



Finding Your Purpose

How individual drive can help the Association as a whole

BY BONNIE BLALOCK, R/W-RAC

Purpose is what drives us. It is why we make each and every decision and ultimately, what gives our life meaning. When I was asked to share my purpose at my recent Region Forum, I was terrified. Partly because public speech is not my strong suit, but mostly because I didn't think I'd be able to present it in a way that was as monumental as the time I discovered my purpose.

A Career Change

At age 21, my entire identity was linked to my ability to help others. I was a certified nursing assistant working my way through nursing school. I loved my work, but after several years of very demanding, long and inconsistent hours, it started to take a toll on my mental and physical health. I finally realized that it was time for a change.

Unexpectedly, someone offered me a full-time administrative position in their right of way firm. Without even having a clue as to what right of way was, I accepted the opportunity thinking it would be temporary and I'd be back to nursing before I knew it.

To my surprise, I discovered an intense hunger to grow and the desire to change. I went to real estate school, started working as an agent and decided to commit to right of way for my career. However, I struggled with the fact that I was no longer directly helping people the way I had as a nursing assistant. At the time, I didn't feel that widening a road or relocating a property owner was a positive. This guilt inadvertently affected my productivity and drive. I was ready to give up on this career choice.

Embracing an Unexpected Experience

One morning, everything changed. On my way into work, I stopped at a store to get some cereal and milk. I was in a hurry and normally, I would have been extremely annoyed with how long it was taking the clerk to ring up my two items, but something seemed off. I decided to ask her if she was okay and she responded with a huge sigh and asked if I had the time to listen. I stayed there and listened as she confided in me. I left wishing I could have done more. So when I got back to the office, I wrote her an encouraging note, and had someone drop it off to her. I didn't see her again for a long time, but when I finally did, she recognized me immediately, hugged me and told me how much I had helped her that day.

It was in that moment that I realized my purpose as a professional lies in how I approach my career. I wondered if I could take what I gained from that experience and apply it to my job. The first opportunity came when a property owner began taking their anger out on me about a project. Instead of reacting, I let them vent. I listened. In doing so, the conversation shifted toward them expressing to me that they were not actually angry with me or with the project. Instead, they were upset over something personal going on in their life. It helped me build a level of trust and rapport with the property owner, and we were able to properly address their concerns.



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While it may not always work, I have found that taking this approach in a genuine and patient manner has not only helped me in my interactions with property owners, but with my colleagues as well.

Whether it's simply letting someone vent or advocating for someone who may not otherwise have a voice, I've discovered that I can serve my industry in so many ways beyond my role description. Not only have I learned to balance my personal and work life, this profession has provided extensive opportunities, helping me to enhance my skillset in ways that I could have never imagined. For that, I am truly thankful for the journey that has brought me here and for the opportunity to share my story through the Young Professionals Group platform.

A Group Effort

Personally, I love that IRWA is asking us to think about our purpose. This prompts each of us to look deep

inside and really think about why we do what we do. The more aware we are about our individual purpose, the stronger we will be as an organization and an industry as a whole. We are truly fortunate to be a part of an organization that supports, encourages and educates its members in such a vast capacity, and I look forward to what the future of the IRWA has in store. ✪



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