and balancing aspirations with unanticipated opportunities. But ultimately, this means nothing if you do not align those with where you actually expend your time, money and energy.

### **Getting the Measure of Success Wrong**

More than a decade ago, Seattle-based SonoSite was founded to make handheld ultrasound equipment — little machines that had the potential to truly change health care. Prior to these machines, the only thing that most family doctors and nurses could do when performing an exam was to listen and feel for problems beneath the skin. SonoSite's handheld ultrasound machines, however, made it affordable and easy for primary care doctors and nurse practitioners to see inside their patients' bodies.

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SonoSite had two families of handheld products. Its principal product, dubbed the Titan, was about as big as a laptop computer. The other, branded the iLook, was less than half the size of the Titan — and one-third the price.

The iLook was not as sophisticated as the Titan or as profitable, but it was much more portable. The company's president and CEO, Kevin Goodwin, knew there was a promising market for it — the iLook had managed to generate a thousand sales leads in the first six weeks after its introduction. It became clear that if SonoSite didn't sell it, someone else was likely to develop the same compact, inexpensive technology and disrupt the sales of the more expensive machines — and SonoSite itself.

Eager to see firsthand how customers were responding to the new, smaller product, Goodwin asked to attend a sales call with one of the company's top salespeople.

The salesman sat down with the customer and proceeded to sell the Titan — the laptop ultrasound. He didn't even pull the iLook handheld out of his bag. After 15 minutes, Goodwin decided to intervene.

"Tell them about the iLook," Goodwin prompted the salesman. But he was completely ignored. The salesman continued to extol the virtues of the Titan. Goodwin asked one of his best salespeople three times to sell the iLook — in front of the customer. Each time, he was completely dismissed.

The salesman wasn't deliberately trying to defy Goodwin. In fact, he was doing exactly what the company wanted him to do — sell the product that provided the highest return.

The problem was that the salespeople were all on commission, and success for them was defined by the total value of their sales and gross margin dollars. It was much easier for Goodwin's best salesman to sell one of the laptop-size ultrasound machines than it was to sell five of the little products. In other words, Goodwin thought that he was giving clear instructions into the salesman's ear. But the compensation system was shouting the opposite instructions into his other ear.

### Allocation Resources Among Your "Businesses"

In the words of Andy Grove, "To understand a company's strategy, look at what they actually do rather than what they say they will do." Resource allocation works pretty much the same way in our lives and careers. Gloria Steinem framed strategy for her world as Andy Grove did for his: "We can tell our values by looking at

our checkbook stubs." The dilemma of what machine to pull out of a salesperson's bag is very similar to the dilemma we all face near the end of a workday: do I spend another half hour at work to get something extra done, or do I go home and play with my children?

Here is a way to frame the investments that we make in the strategy that becomes our lives: we have resources — which include personal time, energy, talent and wealth — and we are using them to try to grow several "businesses" in our personal lives. These include having a rewarding relationship with our spouse or significant other, raising great children, succeeding in our careers, contributing to our church or community and so on. Unfortunately, however, our resources are limited, and these businesses are competing for them. It's exactly the same problem that a corporation has.

With every moment of your time, every decision about how you spend your energy and your money, you are making a statement about what really matters to you.

How do you make sure that you're implementing the strategy you truly want to implement? Watch where your resources flow — the resource allocation process. If it is not supporting the strategy you've decided upon, you run the risk of a serious problem. If the decisions you make about where you invest your blood, sweat and tears are not consistent with the person you aspire to be, you'll never become that person. ●

## SECTION TWO: FINDING HAPPINESS IN YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

### The Ticking Clock

The relationships you have with family and close friends are going to be the most important sources of happiness in your life. But you have to be careful. When it seems like everything at home is going well, you will be lulled into believing that you can put your investments in these relationships onto the back burner.

### Investing for Future Happiness

Many of us thrive on the intensity of a demanding job — one that we believe in and enjoy. We like proving what we can do under pressure. Our projects, our clients and our colleagues challenge us. We invest ourselves in our jobs. But in order to accomplish all this, we start to think of our jobs as requiring all our attention — and that's exactly what we give them.

Unfortunately, the same consequences that businesses face for failing to invest for the future apply to us too.

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While most of us do have a deliberate strategy for creating deep, love-filled relationships with members of our family and our friends, in reality, we invest in a strategy for our lives that we would never have aspired to: having shallow friendships with many but deep friendships with none; becoming divorced, sometimes repeatedly; and having children who feel alienated from us within our own homes or who are raised by a stepparent sometimes thousands of miles away.

And we can't turn the clock back. ●

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### What Job Did You Hire That Milkshake For?

Almost everyone has heard of the discount furniture store IKEA. IKEA has taken a totally different approach. Rather than organizing themselves around the characterization of particular customers or products, IKEA is structured around a job that customers periodically need to get done.

A job? Through my research on innovation for the past two decades, my colleagues and I have developed a theory about this approach to marketing and product development, which we call “the job to be done.” The insight behind this way of thinking is that what causes us to buy a product or service is that we actually hire products to do jobs for us. The mechanism that causes us to buy a product is, “I have a job I need to get done, and this is going to help me do it.”

#### Cheaper? Chocolatier? Chunkier?

The job-to-be-done theory began to coalesce in a project that I worked on with some friends for one of the big fast-food restaurants. The company was trying to ramp up the sales of their milkshakes. The company had spent months studying the issue. They worked and worked on making the milkshake better as a result — but these improvements had no impact on sales or profits whatsoever. The company was stumped.

My colleague Bob Moesta then offered to bring a completely different perspective to the milkshake problem: “I wonder what job arises in people's lives that causes them to come to this restaurant to ‘hire’ a milkshake?”

So they stood in a restaurant for hours on end, taking very careful data: What time did people buy these milkshakes? What were they wearing? Were they alone?

Surprisingly, it turned out that nearly half of the milkshakes were sold in the early morning. The people who bought those morning milkshakes were almost always alone; it was the only thing they bought; and almost all of them got in a car and drove off with it.

We came back another morning and stood outside the restaurant. As customers emerged we essentially asked each of them in language that they could understand, “Excuse me. Can you help me understand what job you are trying to do with that milkshake?”

As we put all the answers together, it became clear that the early-morning customers all had the same job to do: they had a long and boring ride to work. They needed something to do while driving to keep the commute interesting. They weren't really hungry yet, but they knew that in a couple of hours, they'd face a mid-morning stomach rumbling.

#### What Job Are You Being Hired For?

If you work to understand what job you are being hired to do both professionally and in your personal life, the payoff will be enormous.

Like those milkshake buyers, you and your wife can't always articulate what the fundamental jobs are that you each are personally trying to do, let alone articulate the fundamental jobs that your wife has for which she might hire a husband. Understanding the job requires the critical ingredients of intuition and empathy. You have to be able to put yourself not just in her shoes but her chair — and indeed, her life. More important, the jobs that your spouse is trying to do are often very different from the jobs that you think she should want to do.

It's easy for any of us to make assumptions about what our spouse might want, rather than work hard to understand the job to be done in our spouse's life.

#### Sacrifice and Commitment

This may sound counterintuitive, but I deeply believe that the path to happiness in a relationship is not just about finding someone who you think is going to make you happy. Rather, the reverse is equally true: the path to happiness is about finding someone who you want to make happy, someone whose happiness is worth devoting yourself to.

Thinking about your relationships from the perspective of the job to be done is the best way to understand what's important to the people who mean the most to you. It allows you to develop true empathy. Asking yourself, “What job does my spouse most need me to do?” gives you the ability to think about it in the right unit of analysis.

But you have to do that job. You'll have to devote your time and energy to the effort, be willing to suppress your own priorities and desires, and focus on doing what is required to make the other person happy. ●

### Sailing Your Kids on Theseus's Ship

With the best of intentions, we hand our children off to a myriad of coaches and tutors to provide them with enriching experiences — thinking that will best prepare our kids for the future. But helping our children in this way can come at a high cost.

#### Never Outsource the Future

The history of outsourcing in the American semiconductor industry, for example, chronicles the woes that betide companies that blindly adhere to outsourcing. At the outset, it made all the sense in the world to outsource the simplest of the steps entailed in making semiconductor products to Chinese and Taiwanese suppliers. The American semiconductor companies thought they were safe as they retained the more complex and profitable steps, such as product design.

But although the Asian suppliers started out by assembling only the simplest of products, they didn't want to stay there. It was low-cost work, and almost anyone could do it. They knew that they would be vulnerable to losing that work to an even lower-cost assembler. So those Asian suppliers strove to keep moving up-market, fabricating and assembling ever more sophisticated products. Now the suppliers in Taiwan, Korea, Singapore and China have become capable of making products and components that their American customers, who outsourced to these suppliers in the first place, could no longer hope to ever make.

#### The Greek Tragedy — Inside Our Families

As a general rule, in prosperous societies we have been outsourcing more and more of the work that a generation ago was done “internally” in the home. There was so much work going on that children essentially worked for their parents.

Step by step over the past 50 years, it has become cheaper and easier to outsource this work to professionals. Now, the only work being done in many of our homes is a periodic cleanup of the mess that we make. In the absence of work, we've created a generation of parents who selflessly devote themselves to providing their children with enriching experiences — so-called soccer moms, a term that wasn't even part of the American lexicon until 15 years ago. They lovingly cart children around to soccer, lacrosse, basketball, football, hockey and baseball teams; dance, gymnastics, music and Chinese lessons; send them on a semester abroad to London and

to so many camps that many children don't even have the time to get a part-time job in the summer.

Are the children developing from these experiences the deep, important processes such as teamwork, entrepreneurship and learning the value of preparation? Or are they just going along for the ride? When we so heavily focus on providing our children with resources, we need to ask ourselves a new set of questions: Has my child developed the skill to develop better skills? The knowledge to develop deeper knowledge?

#### Children Learn When They Are Ready to Learn

Denying children the opportunity to develop their processes is not the only way outsourcing has damaged their capabilities either. There is something far more important at risk when we outsource too much of our lives: our values.

In outsourcing much of the work that formerly filled our homes, we have created a void in our children's lives that often gets filled with activities in which we are not involved. As a result, when our children are ready to learn, it is often people whom we do not know or respect who are going to be there.

There's a wonderful conundrum left to us by the Greeks. It was first put to print by the author Plutarch, and it's known as the Ship of Theseus. As a tribute to the mythical founder of their city — famed for slaying the Minotaur — the Athenians committed to keeping Theseus's ship seaworthy in the harbor of Athens. As parts of the boat decayed, they were replaced ... until eventually, every last part of the boat had changed.

The conundrum was this: given that every last part of it had been replaced, was it still Theseus's ship? The Athenians still called it Theseus's Ship, but was it?

If your children gain their priorities and values from other people ... whose children are they? Children need to do more than learn new skills. The theory of capabilities suggests they need to be challenged. They need to solve hard problems. They need to develop values. Children will learn when they're ready to learn, not when you're ready to teach them; if you are not with them as they encounter challenges in their lives, then you are missing important opportunities to shape their priorities — and their lives. ●

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### The Schools of Experience

Helping your children learn how to do difficult things is one of the most important roles of a parent. It will be critical to equipping them for all the challenges that life

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will throw at them down the line. But how do you equip your kids with the right capabilities?

### Is it Really the Right Stuff?

In 1979, writer Tom Wolfe captured the public imagination with his depiction of one of the most competitive professional environments in the world: the screening of American fighter pilots. To find out who should rise to the top, the pilots battled it out in an ever-increasing test of nerves, a kind of Darwinian gauntlet. Early NASA executives had decided this was how to identify who had been born with the “right stuff.” Those who thrived under the white-knuckle pressure of the program were deemed natural-born heroes.

Many companies looking to make top staffing decisions tend to replicate the same kind of thinking: that somehow there is a definitive way to identify the difference between the good and the great. In business, the “test” is what a resume shows; you can tell by this whether a candidate is likely to thrive in a challenging new position.

If finding the right stuff is a good way to identify top talent, why is it so common to see executives with a successful track record in one company coming into another company with great fanfare — only to be quickly dubbed a failure and ushered out?

It wasn't until I came across work initially developed by Morgan McCall, a professor at the University of Southern California, in a book called *High Flyers* that I finally found a theory that could help people make better decisions about whom to hire in their future.

The “right stuff” thinking lists skills that are correlated with success. It is, using the description of theory discussed earlier, looking to see whether job candidates have wings and feathers. McCall's schools of experience model asks whether they have actually flown, and if so, in what circumstances. This model helps identify whether someone, in an earlier assignment, has actually wrestled with a problem similar to the one he will need to wrestle with now.

### Sending Your Kids to the Right School

Thinking back on your own life, I bet you had many visits to various schools of experience, some more painful than others. Obviously, it will help a lot if you can work out which courses will be important for you to master before you need them.

When I worked with Boy Scouts over the years, I always wanted the kids to take responsibility for organizing their own camping trips rather than letting the parents step in to do it. When they had to do it themselves,

they learned how to plan and organize, how to divide responsibilities, how to communicate among a group and to appreciate what they'd actually put their own work into.

It sure would have been easier to allow the parents to work through and divide up the tasks on the “to do” list for every trip. We probably would have prepared efficiently for every eventuality — and the boys would certainly have had fun. All they would have had to do was show up. But we would have been denying them important courses — leadership, organization and accountability.

The natural tendency of many parents is to focus entirely on building your child's resume: good grades, sports successes and so on. It would be a mistake, however, to neglect the courses your children need to equip them for the future. Once you have that figured out, work backward: find the right experiences to help them build the skills they'll need to succeed. It's one of the greatest gifts you can give them. ●

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## The Invisible Hand Inside Your Family

One of the most powerful tools to enable us to close the gap between the family we want and the family we get is culture.

### How Does Culture Form in a Company?

Culture is far more than general office tone or guidelines. Schein defined culture and how it is formed in these terms:

*Culture is a way of working together toward common goals that have been followed so frequently and so successfully that people don't even think about trying to do things another way. If a culture has formed, people will autonomously do what they need to do to be successful.*

Those instincts aren't formed overnight. Rather, they are the result of shared learning — of employees working together to solve problems and figuring out what works.

### This Is the Way Our Family Behaves

The parallels between a business and a family should be clear. Just like a manager who wants to count on employees using the right priorities to solve problems, parents want to set those priorities too so that family members will solve problems and confront dilemmas instinctively whether or not the parents are there guiding or observing. Kids won't have to stop and think about what Mom or Dad wants them to do — they'll

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just go about it because their family culture has dictated, “This is the way our family behaves.”

What is important is to actively choose what matters to you and then engineer the culture to reinforce those elements, as Schein’s theory shows. It entails choosing what activities we pursue and what outcomes we need to achieve so that as a family, when we have to perform those activities again, we all think, “This is how we do it.”

As people work together to solve challenges repeatedly, norms begin to form. The same is true in your family: when you first run up against a problem or need to get something done together, you’ll need to find a solution.

It’s not just about controlling bad behavior; it’s about celebrating the good. This is what is so powerful about culture. It’s like an autopilot. What is critical to understand is that for it to be an effective force, you have to properly program the autopilot — you have to build the culture that you want in your family. If you do not consciously build it and reinforce it from the earliest stages of your family life, a culture will still form — but it will form in ways you may not like. Although it’s difficult for a parent to always be consistent and remember to give your children positive feedback when they do something right, it’s in these everyday interactions that your culture is being set. ●

### SECTION THREE: STAYING OUT OF JAIL

#### Just This Once...

Most of us think that the important ethical decisions in our lives will be delivered with a blinking red neon sign: CAUTION: IMPORTANT DECISION AHEAD. Never mind how busy we are or what the consequences might be. Almost everyone is confident that in those moments of truth, he or she will do the right thing.

The problem is, life seldom works that way. It comes with no warning signs. Instead, most of us will face a series of small, everyday decisions that rarely seem like they have high stakes attached. But over time, they can play out far more dramatically.

#### 100 Percent of the Time Is Easier Than 98 Percent of the Time

Many of us have convinced ourselves that we are able to break our own personal rules “just this once.” In our minds, we can justify these small choices. None of those things, when they first happen, feels like a life-changing

decision. The marginal costs are almost always low. But each of those decisions can roll up into a much bigger picture, turning you into the kind of person you never wanted to be. That instinct to just use the marginal costs hides from us the true cost of our actions.

The first step down that path is taken with a small decision. You justify all the small decisions that lead up to the big one, and then you get to the big one, and it doesn’t seem so enormous anymore. You don’t realize the road you are on until you look up and see that you’ve arrived at a destination you would have once considered unthinkable.

If you give in to “just this once” based on a marginal-cost analysis, you’ll regret where you end up. It’s easier to hold your principles 100 percent of the time than it is to hold to them 98 percent of the time. The boundary — your personal moral line — is powerful because you don’t cross it; if you have justified doing it once, there’s nothing to stop you from doing it again. Decide what you stand for. And then stand for it all the time.

#### Epilogue

I promise my students that if they take the time to figure out their life’s purpose, they’ll look back on it as the most important thing they will ever have discovered. I warn them that their time in school might be the best time to reflect deeply on that question. Fast-paced careers, family responsibilities and tangible rewards of success tend to swallow up time and perspective. They will just sail off from their time at school without a rudder. In the long run, clarity about purpose will trump knowledge of activity-based costing, balanced scorecards, core competence, disruptive innovation, the four Ps, the five forces and other key business theories we teach at Harvard.

What’s true for the students is true for you too. If you take the time to figure out your purpose in life, I promise that you will look back on it as the most important thing you will have ever learned. ●

#### RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *How Will You Measure Your Life*, you’ll also like:

1. ***Great Work, Great Career* by Stephen R. Covey and Jennifer Colosimo.** How do you create a great career? Covey and Colosimo offer a complete handbook for anyone seeking answers.
2. ***Mojo* by Marshall Goldsmith with Mark Reiter.** The best-selling author and executive coach lays out the ways that we can get and keep our Mojo.
3. ***The Power of Full Engagement* by Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz.** The authors discuss the four key sources of energy and provide a scientific approach to create energy management rituals that are specific to the results you need.