

*Viktor Frankl's Principles  
for Discovering Meaning in Life and Work*

---

# PRISONERS OF OUR THOUGHTS

SECOND EDITION, REVISED AND UPDATED



ALEX PATTAKOS, PH.D.

Foreword by **STEPHEN R. COVEY**  
author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*

An Excerpt From

***Prisoners of Our Thoughts:  
Viktor Frankl's Principles for Discovering Meaning in Life and Work  
Second Edition***

by Alex Pattakos, Ph.D.  
Published by Berrett-Koehler Publishers

# Contents

---

<i>Foreword by Stephen R. Covey</i>	v
<i>Preface to the Second Edition</i>	xiii
<b>1</b> Life Doesn't Just Happen to Us	1
<b>2</b> Viktor Frankl's Lifework and Legacy	15
<b>3</b> Labyrinths of Meaning	27
<b>4</b> Exercise the Freedom to Choose Your Attitude	41
<b>5</b> Realize Your Will to Meaning	65
<b>6</b> Detect the Meaning of Life's Moments	91
<b>7</b> Don't Work Against Yourself	113
<b>8</b> Look at Yourself from a Distance	131
<b>9</b> Shift Your Focus of Attention	143
<b>10</b> Extend Beyond Yourself	157
<b>11</b> Living and Working with Meaning	173
<b>12</b> The Meaning Difference®	187
<i>Notes</i>	215
<i>References</i>	223
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	225
<i>Index</i>	229
<i>About the Author</i>	235

*Why do some people seem to have an easier time dealing with complex and challenging situations than others? Why do some people seem more capable of dealing with change than others?*

Applying the therapeutic system of world-renowned psychiatrist and philosopher Viktor E. Frankl, learn how to bring personal meaning and fulfillment to your everyday life and work and to achieve your highest potential!

## Core Principles

- ① **Exercise the freedom to choose your attitude.** In all situations, no matter how desperate they may appear or actually be, you always have the ultimate freedom to choose your attitude.
- ② **Realize your will to meaning.** Commit authentically to meaningful values and goals that only you can actualize and fulfill.
- ③ **Detect the meaning of life's moments.** Only you can answer for your own life by detecting the meaning at any given moment and assuming responsibility for weaving your unique tapestry of existence.
- ④ **Don't work against yourself.** Avoid becoming so fixated on an intent or outcome that you actually work against the desired result.
- ⑤ **Look at yourself from a distance.** Only human beings possess the capacity to look at themselves from a distance, with a sense of perspective, including the uniquely human trait known as your sense of humor.
- ⑥ **Shift your focus of attention.** Deflect your attention from the problem situation to something else and build your coping mechanisms for dealing with stress and change.
- ⑦ **Extend beyond yourself.** Manifest the human spirit at work by directing your attention and relating to something more than yourself.

# Foreword

**Stephen R. Covey**

---

Shortly before Viktor Frankl's passing in September 1997, I had heard of his declining health, illness, and hospitalization. I was very anxious to talk with him so that I could express my profound gratitude for his life's work—for his impact on millions of people, including my own life and life's work. I understood that he had lost his sight and that his wife was reading to him several hours each day in the hospital. I will never forget the feeling of hearing his voice and visiting with him. He was so kind and gracious as he listened to my expressions of appreciation, esteem, and love. I felt as if I were speaking to a great and noble spirit. After patiently listening, he said, "Stephen, you talk to me as if I am ready to check out. I still have two important projects I need to complete." How true to form! How true to character! How true to the principles of Logotherapy!

Frankl's desire and determination to continue to contribute reminded me of his collaborative work with Dr. Hans Selye of Montreal, Canada—famous for his research and writings on stress. Selye taught that it is only when we have meaningful work and projects that our immune system is strengthened and the degenerative aging forces are slowed down. He called this kind of stress "eustress" rather than distress, which comes from a life without meaning and integrity. I'm sure these two souls influenced each other, reinforcing

both the physical and psychological benefits of Logotherapy, of man's search for meaning.

When Alex Pattakos graciously invited me to write a foreword to *Prisoners of Our Thoughts* and told me that the Frankl family had suggested this to him, I was both honored and excited to participate—particularly since they felt my work with organizations in management and leadership beautifully paralleled Viktor Frankl's "principles at work," the heart of this splendid book. My sense of the significance of this book deepened further when Pattakos wrote me, "A year before he died, I was sitting with Dr. Frankl in his study and he grabbed my arm and said, 'Alex, yours is the book that needs to be written!'"

I will never forget how deeply moved and inspired I was in the sixties when I studied *Man's Search for Meaning* and also *The Doctor and the Soul*. These two books, along with Frankl's other writings and lectures, reaffirmed my "soul's code" regarding our power of choice, our unique endowment of self-awareness, and our essence, our will for meaning. While on a writing sabbatical in Hawaii and in a very reflective state of mind, I was wandering through the stacks of a university library and picked up a book. I read the following three lines, which literally staggered me and again reaffirmed Frankl's essential teachings:

*Between stimulus and response, there is a space.  
In that space lies our freedom and our power to choose our  
response.  
In our response lies our growth and our happiness.*

I did not note the name of the author, so I've never been able to give proper attribution. On a later trip to Hawaii I even went back to find the source and found the library building itself was no longer present.

The space between what happens to us and our response, our freedom to choose that response and the impact it can have upon our lives, beautifully illustrate that we can become a product of our decisions, not our conditions. They illustrate the three values that Frankl continually taught: the creative value, the experiential value, and the attitudinal value. We have the power to choose our response to our circumstances. We have the power to shape our circumstances; indeed, we have the responsibility, and if we ignore this space, this freedom, this responsibility, the essence of our life and our legacy could be frustrated.

One time I was leaving a military base where I had been teaching principle-centered leadership over a period of time. As I was saying good-bye to the commander of that base, a colonel, I asked him, “Why would you undertake such a significant change effort to bring principle-centered living and leadership to your command when you know full well you will be swimming upstream against powerful cultural forces? You are in your thirtieth year and you are retiring at the end of this year. You have had a successful military career and you could simply maintain the successful pattern you’ve had and go into your retirement with all of the honors and the plaudits that come with your dedicated years of service.” His answer was unforgettable. It seared itself into my soul. He said, “Recently, my father passed away. Knowing that he was dying, he called my mother and myself to his bedside. He motioned to me to come close to him so that he could whisper something in my ear. My mother stood by, watching in tears. My father said, ‘Son, promise me you won’t do life like I did. Son, I didn’t do right by you or by your mother, and I

never really made a difference. Son, promise me you won't do life like I did.”

This military commander said, “Stephen, that is why I am undertaking this change effort. That is why I want to bring our whole command to an entirely new level of performance and contribution. I want to make a difference, and for the first time I sincerely hope that my successors do better than I have. Up to this point, I had hoped that I would be the high-water mark, but no longer. I want to get these principles so institutionalized and so built into our culture that they will be sustainable and go on and on. I know it will be a struggle. I may even ask for an extension so that I can continue to see this work through, but I want to honor the greatest legacy that my father ever gave me, and that is the desire to make a difference.”

From this commander we learn that courage is not the absence of fear but the awareness there is something more important. We spend at least a third of our life either preparing for work or doing work, usually inside organizations. Even our retirement should be filled with meaningful projects, inside organizations or families or societies. Work and love essentially comprise the essence of mortality.

The great humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow came to similar thoughts near the end of his life, which essentially affirmed Frankl's “will to meaning” theme. He felt that his own need hierarchy theory was too needs-determined and that self-actualization was not the highest need. In the end, he concluded that self-transcendence was the human soul's highest need, which reflected more the spirit of Frankl. Maslow's wife, Bertha, and his research associate put together

his final thinking along these lines in the book *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*.

My own work with organizations and with people in the world of work focuses a great deal on developing personal and organizational mission statements. I have found that when you get enough people interacting freely and synergistically, and when these people are informed about the realities of their industry or profession and their own culture, they begin to tap into a kind of collective conscience and awareness of the need to add value, to really leave a legacy, and they set up value guidelines to fulfill that legacy. Ends and means are inseparable; in fact, the ends preexist in the means. No worthy end can ever really be accomplished with unworthy means.

I have found in my teaching that the single most exhilarating, thrilling, and motivating idea that people have ever really seriously contemplated is the idea of the power of choice—the idea that the best way to predict their future is to create it. It is basically the idea of personal freedom, of learning to ask Viktor Frankl’s question: What is life asking of me? What is this situation asking of me? It’s more freedom *to* rather than freedom *from*. It’s definitely an inside-out rather than an outside-in approach.

I have found that when people get caught up in this awareness, this kind of mindfulness, and if they genuinely ask such questions and consult their conscience, almost always the purposes and values they come up with are transcendent—that is, they deal with meaning that is larger than their own life, one that truly adds value and contributes to other people’s lives—the kinds of things that Viktor

Frankl did in the death camps of Nazi Germany. They break cycles; they establish new cycles, new positive energies. They become what I like to call “transition figures”—people who break with past cultural mindless patterns of behavior and attitude.

*The range of what we see and do  
Is limited by what we fail to notice.  
And because we fail to notice  
That we fail to notice,  
There is little we can do  
To change  
Until we notice  
How failing to notice  
Shapes our thoughts and deeds.*

R. D. Laing

With this kind of thinking and with the seven magnificent principles Dr. Pattakos describes in this important book, a kind of primary greatness is developed where character and contribution, conscience and love, choice and meaning, all have their play and synergy with each other. This is contrasted with secondary greatness, described in the last chapter of this book—being those who are successful in society’s eyes but personally unfulfilled.

Finally, let me suggest two ideas on how to get the very most from this book. First, share or teach the core principles, one by one, to those you live with and work around who might be interested. Second, live them. To learn something but not to do is really not to learn. To know something but not to do is really not to know. Otherwise, if we just intellectualize these core principles and verbalize them but do not share and practice them, we would be like a person who is

blind from birth explaining to another person what it means to see, based on an academic study of light, its properties, the eye and its anatomy. As you read this book, I challenge you to experience the freedom to choose your own attitude, to exercise your will to meaning, to detect the meaning of life's moments, to not work against yourself, to look at yourself from a distance, and to shift your focus of attention and extend beyond yourself. I suggest you consider learning this material sequentially, by reading the first principle, teaching it and applying it, then reading the next one, and so forth. You may want to simply read the entire book all at once to give yourself the overview, and then go back and learn the principles sequentially through your own experiencing. You will become a change catalyst. You will become a transition figure. You will stop bad cycles and start good ones. Life will take on a meaning as you've never known it before. I know this is so from my own experiences and from working with countless organizations and individuals in the world of work.

As my grandfather taught me, and as Viktor Frankl taught me, life is a mission, not a career.

# Life Doesn't Just Happen to Us

---

*Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather must recognize that it is he who is asked. In a word, each man is questioned by life; and he can only answer to life by answering for his own life; to life he can only respond by being responsible.<sup>1</sup>*

Every day Vita delivers my mail—cheerfully. It's her trademark attitude. One day, in lousy weather, I heard her whistling as she went about making her deliveries. Instinctively I shouted out to her, "Thank you for doing such a great job." She stopped dead in her tracks with surprise. "Thank you," she said. "Wow, I'm not accustomed to hearing such words. I really appreciate it."

I wanted to know more. "How do you stay so positive and upbeat about delivering mail every day?" I asked her.

"I don't just deliver mail," she said. "I see myself helping to connect people to other people. I help build the community. Besides, people depend on me and I don't want to let them down." Her response was enthusiastic and proud.

Vita's attitude about her work reflected the words inscribed on the General Post Office building in New York

City: “Neither snow nor rain nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds.” The Greek historian Herodotus wrote these words in the fifth century BC. The ancient delivery of messages from one person to another is at the very heart of our Information Age, yet these days it’s the phrase “going postal” that we’re more likely to recognize.

Fair or unfair, “going postal” has become the symbol of all the negativity a job has to offer: boredom, repetitiveness, exposure to the elements, dangerous dogs, irritated customers, and a kind of automated behavior that ultimately inspires an explosion of pent-up rage—a killing spree, retaliation against all the suffered injustice of the job.

*What threatens contemporary man is the alleged meaninglessness of his life, or, as I call it, the existential vacuum within him. And when does this vacuum open up, when does this so often latent vacuum become manifest? In the state of boredom.<sup>2</sup>*

No matter what our opinions might be about the stature of any career or profession, it is the person doing the job that gives the job meaning. Vita is proof that those ancient words of Herodotus are alive and well in the twenty-first century.

But Vita’s attitude goes beyond the “swift completion of her appointed rounds” (to paraphrase Herodotus). She experiences her work as serving a higher purpose. Her attitude about her job and its drudgery goes far beyond an exercise in positive thinking. Vita sees her mail delivery responsibility as a personal, life-saving mission, one that could be fulfilled only by her. She knows she is depended on, perhaps even by people who feel disdain for her work, and it means something. She brings meaning to her job, and in turn, her work becomes meaningful.

*I am convinced that, in the final analysis, there is no situation that does not contain within it the seed of a meaning.*<sup>3</sup>

Why is it that some people, like Vita my mail carrier, experience their work—even mundane work—with passion and commitment? Why do some people have an easier time dealing with complex and challenging situations at work and in life? Why do some people deal more easily with change? Why do some people find meaning and fulfillment in their work and everyday life, while others do not? There are no simple answers to these complex questions; but there are meaningful answers. That is the goal of this book: to illuminate the search for meaning as a path to meaning, both in our work and in our lives outside work.

### **This Book Is About True Freedom**

We are by nature creatures of habit. Searching for a life that is both predictable and within our comfort zone, we rely on routine and, for the most part, learned thinking patterns. In effect, we create pathways in our minds in much the same way that a path is beaten through a grass field from repeated use. And because these patterns are automatic, we may believe these habitual ways of thinking and behaving to be beyond our control. Life, it seems, just happens to us. Not only do we rationalize our responses to life but we also fall prey to forces that limit our potential as human beings. By viewing ourselves as relatively powerless and driven by our instincts, the possibility that we create, or at least cocreate, our own reality becomes difficult to grasp. Instead, we lock ourselves inside our own mental prisons. We lose sight of our own natural potential and that of others.

*Life Doesn't Just Happen to Us*

---

*Each of us has his own inner concentration camp . . . we must deal with, with forgiveness and patience—as full human beings; as we are and what we will become.*<sup>4</sup>

The ways in which we hold ourselves “prisoners of our thoughts” are well documented in the work of many writers and thinkers who explore the landscape of our psychospiritual lives. Physician Deepak Chopra, in the audiotape of his book *Unconditional Life*, says “We erect and build a prison, and the tragedy is that we cannot even see the walls of this prison.”<sup>5</sup>

Yet we can reshape our patterns of thinking. Through our own search for meaning, we can unfreeze ourselves from our limited perspective, find the key, and unlock the door of our metaphorical prison cell.

Viktor Frankl, a psychiatrist who suffered through imprisonment in Nazi concentration camps during World War II, found meaning in spite of—and because of—the suffering all around him. His life’s work resulted in the therapeutic approach called *Logotherapy*, which paved the way for us to know meaning as a foundation of our existence. Frankl is quick to say, however, that such traumatic suffering is *not* a prerequisite for finding meaning in our lives. He means that whenever we suffer—no matter what the severity of our suffering is—we have the ability to find meaning in the situation. Choosing to do so is the path to a meaningful life.

This book explores seven core principles that I have derived from Frankl’s voluminous body of work:

1. We are free to choose our attitude toward everything that happens to us.
2. We can realize our will to meaning by making a conscious, authentic commitment to meaningful values and goals.

3. We can find meaning in all of life's moments.
4. We can learn to see how we work against ourselves and can learn to avoid thwarting our intentions.
5. We can look at ourselves from a distance to gain insight and perspective as well as to laugh at ourselves.
6. We can shift our focus of attention when we are coping with difficult situations.
7. We can reach out beyond ourselves and make a difference in the world.

These seven principles, which I believe form the foundation of Frankl's thinking and approach, are available to us anytime, all the time. They can lead us to meaning, to freedom, and to deep connection to our own lives and to the lives of others in our local and global communities.

Viewing life as inherently meaningful and with unlimited potential requires a shift in consciousness. It also requires responsible action on our part for, as Frankl points out, the potential for meaning that exists in each moment of life can only be searched for and detected by each of us individually. This responsibility, he says, is "to be actualized by each of us at any time, even in the most miserable situations and literally up to the last breath of ourselves."<sup>6</sup>

Frankl walked this path completely. By living a life with meaning right to his last breath, he showed us how his philosophy and therapeutic approach were grounded in practice. His personal experiences throughout his long life, both as a survivor of the Nazi death camps and as a revered and respected thought leader, illuminate the unlimited potential of a human being. His life gives us rich and ample evidence

that the keys to freedom from life's prison cells—real and imagined—are within, and within reach.

Whether we choose this path of liberation is a decision that only we as individuals can make and for which only we can be held responsible. When we search out and discover the authentic meaning of our existence and our experiences, we discover that life doesn't happen to us. We happen to life; and we make it meaningful.

## **Humanizing Work**

A meaningful life includes meaningful work. Let's face it, most people spend at least half of their waking lives "at work" or working in some way. Yet where do most people look to find meaning in their life? The usual answer is in their *personal* life—in their relationships or their religious or spiritual practice. But what about their job? Can people find true meaning at work?

The transformation of work in the twenty-first century is, in many respects, a call for humanity—a new consciousness that suggests more than simply trying to strike a balance between our work and personal lives. It is a call to honor our individuality and fully engage our human spirit at work—wherever that may be. While this idea of empowering workers in body, mind, and spirit is not new, actually putting it to work is new. In some ways, technological advances have redesigned work to better accommodate human factors. What we need now is a way to elevate the human spirit at work and to integrate in a positive, meaningful way this spiritual dimension of work with our everyday life.

One of the goals of this book is to bring meaning to work and, quite frankly, to do for the domain of work what

Frankl as a psychiatrist was able to do for psychotherapy. His unique approach is internationally recognized as a system of humanistic psychotherapy, and Frankl himself has been referred to by some people as the founder of humanistic medicine and psychiatry as well as of existential analysis. Logotherapy, in short, seeks to make us aware of our freedom of response to all aspects of our destiny. This humanistic view of psychotherapy helps clients to find concrete meaning in their lives. As a therapeutic system, it strengthens trust in the unconditional meaningfulness of life and the dignity of the person. By applying this philosophy to work and the workplace, we can more deeply humanize our working lives and bring deeper meaning to work itself. In turn, by bringing deeper meaning to our working lives, we can more deeply humanize and enrich the meaning of our personal—that is, nonworking—lives.

From the perspective of Logotherapy, we can find unconditional meaning in our work situations and experience the unconditional value of our colleagues as unique human beings as we do with our family members and close friends. This is not an easy task, but when we celebrate our differences as cheerfully as we celebrate our similarities, the result is a powerful synergy at work and in the workplace. Best-selling author Stephen R. Covey, who has also been influenced by Frankl's teachings, has observed that "difference is the beginning of synergy."<sup>7</sup> When business leaders and managers on all levels bring this awareness to work, they are the catalysts for profound changes in the workplace—changes that enhance everyone's ability to search for and find meaning, on the job, at home, and within our entire human experience.

*Unconditional meaning, however, is paralleled by the unconditional value of each and every person. It is that which warrants the indelible quality of the dignity of man. Just as life remains potentially meaningful under any conditions, even those which are most miserable, so too does the value of each and every person stay with him or her.*<sup>8</sup>

## **Detecting Your Path**

Of course, being fully human and living an authentic life at home, at play, and at work are formidable challenges. They involve a willingness to embark down a path of self-discovery, drawing heavily upon what Frankl refers to as our “will to meaning”—that is, our inherent capacity to continually search for meaning under all circumstances. This human quest for meaning in every moment creates a path of discernment that runs through all aspects of our lives. This quest, this path is of course a process, not a product, for during our lifetime there is no final destination where everything comes to rest. This book offers guideposts along the way.

In chapter 2, Viktor Frankl’s *Lifework and Legacy*, we look briefly into the life and work of Dr. Frankl. As a mentor and author, he had a profound impact on my way of thinking and dramatically influenced my work and personal life. As the founder of Logotherapy, he brought powerful insights and compassion to the therapeutic world, leaving a legacy of wisdom that only increases over time.

The many pathways to meaning are explored in chapter 3, *Labyrinths of Meaning*, which also refers to the seven core principles of Frankl’s work introduced earlier. Each of these life-meaning principles is then more deeply explored in individual chapters: Exercise the Freedom to Choose Your Atti-

tude (chapter 4), Realize Your Will to Meaning (chapter 5), Detect the Meaning of Life's Moments (chapter 6), Don't Work Against Yourself (chapter 7), Look at Yourself from a Distance (chapter 8), Shift Your Focus of Attention (chapter 9), and Extend Beyond Yourself (chapter 10).

*One may say that instincts are transmitted through the genes, and values are transmitted through traditions, but that meanings, being unique, are a matter of personal discovery.<sup>9</sup>*

Chapter 4, Exercise the Freedom to Choose Your Attitude, examines the logotherapeutic concept of freedom of will. This concept is best described by Frankl's famous quote in *Man's Search for Meaning*, "Everything can be taken from a man but...the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's way."<sup>10</sup> The key ingredient here is the responsibility for choosing our attitude, which lies solely and soundly with the self.

Chapter 5, Realize Your Will to Meaning, explores Frankl's concept of our will to meaning and how we bring our values to life at work. Logotherapy, according to Frankl, "considers man as a being whose main concern consists of fulfilling a meaning and in actualizing *values*, rather than in the mere gratification and satisfaction of drives and instincts."<sup>11</sup> Giving meaning to work, in this context, means more than simply completing a task to receive a tangible reward, such as money, influence, status, or prestige. By committing to values and goals that might appear intangible but are nonetheless real and meaningful, we honor our deepest needs, just as we seek to do in our personal lives.

The fundamental presumption is that only as individuals can we answer for our own lives, detecting in them each

moment's meaning and weaving our own unique tapestry of existence. Chapter 6, Detect the Meaning of Life's Moments, goes farther—into the realm of ultimate meaning, or super-meaning. Frankl's holistic views on the importance of our intuitive capacity for love and conscience offer great insight into how meaning reveals itself in everyday life and at work. Frankl has written: "Love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire. . . . The salvation of man is through love and in love."<sup>12</sup> Yet our ability to weave love into our lives, especially into our work lives, is not only sadly limited but also suspect in today's measurable and impersonal world of work.

Sometimes our most fervent desires and intentions are thwarted by our obsession with outcomes. In chapter 7, Don't Work Against Yourself, the technique known as *paradoxical intention* is examined and applied to work and everyday life situations. Frankl calls this form of self-sabotage *hyperintention*. The tendency to micromanage the work of others, for example, may create hyperintensive stress, performance anxiety, or even covert or overt actions of sabotage that can end up creating the opposite of the result sought by a manager. (A similar result also has been observed in cases where well-meaning parents, under the guise of parental guidance, try to micromanage their teenagers, who are predisposed to being contrarian!) Sometimes focusing too closely on a problem can keep us from seeing the solution. Likewise, becoming fixated on a particular outcome often gets in the way of our best intentions.

Chapter 8, Look at Yourself from a Distance, focuses on the notion of self-detachment and how, among other things,

it can help us to lighten up and not sweat the small stuff. Frankl observed, “Only man owns the capacity to detach himself from himself. To look at himself out of some perspective or distance.”<sup>13</sup> This capacity includes that uniquely human trait known as a sense of humor. Frankl noted that “no animal is capable of laughing, least of all laughing *at itself* or *about itself*.”<sup>14</sup> A dose of self-detachment frees us to be more receptive to the universe of opportunities in our lives.

When Viktor Frankl was a prisoner in the Nazi concentration camps, in order to cope with stress, suffering, and conflict, he learned to deflect his attention away from the painful situation to other, more appealing circumstances. In chapter 9, *Shift Your Focus of Attention*, we explore this skill and how it can be effectively used in the workplace and outside work.

Self-transcendence is explored in chapter 10, *Extend Beyond Yourself*. This principle goes far beyond shifting the focus of attention from one thing to another. It takes us into the spiritual realm of ultimate meaning, where we see how our lives connect seamlessly to the lives of others. We see how being of service, no matter what the scale, is where our deepest meaning is realized. And we learn how to effectively manifest the human spirit in our personal and work lives by relating and being directed to something greater than ourselves.

In chapter 11, *Living and Working with Meaning*, I weave my own views into Frankl’s lessons so that they can be integrated into daily work and life, bringing personal and ultimate meaning to all the moments of our lives. In this connection, I use one of Frankl’s methods of meaning analysis as a frame of reference for examining the extent to which our lives, including our work lives, are focused on meaning.

Finally, chapter 12, *The Meaning Difference*<sup>®</sup>, summarizes both qualitative and quantitative research demonstrating the critical role of meaning in improving the quality of people's lives, increasing happiness, and promoting health and wellness. The links between a personal sense of meaning and happiness, resilience, engagement, and health are examined, and the determining influence of the human quest for meaning on these quality-of-life factors is underscored for its existential value. Here we also get a glimpse at what trends related to the search for meaning loom on the horizon and what they portend for the future of the human race.

So, let's first take a look at Dr. Frankl's lifework, explore more fully the foundations of his meaning-centered approach, and see how we can apply his groundbreaking philosophy to work, workplace issues, and our personal lives.



Recall a situation in which you felt especially negative about your job or career. Perhaps you just didn't like the work you were doing, or maybe you disliked your supervisor, boss, or co-workers (this may even be your situation today). Alternatively, recall a situation in your personal life, such as a relationship or family matter, about which you felt especially negative. Did you view yourself as a victim of circumstances that were outside your control, or did you feel responsible in some way for creating the situation and therefore feel ultimately responsible for dealing with it? What, if anything, did you do about it? As you think about the situation now, what did you learn from it? What could you have done differently?



**Meaning Question: What can you do to make your life or your current work/job more meaningful?**

FOR FURTHER  
**REFLECTION**

Ask yourself honestly, Am I a prisoner of my thoughts? Do I hold other people, including co-workers, family members, or friends, prisoners of my thoughts?

this material has been excerpted from

***Prisoners of Our Thoughts:  
Viktor Frankl's Principles for Discovering Meaning in Life and Work  
Second Edition***

by Alex Pattakos, Ph.D.

Published by Berrett-Koehler Publishers

Copyright © 2010, All Rights Reserved.

For more information, or to purchase the book,  
please visit our website

[www.bkconnection.com](http://www.bkconnection.com)