

THE BIG IDEAS

Sheep vs. Strategists

Which are you?

How's Your Ikigai?

A matter of life and death.

Swimming Rats

240 times longer.

Greatness

2 step process.

Singularity

The physics of purpose.

Vision —> Decision

Move from fantasy to reality.

Black Hole Focus

How Intelligent People Can Create a Powerful Purpose for Their Lives

BY ISAIAH HANKEL, PH.D. · CAPSTONE © 2014 · 272 PAGES

"I've always been fascinated by black holes. The idea of some massive force so intense that absolutely everything is pulled into it is awe-inspiring. Nothing escapes a black hole. In fact, black holes are called 'black' exactly because nothing escapes them—not even light. The world's top physicists used to believe that anything that entered a black hole was obliterated. But this is no longer a popular viewpoint. Current research shows that, instead of destroying objects, black holes *transform* them.

Imagine if your purpose in life was as powerful as a black hole. With a force this strong, absolutely everything in your life would be pulled towards it. Nothing would escape. Every thought, every action—your entire identity—would be sucked into it. And, as a result, who you are, what you have, and how you live would be completely transformed.

Determining your ultimate purpose in life is the toughest decision you will ever make, which is why so few people actively decide on one. Instead, most people let life make this critical decision for them. These people fritter their lives away in an endless stream of tiny, meaningless decisions that elicit no great change and leave no real impact. They spend all their time and resources putting out day-to-day fires and focusing on short-term objectives.

Black Hole Focus will show you how to avoid this hollow fate, how to decide your purpose, and how to align your life around your chosen path."

~ Isaiah Hankel, Ph.D. from *Black Hole Focus*

"I used to think that information was destroyed in black holes. ... This was my biggest blunder, or at least my biggest blunder in science."

~ Stephen Hawking

Black holes.

Just contemplating the sheer, fierce power of them is, indeed, awe-inspiring, eh?

I mean, NOTHING escapes a black hole—not even light. Yowsers.

Although physicists *used* to think that everything got destroyed in a black hole, now they believe that it's less about destruction and more about *transformation.*

Isaiah Hankel is a young, smart, passionate guy and this an uber-inspiring, practical guide to discovering and living your purpose while creating your greatest life possible—with black hole-like focus + transformative mojo.

If you're into that sort of thing (particularly if you're also young and ambitious and looking to crush it), I think you'll dig it. (Get a copy [here](#).)

The book is packed with Big Ideas and I'm excited to share a few of my favorites so let's jump straight in!

SHEEP VS. STRATEGISTS

"I was a sheep. I had spent the last ten years running away from sticks and chasing carrots. Instead of finding my own purpose and working to fulfill it, I had been working to fulfill other people's purposes. Everything turned around in that moment."

~ Isaiah Hankel

"Sheep are the ultimate tacticians. They only respond to two things: sticks being banged behind them and carrots being held out in front of them. This is why it's so easy to shear sheep. Their herd mentality and lack of foresight make it very easy to funnel them down a narrow track until they are stuck; trapped by their own tactical nature. But sheep aren't the only animals that get stuck by groupthink and nearsightedness. It happens to humans too.

When we live our lives within the herd and without farsighted vision—like sheep instead of strategists—we end up trapped. Feeling trapped in a situation or bound by your circumstances is one of the worst feelings in the world. It can feel like you're slowly rotting while everyone else is getting ahead. The good news is that no matter how far down the tactical rabbit hole you have traveled, it's never too late to start thinking like a strategist. A strategist is someone who can see the end from the beginning and who acts independently from other people's expectations. A strategist is someone who maps out their purpose in life and works backwards to fulfill that purpose."

Isaiah kicks the book off with a story about his experiences as a kid shearing sheep.

His job was to corral them into the shearing station. And, apparently, it was really easy. All he had to do was team up with a few other farmhands, get behind the sheep and start banging a couple of big sticks together. (Apparently sheep hate sticks.)

The sheep would move quickly away from the sticks toward a triangular pen. Once there, they'd be led by carrots into the shearing station.

Carrots and sticks was all it took.

Alas, most of us are about as easy to manipulate. Sticks of disapproval from society combined with shiny carrots and #bam. We're sheared of our deepest purpose and wonder what happened.

The alternative?

We need to become strategists—step outside of the carrots and sticks being offered and actually think about what we really want. Like, REALLY want.

As Isaiah says, "A strategist is someone who can see the end from the beginning and who acts independently from other people's expectations. A strategist is someone who maps out their purpose in life and works backwards to fulfill that purpose."

Helping us figuring out WHY we should care about living our purpose and HOW to go about being a purpose-driven strategist is, of course, what the book is all about.

Let's explore some Big Ideas on how to go about doing that.

PURPOSE: IT'S A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

"In *The Blue Zones*, Dan Buettner describes regions of the world where people commonly live active lives past 100 years old. Buettner discusses a particular Blue Zone located on the northern part of the main island of Okinawa. He calls this place 'ground zero' for world longevity because people in this area have the longest disability-free life expectancy in the world. These Okinawans live about seven good years longer than the average American. They also have one-fifth the rate of colon and breast cancer, and one-sixth the rate of cardiovascular disease. The Okinawan language has no word for 'retirement.' Instead, there is one word Okinawans live their life by: *ikigai*. Roughly translated, it means 'the reason for which you wake up in the morning.' Whether it's teaching karate at 102 or learning to fish at 104, the Okinawans maintain a strong sense of purpose. Buettner believes this intimate relationship with direction is why Okinawans often live so long."

"Studies from Dominican University and Virginia Tech show that people who write down their goals are 33% more likely to achieve them. These same studies show that people who write down their goals make nine times more money than people who don't. Yet, 80% of Americans don't have goals."

~ Isaiah Hankel

Ikigai.

(Pronounced icky-guy.)

The rough translation? —> The reason you get up in the morning.

That begs the question: Why do YOU get up in the morning?

Your ability to answer that question is going to shed some light on your purpose which is going to be correlated to your well-being.

In short, if you have a strong answer to that question, you likely have a strong purpose and feel pretty darn good. If not, you probably don't have a particularly strong purpose and, unfortunately, you probably don't feel super energized and awesome.

As Isaiah says: "Your purpose—your *ikigai*—is fuel for your internal engine. It's what gives you direction and keeps you moving forward. The more purpose you inject into your life, the brighter your internal spark will burn, the longer you will live, and the more productive you will be while you're alive."

We all need a strong reason to live.

We all need a strong purpose.

What's yours?

#ikigai

RATS AND THEIR SWIM TRUNKS

"In the 1950s, Curt Richter, a Harvard graduate and Johns Hopkins scientist, did a series of experiments that tested how long rats could swim in high-sided buckets of circulating water before drowning. Dr. Richter found that, under normal conditions, a rat could swim for an average of 15 minutes before giving up and sinking. However, if he rescued the rats just before drowning, dried them off and let them rest briefly, and then put them back into the same buckets of circulating water, the rats could swim an average of 60 hours. Yes, 60 hours. If a rat was temporarily saved, it would survive 240 times longer than if it was not temporarily saved. This makes no sense. How could these rats swim so much longer during the second session, especially just after swimming as long as possible to stay alive during the first session? Dr. Richter concluded that the rats were able to swim longer because they were given hope. A better conclusion is that the rats were able to swim longer because they were given energy through hope. The rats had a clear picture of what being saved looked like, so they kept swimming."

Now, I'm not a huge fan of animal testing, etc. but WOW. That's crazy staggering.

Quick re-cap: The average rat could swim for 15 minutes before giving up and sinking. If rescued and then put back in they could swim for 60 HOURS.

Think about that for a second. 15 minutes vs. SIXTY HOURS—240 TIMES LONGER!!!

rubs eyes

Why?

The researcher says it was because of HOPE.

Remember our definition of hope? Science says it's very simple.

Basically, hope = believing that your future is going to be better than your present. (Thank you, Shane Lopez via *Making Hope Happen*—[see Notes](#).)

Once our rats had been rescued, they could "see" a better possible future. And that led to a staggering 240 times (!!!) increase in endurance.

"What allows us, as human beings, to psychologically survive life on Earth, with all of its pain, drama, and challenges, is a sense of purpose and meaning."

~ Barbara de Angelis

Taking liberty with the metaphorical comparison: If YOU don't see a better future, your "average swim time" before giving up is going to be a paltry 15 minutes. With hope? 240 times longer. Nuts.

As Isaiah says, "Purpose equals hope equals energy. Defining the path in front of you will give you the energy you need to complete it. The key is to positively visualize the end at the beginning. You don't have to actually see the finish line; you just have to envision it. Vision creates hope, or a feeling of expectancy. And hope creates energy."

Purpose = hope = energy.

Can you see a better future?

Let's put on our swim trunks and work out our hope muscles (again! REPS! :) with one of the most powerful hope + optimism-building exercises: Imagine your life in 5 years. You've worked hard. Things have come together. What's your life look like? Think about it. See it. Feel it.

KNOW your life is getting better. Get energized.

P.S. Remember another crazy stat on Hope: 69% of individuals whose leaders/managers at work inspire hope (again: hope = make them believe their futures will be better than their present) are engaged. For those whose leaders do not inspire hope, only 1% (ONE!) are engaged.

Inspiring hope is huge—as leaders, coaches, parents, etc. INSPIRE HOPE!

YOU CAN ACHIEVE GREATNESS

"You can achieve greatness. No matter where you are in life right now, there is something you can be uniquely incredible at. But before you can be incredible, you must believe that you can do anything. That's the first step. The next step is a little harder; you must decide what you want to be incredible at."

Here are the first two steps in actualizing your potential and achieving greatness.

Step 1. Know you can achieve greatness.

Seriously. KNOW it. Self-efficacy 101. "Whether you think you can or think you can't, you're right." etc.

Step 2. Decide what you want to be great at.

As Isaiah says, this part is a little harder but, let's be honest, it's not *that* hard—just requires some courage to go with what you're currently leaning toward and then test, adapt, etc.

Reminds me of Gary Vaynerchuk and Carlos Castaneda.

First, Gary Vee. I laughed as I read this passage from his new book called #ASKGARYVEE (Note soon). (The book is laid out as a series of questions and his responses.)

Q: "I have a ton of strengths. What's the best way to drill down on the best and move forward at a faster pace?"

A: "Shut the f*** up, pick the one you like best, and start winning."

HAH! Thank you for simplifying, Gary.

Carlos Castaneda puts it this way ([see Notes](#) on *The Wheel of Time*).

First, he establishes that "Anything is one of a million paths. Therefore, a warrior must always keep in mind that a path is only a path; if he feels that he should not follow it, he must not stay with it under any conditions. His decision to keep on that path or to leave it must be free of fear or ambition. He must look at every path closely and deliberately. There is a question that a warrior has to ask, mandatorily: 'Does this path have a heart?'"

"The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss, but that it is too low and we reach it."

~ Michelangelo

"In order to fulfill your new purpose in life, you must dramatically increase your expectations. Once you decide on a goal, you need to decide to achieve it. This means you must increase your expectations. You have to expect to achieve your goal."

~ Isaiah Hankel

I like it.

Then, he says: "But how will I know for sure whether a path has a heart or not?" "Anybody would know that. The trouble is nobody asks the question; and when a man finally realizes that he has taken a path without a heart, the path is ready to kill him. At that point very few men can stop to deliberate, and leave the path."

Ouch! Tough but true.

We know... The question is, do we have the courage to follow it?

P.S. Let's speak about greatness for a moment longer by reflecting on two extraordinary quotes Isaiah shares in the book.

First, Tim Ferris: "It's lonely at the top. Ninety-nine percent of people in the world are convinced they are incapable of achieving great things, so they aim for mediocre. The level of competition is thus fiercest for 'realistic' goals, paradoxically making them the most time- and energy-consuming ... The fishing is best where the fewest go, and the collective insecurity of the world makes it easy for people to hit home runs while everyone else is aiming for base hits. There is just less competition for bigger goals ... Unreasonable and unrealistic goals are easier to achieve for yet another reason. Having an unusually large goal is an adrenaline infusion that provides the endurance to overcome the inevitable trials and tribulations that go along with any goal. Realistic goals, restricted to the average ambition level, are uninspiring and will only fuel you through the first or second problem, at which point you throw in the towel."

And, John F. Kennedy (from [this goosebumps-inducing speech](#)): "But why, some say, the Moon? Why choose this as our goal? And they may well ask, why climb the highest mountain? Why, 35 years ago, fly the Atlantic? ... We choose to go to the Moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win."

THE PHYSICS OF YOUR PURPOSE (<— SINGULARITY)

"In physics, a singularity is a point of infinite density and infinitesimal volume. Singularities exist at the center of black holes, which are regions of space that have a gravitational field so intense that no matter or radiation can escape. Likewise, the pull of your purpose combined with your core priorities is so intense, so massive, that nothing you do can escape its influence.

Every thought you have, every decision you make, and every action you take is pulled by this force."

Imagine having a singularity of purpose such that "every thought you have, every decision you make, and every action you take is pulled by this force."

That's black hole focus—the physics of your purpose.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi echoes this wisdom in *Creativity* ([see Notes](#)) telling us: "After creative energy is awakened, it is necessary to protect it. We must erect barriers against distractions, dig channels so that energy can flow more freely, find ways to escape outside temptations and interruptions."

And, Stephen Cope tells us pretty much the same thing in *The Great Work of Your Life* ([see Notes](#)): "Having first named and claimed our dharma, we next begin to systematically organize all of our life's energies around our calling."

How can you organize your life around your purpose a little bit more today?

<— Let's do that.

"Do you want to know who you are? Don't ask. Act! Action will delineate and define you."

~ Thomas Jefferson

"If a man empties his purse into his own head, no one can take it from him. An investment in knowledge always pays the highest return."

~ Benjamin Franklin

VISION → DECISION

"A decision is the link between wanting something to happen and making something happen. Your vision will remain a fantasy until you decide to transform it into reality. Without a decision, your vision is a pipe dream. It's wishful thinking. This is how most people live their entire lives, hoping for something to happen but never deciding to make it happen. Their goals are better described as wishes. Their visions are hallucinations. You can be different by making the decision to fulfill your purpose. ... Cut yourself off from any other option. By making this decision, you will automatically raise your mind's expectations. You will bring the full breadth of your mental powers to attention."

Before we can create the singularity of black hole focus, we need to DECIDE.

We need to cut ourselves off from any other option.

Stephen Cope echoes this wisdom as well: *"Naturally, there is an obstacle to all this wonderment. Alas, it turns out that the process of unification requires saying 'no' to actions that do not support dharma—saying 'no' to detours, and to side channels of all kinds, even to some pretty terrific side channels. It requires snipping off all manner of 'other options.' The root of the word 'decide' means, literally, 'to cut off.' To decide for something means at times to decide against something else."*

What decision do you need to make?

Let's move from vision to decision to black hole focus as we optimize and actualize!

B

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About the Author of This Note

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Brian Johnson is the Founder + CEO of Heroic. He's spent half of the last 25 years as a Founder/CEO and the other half as a Philosopher. Brian loves integrating ancient wisdom and modern science to help YOU become the best, most heroic version of yourself so we can create a world in which 51% of humanity is flourishing by 2051. Learn more at heroic.us.