

If you only have a minute, Rooted and Unwavering is all about connecting deeply with ourselves, others, and our service in the world. In times of crisis, it's more important than ever to know your purpose, to trust people, and allow them to astound themselves.

Living a Life of Purpose

By Esther Groves and Hylke Faber

Simon King, Chief People Officer at Daiichi Sankyo, Inc. and a 30-year veteran of biopharma leadership, learned to appreciate the preciousness of life earlier than most. Two significant life experiences established a deep connection in him that set the foundation for his calling.

When he was 16 years old, Simon volunteered at a small community hospital near his house, doing whatever was needed: serving food, cleaning, making beds, and interacting with patients. He often had meaningful conversations and developed friendships with some of them, including a woman with cancer. After a long healing journey, she passed away. Simon felt a profound sense of loss, which made him reflect on what more he could have done to give her a better quality of life.

His second experience relates to his mother. She was born on a farm in the Czech Republic in 1940 and lived her first few years during World War II. When she was about 4 years old, walking with her mother down a country road, a farmer beckoned them to hide in a haystack to avoid enemy soldiers. She was terrified as the soldiers used their bayonets to probe the haystack. Miraculously, they did not find them. At the end of the war, she and her family moved to Germany as refugees, with absolutely nothing.

"It doesn't make me feel sorry for her, because she has lived the life she's always wanted," reflects Simon. "She had a happy family life, even with nothing, but what truly inspired me was the ability for anybody to live the life and career that they really want."

These two experiences launched a quest to help people live longer and fuller lives, serving as a guiding light for his career. He began by studying genetics and molecular biology, then transitioned to working in biopharma to bring new medicines to patients, eventually moving into human resources. "Once you get grounded on what you're here to do, it frees you up to bring your full energy," he says.

Later in his career, Simon realized that he could only fulfill his purpose in collaboration with others. This requires trusting people. "When you trust people, you give them the opportunity to astound themselves," reflects Simon.

His purposefulness and trust guided him through the first months of the pandemic. He called his team together remotely and told them, "Look, we have not faced this situation before. It's scary. We don't know how long it's going on. It's best that you're at home, but we're going to need your help because we don't have all the answers. We're going to meet every week to figure our way through this together."

“And I remember one of our colleagues bravely raised their hand in a big meeting and said, ‘Thank you for saying that. I’m sitting on my washing machine in my laundry room. How am I going to manage for the coming months?’”

Together, Simon and his team established three core principles to live by:

1. Trust every one of our employees. They probably have the answers.
2. Keep people safe. Patients are paramount. How do we safeguard the supply of medicines?
3. Be fiscally responsible. Without resources and finances, we cannot operate.

In the end, Simon and his team delivered higher levels of engagement and achieved higher levels of productivity than before. Everyone remained safe, and patients received their medicine. “I give credit to our employees,” he says. “It’s their ideas and thinking, and us listening that helped us truly manage.”

“My purpose, and when I feel connected, is when I’m helping bring medicines to patients and when I’m helping people grow and develop. It’s beautiful.”

~ Simon King

This article reflects the views of the author and not those of Daiichi Sankyo.