

I believe in acting with purpose. I have found it necessary for success. The first time I grasped the importance of acting with purpose was as a young kid on the basketball court.

Although I was the tallest on my team, I was a weak rebounder. My coach taught me to be strategic about where I placed myself on the court in order to be a successful rebounder. "Position yourself at a right-angle from where the shooter is," he told me. "That's where the ball tends to go after a missed shot," he continued, "that way you'll automatically increase your chances of getting your hands on the ball."

My coach's advice seemed a little too basic, too simple; but when I put it into practice I was stunned by the results. I began asking myself, "Why am I here? Why am I on this spot on the court?" The answer, of course, was "to get rebounds." Then I could definitively answer with a "yes" or "no" the next logical question, "Is this the best place for me to be to accomplish that?" Once I began moving on the court with a conscious, strategic purpose, the ball came to me more. My efforts to pull down rebounds were more successful because I was already close to the action.

Acting with purpose doesn't guarantee success, but it's a necessary step in getting there. Asking myself whether I am acting with purpose also forces me to be clear about what my purpose was in the first place. I am shocked at my tendency to lose sight of my goals, but remembering the importance of acting with purpose keeps me in the game.

This deliberate mindset is nowhere more crucial than in interpersonal conflict. When acting as a participant, I need to be purposeful in my speech and demeanor. When acting as a mediator, I must be aware of the purposes of all the participants as well as purposeful in my direction of the discussion. Every note I take, every question I ask, every movement I make should be purposeful.

I cannot spark a powerful, courageous conversation without a foundation of purposeful action. Like deliberate actions to rebound a basketball, not all actions will bring success, but each one is necessary for reaching eventual success.