FOREWORD

WORK IS SOLVING PROBLEMS: MY FATHER'S STORY AND MINE

In 1970, my father worked as a shipping clerk in a factory in Detroit, Michigan. It was a decent job, but he saw no path to progress, to learn more, to earn more. One day he read a newspaper ad for a trade school training course in COBOL, IBM's mainframe computer language. My father had dropped out of college after a year, with no technical skills beyond a solid high school education. Furthermore, he knew no one in the computing field, nor many African Americans in professional roles. Still, the ad said companies had such a need for COBOL, that anyone who learned it could land a programming job, whatever their background. So he took a leap of faith.

While my mother's paycheck supported us, my father immersed himself for six months to master unfamiliar techniques, terminology, and procedures of COBOL computer programming—tasks more challenging than any his previous employer had ever trusted him to undertake. After six months, he was recommended for a “job shadowing” opportunity in a management information systems (MIS) department and demonstrated enough potential

to be offered an entry-level programming job. His new career in computing brought our family into America's middle class.

Hire Purpose contains a bracing analysis of the risks leading economists, futurists, technologists, and business executives see, of automation displacing hundreds of millions of jobs globally, including tens of millions of jobs in the United States alone. We should take these projections seriously, but we should also be willing to probe more deeply. My formal training as a PhD economist makes me skeptical that technological progress will necessarily destroy more good jobs than it creates, but my view is shaped too by this particular slice of my family's own history.

My father loved his work as a COBOL programmer, always describing it as solving problems by making important systems work better for the people who used them, whether for customers or for employees. As I grew up, I noticed so many systems that needed some fixing, it seemed to me like we'd all run out of time long before we ran out of work! I've spent almost twenty years helping to solve business problems, mostly in the technology and information industries, and almost a decade focused on even more complex systems problems—in economic policy, education, national infrastructure, basic research, workforce development, and labor markets. I've shaped decision making in corporate boardrooms as a senior partner at McKinsey & Company and in the White House National Economic Council under President Obama. I've also learned from hundreds of front line workers sharing with me the challenge and purpose in their work. I can report this back definitively: we're not running out of problems to solve. If a jobless future arrives someday, the fault won't be rising technology or gaps in workforce skills, but shrinking creativity, inclusivity, empathy, and human agency.

WHAT MATTERS: DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND *HIRE PURPOSE*

As I write, the United States and the entire world are in the throes of a devastating coronavirus pandemic, with its myriad consequences still unfolding. In merely ten weeks, from mid-March to the end of May 2020, over 40 million American workers were made unemployed due to severe economic disruptions incurred as part of public health efforts to slow the spread of the virus. More quietly, at a breakneck pace, digital transformations to enable remote working and consuming on a scale previously unimagined have gone from unthinkable to unavoidable. Human health vulnerabilities are tipping the scales towards automation in several fields. Against this backdrop, the business and human lessons Deanna Mulligan distills from leading Guardian through its purposeful and profound change could not be more relevant, and she shares them generously. I do not know what the U.S. economic situation will be as you read *Hire Purpose*, but I do know this: if work is solving problems, there will be more work to do than ever. Our work ahead is to imagine, invent, fix, build, heal, care, teach, protect, and more. We'll be needing all the tools and all the talents.

All the tools. All the talents. Guardian Insurance is a business; this is a business book. However, far more than most in its genre, this book begins and ends with "Purpose," and is deeply rooted in a belief that to successfully *change* complex institutions as deeply and rapidly as revolutions in digital technology and customer expectations demand, leaders must follow some North Star of Purpose, or risk losing their way. "Purpose" defines both "what matters" and "who matters."

Writing on "digital transformation" is usually about "the tools." *Hire Purpose* enriches this typical canvas in three important ways.

First, it always describes a tool's purpose—the customer or employee problems for which artificial intelligence, machine learning, predictive analytics, chatbots, neural networks, or data science tools enable new solutions. Second, it shows how a rapid digital renewal of a company born on the eve of the U.S. Civil War, whose very foundation is reliability for the long term, depended as much on leadership tools of building trust, busting hype, and learning from outsiders as it did on respecting the hard-earned wisdom of frontline teams. Deanna Mulligan's "what matters" recipe is serious, practical, and executed with the persistence to deliver results and the patience for teams to build commitment to the new ways of working.

WHO MATTERS: ALL THE TALENTS, STARS, AND OPPORTUNITY@WORK

Finally, much rarer, and most appealing to me personally, *Hire Purpose* features some serious reflection and insightful examples of what it means to tap into "all the talents," to win the future. Chief executives bemoaning "the skills gap" and calling for higher standards in K–12 education is by now a cliché. However, it is unusual to dig as deeply into the root causes of this "gap" as Deanna Mulligan does in *Hire Purpose*, and rare for a CEO to offer as insightful, empathetic, and self-aware an account of the role of companies in creating that "gap"—mostly inadvertently but no less damagingly. Addressing head-on the facts of falling business investment in training and the lazy drift to require bachelor's degrees for ever more roles, her *Hire Purpose* solutions begin with what changes business needs to be a better partner in the vital work of developing talent, not a laundry list of demands to educators. Even better, Deanna illustrates with example after

example what it truly takes to expand talent pipelines, with a refreshing blend of humility and confidence that mutual success comes by listening to and learning together with educators, and employees, and by designing with the real lives of working learners in mind. It rings true.

This is the “who matters” of *Hire Purpose*, and it resonates deeply with what I’ve learned as the CEO of Opportunity@Work, whose mission is to rewire the U.S. labor market so that Americans who lack four-year college degrees but who are skilled through alternative routes (STARs) can work, learn, and earn to their full potential amid the economic and technological trends this book elucidates. Analysis of the Bureau of Labor Statistics O*Net skills database shows that out of 71 million STARs in the United States, some 30 million have skill sets based on their current jobs that match needed skills for jobs paying at least 50 percent more than they earn today. STARs have problem solving, interpersonal, and organizational skills that employers prize but they lack the ability to signal those skills. Or as Deanna might put it, companies don’t know how to read them.

Is this so surprising, when so many companies use applicant-tracking algorithms that hardwire this bias to screen out STAR candidates? While employers struggle to recruit and retain college grad employees also certified as salesforce administrators, hundreds of thousands of STARs with the right core skills working in lower-paying jobs are overlooked. If workers can get better-paying jobs by demonstrating valued skills, “learning” is a path to economic progress. If past pedigree determines who gets a shot at good jobs, “lifelong learning” will come to seem like “gaslighting.” If companies had been as degree-obsessed in 1970 as they are in 2020, my father would never have become a programmer. Our lives would have been much different, but would anyone have noticed the loss of his talent, and likely mine?

INSURANCE AND AGENTS: MY MOTHER'S PURPOSE

I'll confess a possibly unpopular opinion: I'm genuinely fascinated by the life insurance industry.

My first professional role model was my mother, who spent most of her career as a life insurance agent. She always impressed upon me how much this was not just a job but a professional calling. My mother taught me that being a professional meant putting her clients' interests before her own self-interest. Her work as an agent had purpose: she informed, guided, and coached her clients, helping them clarify what they wanted for themselves and their loved ones, what resources they could invest in the present to cope with an uncertain future, and which choices suited their situation best. These decisions were deeply personal, with many considerations unique to each individual client. By contrast, the actuarial figures were more impersonal: the math was the math. On both scores, my mother always endeavored to find the right fit, and she treated her clients as clients for life. Sometimes, just taking a serious look at what the future might bring inspired her clients to take action for themselves in the present—actively changing their own future rather than just waiting for it to arrive.

In its way, the decision to pursue a given career path is as deeply personal and as emotionally fraught as the life insurance and estate planning choices through which my mother coached her clients. It speaks strongly to one's identity, it is a tremendously important financial decision, it typically requires sacrifices today to invest in one skill for tomorrow. However, in many ways, it is a far more complex set of decisions and investments of time, money, effort, and hope. The math is not so clear. Whether choosing a program of study after high school, or trying to carve

out time as a working learner to gain skills for a better job, it is all too easy to invest both time and money—scarce commodities—without realizing a return in more meaningful work, better pay, or job security. While nothing guarantees success, one of the best possible assets is to have trusted coaches, guides, mentors whose priority is to help you find your own best route—as my mother did for her clients. For most people, whose families and social networks don’t make them privy to today’s “inside game,” far less the future, such guidance is hard to come by.

SKILLS, PASSPORTS, POLICIES, AND AGENTS OF THE FUTURE

If the future were certain, there would be less need for insurance, or for this book. But the future is far from certain. If only workers had dynamic “insurance policies” to preserve or grow the value of their skills over time, or their own career “agent” to help guide their choices for their desired future. Well, why not? Given the unpredictability of skills obsolescence, why not insure against wage declines? Why not guarantee a right to robust income support through periods of intensive retraining? Why not apply machine-learning algorithms to human learning on the job, perhaps productizing an “AI skills patch” to augment and simultaneously apprenticing workers as they master newly in-demand skills, techniques and tools, all while earning a better living?

Building on the purpose and principles by which she has steered Guardian, Deanna Mulligan offers a multifaceted proposal based on a fully portable digital “skills passport” for each working learner in our society, across their active lifetimes. It’s an excellent start. I hold three core beliefs in the workforce

field: people are not problems to be solved, they are problem solvers; if you can do the job, you should get the job; what we cannot accomplish alone in silos, or by accident, we can achieve together on purpose. A similar belief in people leaps off each page of *Hire Purpose*.

The future is so uncertain partly because it depends on what we do or fail to do in the present. Worse, what people think the future holds transforms it, by changing what we dare to undertake today. So, here's a last word of advice: don't put down *Hire Purpose* until you learn something you can use to make the future better—in your company, in your community, or in your country.

Byron G. Auguste

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