



# One Big Thing

Discovering What You Were Born to Do

by Phil Cooke  
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## Take-Aways

- Every life should have a special purpose, a dedication to “One Big Thing” (OBT).
- Many people – successful and unsuccessful – live their lives without a special purpose.
- Ask yourself what you can do better than anyone else in the world.
- You cannot discover your OBT until you know who you are.
- People’s OBTs transcend their position, income and status.
- Your OBT should be something no one else can duplicate.
- Once you know your OBT, you must get the world at large to notice you.
- Accept your strengths and weaknesses; revel in your nature.
- Achieving your OBT will not be easy.
- You can begin your search for your OBT or transform your life at any age.

## Rating (10 is best)

Overall  
**7**

Applicability  
**7**

Innovation  
**6**

Style  
**7**

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## Relevance

### What You Will Learn

In this summary, you will learn: 1) Why everyone should have a special purpose in life, 2) How you can find your “One Big Thing” (OBT) and 3) How to begin to live the purposeful life you were meant to live.

### Recommendation

Many people wander through life with no direction or personal goals, even successful individuals with good jobs and hefty salaries. Modern-day Renaissance man Phil Cooke, a media consultant, offers some great ideas about how to discover your true purpose in life and to work toward it. Practical and inspirational, Cooke explains how to live a meaningful life and offers plenty of warmth and encouragement. *getAbstract* recommends his ideas to those who want to live life to the fullest, particularly those who share his heartfelt Christian perspective.

## Summary

### What Is Your Life All About?

Two “Big Questions” face everyone, particularly those who are not content with the course of their lives or careers. First, “What am I supposed to do with my life?” Where do you excel and what could you be “the best in the world at doing?” This question addresses your primary strengths. If you can answer this first Big Question, you are on the right track to finding your purpose in life – your “One Big Thing” (OBT).

People may do well, earn good salaries and attain social status. But if they do not carry out their authentic intention in life, whatever it may be, they will remain unfulfilled. For example, when someone asked a respected medical company CEO where he could be most useful, he did not know. He could say only, “I have no idea if I’m actually doing what I was really put on the earth to accomplish.” Alas, many people feel this way.

The second Big Question is “How do I get noticed?” – that is, “How do I get my voice heard?” or “How do I get my dream project on the radar?” The second Big Question is as important as the first. You may know what your purpose should be, but unless you stand out from the crowd, your dream will never become a reality.

The world is filled with people who possess big ambitions but no connections. Perhaps they aren’t skilled at establishing networks by communicating their dreams in compelling ways – for example, through inspiring stories. To succeed at your OBT, you must learn how to get people to hear your story.

### Your Special Purpose

Discover your life’s special purpose – the niche that is perfect for you – so you don’t waste your years going through the motions. When you discover your purpose and take active steps to pursue it, you will become filled with energy, determination and courage. You will jump out of bed each morning, ready to take charge of the day. Your life will have renewed meaning.

*“Millions of people spend their lives in the pursuit of nothing.”*

*“Great things aren’t accomplished by people who live in denial or refuse to face the truth.”*

*“When it comes to your career, calling or dream, understand that you won’t get noticed for being pretty good at everything.”*

*“Visibility is just as important as ability.”*

*“In today’s hypercompetitive, distracted, cluttered, ADD culture, the best way to get noticed is to be incredible at one thing.”*

*“Plenty of people want to change the world, but not enough want to change themselves.”*

For example, George Washington was not a brilliant general, but he understood his life’s purpose. Washington seized opportunities when they presented themselves. He “had a powerful and sharp eye for acting at the right moment,” and he knew how to take advantage of his foes’ mistakes. Washington had “an extraordinary ability to lead,” and was crystal clear about his purpose, so he inspired confidence in his soldiers.

As you orient your life to find your special purpose, understand that this goal has nothing to do with the ultimate position you can attain, what job title you can gain or how rich you might become. Some people who are nearly penniless can identify their purpose in life and work with joy to achieve it, while millionaires may flounder feebly and never discover their real aim.

Finding your OBT isn’t easy; you must commit to its active pursuit. Don’t expect to discover your purpose right away. But have confidence in this vital mission. You can find the meaning of your life if you are prepared and determined to change who you are, if that’s what it takes to achieve real purposefulness – and it often does.

### **Purposeful Living**

People who lived in earlier times found it easier to discover their OBTs. During the 19th century, many parents predetermined what their children’s lives would become. Many young people did not have to search through numerous confusing options to discover their OBTs. Their parents had already fully laid out their One Big Things for them, giving their children the gift of focus or “intentionality.” The Thornton Portrait Gallery near Pasadena, California, features portraits of 19th-century leaders who have this potent intention etched into their strong faces. These leaders from all walks of life – including the military, the arts, politics and the social world – knew from their earliest days exactly what their purposes would be, and they focused their efforts fully to living that purpose.

How different things are today, when so many people have a laissez-faire mind-set about their lives. This is particularly true for people who grew up during the go-with-the-flow 1960s. They tend to believe in the power of coincidence. But finding your purpose doesn’t happen by accident. You have to systematically seek it.

### **A Wasted Life**

A student graduated from high school and went to college, without ever planning his life. Though he was excited about getting a higher education, he soon dropped out of college. The young man went to Hollywood to become an actor. That didn’t work out. Without success, he tried to sell real estate. He got married and later divorced. Today, this man is in his 50s and works in a café. Every day, he scans the wanted ads, but he never finds anything attractive or attainable. His go-with-the-flow life has flowed down the drain. He certainly could have benefited from having a purpose. Such a purpose usually accrues to three types of people:

1. **People who have always known their purpose in life** – Think of the author who began writing short stories as a young girl, the pastor who preached to choirs when he was a kid or the child entrepreneur whose lemonade stand had people lined up around the block. These fortunate individuals knew exactly what they would become in life.
2. **People who require an “epiphany” to discover their purpose** – These lucky individuals experience “Eureka!” moment revelations, usually during an activity that immediately gave them deep insight into their life’s purpose.

*"In a digital culture, only the messages that actually connect will make an impact."*

*"The most valuable commodity of the 21st century will be undivided attention."*

*"Discovering your one thing will make you passionate, and people respond to passion."*

*"Few One Big Thing revelations come while sitting on the sofa watching The Simpsons."*

3. **People who discover their purpose only after a long search** – These folks often travel many false roads before they find their true path. Author Phil Cooke once dreamed of becoming a piano player. Later, he wanted to become an astronaut, so he got a US congressman to recommend his application to the US Air Force Academy. He won numerous college sports scholarships. He worked as an amateur magician. He wrote screenplays that no one produced and a novel that no one published. Only after all those failures, did Phil Cooke discover his One Big Thing.

### What Is Your Special Niche?

In the Notting Hill area of London, the Portobello Road street market offers items you can't find anywhere else. These treasures include antiques, rare books and jewelry. One street merchant at the market, fondly known as the "Bread Plate Lady," is a sweet woman in her 80s. She sells only antique bread plates, which are known in the US as cutting boards. She has been at the Portobello Road street market for 47 years. Although the Bread Plate Lady has no formal marketing training, she does have an instinctive understanding of how to stand out from other merchants. Since she specializes in just one item, over the years, she has become the only merchant to visit if you want an antique bread plate. She developed her own special brand, a promotional advantage that directly translates into sales.

Like the Bread Plate Lady, you need your own personal brand. Nothing is more important. Make sure your OBT is unique to you. Become incredibly good at that one thing. In an overly cluttered world, where everyone faces constant demands on their attention, that's the only way to get others to notice you, to remember you and to seek you out.

### Your Personal Brand

According to *Brandweek* magazine, "Brands are the express checkout for people living their lives at ever increasing speed." Your brand should communicate something singular. Every aspect of your life and biography should support your brand. As marketing expert Brad Abare said, "Everything communicates." To build your brand, remember:

- **"Visibility is just as important as ability"** – You may be extremely talented at what you do and have a clear, meaningful OBT, but if people don't know about you or your purpose, you will never achieve your dreams.
- **"You can't brand a lie"** – Be authentic. People will sense when your brand and identity do not align.
- **"In a media-driven culture, being different is everything"** – No one is exactly like you. Celebrate and promote your singularity. Communicate who you are and what makes you special.

### Know Thyself

Your OBT, whatever it is, depends on who you are. Unless you know exactly what makes you tick, you will never be able to discover your purpose in life. Use personality tests to gain insight into your psychological assets and liabilities and your personal strengths and weaknesses. The DiSC Profile classifies people according to four separate aspects of their behavior: dominance (assertiveness and control), influence (socialization issues), steadiness (persistence and patience), and conscientiousness (organizational considerations). The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, which divides test-takers into 16 different personality types, is another useful tool.

*"Life is either a great adventure or it's nothing." (Helen Keller, blind and deaf American author)*

*"A ship is safe in harbor, but that's not what ships are for." (William Sheed, 19th century theologian)*

*"It's not about where you are; it's about where you're going."*

*"Wheresoever you go, go with all your heart." (Confucius)*

Once you discover and pursue your OBT, you will find yourself, or maneuver yourself, into a position of prominence, enabling you to establish "a legacy of influence." The process of gaining self-awareness and acquiring knowledge also helps you build passion about your OBT. This makes you doubly influential, because "people respond to passion."

### Evaluating Your Values

Values, which establish priorities, will help determine your OBT. Think of your values as the "bumpers on the bowling alley of life." Your values are your moral boundaries. They guide your choices, including the decisions that move you toward achieving your OBT. Never compromise your values. If you do, you will sacrifice your true identity.

### The Crucial Questions

Ask three questions to discover your OBT:

1. **"What comes easy to you?"** – People who are great writers but terrible with numbers should not be accountants, bookkeepers or financial advisers. Stick with what you are good at doing.
2. **"What do you love?"** – Work that you love takes no effort. Do everything you can to make such pleasurable labor your future.
3. **"What drives you crazy?"** – Flip the factor that makes you really irritated by becoming passionate about solving it. Maybe your OBT is a problem you can fix for everyone else.

### Achieving Your One Big Thing

OBT goals are never easy to achieve. For example, if your OBT is to become a successful screenwriter, you have to live in Hollywood or New York City. You need to develop a responsible plan for changing your life. If screenwriting is your goal, don't immediately quit your job and move to the east or west coast. Before you jump into something, organize your life so as to give you a legitimate chance at success. Plan what you need to do in an orderly way. You might first determine if you have a gift for screenwriting by, for example, writing a few screenplays.

Make the time to bring your dream to life. Many famous authors developed their craft by getting up early to write before work or writing late at night. Be ready to make similar sacrifices with similar discipline. Your OBT is worth the effort. If achieving it were easy, it might have no value.

No matter what your age, you can discover your OBT. For instance, mystery author Raymond Chandler didn't succeed until he was in his 50s. The beauty of life is that, right up to the end, it always offers one more chance. Regardless of the obstacles in your path, take your chance. Be bold. Discover your OBT and live a life of significant purpose. Your OBT should be your life's most valiant quest. Start your search today.

## About the Author

**Phil Cooke** founded Cooke Pictures, a firm that helps nonprofit organizations tell their stories. He has produced media programming in some 50 countries.