

Being a Corporal and the Meaning of Life

By: Sgt. Steve

Philosophy can help you find answers to all kinds of questions and provide solutions to many problems and issues that LEOs face: how to deal with being insulted, how to cope with a micromanaging boss, or how to navigate the drama of "Police High School." I like to use philosophy to learn how to be happy in an unhappy world, and how to grow tougher and stronger than the situations. The day-to-day applications of philosophy, but in this article we are going to go deeper and cover one of the biggest, most intimidating questions people face: "What is the meaning of life?" You might have asked, "Why am I here?" or perhaps the nagging question, "What should I be doing with my life?"

The answers to these questions have a lot of correlation with what it means to find your place as a Corporal. Even if you don't have Corporals at your agency, you probably have some job title that falls into this category. This is a rank where the responsibilities and role can be a little unclear, and there can be some grey areas. Corporals are sometimes supervisors, while at other times they take on the duties and responsibilities of an Officer or Deputy. In the civilian world, Corporals are essentially like assistant managers, people who can handle responsibility but aren't quite in charge yet.

The role of Corporal is the toughest rank due to this murky middle ground Corporals occupy. What is expected of you, and what you should be doing, can change from day to day. How others view you also shifts. As a Corporal, you might ask yourself several times a day: "What is my role here? Am I in charge, or should I be asking questions and following orders? Should I be answering questions or asking them? What is my responsibility in this situation, and do I have the authority to act?"

Being a Corporal is tough, but there is a lesson to be learned. Here's what you discover after being a Corporal for a while: your role is what you decide it is. You have the authority and responsibility that you take on. You learn that you define your own role. Your actions will either define you as "basically a Sergeant" or "basically an Officer." As I've said many times, "There are corporals, and then there are CORPORALS." The rank is an opportunity to lead; what you do with that, and the purpose you give it, is entirely up to you.

Now, back to the meaning of life and why you are here. Let me start by saying that I believe in Fate, but I've never seen any evidence or heard a compelling argument for destiny. I don't think there is a set destination for you or your life. I do not think you were born to do any specific thing. I believe that's very good news. I'd hate to live a story where the ending was already written.

Let's say destiny was real, and I was destined to become "King of Earth." When I finally became "King of Earth," would I really be able to take any pride in that? Did I do anything to earn it? No, I'd just show up and have it handed to me by destiny. In a world where destiny is real, life has no point or meaning. We'd just happen to be born and, like puppets on a string, play our role in some big production.

We have the power of choice. In every moment we can choose our thoughts, our words, and our actions. Through these choices, we set our own path into the future.

If you believe in destiny and accept those puppet-like terms and conditions, then asking "Why am I here?" or "What is the meaning of life?" makes sense. I don't think destiny makes much sense and neither do those questions.

However, if you can reject the idea of destiny, then you can toss out those questions and take on a more empowering and liberating point of view. You stop asking the universe, "Why am I here?" Instead, you tell it. You tell the world, and everyone around you: "I am here because... (insert your purpose here)."

But, you might ask, what is my purpose? Here's the cool thing: you get to answer that question. You get to set your own "why." Here's a list of things you might ask yourself to help fill in the blank:

- What do I care about?
- What/who do I love?
- What am I good at?
- What talents do I have?
- What position or resources do I possess?
- What am I most capable of doing?

Once you answer those questions, you can combine the answers, and a purpose perfectly suited to you will begin to take shape. You CAN have more than one "purpose," just like you can have more

than one goal. You don't have to be laser-focused on just one thing for your life to have meaning. You can also share the same purpose as someone else; in fact, it's really cool if you do. Also, your purpose can change. You don't just have one thing to do in life—you have many things going on, and sometimes those things change. Priorities change. At different stages of life, your capabilities and limitations will change. When they do, define a new purpose and set about telling the universe why you are here.

“Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather he must recognize that it is he who is asked.”

– Viktor E. Frankl

Amor Fati
-Sgt. Steve