

# Heart and Hustle at VaynerMedia



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*By Patrice Tanaka, Founder, Joyful Planet*

Patrice Tanaka, Founder & Chief Joy Officer of Joyful Planet LLC, interviews people who are actively living their purpose and contributing to a more joyful planet. This interview spotlights Claude Silver, Chief Heart Officer, VaynerMedia.



Claude Silver  
Chief Heart  
Officer,  
VaynerMedia.

**PT:** Claude, what I love and admire about you is how you're pursuing your passion and living your purpose, in part, through your amazing work at VaynerMedia. I love that Gary Vaynerchuk actually created the position of Chief Heart Officer specifically for you, allowing you to focus on what matters most to you. You wrote in a recent blog post that,

“For me, it starts with purpose. Mine has always been to be of joyful service in everything I do, including my corporate work.” You also went on to say that, “...my own joy comes from unlocking growth on a person-to-person level, which is the achievement I’m proudest of in my career.”

**Claude, please tell us more about your life’s purpose, which I think we both define as one that leverages your greatest talents, expertise and passion in service of people and planet. When did you discover your life’s purpose? Was there a triggering incident?**

**CS:** I’ve always been a natural coach, team player, and cheerleader. Even at a young age, I knew that “helping” felt unlike anything else. To serve was a reward. Coupled with my natural curiosity about people, it became a passion for “unlocking” others. At the time, though, I knew it only as feeling good whenever anyone I cared for felt happiness.

Like many, I had difficult moments in my teens and early 20s. Those experiences were formidable, and enough to kick anyone down for good. Yet, at 25, I decided to not allow events to define me. It’s something that I remember clearly, and it happened in part because I remained grounded in those stirrings from early on. Through emotional pain, I discovered power in my internal pilot light, self-growth, acceptance and change.

So, I arrived at my purpose in a nonlinear but natural way. And, that’s what I do for others: teach them how to look for purpose within their own journeys. I want to help people come out of negative “trances,” as it were, and find their internal compasses, ones that lead them in a more fulfilling direction and are rooted in their specific experiences.

**PT: And once you determined your purpose did you find yourself begin to actively live it? How did you begin? What did you do?**

**CS:** It began when I lived in Northern California, where I had the benefit of hearing Marianne Williamson speak about the importance of self-love and having compassion for oneself.

My own way to self-care was to visit centers for intuitive studies. Ashrams, too. I would spend hours at Spirit Rock to listen to wise sages. Those trips to sacred places mirrored the profoundly deep examination I was conducting internally. To find out both what made me “tick” and how it connected to the bigger, universal ways of love and spirituality in which I believe.

That’s how I began to actively live my purpose. I started to listen more. To learn how to make spaces for people to just “be.” To experience and help bring about magic everywhere I went, be it working at a grocery store, standing in line at the cinema, or pulling long hours on a client presentation. I gave, and gave joyfully. In all of that giving, there came signs that this was the right path for me, as is natural whenever you’re traveling the right road.

However, I don’t want it to sound as if the proverbial gates flew open immediately. They didn’t! You know the saying “fake it ‘til you make it?” Change it to “fake it until I AM IT,” and you’ve got the fuel I used to power through doubt and roadblocks. But, that visualization and action-oriented affirmation—“I AM IT”—eventually led me to realize bone-deep self-acceptance, and what I dub my unconditional love “engine.” It also didn’t hurt that I had the living epitome of “I am it” in my Nana, who was, simply, all heart, all love, and all presence. I had only to pick up a phone for a direct line to my personal pinnacle.

**PT:** Did knowing your purpose in life change what you do in your professional life in any way? And, in your personal life?

**CS:** Well, I’ve always been someone who wants to squeeze the orange of all its juice until only pulp remains! Which means

I've searched high and low to experience life, and to observe how others experience it (there goes that curiosity again). And that's opened me up to massive amounts of empathy.

I took a post-9/11 sabbatical from advertising to start a surfing and outdoor adventure company for women and girls in San Francisco. It was, hands down, heaven on earth. I taught surfing 250 days a year, and on those days I got to be a cheerleader 24-7. Coaching women to move their bodies into action was a way to help people stretch beyond self-imposed limitations. My belief in the strength of individuals was reaffirmed tenfold. What I created became a space that reflected my values, a space that facilitated growth and self-discovery under a blanket of unconditional love.

**PT: How does it feel to be living your life's purpose? Specifically, how would you describe it in terms of the success, fulfillment and joy you experience?**

**CS:** I've had a pretty incredible journey! At first, I wanted to become a psychotherapist but in 1998, I was bitten by the dot-com flurry in San Francisco and found myself working as a project manager. My coaching skills kicked in and I worked my way up to managing teams.

After establishing the adventure company in 2002, I returned to advertising. I'd had a genuinely fulfilling life as a digital strategist, particularly when I lived in London and helmed large-scale, global strategies for several CPG brands. I loved everything about it but, especially, building the global teams. Nothing comes close to the tingle I received after speaking with someone who'd had a breakthrough, be it at work or personally. And witnessing that spark in someone's eyes when they were close to solving a particular puzzle. To see teams find their bond—I loved witnessing everything from the initial cacophony to the eventual outcome.



Claude Silver with People & Experience Team

And now...well, now I have the honor of being Chief Heart Officer at VaynerMedia, a role that my friend Gary Vaynerchuk created with my purpose in mind. I get to listen, motivate, and coach 700+ people worldwide as they hustle and stretch themselves towards goals they once believed impossible. It's "people first" at VaynerMedia; it's our through-line. "People first" is how we get the very best from our teams, which leads to measurable business success across the board.

**PT: What is the result of knowing and actively living your life's purpose? Is there a power that comes from knowing your life's purpose in being able to actively live it?**

**CS:** It's knowing, with certainty, that there is no alternative for me. I must live my life authentically in order to live my purpose because my purpose goes beyond serving just

me. Being of joyful service is the beginning, middle, and end for me. I don't put the clothes on every day to become this person—it's just who I am. The power is in the joy and fulfillment in my work, in knowing that I get to be me. Every day! And, just by being me, I'm entrusted to help others.

Power also comes from forward motion. In difficult situations, moving towards resolution is 100% more powerful than staying put or, worse, moving backwards. Just keep moving.

**PT: What are your greatest hopes and dreams for the life purpose you have chosen?**

**CS:** To reach people at scale. One to many – and bring about change in organizations that are in desperate need of a culture shift that drives both engagement and success. I also want to reach the many who are stuck, or are on the brink of giving up but need that extra push. To be a listener for people who are dealing with trauma and need an open, caring space in which to be heard. I want to seed growth, healing, and change for as many people as I can possibly reach in both my position and just as a human being. Basically, to keep experiencing and bringing about joy and action in all corners.

**PT: What do you think you would be doing now if you hadn't determined and then actively begun to live your purpose?**

**CS:** Ooh, great question! Let's see. Maybe sailing the Seven Seas, or hiking mountains in search of even greater connection with the world? I would continue to search for growth in any form. But, really, I can't imagine not living like this day-to-day, excuse the double-negative. Human exploration, optimism, empathy... these are my orbit.

**PT: How important is it for individuals to discover their life's purpose? And, do you think that businesses would be wise to help employees discover their purpose?**

**CS:** It's everything—and that's not to be reductive or proffer

a vague platitude.

Without purpose, how can we expect to navigate from the driver's seat of the car? It means you're merely letting life happen to you, operating without agency and personal investment. Not being an active player in your life? Not happening. This is it—there's only one go-around.

Right now, there is a massive shift happening in this collective consciousness of which we're all a part. Our lives have sped up exponentially, which means we need to apply equal amounts of tenderness for proper balance. There's a groundswell mounting for being more awake and empathetic. Since work is where we spend most of our day, work culture then has to facilitate wellness for its people. If not, it fails to acknowledge and support the gains happening right now, outside the workplace. Businesses must assist employees in finding their purpose. Yes, it's a long game but one that rewards organizations with loyalty, motivation, and investment on the part of employees. And that's impossible to value. Employees who are fulfilled and appreciated lead to amazing work culture, which leads to repeated success.

**PT: What advice would you give others about discovering their life's purpose?**

**CS:** This, from the great Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*, says it all for me:

“And when he came to the place where the wild things are, they roared their terrible roars and gnashed their terrible teeth and rolled their terrible eyes and showed their terrible claws till Max said, ‘Be still’ and tamed them with the magic trick of staring into all their yellow eyes without blinking once.”

*About the Author: Patrice Tanaka is a serial entrepreneur,*

having co-founded three award-winning, PR & marketing firms and, most recently, *Joyful Planet*, a Business & Life Strategy Consultancy. "Through *Joyful Planet*, I am doing what I love and do best, leveraging my creative, problem-solving talent to help individuals and organizations discover and live their purpose and unleash greater success, fulfillment and joy in their lives, in their workplaces and in the world," says Patrice. This is the subject of Patrice's new best-selling book, *Beat the Curve*, co-authored with world renowned management consultant and coach, Brian Tracy, and other business leaders. Her chapter is entitled, "Live Your Life's Purpose and Unleash Your Joy." Connect with [Patrice@JoyfulPlanet.com](mailto:Patrice@JoyfulPlanet.com) and via [LinkedIn/Patrice Tanaka](#) and [Twitter/Patrice Tanaka](#).