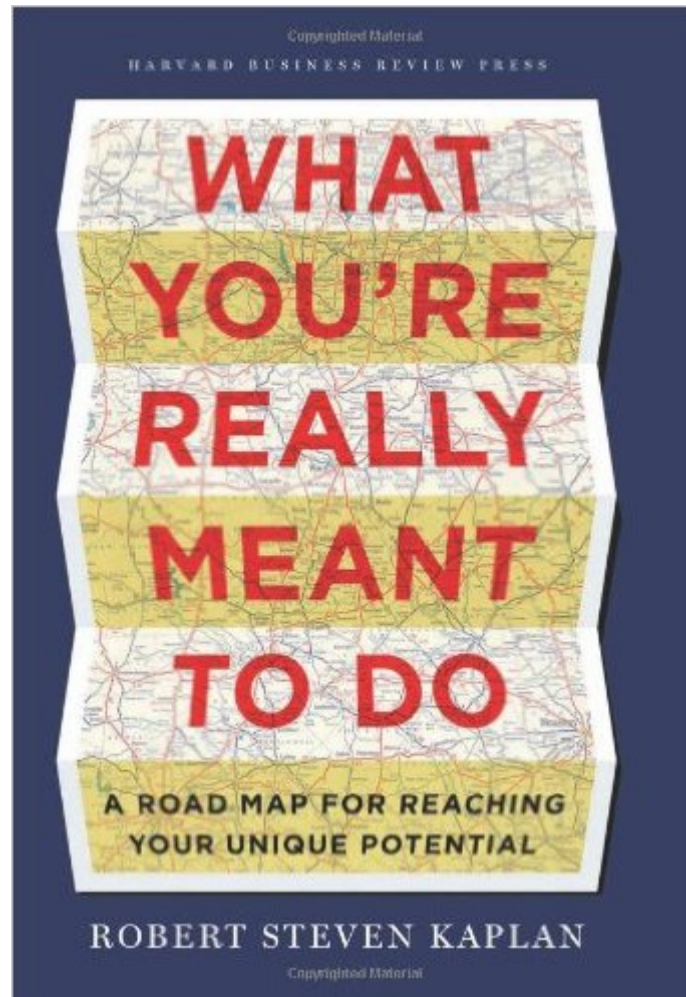


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# What You're Really Meant To Do: A Road Map For Reaching Your Unique Potential



## Synopsis

How do you create your own definition of success and reach your unique potential? Building a fulfilling life and career can be a daunting challenge. It takes courage and hard work. Too often, we charge down a path leading to "success" as defined by those around us; and ultimately, are left feeling dissatisfied. Each of us is unique and brings distinctive skills and qualities to any situation. So why is it that most of us fail to spend sufficient time learning to understand ourselves and creating our own definition of success? The truth is, it can seem so natural and so much easier to just do what everyone else is doing; for now; leaving it for later to develop our best selves and figure out our own unique path. Is there a road map that will enable you to defy conventional wisdom, resist peer pressure, and carve out a path that fits your unique skills and passions? Harvard Business School's Robert Steven Kaplan, leadership expert and author of the highly successful book *What to Ask the Person in the Mirror*, regularly advises executives and students on how to tackle these questions. In this indispensable new book, Kaplan shares a specific and actionable approach to defining your own success and reaching your potential. Drawing on his years of experience, Kaplan proposes an integrated plan for identifying and achieving your goals. He outlines specific steps and exercises to help you understand yourself more deeply, take control of your career, and build your capabilities in a way that fits your passions and aspirations. Are you doing what you're really meant to do? If you're ready to face this question, this book can help you change your life.

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## Customer Reviews

I saw Robert Kaplan on television, was greatly interested, and just finished the book. Unfortunately, this book is written only for those working within large corporations with lots of job security and many choices about career paths and ranges of compensation. I don't know if those people exist anymore. His talk about teams, coaches, bosses, and management reads like something out of Tom Peter's era, when America was rich, jobs weren't being slashed, and employees weren't required to do the work of 2-3 people. He even offers advice on how to choose the right job when you first graduate from Harvard Business School! "Finding your passion" to Kaplan simply means being mentored into a more rewarding job in your corporation or "super radical idea" moving to a different large corporation. The section on assessing your weaknesses and strengths is most valuable, however, it is structured largely within the context how of your boss and direct reports view you, and therefore has limited usefulness for those who are engaged in more entrepreneurial endeavors. Too bad.

Self-improvement initiatives or, if you prefer, self-fulfillment or self-actualization initiatives, are best viewed as an on-going journey, not as an ultimate destination. Many authors of books about that process invoke the map or road map metaphor, and rightly so, because it implies and (yes) enables all manner of appropriate dimensions of internal as well as external exploration and discovery. This seems to be what Robert Steven Kaplan has in mind when observing, "I have come to believe that the key to achieving your aspirations lies not in 'being a success' but rather in *working to reach your unique potential*". This requires you to create your own definition of success rather than accept a definition created by others...This approach takes courage and hard work. It does not yield easy answers or get you to a final destination. It is, instead, a multistage, lifelong effort. It involves developing a different mind-set and a new set of work habits."At this point in my brief commentary, I want to express appreciation of Kaplan's previous book, *What to Ask the Person in the Mirror*. Its title refers to anyone who seeks both knowledge and wisdom that will improve quality of life as well as standard of living. What Kaplan offers in abundance is assistance with framing questions that can help to achieve those worthy objectives. Those who read the book will be much better prepared to ask them; better yet, they will be much better prepared to obtain the right answers to them. In this book, as its subtitle suggests, he offers "a road map for reaching your potential," one that is accompanied by a wealth of information, insights, and counsel as well as self-diagnostic exercises to help his readers determine what they are really meant to be and to do. As Oscar Wilde so wisely advised, "Be yourself. Every one else is taken." But as Darrell Royal once

observed, "Potential" means "you ain't done it yet." These are among the dozens of passages that caught my eye, also listed to indicate the scope of Kaplan's coverage.

- o Who Defines Your Success? (Pages 18-22)
- o Five Suggested Rules of the Road (24-30)
- o Assessing Your Strengths and Weaknesses (31-37)
- o You Don't Have to Be Good at Everything (56-57)
- o The Pursuit of Passion, and, Understanding Your Passions (63-66)
- o The Power of Narrative: Three Steps (85-97)
- o Being at Your Best (102-105)
- o Dealing with a Painful Setback, and, Dealing with Injustice (126-129)
- o A Star Wants to Realize His Potential (138-142)
- o The Power of an Ownership Mind-Set (149-150)

Note: Our lives tend to be the result of our decisions. There is also great power in taking personal ownership of accountability for those decisions.

- o Values, Boundaries, and Your Philosophy, and, Character and Leadership (156-162)
- o Try Building Your Relationship Muscles (173-175)
- o Creating Supportive Relationships (181-182)
- o This Book: It's About You (196-198)
- o Next Steps (201-203)

While reading and then re-reading this book, I was again reminded of many of the observations shared by other authors in their books, notably Rick Warren in *The Purpose Driven Life*, Bill George in *True North*, James O'Toole's *Creating the Good Life*, Randy Pausch in *The Last Lecture*, and Clayton Christensen in *How Will You Measure Your Life?* However different they and their works may be from Kaplan and his, all of them -- they and he -- stress the importance of continuous self-improvement to serve purposes and to achieve goals worthy of our very best efforts. For the title of this review, I chose a paraphrase of Whitman's line in "Song of Myself" because it correctly suggests almost unlimited potentialities for personal growth and professional development. Robert Steven Kaplan wrote this book to help each of us to fulfill as many of them as we can. When concluding his book, he observes, "If you follow your own path, I don't know how much money you will accumulate, how much stature you will achieve, or how many titles you will garner. But if you're true to your convictions and principles, I know you're far more likely to feel like a big success. In the end, that feeling will make all the difference."

If you read career books, many are written by folks in career counseling and advising. What is unique about this book is that the author's perspective has been shaped by business and academic experiences. The author, Robert Kaplan, ran global businesses for two decades, ultimately becoming the executive chairman of Goldman Sachs. These experiences in working with, and mentoring, individuals in business in various stages of their careers, prompted Kaplan to think deeply about human potential, development and leadership. He left Goldman Sachs to teach in the M.B.A. program at Harvard, teaching a course on Authentic Leadership based on Medtronic CEO'S book *TRUE NORTH*. All of us yearn for success. The thesis of this book is that you won't feel

satisfyingly successful without working to reach your unique potential. The good news about potential is that it is unlimited. Kaplan says you never get to the end of your potential as there are always ideas to explore, things to learn and skills to improve. Kaplan encounters a mix of folks in his executive MBA classes at Harvard and discovers many have great credentials and are achieving monetary success but are dissatisfied. What are they missing? Some older executives and professionals are feeling regret and bitterness concerning their career choice. He also encounters many individuals who are making less money, perhaps, but working in a field they are passionate about, using the skills they enjoy most using, and are happier than the folks who have pursued wealth or status at the cost of doing something in a field they loved. It's difficult to be truly successful in the long term if you don't have some sense of passion for what you do, Kaplan suggests. This book offers exercises in self-discovery to understand yourself better and to identify what you want. Its eight chapters are grouped under umbrella topics: 1) what you're really meant to do 2) know thyself 3) make the most of opportunities and 4) the extra mile. At the end of each chapter are suggested follow-up steps regarding taking action. There is a lot of wise advice in this book regarding attitudes and behaviors from someone who has been successful in business, mentored others and thought deeply about developing potential. For example, he discusses how to deal with setbacks in a career. Engaging examples of individuals he has encountered in his executive M.B.A. classes at Harvard who are sorting out career issues are integrated throughout the book and enrich the principles in the book. Kaplan gives examples of folks who are thinking of leaving their job or career because of a current obstacle. By asking probing questions and coaching, Kaplan demonstrates that often these individuals still love their field and company, but just need to deal with the obstacle. To be successful, Kaplan suggests you ask yourself: what are the top three tasks you must do extremely well to succeed in your job? And then spend 70% of your time and focus on those three tasks. Another searching question Kaplan poses: What stands in the way of you spending time on the activities you enjoy? Is there an action you could take that would remove one or more of these impediments? As to whether this book would be helpful to entrepreneurs, it could. Kaplan gives examples of some of the entrepreneurs, or folks who worked for entrepreneurs, whom he has encountered: a chef who owned three restaurants in Rhode Island and was thinking of adding more but was unhappy, a retailer who co-owned a successful business in California but was thinking of leaving it due to conflict with her business partner, a student who chose to work for a small philanthropy organization instead of going into the financial services field like her classmates, and an individual who started his own money management firm. The questions in this book will give aspiring entrepreneurs some self-assessments as to what they really want to do. (Also recommend

the book: Startup Leadership: How Savvy Entrepreneurs Turn Their Ideas Into Successful Enterprises by Derek Lidow who started iSuppli Company and sold it for multi-millions. Lidow teaches Entrepreneurship at Princeton. If you want a look at entrepreneurship to see if you would enjoy its rigors, his book is helpful.)Kaplan's central message is we should worry less about being a success and more about reaching - and developing - our potential as this is where happiness lies. He says there are many paths to accomplish this, and we should pick a path which suits us. This book has some ideas on how to do this.

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