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Purpose... Lessons In Life & Health

A WELCOA

Expert Interview with

Dr. Victor J. Strecher

on the importance of having
a strong purpose in life



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An Expert Interview with

Victor J. Strecher, PhD, MPH

ABOUT **VICTOR J. STRECHER, PHD, MPH**



Dr. Strecher received his PhD in Health Behavior and Health Education at the University of Michigan School of Public Health in 1983. As Director for Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship, Dr. Strecher is working in the UM School of Public Health and the University of Michigan to create an environment that promotes more direct dissemination of research efforts to improve the public's health nationally and globally. He is also Visiting Professor at the Peking University's School of Public Health. Dr. Strecher's book, *On Purpose: Lessons in Life and Health From the Frog, the Dung Beetle, and Julia*, is related to the importance of developing and maintaining a strong purpose in life.

ABOUT **RYAN PICARELLA**



As WELCOA's President, Ryan brings immense knowledge and insight from his career that spans over a decade in the health and wellness industry. He is a national speaker, healthcare consultant, and has designed and executed award winning wellness programs. Known for his innovative and pragmatic approach to worksite wellness, Ryan looks forward to furthering the WELCOA mission and vision and continuing to position the organization for success for the future.

Ryan Picarella can be reached at rpicarella@welcoa.org.

At one time or another, we've probably all pondered our purpose in life. What are we here for? What are we meant to do? These are certainly common questions, but the answers are not so easy to come by. Indeed, some of the brightest and most intelligent minds on the planet devote their lives to these very questions. Such is the case with Vic Strecher.

In this exclusive interview with WELCOA President Ryan Picarella, Vic discusses the importance of having "purpose" in life and health. Dr. Strecher gives, in detail, how his life was changed after the passing of his daughter, Julia, and how he was able to find new purpose for living well.



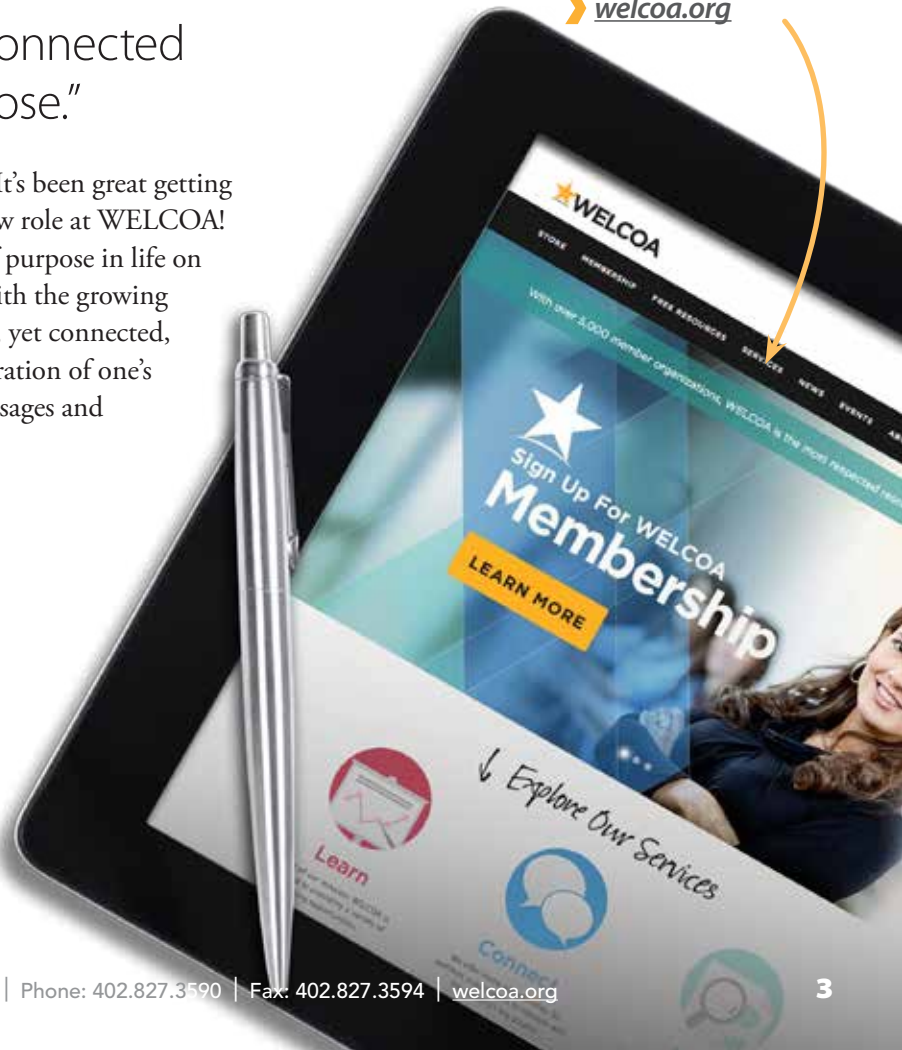
Q1 Vic, tell me how you first connected with the concept of "purpose."

Victor Strecher: First, thank you Ryan for this interview. It's been great getting a chance to know you and I'm really excited about your new role at WELCOA! Four years ago I started reviewing research on the effects of purpose in life on longevity, disease and even DNA repair. I was impressed with the growing body of evidence and the strength of the effect. A different, yet connected, body of research related to self-affirmation finds that elaboration of one's core, purposeful values reduces defensiveness to health messages and influences health behavior changes.

“...the elaboration of one's core, purposeful values **reduces defensiveness** to health messages and influences health behavior changes.”

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Q2 What events in your life helped to define your new perspective on purpose?

VS: My exploration of purpose in life followed the death of my 19-year-old daughter, Julia. From the age of one, she was a heart transplant recipient. She gave me a strong purpose in life and she lived her own life with great purpose.

Q3 Tell me about your journey following Julia's passing.

VS: When she died I lost my purpose in life. It took a few months to realize that I needed to re-purpose my life or wouldn't survive her loss. Being a behavioral scientist, I decided to document my own journey and the rabbit holes I went through as I learned more about purpose in life, self-affirmation, self-transcendence, loss of ego defense and the quantum changes that resulted from embracing these concepts. This exploration resulted in a book, *On Purpose: Lessons in Life and Health from the Frog, the Dung Beetle, and Julia*.

Q4 Where did you first discover the dung beetle and how did that insect become the inspiration for your new book?

VS: A Hollywood screenwriter friend of mine suggested that a book about my journey needed a sage or oracle, similar to the Yoda character in *Star Wars* or Jiminy Cricket in *Pinocchio*. I was in the British Museum in London and discovered Khepri, the scarab god. Khepri is associated with transformation and rebirth. Every morning Khepri rolls the sun up to the horizon. The model for Khepri, oddly enough, was the lowly dung beetle. The more I read about this beetle, the more I became attracted to the thought of turning a creature who is literally born into poop, and who turns poop into a purpose, into the sage of my book. His name is Winston.

“When Julia died I lost my purpose in life. It took a few months to realize that **I needed to re-purpose my life** or I wouldn't survive her loss.”



Q5 Do you think everyone has a purpose?

VS: No, but I do believe that everyone needs a purpose. I think that our society has increasingly lost purpose and substitutes purpose with materialism and Miley Cyrus twerking videos.

Q6 Does purpose matter at an individual level or at an organizational level?

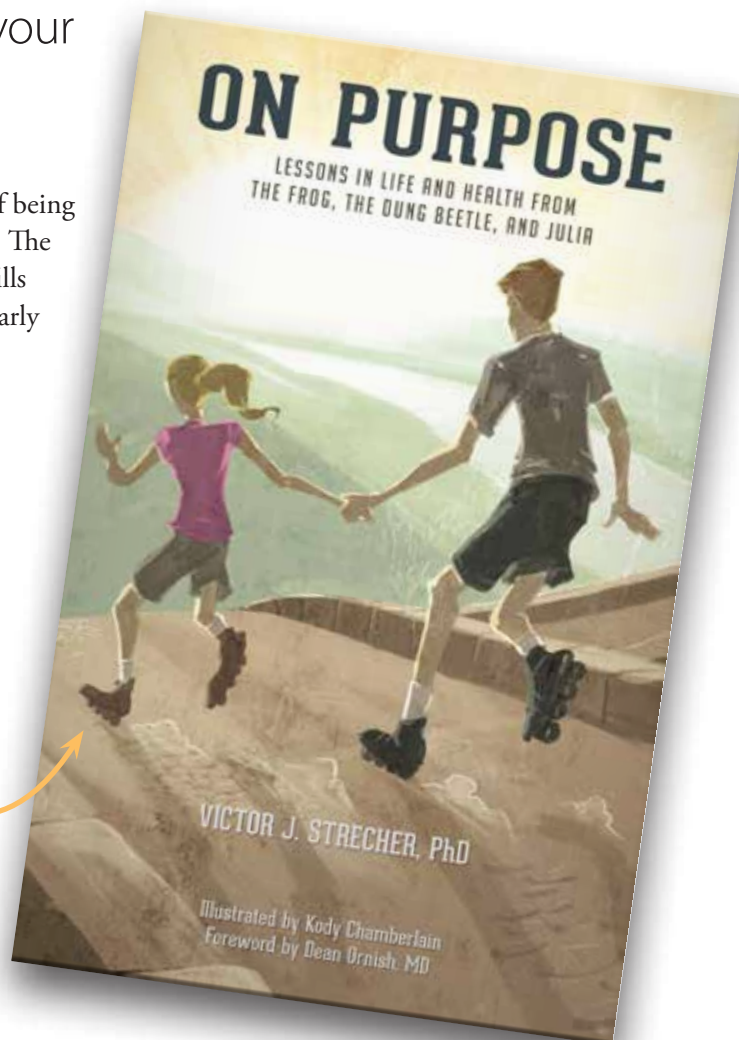
VS: Both. When an organization goes through trauma, such as a downturn in the economy or an acquisition, the purpose (often called a “mission”) of the organization becomes its north star. Organizations with a strong purpose have been shown to outperform those with a weak purpose by roughly eight to one. Employees who find meaning and purpose in their workplace have, on average, lower absenteeism and higher motivation and engagement than those who do not.

Q7 How has your academic and professional career shaped your perspective on “purpose?”

VS: My career has been focused on how to help people make significant changes in their lives. I view this as a unique aspect of being human and have never tired or gotten bored from this endeavor. The role of purpose in life has become my primary focus because it fills so many gaps in my thinking about the issue of change, particularly large or “quantum” change. **N&V**

Check out Dr. Vic Strecher’s book, *On Purpose: Lessons in Life and Health from the Frog, the Dung Beetle, and Julia*

Get it at Dr. Strecher’s website:
<http://www.dungbeetle.org/>



“The role of purpose in life has become my primary focus because it **fills so many gaps in my thinking about the issue of change,** particularly large or “quantum” change.”

Attention WELCOA Members...

Check out part two of WELCOA'S Expert Interview with Dr. Vic Strecher where he dives deeper into the future of wellness programs and how to drive them with strong purpose.

Members can download "Purpose Driven" now at WELCOA'S Member website, ***AbsoluteAdvantage.org!***



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