**The “SMOOCH” Project**

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By Valorie Manninen-Nelson

It is always a challenge to come up with a new topic for the Articles we write for the WCA. After this year's WCA convention and the topic of “Wellness” being very relevant it certainly was a rejuvenating year. With the focus on taking care of ourselves and our loved ones I really was convinced that this was the right topic, something to bring a smile to our face.

I had already chosen this topic for my article because I thought it was something fun, whimsical and it just plain made me smile.  In such a stressful world we need more smiles and I really hope that you enjoy this article and look up more information on this... "The Smooch Project"!

In October of 2004 Bonnie Fournier a photographer from Minneapolis, Minnesota began what became the smooch project in her living room by taking a picture with her twin sister Barb. Bonnie took this opportunity just as the flash was about to go off and kissed the side of her sister's face in a playful way surprising her sister.  That was the onset of what has now become her passion taking pictures of people for her smooch project. What was next to follow became smooch history. The first time Bonnie laid eyes on the actual photograph she took that day her heart went through the roof she said.  It is what made her think that she should open her apartment building to other people who would like to participate in a little project. The first time she decided to take the photos of other people smooching 17 people, several dogs and one cat showed up and so began the smooch movement. Bonnie realized "Happy photo, Happy heart!" Bonnie has talked about how lucky she is to have her career as a photographer create a worldwide movement bringing happiness to so many.

Since this began over 10,000 "Smooch" shoots have taken place worldwide. In a world where there is so many things going on and people are so busy how great is this one simple moment of two people and a kiss, or one person and a beloved pet with a kiss shared in a snapshot.
How happy does that make us and what a great way to save a memory of that moment in time. Let’s be honest we are all excited to share pictures of our children, loved ones, pets, family and friends. We get great joy sharing those memories and moments with people. We're smiling when we do it.
I think Bonnie really was right when she said this smooch project was such a great and simple concept. Happy photo, happy heart indeed.

We need to treasure those people who are so important to us and take time to make more memories, pictures, vacations or just enjoy the moments we have with them. We deserve it & so do they!
Go check out Bonnie's FB page or projects. There are pictures from around the world with couples, babies, pets, grandparents and more.
One of this year's breakout sessions was "Know your Why". This certainly is a tribute to one person finding out what their passion was and Bonnie Fournier certainly discovered what her "WHY" was by bringing smiles to people's face, and focusing on love, healing and trying to make the world a better place one picture at a time. Together we can make the world a better place to live in!



So what can we do to make a difference in some small way or work towards finding our “WHY” or a cause to be passionate about? Maybe it is a charity we are close to as a survivor or because of a family member who has been impacted by Cancer, Autism, Diabetes or Multiple Sclerosis. Is there a set of skills you were born with that is obvious and leads you in a direction that has always been in the forefront of your life? It is ok there is still time to keep exploring what may be the passion or fire within-keep looking. Just like Bonnie who had a career it took a situation of sadness and looking for healing from a hurtful situation to take that first photo to bring her happiness. Go looking for it, find something that brings happiness or puts fire in your soul to want to make a difference in this world in a big way for the better. Maybe you are a crafter so you could volunteer with a hospital, youth group or local church fundraiser for a mission trip. If you have not found your niche yet don’t be discouraged keep looking and get involved with anything that seems fun and brings a smile to your face it may be just what you are looking for you just don’t know it yet. Are you an animal lover? You could volunteer to help out at an outreach in the community Adopt a Shelter Pet Day! Keep looking, You Got This.. There is something for all of us to get involved with and you will find it!

The following Article from Developing Good Habits.com is a good reference point and may bring some good starting points for you to search out your own ideas and information for future endeavors of learning more about yourself to create a happier you ☺

How to Find Your Why

These activities require you to be introspective and answer some questions about your personal experiences to uncover your life’s purpose. It is a good idea to write down your thoughts in a journal as you do these exercises.

1. Identify the things you can do to make other people’s lives better.

Having [self-awareness](https://www.developgoodhabits.com/what-is-self-awareness/) is great. However, doing something that will benefit others more than yourself is amazing. In fact, research has shown that people who have a sense of purpose and are grateful for the life they are living often contribute more to the world beyond themselves than those who do not have this sense of gratitude. This might be because, if someone can see how others benefit their life, that person will be more motivated to give back to humanity.

One [study](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17439760.2015.1048814?journalCode=rpos20) in particular found that people who engage in altruistic behaviors such as volunteering or donating money typically have a greater sense of purpose than those who don't. Further, research has shown that people who are altruistic also report having a strong sense of purpose. The feeling of making a difference in the world or in someone else's life is ultimately the most important thing for your own joy and fulfillment—and importance is parallel with purpose.

2. Think back to the activities you did that made you forget about the passage of time.

You have probably heard people say, "Time flies when you are having fun!" Moments like this are what psychologists call the “flow,” and what spirituals call connecting with the divine. Whatever is the case for you, these activities are where your passions are.

You are fulfilling your purpose when you are doing something that energizes you rather than something that drains your energy and leaves you feeling exhausted. When you are living your purpose, you are not left wondering, "Is it 5:00 yet?"

3. Recall what you liked to do when you were a kid.

You can see glimpses of your purpose by remembering the things that you did just for the sheer fun of it as a child. As you reflect upon the story of your life, it’s easy to pick up on certain patterns that tend to repeat themselves, or some trends in the activities that you did. These patterns may hold clues to your purpose. What have you found enjoyment in for your entire life? We have a tendency to lose touch with the things that we loved as children. With adolescence and adulthood come societal pressures that take certain passions away from us.

As adults, we often believe that we should only do things that we are somehow rewarded for. The transactional nature of our society often leaves us disconnected from doing the things that we truly love.

4. Think about the things that you are willing to do even if you look like a fool.

Before you can do something well, at some point you have to do it without any competence or knowledge about what you're doing. And, in order to continue working at something even after you have made some mistakes and embarrassed yourself in doing so, you have to be passionate about it. These activities are meaningful enough for you that you do them regardless of other people’s opinions.

People avoid embarrassment for obvious reasons, but if you avoid doing anything that has the potential to embarrass you, then you won't end up doing anything that feels meaningful.

Feeling foolish comes with the territory when you are on the path to achieve something important or significant. The more intimidated you are by a major life decision, the more you probably need to be doing it.

5. Observe what people ask of you when they come to you for help.

Is it a specific talent that you have? Are you a sounding board for your friends’ concerns? What do people thank you for? Appreciation from other people can help fuel your work.

You may not be able to see your strengths like others do because they come naturally to you. Look for common themes in reasons behind why people reach out to you in times of need.

For example, you might not realize the ways in which you inspire your friends to want to be like you. If you ask your friends directly what they believe your strengths to be, they might say something like, “You are great at being *proactive* in solving problems, rather than being *reactive* once a problem occurs.” You can tie these strengths into your “why.”

6. Imagine what you would be doing if you learned that you only had a year left to live.

Most people don't like thinking about death, but death forces us to focus on the truly important things. Knowing this often leads you to realize what your “why” is, and allows you to let go of things that are trivial or distracting. Death may be the only thing that can give you a clear perspective on the value of your life. How do you want people to remember you?

When people do not feel like they have a sense of direction or purpose, it is because they haven't figured out what’s important to them or what their values are. And if you aren't living in line with your own values, whose values or priorities are you living for? Discovering your “why” in life means that you have found a way to spend your limited amount of time here on earth well.

7. Enumerate the things for which you would be willing to go the extra mile.

These are the things that, regardless of failure or setbacks, you’ll still make an effort to do—and get up and learn from your previous mistakes. A lot of people don’t understand that passion is a *result* of action rather than the *cause* of it. You won't find your passion by being complacent. It is a trial-and-error process. If you aren't willing to go out of your way to do something, then you aren't truly passionate about it.

8. If you were given the chance to teach others (e.g., young people), what would you teach them?

If you consider this question, you are really thinking about what you would change about the world, or what knowledge you want to pass on to future generations. This question also forces you to reflect upon the things in life that you believe you are truly competent in and able to teach other people about. How would you want to improve other people's lives, or where do you believe there is a gap in knowledge that you could fill?

9. What task at work would you do for free if you didn’t need the paycheck?

Do you work to live or do you live to work? If you are doing something that you are passionate about, it won't feel like work. There will never be a Sunday night where you are dreading the imminent Monday morning.

What part of your work comes easy to you because you are happy while you're doing it? Aligning your professional life with your purpose is a critical part of living out your why.

10. What’s usually the reason why people thank you?

Similar to observing why people come to you for help, how do people find value in you or your contributions? Do you give great advice? Are you willing to take extra time out of your day to help your friends with something in particular? Think about the things that you do for people that are unique.

11. If you were given the chance to do something that you love and not worry about the paycheck, what would it be?

Considering this question is a great way to discover your passion. What would you do with all of your free time if money was not an issue? If you're not motivated by money, the only other thing you can be motivated by is time, and how you spend your time would certainly be on something that you love.

 In conclusion I hope you found something interesting in this article. In the beginning you got to read a little something about Bonnie who went on to find her why. Now the challenge is about going on and hope you will take the time to go out and find what you are passionate about too. Finding your “why” is important not only for success in your professional and personal life, but also for your well-being and longevity. Hopefully, the tips presented above on discovering your “why” can help you identify your own purpose and implement it in all areas of your life. You need to look within, discover the things that you are passionate about, and pursue them—regardless of other people’s doubts or the setbacks you’ll meet. Your own purpose will point the way to your success. Go Forward, Be happy and if you can be anything be Kind. See you Soon!

\*The "Smooch" Project is updating pages and photo dates so not all information is available but check it out. As we work to reorganize our public galleries, please enjoy the slideshow of selected photographs for the smooch project collection currently containing 3,000+ photos on WWW. TheSmoochProject.Com. The pictures are priceless and the message is clear💋

\* Developing Good Habits.com