“Aaron Hurst powerfully sums up in *The Purpose Economy* the fundamental changes taking place in the business world.”

Arianna Huffington

*Chair, President and Editor-in-Chief*

*Huffington Post Media Group*

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**The Purpose Economy**

*How Your Desire for Impact, Personal Growth and Community Is Changing the World*

Aaron Hurst

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elevate

Elevate, USA
Advance Acclaim

“Here is that rare animal, a business book grounded in compassion. *The Purpose Economy* taps into our deep craving for meaning in our life and work. If Aaron Hurst is right, and I think he is, we are on the threshold of a new, more value-rich era in business. This book will help you find your place in it.”

Daniel H. Pink
*Author, To Sell Is Human and Drive*

“After building the largest nonprofit consultancy in the nation and changing the role of professionals in society, Aaron Hurst takes aim at his next target, the global economy.”

Chan Suh
*Founder, Agency.com*

“Writing with the fierceness and intelligence of one who has been on the front lines of creating the Purpose Economy, Aaron Hurst pulls together a seemingly disparate collection of trends and multi-generational yearnings into a cohesive argument that our economy is entering a new period where meaning is, perhaps, the ultimate capital. *The Purpose Economy* is at once both a description of profound changes and a call to action to make those changes a part of our society.”

Jerry Colonna
*Chair of the Board, Naropa University | Co-Founder, Flatiron Partners*
*Author, The Monster in Your Head*

“The Purpose Economy eloquently sums up what we have seen around the world over the last ten years. Aaron Hurst is a rare visionary with the talent to see the future but also find a way to bring us all along on the journey to realize its potential.”

Markus Hipp
*Executive Director, BMW Foundation*
The Purpose Economy is dedicated to the amazing women in my family who have taught me nearly everything I know.

Kara Hartnett Hurst, my muse and wife.

Lola B. Hurst, my daughter and the closest thing to perfection on this planet.

Tera Pierce, my sister and hero.

Sandra Slater, my rock and aunt.

Bonnie Slater Hurst, my departed mother, whose disdain for the ordinary lives with me to this day.
Acknowledgements

The Purpose Economy 100

The cover of this book celebrates 100 pioneers of the new economy. Their names are as follows:

SECTION TWO
PERSONAL PURPOSE—OWNING IT
The WHO, HOW & WHY of Purpose

Frank Santoni served for several years as the director of the Catholic Campus Ministry at Southern Methodist University. While he had his share of conversations with students about the day-to-day moral test associated with being an undergraduate student, his core counseling was for students struggling with the exploration of purpose in their life and careers after graduation.

This is the same conversation so many faculty members in every department of every university find themselves having with students. HR professionals today also face questions about purpose from employees all the time, and it is the subject of countless informational interview requests social entrepreneurs receive. It is also the driving force behind the amazing growth of the “life coaching” profession in the last ten years.

Frank left SMU to become the executive director of Dallas Social Venture Partners, a nonprofit network of wealthy and philanthropically-minded people in the region. In his new role, he finds himself having the same conversation he did back on campus. Despite great success and wealth, his members are hungry for conversations about personal purpose and impact.

The first edition of Richard Nelson Bolles’s *What Color is Your Parachute?* was self-published in 1970. It has since sold over ten million copies around the world. It was a groundbreaking book for the Boomer generation. It popularized the idea that what you
enjoy doing most is usually what you are best at doing. It was a revolutionary idea 40 years ago, but today is largely accepted in most circles.

But to Richard’s question, I would add another: “What color is your purpose?” It is a critical question and one that we have yet to find common language around. We have language to talk about everything, from our education to our skills to strengths to our titles, but we don’t have a shared way to talk about who we are and what matters to us personally.

Even employers are finding that old ways of describing our professional selves are not as effective as we once thought. Laszlo Bock, Google’s SVP of HR, has found that “GPA and test scores are worthless as a hiring criteria.” In short, what we put on our resumés is largely not the stuff that matters.

In 1983, Harvard’s Howard Gardner published his breakthrough theory of multiple intelligences. He laid out a framework for looking beyond traditional measures of IQ. A measure of someone’s intelligence is made up of seven distinct forms of intelligence: existential, naturalistic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, kinesthetic, mathematical, linguistic, spatial, and musical. IQ and GPA don’t begin to measure all of these.

But what Gardner found twenty years later was that intelligence only mattered in the service of purpose. The key, his research revealed, was to have a highly articulated purpose. His research took a major shift to focus on responsibility at work and how we bring our values into the office.

It is critical that you own your purpose and can articulate it powerfully as part of your identity. In working with thousands of professionals around the world and across sectors, patterns have emerged about how different people gain purpose in their work. Over the last 18 months, I have tested these patterns with leading researchers in the field and in workshops to validate what I was seeing at Taproot. The result is what we have come to call “purpose
patterns”—a term coined by my colleague Phi-Hong Ha. It is an attempt to speak about purpose as a society within a standalone frame.

And when it comes to purpose at work, there are three core drivers that will determine whether we feel fulfilled in what we’re doing: who we serve, how we serve them, and why we serve them. While we all generate purpose from a wide range of sources, people tend to have specific patterns in how they find purpose based on their own psychological profile.
When people would ask about this work, I first often described it as creating a Myers-Briggs or Strengths Finder for purpose. But as we researched purpose patterns, we came to realize that purpose is a somewhat different beast. Going beyond psychological analysis or personality inventories, creating your mission statement is about defining your true north and acting on it, making it personalized and in your own voice.

For over a decade, I have been working with nonprofits to develop their mission statements. For a nonprofit, their mission statement is their reason for being. It is their purpose. It guides their decisions, both big and small, and it serves as their bottom line. Similarly, a purpose pattern is most powerful when it is expressed in your own words and in a format akin to a mission statement.

To proactively infuse purpose into your work and life, clearly understanding what drives purpose for you greatly increases your odds of success. You need a mission, or better yet, a purpose statement, a short and powerful way to remember what matters and keep it front and center in your daily work. The purpose patterns that we’ve identified provide an outline and a starting place for us to each create our own personal purpose statement. It gives us the who, the how, and the why that we can then put into our own words and hang on our literal or figurative wall in the office.

My purpose is: to work to create communities that are empowered to realize their potential. The “who” are communities, which often take the form of organizations. It doesn’t mean individuals or all of society, but rather groups of people who form a collective towards meeting a goal. The “how” is both in the acts of creating communities and empowering them. It is about creating the ecosystem that empowers people to do things they could never do on their own. Finally, the “why” for me is all about realizing potential. I get such a purpose boost when I see potential realized
and not squandered. When a vision is achieved, it isn’t only a victory for the people involved, but also is a win for everyone. It shows what we are capable of doing and fuels hope.

**WHO of Purpose**

My neighbor is an eye doctor. She sees patients every day. The vast majority of her patients suffer from a handful of common conditions, many a natural byproduct of old age. She helps people every day in a very tangible way. She loves it.

I, on the other hand, wouldn’t last a week as a doctor. After seeing a couple of cases of glaucoma or cataracts, I would be ready to move on. Check—got it. What’s next? It was part of why I found I wasn’t meant to be a teacher—you never graduate. I am actually pretty extreme in this area, but my case is illustrative. Where some people see each person as unique and wonderful, I see patterns and have trouble focusing on each person as an autonomous individual. Some people have trouble seeing the forest through the trees. I tend to see the forest and not the trees.

The converse is also true. One of the most common sources of turnover at Taproot, with both team and board members, is the realization that we are too far removed from the front lines, and that they are meant to work directly with people and make an impact directly in their lives. Helping a nonprofit become stronger is intellectually satisfying but not engaging for them. We lose many talented pro bono consultants for the same reason—they want to be working directly with those in need.

My friend James Shepard once roughly described this as the difference between a doctor and a hospital administrator. Many people want to directly serve those in need, while others (like me) like to build the systems that enable and support doctors. For the latter, our playground is advancing organizations. We see organizations and groups of people as the organizing units of society.
My cousin, Jason Elliott, is a policy aid to the mayor of San Francisco. His work arena represents another type of playground. His passion is for working at a policy level, analyzing how city, state, and federal programs impact hospitals and clinics and can also set those places up better for success. He is about as far removed from the front lines as you can be, but the impact of even the smallest decision at that level can affect thousands of patients.

In my early twenties, I began to realize that my playground is organizations. I am intellectually curious about policy and broader changes in systems, but they tend to move too slowly to meet my need for experimentation and feedback. Changing policies and whole systems tends to take decades, and then years longer to see if they worked. This work is so removed from the front lines that it doesn’t give me an emotional charge. I also enjoy working to help individuals sometimes, and working on the intersection of organizations and society. But at the core for me is a love for helping organizations realize their potential.

As you seek to have more purpose in your career, this is the first area where you should seek clarity. Are you a doctor, a hospital administrator, or policy-maker? This isn’t an intellectual question; it has to do with what turns you on and ultimately, what will allow you to create the most meaningful impact in the world.

**Individual: Abigail Donahue**

Face-to-face with human potential, I feel my whole heart at work. These moments exemplify times when I’ve felt the deepest sense of purpose in my life. Working alongside my students, directly serving communities in need, feels meaningful and engaging in ways I can’t fully articulate. I observe awareness and altruism accumulating in small acts of kindness. Someone who needs food is fed; someone who wants a chance to speak...
is heard. In these moments, I see a new world evolving right in front of me.

For me, individual transformation leads to social impact. Though nebulous social issues require vast structural shifts, I believe personal connection to these issues is what changes society. Beliefs, theories, policies, and laws need to change for social justice to occur; each person’s actions drive these changes; and embodying these changes takes a personal commitment from everyone. I see my work as part of this social change feedback loop.

**Organization: Elaine Mason**

My role enables me to reach thousands of people, setting them up in the best way possible to achieve personal and professional success. My team recently finished working with a newly-formed business group, where we worked with the senior leadership team to redefine how their organization would produce and market new products. This was the first time the group worked this way, and the results of our work impacted every member of the organization.

At the close of the project, the group president hosted a town hall to explain the new way of working and the rationale behind all of the changes. During the town hall’s open Q&A, many team members thanked her for thinking things through and making it easier for everyone to succeed in their group. One team member commented that it was the first time he ever experienced a
leader that was so thoughtful. In response, the group president asked my team to come on stage and acknowledged that she hadn’t worked that way in the past, but in partnership with my team, she saw the importance of defining meaning in everyone’s role. Knowing that my team was able to improve the work life of so many people reminds me of how impactful my work can be across an organization.

Society: Tera Pierce
The laws of our land usually come from one person or group who experience a barrier in their life and bring it forward to a governing body, trying to change it for the next person. It is, in a way, a form of paying it forward. Generally, laws are not perfect the first time around and have unintended consequences. It is up to the legislature to listen to their constituents and amend our laws so that they can do what they are intended to do. Being involved in this kind of work is exciting, empowering, interesting, and constantly changing.

I love the work I do. As a trained social worker now working in public policy, I am able to facilitate changes to policies that have negative impacts on underserved and vulnerable populations, as well as craft new policies that will help break the cycle of poverty or addiction and expand access to education and vital services. It is fascinating work and changes daily. On a given day, I can be working on policy that stops predatory businesses from posting mugshots online, to mandating vision screenings for kids in school to prevent blindness and help them succeed.
WHY of Purpose

The foundation for our purpose is our moral view of the world. We are each driven in our work to drive progress toward achieving what we view as a moral utopia, where our values are universally achieved. It is our definition of progress, our motivation to move forward as a people.

Jonathan Haidt, a researcher at New York University, is the leader of a group of social and cultural psychologists who have been studying what they have dubbed moral foundations theory. They traced back our moral foundations to our earliest beginnings—first as apes, and then later as tribes. Their theory has now been tested around the world and helps to explain why morality varies so much by culture but retains many “similarities and recurrent themes.” The theory is based on the ideas of anthropologist Richard Shweder, who defined six clusters of moral concerns: care/harm, fairness/cheating, liberty/oppression, loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, and sanctity/degradation.

What Jonathan and his team found was that these six foundations are the comprehensive lists from which political cultures and movements base their moral appeals. Jonathan developed this theory through his lens as an expert in business ethics. He found that morality serves as the foundation for “intuitive ethics,” which determines how we make decisions at work. It is always playing in the background as we operate in our work and in the larger world.

To simplify this framework, it is easiest to think of the moral foundations as they apply to work as being on a continuum between two moral poles. Like the notion of yin and yang, our society thrives when they are in balance. Neither is right or wrong, but rather critical ingredients to build a strong society. Even for those approaching the framework from a particular spiritual background, they likely will discover that what they believe to be the will of their god falls in line with one of these two poles.

The first pole Jonathan frames through the lens of karma. Karma is basically a moral version of Newton’s laws of motion: for
every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. As Jonathan puts it, karma dictates that “kindness, honesty and hard work will (eventually) bring good fortune; cruelty, deceit and laziness will (eventually) bring suffering.”

He goes further and describes the belief in karma among those believe it to be as natural as gravity. It is a belief in how the world works. Nature will ensure in the long run that everyone gets his or her just desserts. It is our job to get out of the way and let karma work. This is a set of moral beliefs that value market forces. They trust the market and system to create a fair society, which ultimately delivers karma. It might not be immediate, but it will happen, and it will create the right carrots and sticks to optimize the results for the largest number of people.

The other pole doesn’t trust that karma and nature will ensure that everyone gets what is coming to them. All around them, they see examples of injustice. They see natural forces as inhumane and brutal. Where those with a moral foundation based on karma might subscribe to a moral version of Newton’s laws of motion, this other group sees natural forces as something more akin to entropy. They believe that without intervention, all groups and societies will move from order to disorder. It is only with intervention that we can be a moral society. They see harmony as the moral ideal and elevate it over competition.

An ideal world is one that erases boundaries between groups and people. We don’t create success by pitting ourselves against each other, but by caring for others and building a society with room for everyone. This doesn’t happen by itself. It requires constant social engineering and intervention. It is the moral responsibility of everyone to be vigilant to find where entropy is occurring and help return it to a sense of harmonious order. Harmony is based on empathy and compassion. It is based on seeing a moral society that is made up of individuals who need empathy and support to protect them from the chaos and injustice of nature.
We all sit somewhere in this continuum. It defines the underlying motivation behind our work. Within any job, we operate based on our assumptions about a moral society and take actions to advance our progress toward that utopic vision. Like most people, I am not on either extreme, but my core belief is that natural forces push us to entropy, and that human intervention is required. I see the primary role of organizations and society as managing that delicate balance between nature and humanity.

Karma: David B. McGinty

My life’s purpose became more acutely focused on helping non-governmental organizations (NGOs), social enterprises, and inclusive and responsible businesses be more efficient changemakers and install the right incentives to achieve sustainable development outcomes.

For years, I’ve worked on building ecosystems of telecommunication companies, funders, governments, and NGOs to create jobs and support families by delivering deep-field, mobile phone-based health care and education systems. Yesterday was spent working through alternative models for public-private partnerships to provide emergency transportation for expecting mothers in remote areas. This afternoon, my team is building a mezzanine of philanthropic and commercial investments to drive economic growth that incorporates smallholder farmers. Tomorrow, we are helping a NGO redesign its internal business processes to more efficiently support external cross-sector collaboration. Next week, we are looking at expansion plans to provide youth support services in sub-Saharan Africa.
Harmony: Bentley Davis

When I ran the free clinic, we also had a dental clinic. We had a part-time hygienist who took care of cleanings and preventative care, but treatment was harder to find. The longest wait was for dentures. When explaining poverty to someone who thinks that one can just pull themselves up from their bootstraps, I always use the example of those missing teeth. It is very hard to get any job, even a low-paying job, if one is missing front teeth. In the course of my travels, I met a denturist and explained the need. She volunteered to do a set of dentures per month for free. My first patient to get dentures was a working-age woman who had been waiting for over a year. She couldn’t find work and had been embarrassed to smile. After she got her dentures, she was elated. I still have the thank-you note she sent me.

HOW of Purpose

Even with the same moral foundations defining success, we approach the process of getting there differently. How we work is also tied to our view of the world and how we both solve problems and engage in the creative process. We can perhaps gain the most purpose in our work in how we approach it. Insight into how we approach work emerged while doing research on promising solutions to strengthen K–12 education in the United States. As I dug in, I found incredibly diverse assessments and solutions.

The more I listened, what emerged was that people had fundamentally diverse thinking styles. These styles profoundly influenced how they engaged in addressing the opportunity to improve education in the country, as illustrated in the following examples.
Community-Centered

If you look at the best schools in the country, you find one thing they all have in common: incredible parent participation and leadership. The parents are well-informed and invested in the school’s success, and they hold the school accountable for results; they also find ways to generate resources and advocate for the school within the community. To improve education in this country, we must learn why some schools have this kind of parent involvement and build that capacity. You can never know what challenges a school will face in the future, but with strong parent and community involvement, schools can face any challenge.

Human-Centered

Have you been in a typical public school classroom lately, especially in a big city? How do we expect a child to be inspired and learn in that kind of environment? The school is more like a prison than a place to promote feelings of well-being that help students learn and focus. We need to build pupil-based schools that provide fresh air and light. They need enough space for students to work without banging into each other, and classrooms need to be arranged to create natural social settings that encourage communication. If we want kids focused, they also need healthy food. And why are we asking teenagers to come to school at the break of dawn, when all the research says this isn’t natural and makes learning nearly impossible?

Structure-Driven

We don’t provide the right training, support, or tools to teachers and principals. We need to design effective leadership practices, policies, and procedures for school systems. We need to redesign curriculum and pedagogy (i.e., educational approach) that works with the needs of today’s kids, and help teachers adopt the new design so they can be set up for success. With this kind of support, our principals and teachers can achieve anything.
Knowledge-Driven

Improving education requires that we look at the data and research and build upon it. We don’t know what successful education even means today; we are blindly just continuing to use old models that don’t work anymore. We don’t know enough about education and what success looks like for today’s schools. We continue to take the test and fail, because we ourselves aren’t doing our homework.

In my experience, all of these mindsets are true, and yet not one of them would provide the level of change we need to see in our educational system. The point here isn’t about being right, but rather understanding each perspective about how the world works. There is a tremendous need for all these approaches. It’s my experience that people will find that their sense of purpose and engagement directly ties to their ability to work in alignment with their perspective about the best ways to further change.

These perspectives are not confined to education or even nonprofits. We see them in how people approach challenges and opportunities in just about any setting. Some people are always looking for ways to bring other people into an issue to help build ownership, community, and awareness. Some people see every situation as an opportunity to redesign it in order to better serve needs. Some people are laser focused on learning and understanding everything about an issue before they move forward. Others look for potential efficiency gains in every line they wait in, and know there is a better way to design processes to bring out the best in people and keep their time focused on the things that matter.

Community-Centered: Jennifer King

For me, it’s about facilitating connections that lead to social impact. Connections between philanthropists and social change organizations. Between photographers and social
cause projects. Between business and nonprofits. It seems to be the common theme to the moments I feel purpose most strongly. One moment where I felt purpose in my work related to community social impact was the day of the Venture4Change summit, a one-day event I developed that brought together businesses, social ventures, funders, community leaders, and nonprofits. It was an opportunity to find common ground, talk about mutual challenges and opportunities, and break down silos and build bridges. I felt tremendous satisfaction to see more than 100 people from all backgrounds engaged in deep and meaningful discussion about our community and how we can work together to drive social change.

**Human-Centered: Rebekah Heppner**

I had the opportunity to serve as interim CEO at a nonprofit organization during a period of transition. This was a very difficult time for the people who worked there, being surrounded by uncertainty about the future and not knowing who the next leader would be or what changes he or she would make. In addition to keeping up with the day-to-day work of the organization, I was able to get to know the staff members individually and provide them with a sense of stability. We were able to keep the lines of communication open between staff and the board, which made both the individuals and the organization stronger. When I left after six months, the staff not only threw me a party, but each person handed me a rose with a note attached, expressing what my time in the organization had meant to them.
I try to select projects and plan activities that allow me to meet individually with people. In my work as an applied anthropologist, I primarily conduct interviews to learn a person’s individual viewpoint about a situation or experience, then synthesize the information to find common themes. For example, my dissertation research, which has recently been published as a book, contained career-history interviews of former women executives who, like me, have left their corporate careers behind and found more meaningful work. I analyzed those interviews to find themes, and the book is built around stories the women told me, providing a glimpse of the culture that exists in the contemporary corporation.

**Structure-Driven: Stephanie Fuentes**

Because of the influence of data (or a lack of it), I regularly offer to facilitate meetings and brainstorming sessions in decision-making and to help focus the discussion. I look for ways to apply logic models to my projects and help others with theirs. And I don’t give up. This work takes a long time to bring to fruition, so I have to be able to see the unseen potential in the situation in order to shepherd my clients through the journey. I often have to work knowing people may not see the integration of the system I can see until they reach the very end. As an example, in the past 18 months in my current position, I’ve redesigned and re-launched over ten major evaluation and data collection projects for the organization. Some results have led to strategic shifts in communication for the organization and a better focus on business results. Most importantly, people are now talking about what data they have or can get that will help them decide what to do.
I absolutely love the process of asking questions of my client (external or internal) and watching the process unfold as they discover for themselves what is important, what is meaningful, and how to measure it. I never know how it will turn out until the model is complete. It’s a co-creation through structured conversation. If I could do logic models every day, I would—they are the epitome of fun.

**Knowledge-Driven: Daniel Reif**

I’m generally asked to look at data for two reasons: to answer a question about it, or to figure out a way to better manage it (capturing it, storing it, moving it, or presenting it). To do so, I’ll begin by understanding the applications, people, or processes that create the data I’m interested in. Once I’ve captured all of the factors that create the data, I’ll use SAS to model how events or changes to the process will impact it. What is unique about this is that it makes apparent how well or how poorly you understand the data you are analyzing. If an event occurs, and you can exactly explain why and how it changed the data you are analyzing, there is a definitiveness to the knowledge that you’ve gained, which I think is hard to come by when not dealing with numbers. This has given me the confidence that I fully understand complex problems, as well as the ability to clearly use data to explain them to others, something I find very rewarding. As I move from one project or subject to another, I feel that I’m amassing more and more knowledge and making progress toward understanding the health care industry. This gives me a strong sense of purpose.
Section Two: Personal Purpose—Owning It

To infuse purpose proactively into your work and life, clearly understanding what drives purpose for you greatly increases your odds of success. You need a mission, or better yet, a purpose statement. You need a short and powerful way to remember what matters.