

WIRED TO BECOME

The Brain Science of Finding Your Purpose,
Creating Meaningful Work, and
Achieving Your Potential



Britt Andreatta, PhD

*Author of *Wired to Grow*, *Wired to Resist*,
Wired to Connect, and *Leading with Emotional Intelligence**

Discover the science behind our quest for purpose and new tools for achieving your potential.

"While the library of books on purpose is large and ever expanding, Dr. Britt Andreatta makes an invaluable contribution through *Wired to Become* by integrating the extant research in this burgeoning field and presenting it in a coherent, compelling, practical, and highly readable way. If you use this brilliant book as a guide, you and your business will be transformed."

**Dr. Raj Sisodia, FEMSA Distinguished University Professor
of Conscious Enterprise, Tecnológico de Monterrey,
and Co-founder of Conscious Capitalism, Inc.**

"*Wired to Become* is an incredibly relevant and thorough examination of the need, not just for purpose, but for meaning in today's world. Dr. Andreatta's book is filled with insights and strategies to help us further embed purpose into our work and lives and is enlivened by numerous stories from individuals finding—and growing into—their purpose. Thanks for the inspiration, Britt!"

**Rick Lozano, author of *Acoustic Leadership:
Develop a Leadership Culture That Resonates***

"There have been major advances in our understanding of purpose and meaning at work over the last five years. Andreatta distills the research down to make it immediately accessible and actionable, so we can find fulfillment in our lives and work."

**Aaron Hurst, founder of Taproot Foundation, Imperative, and
Purpose Mindset, and author of *The Purpose Economy***

Around the world, people's quest for purpose is at an all-time high. *Wired to Become* meets the moment with new findings in the science of becoming our best selves and why purpose and meaningful work are critical for our physical and emotional health. Dr. Andreatta examines the pandemic's cultural and personal impact and crafts a new understanding of why society is forever changed and how to benefit. She offers tools you can use to explore and clarify your own purpose and professional journey, plus concrete strategies for building purpose-driven organizations—the future of work.

Dr. Britt Andreatta is an internationally recognized thought leader who uses her unique background in leadership, neuroscience, psychology, and education to create groundbreaking solutions for today's workplace and personal challenges. She has over 25 years of experience consulting with executives and inspiring all types of organizations.

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This book is dedicated to the scientists who continually strive to expand our knowledge. I appreciate your commitment to discovery and dedication to accuracy.

Content Warning

This book touches on the subject of trauma and suicide, which some readers might find difficult. We have placed a trigger warning at the beginning of those chapters.

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INTRODUCTION

*“The mystery of human existence lies not in just staying alive,
but in finding something to live for.”*

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, author

If you picked up this book, you are likely on your own journey of seeking more purpose in your life, or at least have noticed that a lot of other people are. It’s hard to miss given that it’s featured around the world in publications like *Forbes*, *Time*, *Entrepreneur*, and *Fast Company*. Consider these recent headlines:

Employees Want Purpose at Work: How to Deliver on This Top Priority

Finding Purpose at Work and the Growing Need for Corporate Values

Everyone Wants Meaningful Work.
But What Does That Really Look Like?

I started doing the research for this book at the beginning of 2018, after my community was torn apart by a natural disaster. On January 9th, in the span of 30 minutes, a 40-foot-high wall of mud and boulders the size of cabins slammed down, pulverizing cars and wiping away entire homes. The mudslide killed 23 people, including many children.

I saw firsthand that when all sense of happiness is gone, a sense of purpose is the only thing that gets you through. Purpose is also what motivates us to help others. We had this miraculous thing happen—people from hundreds of miles away started showing up to help. A loose volunteer organization formed, calling themselves the Bucket Brigade. They didn’t live here but they showed up to remove the tons and tons of waist-high mud that buried streets and filled homes. They excavated people’s living rooms, they dug out trees so they wouldn’t suffocate, and they found and carefully organized possessions in hopes of returning them to their owners. It was an amazing act of generosity and kindness to witness and receive. It made those dark days a little more bearable.

At the same time, I began reading Aaron Hurst’s book, *The Purpose Economy*, and realized that purpose was playing a far bigger role than what I could see in my own community. It was shifting the global economy.

Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit, scuttling my plans to write this book. My speaking income dried up overnight and I pivoted to supporting my 7th grader who was attending “Zoom school.” As one of thousands of tech leaders charged with migrating a workforce to work-from-home employees in a matter of weeks, my husband’s work intensified.

As we made our way through the lockdowns and worried about our loved ones, I started to notice a shift in my own sense of purpose. I felt a deep need to help in some way but wasn’t sure how I could. At the time, I was recording the

audiobook version of *Wired to Resist* and realized that I was uniquely positioned to help people live through this massive change we were experiencing. My team quickly built and offered a free online course on how to deal with change. I was stunned by the response. Nearly 1,500 people from around the world took the course and we were inundated with comments like: “Thank you for sharing it during this difficult and uncharted time. It’s such a profound way of viewing change,” and “What a blessing. This course was terrific, timely, and helpful!” and “It was an amazing gift to us during these difficult and challenging times. The concepts shared are all life changing!”

As time went on, I was asked to consult with several global organizations. I began to see the incredible toll burnout was taking on workers across every sector. I started doing research on the effects of burnout and realized we were headed toward high levels of disengagement and turnover, which ultimately became known as the Great Resignation.

We were living through a unique time as the whole world engaged in a simultaneous experience of reflecting on our values and clarifying our priorities. I was not surprised to see the many headlines about people’s hunger for purpose and realized it was time to start up my research again. I quickly found that some amazing studies had been done during the pandemic, giving us new data and insights. If I had published this book earlier, it would already be out of date because things have shifted so significantly since 2019.

What is clear is the pandemic has changed us. Permanently. It accelerated what was already in motion, creating distinct pressures that magnified our need for purpose in significant ways. This societal shift impacts all age groups and all industries. There is no going back to “the before times” because we are different now. We are going through an amazing transformation, one that has shifted what we value, how we want to work, and ultimately the good that we wish to create in the world. While it has been challenging, it is also inspiring.

How to Use This Book

This book is designed to help you on your own journey to find your purpose and create meaningful work. I will share recent discoveries in neuroscience and other disciplines to give you new information and tools. You can apply this material to your own life immediately, starting today. If you have a role where you help or lead others, you will also gain new strategies for unlocking their potential and building more purpose-driven organizations. This book is organized into five sections:

- I. We’ll begin by diving into new findings about the science of becoming our best selves and why happiness, purpose, creativity, and innovation are all important elements.
- II. Next, we’ll explore the unique combination of forces and pressures driving this global quest for more purpose and how it’s shifting human consciousness.

- III. Then we'll dig into your individual journey toward finding purpose and creating a meaningful work. I'll share several tools and strategies you can use immediately to create more clarity.
- IV. Next, I'll share new findings from research about meaningful work and what gives people a sense of purpose in their jobs and careers.
- V. We'll continue your journey to find your own sense of purpose with additional tips and tools.
- VI. We'll end with looking at purpose-driven organizations as the new future of work and practical strategies for employees, managers, and executives.

Throughout every section, you will find Purpose Stories, first-person narratives from 25 individuals from around the world including Ukraine, Brazil, The Netherlands, Australia, and the United States. They answered an open call for submissions and represent a wide range of industries from finance to manufacturing, from retail to education, and technology to healthcare. Each person tells their own story of finding purpose—sometimes at a young age, but more often discovered over the course of a career, learning what was *not* the right fit before finding what is.

Their journeys were shaped by a host of experiences from success and failure to burnout and tragedy. On multiple occasions, I found myself getting goosebumps as I read them and I hope you will find inspiration in learning how all of us are walking similar paths to finding our purpose. Each story is set off in a box with this compass icon. Consider this powerful story from Uvalde, Texas in the United States:



**Purpose Story 1:
Purpose as a Way Through Tragedy**

As a professional nonprofit fundraiser, I am driven by helping organizations secure the funding they need to serve communities. I consider myself a professional relationship builder. In this capacity, I matchmake—I match donors to causes that fulfill their deepest values.

Initially, I thought that academia would be the area where I could make the most impact. But after uncovering the deeply impactful work performed by nonprofits, I knew the sector offered a great fit for my aspiration and talents. Nonprofits are entrepreneurial spaces. Success is not dictated by the marketplace but rather by social change.

The work of a fundraiser is unique. You're positioned between the nonprofit and the funder. You're the curator of value-aligned relationships. It is hard work and often goes unrecognized. I have always found the work rewarding and it fulfilled my sense of purpose to help communities thrive.

But in 2022, a tragedy brought this work into sharp focus. My nonprofit organization was tasked with processing public donations after the mass school shooting in Uvalde, Texas. The kicker: I am from Uvalde and attended elementary school there.

This horrific situation made people across the country feel so helpless. I felt helpless. But being in a position where I could help facilitate the public outcry was quite fulfilling.

After the school shooting, everyday people and corporations wanted to help. Honestly, the only thing many felt that they could actually do was give a donation for the survivors and their families. In my role, I facilitated this along with my team. We created donation pages, responded to hundreds of emails, answered calls, and directed inquiries to the right people. We thanked everyone along the way for their light during this very dark time.

I relearned something that I already knew as a fundraiser—every donation matters. Every act of generosity deeply matters. People across the country gave what they could: \$10, \$15, and it added up. Everyone (and I do mean literally everyone) said, “I wish I could give more.” We processed over \$8 million in donations in the matter of a few months proving the collective power of caring.

Purpose comes at funny times, revealing itself when you’re not desperately seeking it out. Follow what you love to do—it will reveal itself, in time. And most likely when you least expect it.

My Research Process

While I started researching purpose and meaningful work in 2018, when I resumed research I found many newly published studies had been conducted during the pandemic in every region of the world, showing a universal global experience. Countries included Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Brazil, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Colombia, Ukraine, Yemen, Turkey, Romania, India, South Africa, Eretria, Korea, China, Japan, East Java, Indonesia, Spain, Italy, Netherlands, Canada, and the United States.

I first focused on neuroscience, reading journals like *Neuron*, *The Journal of Neuroscience*, and *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*. Inevitably, these studies led me to other disciplines and studies in biology, psychology, business, and education. I reviewed research from many branches of medicine and healthcare.

I also conducted a content analysis of the personal stories submitted to identify common themes and experiences.

Another important part of my research process is mapping what scientists find in their labs to issues that impact today’s workplaces. I leverage research by data giants like Deloitte, Gallup, Gartner, and McKinsey, as well as professional organizations like the Association for Talent Development (ATD) and the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). Many of these global studies yielded fascinating insights about our hunger for purpose and meaning at work.

I also read over 30 books about purpose and meaningful work. I was especially struck by what they all had in common—when I looked at the totality of what the authors said, I saw clear patterns and themes that indicate a shared truth. I’ve attempted to synthesize them into a cohesive whole.

To be clear, I am not a neuroscientist; my PhD is in education, leadership, and organizations, and I have done my own research on the science of success. Because I am an active practitioner, designing and delivering learning experiences out in the field, I can see where lab studies do and do not translate to how people experience these concepts in the real world and especially at work.

I used this research to build science-based training programs that are proving to be exceptionally effective in all kinds of organizations and industries. If you want to learn more, visit www.BrainAwareTraining.com.

So, let’s take a journey together. I’d like to introduce you to the fact that we are wired for purpose—it is part of our biological makeup as humans. We are neurologically designed to experience purpose and that it’s different from happiness. The key to a meaningful life is to have them in balance.

It is also true that finding our sense of purpose is meant to be a journey that unfolds over time and shifts with life’s experiences. Some people find many purposes over their lifetime, and others focus on one. There is no one right way but I have gathered some tools and information that can help you and others along the way. Let’s get started!



Take a Learning Journey

I have learned that before I can write a book, I have to teach the concepts and content to live audiences. I always try to create a learning experience that shifts people’s knowledge and behaviors. Before I wrote this book, I taught some of this content through workshops. In a live presentation, I model best practices in learning design based on the research of my previous book, *Wired to Grow: Harness the Power of Brain Science to Master Any Skill*. This includes having the audience pause and reflect on content every so often, applying it to their current situation.

Engaging with concepts in a personal way helps the brain learn and retain material and, more importantly, it’s where any meaningful shift in actions starts. To help you gain the most from this book, you will find this light bulb icon marking an element called “Your Learning Journey” at the end of each section. Each includes instructions for applying the content to your experiences.

To make this easier, I have created a free downloadable PDF for you to fill out as you explore each concept (www.BrittAndreatta.com/Wired-to-Become). To maximize your experience, I also recommend you find a partner as social learning boosts long-term retention, and when you work in partnership, you gain the insights of each other’s experiences. So, ask a friend or colleague who is seeking more purpose or meaning in their life and explore the content together.