

THE
RACE
TO
RELEVANCE

A NEW PARADIGM FOR BUSINESS
AND PERSONAL SUCCESS

COLT BRINER

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FOREWORD

I have long been fascinated by the concept of purpose. Like the lives of so many, my life has been a twisty-turvy road filled with more questions than answers. Since first reading *A Purpose Driven Life* by Rick Warren in my early twenties, I have sought to understand my own existence and impact on the world around me.

Until fairly recently, purpose was a pursuit in my personal life. It was a topic I debated mostly in my own head and rarely shared beyond the most intimate circles. I connected purpose to family, to church, or to community. I carried on this way for over two decades, separating my thoughts about purpose from my thoughts about my career and professional aspirations.

Then, as luck would have it, I met Colt Briner. There are times when someone enters your life, and you know instantly that they are going to be important, but you rarely know in what way. What began as an easy conversation with a lot of laughs very quickly turned into vulnerable and existential conversations. Colt challenged me to think differently in a playful and gentle way. He actively listened and responded in ways that took the conversation to new and deeper planes. Before long, we had a regular commentary going about purpose over glasses of wine, on a hike, or in each other's kitchens.

Colt's concept of a purpose-driven business changed how I think about my own purpose. Instead of seeing two halves (one personal and one professional), I began to see my purpose holistically and connected deeply to the organization I was working in at the time. I saw others, at every level, come to the same conclusions and show up for work with a renewed energy focused on the greater good.

Now, it seems that more and more people are seeking this connection with their organizations. We are asking ourselves how we connect to an organization's mission before deciding to accept job offers. We want to know what an organization stands for, what it is all about, and what impact it intends to make in the world. Simply put, we want to connect with something bigger than ourselves.

Purpose and profits are not mutually exclusive. Let your organization be a beacon of light, a place where people can feel a sense of belonging, and watch how that kind of culture will impact your bottom line.

Sarah Armstrong
CEO of Trend Health Partners

PREFACE

I grew up just outside of Seattle, Washington, raised by a single mom and occasionally tormented by my older brother (we get along great now, but it was full-on *Wonder Years* back in the day). I have lots of great memories from back then—it was the before-cell-phone, “be home by dark” era—but one image above all has remained etched in my mind in the decades since a handwritten note from my mom on the inside of the front door:

Do great things.

In addition to seeing this note several times a day, the encouragement was further reinforced by my mom calling out, “Do great things,” each time I left the house (even with my friends in tow).

The reactions I had to both the note and the daily rallying cry spanned everything from classic teenage eye-rolling apathy to chest-puffing determination to feeling downright intimidated. Ultimately, they served their intended purpose in motivating me to do my best in the many activities I pursued.

If you allowed me three words to sum up this book, those would be the ones I would choose: do great

things. That's the fundamental guidance I am giving to modern business leaders. But let me be clear: the classic measures of business greatness are not what I am talking about.

For my entire life, the "greatness" of businesses has been measured in terms of financial value. We've gone from celebrating companies worth millions to celebrating companies worth billions, and I'm sure the trillions are right around the corner. What then? Should we march on to quadrillions?

Here's the thing: I feel like we've pretty much checked the box on building value measured in dollars. It is not like a dimpled chad checking the box, but a stabbed dead center with an eight-foot harpoon checking the box.

We did it. We got there. Awesome job everyone! We have officially achieved greatness in the dollars-measured dimension of business.

So, can we move on now? Can we please set a new metric for greatness in business? Can we possibly imagine becoming as excited about, curious about, and scientific about a business's purpose as we are about its profits?

I don't mean to abandon one for the other. I'm talking about dreaming and achieving in more than a singular dimension.

I wrote this book in service to my personal purpose: to accelerate the world's transition to a new business model—one that is driven by purpose and powered by

creativity. In this book, we focus on the *what*, *how*, and *why* of business that is driven by purpose. God willing, if I survive writing this book, I'll tackle the "powered by creativity" part in a subsequent work.

Simply put, purpose is fundamental. Throughout my tenure as chief marketing and communications officer at a company nestled near Cincinnati, I bore witness to the extraordinary impact of placing purpose at the forefront of a company's mission. This commitment catalyzed our growth, skyrocketing our (privately held) valuation tenfold to over \$2 billion and securing a commanding 60 percent market share within a mere three-year span.

While purpose alone didn't carve this path to success, its undeniable influence has solidified my belief that it is a cornerstone in the evolving landscape of global business. This book is born from a deep-seated desire to champion the shift toward purposeful business strategies.

Let's face facts: traditional assurances tied to work, career, and business have undergone major shifts in the past generation. Employment used to have a much stronger element of long-term security—it provided a reliable path to owning a home and living the American dream, and it offered comfort in retirement—but all that has significantly eroded in the last few decades. Such changes have led to employee disengagement, talent shortages, and a sharp rise in "quiet quitting." Amid these changes, traditional notions of retirement

are fading, the American dream is evolving, and the boundary between work and personal life is blurring.

It is imperative for today's leaders to recognize and respond to these transformations. Many organizations remain tethered to archaic beliefs about job satisfaction, employee engagement, and consumer behavior.

My direct experiences with the power of purpose in business have convinced me that it is the key to unlocking success in the new paradigm.

Leaders who fail to adapt will find themselves relics of a bygone era, overtaken by those who heed the call to evolve. We are in a race for relevance, and the stakes are the future of our businesses.

My aim with this book is to impart the lessons of a purpose-driven business model and offer guidance to those ready to embark on this transformative journey.

Stay relevant, stay competitive. Join me in exploring the power of purpose and its paramount role in shaping the future of business.

Do great things.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Colton Briner', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Colton Briner
Santa Rosa, California



PART I

**WHY PURPOSE
IS THE NEW
COMPETITIVE EDGE**

Choose Purpose Or Choose Irrelevancy

Come back with me in time to September of 2018 and the locale of Chicago.

This was when I first met the CEO of the company where I would come to learn the power of purpose. As a courtesy of anonymity, we'll call him "Kevin."

Kevin has many admirable leadership qualities. He is inspiring, astute, and a phenomenal team builder. His superpower is his ability to unite people.

Little did I know the united purpose we would soon share.

His firm, again for the sake of anonymity, we'll call it NovaRev, operates in the revenue-cycle management space.

NovaRev supports the back office of healthcare providers—hospitals, health systems, and clinics. This is all the nonclinical work that must get done so patients can get the care they need, and providers can get paid for the work that they do. Over the last several decades, these processes have become increasingly complicated in the American healthcare system,

making it harder for providers to focus on patient health and more challenging for them to get paid for their work. Companies like NovaRev off load that work from the providers so that the providers don't have to spend time fighting to get paid and can instead focus on caring for their patients.

When healthcare providers have strong financial performance (sadly, this is rare in American healthcare), they become tremendously better empowered to execute their mission: ensuring the wellness and longevity of the people in the communities in which they operate. NovaRev was helping to make this possible for the providers they worked with by being good at what they do, but there was a problem.

My first move when I started as NovaRev's chief marketing and communications officer was to interview the C-suite leaders of the health systems they were supporting. Through those conversations, it became abundantly clear to me that NovaRev's team was instrumental in ensuring the health and wellness of millions of people. In my mind, it was not a stretch to say that, through the work NovaRev was doing, they were, in fact, literally saving lives. With more time and resources to spend on fine-tuning patient care, health systems partnered with NovaRev were able to expand their clinical teams, start new clinics, add equipment and imaging machines, detect disease states earlier, and intervene to prevent progression and episodic events. That is heroic stuff.

Unfortunately, the NovaRev team members did not know those stories. Their cubicles and offices were hundreds or even thousands of miles away from the health systems they supported.

The staff was tracking all the right key performance indicators (KPIs) for revenue-cycle performance and knocking it out of the park, but they had very little insight into the true impact of their work—the human lives their work was touching.

This was the missing piece. This is what takes the day-to-day from “revenue-cycle management outsourcing” to “redefining the possible in American health care.”

Kevin had built a world-class leadership team that brought a playbook for excellence in every function of the revenue cycle of American health care. It was clear that his company would create strong career opportunities for the talent it was attracting at every level. What I didn’t know at the time was how much more it would mean to give that talent a role in powerfully affecting the lives of patients. What might happen if they were empowered with that ability?

I did not have the purpose playbook in my pocket when my engagement with NovaRev began. If the disconnect between cubicle and clinic hadn’t become so starkly evident to me, I don’t think I would have seen the path that led me to this work in purpose. Kevin’s team had built a powerful machine. What I discovered was an additive to the fuel that would help to drive

it to heights never seen in the industry. The internal visibility of purpose and the alignment on mission was the turbocharger.

I can say this to business leaders now: I've walked the path. Back then, I was simply confident that the marketing strategies I believed in, along with creative execution, would put a little-known company on the industry map in short order. Kevin shared my confidence in that.

As Kevin and I discussed what it would truly mean to be all-in on being purpose-driven, we could foresee potential difficulties given the nature of the disconnect between the cubicle and the clinic.

"The key will be to truly connect NovaRev employees with the noble aspects of their work, which is giving healthcare providers the resources they need to save lives and help people live longer," I said. That is the power of relevance."

The Journey Toward Purpose-Driven Powerhouse

According to *JAMA*, the Commonwealth Fund, and *U.S. News & World Report*, American health care ranks last or near last in nearly every measure of health system performance among developed nations.¹ There are a thousand answers as to why, but the most well-known axiom in health care is "no margin, no mission." When

our providers are running on razor-thin or even negative margins, they cannot deliver world-class care. The truth of this hit me like a freight train through the course of the conversations I had with the health-system leaders and clinical staff of NovaRev's partners. These were the types of conversations that NovaRev's team did not have access to. They needed to hear these stories to understand the true impact of their work.

Once my eyes were open to this disconnect, I discovered that it was not at all unique to NovaRev, but rather the norm in businesses in every industry. It was like finally seeing color after being color-blind. If you are not familiar with the "Baader-Meinhof phenomenon," this is when something you've noticed or recently learned suddenly seems to appear everywhere. That's what I was experiencing, on a scale that had the potential to usher in a new and more powerful model of how businesses operate in the world. This was a big deal.

Purpose became the focal point of daily meetings, marking a transformative shift in the organizational ethos. The company experienced explosive growth, adding over thousand new employees annually. Financially, NovaRev doubled, redoubled, and again redoubled their valuation in the span of thirty months, attracting 60 percent market share in the US.

While a more detailed exploration of NovaRev's experience is undertaken later in the book, it is evident that the company thrives under a purpose-driven model.

As it maintains its trajectory of growth and prosperity, the unwavering commitment to purpose remains at the core of its success.

The NovaRev narrative serves as a testament to the potency of being a purpose-driven company, with individuals and investors alike betting on its continued triumph.

A Path To Your Purpose-Driven Future

The renowned anthropologist Margaret Mead is reported to have famously said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Some critics will say being purpose-driven is pie-in-the-sky thinking, kumbaya garbage, and a waste of time and resources. In reality, the data tells a different story:

- *Employee attraction and retention.* Millennials who have a strong connection to the purpose of their organization are 5.3 times more likely to stay.²
- *Shareholder return.* Nearly every company with a purpose strongly embedded within the organization has a ten-year total shareholder return above the S&P 500 median.³
- *Marketing and sales.* Nielsen data shows a more than fourteen times higher growth rate for products with sustainability/social benefits

versus conventional products (5.8 percent versus 0.4 percent, respectively).⁴

- *Defense from disruption.* Companies that operate from purpose do a better job of predicting the future, innovating in the present, and learning from the past.⁵

In today's business world, a purpose-driven organization tackles challenges with a focus on a future vision that goes beyond specific technologies, fostering a collective aspiration.

That collective aspiration drives improved performance in nearly every measurable aspect of business performance, from product design and decision-making to customer support and revenue growth.

Perhaps you are familiar with the anecdote of the three bricklayers, an authentic parable rooted in a story. After the great fire of 1666 leveled London, the world's most famous architect, Christopher Wren, was commissioned to rebuild St. Paul's Cathedral.⁶

One day in 1671, Wren observed three hard-working bricklayers. To the first bricklayer, Wren asked, "What are you doing?"

The bricklayer replied, "I'm a bricklayer. I'm working hard, laying bricks to feed my family."

The second bricklayer responded, "I'm a builder. I'm building a wall."

But the third bricklayer, when asked the question, "What are you doing?" replied with a gleam in his eye.

“I’m a cathedral builder,” he said. “I’m building a great cathedral to The Almighty.”

The benefits for purpose-driven companies are plentiful, including enhanced talent attraction, increased customer loyalty, strengthened innovation capabilities, resonant marketing, augmented sales, reduced vulnerability to disruptions, increased shareholder value, and improved resilience in economic cycles.

However, realizing these advantages depends on the authenticity of a company’s purpose. Organizations that merely pay lip service to purpose, substituting it with superficial statements, risk negative consequences like customer loss, talent attrition, revenue decline, and increased susceptibility to disruption by genuinely purpose-driven competitors.

Top talent increasingly seeks meaningful work, as indicated by a Deloitte survey showing that 62 percent of employees consider an organization’s purpose before joining, with 36 percent ranking purpose equally crucial as salary and benefits.⁷

Great Place to Work further reinforces the tangible benefits of purpose-driven companies with data showing that such organizations exhibit higher employee retention, pride in workplace association, long-term commitment, eagerness to work, and traits linked to innovation.⁸

The findings underscore the comprehensive benefits of integrating purpose into organizational frameworks, influencing employee engagement, financial performance, consumer preference, and resilience against

disruptions. Purpose-driven strategies position organizations for sustained success in today's dynamic business landscape. Purpose-driven companies outperform non-purpose-driven counterparts during challenging times, using the purpose to turn adversity into sustainable, inclusive growth opportunities.

Summing It Up

Embracing a purpose-driven approach is far from being simply idealistic; it's a strategic imperative grounded in data. When purpose permeates an organization, it has the potential to attract and retain a dedicated workforce, drive shareholder returns, stimulate market growth, and provide a robust defense against disruption. The evidence is clear: companies with a deeply embedded purpose experience remarkable advantages in every facet of their operations.

From attracting talent who are over five times more likely to stay to outperforming the S&P 500 to achieving substantially higher growth rates for purpose-aligned products, the case for purpose is compelling.

Purpose is not a nice-to-have thing—it's the cornerstone of a resilient, innovative, and future-fit business.

Next, we examine the accelerating forces of change, and the role purpose plays in helping companies navigate the escalating storm.