



**THE TAOS INSTITUTE: “PURPOSE AS LIFE SAVING.”**

*Purpose as 'lifesaving' reflects a statement of good intentions according to Taos Institute. The organisation's foundations revolve around a social constructionist theory. They state, "it is through the social and relational processes that we construct the world." If you are over the age of sixty-five this could resonate with you, and also you could include having a social, physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual purpose too.*

*Intentionally, having a purpose in life could be the reason which prompts us to 'get-out-of -bed' in the morning. Having a purpose could simply mean any one of the following activities— volunteering, belonging to a walking group, assisting migrants-refugees to learn English, participating in yoga, tai chi, music- drama, or with an environmental land care project. As a seventy-three-year-old person, there are many purposes in my life including volunteering, conscious spirituality projects, tai chi, meditation, walking and swimming. An article appearing in the November-December 2017 Tao Institute positive aging newsletter highlights the positive aspects of having a purpose-in-life. An extract follows.*

*—Philip Crouch, Tasmania, 2020*

**TAOS INST: POSITIVE AGING, ‘PURPOSE AS LIFE SAVING’**

‘According to a number of research studies, having a purpose in life is not only personally rewarding, it is also associated with good health. Having purpose is linked to a number of positive health outcomes, including better sleep, and fewer strokes and heart attacks. In addition, there is a lower risk of dementia and disability.

**In part, these positive outcomes are linked to the way that people with a sense of purpose take care of themselves.** They are more likely to check in with preventive health services, and to get mammograms, colonoscopies and flu shots. It should come as no surprise, then, that having purpose may save your life.

A longitudinal study of more than 6,000 individuals - young and old - indicated that those with greater purpose were 15 percent less likely to die in a given year than those who were aimless. Having purpose was protective across the life span – for people in their 20's as well as those in their 70. **Having purpose is not a fixed trait, and one can develop (or lose) purpose at any time in life. Purposes can be great or small - from planting a little garden to putting together a new business.**



In our opening essay we talked about several ways in which people find new aims in life after retirement. Purpose can also emerge from our daily encounters with others, as we talk about what matters in our families, communities, or the world more generally. We were particularly struck by a program run by Experience Corps, an organization that trains older adults to tutor children in urban public schools.

Both children and the tutors drew nourishment from their relationship. Interestingly, however, the tutors showed marked improvements in mental and physical health. The improvements included higher self-esteem, more social connectedness, and better mobility and stamina. Perhaps this should not be surprising. **For most people helping others is especially meaningful. And it reduces the dangers of a me-centered life.**

### TAO INST: MENTAL FOCUS - TRICKS TO EVADE DISTRACTION

<sup>1</sup> The ability to stay in focus is sometimes difficult. Not only are there the distractions of every day life, but as well the storehouse of memories that pop into mind without invitation. To focus requires a certain discipline, and it is something that may be helped by engaging in certain activities and not others. According to various research studies, here are a few ways to promote focus:

**Read a good novel.** In a study done at Emory University, people who read at night increased connectivity in the part of the brain associated with language. This change lasted for five days after the participants in the study finished the book.

**Play an instrument, meditate, or write without interruptions for 30 minutes.** Being able to focus on one single, complex task improves one's ability to focus on other tasks.

**Work in the morning.** The brain is fresher in the morning. It is a shame to waste these hours on trivial matters. In one study, participants aged 60-82 performed better on cognitive tasks when tested in the morning, rather than the afternoon.

**Chew gum.** We have our misgivings, but in a study at Cardiff University in Wales, people chewing gum were able to respond more quickly and accurately to a test of recalling random numbers than those who did not.

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<sup>1</sup> *Keep Your Mental Focus by Ken Budd, AARP Bulletin. December, 2017, pages. 1, 22*



**Suggested resources:**

TAOS Positive Aging Newsletter—*"Purpose as Life Saving."*

<https://www.taosinstitute.net/2017-novemberdecember>

<https://www.taosinstitute.net/positive-aging-newsletter>

Sleep benefits,

<https://sleep.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s41606-017-0015-6>

Fewer strokes/heart attacks:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26630073>

Lower risk of dementia:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2740716/>

<https://www.aarp.org/health/brain-health/info-2017/mental-focus-smartphone-use.htm>

