

AN EVOLUTIONARY JOURNEY INSPIRED BY
THE WISDOM OF PIONEERING AFRICAN WOMEN

make

Your Contribution

count

for

you

me

we

Chapter 10
Preview
Copy

SUZANNE F. STEVENS

Advanced acclaim

“Suzanne F. Stevens takes the reader on an inspiring global journey where she shares strategies on how to activate your purpose, harness your mission, and lead at home or abroad a social, economic, and environmental initiative. A message for anyone who wants to impact society consciously and sustainably.”

Aaron Hurst, Co-Founder & CEO of Imperative, Author of the Purpose Economy and Founder of Taproot Foundation

“Unforgettable true stories and adventures await you on these pages as you learn how conscious-contributions™ can change your organization, and ultimately the world.

The wisdom of African women leaders together with Suzanne’s inquisitive, insightful, and meaningful deep dive into how to create a sustainable social impact will motivate you to take action in your own community or business. As an NFP leader you will gain insight into cultivating the opportunities that will lead to the growth of a successful organization.

If you are in the for-profit or not-for-profit world and seeking some inspiration — read this book!”

**Susan Slezak Kawa, BScPT, MA
Executive Director of charitable, NFP organization for 20 years**

“Make your contribution count for you. me. we” had to be written by a woman. It questions the very foundations upon which we build perceptions of “you” and “me” in a safe and inclusive dialogue that also calls for accountability. In Humility and vulnerability, Suzanne opens up to invite in the wisdom that is gained from diversity. Against the prejudice of prevailing culture, by acknowledging the contributions African women are making to solving the world’s common challenges, Suzanne harnesses the power in “you” and “me” to create a courageous new reality of “we,” where all things are possible, and nothing can stop us.”

Modesta Mahiga-Mbughuni, multi-leadership award recipient, named One of Africa’s ‘Movers and Shakers’, Author, Speaker, and Africa Human Capital Expert

“Now more than ever we need to look to cultures who live connected in communities with a spirit of reciprocity, love and caring. Join Suzanne’s storytelling tour to meet inspiring leaders who impart wisdom from the ages. You’ll find insights to help you design how you will make your contribution in this one amazing life we are gifted.”

**Vicki Saunders,
SheEO Founder**

Advanced acclaim

“This book is a fantastic read whether you are leading a not-for-profit, social enterprise, or for-profit company. Those of us in the West tend to have the attitude that we need to “teach” others; this book is refreshing in sharing what we can learn.

The inspiring lessons from Suzanne and the accomplished African leaders will ignite your ambition to do good while doing good work to ensure that your contribution counts. As an entrepreneur, I especially valued the messages surrounding conscious leadership and collaboration – that we need to collaborate with a multitude of stakeholders to compete more effectively while not deviating from our mission. You will find yourself energized with a renewed focus on the positive ripple effect that you can create when you work collaboratively with others.”

Jennifer Spear, MBA

Founder of Clean Slate Strategies, Keynote Speaker and Facilitator

“Suzanne F Stevens demonstrates the rare ability to see Africa through African eyes, feel with an African heart, and candidly express this without losing her personal Canadian and global perspective.

Suzanne chronicles, in a vivid explosion of prose, the diverse beauty and wealth that is Africa and the immeasurable potential lying in wait when the mother continent comes into maturity. The showcase of rich African culture, norms, and practice, through her powerful women role models, however simple, however accomplished, make this **my** book, about **my** Africa, by **my** friend.”

Joanne Mwangi-Yelbert is an award-winning CEO and Founder of top Marketing and PR team, PMS Group Africa Ltd, a Judge and Equity Investor on Kenya’s TV show “The Lion’s Den” as well as a powerful advocate for women’s economic success.

“This powerful book is both timely and engaging for us to embrace and provide opportunities for feminine energy worldwide. Suzanne will take you to unexpected places both geographically and in shifting your contribution perspective. You will discover how to tap into your purpose and exploit it to benefit the community and incorporate a well-aligned mission into your life and career. Her captivating storytelling reminds you about the critical importance of ensuring your legacy lens is holistic, realistic, and consistent so that you will make conscious-contributions™.

This is a must-read book for any organization!”

Cate L, Collins

Powerful Journey Consulting, Leadership Mindset Mastery

Advanced acclaim

“Suzanne has demonstrated that she is courageous, passionate, and determined to provide a fresh look at practical solutions and those that provide them. Through the lens of trailblazing women, she exposes how to provide support to people who are in need. She shares how to help diverse groups of people without making the beneficiaries dependent on a benefactor for their wellbeing. This book is a must-read for women or men alike, who want to uplift the life of someone, or a group, sustainably.”

**Diane Tompson, President,
The International Alliance for Women (TIAW)**

“No matter where you are in the world, this book provides insightful tips and firsthand stories, sharing the importance of social enterprises and the power of working alongside communities to create sustainable change.”

**Roxanne Joyal
CEO at ME to WE**

“Suzanne captures conscious driven leadership, the importance of human connection, and takes us on a masterfully written journey into the success stories of inspiring African women. Through her writing, Suzanne raises the vibration and provides us with references and an opportunity to reflect on how we can contribute consciously to our teams and our communities. Ways we can be the inspiration, make a difference, and lead with a conscious connection.”

**Jen Scholte, Real Estate Broker/ Team Leader, NLP Master Coach and
Past President of the Rotary Club of Collingwood South Georgian Bay**

“Make Your Contribution Count is a unique and inspiring read. We all want to give and make a positive impact with our one life but figuring out just how to do that is not so easy. Through deeply inspiring interviews with female leaders in Africa, Suzanne F. Stevens helps us dig into our purposes and figure out how to put them to work in a useful, meaningful, and sustainable way. She shares our responsibility to each other and our communities, a concept that continues to fade over time in our Western culture. We often don't know how to fulfill that need to contribute, but this book changes that.”

**Shelby Taylor, Founder and CEO of Chickapea, a Certified B Corporation
and Women Owned Enterprise**

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Published by YouMeWe Social Impact Group,
an Ignite Excellence Inc. Company

Collingwood, Ontario, Canada

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for you • me • we
Suzanne F. Stevens

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To the African women who led me to the
mission taken — YouMeWe

To the women who walk alongside me.
And to the man who partnered with me.

Ubuntu – I am because we are

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Introduction

The mission taken

I want to make a difference. Since I was a little girl, all I wanted was to have an impact on the world. I now know I wasn't alone in this burning desire. But, it wasn't until I stopped focusing on what I wanted that I understood the kind of contribution I could make.

On January 20, 2007, 18 Canadian women, and a couple of young adults, arrived in Kenya. A friend, Ruth Douglas, gathered a group of leaders and entrepreneurs to embark on an adventure. Ruth's sister, Lois Shaw, a missionary and marketer for Africa International University (AIU), had designed our experience after living in Kenya herself for 25 years. Our draw to embark on this customized crusade was a little adventure and to connect with the local Kenyan women and children. We wanted to learn about the culture, provide helping hands, and share insights.

On our first day in Kenya, we attended a welcome ceremony with our host, Lois Shaw, the late Dr. Douglas Carew, the Chairman of AIU, along with a dozen wives of Ph.D. students. We all gathered in the chapel.

The wives were in heels, traditional dress, not a hair out of place. We were in our relaxed Western clothing looking like we'd just spent a month on safari.

They hugged us. We shook their hands. They sang. We listened. They danced. We watched. It wasn't until they grabbed our hands to participate in a traditional dance that the celebration began. This day was the first of many days I would follow the lead of African women.

During Dr. Carew's welcome remarks, he shared what he believed to be the most significant issue in Africa.

The biggest problem in Africa today is not AIDS, poverty, disease, education, or urbanization; the biggest problem is leadership. When moral leaders with integrity and justice arise, then Africa's problems will be solved.¹

A message like this can force us to pause and reflect on which direction we will take. Dr. Carew's welcoming words propelled me down a new path. At the time, I did not know how far I would travel or how profound the journey would be.

Within a month after receiving this reflective message, I was training a professor, Ph.D. students, and ambitious women on how to fundraise and communicate as leaders. A few months later, I founded the Ignite Excellence Foundation Fund (renamed in 2016 to YouMeWe Foundation Fund) to raise funds to provide university scholarships for prospective women leaders in Africa. The goal of the investment was to establish more leaders with integrity while addressing injustices suffered by women and children. Higher education would build a bridge to more healthy families and more productive communities.

At the time of writing this book, we have provided university scholarships to 27 women in Kenya, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and South Africa, making a small stride to crossing a vast chasm to establish more women leaders.

After a couple of trips to Kenya, I returned to my influential communication leadership and sales training organization, Ignite Excellence Inc., back in Toronto. I couldn't kick a nagging feeling. By offering free courses at AIU, was I taking a Kenyan's job? Was there an expert in influential communications that could have been paid to provide training services? If I return, what mission would have the desired impact?

A COUPLE OF YEARS later, I became unsettled. Leading a team of consultants and training corporations whose primary focus was to win business and optimize profits was not filling my soul. I longed to immerse myself into an experience that was more fulfilling than seeking the almighty dollar and more significant than my professional achievements.

On March 17, a day after my 42nd birthday, I was experiencing midlife madness. As I sat on my couch looking around, all I could see was stuff — you know, the things you put on your checklist as signs of success. For me that stuff included a convertible, a two-story loft, paintings, a rooftop hot tub with a view of the city and the water, ... (blah, blah, blah).

Throughout my appraisal of my material accomplishments, questions were blaring in my head: “What contribution am I making? What impact am I creating?” I started to cry. Mike, my dear husband, entered the room. He tried to comfort me. I bet he was trying to figure out what he hadn’t done for my birthday.

Through the tears, I asked: “Honey, is this it?”

“Is what it?”

“Is this all the impact we will ever make?”

“What do you propose?”

I anxiously rambled, “I feel it’s time to do something more meaningful. Let’s take one or two years and go back to Africa. We could create a platform for African women with integrity where they could share their insight to help educate future African women leaders.

“What do you think?”

Mike hesitated, and then smiled.

“You know, you will have to take the lead, but I will follow.”

It took time for us to get organized. My husband left his leadership position in sports facility management, and I reorganized my training team. Then we sold almost everything.

In March 2011, we embarked on a new mission: to celebrate, cultivate, and inspire future women leaders in developing countries.

This self-funded adventure took us through 14 African countries. We interviewed 70 pioneering women, representing 17 countries. The goal: to build a bridge between young African women seeking to learn, lead, and succeed in life, business, and community, and to provide easy access to accomplished African women's inspiration and wisdom.

WisdomExchangeTv.com a free website which houses interviews with pioneering African women leaders, was constructed to cross the chasm.

AFTER EACH INTERVIEW I was awed and inspired. Each of these pioneers demonstrated perseverance, tenacity, belief, and unwavering dedication to uplift the lives of others through their contributions to their community, country, and continent. Most came from humble beginnings, and yet they had an impressive ability to address human rights violations or create sustainable opportunities for fellow citizens, all while creating a positive ripple effect. Their aspirations took courage, character, and a choice to serve society. It seemed they all embodied the Mahatma Gandhi creed: *Be the change you wish to see in the world.*

Humbled by the social, economic, and environmental impact of all these leaders, I questioned what had taken me so long to contribute actively to society. All I came up with is that in the West, it's often later in life that we talk about leaving a legacy. African women live their legacy; it is how they live their life. They are on the verge of transforming African societies. Each day they *make their contribution count.*

Here, we tend to think we need to *save* Africans. We need to *teach* them. As we embark on this journey, let's be open to learn from the wisdom of African women pioneers who are conscious-contributors. Let them be our teachers. See how they have contributed to uplifting society in the African context. We can learn how to participate or consciously lead in a worthy cause, not-for-profit or social enterprise at home or abroad.

BEFORE YOUMEWE BECAME OUR ethos, it was a website where Mike and I sporadically shared the experiences of our 20-month journey through Africa. With each interaction, our perspective and beliefs were transformed. Our focus on *me* evolved. *You* and *we* captured our curiosity and took us on a unique adventure, which developed the evolved intention of YouMeWe, from a journal of our journey to a social enterprise and movement.

As a social enterprise, YouMeWe's mandate is to ignite sustainable conscious-contributions™ through what we believe is a receptive entry point to transform society — feminine energy. We aspire to mobilize feminine energy, often found in women-led organizations. Speaking engagements, events, training programs, blogs and vlogs, moderating, facilitating, and curating the best social business practices brought to the YouMeWe community: Women leaders driving social impact. YouMeWe will enhance how we consciously contribute consistently and sustainably.

Through the YouMeWe Movement, we hope to inspire citizens to shift their focus from *me* to *we* and to understand the importance of you in achieving that goal. Consider not only the *helper's high* that satisfies our ego, but also the impact of our generosity. Let us not only concern ourselves with what directly impacts us, but take responsibility for our global community; rely not on what others should do, but what we can do; move away from communicating problems, and move toward sharing solutions; stop amplifying what is wrong with the world, and start celebrating what is right.

The mission of YouMeWe Social Impact Group is to raise consciousness and inspire individuals and organizations to lead or participate in contributions that positively impact their community or beyond. This aspiration will promote more conscious, caring, kinder, and inclusive humanity while making our communities flourish — in effect, *making your contribution count for you, me, and we*.

Context to optimize your reading experience

The YouMeWe ethos is the foundation of the book and divides it naturally into three parts.

Part 1: *you* — make your contribution count — *consciously*

You refers to understanding the needs of the individual or group you would like to contribute to while being conscious of the more significant implications of fulfilling that group's needs.

Part 2: *me* — make your contribution count — *maximize your meaning*

Me refers to the self being a global citizen. We all have a responsibility to contribute to uplift the life of another. We will maximize our meaning when we channel our unique gifts, life purpose, mission, and personal values in the service of others.

Part 3: *we* — make your contribution count — *sustainably*

We is the reality that momentum is not achieved alone. To consistently contribute to an initiative, we need to collaborate with value-aligned people and organizations. We must employ sustainable solutions along with mission and conscious leadership techniques. By harnessing our feminine energy, we will generate a positive ripple effect of our consistent conscious-contributions™.

Throughout this book are stories, examples, considerations, tools, and reflective questions to inspire you to consciously contribute to fill a gap in society, be it social, economic, or environmental; be it in your company, community, country, or beyond.

As a volunteer, philanthropist, small-business owner, entrepreneur, or leader of a not-for-profit or profitable business, you will gain insight and strategies on how to live your most meaningful life and how to lead others to live theirs.

Travel this reading journey with your book club, social club, a group of colleagues, or friends. The questions at the end of each chapter will

spark conversation and connect you at a deeper level: the best part, the opportunity to collaborate on a meaningful project or cause. While reading, consider how to make your contribution count collectively by forming a Conscious-Contribution Circle™.

Visit the YouMeWe.ca book community to access Conscious-Contribution Circle™ ideas. Share your initiatives at <https://youmewe.ca/your-contribution-counts/>, and we will celebrate your contribution by investing in a woman's education or business, helping her move from poverty to prosperity.

MANY OF THE STORIES throughout this book are in the African context; however, they address several of the world's shared challenges. Some pioneers transformed policy to advocate for equal rights of women. Others have a voice in the political future of their countries and continent. Several pioneers escalated issues that affect women's health and well-being. Many pioneered social enterprises that lifted thousands of women and their families out of poverty. Courageously, others merged commerce and collaboration to create productivity and peace. All gave hope to those who had little.

Since our interviews, some African pioneers have moved on to new organizations, countries, or careers. When I reference a pioneering woman, it will be in the context of what position she held, where she was living, and the mindset she had when interviewed. Although their situations may have changed, their insights remain very relevant today.

We all need to be more aware of who, how, and when to contribute. By sharing pioneering African women's wisdom, you will have a glimpse into their culture, their courage, and their conscious-contributions while provoking contribution ideas in yourself.

Many of the interviewees mention cultural and national circumstances; such references are from their perspectives, and others are from my own observation and research.

The guidance shared is based on my 20 years of entrepreneurial and leadership experience, years in training and development, the extensive

insights from the interviews coupled with research on the evolution of contributing, volunteering, conscious businesses, leadership, and collaboration. The strategies are presented to help equip you with how to *make your contributions count* while creating a sustainable initiative wherever you are on the journey of living your most meaningful life.

In immersing myself in this mission, I have read, listened, observed, and researched. Sometimes it is difficult to know where someone else's ideas end and mine begin. To the best of my ability, I have credited the source that inspired an idea.

Throughout the book, I will share experiences of Mike's and my journey. The stories are from my perspective, and when others were present, they may have a different view of how events unfolded. The intention is to represent the situation to the best of my recollection.

At the end of the book, you will find a link to each of the interviews on WisdomExchangeTv.com. Hear about interviewees' journeys in their words. You can gain further insight into what makes these women unique and inspiring while learning from their *words of wisdom*. In the glossary, you will find the terms I use throughout the book. If you are newer to the world of causes, volunteerism, not-for-profits (being defined as incorporating NGOs, non-profits, charities, and foundations), social enterprises, or conscious social impact, we can stay together on this journey.

There are additional resources to assist you in making your contribution count. You can find them at YouMeWe.ca in the Book Community. With this book you have free access. Here is your community code: **MyContributionCounts**.

WISDOMEXCHANGETV.COM HAS EVOLVED TO include international interviews with conscious-contributors who have a social impact on our communities and beyond. Subscribe to stay abreast of who is transforming our world, many of whom are small business owners. Learn how they are moving the social, economic, and environmental agendas forward to address the United Nations

Sustainable Development Goals. Conscious-contributors will guide you to optimize your impact.

Lastly, the book is targeted to and written about women but can be relevant to anyone. I refer to feminine energy often because I believe we all have feminine energy. I believe it is the power we need to access if we are to experience a profound social or environmental transformation.

If you are looking to maximize your meaning or seeking how your organization can have a social impact sustainably, grab your backpack and join Mike and me on this adventure, on what I hope will be a compass to your *mission taken*.

Chapter 10

Discover your purpose



Words of Wisdom

Lead your best life. Whatever your calling is, don't make any apologies for it. Do what you feel in your heart of hearts.

Joanne Mwangi, CEO, PMS Group, Nairobi, Kenya
Pioneer: founder of the Federation of Women Entrepreneur Associations

On my first trip to Kenya, the 18 women I traveled with had multiple suitcases filled with teddy bears, clothes, toiletries, sewing materials, and art and medical supplies. I arrived in Kenya with my clothes, hiking boots, and good intentions.

In preparation for our Kenya experience, the well-intended women discussed what they could contribute to Kenyan society. Not knowing what I had to offer that Kenyans would want, I surrendered to the experience. I would let Kenyans inform me if I have a skill that could serve its citizens.

One evening, one of my travel companions and I were invited to dinner at the home of Samuel, a student pursuing his master's degree in divinity at Africa International University.

I was curious. "What type of work do you hope to do?"

Samuel proudly responded, "I want to continue with the work I'm doing now. I started the Africa Frontier Initiative, a charitable organization that will transform the lives of pygmies in the Congo and other communities in the region. Pygmies lived in the deep forest between Rwanda and the Congo and at the end of the 1994 genocide,

many of the militia backed by the Hutu ethnic group that provoked the genocide, ran to the forest to escape. The militants murdered and then cannibalized the pygmies for medicinal purposes.”

I was horrified but completely enthralled. Not only had I not heard the word pygmy in years, I had thought it was a derogatory term. I also couldn't believe that these small, non-violent people were being brutally killed.

“For the pygmies to survive we need to get them out of the forest and assist them in establishing a new way of life.” Samuel continued.

“How are you going to help?”

“We are teaching the pygmies how to farm.”

“Do you know how to farm?”

“I don't know how to farm,” he said.

In that instant, I couldn't help hearing the echoes of many Africans' belief that Westerners often arrive in their countries with bravado, teaching what they don't know, and trying to fix what they don't understand. Samuel, a Kenyan, was attempting to assist pygmies in the Congo by teaching a topic about which he had little knowledge.

He continued, “But some of the people I work with do. We will teach the pygmies to farm so they can survive outside the forest.”

“And your role?”

“To raise money for the seedlings and the travel to get there. It takes days to travel by bus to get to this remote region in the Congo.”

Watching my travel companion fidget, I leaned in. “So, Samuel, have you ever fundraised?”

“Would you be interested in training in how to fundraise?”

His answer was a resounding “Yes.”

Now, a Kenyan had informed me of a skill I had that would be of service.

I had planned to stay for a full two months, originally to sightsee, but now I had a purpose — to provide people who discovered their purpose the skills to amplify their message.

Within the month, I was conducting training programs on fundraising and persuasive presentation skills, and yes, Samuel was a participant. He went on to expose the struggles of the pygmies in the Congo, Rwanda, and Kenya. He has written a book, *The Pygmy World*, and he is the founder and executive director of Pipes International. The NGO's focus is on serving indigenous pygmies, vulnerable children, and marginalized groups to help provide opportunities and hope through education, health awareness, resettlement, small businesses development, food security, missions, and outreach programs.⁵³

Samuel knew his purpose was to assist the vulnerable; his mission was to help the pygmies thrive; he just needed further skills to realize his vision for both.

Living my purpose started years ago by training people to communicate their company's message influentially. Now my intention developed. I was to train Kenyans to persuasively communicate their mission to garner support — a shift in a purpose being lived.

In reflecting on each milestone that offered clarity to my purpose and evaluated socially conscious leaders, an interconnected framework emerged on how to maximize meaning: B.E.L.I.E.V.E.

B – Being authentic: Who is your authentic self?

When making decisions to shape a meaningful contribution to your profession, community, or beyond, it serves to act in line with one's authentic self. If you execute decisions from this perspective, you will minimize regrets and maximize the feeling of contentment, knowing it is consistent with your authentic being.

Jane Wathome, founder of Beacon of Hope, Kenya, suggests, "Visit with yourself." Self-reflect, create a list. Acknowledge your skills,

talents, wisdom, strengths, fears, weaknesses, and perceived obstacles. Most importantly, identify who you are at your core — your unique, uplifting characteristics that yearn to be expressed.

Doo Aphane, a renowned women's activist from eSwatini, states that responsibility emanates from *me*:

I believe that *I count*. No matter what came before me. When I ask God to help, I have to be there to ask the question. The individual counts.

I / me is the strength, motivation, inspiration, and the engine to make our purpose emerge.

Be present with yourself by finding the silence between your words and thoughts. Focusing on the now perpetuates a calm that will expose your authentic being; a benefit often realized through the practice of quiet meditation or meditative movement, such as walking amongst trees or yoga. Another approach to exude your natural essence is to uplift the life of another. From here, your purpose may emerge.

E – Empathy and compassion: To whom do you feel connected?

Empathy means you have an understanding or share feelings of another. It can manifest because of an intense life experience, such as a friend's family member being diagnosed with a disease that your family member suffered. Often people are connected to a cause because someone they know has been impacted by it.

Although empathy can be a valued trait, it can also appear as unempathetic. In our attempt to comfort another, we share similar experiences and feelings. Sometimes the focus shifts to us, leading to being consoled rather than us doing the consoling! To be effective, when being empathetic, we need to ensure the interaction is about them, not us.

However, you don't need to share similar circumstances or feelings towards another to be compassionate.

Consider who or what you are connected to, a particular group of people, animals, architecture, or the environment. For some reason, perhaps unknown to you, that specific group or issue pulls at your heartstrings. The feeling is unmotivated by a circumstance; it just is. I call this your *compassion-connection* — profound concern or care. Its interest is not passive, but active. You don't only feel for another or a situation; you're prepared to do something about it.

Knowing who you are compassionate towards, regardless of personal circumstances, will drive the realization of your purpose because it comes from your authentic being.

Your compassion-connection chooses you. Reflecting on who or what you are compassionate towards, will likely influence your career choice, volunteer efforts, and charitable giving while filling your mind and heart, en route to maximize your meaning.

L – Love and joy: What motivates you?

What you love motivates you to act. You love different things to different degrees. Some people love competition, camaraderie, the outdoors, being accepted, being challenged, being inspired, inspiring ourselves, money (usually it is what money can buy that motivates us rather than money itself) — the list is vast. The combinations of what drive us are diverse.

Motivations are rational, emotional, social, and cultural. Regardless of what or who motivates you, at the core, people want to love, to be loved, and to have joy in their lives.

Emotions have a high degree of influence on your decisions. When deciding on where to contribute, you tap into those emotional motivators. Knowing what motivates you will help identify what you love, and what you love will help motivate you.

As a lover of community participation, Yetnebersh Nigussie, an Ethiopian, focused on her abilities, not her disabilities. Blind at five years old, she was compelled to get involved in school, clubs, and

councils as a way to prove herself. She wasn't going to be a victim, and her love for participation propelled her to create a school to empower others who had a similar fate.

As a baby when you are born into a family, you need to be taken care of. You need to be provided with things. I needed to show my family and the community that I am a person that can also contribute, not only consume contributions from other people. I also need to contribute to the world.

What I am proving for others is that I can do things by myself. I can do things, not as a blind person, not as a young person, but just as a person.

When exploring your purpose and evaluating what you love, also consider pursuing what brings you joy. Doing what you enjoy can help you discover your strengths, leading you to what motivates you.

Norah Odwesso transitioned into a role in public affairs and communications at Coca-Cola, Central East and West Africa, from a career in accounting. She was a good accountant, but she didn't enjoy it. She started seeking new opportunities within the organization to connect with her colleagues and communities. By pursuing a career in communications, Norah now loves her job because she has the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others. By taking the leap, Norah believes "I am living right in the middle of my purpose — that is a success."

Similar to Norah, when deciding where I wanted to participate during my first trip to Kenya, I struggled between my strengths of business development and what I thought I would enjoy. My option was to work with women entrepreneurs or paint a school alongside teenage girls. Although both options would provide unique insight, I had an opportunity to gain access to a place that tourists often don't go. Speaking to Kenyan teenage girls would offer me a perspective I may never otherwise experience. The road taken proved to be transformational.

The insight gained from these teenagers was another motivator for me to establish the YouMeWe Foundation and to pioneer WisdomExchangeTv, to provide teenagers with a platform to learn

from leaders within their culture. Conducting interviews connected me to pioneering women and allowed me to learn about their leadership and social impact, all of which I love.

Your joy will bring others joy. Pursuing what you enjoy can lead you to what you love.

I – Inner strengths: What is your strength thread?

You were born with natural strengths. Take the time to identify and build on them. When evaluating inner strengths, you will often see a thread that connects them. I refer to this as your *strength thread*.

Meaza Ashenafi found herself always wanting to protect those who could not defend themselves. At a young age, she was a guardian of her siblings and later an advocate for the rights of domestic workers. Her *strength thread* led her to become a women’s rights lawyer and activist in Ethiopia, where she has a national platform. Meaza shares, “I think we need to reflect continuously on our internal strengths and never settle. We need to pick up on those strengths, push ourselves.”

As one of the first female pilots, and commander of the first all-female Boeing crew in South Africa, Jane Trembath self-reflects on her journey to discover her inner strengths. In attempting to find her place in a male-dominated world as a commercial pilot, she continued to try to gain acceptance. It was through extensive journal writing and asking herself: “Why did I react and how could I be better next time?” that provided insight into her authentic self. The journal writing allowed her to vent her emotions so she could ignore them and better evaluate the behavior and reveal her strengths.

I had felt inadequate because I believed that I had these personality traits that got me into trouble. When I realized those perceived weaknesses are actually strengths when I use them in the right way, I was able to be the best version of who I was. We have to appreciate our uniqueness because we are built the way we are to fulfill our unique niche on earth.

The director of African Programs at Computer Aid Africa, Gladys Muhunyo, describes how to use your inner strengths best:

It is all about what you have, not what you don't have. Begin with what you have, and you will be able to achieve your objective. Know your skills and talents, and your business [and you] will grow.

Be aware of your weaknesses but put effort into developing your strengths. Too much emphasis on improving deficiencies will leave you feeling exhausted and discouraged.

If, however, a weakness is a skill that you require to achieve your purpose, well dig in. Overcome it.

E – Environment: What environment brings out your best?

I attended a Big Brothers Big Sisters fundraising event. This international charity works with young people by providing voluntary mentors. During the dinner, one of the speakers explained the various roles someone can play to contribute to youth. She suggested you could be a donor, sit on the board, be a big brother or sister, or participate in fundraising. Each position is distinct, and you will want to consider where you are most motivated, what you enjoy, and where you can utilize your strengths.

If you like to brainstorm ideas, you may choose to be on a board of directors to have a voice in the strategy of the organization. You may prefer to work solo and find yourself drawn to fundraising where you can get things done on your terms. Perhaps you like to experience your impact firsthand and therefore want to be involved at the grassroots level. In this case, providing mentorship to youth could be the most fulfilling.

Your purpose may connect you with a cause or initiative, but you may not know how to serve it. There are many roles available, be it at your child's school, on her sports teams, with a charity, or at the boardroom table. Assess which environment brings out your best, a discovery that will propel your impact.

The environment best for you may be closing a social gap by establishing a not-for-profit. Lydia Muso, the oldest child of seven, was

drawn to taking care of others. She followed her inner strengths and enjoyment of care to become a nurse in Sudan, where she saw many neglected children.

Returning home, Lydia researched the state of child neglect in Lesotho. She found there were no social programs available for vulnerable children and decided to be part of the solution. After being educated in counseling and social work, she started The Lesotho Child Counseling Unit. She now lobbies for policy change to protect children's rights. Although Lydia takes on many roles, the one that gives her the most fulfillment is one where she can connect with the children. She opened her home to abused children giving them a temporary place to feel safe while preparing them mentally and emotionally to go back into the world. Lydia excels in an environment where children are safe and happy under her full-time care.

V – Values: How do your values influence your purpose?

The most influential element of deciding how you will contribute to society, will be dictated by your values. Values are your moral compass, guiding you to make the smallest or the most life-altering decisions.

Values are composed of your ethical standards, religious beliefs, and personal values. Two people can hold the same ethical standards and religious beliefs and yet have very different personal values. You choose your ethical standards and religious beliefs; your personal values choose you.

Many of your values are so deeply submerged in your authentic self that they unconsciously impact the way you live. Your values are often not apparent, and it is not until you are in a moment experiencing inner tension that you realize authentic being is at risk. It causes you to make a choice that will be in line with your core values, which will calm your agitated state. Through this tension, your unconscious values become conscious. You will identify and experience your core values as they guide you throughout your life. Those values will influence your purpose, and therefore your conscious-contributions.

Once you are aware of core personal values, you can alter them to emulate your evolving purpose. Your authentic self is reflected in the intensity of each of your values lived. For example, you may value transparency and privacy. When presented with a situation where being forthcoming may be perceived as interfering in someone's personal life, you will need to decide which value to honor.

While in Kenya, I spent many hours with missionary friends Lois and Mark Shaw, discussing topics such as divinity, university life, and the Kenyan culture. Of all the conversations we had, the one that was most enlightening was about values.

Sitting over dinner, they advised me of the importance of a husband and wife creating family values and a collective life mission. Their commitment to their marital values and mission helped them stay connected over 25 years while they continuously relocated between Kenya and Virginia. When making a decision, they let their family values and mission guide them.

I live, teach and breath values in my work, but it was Lois and Mark's suggestion that prompted Mike and me to discuss what we value in our marriage. We then created a collective mission. Eventually, that conversation would change our course. When we were considering whether to sell our home and most of its contents to go to Africa to conduct interviews, the values and the mission we wrote together guided the decision.

Becoming fully aware of the values that you exercise consciously or subconsciously will guide your actions and help define your purpose. Visit YouMeWe.ca book community to consider your top 10 core values.

Consider adopting the YouMeWe's guiding values of: consistency, consciousness, contribution, care, collaboration, courage, empowerment, and inclusivity.

E – Empower: How can your passion empower you?

Empower your purpose with focused passion. Passion emanates from a combination of being, empathy and compassion, love and joy, inner strengths, environment, and values.

Passion comes from deep inside. It is an intense desire and enthusiasm, and it will empower your purpose. It will energize you to do what others think can't be done. It helps you stay the course when obstacles seem insurmountable. It will carve through any shame people attempt to bestow on you. It gives you the strength to endure when the mountain is high, and the criticism is constant. It will make you feel rich, even if you are poor. It will make you feel supported, even if you are alone. It is the passion for your purpose that will imbue you with courage.

When your purpose is to lobby for the voiceless, to protect against abuse, to raise the suppressed, your passion will inspire you to persevere.

A word of caution, passion can be the fuel to keep you going, but it can also empty your tank and leave you stranded. Exhaustion happens when you give too much of yourself at the expense of rational discourse and self-care.

Consider authentic being and your values to ensure your passion stays directed for good.

B.E.L.I.E.V.E a framework to discover your purpose

To maximize your meaning, your purpose needs to be in service of others. It is the synergy created by the interaction of your authentic being, who you are compassionate towards, what you love, your inner strengths, the environment in which you like to contribute, the values you hold, and the passion that empowers you.

Contributing in line with your purpose in a small way, or with complete devotion, is dependent on the time, resources, and your motivation. To have a social or environmental impact, you may find

the need to streamline your life, to reduce distractions to accelerate meaning.

Perhaps you want to incorporate your social or environmental contribution into a model where you can also make a living fusing an equilibrium of profit and purpose.

THREE EVENTS INSPIRED MY journey to establish the YouMeWe Foundation Fund. The first was the late Dr. Carew's message that the biggest problem in Africa is leadership. Second was the realization fundraising could assist in preventing the pygmies' demise. And third, when I painted the school alongside teenage girls, they shared their need for mentors.

While providing fundraising and persuasive presentation training, I started to question if a Kenyan could provide this skill development. Free training is challenging to compete with, so, whose job was I taking? The question led to creating WisdomExchangeTv.com. My *strength thread* prevailed — to question, listen, isolate a gap, explore solutions, and to implement a course of action.

The interviews exposed the one characteristic that bonded all the women pioneers — their practice of conscious-contribution. This realization is infused into the YouMeWe ethos and reflected in the social enterprise and movement.

Make your contribution count

Explore your *why* and B.E.L.I.E.V.E. It will guide you to living your most meaningful life. Take one conscious step at a time and your purpose will unfold the way your higher power intended so you can *make your contribution count*.

Reflect on how to make your conscious-contributions™

1. How would you describe your authentic self?
2. Who or what do you feel the most compassion toward? Why is that?
3. What motivates you? How would you prioritize those motivators?
4. What is your strength-thread?
5. What environment brings out your best?

You've just finished the preview.

To learn more or purchase the book visit

<https://youmewe.ca/make-your-contribution-count-book/>

or to hire Suzanne F. Stevens for a speaking
engagement

contact us: we@YouMeWe.ca

Create a Social Impact

in your community or beyond

You yearn to make a difference in others' lives. You feel the call to throw your wisdom, energy, and time into a cause, social enterprise, or not-for-profit. You want to give.

Have you considered your giving may be hurting, not helping?

In the West, we want to fix things, and the tools to repair social, economic, and environmental issues are often unconsciously selected by the ego, rather than by looking consciously at benefiting the whole. The strategies to correct the injustices of our time are lived by leaders who make their contribution count — every day.

make your contribution count imports pioneering African women's guidance to navigate how the West can integrate African cultural ethos, where *we* takes precedence over *me*. Pioneers who have endured many unimaginable circumstances harness their feminine energy to transform how to lead, contribute, consume, and structure organizations to have a social impact in their communities and beyond — sustainably.

Be transported through 17 African countries and 70 interviews along with author, Suzanne F. Stevens and her husband, Michael K. Gingerich as they backpack through a timely social evolution. Through real-life adventures, international research findings, practical strategies, and reflective questions, the author will take you on a journey where:

- Your contribution awareness will be heightened locally and abroad
- You will explore strategies on how to tap into your purpose to maximize your meaning
- You will discover tools to lead conscious-contributions™ — sustainably

Collaboratively we can address the social, economic, and environmental issues of our time—we all have a role to play.

“Suzanne takes the reader on an inspiring global journey where she shares strategies on how to activate your purpose, harness your mission, and lead at home or abroad a social, economic, and environmental initiative. A message for anyone who wants to impact society consciously and sustainably.” **Aaron Hurst, Author of the Purpose Economy**



Suzanne F. Stevens,

conscious-contribution™ cultivator and amplifier of social contributors' voices. As the founder of YouMeWe Social Impact Group, Suzanne ignites leaders and entrepreneurs to make their contributions count. As a lover of travel and adventure, her most profound journey lies on these pages.

Join the mission at YouMeWe.ca

Five percent of book sales are invested in higher education for women in Africa.

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