

Purpose. It may be one word, but it is a word that is unique to every soul that exists in the universe. Often those in our environments try to define its value and characteristics; but ultimately, it is a feature that can only truly be revealed by us. The process of discovering our purpose is also relatively unknown. The journey is ambiguous in nature, and has no set time frame to be revealed. It is truly up to the individual to open their mind and heart to embracing this juncture in self-actualization. Over the course of the past couple of months we have explored the journeys of several characters as they search for their purpose from career development. These six characters all struggled with their career identity, and faced a multitude of scrutiny from their social environment. But what is their common bond? Were they simply analyzed in this course purely for the sake of learning, or is there something more methodical that explains their significance? Parker Palmer would agree that these individuals were all in the midst of listening to their own internal voice of vocation. His philosophy is simple yet quintessential as he believes that humans have an innate calling to fulfill their own authentic visions of selfhood (not the ideals of others) through seasons of change. Today we will examine these same individuals' career development through Parker's lens of vocation (namely his outlook on the "turning seasons"), explore the defining moments of when they began to listen to their voice, and how that change affected their outlook on careers.

Before we can begin our analysis we must first have a thorough understanding of the key elements of Palmer's philosophy. We have already touched upon some key highlights; however, the eloquence of his philosophy is that it is based on the individual exploring their own truth. According to Palmer he believes if humans are to live their lives full then they must learn to embrace opposites, use their gifts in ways that fulfill their potentials, honor limitations in a manner that does not distort human nature, and only follow the doors that resonate with the spirit. Careers should, therefore, be in direct alignment with these key elements. It should mirror the goals of the individual, and should never cause conflict within the internal value system. Sometimes a worker can become considerably challenged with their position because it opposes their true vocation. Palmer's philosophy states that the individual should not engage in responsibilities or acts that contradicts their inner truth; but instead, should embrace the image of who they think that they should be. Many of us betray our true self simply to gain the approval of others. This just continues the vicious cycle of ignoring the voice that is within, and eventually the voice will compel the individual to embrace the person they were born to be in life.

### Andrea Sachs

The first character we will explore using Palmer's Theory is Andrea Sachs. Young "Andy" struggles in identifying her career path because she clung unto prior ideologies that she believed identified her true strengths. Her initial goal solely focused on becoming an esteemed, yet humble journalist, but a lack of opportunities steered her in a direction to find employment to maintain her livelihood and to gain some type of experience. Andy slowly became intertwined

into a world that placed value on beliefs that she once shunned, and she slowly begins to emulate the actions of the influential figures in her company.

According to Palmer this is a quintessential example of how the seed within Andy is conflicted with the change and opposition to her true self. When we embrace the seasons of change of our vocation we are forced to embrace loss and gain, falling into darkness and enlightenment, because these changes are the opportunities for growth that are required for fulfillment. Andy enters a point in her life when she loses virtually everything that was important to her, but in this loss she finds herself. As we literally witness her move through the transitions of cultivating the seed that was within herself we see her embracing the ability to find what motivates her. The awkwardness she once possessed is completely eliminated and she manages to transform herself into a physical manifestation that remains true to her inner beliefs. She realizes that being a humble, honest writer is the heart of her vocation, and that external rewards of social prestige and upward mobility are in direct opposition to her true sense of selfhood.

#### Dr. Danielle Ofri

In the case of attending physician, Danielle Ofri, she found the purpose of her career in medicine through a spiraling journey of exploring the events as she practiced medicine. Many physicians revel in the art of medicine and perfecting their craft, but Ofri spends quite a long amount of time trying to decipher if she is truly making a difference in the lives of others. She is placed in a number of different clinical settings, all of which offer her different perspectives of providing care for the population. Each patient, coworker, and opportunity challenges the beliefs that she once held high as an aspiring medical student. Ofri begins to realize that her career in medicine is synonymous with human relations, but her role as a physician also had to serve a higher purpose beyond the traditional confines of medicine.

Ofri struggles throughout most of her young adult life establishing her life truths, but this may be due in part because she never truly took the opportunity to digress and explore why she chose to be a medical provider. We all know the amount of time, dedication, and patience it takes to become a physician, and it is evident that Ofri did not come to this decision overnight. However, Palmer's philosophy would engage Ofri to "let her life tell her what truths she embodies as well as the values she represents," rather than telling herself what values that she must live up to and accomplish. In essence, Ofri's career development had been consistently molded by the strict ideologies of medical ethics, but Ofri had to live the life that made sense to her, not to everyone else. She restructured the focus of her practice, but also found another passion that also has helped others to discover their own vocation: becoming a writer.

#### Dr. Jeffrey Wigand

Dr. Jeffrey Wigand was an esteemed biochemist, and quickly moved up the corporate ladder, eventually landing a leadership position at a prominent tobacco company in the United States. At first glance, one may assume that Wigand was at the pinnacle of his professional career; but

in actuality, deeper analysis reveals a more complex situation. Wigand becomes embroiled in a vicious battle of publically reporting the unethical practices of the company; a decision which ultimately forces him to lose not only his livelihood but also his family and reputation. His initial thoughts on vocation center on nobility, wealth, and prominence, but as he evolves through his season of change he learns to “let his life speak.”

The problem that Wigand has throughout his seasons is that he is conflicted with allowing his truths and values guide his life. He is constantly in a battle to define who he is, but struggles to accept that his life never adhered to his true purpose. Yes, he was meant to be a significant contributor to his community and was a brilliant scientist; however, none of these careers resonated within himself. He left work each day attempting to erase the stench of unauthenticity, completely insecure about embracing his own identity. Palmer’s philosophy holds that when individuals are “insecure about their own identities that they create settings that deprive other people of their identities as a way of buttressing their own.” Perhaps Wigand worked with individuals that deprived him of this very principle, or maybe his family left him because he was the one who deprived them. He eventually came to terms with creating a true identity and finding passion in teaching; but more importantly, he learned to embrace the opposites and limitations that once caused him considerable conflict. He was not a whistle blower: he was someone that realized his potential was to support the needs of others.

### Linda Greenlaw

We stagnate our own passions or interests for the sake of sparing criticism that often comes with challenging conventional ideologies. Linda Greenlaw has chosen to be the exception to this rule. Though she was on a seemingly idealistic path from college to law school, Greenlaw could never escape the captivation of pursuing her passion: a career as a fisherman. But despite her decision to pursue her own goals she struggled validating her decision to others, especially those who worked in her field. Women generally do not work in this profession, and Greenlaw was often deemed as an anomaly and was treated indifferently by male counterparts. She constantly stays in an external and internal battle of accepting her choice, despite already knowing what she was meant to do.

Far too often we pick and choose careers that seem fulfilling based on societal norms, but Greenlaw’s vocation is purely with the sea. Palmer would agree that Greenlaw becomes conflicted because she toys with living someone else’s life. She will invariably fail because her inner voice is constantly calling her to the sea. Greenlaw may ponder thoughts of what could have been, but she will never eradicate her passion because it is her vocation. With every change in season and catch she redefines the reasons of why her career makes sense to her, and strengthens her belief in her choices. Her abilities to defend her choices and to accept the stigmatization diminishes because she has confidence in herself and the gifts in which she was blessed with. The seed within herself has finally matured and blossomed into something that she could have never imagined: an acceptance to live for herself.

## Steve Jobs

Steve Jobs is perhaps the only individual throughout this course who already had a firm grasp on vocation and his purpose in life. His methods and path to creation were often riddled with cynicism and down-right cruelty, but the beauty of Jobs is that he never had doubt within himself. His imperfections truly gave way to a fervor that many of us are too afraid to confront. Even in the midst of death Jobs remained true to his own principles. It may seem foolish to others, but purpose cannot be challenged when a person embodies their convictions. Jobs embodied these types of principles (despite the conflict between the ideals of his social environment), and seemed to never let a change in his season affect his abilities to live according to his own beliefs. Life does not have to make sense to others; but rather, it should be a testament to always help us challenge who we can become.

If Palmer was assessing the ideals that Jobs held he would probably note that he is a shining example of someone who understood vocation and purpose from the onset of his life. Jobs knew there would be dark and light times, and that most people would not understand the worth of his ideals. But his fervor and tenacity to be himself is what truly drove him to success. Yes, he was a great creator, but his ability to embrace each season is what demonstrates that he always had a grasp of his vocation. Through the midst of illness, loss, and struggle he embraced each struggle and delight with a passion that many of us may never experience. His vocation constantly evolved through his willingness to accept these transitions; and as a result, he was able to achieve and relish within a career that was solely molded by his own selfhood.

## Glenn Holland

“Mr. Holland we are your opus...” Glenn Holland would have never understood the gravity of these words when he first reluctantly took the position as John F. Kennedy’s music teacher; but towards the end of his professional career had developed a different outlook on his true vocation. Formerly an astute and talented music composer, Holland accepts the teaching job as a means to have more time to focus on writing orchestral music, but he never imagined his career change would be a permanent transition. For over thirty years Holland works in his version of mediocrity. He assumes he has made no impact in the world of music, primarily because he failed to reach the heights of greatness that have been associated with some composers and musicians.

The issue that Holland has is that he lives the majority of his life never truly grasping the true identity of his vocation. He could never accept letting the role of becoming an accomplished composer cease to exist because he felt as though he could defy his true nature. Holland was a prolific teacher and mentor yet he never saw this until his day of retirement. All of the lives that he touched never forgot him, despite him forgetting the impact he made to them. Finally, Holland realizes that his “opus;” or rather, his vocation was to bring music into the lives of

everyone that he met. There is no time limit to discover vocation, as the process is singular in nature and in this case Holland needed a life-changing event to bring his purpose into focus.

### Conclusion

The ecology of life transcends beyond biological realms of existence; it is a process that allows the individual to formulate their own organic reality by thriving from what is instilled in their souls. Every human is expected to go through bouts of failure and success, but the purpose of these seasons is to cultivate growth within ourselves. We have to learn to embrace change, not for the sake of simply defining a career role, but to discover why we exist. A change of seasons renews the spirit, redefines focus, and keeps the soul engaged. None of these characters had the same process of finding their inner selfhood, yet they all desperately sought to establish an authentic identity that was solely true to themselves.