

# Purpose Lesson

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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## SPEAKERS

Gavin Weeks, Grant Liversage, Natasha Adair, Danny Kerry, Paul Barnett

### Paul Barnett 00:00

Welcome to the lessons from the great coaches podcast. I've learned that you don't do it alone.

00:06

You learn so many different things from so many different coaches. That's an elite learning environment.

00:13

How you deal with how to be resilient, how important it is to infuse joy in the process of learning. To be a good candidate, you've

00:21

got to do more than you take. What an interesting life it is to be a leader.

### Paul Barnett 00:29

My name is Paul Barnett, and you are listening to the great coach's podcast, where we explore leadership through the lens of high performance sport, by interviewing great coaches from around the world, to try and find ideas to help all of us be better leaders. As the podcast has grown. The great coaches we have interviewed have shared so much insight and wisdom that we decided to create episodes dedicated entirely to the ideas that have resonated with us the most. Today's episode is something a little different. Grant and I are joined by Dr. Gavin weeks to discuss purpose. Gavin is a doctor of psychology and Associate Fellow at Oxford Saïyid Business School and director of innovation and development at the consultancy Thompson Harrison. And why is it a little different? Because today in our conversation, we discuss the overlap between coaching the corporate world and psychology when it comes to the topic of purpose. And as this is something new, please let us know how you feel about it. All the details on how to contact us are in the show notes or at our website, the great coaches podcast.com. And now please enjoy our discussion on the topic of purpose. With Dr. Gavin weeks.

01:40

The lessons from the great coaches podcast.

**Grant Liversage 01:43**

So good day, everybody. And thanks for tuning in to the next episode of the great coaches Podcast. Today. I've got Dr. Gavin weeks with me, and we're going to talk about purpose. Purpose seems to be a buzzword that is all around us at the moment people talking about being more purposeful, and what is their purpose and what is the company's purpose. So Gavin, thanks for joining us. Maybe if you can start just by telling us a little bit about yourself and how you get to be talking about purpose.

**Gavin Weeks 02:15**

Always easy grants tell the story backwards, isn't it? That sounds coherent. But I think in my life and my experience, actually looking back, having a sense of purpose or indeed being purposeful, and we're talking about the difference between those those things, has been important for a long time. So it being the great coaches podcast, it probably makes sense to say that part of my growing up was done in sport, I was an athlete, I was a rower, I competed at National University, and then international level, up to about the age of 25. And I think looking back at those times, probably my best performances came, whether it was individually or whether it was in a team, when I wasn't really obsessed by that individual performance. When there was something when there's something bigger going when I felt connected to something, something bigger than than me. Then I trained as a psychologist, I took the clinical training option. And actually, from early on in my clinical career, whilst people were coming and dealing with psychological or emotional challenges, I was always attracted to to therapies that were about really orienting people to what really matters to them, in spite of the struggles that they're experiencing. And I could see that doing that when I did that well didn't necessarily always do it well, but doing it well was connecting people to resources that they have to change already, the ability that's within them to make to make changes in life that really mean something to them, by then spend some of my career working in sports with with athletes. And again, the work that I liked doing most was really helping athletes to think about how they wanted to be as an athlete, how they want to play the game, how they want to be in training, how they want to be as a, as a teammate, or a leader of the team, which for me was really about the purpose of doing it beyond simply getting results or winning or winning medals. And kind of taking up to the to the current moment in my work. I work as part of a organization called Thomson Harrison. And we do work around leadership and culture and organizational development. But one of the things that I'm doing a lot of at the moment is helping leadership teams to think about what does it mean to bring purpose to life? What does it mean, to really think about the impact that we want to have as a team or as an organization and what might that what changes might that lead to what new agendas might be on the table. So that sort of takes us up to the to the present moment around

**Grant Liversage 04:55**

Thanksgiving, this thing about connecting people to resources that already ad within themselves really resonates. And we did an episode on underdogs recently. And this concept of accessing resources within people, and getting outstanding results came through quite strongly. So maybe tell us what is purpose?

**Gavin Weeks 05:18**

I guess if we look back at the history of philosophy and the history of religion, we'd see that people have been grappling with what does it mean to have purpose for millennia? But my way of thinking about purpose is, what are we really here to do? Whether that's me as an individual, us as a team, or the bigger US as a whole as a whole organization? That often leads to statements or descriptions connects to? What should our what should our strategy be? What's the impact that we're trying to have in the world? That's work that lots of organizations are doing both in academia. So Colin Mayer, Oxford is particularly well known for talking about purpose in business, the Patagonia or former CEO if Chouinard if I pronounced his name, right, the man that turned his his organization over to the earth made the Earth the only the only shareholder of Patagonia. That's really from defining what what is this organization here to do? What's the impact that we're trying to have? And I think for many, many reasons, that can be really, really important. It can be galvanizing, it can bring teams together. And it can really focus people on the impact they're trying to have in the world. But for many of us, and I include me in that saying, I have a purpose feels like it's kind of narrowing down, feels like sending I'm, you know, I have one, I have one direction that I'm that I'm following. And actually, I think we all have many different roles in life that are really important to us, as a professional, as a parent, as a carer, as a friend, as a partner, as a coach. And being purposeful to me, is about saying across all of those different domains of life, what are the things that really matter to me, and trying to organize my life and organize my time, so that I'm doing more of those things? And using using those things, using that question, what really matters to me to also have conversations about what are some of the things that run counter to that, that, that we shouldn't be doing, that we shouldn't be focusing so much time and attention on? And I think as as life gets seemingly busier for pretty much everyone as the opportunities for for what we spend our time doing get bigger and bigger and bigger. Those conversations about what what are the what are the few things that really matter? I think they become more important.

#### **Grant Liversage** 07:56

And so can people be purposeful, and have a purpose without really having articulated what that is?

#### **Gavin Weeks** 08:04

I would argue, yes, I think the doing, and the kind of considering what we spend our time doing. And what we connect through is probably more important than turning that into a kind of pithy statement of intent. Those statements I think, are really important when you want to give organizations permission to really think about what they do. But if you look at some of the research on on purpose in life, outside of organizations, there's a there's a lovely book called life on purpose, which is written by a Michigan professor called Vic stretcher. And what what Vic did, or what Vic talks about, in that in that research is very simple measures, where you ask people, for example, to what extent do they feel that their life has purpose, you could do that on a scale of one to five, and demonstrates that small shifts on those kinds of scales have quite important outcomes. They relate to improve mental health, improve physical health, improved sense of connection to other people better sleep, even things like a reduction in causes of mortality. So basically, a lower a lower chance of dying of things. And the The lovely thing about that research is it shows that it's a sense of purpose that influences those outcomes, and not the other way around. So it's not that people who happen to be healthier, have a sense of purpose. And if you ask those people where did where did they get a sense of purpose from the kind of people in those research projects, they might talk about the job, they might talk about their community, they might talk

about their sports organizations, they're part of their families, their religious groups that they're that they're members of, they wouldn't necessarily be able to say, My purpose is to solve world peace. St.

**Grant Liversage 10:01**

Paul, I wonder this notion of connecting people to the resources that are within them, I'm sure this is the theme on which some of the great coaches have spoken to you about.

**Paul Barnett 10:14**

Grant, this concept of purpose does come up quite a bit. And it, it comes up in relation to some of the things that Gavin just talked about, you know, finding the things that matter. And then using this to focus you, and then in turn, how this focus goes on to influence your outcomes, both as an individual and for the team itself. And I think this quote from Danny Carey, who led the English women's hockey team, to the Olympic gold medal best summarizes this idea.

**Danny Kerry 10:47**

And, essentially, there's a real guided process led by the psychologists and I'm privy, I'm very fortunate to be involved in this, both doing it myself, and also listening to the other athletes stories in this process was a real guided process, around the athletes exploring their life histories, reflecting on what have been the really most satisfying and enjoyable aspects of their lives, what are the things they look fondly back on equally the things that they've found challenging in their lives. And in doing that, trying to understand what they bring from the past or the present, and why they act and behave the way they do. And we start to solve an inner self insight in our athletes, and connect them perhaps with the things that they love about what they do to allow them to have a greater sense of perspective about what they do and why they do it. And at its core, then understanding why do you do what you do? And what would you want to have as sitting behind the purpose for what you want to do, that process goes on in really, over a number of sort of extended, interviews, conversations, conversations, a better word. And that gets sort of boiled down or simulated, and once the athlete feels very happy and contented, really got to a place where they feel they understand their why they are then sort of guided to present that to all of us so that all of the other athletes and other staff, so it becomes a sort of a greater level of mutual understanding between the athletes and the staff. And that creates a greater level of mutual support between because we tend to know where people come from, what they enjoy about their life, that what they're seeking from what they do, and what they want from others in that process and what they need from others in that process. And that's how we go about it in the current Great Britain men's hockey program.

**Grant Liversage 12:37**

So in this current Zeitgeist around purpose and purpose statements, employees and members of organizations find themselves in an organization, which has a purpose statement, and how does that relate then to this personal purpose? And whose purpose prevails? And how do those two things coexist in that environment?

**Gavin Weeks 13:04**

So some of the organizations that we've been working with, I think, have done, have done a really powerful things because they've, they've done a piece of work, that baps talks to people at different

levels of the organization, or we've been asked to do similar similar work, and results in the some statement or some paragraph that really describes what's this organization for, and you can end up with a really tight statement, improving people's lives, helping people make make connections, but then he's given over to people given over to different groups at the level of the level of countries or functions within the organization to say, Okay, if this really is our purpose is if this really is what this organization is here to do. How do we bring it to life? In our own work? What should we what should we do differently? What should we change? What should we think about not doing? What are we paying too much attention to that doesn't really serve our purpose? And then beneath that, creating opportunities for people to think about? Well, what really gives me a sense of purpose in my own work? And how does how does that connect to what the organization is here to do? And I think people in organizations, whether it's a sports team, or a business, being part of the organization is that is that kind of healthy tension between being able to direct your own goals, being able to have autonomy and be able to have a bigger impact, most of us can have a bigger impact, do more interesting, exciting work as part of a group than we can do on our own. And that means at some level, saying, what's the what's the space between what I what gives me a sense of purpose, and what the organization So how or how the organization describes the purpose?

**Grant Liversage 15:03**

Yeah, that's fantastic. And I think it takes us then into the sort of next logical discussion around. Why do we need purpose?

**Gavin Weeks 15:12**

But if we then come back to the individual, why don't individuals need purpose? There's pretty, there's pretty convincing research in psychology that has been done by Richard Ryan and Deci. Deci, which talks about self efficacy. And says that when you look at lots of positive outcomes in life, health outcomes, even a sense of personal kind of energy and vitality, they're influenced by people's need for autonomy, people's need for a feeling of competence that we do things well, and people's need for connection. Now together, autonomy, connection, and competence. sound to me a lot like having a sense of purpose, knowing what I'm knowing what I'm really good at being able to direct my energies and feeling that that's connected to other people somehow.

**Grant Liversage 16:08**

How do people become more purposeful or find their purpose?

**Gavin Weeks 16:15**

I think they, I mean, there's so there's so many ways into that conversation grant. But here's some of the things that I that I that I think about, I think about purpose as in as a as an energizer. When we're doing purposeful work. Or when we're doing things that are connected to our sense of purpose, we often feel, we often would describe ourselves as feeling energized, that can come from connection, it can come from a sense of excitement, it can come from those feelings of mastery and flow that people talk about, particularly in, in athletic context. So one of the ways in to a conversation about purpose is to really think about what's really energizing to us. When do we really feel, you know, as an individual, or as a team, that we come to that we come into life. We're also when you look back, you're also most fulfilled, kind of professionally and purpose, professionally and personally. And when we're being

purposeful, when when the work that we're doing or the things that we're doing in life is connected to what gives us a real sense of sense of purpose, I get people often to think back about the times in their career, when they most felt fulfilled, usually, especially put up into the sporting context, you could you could be talking to an athlete, or who's got a 10 year career in different in different organizations and different in different football teams, or rugby teams, or whatever, and talk to them, and when did they feel most fulfilled in their in their career, and it may not necessarily be in the team that was that was winning the most, or performing the best. Maybe there may be something there may be something else. And then I think the other thing I do is think about the roles that we play, the the important roles that we play in life and the impact that we want to have in them. So this is the this the great coaches for a coach that might be the ethos they're trying to create in the team that they coach, for an athlete, it might be the, the way they play the game, the attitude they want to bring to the game, the causes that they can connect, they know if they happen to be a famous athlete, the causes that they can connect to and the platform that they that they have. It can be the role that people play in communities, the role that they play in their in the families really getting down the roles that I have in my life that are important to me. And thinking about what what what is the the impact that I'm trying to have in those roles, and doesn't necessarily need to be bigger than world shaking. It can be the impact that I'm trying to have, as a father as teach my kids to be kind and to work hard, small and humble thing that that many of us who happen to be parents might find that we stray from from time to time when we focusing on discipline or getting the homework done. And then And then lastly, it's recognizing that our answers to those questions, they evolve over time. If you'd have asked me, What are they? What are the roles that are important to me? And what are the markers of success in those roles? 20 years ago, you'd hear a very different answer than the answer you might hear today.

#### **Grant Liversage** 19:31

I wonder Paul, if we can ask you to maybe let us know what some of the great coaches say about the same thing.

#### **Paul Barnett** 19:40

Or Gavin I love that idea of your purpose, just being small and humble things which is something that that I definitely relate to as well. But I have a good example of this idea of purpose delivering energy that can lead to fulfillment as it allows you to shop and your role as a player and a coach. And it comes from On a lady called Natasha Adair, who was the coach at Arizona State. And we had this fantastic interview earlier this year. And I'll insert the clip now and what she had to say about purpose.

#### **Natasha Adair** 20:13

I'm a player's coach our players, because it's not just my job and our staffs job to coach them on the basketball court, we're going to coach them for life. And I can't coach them to their why, if I don't know who they are, if I don't know why they're doing this, and if I don't know, their family, or what's important to them. And so we asked, I asked those questions in recruiting, I ask those questions when they get here. I constantly ask, why, what is your commitment to this game? What is your commitment? Why are you doing this, and you hear so many things over the years, I'm doing it for my family, I'm doing it for my mom, I'm doing for my family's knee, I'm doing it. Because I want to take care of my family, I'm doing it for the love of the game. I'm doing it coach, because I'm enough, I was told growing up that I wasn't going to be or I couldn't do. And I'm doing it to prove people wrong. So you have a team of 15



scholarship, student athletes, all 13 of them, each person, they're playing this game for different reasons. And if I'm only going in with my standards, and my expectations, I'm going to miss and everyone you and I, everyone wants to be heard. They want to feel needed. And they want to feel appreciated and valued. And for me, it's just it works. When they know I'm coaching them to their why they say wow, Coach heard me, she's listening and matter. And it doesn't mean I lose sight of our foundation, I lose sight of the culture are the standards in which we will play with. But if they know that they matter, you know how hard they're going to fight for their team and their sisters. And when everyone knows each other's why collectively, they're going to help, they're going to push, they're going to encourage they're going to motivate. And so I have found that when you empower your student athletes, when you empower your assistants, when you empower your support staff, all the people around you, and you know what makes them tick, and you feed it, then they'll run through a wall for you because they know it's authentic. They know it's intentional, and it just makes them feel important.

#### **Grant Liversage** 22:29

So we've sort of charted a course through the conversation to what is purpose? Why do we need it? How do we get it? And I guess to sort of wrap it up, how does purpose relate to results and performance. And I'd love you to mention Nottingham Forest when you talk about how purpose relates to.

#### **Gavin Weeks** 22:52

So that's my, that's my football team that I've spent the last 30 something years feeling slightly disappointed by but never really been able to disconnect from. But it's actually a lovely a lovely example of how creating a real sense of purpose and linking that to connection can or seems to be part of the the elements that create great performance. So forest were languishing at the bottom of the championship. So the league below the Premier League in the in the UK. And as happens in that situation, the manager got sacked, and a new manager got brought in and then called a man called Steve Cooper. And Steve Cooper had to of course, do what managers often do bring in some new players. But what he also did was moved right into the center of Nottingham, right into the center of that of that city, so that he could be around fans and he could be around the businesses and the communities that that create that place. And he connected the team to the stories of the past. So 40 years ago, they were the champions of Europe, they have some of the most famous players and managers to have been through English football associated with that with that club. And he started bringing people in to meet them. Old, old people, old fans, people who had been part of the club for 50 years. When the when the captain was being interviewed after after matches, he'd often start talking about the people who cooked who cooked dinner for them at the training ground. So that was kind of really forging a sense that we want organization trying to do something really exciting trying to get back into the Premier League and over the course of that year, from January to May, they went from bottom of the premiership to in the top six and eventually winning the playoffs and they're now in the in the Premier League and we'll see where it goes from from there too. It's too early to say but notable. That story is very very similar to Gareth Southgate working with the with the good football team, bringing people together around a sense of connection. Firstly, but purpose. Secondly, what's this England seem really here to do. And he worked very closely with a performance coach called Orion east, which has been doing that for about for a long time, and it really explored now what what are the good? What's the impact that belonging, sense of belonging has on performance. And as you know, grant my

my colleagues, Tracy kabalarian, Sam Rocky, have been doing some some research over the last couple of years with an evolutionary psychologist called Robin Dunbar and really exploring what are the components that groups need to be able to thrive. And those those components include connection, belonging, learning, learning, a sense of learning within an organization, they include a real sense of purpose, and very strong and talked about values. And so, so purpose is kind of part of part of the things that helps groups to thrive, and being purposeful, is deliberately making making use of those components, deliberately creating connection deliberately learning together, being really clear about what the about what the values are, and how we bring them to life in the work and the way that we play the game. In the projects that we launched, the things that we do the things that we that we don't do.

**Grant Liversage 26:30**

So Thanks, Kevin. I mean, that's a wonderful journey, through what purposes why we needed, how to get it, and why it matters and how it drives performance. What's the takeaway from for coaches and or leaders on this concept of purpose?

**Gavin Weeks 26:48**

If I can summarize all of that it's to as a coach and as a leader, but also with the people that you coach and with the people that you lead. Really make time to think about what are the what are the roles that matter most to people? And then dig into questions around when you're, when you're doing those things. When you're doing those roles, and you feel at your best and you feel energized. What are the things that you're doing? What are the things that you're bringing to life? What are the ways of working? What are the ways of being and recognize that sometimes we do that, and then there are other times that things get in the way and help people orient themselves to being being the person they want to be in the roles that are in the roles that matter? And to keep on thinking about it.

**Grant Liversage 27:43**

Fantastic, thanks again, Dr. Gavin weeks. So how do people if people want to learn more about what you do how you do it? How did they get in touch with you

**Gavin Weeks 27:53**

so people can connect to me on LinkedIn? Hopefully we can put the link in the in the notes that you put and people can look on the on the Thomson Harrison website is probably the best place to find things that I'm doing things that I've written on, on the on the blogs and articles that we have on there. The best places. Great,

**Grant Liversage 28:15**

thanks again. Cheers.