



HIGH PERFORMING PEOPLE
PURPOSE

How to use this resource

We are really pleased to provide you with this resource on the topic of Purpose.

It sits as part of the **High Performing People Framework** and aims to provide some useful information on one of the framework's 13 identified characteristics. A resource will be available for each characteristic.

The recommendation is to use this resource to help you to understand the key theories that underpin Purpose and to provide you with practical recommendations as to how to apply the theories.

The resource isn't designed to be directly used by athletes but instead to be used by the coach, to think about how the information might be best applied with the specific group they coach based on their age, experience, and unique characteristics. If you have access to a performance psychologist then involving them in the conversation would be beneficial.

Enjoy the resource and we hope it stimulates some new ideas and, most importantly, actions.

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[Click to read about the High Performing People framework](#)



“Every one of us has a WHY, a deep-seated **purpose**, cause or belief that is the source of our passion and inspiration.”

(Simon Sinek)

Starting point

Fulfilment is a right and not a privilege. Every single one of us is entitled to feel fulfilled by what we do, to wake up feeling inspired to go turn up, and feel that we contributed to something larger than ourselves.

It is not a feeling reserved for a lucky few who get to say: "I love what I do."

Every one of us has a WHY, a deep-seated purpose, cause or belief that is the source of our passion and inspiration. You may not yet know what yours is or how to express it in words. But, I guarantee, you have one.

Fulfilment isn't another word for happiness. All kinds of things make us happy: hitting a goal or completing a training block. But, happiness is temporary; the feeling doesn't last. The intensity passes with time.

Fulfilment is deeper. Fulfilment lasts, the difference between happiness and fulfilment is the difference between liking something and loving something.

We don't necessarily find happiness in what we do every day, but we can feel fulfilled by what we do every day if it makes us feel part of something bigger than ourselves. **Fulfilment comes from when what we do connects directly to our WHY.**

COACH ACTION

Establish WHY an achievement would mean something to an athlete.

"Why would this make you happy / inspired / what would it do for you?"



Why is it important?

Research shows that finding your purpose is linked to living longer. Researchers surveyed nearly 7,000 older adults on the relationship between mortality and finding your purpose.

Participants who did not have a strong sense of meaning in their lives were more than twice as likely to die prematurely as those who had figured out their purpose in life.

Having a sense of purpose also reduced the incidence of cardiovascular events like heart attack and stroke.

These results were universal, even when controlled for income, race, gender and education level.

Researchers concluded that finding your purpose helps you live longer. It's also essential for happiness and fulfilment.

[Read the research here](#)

What do we mean by purpose?

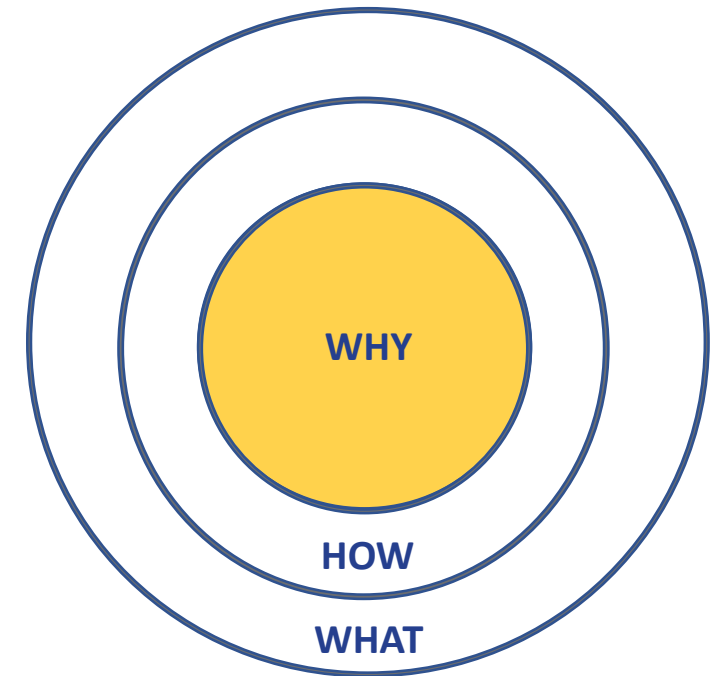
Every organisation, and every person's career, operates on three levels, as shown in the illustration: what we do, how we do it, and why we do it.

We all know what we do: the jobs we do. Some of us know how we do it: the things that we think make us different or stand out from the crowd. But, very few of us can clearly articulate why we do what we do.

"Hold on", you might say. "Let's be honest here – aren't most people doing it to win medals? That's the obvious 'why'". First, a medal is a result. Though it is a part of the picture, it's not what inspires most of us to get out of bed in the morning.

WHY focuses much deeper to understand what motivates and inspires us. It is the purpose, cause or belief that drives us.

It is important to recognise that our WHY changes with age and time within a sport. Someone's WHY when they first take part in the sport might be about enjoyment or learning. As someone engages more time, this might change to something else.



ACTIVITY

[Click here to watch Simon Sinek's talk about WHY on TED.com](#)

What do we mean by purpose?

The outer section of the golden circle – the WHAT – corresponds to the outer section of the brain – the neocortex.

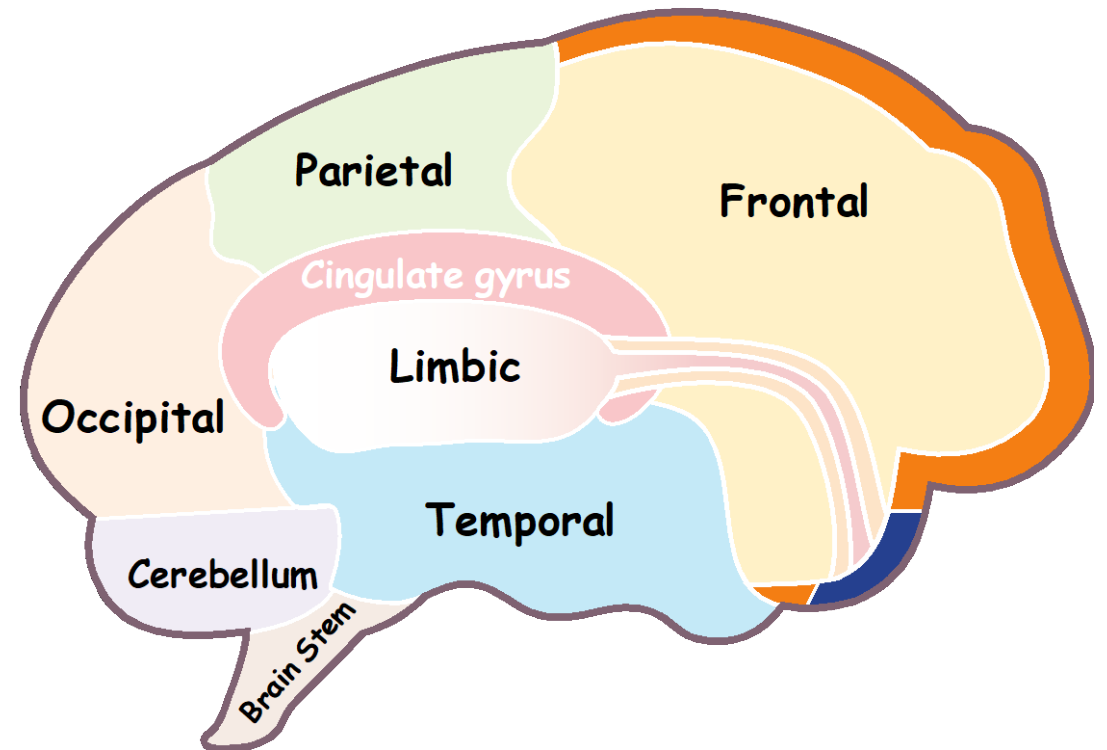
This is the part of the brain responsible for rational and analytical thought. It helps us understand facts and figures. The neocortex is also responsible for language.

The middle two sections of the Golden Circle – the WHY and HOW – correspond to the middle section of the brain, the limbic system.

This is the part of the brain responsible for all our feelings, like trust and loyalty. But, unlike the neocortex, the limbic system has no capacity for language.

The limbic system is where “gut feelings” come from. It’s not our stomach. It’s a feeling we get about a decision we have to make that we struggle to explain.

Once you understand WHY you’ll be able to articulate what makes you feel fulfilled and to better understand what drives your behaviour when you’re at your natural best.



Identifying purpose

STEP 1: STORIES

Your WHY is born from past experiences; it is the total of the lessons you learned, the experiences you had, and the values adopted while growing up. You're looking for stories that fit the bill, jot down notes on each so you can recall them.

GUIDELINES FOR GATHERING STORIES TO LEAD TO YOUR WHY:

Think of specific experiences and people in your life that have shaped who you are today. You may choose an important event, but it could be a less obvious one, like a defining moment you had with an old coach.

If the event meant something to you, helped you become who you are, taught you something or made you proud, write it down.

As you think of the people who have been the most influential in your life, try to recall specifics about what they said or did that made such a difference to you.

Since your WHY comes from your past, which is the period from your birth until yesterday, you can draw your stories from any time in between those markers. The memories may come from school, home, work or any other areas of your life.

You may recall times or events that you would gladly revisit. Or you may retrieve memories of painful episodes that you would never want to relive. What both kinds of experiences have in common is that good or bad, they helped make you who you are.



Identifying purpose

STEP 2: THEMES

As you pan for your stories and share them, themes will start to emerge and insights about yourself will begin to come to light. As the process unfolds, one or two of those nuggets will seem to shine brighter than all the others.

They will feel bigger, more important. They will shine so brightly that you'll point to them and say, "That's me...that's who I am". These themes become the foundation of your WHY statement.

There are no limits to how many themes your stories yield. You may end up with eight, ten, fifteen. That's ok. The first step is getting all the themes down on paper.

With your themes all in one place, take a couple of moments to look them over. In some cases, the themes will be in every story.

STEP 3: DRAFT AND REFINE A WHY STATEMENT

With one or two shiny nuggets in hand, you're ready to take a crack at your WHY statement.

Try to make yours simple and clear, actionable, focused on the effect you'll have on others, and expressed in affirmative language that resonates with you.

Eventually, you will put your WHY statement into this format:

TO _____ **SO THAT** _____ .

The first blank represents the contribution you make to the lives of others.

The second blanks represent the impact of your contribution.



Applying a personal purpose



HOWs and WHATs

Once we know our WHY, we then need to explore HOW we apply it in WHAT we do.

Our HOWs are the strengths that we want to bring to a situation. These are the things that make you unique and world class.

ACTIVITY

To understand your strengths you can look back at the themes that you identified and then turn each one into actions.

For example, if one of the themes is Optimistic, then making it actionable could include:

Find the positive in everything
See the glass as half full
Look forward, not backward.

Once you have done this you need to give some context to them: WHAT do they look like in the context of



How can we use this?

ACTIVITY

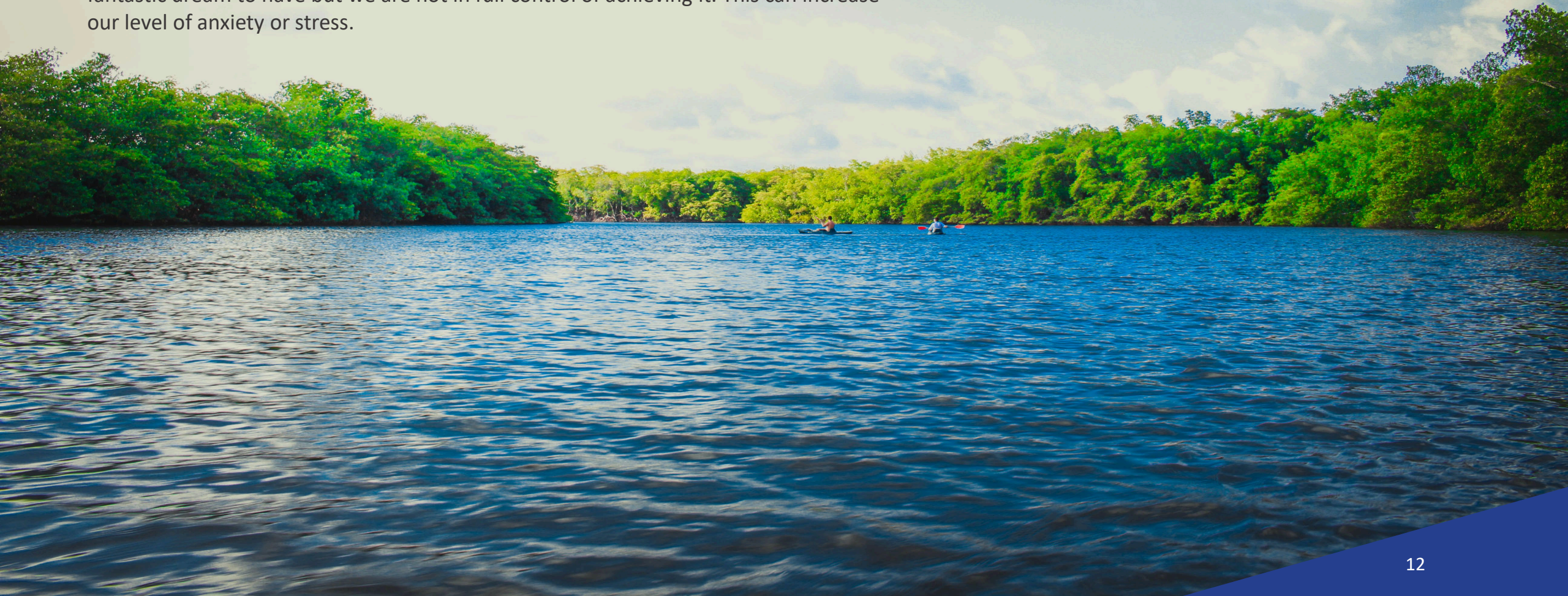
- Spend time exploring WHY an athlete wants to be involved in the sport.
- Provide opportunities for the athlete to reflect on how well what they are doing links to their purpose.
- Create an environment that aligns with the athlete's purpose (e.g. if their purpose is around fun, how do you create an environment that is fun for them to train in?)
- Think about how your communication aligns with the athlete's purpose (e.g. if their purpose is about learning and developing and you, as the coach, are talking about winning then the purposes are not aligned.)
- Think about how your purpose, as a coach, aligns or not with the athlete's purpose.



To be careful of?

Having a purpose that has an end point. This is likely to be a goal and when we reach it, we may feel a sense of loss at the end of the process

Having a purpose that is not in your control. Winning a medal at a competition is a fantastic dream to have but we are not in full control of achieving it. This can increase our level of anxiety or stress.



Resources

- **Find your Why**
by Simon Sinek, David Mead and Peter Docker
- **A Path through the Jungle: A Psychological Health and Wellbeing Programme to: Develop Robustness and Resilience**
by Steve Peters

