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Living a Committed Life

Finding Freedom and Fulfillment in a Purpose Larger Than Yourself

Lynne Twist • Berrett-Koehler © 2022 • 240 pages

Personal Development / Authenticity

Take-Aways

- Commit to a purpose larger than yourself to connect the needs of the world with the energy of your heart.
- Take a stand to harness your true potential and unleash collective change.
- Redefine the dominant narrative to allow new possibilities to emerge.
- Breakdowns – personal and social – can lead to breakthroughs.
- To achieve true wealth, develop gratitude for what you already have.
- A committed life brings challenges that lead to growth and learning.
- Closure and forgiveness free you to embrace new opportunities.
- To discover your authentic purpose, reflect on your experiences and passions – then commit for the long haul.
- Seek to create a better future for all life, not just humanity.

Recommendation

Following a period of deep unhappiness and self-doubt, Lynne Twist found meaning by committing her life to a purpose larger than herself: ending world hunger. Since then, she's transformed not only her own life but the lives of countless others. She's also raised hundreds of millions of dollars by creating authentic connections with wealthy donors through her soulful message. Here, she makes a powerful case for fulfilling your potential by living a life of service to others. Twist offers guidance, inspiration and hard-won truths about traversing the challenging, but rewarding, path of a purpose-driven life.

Summary

Commit to a purpose larger than yourself to connect the needs of the world with the energy of your heart.

Committing to a purpose larger than yourself – taking a “stand” – will draw out extraordinary capabilities in you, shaping who you must become to fulfill that larger role. For example, commitment to climate action turned Greta Thunberg from a teenage girl protesting outside the Swedish Parliament to a global icon mobilizing millions. Your commitment, though, doesn't need to have a global reach to prove worthy – it's not the scope that matters, but the intent. Serving your local community as a dedicated teacher, nurse or firefighter can prove just as powerful a stand, when pursued with commitment.

“Ordinary people become extraordinary when they take a stand for a purpose larger than themselves.”

A bold commitment doesn't trickle down from your mind; it bubbles up from your heart and soul. It forms a context for your life, empowering you to connect the needs of the world with the energy of your heart. When you commit to take a stand – such as fighting hunger or protecting the rainforest – your path forward will begin to unfurl as you walk it.

Take a stand to harness your true potential and unleash collective change.

Commitment to a larger purpose deepens the meaning of your individual life by providing a shape and direction to your thoughts, feelings and actions. For example, in the early 1970s, Lynne Twist had an enviable life. She was happily married to a loving husband with a high-paying job; they had three children together and lived in the vibrant city of San Francisco.

Nevertheless, Twist felt anxious, miserable and full of self-doubt. Then, she attended an Erhard Seminars Training (“est”) self-help workshop and came away transformed and inspired. Soon after, she committed to working on The Hunger Project, est's program to end world hunger.

“The commitment draws to you the messages, wisdom and resources to fulfill itself, and you find yourself becoming an instrument of something larger than yourself.”

Fundraising proved to be a big part of Twist's work. She raised hundreds of millions of dollars for The Hunger Project by making authentic, soulful connections with wealthy investors, allowing them to use their financial resources to express their highest ideals. Twist's success with fundraising "from the soul" eventually led her to write a book about Western attitudes toward wealth, *The Soul of Money*, and establish the Soul of Money Institute, which coaches people into healthier relationships with money.

Redefine the dominant narrative to allow new possibilities to emerge.

Change and transformation aren't the same. Change is a critical reaction to the status quo, seeking to make it less, more, different or otherwise. Although change is necessary, it's not sufficient; change doesn't shift fundamental perceptions – only transformation does. Instead of criticizing what exists, transformation accepts, embraces and celebrates the imperfections of the past in order to create something new.

"Possibility isn't something that is there waiting to be discovered. We have to generate it."

Transformation results when you redefine the dominant narrative. For example, The Hunger Project reframed hunger as an inevitable problem resulting from unchangeable factors to a challenge people could solve within a few decades, if they would commit to finding a solution. A new story reframes an old narrative, allowing inspiration, healing and new possibilities to emerge.

You can reframe the narrative, for example, by seeing people's experiences as happening *for* rather than *to* them. Viewing events as happening to you creates a context of blame and victimhood. When you see experiences as happening for you, it's easier to view them as opportunities to learn, build and innovate. New stories give people agency and hope for a better world.

Breakdowns – personal and social – can lead to breakthroughs.

Inside most breakdowns exist a seed – a piece of feedback, teaching or message it's trying to impart. If uncovered and nurtured, that seed can serve as a precursor to a breakthrough, leading to new relationships, resources and ways of being.

"For most of us, every disappointment, every heartbreak, every breakdown is the opportunity for a breakthrough and an evolutionary leap in life."

Lynne Twist's breakdown came while sick with malaria. During that time, she re-examined her work with The Hunger Project, leading to a breakthrough that saw her take on a new commitment: the Pachamama Alliance's mission of protecting the Amazon rainforest. This new project also helped further her commitment to end hunger, since deforestation contributes to global warming, turning lush forests into dry deserts that cause famine.

Alongside individual breakdowns, there's also a planetary breakdown happening: climate change. Although the consequences are dire, climate change also carries a seed of possibility – its solution requires international collaboration to create systemic change. If that seed is nurtured, it could lead to a massive breakthrough.

To achieve true wealth, develop gratitude for what you already have.

Despite having plenty of material comforts, many people get stuck in a scarcity mind-set. Whether consciously or unconsciously, they fall for three myths: the world doesn't have enough resources, such as food and water, so people must compete for and hoard them; more material possessions will solve their problems and bring happiness; and people must accept the system as it exists because change isn't possible. These myths breed separateness, dissatisfaction and cynicism, and can prevent you from making a commitment to a larger purpose.

"True wealth comes not from accumulating what we think we want, but from knowing we are blessed with what we truly need."

Embrace a mind-set of sufficiency to break free from these toxic myths. Sufficiency comes from knowing you have exactly what you need. Move beyond a scarcity mind-set to free up the energy you were spending on acquiring more. You can pour this energy into being grateful for what you already have and into efforts to make change in the world. Paradoxically, when you stop chasing more, your gratitude for what you already have will lead to true abundance.

A committed life brings challenges that lead to growth and learning.

A committed life will inevitably bring challenges. Face those challenges to overcome them and learn the skills you'll need to fulfill your purpose. Common challenges include feeling overwhelmed, coming face-to-face with suffering and dealing with personal loss and failure.

"Being tested is how we learn."

The experience of overwhelm challenges you to reprioritize your time and energy. For example, Lynne Twist felt overwhelmed by competing commitments and her desire to fix everything, which affected her health and her ability to complete tasks effectively. To contain overwhelm, take a step back, double down on self-care, and empower co-workers to step into leadership roles.

Then, lean into suffering to deepen your compassion and commitment to become truly helpful to others. It's an essential albeit difficult part of the committed life. Instead of avoiding the pain of the world or keeping it at an intellectual distance, move toward the pain and engage it on a physical and emotional level; you will be transformed.

For example, the United Nations' Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict sought to use the power of personal encounters with suffering to spur change. In 2014, 1,700 delegates from 123 countries came together to listen to the stories of women assaulted in conflict. Their encounters put faces, names and stories to the cold statistics in which bureaucrats often traffic.

Deal with loss and failure to build resilience. For example, Hafsat Abiola Costello lost both her parents to Nigeria's military junta – her influential father was imprisoned, her mother was assassinated, and Costello herself was exiled to the United States. Rather than allow these experiences to crush her, Costello went on to establish organizations supporting democracy and gender equality in Africa.

Closure and forgiveness free you to embrace new opportunities.

Some projects and experiences end without closure. The resulting unresolved feelings and regrets can linger and drain your energy. Engage in “honorable closure” to free up your energy to focus on new opportunities.

Honorable closure follows four steps.

1. Rewrite the story of your experience, incorporating gratitude. Pay attention to what you learned, what you're grateful for and how you grew.
2. Identify lingering regrets, and resolve them. Humbly acknowledge and own your mistakes and learn from them.
3. Release the past. Forgive yourself and others by letting go of grudges.
4. Decide what will come next. Identify new possibilities that fill you with joy.

Often when experiences lack closure, it's due to a lack of forgiveness. Ultimately, this binds you to an old story with its limiting beliefs, patterns and pain.

Nelson Mandela's 1994 presidential inauguration beautifully illustrates this. During his 27 years in prison, Mandela had three jailers. For 17 of those years, he understandably hated them all. Then, he came to realize how that hatred harmed him and his movement, so he expanded his heart by learning more about his prison guards' lives.

Mandela invited both surviving jailers to his presidential inauguration, and asked them to forgive him for his 17 years of hatred. With tears streaming down their faces, the jailers accepted Mandela's apology and then sought forgiveness from him. That powerful moment helped lead to a formal Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which brought Black and white South Africans together to acknowledge and heal past wounds.

To discover your authentic purpose, reflect on your experiences and passions – then commit for the long haul.

To identify your “stand” – the big-picture issue you can commit to serving – start by identifying what makes you feel alive. Reflect on what you were passionate about when you were younger and who you admire now. If you admire conservationist Jane Goodall and enjoy outdoor recreation, then your stand might be environmental preservation. Don't be afraid to dream big.

Once you identify your stand, commit to it, and expect to face challenges. Don't shy away from these tests; they will teach you what you need to learn and help you follow through on your commitment. To help you navigate the ups and downs of a committed life, find support. Reach out to friends and mentors, collaborate with like-minded people, and ask for help when you need it. Tap into sources of meaning and strength, like wisdom from spiritual or indigenous traditions.

“A big commitment is rarely, perhaps never, accomplished alone or quickly.”

Rituals and ceremonies can also support your stand. Whether it's meditation, prayer, or a simple walk in the woods, these practices can provide meaning and significance. Keep a gratitude journal, for example;

write down five things you're grateful for at the end of each day. Consider keeping an accomplishment journal. Rather than focusing only on what needs to be done, take time to acknowledge what you've already accomplished. Savor your achievements – write them down, share them with others or throw a celebratory party.

Lastly, support your committed life by accepting you can't do everything. Any purpose larger than yourself is going to unfold in its own time. Your job isn't to force it. Simply be clear in your vision and intention, and create space for your stand to come into being.

Seek to create a better future for all life, not just humanity.

Many of society's institutions are failing. In addition, life-sustaining systems face collapse due largely to human activity. Scientists call the present era the Anthropocene to emphasize how humanity has become an evolutionary force shaping the planet's future. To address societal and environmental problems, activists need to become "evolutionary activists," who co-create a better future for all life forms.


"We don't live in an ecosystem; we are part of an ecosystem."

That co-creation requires a paradigm shift from dominating nature to working with it. Instead of building the future, which suggests patriarchal control over outcomes, co-creation means ushering in the future by allowing something new to unfold. During this creation process, people need a vision to pull them forward, lest fear and despair pull them apart.

Regeneration provides that vision. A concept from climate change visionary Paul Hawken, regeneration offers a context for creating a new relationship between humans and the Earth, where people consider the renewal of all life in their choices and actions. The concept of regeneration rejects cynicism, builds courage and inspires action.

About the Author

Lynne Twist is an award-winning speaker, author and activist, who has committed decades of effort to end hunger, preserve the Amazon rainforests, empower women and change Western attitudes towards money. She is the best-selling author of *The Soul of Money*, founder of the Soul of Money Institute and co-founder of the Pachamama Alliance, a global learning community committed to creating a sustainable future for all.

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