

Melissa Fors Shackelford, MBA, NACD.DC, APR

Purpose-Driven Leadership Speaker, Author & Growth Strategist

"Helping leaders turn purpose into performance and vision into action"



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OLAFSON ETHICS SYMPOSIUM • UND NISTLER COLLEGE



EMI HOUSTON

About Melissa

Melissa Fors Shackelford is an author, TEDx speaker, and growth strategist with twenty-five years leading teams through change in healthcare, nonprofit, and technology organizations. As founder of Shackelford Strategies, she advises mission-driven startups and established organizations on scaling with integrity.

Her TEDx talk, "**How to Make Purpose Your Lifeline When Life Gets Hard**," has been viewed more than **100,000 times**. She is the author of the **Amazon #1 bestseller** *Harnessing Purpose: A Marketer's Guide to Inspiring Connection*. She has spoken at the American Marketing Association, the American Hospital Association's Society for Healthcare Strategy and Market Development, the University of North Dakota, and the University of Minnesota. She has been honored as **Nonprofit Marketer of the Year** by the American Marketing Association and named one of the **Top 50 Women in Healthcare**.

FEATURED KEYNOTE

Align. Collaborate. Lead.

Turning shared purpose into performance that lasts.

Two out of three people feel disconnected from the work they do. That gap is not a morale problem. It is a performance problem, and it shows up as turnover, burnout, and teams that are present but not switched on.

Melissa has spent twenty-five years inside that gap, leading teams through it and studying what actually closes it. This keynote builds on her Amazon bestselling book *Harnessing Purpose* and the TEDx talk that grew out of it, taking both further into what purpose looks like on an ordinary Tuesday with a real team.

She makes the business case first, then the human one, then the part most talks skip: what makes purpose hold when conditions get hard and people are being asked to do more with less. Along the way she takes on psychological safety and burnout directly, without the usual lip service. Leaders leave with three specific moves they can make Monday morning, and a clear-eyed answer to the question their people are quietly asking, which is whether any of this matters.

Attendees will leave able to:

- Name the real cost of disconnection in their own organization, in the terms their leadership already tracks: retention, productivity, and burnout.
- Give every person on their team line of sight to who benefits from their work, including the people whose roles sit two steps removed from the customer or resident.
- Identify what energizes each individual and shift one thing toward it, using a simple two-question approach they can run in their next one-on-one.
- Build alignment through collaboration instead of mandate, so that purpose is something their team articulates rather than something handed down to them.
- Recognize what psychological safety actually looks like in practice, and where their own team currently stands.

Additional Signature Talks

Healthcare

Breaking Barriers: Understanding and Addressing Stigma in Healthcare Marketing

Stigma quietly erodes trust, engagement, and outcomes. This session shows how to spot it, remove it, and replace it with language that respects people and strengthens credibility.

Audience leaves with: Stigma-Safe Messaging Checklist, fast copy audit method, before-and-after rewrite examples tailored to healthcare communications.

AI Can't Rebuild Trust: The Human Side of Innovation in Healthcare

Technology can scale access, but it cannot manufacture trust. This keynote reframes "innovation" around human proof, clarity, and accountability so adoption becomes possible.

Audience leaves with: Trust-by-Design framework, messaging do's and don'ts for AI and automation, a simple model for measuring trust beyond satisfaction scores.

Marketing

Harnessing Purpose: How Marketers Can Lead with Meaning and Still Drive Results

Purpose does not replace performance. It improves it. This session equips marketers to align brand and culture, create high-impact campaigns, and prove results with credibility.

Audience leaves with: Purpose-led campaign brief template, messaging architecture that ties to outcomes, KPI map that connects purpose to action and conversion.

Marketing With a Conscience: Reclaiming Integrity in a Purpose-Driven World

In a world of skepticism, integrity is not a nice-to-have. It is a competitive advantage. This talk helps leaders work through complex issues with purpose as a compass while reducing reputational risk.

Audience leaves with: Ethical marketing decision checklist, trust and harm pre-mortem method, practical language guidelines for transparency without overpromising.

Testimonials

"Melissa was an outstanding speaker for our Olafson Ethics Symposium at the UND Nistler College of Business & Public Administration. She brought insightful stories, real-world experiences, and thought provoking discussion to our students and campus community."

Laura Arneson, University of North Dakota

"The conversation was energizing, leaving me with a clear takeaway: the critical importance of leading with your full, authentic self."

Lindsay Amundson, CMO, Sabrosura Foods

"Melissa, it is so refreshing to hear your passion for healthcare marketing and how there are real outcomes with the content we put out there."

Andy Pondillo, The Making of a Marketer

Awards & Recognition

- #1 Amazon Bestseller, *Harnessing Purpose: A Marketer's Guide to Inspiring Connection*
- TEDx speaker, "How to Make Purpose Your Lifeline When Life Gets Hard" (100,000+ views)
- Nonprofit Marketer of the Year, American Marketing Association
- Women's Health Leadership TRUST Award
- Top 50 Women in Healthcare (2025)



Book Melissa for Your Next Event

To inquire about availability, fees, or to request Melissa's keynote for your conference, please contact:

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