

*Viktor Frankl's Principles
for Discovering Meaning in Life and Work*

PRISONERS OF OUR THOUGHTS

INCLUDES NEW CHAPTER ON THE PRINCIPLES IN ACTION



ALEX PATTAKOS, PH.D

Foreword by **STEPHEN R. COVEY**
author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*

an excerpt from

***Prisoners of our Thoughts:
Viktor Frankl's Principles for Discovering Meaning in Life and Work***

by Alex Pattakos, Ph.D

Published by Berrett-Koehler Publishers

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Why do some people seem to have an easier time dealing with complex and challenging situations than others? Why do some people seem more capable of dealing with change than others?

Applying the therapeutic system of world-renowned psychiatrist and philosopher, Viktor E. Frankl, learn how to bring personal meaning and fulfillment to your work and everyday life and achieve your highest potential!

Core Principles

- 1 ***Exercise the freedom to choose your attitude***—in all situations, no matter how desperate they may appear or actually be, you always have the ultimate freedom to choose your attitude.
- 2 ***Realize your will to meaning***—commit authentically to meaningful values and goals that only you can actualize and fulfill.
- 3 ***Detect the meaning of life's moments***—only you can answer for your own life by detecting the meaning at any given moment and assuming responsibility for weaving your unique tapestry of existence.
- 4 ***Don't work against yourself***—avoid becoming so obsessed with or fixated on an intent or outcome that you actually work against the desired result.
- 5 ***Look at yourself from a distance***—only human beings possess the capacity to look at themselves out of some perspective or distance, including the uniquely human trait known as your “sense of humor.”
- 6 ***Shift your focus of attention***—deflect your attention from the problem situation to something else and build your coping mechanisms for dealing with stress and change.
- 7 ***Extend beyond yourself***—manifest the human spirit at work by relating and being directed to something more than yourself.

Foreword

Stephen R. Covey

Shortly before Viktor Frankl's passing in September 1997, I had heard of his declining health, illness, and hospitalization. I was very anxious to talk with him so that I could express my profound gratitude for his life's work—for his impact on millions of people, including my own life and life's work. I understood that he had lost his sight and that his wife was reading to him several hours each day in the hospital. I will never forget the feeling of hearing his voice and visiting with him. He was so kind and gracious as he listened to my expressions of appreciation, esteem, and love. I felt as if I were speaking to a great and noble spirit. After patiently listening, he said, "Stephen, you talk to me as if I am ready to check out. I still have two important projects I need to complete." How true to form! How true to character! How true to the principles of Logotherapy!

Frankl's desire and determination to continue to contribute reminded me of his collaborative work with Dr. Hans Selye of Montreal, Canada—famous for his research and writings on stress. Selye taught that it is only when we have meaningful work and projects that our immune system is strengthened and the degenerative aging forces are slowed down. He called this kind of stress "eustress" rather than

distress, which comes from a life without meaning and integrity. I'm sure these two souls influenced each other, reinforcing both the physical and psychological benefits of Logotherapy, of man's search for meaning.

When Alex Pattakos graciously invited me to write a foreword to *Prisoners of Our Thoughts* and told me that the Frankl family had suggested this to him, I was both honored and excited to participate—particularly since they felt my work with organizations in management and leadership beautifully paralleled Viktor Frankl's "principles at work," the heart of this splendid book. My sense of the significance of this book deepened further when Pattakos wrote me, "A year before he died, I was sitting with Dr. Frankl in his study and he grabbed my arm and said, 'Alex, yours is the book that needs to be written!'"

I will never forget how deeply moved and inspired I was in the sixties when I studied *Man's Search for Meaning* and also *The Doctor and the Soul*. These two books, along with Frankl's other writings and lectures, reaffirmed "my soul's code" regarding our power of choice, our unique endowment of self-awareness, and our essence, our will for meaning. While on a writing sabbatical in Hawaii and in a very reflective state of mind, I was wandering through the stacks of a university library and picked up a book. I read the following three lines, which literally staggered me and again reaffirmed Frankl's essential teachings:

Between stimulus and response, there is a space.
In that space lies our freedom and our power to choose our
response.
In our response lies our growth and our happiness.

I did not note the name of the author, so I've never been able to give proper attribution. On a later trip to Hawaii I even went back to find the source and found the library building itself was no longer present.

The space between what happens to us and our response, our freedom to choose that response and the impact it can have upon our lives, beautifully illustrate that we can become a product of our decisions, not our conditions. They illustrate the three values that Frankl continually taught: the creative value; the experiential value; and the attitudinal value. We have the power to choose our response to our circumstances. We have the power to shape our circumstances; indeed, we have the responsibility, and if we ignore this space, this freedom, this responsibility, the essence of our life and our legacy could be frustrated.

One time I was leaving a military base where I had been teaching principle-centered leadership over a period of time. As I was saying goodbye to the commander of that base, a colonel, I asked him, "Why would you undertake such a significant change effort to bring principle-centered living and leadership to your command when you know full well you will be swimming upstream against powerful cultural forces? You are in your thirtieth year and you are retiring at the end of this year. You have had a successful military career and you could simply maintain the successful pattern you've had and go into your retirement with all of the honors and the plaudits that come with your dedicated years of service." His answer was unforgettable. It seared itself into my soul. He said, "Recently, my father passed away. Knowing that he was dying, he called my mother and myself to his

bedside. He motioned to me to come close to him so that he could whisper something in my ear. My mother stood by, watching in tears. My father said, ‘Son, promise me you won’t do life like I did. Son, I didn’t do right by you or by your mother, and I never really made a difference. Son, promise me you won’t do life like I did.’”

This military commander said, “Stephen, that is why I am undertaking this change effort. That is why I want to bring our whole command to an entirely new level of performance and contribution. I want to make a difference, and for the first time I sincerely hope that my successors do better than I have. Up to this point, I had hoped that I would be the high-water mark, but no longer. I want to get these principles so institutionalized and so built into our culture that they will be sustainable and go on and on. I know it will be a struggle. I may even ask for an extension so that I can continue to see this work through, but I want to honor the greatest legacy that my father ever gave me, and that is the desire to make a difference.”

From this commander we learn that courage is not the absence of fear but the awareness there is something more important. We spend at least a third of our life either preparing for work or doing work, usually inside organizations. Even our retirement should be filled with meaningful projects, inside organizations or families or societies. Work and love essentially comprise the essence of mortality.

The great humanistic psychologist, Abraham Maslow, came to similar thoughts near the end of his life, which essentially affirmed Frankl’s “will to meaning” theme. He felt that his own need hierarchy theory was too needs deter-

mined and that self-actualization was not the highest need. In the end, he concluded that self-transcendence was the human soul's highest need, which reflected more the spirit of Frankl. Maslow's wife, Bertha, and his research associate put together his final thinking along these lines in the book, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*.

My own work with organizations and with people in the world of work focuses a great deal on developing personal and organizational mission statements. I have found that when you get enough people interacting freely and synergistically, and when these people are informed about the realities of their industry or profession and their own culture, they begin to tap into a kind of collective conscience and awareness of the need to add value, to really leave a legacy, and they set up value guidelines to fulfill that legacy. Ends and means are inseparable; in fact, the ends pre-exist in the means. No worthy end can ever really be accomplished with unworthy means.

I have found in my teaching that the single most exhilarating, thrilling, and motivating idea that people have ever really seriously contemplated is the idea of the power of choice—the idea that the best way to predict their future is to create it. It is basically the idea of personal freedom, of learning to ask Viktor Frankl's question: What is life asking of me? What is this situation asking of me? It's more freedom *to* rather than freedom *from*. It's definitely an inside-out rather than an outside-in approach.

I have found that when people get caught up in this awareness, this kind of mindfulness, and if they genuinely ask such questions and consult their conscience, almost

always the purposes and values they come up with are transcendent—that is, they deal with meaning that is larger than their own life, one that truly adds value and contributes to other people’s lives—the kinds of things that Viktor Frankl did in the death camps of Nazi Germany. They break cycles; they establish new cycles, new positive energies. They become what I like to call “transition figures”—people who break with past cultural mindless patterns of behavior and attitude.

*The range of what we see and do
Is limited by what we fail to notice.
And because we fail to notice
That we fail to notice,
There is little we can do
To change
Until we notice
How failing to notice
Shapes our thoughts and deeds.*
—R.D. Laing

With this kind of thinking and with the seven magnificent principles Dr. Pattakos describes in this important book, a kind of primary greatness is developed where character and contribution, conscience and love, choice and meaning, all have their play and synergy with each other. This is contrasted with secondary greatness, described in the last chapter of this book—being those who are successful in society’s eyes but personally unfulfilled.

Finally, let me suggest two ideas on how to get the very most from this book. First, share or teach the core principles, one by one, to those you live with and work around who might be interested. Second, live them. To learn something

but not to do is really not to learn. To know something but not to do is really not to know. Otherwise, if we just intellectualize these core principles and verbalize them, but do not share and practice them, we would be like a person who is blind from birth explaining to another what it means to see, based on an academic study of light, its properties, the eye and its anatomy. As you read this book, I challenge you to experience the freedom to choose your own attitude, to exercise your will to meaning, to detect the meaning of life's moments, to not work against yourself, to look at yourself from a distance, and to shift your focus of attention and extend beyond yourself. I suggest you consider learning this material sequentially, just by reading the principle, teaching it and applying it, then reading the next one, and so forth. You may want to simply read the entire book all at once to give yourself the overview, and then go back and learn them sequentially through your own experiencing. You will become a change catalyst. You will become a transition figure. You will stop bad cycles and start good ones. Life will take on a meaning as you've never known it before. I know this is so from my own experiences and from working with countless organizations and individuals in the world of work.

As my grandfather taught me, and as Viktor Frankl taught me, life is a mission, not a career.

Preface

Have you ever worked in a job that you really didn't like? Or even if you were satisfied with your job—say, because it paid well or seemed secure—you still didn't feel fulfilled by the work that you were doing? More broadly, have you ever wondered if there was more to “life” than what you were experiencing? Have you ever felt like “bad” things just happened to you, challenging situations that were out of your control? If you answered yes to any of these questions, or even asked yourself such questions before now, you should know that you are not alone. Not at all. And, importantly, you should know that, because we're all human, it is totally natural to ask ourselves such fundamental questions about the way we work and live.

This book deals with the human quest for meaning and, therefore, was written with you in mind. It is grounded firmly in the philosophy and approach of the world-renowned psychiatrist, Viktor Frankl, author of the classic bestseller, *Man's Search for Meaning* (named one of the ten most influential books in America by the Library of Congress). Frankl, a survivor of the Nazi concentration camps during World War II, is the founder of Logotherapy, a meaning-centered and humanistic approach to psychotherapy. His ideas and experiences related to the search for meaning have significantly influenced people around the world. In this book, you will

find a conceptual foundation, as well as practical guidance, for examining your own questions about meaning in your work and everyday life.

The goal of this book, moreover, is to bring meaning to work—that is, to do for the domain of work what Frankl, as a psychiatrist, was able to do for psychotherapy. Because I am defining the notion of “work” very broadly, the message in this book applies to a very broad audience as well. In fact, it applies to volunteers as well as to paid workers; to people working in all sectors and industries; to retirees; to individuals beginning a job search or career; and to those in “transition.” And, because this book demonstrates how Frankl’s principles actually *work* in a generic context, its message can be applied to everyday living too. In this regard, besides introducing you to Frankl’s core ideas about life, the book is filled with examples, stories, exercises, and practical tools that can help guide you on your path to finding meaning at work *and* in your personal life.

It was in a meeting with Frankl at his home in Vienna, Austria, in August 1996, when I first proposed the idea of writing a book that would apply his core principles and approach explicitly to work and the workplace, to the world of business. Frankl was more than encouraging when, in his typically direct and passionate style, he leaned across his desk, grabbed my arm, and said: “Alex, yours is the book that *needs* to be written!” As you can imagine, I felt that Frankl’s words had been branded into the core of my being, and I was determined, from that moment forward, to make this book idea a reality. And so it is.

My fascination with Frankl and his work, like so many



*The author with Dr. Frankl
in his study, Vienna, Austria,
August 1996*

other people's, is long-standing. Yes, I feel blessed that I was given the opportunity to meet with him in person and seek his

counsel. This said, Frankl's influence on my work and personal life go back almost forty years. I have spent many of these years studying his groundbreaking work in existential analysis, Logotherapy, and the search for meaning, and have applied his principles in many different work environments and situations. As a mental health professional, my reliance on the power of Frankl's ideas has evolved and expanded over time. In this regard, I have employed (and tested) various elements of his philosophy and approach within a wide variety of organizational settings, as well as having worked closely with many individuals in the throes of an existential dilemma either at work or in their personal lives. During this time, of course, I also reflected seriously on my own life journey and found myself, on numerous occasions, relying on and benefiting from Frankl's wisdom. You'll find some of my own meaning-focused challenges and opportunities described in this book.

It is important to underscore that Viktor Frankl, throughout his life, "practiced what he preached." This, I must say from personal experience, is not always easy to do.

There is a saying in the academic world suggesting that we teach in order to learn, that is, we don't know what we don't know until we try to teach it. The same thing can be said about writing a book. In many respects, *writing* a book is the easy part. The really hard part, I must confess, comes when we try to *do* what we write about. Frankl was able to do both; he lived and worked with meaning all of his life. I can only try to follow his lead and hope that, by writing "the book that *needs* to be written," I have also learned how to live and work with meaning.

I also must say that the same thing applies to you. After you read this book, I challenge you *not* to put it out of sight, out of mind. No, please don't do that, because I've distilled some core principles from Frankl's voluminous body of work that deserve more of your attention than a simple read-through will provide. After reading this book, I would like you to "live" it by practicing the exercises, reviewing the concepts and cases (as many times as might be necessary for you), and adopting the core principles in your daily work and life. Only in this way will this book be more than another book in your library. Only in this way will this book help you find true meaning in your work and life. And only in this way will the message that Frankl branded in my soul,— "Alex, yours is the book that *needs* to be written!"—have the kind of meaning that he intended.

Alex Pattakos
Santa Fe, New Mexico USA
August 2004

Life Doesn't Just Happen to Us

Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather must recognize that it is he who is asked. In a word, each man is questioned by life; and he can only answer to life by answering for his own life; to life he can only respond by being responsible.¹

Every day, Vita delivers my mail—cheerfully. It's her trademark attitude. One day, in lousy weather, I heard her whistling as she went about doing her deliveries. Instinctively I shouted out to her, "Thank you for doing such a great job." She stopped dead in her tracks with surprise. "Thank you," she said. "Wow, I'm not accustomed to hearing such words. I really appreciate it."

I wanted to know more. "How do you stay so positive and upbeat about delivering mail every day?" I asked her.

"I don't just deliver mail," she said. "I see myself helping to connect people to other people. I help build the community. Besides, people depend on me and I don't want to let them down." Her response was enthusiastic and proud.

Vita's attitude about her work reflected the words inscribed on the General Post Office building in New York

City: *Neither snow nor rain nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds.* It was the Greek historian Herodotus who wrote these words in the fifth century B.C. The ancient delivery of messages from one person to another is at the very heart of our Information Age; yet these days, it's the phrase "going postal" that we're more likely to recognize.

Fair or unfair, "going postal" has become the symbol of all the negativity a job has to offer: boredom, repetitiveness, exposure to the elements, dangerous dogs, irritated customers, and a kind of automated behavior that ultimately inspires an explosion of pent-up rage—a killing spree, retaliation against all the suffered injustice of the job.

What threatens contemporary man is the alleged meaninglessness of his life, or, as I call it, the existential vacuum within him. And when does this vacuum open up, when does this so often latent vacuum become manifest? In the state of boredom.²

No matter what our opinions might be about the stature of any career or profession, it is the person doing the job that gives the job meaning. Vita is proof that those ancient words of Herodotus are alive and well in the twenty-first century.

But Vita's attitude goes beyond the "swift completion of her appointed rounds" (to paraphrase Herodotus). She experiences her work as serving a higher purpose. Her attitude about her job, and its "drudgery," goes far beyond an exercise in positive thinking. Vita sees her mail delivery responsibility as a personal, life-saving mission, one that could be fulfilled by her, and only by her. She knows she is depended on, perhaps even by people who feel disdain for

her work, and it means something. She brings meaning to her job, and in turn, it becomes meaningful.

*I am convinced that, in the final analysis, there is no situation which does not contain the seed of meaning.*³

Why is it that some people, like Vita my mail carrier, experience their work—even mundane work—with passion and commitment? Why do some people have an easier time dealing with complex and challenging situations at work and in life? Why do some people deal more easily with change? Why do some people find meaning and fulfillment in their work and everyday life, while others do not? There are no simple answers to these complex questions; but there are meaningful answers. That is the goal of this book: to illuminate the search for meaning, as a path to meaning, whether in our work or in our everyday lives.

What This Book Is About

We are, by nature, creatures of habit. Searching for a life that is both predictable and within our “comfort zone,” we rely on routine and, for the most part, learned thinking patterns. In effect, we create pathways in our minds in much the same way that a path is beaten through a grass field from repeated use. And because these patterns are automatic, we may believe these habitual ways of thinking and behaving to be “beyond our control.” Life, it seems, just happens to us. Not only do we rationalize our responses to life but we also fall prey to forces that work to limit our potential as human beings. By viewing ourselves as relatively powerless and driven by our instincts, the possibility that we create, or at least

co-create, our own reality becomes difficult to grasp. Instead, we lock ourselves inside our own mental prisons. We lose sight of our own natural potential, as well as that of others.

Each of us has his own inner concentration camp . . . we must deal with, with forgiveness and patience—as full human beings; as we are and what we will become.⁴

The ways in which we hold ourselves “prisoners of our thoughts” are well documented in the work of many who explore the landscape of our psycho-spiritual lives. Physician Deepak Chopra, in the audiotape of his book *Unconditional Life*, says “We erect and build a prison, and the tragedy is that we cannot even see the walls of this prison.”⁵

It is through our own search for meaning that we are able to reshape our patterns of thinking, “unfreeze” ourselves from our limited perspective, find the key, and unlock the door of our metaphorical prison cell.

Viktor Frankl, a psychiatrist who suffered through imprisonment in Nazi concentration camps during World War II, found meaning because of, and in spite of, the suffering all around him. His life’s work resulted in the therapeutic approach called *Logotherapy*, which paved the way for us to know meaning as a foundation of our existence. Frankl is quick to say, however, that such traumatic suffering is *not* a prerequisite for finding meaning in our lives. He means that even if and when we do suffer, no matter what the severity, we have the ability to find meaning in the situation. Choosing to do so is the path to a meaningful life. And a meaningful life includes meaningful work.

This book explores seven Core Principles that I have

derived from Frankl's work: (1) we are free to choose our attitude toward everything that happens to us; (2) we can realize our will to meaning by making a conscious commitment to meaningful values and goals; (3) we can find meaning in all of life's moments; (4) we can learn to see how we work against ourselves; (5) we can look at ourselves from a distance and gain insight and perspective as well as laugh at ourselves; (6) we can shift our focus of attention when coping with difficult situations; and (7) we can reach out beyond ourselves and make a difference in the world. These seven principles, which I believe form the foundation of Frankl's work, are available to us anytime, all the time. They lead us to meaning, to freedom, and to deep connection to our own lives as well as to the lives of others in our local and global communities.

Viewing life as inherently meaningful and literally unlimited in potential requires a shift in consciousness. It also requires responsible action on our part for, as Frankl points out, the potential for meaning that exists in each moment of life can only be searched for and detected by each of us individually. This responsibility, he says, is "to be actualized by each of us at any time, even in the most miserable situations and literally up to the last breath of ourselves."⁶

Frankl walked this path completely. By living a life with meaning right up to his last breath, he showed us how his philosophy and therapeutic approach were grounded in practice. His personal experiences throughout his long life, both as a survivor of the Nazi death camps and as a revered and respected thought leader, serve to illuminate the unlimited potential of a human being. His life gives us rich and

ample evidence that the keys to freedom from life’s “prison cells”—real and imagined—are within, and within reach.

Whether we choose this path of liberation, however, is a decision that only we as individuals can make and for which only we can be held responsible. When we search out and discover the authentic meaning of our existence and our experiences, we discover that life doesn’t happen *to* us. *We* happen to life; and *we* make it meaningful.

Humanizing Work

The transformation of work in the twenty-first century is, in many respects, a *call for humanity*—a new consciousness that suggests more than simply trying to strike a balance between our work and our personal life. It is a call to honor our own individuality and fully engage our human spirit at work—wherever that may be. While this idea of empowering workers in body, mind, and spirit is not new, actually putting it to work is new. In some ways, our technological advances have redesigned work to better accommodate *human* factors. What we need now is a way to elevate the *human spirit* at work.

The goal of this book is to bring meaning to work and, quite frankly, to do for the phenomenon of work what Frankl as a psychiatrist was able to do for psychotherapy. His unique approach is internationally recognized as a system of humanistic psychotherapy and Frankl himself has been referred to by some as the founder of humanistic medicine and psychiatry. Logotherapy, in short, seeks to *make us aware of our freedom of response to all aspects of our destiny*. This humanistic view of psychotherapy helps clients to find concrete meaning in their lives. As a therapeutic system, it strengthens

trust in the unconditional meaningfulness of life and the dignity of the person. By applying this philosophy to the workplace, we can more deeply humanize our working lives and bring deeper meaning to work itself.

From the perspective of Logotherapy, we can find *unconditional meaning* in our work/life situations and experience the *unconditional value* of our colleagues as unique human beings. This is not an easy task but when we celebrate our differences as cheerfully as we celebrate our similarities the result is a powerful synergy at work *and* in the workplace. Bestselling author Stephen R. Covey, who has also been influenced by Frankl's teachings, has astutely observed that "difference is the beginning of synergy."⁷ When business leaders and managers on all levels bring this awareness to work, they are the catalysts for profound changes in the workplace—changes that enhance everyone's ability to search for and find meaning, on the job, at home, and within our entire human experience.

*Unconditional meaning, however, is paralleled by the unconditional value of each and every person. It is that which warrants the indelible quality of the dignity of man. Just as life remains potentially meaningful under any conditions, even those which are most miserable, so too does the value of each and every person stay with him or her.*⁸

Detecting Your Path

Of course, being fully human and living an authentic life at home, at play, and at work are formidable challenges at best. They involve a willingness to embark down a path of *self-discovery*, drawing heavily upon what Frankl refers to as our "will to meaning," that is, our inherent capacity to continu-

ally search for meaning under all circumstances. This human quest for meaning in every moment creates a discerning path that runs through all aspects of our lives. It is a path that weaves a process, not a product, for during our lifetime there is no final destination where everything comes to rest. This book offers guideposts along the way.

In Chapter 2, *Viktor Frankl's Lifework and Legacy*, we get a glimpse into the life and work of Dr. Frankl. As a mentor and author, he had a profound impact on my way of thinking and dramatically influenced my work and my life. As the founder of Logotherapy, he brought powerful insights and compassion to the therapeutic world, leaving a legacy of wisdom that only increases over time.

The many pathways to meaning are explored in Chapter 3, *Labyrinths of Meaning*, which also makes reference to the seven core principles of Frankl's work that were introduced earlier. Each of these life-meaning principles is then more deeply explored in individual chapters: *Exercise the Freedom to Choose Your Attitude* (Chapter 4); *Realize Your Will to Meaning* (Chapter 5); *Detect the Meaning of Life's Moments* (Chapter 6); *Don't Work Against Yourself* (Chapter 7); *Look at Yourself from a Distance* (Chapter 8); *Shift Your Focus of Attention* (Chapter 9); and *Extend Beyond Yourself* (Chapter 10).

One may say that instincts are transmitted through the genes, and values are transmitted through traditions, but that meanings, being unique, are a matter of personal discovery.⁹

Chapter 4, *Exercise the Freedom to Choose Your Attitude*, examines the Logotherapeutic concept of *freedom of will*.

This concept is best described by Frankl's famous quote in *Man's Search for Meaning*, "Everything can be taken from a man but . . . the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's way."¹⁰ The key ingredient here is the *responsibility* for choosing our attitude, which lies solely and soundly with the self.

Chapter 5, *Realize Your Will to Meaning*, explores Frankl's concept of our "will to meaning" and how we bring our values to life at work. Logotherapy, according to Frankl, "considers man as a being whose main concern consists of fulfilling a meaning and in actualizing *values*, rather than in the mere gratification and satisfaction of drives and instincts."¹¹ Giving meaning to work, in this context, means more than simply completing a task to receive a tangible reward, such as money, influence, status, or prestige. By committing to values and goals that might appear intangible but are nonetheless "real" and meaningful, we honor our deepest needs.

The fundamental presumption is that only as individuals can we answer for our own lives, detecting in them each moment's meaning and weaving our own unique tapestry of existence. Chapter 6, *Detect the Meaning of Life's Moments*, goes further—into the realm of ultimate meaning or "super-meaning." Frankl's holistic views on the importance of intuitive capacity for *love* and *conscience* offer great insight into how meaning at work and in everyday life reveals itself. Frankl has written: "Love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire. . . . The salvation of man is through love and in love."¹² Yet our ability to weave love into our lives, especially into our work lives, is not only sadly limited but also suspect in today's "measurable" world of work.

Sometimes our most fervent desires and intentions are thwarted by our obsession with outcome. In Chapter 7, *Don't Work Against Yourself*, the technique known as “paradoxical intention” is examined and applied to work and everyday life. Frankl calls this form of self-sabotage “hyper-intention.” The tendency to micro-manage the work of others, for example, may create hyper-intensive stress, performance anxiety, or even covert/overt actions of sabotage that can end up creating the opposite of the result sought by a manager. Sometimes focusing too closely on the problem can keep us from seeing the solution. Likewise, becoming obsessed with or fixated on a particular outcome, more often than not gets in the way of our best intentions.

Chapter 8, *Look at Yourself from a Distance*, focuses on the notion of self-detachment and how, among other things, it can help us to lighten up and not sweat the small stuff. Frankl observed that “Only man owns the capacity to detach himself from himself. To look at himself out of some perspective or distance.”¹³ This includes that uniquely human trait known as a sense of humor. Frankl noted that “no animal is capable of laughing, least of all laughing at *itself* or *about itself*.”¹⁴ A dose of self-detachment frees us to be more open and receptive about the universe of opportunities in our lives.

When Viktor Frankl was a prisoner in the Nazi concentration camps, in order to cope with stress, suffering, and conflict, he learned to deflect his attention away from the painful situation to other, more appealing circumstances. In Chapter 9, *Shift Your Focus of Attention*, we explore this skill and how it can be effectively used in the workplace.

Self-transcendence is explored in Chapter 10, *Extend Beyond Yourself*. This principle goes far beyond shifting the focus of attention from one thing to another. It takes us into the spiritual realm of ultimate meaning, where we see how our lives connect seamlessly to the lives of others. We see how being of service, no matter what the scale, is where our deepest meaning is realized.

Finally, in Chapter 11, *Living and Working with Meaning*, I weave my own views into Frankl's lessons so that they can be integrated into daily work/life, bringing personal and ultimate meaning to all the moments of our lives.

So, let's first take a look at Dr. Frankl's lifework, explore more fully the foundations of his meaning-centered approach, and see how we can apply his groundbreaking philosophy to work, workplace issues, and our personal lives.



**Meaning
Moment**

Recall a situation in which you felt especially *negative* about your job or career. Perhaps you just didn't like the work that you were doing, or maybe you disliked your supervisor, boss, or co-workers (this may even be your situation today). Did you view yourself as a "victim" of circumstances that were outside of your control, or did you feel responsible in some way for "creating" the situation and therefore were ultimately responsible for dealing with it? What, if anything, did you *do* about it? As you think about the situation now, what did you *learn* from it? What would you have done differently?

Life Doesn't Just Happen to Us

this material has been excerpted from

***Prisoners of our Thoughts:
Viktor Frankl's Principles for Discovering Meaning in Life and Work***

by Alex Pattakos, Ph.D

Published by Berrett-Koehler Publishers

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