

Written By: Harvey Schachter Special to The Globe and Mail Magazine

Shelley Paxton walked away in 2016 from her job as chief marketing officer at Harley-Davidson to ponder life during what she calls a “soulbbatical.” Even before that, she had been trying for many years to nail down her purpose in life – the elusive “why.”

“I always believed that it would be some epic statement that would rock the world and instantly change my life,” she writes in her book *Soulbbatical*. In that longing, she was falling prey to some powerful myths surrounding passion and purpose.

Myth 1: We create our own purpose. We set out on an intellectual exercise that ignores that purpose emanates from the soul and is revealed or discovered, not created. “The key to understanding it is connecting with ourselves and paying attention to what we love to do, what we are most passionate about, what change we want to see (and be) in the world. This is rarely a lightning-bolt epiphany,” Ms. Paxton, now a career coach, says. Give the quest – and yourself – time. Get to know yourself. She says she was aimless for quite a period of time but learned to trust the process; the scarier it feels, the closer you are to a breakthrough.

Myth 2: Purpose has to be an earth-shattering idea. Of the fictions she shares in her book, this trips people up the most. In reality, you are looking for little-p purpose – what you feel called to do day-to-day or week-to-week – rather than the big-P Purpose of a grand mission guiding all your actions. However, little-p passions can lead you to big-P Purpose in time.

Myth 3: Purpose is not for profit. Innately, we feel that we won’t be able to make a living from our purpose. That’s an excuse, indicating you’re simply not ready or willing to prioritize your purpose. “Many wildly successful businesses have been founded on purpose, from a passion to do better/be better/look better/feel better,” Ms. Paxton says, citing Tom’s, Spanx, Beautycounter and Mindvalley University. “These companies were started in someone’s soul – some as side hustles, others as going-for-broke ventures, but all with the courageous conviction of ‘I can.’” At the same time, she stresses you don’t have to make a living following your purpose – just that it may be possible.

Myth 4: You have only one purpose. Once you find it, that’s not the end. Your purpose will develop, deepening and evolving. Give it time and space to grow. There may be other purposes that emerge over your lifetime, as well. “Ultimately, purpose is personal, and one of the best ways to discover yours is to spend quiet time alone, tuning in to that inner voice. Even if you can only set aside a couple of hours a week right now, I challenge you to do it,” Ms. Paxton says.