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DR. CHRISTINE ALLEN

On leading a purpose-filled life

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Have you ever felt as if you don't have a purpose? Have you ever felt like you're not living up to your potential? Or maybe you're content but you're always open to growing and changing? If so, you're like a lot of the people and companies Chris Allen coaches. As a workplace psychologist/executive and team coach, and the president of **Insight Business Works**, she helps organizations become healthy in ways that are right for them. She assists them in finding purpose, improving communication, becoming more eco-conscious, more diverse and inclusive at the executive level, which helps companies and individuals thrive. Chris works with leaders to help them answer the question: "How can you show up in your integrity as your best self?"

"It's really about helping the individual leader develop to a higher level and helping the team work better together. Ultimately things get done in life and our world through groups or teams working together to solve problems, not by one person being brilliant at solving a problem," she said. "That's what I love, that's what I love to do."

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Photo by Alice G. Patterson

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I imagine I will always do it. I don't envision myself ever retiring because my work makes me happy."

As she explored her purpose, she went from pursuing her doctorate in psychology at Penn State University decades ago to private practice and directing a Women's Program as a private psychiatric hospital in Syracuse and serving as the president of the New York State Psychological Association, to founding her own business in 2011, where she now uses her skills and experience to make a broader impact.

"I'm a psychologist, I'll always be a psychologist, that does define me. Although I've always been focused on service and helping other people, for the last 15 years, as my kids have been older and [as] I've been able to travel more, I've wanted to have a broader impact on our world, to make a difference on a bigger scale. Doing whatever I can to leave the world and the planet better for my children, my children's children, for everyone's children's children."

According to Allen and other researchers in the field, our early experiences reveal our values and who we've always been; with that self-awareness, we can make the right decisions for ourselves. "For me, when I was 10, my mom could never find me because I was always up in a tree reading a book," she said. "My mom was mad at me when she gave me three books for my birthday and I read them all on the same day. As long as you're learning, it's fuel." Learning and growth are crucial to Allen living a fulfilling life, and so is connection.

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—Dr. Christine Allen



"I love to connect with people. My daughter teases me. I was just in a conversation [with a technology support specialist who was] helping with an email/computer problem, Nigel was his name. I always know the waiter's name. I want to thank the person by their name."

Importantly, Allen doesn't spend her days dishing out advice, she's committed to practicing what she preaches. "It's not enough to be able to say [to clients], 'Gee, you put exercise on your development plan, and how's that going?', if I'm not doing it." So she exercises most days, but sometimes things get in the way, and that's okay. She also has her own coach to help her on her journey as she believes in development and accountability. "

I also have a great husband who helps me to show up as my best self." When she and her husband, Rob, moved to Syracuse more than 30 years ago, they bought an older house that needed renovating, which led to another challenge entirely. "We were doing work in the house, then in the middle of that, my husband, instead of helping with the wallpaper – he's outside in the back digging a pond! And I'm like, 'We need to rip up the carpets, we need to take down the wallpaper, we don't really need to be digging a pond.' I was really mad at him ... now, the favorite part of my house? It's sitting [by the pond] with the frogs, and the lily pads and the ferns ... drinking a glass of wine, a cup of coffee, doing work, reading a book ... I would have never prioritized making a pond. I would have prioritized, 'Let's get these big things done.' That's my personality. I'm

grateful because I'm married to somebody who is different from me and who has helped me ... he's kind of a free spirit, my husband."

The couple met when they were at Penn State, Chris in graduate school and Rob as an older undergraduate who had served first in the military. Then, while she did her clinical internship at a psychiatric hospital in Syracuse, Rob finished college summa cum laude at Le Moyne College. The couple moved to Boston so he could pursue a law degree focused on public interest law at Northeastern University. Thereafter they returned to Syracuse, Chris as a psychologist and Rob a legal services attorney. They have stayed here ever since, raising two children and becoming part of the community.

Allen enjoys the big things in life, like savoring the moments when Rob makes her an expertly crafted cup of coffee in the morning and they simply talk. Moments like these matter, especially because they were diagnosed with cancer close to the same time; she is still being treated but will make a full recovery whereas his health is uncertain. She describes herself as the "poster child for early detection." During the pandemic, she had an abnormal MRI, but nothing significant was found; then in 2022, her doctors did an ultrasound, a core needle biopsy, and eventually she had two surgeries. On the other hand, "My husband, he was supposed to get a physical in March 2020. Well, in March 2020 everything shut down and the doctor canceled ... by the time he went for the physical in March 2021 ... although he didn't have any symptoms. ... [He was diagnosed with] advanced aggressive prostate cancer."

They've taken care of each other, and so have their friends, as they live far from immediate family, who have shown up as their best selves to support them. "We have people here who are like family, who would do anything for us, who would just ... I'm going to cry. Rob had just had this external and internal radiation, he was so fatigued, I broke my wrist and had to have surgery with a plate and seven screws, he was taking care of me, this was before I was diagnosed with cancer. And people would just ring the doorbell ... and there would just be a whole meal on the porch that one of our friends would leave for us. It really means a lot."

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Photo by Alice G. Patterson

Living in the present, considering the future

Allen said her future is “still to be determined”: “I envision myself working less, hopefully being with my husband, my kids, I don’t know if they’ll have kids or not. Be with people I love.” Her daughter, Hannah, just started a PhD program at Penn State in applied linguistics. And her son, Tom, a virtual design construction engineer, lives in Colorado with his fiancé.

In regards to coaching, she said “I’m super excited about Micron coming and having [a] generation-changing impact on this community and hopefully promoting greater equity in this community, and I’d love to see how that evolves and develops,” adding that she and her team of coaches embrace collaboration over competition: “You don’t want people fighting over resources, you want people collaborating for the best outcome for the whole community.”

She’s also focused on the future of the planet. “Being here, seeing where my kids settle, the planet is an important stakeholder and it’s important to me to do eco-conscious consulting and coaching. So [I’m interested in] helping, when I work with a company, to think about their environmental impact, their relationship to the planet.”

As a cancer survivor, and someone who is thriving, she does have some advice for women: “You can’t show up the best for other people, whether it’s your employees, your children, if you’re always on the back burner and you never get around to [screenings]. And I can’t tell you how many women I have coached who have said, ‘Oh yeah, I need to get to that, I need to schedule my mammogram.’ I’m really good about doing those things. I know it’s been a scary time with Covid, but I think it’s really important for people to do the tests, to take care of themselves, and make time for those things,” she said adding, “I’m lucky. I’m lucky. I’m really lucky.” SWM