

Designing Your Purposeful Third Act

About Purposeful Third Act (P3A)

Purposeful Third Act is a Canada-first movement helping accomplished leaders use their wisdom, experience, relationships, and resources to make a meaningful contribution after full-time work. Learn more: zabeenhirji.com/purposeful-third-act

The P3A PLANNING FRAMEWORK

A simple framework to design your third act with intentionality.

INWARD: Reflect on your purpose, strengths, interests, and what you want this stage of life to include.

OUTWARD: Identify your areas of focus and learn about how best to help.

FORWARD: Bring your purpose to life through building a plan.

1 WHERE YOU ARE NOW

As you enter your third act, what would you like more of in your life and what would you like less of?

Moving out of full-time leadership can change more than your work. It can affect how you spend your time, where you find connection, and how you see yourself. What do you want in this stage of life? Consider factors such as relationships, intensity/ pace, responsibilities, contribution, friendships, health and the kinds of activities that give you joy and energy versus drain it.

2 YOUR PURPOSE

Your purpose is your “why”, the deeper cause or belief that drives you and the contribution you want to make. Purpose gives you a way to choose among many worthwhile opportunities. Many people assume they need to invent a new purpose for this stage of life but in reality, purpose is often easier to recognize than invent. To find it, look back. *What work has mattered most to you? What problems or people have you consistently been drawn towards? What have others relied on you to do?* The themes that repeat may point to your purpose.

My Why

Sentence starters: “I want to...” or “I want my life to be about serving.....”, “My purpose is...”

3 YOUR CAREER CAPITAL

Career capital is the practical set of assets and skills you've built over your lifetime and can now choose to use in service of your purpose. Understanding this helps you move from a general sense of "I have a lot to offer" to a more concrete understanding of what you bring. Mark the ones you have, then identify those you most want to keep using.

EXPERTISE & LEADERSHIP ● Policy, regulatory, or program expertise ● Government operations and service delivery ● Machinery-of-government knowledge ● Crisis, transformation, or change leadership ● Judgment gained from leading through complexity ● Governance, oversight, or fiduciary experience ● Intergovernmental or international experience OTHER ● _____ ● _____	RELATIONSHIPS & INFLUENCE ● Relationships across sectors and communities ● Convening and bringing the right people together ● Communications, public speaking, or advocacy ● Reputation, credibility, or public trust within a field PEOPLE, PERSPECTIVE & RESOURCES ● Mentoring, coaching, or talent development ● Indigenous relations or community-based knowledge ● Lived experience / close knowledge of an issue, population, or challenge ● Financial resources
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Of the items you've checked above, which would you most like to use in your third act?

4 WAYS OF CONTRIBUTING

There are many ways to contribute in a P3A. Review the options below and mark those that appeal to you.

- **Board governance:** Serving as a director with fiduciary responsibility and strategic oversight.
- **Advisory:** Offering expertise and judgment without the formal responsibility of a board seat.
- **Building:** Helping create, launch, or lead an organization, initiative, campaign, or collaborative project.
- **Hands-on contribution:** Providing direct support via volunteering, pro bono work, or scoped projects.
- **Mentoring and coaching:** Supporting leaders and changemakers through developmental relationships.
- **Knowledge-sharing:** Sharing expertise through teaching, workshops, or guest lectures.
- **Convening:** Bringing people together to learn, collaborate, or act.
- **Connector or catalyst:** Making introductions and unlocking useful people, partnerships, or resources.
- **Public voice:** Using writing, speaking, media, or advocacy to influence ideas, policy, or systems.
- **Financial contributions:** Using donations, philanthropy, impact investing, or catalytic capital for change.
- **Learning and exploration:** Building knowledge of an issue or sector before deciding how to contribute.

Looking at the list above, which 2 to 3 ways of contributing would you like to prioritize in your third act?

Many people combine several ways of contributing in their P3As. Choose the ones that give you energy and that fit the lifestyle you are building.

5 FOCUS AREAS

Focus areas make your purpose more specific by identifying the issues, communities, or kinds of change you want to support. Mark the areas that interest you below.

ISSUES	COMMUNITIES	KINDS OF CHANGE
PEOPLE & WELLBEING ● Mental health and wellbeing ● Health, aging, and caregiving ● Poverty and income / food security ● Housing and homelessness	● Children and youth ● Older adults ● Workers in transition ● Indigenous communities ● Newcomers and refugees ● People with disabilities ● Low-income communities ● Rural or remote communities ● Local neighbourhoods ● Women and girls ● Racialized communities ● Entrepreneurs/ innovators ● Future generations ● Ecosystems/ natural places ● OTHER _____	NEEDS ● Immediate relief from suffering, risk, or instability ● Greater dignity or wellbeing ● Environmental harms reduced ● Nature, biodiversity, water, or animals protected/restored
OPPORTUNITY & INCLUSION ● Education and lifelong learning ● Workforce, skills, and economic mobility ● Youth development ● Immigration, newcomers, refugees ● Disability, accessibility, and inclusion ● Reconciliation and Indigenous futures		OPPORTUNITY & CAPACITY ● Access to opportunity ● Stronger capabilities / leadership ● More connected communities ● More resources reaching overlooked needs
SOCIETY & INSTITUTIONS ● Civic trust and democratic institutions ● Arts, culture, heritage, and storytelling ● Responsible tech and digital inclusion		SYSTEMS ● More effective institutions ● Better governance ● Policy or systems change
PLANET & GLOBAL ● Climate, energy, and the environment ● International development / health ● OTHER _____		POSSIBILITY ● Shifts in public understanding ● Innovation and new models ● OTHER _____

From the list above, choose one to two focus areas for greater exploration.

Look across all three lists and see which ideas naturally fit together. As you review, ask yourself: Which combinations feel most meaningful or motivating? Which draw on your strengths, experience and career capital? Which seem realistic given your energy and stage of life?

Note: Understand the field before you decide how to contribute

Social and environmental issues are often more complex than they first appear, and organizations may need something different from what an outsider assumes. If you are interested in an issue or sector, spend some time getting to know it before deciding where you can help. Learn who is already doing the work, what organizations and communities say they need, and where there may be gaps.

A good place to start is by reading a few trusted sources, attending an event or site visit, and talking with practitioners, community leaders, and people with lived experience. Ask what is working, what is getting in the way, and what kind of support would be useful.

6 YOUR DRAFT P3A PLAN

Bring your thinking together in a preliminary P3A plan. This is a first draft and will evolve as you learn and experiment.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

My "Why"

FOCUS AREA(S)

The issues, communities, and outcomes I want to focus on.

MY WAYS OF CONTRIBUTING

How I want to put my purpose into action.

TIME & BOUNDARIES

The pace, locations, types of work, and the kinds of people or organizations I want to work with.

NEXT STEPS

Actions I will undertake within the next 12 months to move me forward.

Example Preliminary P3A Plan

- **Purpose:** *To help build stronger institutions in service of more inclusive communities.*
- **Focus area(s):** *Governance and organizational effectiveness in the social sector - particularly newcomer integration. Also potentially civic participation and democratic infrastructure.*
- **Ways of contributing:** *One seat on a mid-sized social service org; mentoring up to two EDs navigating leadership transitions; \$10K/year in relational giving to three organizations, each; One annual dinner connecting nonprofit leaders in adjacent fields; Continued learning about civic infrastructure.*
- **Fit with life:** *About one day/week, primarily local with limited travel, ideally in-person when possible*
- **Next steps (before end of year):** *Meet two sector leaders, explore board opportunities, set up annual donations, and attend one learning event.*