

# September 11 Made Me Rethink My Purpose in Life

September 11 was a defining moment in my life, which made me “rethink” my purpose in life. Twenty years later I am still living that purpose – *“to choose joy every day, to be mindful of that joy and to share that joy with others.”* Living my purpose has unleashed greater success, fulfillment and joy in my life over the past nearly two decades and has even helped me to stay productive and positive during this unimaginable time of global pandemic and crises.

I once believed September 11 to be “the” defining moment of my life. I now realize it was “a” defining moment.

September 11 and this challenging time are opportunities for deeper reflection about the future we are committed to creating for ourselves and others. For me, that future is still a joyful planet populated by 7.7 billion people living their purpose and leveraging their expertise, talent and passion in service of others and our planet.

*Peace, Love and Joy,*

*Patrice Tanaka, Chief Joy Officer, Joyful Planet*



*Imagine*

7.7 billion people *living* their purpose  
and *creating* a more joyful planet.

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



I will always remember 9/11.

As a New Yorker, I remember that crystalline blue sky day from the windows of our West Village office, which made the horror and devastation downtown almost unfathomable.

I'm still haunted by the idea that nearly 3,000 people went to work that morning in the Twin Towers and did not return home that evening. Most people go to work fully expecting to return home in the evening. These people did not. For months after 9/11, that's what haunted me most.

In February 2002, five months after 9/11, I went to see an executive coach because I was depressed and in a malaise that I could not shake. I was totally burnt out, exhausted and unexcited by my own life. It was a combination of 9/11 and the relentless work of building a business with 12 other partners during the previous decade and caring for a terminally ill husband that made me seek out Suzanne Levy, an executive coach, who had been working successfully with another colleague.

I went to Suzanne, hoping that she could "fix me" and make me feel better. She said she could, but that first, I needed to "think" or "rethink" my purpose in life. I was annoyed to

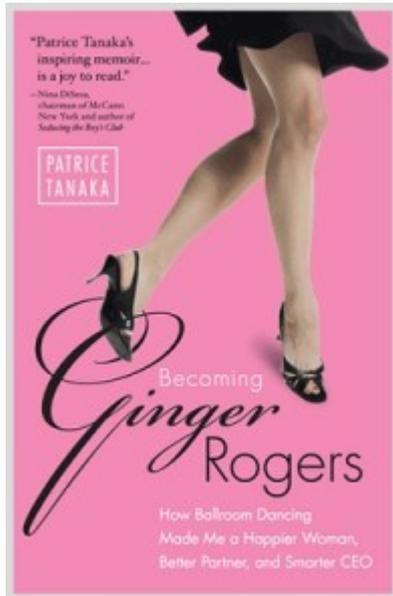
hear this because I didn't have the energy to get out of bed, much less think of a grand vision for the rest of my life.

Suzanne was adamant and said she couldn't help me feel better unless I could tell her my life's purpose so that she could help me live it! Over the next two weeks before our next coaching session, I considered and rejected many life purpose statements that were either too grandiose or tied to some future I might not have. When I met with Suzanne two weeks later, I told her that my purpose was informed by the people who died on 9/11.

I said to Suzanne that, "My purpose in life is to choose joy in my life every single day, to be mindful of that joy and to share that joy with others." I told Suzanne that I chose this "aspirational" purpose because my life, at the time, was the opposite of joy. I also explained to her I chose a purpose that would make every day complete in and of itself so it wouldn't matter how many or how few days I had to live or whether I had much notice or any notice at all before my death.

Suzanne's follow-up question was, "So, what brings you joy?" To myself I said, "Well, nothing right now." But, Suzanne kept badgering me to name one thing that brought me joy. The first thing that popped out of my mouth was "dancing." This led me to remember that my dream as an eight year old was "to dance like Ginger Rogers." When Suzanne found out that in the past 42 years I had never taken a dance lesson and I couldn't even remember the last time I went dancing, she gave me homework: to book myself a dance lesson before our next coaching session in two weeks.

A half an hour before my next coaching session two weeks later, I'm on the phone, trying to book myself a dance lesson at the Pierre Dulaine Dance Studio to learn ballroom dancing.



My first dance lesson (the Fox Trot) with Pierre was both awkward and exhilarating! But, soon, I got hooked on ballroom dance and joy came flooding back into my life. I started taking more lessons, performed at the studio's "Showcase" (like a dance recital), and then began competing in ballroom competitions around the country and even won a few championships. Some years later, I wrote a book, *"Becoming Ginger Rogers...How Ballroom Dancing Made Me a Happier Woman, Better Partner and*

*Smarter CEO."*

The lessons I learned from ballroom dancing such as "being fully present," "dancing full-out and fearlessly," "partnering closely" and, as the woman, being an active follower (not the leader) to create a winning partnership helped me to overcome my CEO ego to be able to sell my first agency, PT&Co., to create a bigger, mid-size national agency, CRT/tanaka, and later, to sell CRT/tanaka to create [PadillaCRT](#), the largest, employee-owned PR agency in the country with (then) 200 employee-owners.

So many other amazing things have happened since I discovered and shared my life's purpose with my executive coach Suzanne! I was invited to join the board of an amazing non-profit, Dancing Classrooms, which brings ballroom dance into public elementary and middle schools as an effective social and emotional learning (SEL) program. I started a new consultancy, Joyful Planet, focused on helping individuals and organizations discover and live their purpose to unleash greater success and joy. And, I contributed a chapter, "Live Your Life's Purpose and Unleash Your Joy," to renowned management consultant Brian Tracy's best-selling book, *Beat the Curve*.

These are just some of the unexpected and wonderful things

that have happened to me since I discovered and shared my life purpose with executive coach Suzanne Levy 14 years ago.

My own personal journey is why I fervently believe that discovering your life purpose is THE SINGLE MOST EFFICIENT and POWERFUL THING YOU CAN DO to UNLEASH your LEADERSHIP POTENTIAL and the JOY of a more fulfilling life.

I truly believe if more people are living their life's purpose and leveraging their greatest talents, expertise and passion in service of other people and our planet this is how, together, we can create a more JOYFUL PLANET.

**Peace, love and joyful planet,  
Patrice Tanaka**

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**About the Author:** After an award-winning PR & Marketing career and co-founding three agencies, Patrice Tanaka started *Joyful Planet*, working with individuals and organizations to discover and actively live their purpose and unleash greater success, fulfillment and joy in their personal lives, in their workplaces and in their communities. Life and organizational purpose are the subjects of Patrice's best-selling books, *Beat the Curve* and *Performance360*. Patrice has been honored by PRWeek (Hall of Fame inductee), PRSA Foundation (Paladin Award), PRSA (Paul M. Lund Award for Public Service), among others. Reach Patrice via [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).