

The Focused Life (STRATEGY)

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J. Robert Clinton (*Clinton's Biblical Leadership Commentary*) has developed the concept of “focused living” from his research on leaders who finished well in life and leadership. Clinton defines a focused life:

“A focused life is a life dedicated to exclusively carrying out God’s unique purposes... by identifying the focal issues of life purpose, major role, effective methodology [and] ultimate contribution, which allows an increasing prioritization of life’s activities around the focal issues, and results in a satisfying life of being [spiritual formation] and doing [leadership and strategic formation].” (p. 403)

Let’s take a look at each of these “focal issues” in more depth here:

1. *Life Purpose* – “a burden-like calling, a task or driving force or achievement, which motivates a leader to fulfill something or to see something done” (p. 403). Clinton has observed a general age related pattern for discovering life purpose (p. 403):

- During our 20’s – commitment, character, and initial sense of purpose.
- During our 30’s – leadership experience and more specific sense of purpose.
- During our 40’s – clarification, modification, and expansion of major role along with deepening sense of purpose.
- During our 50’s and 60’s (my age!) – life purpose, major role, and unique methodologies are in place, resulting in effective service to others.
- During our 60’s and beyond – focus is on finishing well and realizing the fulfillment of ultimate contributions.

2. *Major Role* – “is the official or unofficial position, or status/platform, or leadership functions, or job description” (Clinton, p. 403). Major role involves base and functional components. Base components involve job position/job description and status. These components can provide a context and opportunities for leadership, but do not ensure effectiveness. Functional components involve gift mix, unique methodologies, score of influence, and strategic direction. These components are critical for effectiveness in leadership.

According to Clinton, major role (in terms of functional components) usually begins to firm up in our 40’s. Prior to that we are learning about roles that enhance or block achievement of our deepening sense of life purpose. Not all roles are equal in terms of fulfillment of life purpose.

3. *Effective Methodologies* – “insights around which the leader can pass on to others the essentials of doing something or using something or being something, that is, a means of effectively delivering some important ministry... which enhances life purpose or moves toward ultimate contribution[s]” (p. 404).

Discovering effective methodologies is a discovery process. We learn what works and what works for us as we discover and develop our gift mix (spiritual gifts, natural abilities, and acquired skills) along the way. Because a methodology works for someone else does not mean that it will work for us. We may try something that works for others and adapt (or discard) it as we evaluate “fit” in terms of our sense of life purpose, core values, and unique leadership philosophy.

Clinton points out that most leaders do not become really proficient in their unique methodologies until their 50’s and beyond. Prior to that, we are usually in an “on the job training” program where we learn by trial and error, evaluation, and ultimately formation that leads to effectiveness and fulfillment.

4. *Ultimate Contributions* – “a lasting legacy of a Christian worker for which he or she is remembered and which furthers the cause of [Christ]...” (p. 404-405). Legacy (p. 512) is described as:

- *Character* - setting standards for life and leadership.
- *Ministry [Leadership]* - impacting lives through evangelism and/or disciple-making (mentoring).
- *Catalytic* - serving as a change agent who helps make the world better.
- *Organizational* - leaving behind an organization, institution, or movement that will impact society in kingdom-advancing ways.
- *Ideation* - discovering, developing, describing, communicating, or promoting ideas that help others come to or grow in faith.

Clinton has identified 12 ultimate contributions in his research that relate to one or more of these legacy characteristics. They include (p. 512):

Character:

1. SAINT – a person who has a model life: not a perfect one, but a life others want to emulate.
2. STYLISTIC PRACTITIONER – a person who has a model ministry [organization] style which sets the pace for others and which others want to emulate.

Ministry [Leadership]:

3. MENTOR – a person who empowers others through individual and/or small group influence.
4. PUBLIC RHETORICIAN – a person who empowers others through effective communication to large groups.

Catalytic:

5. PIONEER – a person who starts apostolic (missionary/entrepreneurial) organizations/enterprises.
6. CHANGE PERSON – a person who is able to influence cultures to better organizations and/or correct social injustice in society.

7. ARTIST – a person who is able to impact organizations and/or cultures through innovation and creative breakthroughs.

Organizational:

8. FOUNDER – a person who establishes a new organization to meet needs or capture the essence of cultural change.

9. STABILIZER – a person who can help fledgling organizations develop and move toward stability, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Idealion:

10. RESEARCHER – a person who develops new ideas and/or concepts from study and/or research.

11. WRITER – a person who is able to conceptualize, contextualize, and communicate ideas effectively in a written format.

12. PROMOTER – a person who is able to promote new ideas through motivation and/or networking strategies that expand exposure and buy in.

You may find the terms that Clinton uses a little difficult to understand or relate to, but his general categories and types of ultimate contributions are very helpful as we discover and develop our sense of calling and attempt to become more focused and intentional in its fulfillment. An awareness of this information may be premature for many of you in terms of application, but it can serve as a big picture or road map for you as you grow and mature as a Christian leader.