

APEX · SESSION 2

Designing Your Purposeful Third Act

From idea to practical pathways

15 SEPTEMBER 2026

Start with impact, not activities

Most people start here:

- What board should I join?
- Should I consult?
- Could I teach?
- Where should I volunteer?

A better starting point is to ask yourself:

What impact do I want to have in my next act? And why?

“Purpose” is a practical compass

PURPOSE IS

- What you want your life to serve
- A direction expressed through different activities
- A filter for worthwhile opportunities

PURPOSE IS NOT

- A specific role or organization
- One perfect opportunity
- A slogan or personal brand

Freedom creates a need for direction

DURING FULL-TIME LEADERSHIP

- Structure is provided
- Identity is reinforced
- Community comes built in
- Success is externally defined

IN YOUR THIRD ACT

- You choose the structure
- You define your identity
- You build your communities
- You decide what success means

84%

of Canadians reporting high life satisfaction also reported a strong sense of meaning and purpose.

Purpose is *recognized*, not invented



BELIEFS

What makes life and contribution meaningful?



PATTERNS

What has consistently mattered across my life and work?



PULL

What am I drawn toward, responsible for, or unable to ignore?

Look for the common threads

Purpose must be broad & directional

TOO BROAD

- I want to do good.
- I want to help people.
- I want to make a difference.

TOO TACTICAL

- I want to volunteer at a food bank.
- I want to mentor entrepreneurs.
- I want to join a climate board.

USEFUL

- I want to create access to opportunity for people whose talent exceeds their networks.
- I want to build bridges across differences so communities can move forward together.
- I want to help people navigate change with confidence, courage, and support.

A useful purpose statement is specific enough to guide choices, but broad enough to encompass many ways of contribution

Turning Purpose into a P3A Plan

EXAMPLE P3A PLAN

PURPOSE

To help build stronger institutions in service of more inclusive communities.

FOCUS AREAS

Social-sector governance and organizational effectiveness
particularly newcomer integration

Civic participation and democratic infrastructure
Exploratory; still learning

WAYS OF CONTRIBUTING

- **Board governance** — a mid-sized social-service org
- **Mentoring** — two EDs navigating leadership transitions
- **Philanthropy** — \$30K of giving to three organizations
- **Convening** — one annual dinner connecting nonprofit leaders
- **Learning** — continued exploration of civic infrastructure

The P3A Planning Framework

01

INWARD

Understand yourself

- Where you are now
- Your purpose
- Your career capital
- Ways of contributing

02

OUTWARD

Understand the field

- Focus areas
- What is actually needed

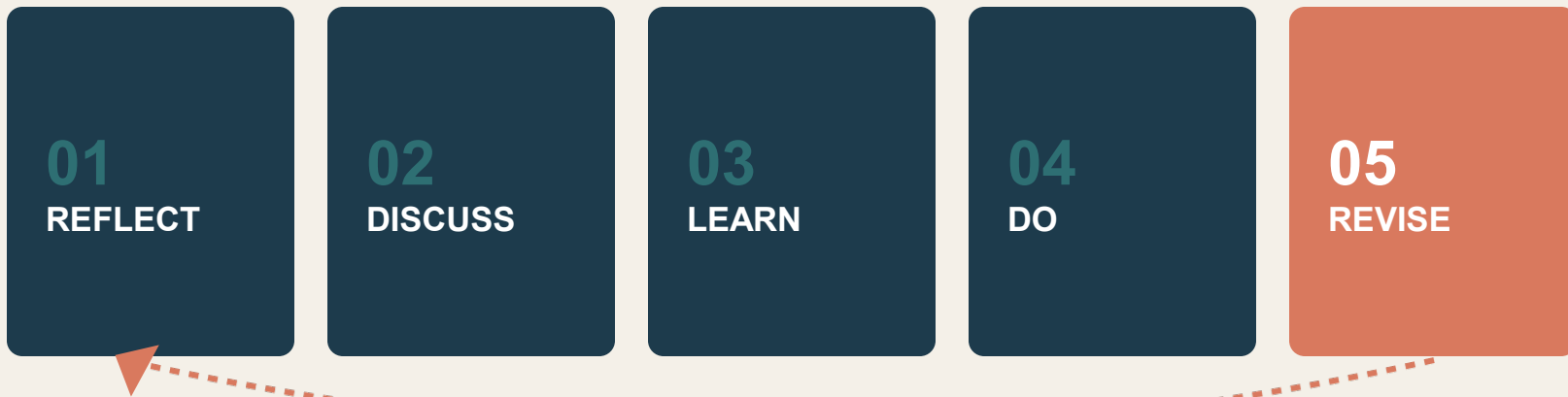
03

FORWARD

Build and test a plan

- Draft P3A plan
- Boundaries
- Practical next steps

A Purposeful Third Act will change over time



Your first P3A plan is a working draft.

Clarity grows through reflection, experience, and action.



If the next 20 years could be among your most impactful...

**What purpose would you
want those years to serve?**