

"Speaking right from the heart, Shirley shares her journey, her dots, and lessons learned. It's a great read that will inspire you to be your best self."

– Chester Elton
Bestselling author of *Leading with Gratitude*

An inspirational guide with practical insights and advice that will help you to navigate change and take charge of your success.

Shirley Taylor has inspired audiences around the world with her heart-warming stories and simple but powerful lessons. Now through the pages of this book, they will inspire readers to stay positive during challenging times and create new opportunities for growth and success.

In looking back at the significant turning points in her life, Shirley shares the key lessons that have helped her to grow both professionally and personally. She then "connects the dots" to reveal the common thread that runs through all these turning points.

Shirley also includes inspiring insights from global leadership experts who share their own personal turning points and the lessons they learned.

In *Connecting the Dots*, Shirley provides down-to-earth advice and practical tools that will help people everywhere to navigate change, unlock their true potential, and drive their own success.

An inspirational journey from secretary in Sheffield to international bestselling author, trainer and respected global speaker.



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Shirley Taylor

Connecting the Dots

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"Uplifting. Practical. Enthusiastic. Qualities of Shirley Taylor that exude from her and into this book. It's such an inspiration..."

– Karen Jacobsen, The GPS Girl

Connecting the Dots

TO INSPIRE
THE LEADER IN YOU

Shirley Taylor

Shirley Taylor

For Review Only



Connecting
the **Dots**

TO INSPIRE
THE LEADER IN YOU

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INTRODUCTION

"It is strange, but true, that the most important turning points of life often come at the most unexpected times and in the most unexpected ways."

– Napoleon Hill

I believe there's a leader inside each of us. Well, at least I do now. But I haven't always felt this way.

Growing up in Sheffield, England, I never felt like I was good enough. I was never the top of the class. I was always the last person to be picked in the sports teams. I often felt I was not as smart as the others in my class. I was just average. But I had great parents who loved me, and I had good friends. So, I was happy ... or was I?

As I grew up, others probably saw me as outgoing and confident, but how I felt inside was a different story. I was full of doubts and fears, worrying that I wasn't good enough, never feeling as pretty or as slim as my friends, being afraid to step up. I was frequently wondering, "Did I do or say the wrong thing?"

Does this sound familiar?

Whatever the reason you are reading this book, I'm glad you are, and I believe it's no coincidence. So, let me ask you a few questions:

It's no coincidence that you are reading this book right now.

Have you ever felt that you are not good enough?

Do you often doubt yourself or your decisions?

Do you feel you need a little push sometimes?

Do you ever dream of changing places with someone?

Do you wish you had more confidence when meeting new people?

Do you wish someone would give you just the right words of encouragement?

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Have you felt stuck in your comfort zone with no courage to step out of it?

Have you seen a friend get promoted and wondered, "Why not me?"

Has something ever happened when you said "no", and you wish you'd had the courage to say "yes"?

Trust me, I've been there. I've asked myself these questions and more. Many times. That's why I've written this book.

But even now a voice in my head is wondering, "Why on earth would people want to read your story?" and "Who do you think you are? You're just Shirley from Sheffield!"

Fortunately, I've now arrived at the point where I'm very proud to say, "I'm Shirley from Sheffield." But it's taken a long time – decades, in fact.

Not bad for Shirley from Sheffield who left school at 15 with no qualifications!

In this book, you'll read how Shirley from Sheffield ended up at the other side of the world in Singapore; how I was stunned when international publishers asked me to write my first book in 1991; how I was even more stunned when the same publishers asked me to write another book that has since sold over half a million copies and been translated into 17 languages; how I became chief examiner of a major UK examinations board; how I became founder and CEO of my own company providing training all across Asia; how joining a local speakers association helped me find a new passion and a global tribe of people I proudly call friends, many of whom are featured in this book; how that global tribe led me to becoming President of the Global Speakers Federation.

Not bad for Shirley from Sheffield who was always the last person chosen in the school's sports teams and left school at age 15 with no qualifications!

I can't take the credit for coming up with the idea to write this book, though. Years ago, a good friend of mine, Tremaine du Preez, said to me, "Shirley, you need to write a book called From Secretary to CEO. And if you don't write it, I will!" I laughed, but secretly I thought, "Wow! That's not a bad idea."

Several years later, after travelling the world for a year representing the Global Speakers Federation, my publishing friend Leslie Lim said to me, "Shirley, enough books on email and business writing. It's time for the leadership lessons you've learned – from being a secretary in Sheffield to becoming the President of the Global Speakers Federation."

"Enough books on business writing. It's time for the leadership lessons you've learned."

The common thread of lessons learned is proving even more important now, given the challenges of COVID-19.

As you'll learn through the pages of this book, when Leslie says things like this to me, I sit up and listen. This made me look back at all the significant turning points in my life and, in the process, recognise key lessons I'd learned – lessons that helped me grow both professionally and personally. In doing this, I was able to "connect the dots", as Steve Jobs famously said. Connecting the dots helped me uncover the common thread that runs through all my key turning points. And interestingly, this common thread is proving even more important now, given the challenges the whole human race faces with the COVID-19 pandemic.

In each chapter of this book, I develop the key lessons I learned by giving you practical tools to help you deal with all the questions you may have been asking. I also provide relevant questions so you can reflect on each topic and make notes. Writing down your thoughts can be highly liberating and energising. I strongly recommend you use writing to make the most of these interactive sections.

It may have been my imposter syndrome striking, but I realised you might enjoy some stories not only from me but from other people, too. So, I approached some global leadership experts I've been privileged to meet over the years. I was thrilled when every single person I asked agreed to be interviewed and featured in this book. I am immensely grateful for their contributions and friendship, and I know you will find their reflections, stories, and lessons inspiring.

Connecting my own dots through my writing journey has been a learning lesson in itself. It's May 2020 as I write this introduction. By this time, I had planned to be living in the UK starting a new life after living in Singapore for 18 years. But no, I'm writing this while in lockdown in Singapore. As the old saying goes, "The best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry."

"The best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry."

The global pandemic has affected all of us in many different ways. From my current vantage point in Singapore, I never thought I'd say this, but it looks like my stalled plans could be a blessing in disguise. Time will tell...

"When life throws you lemons, you make lemonade."

Yes, life throws us curve balls sometimes. But there's an old saying that when life throws you lemons, you make lemonade. Right now, I'm enjoying the lemonade. I'm busier than I've ever been, and I

hardly dare say it, but I'm also happier than I've been in a long time. Who would have thought it? Certainly not me! I won't spoil anything by saying more here. Instead, I'll update you on my Facebook group. You'll find the QR code at the bottom of this page.

As you turn the pages to read my stories and those of my friends, my hope is that you will find the courage and inspiration to unlock your true potential. I hope the lessons learned from my key turning points will help you navigate change, stay positive during challenges, and create new opportunities for growth and success.

This is the book I wish I could have read when I was Shirley in Sheffield feeling lost and looking for guidance. I hope it now provides guidance to you!

Wherever you are in life right now, thank you for trusting me to accompany you on your journey to connect the dots. Here's to your success!

Shirley Taylor



Please join my Facebook group 'Shirley Taylor Connecting the Dots'. I'll be adding updates, interviews and other motivating content regularly. I'd also love to hear your 'aha' moments or turning points.

For Review Only

WHAT ARE YOU THIRSTY FOR?

Your passion will lead
to your purpose

CHAPTER

*"Follow your passion.
It will lead to your purpose."*

– Oprah Winfrey

"Follow your passion." How many times have you heard this well-worn phrase? If only you knew what your passion was.

Finding and following your passion can be an issue for those just starting out in their careers. It's also an issue for many people who are stuck in jobs they don't enjoy.

Perhaps you have a steady job, you work hard, and you earn enough to provide for your family and yourself. It's routine and comfortable, but are you really fulfilled? Sometimes you wonder if you've just accepted this as what's meant to be.

Or maybe you have some dreams about what you'd like to do, but you lack the confidence to do something about it.

Whatever is the case for you, you can be sure you are not alone.

But what if your passion is impatiently waiting for you to find it?

The world needs your passion. And when you find it, you can be sure that it will always guide you in the right direction.

My early years

There was always lots of activity in my house as I grew up in Sheffield, England. Between my brother and me, we constantly had friends over. Mum would often joke, "Don't your friends have homes? They are always at ours!" We had lots of space to run around and play. Mum's baking was popular, and Dad loved to joke around with everyone. They always made our friends feel welcome.

No one in my family was shy of hard work. Mum started her career as a secretary until she got an opportunity to go into teaching. With no special qualifications, she became skilled at teaching shorthand and typewriting, and she loved it. She became a great role model for me.

Dad loved being outside with plants and flowers. He also had no qualifications, but he loved his job as head gardener in Sheffield Parks Department. I'd often take friends to the park where Dad was working, and we would get a free game of tennis or bowls. And because Dad was always joking, singing, and making up funny limericks, growing up was a lot of fun!

I was never academically talented, but I got by at school. I just wasn't interested in geography or history, and I wasn't good at mathematics. In junior school, I actually passed my Eleven Plus, which got me into high school. But although I enjoyed school and my friends, I didn't do well in a lot of subjects. But I did do very well in English, which I loved.

Growing up, I was always asking Mum about those funny squiggles when she wrote down notes. Those squiggles were actually Pitman's shorthand. I was happy when she started teaching me the basics of shorthand as well as touch typing.

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At the start of my fourth year at high school (age 14-15), Mum and Dad had "the talk" with me about what I would do at the end of the year. In those days, parents could take their children out of school at the end of four years in high school. Mum and Dad both knew I cared more about shorthand and typing than mathematics and history. After a serious discussion, we decided I would leave school in the summer of 1971 and go straight to secretarial college for two years. I couldn't wait.

But the headmaster at my school had other plans. He was not at all happy when he brought in my family for a meeting. I remember him staring at my parents and saying, "Shirley needs to get some O levels. She must stay here for at least two more years so she gets some qualifications. If she doesn't do that, you'll really regret it!" Mum and Dad looked at me first and then at each other. They immediately stood their ground with the headmaster and removed me from school.

* * *

I'll never forget my first day at Granville College of Further Education starting a two-year secretarial course. Guess who got the role of being my Form Tutor? Yes, my Mum. When the department head told her she would take on this role for the new group, Mum asked him if it was a good idea. She didn't want to be seen as giving me any favouritism. Her boss told her, "Don't worry. The external results will tell their own story."

My fellow students quickly realised Mum wouldn't make me teacher's pet. Even in class, she insisted I call her "Miss" as the other students did. No favouritism for me! In fact, it was actually the contrary. If I told Mum I'd forgotten what she'd asked us to do for homework, I always got this answer: "Well, whose fault is that? Don't expect me to tell you!" After having to phone friends to ask several times, I soon learned my lesson.

I thrived at college. I made great friends and discovered I was good at something – in fact, lots of things. At the end of our second year, we had to face the dreaded external examinations. I studied hard and was so excited when I passed every examination with flying colours. At the prize-giving presentation that year, I was thrilled to receive the award for Student of the Year for having passed the most external qualifications. How proud my Mum and Dad were, and the department head was thrilled, too. I often wondered, “What would my old headmaster have thought about that?”

In July 1973, I immediately got a job as shorthand-typist at a large family firm in Sheffield. By working hard, I gained a reputation for producing high-quality work quickly. I enjoyed taking shorthand dictation from my bosses, typing quotations, memos and letters, and organising meetings. As a result, I was given more and more responsibility.

I also knew it was important to gain more qualifications, so I went to evening classes. Mum had earned a Pitman’s certificate for 160 wpm shorthand, so I was keen to see if I could match or beat that. Eventually, I got a certificate for 170 wpm. In the first few years of working, I often took dictation from the chairman of the company. He would always try to push me by asking, “Shall I speak faster?” and then “Even faster?” Even today, rarely a day goes by that I don’t write down notes using my shorthand.

One key event stands out from my days as a secretary. After taking dictation from my boss, I typed it as best I could. When I presented one important letter to him, he read it through, then looked at me, and said, “This is not what I said...” “Oh no,” I thought, “I’ve done it wrong!” But then he smiled and quickly added,

Don’t just do a good job. Do a great job!

“... but it’s exactly what I wanted to say!” What a laugh we had. I took pride in putting myself in the reader’s place and writing clear, concise messages that made sense and got the right response.

After being at this company a couple of years, I was promoted to be secretary to the financial director. When he eventually became the deputy managing director, I felt very proud to hold the role of his secretary until I left the company nine years later – in 1982.



“Leave your ego at the door every morning, and just do some truly great work. Few things will make you feel better than a job brilliantly done.”

– Robin S. Sharma

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Dot #1

Mum and Dad



Shirley with Mum and Dad.

LESSON:

Follow your passion. It will lead to your purpose.



What if...?

What if the school headmaster had won and I'd stayed on at school for two more years?

What if Mum and Dad agreed that I needed to get O and A levels?

What if I hadn't followed my passion?

What if I hadn't applied myself at college and achieved good results?

Mum and Dad knew what I was good at – and so did I. We also knew what I wasn't good at, and together we chose the right path for me. With their encouragement, I found my passion – not only for shorthand and typing, but for organising, administrative work, scheduling, meeting planning, and of course writing. But good was never enough for me; I always wanted to get better.

Leaving that company in 1982 was just the start of something big. After watching my mum in action in the classroom, I knew I wanted to follow in her footsteps. Before long, it became obvious that my passion for secretarial work would lead me to my purpose – teaching and training. This ultimately led me to the first stage of a journey I could never have foreseen – one that took me far away from Sheffield and led to more passions and more purposes. You'll learn about them as you read through the pages of this book.

“If you can't figure out your purpose, figure out your passion. For your passion will lead you right into your purpose.”

– T. D. Jakes

For Review Only



Moustafa Hamwi, aka Mr. Passion.

Reflections from Moustafa Hamwi

Moustafa was running a multimillion-dollar communication and entertainment business in Dubai and living what seemed to be a highly successful life. But he always felt like something was missing.

While his life looked super successful on the outside – like the kind of scenes you see in movies and rap videos – Moustafa did not feel fulfilled. The more glamorous his life had become, the emptier he felt.

One day in 2012, in pursuit of his passion and purpose, he bought a one-way ticket to India. During his journey there, Moustafa met a swami who had lived in caves for 13 years, where he led a life of solitude and meditation. He was now teaching wisdom-seekers in his ashram (temple) in a small village near the town of Manali in the Himalayas.

A swami is a spiritual teacher or guru who has set aside all worldly and materialistic ambitions to pursue a life of spiritual realisation and serve others in the same way.

Moustafa had many deep conversations with the swami, trying to get an answer about the purpose and meaning of everything in life. One day, the swami, contemplatively playing with his long beard, said, “Do you know what you are thirsty for? Because if you don't know what you are thirsty for, you cannot quench your thirst.”

Moustafa told me, “Every time I tell this story, I feel teleported back to that moment. It is so vivid in my head and such an ‘aha’ moment for me. With that single statement from the swami, I realised I had

When you ask the right question, you are more likely to find the right answer.

bought a one-way ticket to India seeking the answer, but I did not have the right question. I had no idea what I was thirsty for!"

Moustafa continued his journey across India, and one day he discovered he had a medical condition that experts labelled "non-curable". Determined to heal using natural means, he dedicated all his time and energy towards healing with the help of herbal medicine, healthy eating, and various kinds of meditation, including laughter and crying meditation.

Eventually, Moustafa recovered his health. However, this experience made him ask the question, "What if I did not recover and these were the last days of my life? Did my life really matter?"

He also asked himself three other questions, as if he really were in the last days of his life. I now encourage you to ask yourself the same questions:

1. Have I been fully engaged with life, or was I just a tourist?
2. Did I live a life that was meaningful to me, or did I just comply with other people's expectations?
3. Did I leave a legacy and an impact I am proud of?

Back in Dubai in 2013, Moustafa was invited to deliver an inspirational talk about his journey in India. A few months later, he bumped into a stranger who told him, "I attended your talk about your India journey. You changed my life!"

What a lightbulb moment this became for Moustafa! Finally, he knew what he was thirsty for! He was thirsty for being able to influence lives with his work and hearing more people say, "You changed my

life." These words ultimately became his key performance indicator for knowing he was doing his job well.

From that moment on, Moustafa started speaking around the world about passion and its impact on our success in life and work. In the span of a few years, he earned the nickname "Mr. Passion", given to him by Professor Tony Buzan, inventor of Mind Mapping. Moustafa was also ranked as one of the top 100 coaches in the world by Dr. Marshall Goldsmith.

Here is how Mr. Passion defines passion: *"Consistently doing what you love, what you're good at, and what is of value to the world."*



Reflections from Connecting the Dots.
Watch exclusive interviews with all Shirley's guests.



"The secret to a truly passionate life is to trade your time, energy and efforts for what fulfils you the most."

– Moustafa Hamwi

Passion	Purpose
Life without passions can feel dull. Passions make life fun and exciting.	Life without purpose can feel aimless.
Passion is energy. It's what starts your engine.	Purpose is being useful, making a real difference in some way.
Passion is something so meaningful to you that you crave it.	Purpose is what you were put on this earth to do.
Passion is about emotions. It's an emotional spark that drives you forward.	Purpose is the reason you do what you do. It's the foundation on which your passion is built.
Passion can sometimes be selfish. When you pursue your passion, it's because you enjoy it and pursuing it feels good.	Purpose is never selfish. Your purpose could mean you have to put others first or put aside your own feelings for the sake of the greater good. But you won't mind doing so, because you know it's what you are meant to do.
Passion is ruled by emotions or feelings. It can often change on a whim.	Purpose is more focused. It might be <i>only one thing</i> that makes you feel fulfilled and complete.
Passion can come and go.	Purpose is forever, or perhaps until you've completed one purpose and find a new one.
Passion focuses on nouns. It's about what you love.	Purpose focuses on verbs because it brings in <i>action</i> . It completes you.

Passion, purpose and you

It's important to know the difference between your *passion* and your *purpose* because it can often help you get your life on the right track. When you know your purpose and give it all your time and energy, living your passion becomes even more focused and enjoyable. And having a good balance between passion and purpose will make your life worthwhile.

How do these descriptions of passion and purpose apply in your life?

The sweet spot is where your passion and purpose align. The ultimate life goal has to be following your passion while living out your purpose.

Does it always work to follow your passion?

"Follow your dreams" is the advice given by many people when it comes to choosing a job or career. But sometimes following your dreams – or your passion – can be risky. How many people move to Hollywood to chase their dream of being an actor only to find themselves in the unemployment line?

But what's the alternative? What happens if you ignore your dreams, your passion? This could lead you to putting your head down every day, slogging along, and doing dull, meaningless work that you don't enjoy, just to earn a salary.

I once saw an interview with comedian Jim Carrey in which he shared how his father had a talent for making people laugh but lived in fear of failure. His father chose the safe route of working in accounting, but when Carrey was just 12 years old, his father lost his job, putting his family in dire straits. Will you let fear rule you and take the safe route? Or will you follow your passion?

Questions to determine your passion

For many people beginning their careers, it can be impossible to identify your passion. It can also be tough for people who've been in the same job for years to figure it out. If you're having difficulty identifying your passion, answering these questions may help you.

1. What would I do this year if I had no fear?

(from a Jana Stanfield song)

What *would* you do this year if you had no fear? For decades, I wished I'd kept up with my piano lessons. I've decided that 2020 will be the year, *I will take piano lessons*. There, I said it. It's out there!

2. What would you do if you could do anything?

Don't just say go on holiday or buy a big house. My friend Sue started attending art classes and found a huge passion. She's now selling her wonderful paintings and preparing for her own exhibition. I've decided that 2020 will be the year I join some kind of singing group.

3. What do you really dislike doing?

List what you don't enjoy doing. Perhaps writing them down will make your true passion more apparent.

4. Who do you really admire and why? What do they do that you respect?

I really respect my good friend Heather. She sets her mind on something and she does it. She's even a black belt at taekwondo.

5. Ask your friends, family, or colleagues what they think you're good at.

Sometimes we don't know our own strengths. When you hear what they say, you might be surprised, so do give everything serious thought. My friends tell me I'm good at organising and going through all the fine details of a project.

6. What are you good at but not great at?

Most people know they are okay at doing lots of things. Write these down and ponder over them. Could you weave any of these skills together in some way? Steve Jobs wasn't the world's greatest engineer, salesperson, designer, or businessman. Still, he was good enough at all of these to fuse them into something great – Apple.

7. What did you love doing as a child?

Paint? Write stories? Recall what you enjoyed most during your childhood before you felt the pressure to study the right subjects or get a good job. Bringing back these memories can help you find your true passion now. I loved helping Mum to bake. I think I should dig out her recipe book, don't you?

8. What new things could you create?

With every new thing you make, you're creating something to be passionate about. For example, my assistant Rekha loves Harry Potter, so she started designing her own wands, which she sells to family and friends.

9. **Imagine you are now 80 years old. What do you wish you had spent the last 20 to 30 years doing?**

This exercise can be really cathartic and emotional. And it might just instigate a huge change in your life.

Don't expect a "eureka" moment from doing this exercise. These moments are rare. But inspiration could strike at any time once you pay attention to these important questions. Treat yourself by spending 15 minutes a day thinking about these questions and more. Inspiration or motivation often strikes as a result of a few small steps rather than one giant leap.

Two practices I strongly suggest are:

- **Meditation**

Practising meditation helps you focus and think more clearly. It can clear your mind and determine what's going on within. It could even lead to you discovering your true passion.

- **Visualisation**

Close your eyes and imagine it's early in the morning. The alarm goes off, and you jump out of bed feeling excited about the day. You have a spring in your step as you dress quickly, full of enthusiasm. The sun is shining brightly, you're smiling widely, and you take those first steps out of your house. Where are you going, and what kind of job follows from that amazing feeling?

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"There is no passion to be found playing small – in settling for a life that is less than the one you are capable of living."

– Nelson Mandela

Your reflections

Here are this chapter's questions again with a space to answer them. If you wish, go back to the previous pages where they're explained. Give yourself quiet time to reflect and jot down your answers on paper.

1. What would you do this year if you had no fear?

2. What would you do if you could do anything?

3. What do you really dislike doing?

4. Who do you admire and why?

5. What do your friends, family, or colleagues think you are good at doing?

6. What are the things you are *good* at, but not *great* at.

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7. What did you love doing as a child?



8. What new things could you create?



9. Imagine you are now 80 years old. What do you wish you had spent the last 20 to 30 years doing?



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“Since 80 per cent
of your life is
spent working,
you should start
your business around
something that is
a passion.”

– Sir Richard Branson