

14 Paths to Your Passion

Workbook

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Sunday night, crammed into an airplane seat, tired, with a headache banging through my forehead, I feel miles away from the topic I planned to write about this week: passion.

But I'm going to give it a shot because I'm armed with reams of notes I've taken on the topic and because, more importantly, if I can do this now, if I can pull out of the lethargic state I have fallen into and reconnect with my energy, passion, and purpose ... I can do it any time I want.

Finding your passion has long been known to be an essential ingredient of winning armies, companies and individuals. It is not a soft nice-to-have, but a strategic requisite. So ...

How can you rapidly connect to your passion and purpose?

Step 1: Want it

The ability to find your passion is not nice-to-have. It is a requisite for impacting the world. Carl von Clausewitz, the Prussian military strategist, talked about it, Sun Tzu, the ancient Chinese general, underscored its strategic value as well. Soldiers who care more deeply about their cause enjoy a tangible competitive advantage. They fight harder and with greater energy. Their passion invites more support. They turn the world on their side.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, the psychologist who coined the term "Flow," describing it is as "the feeling of total engagement in the activity so that you don't notice anything outside of what you're doing; you forget time and you forget yourself," shows that athletes who can connect with their flow hold an advantage. People who find their flow reduce stress, increase happiness, and improve their mental health.

Paul Graham, the founder of Y Combinator, argues that entrepreneurs who are out of touch with their passion start doing things for "prestige."

"Prestige is the opinion of the rest of the world," said Graham. "Prestige is like a powerful magnet that warps even your beliefs about what you enjoy. It causes you to work not on what you like, but what you'd like to like." Entrepreneurs who work on what they would like to like can't hold their own against entrepreneurs who actually love to work.

There is an even greater risk to operating detached from your passion – because you are pursuing what other people are passionate about, rather than what you love, you will always be following, second to market, behind the ball.

Richard Branson, founder of Virgin Group, puts it best: "If you're into kite-surfing and you want to become an entrepreneur, do it with kite-surfing. Look, if you can indulge in your passion, life will be far more interesting than if you're just working. You'll work harder at it, and you'll know more about it. But first you must go out and educate yourself on whatever it is that you've decided to do – know more about kite-surfing than anyone else. That's where the work comes in. But if you're doing things you're passionate about, that will come naturally" (source: http://money.cnn.com/magazines/business2/business2_archive/2006/08/01/8382250/).

Step 2: Find it

So, hopefully you want it now (I do!). Now what? How do you find it?

I uncovered 14 short, practical exercises you can apply.

Exercise 1: Build your portfolio

Randy Komisar, technology legend and now a partner at Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers, thinks you should not look for your one passion. That search will paralyze you. Instead think of a portfolio of passions and use those passions to guide you. You don't have to choose just one! He also suggests that you don't try to define your end-goal, or your horizon, but rather define your values, or your north-south-east-west as he calls it. This lowers the pressure on you to get it right. It allows you to move into action now. You don't have to have a clear vision of the future you want, but just have to know that you want to go north or south. (See a great video interview: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSu-YbxxbVw>.)

List 10 possible passions; put a star next to the five that seem to resonate most powerfully with you: 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10.
List 10 possible values that matter to you; put a star next to the five that seem to resonate most powerfully with you: 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10.

Exercise 3: Recall flow states

Sit me down in a library with a stack of old books and a mission to produce a blog or paper, and time stops. I blink and three hours have passed. Flow states occur when your mind is so engaged in your activity that it lacks the mental capacity to notice other things. It means you are loving what you are doing. Sit down and think back from childhood to today and put together a catalogue of activities that put you into a state of flow.

What's a moment in the past where you experienced a sense of "flow"?	What activity gave you flow?	What passion or purpose does this point to?

Exercise 4: Explore the “four aims of life”

A Buddhist framework suggests there are four aims to life (I am simplifying here): (1) achieve physical health, (2) build wealth and artifacts and family, (3) seek to become a perfect person, and (4) find your greater purpose. Think of and write down three potential passions for each of these aims.

Aim of life	Potential passions/goals/desires:
Achieve physical health and pleasure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•••
Build wealth, things, home, family	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•••
Seek to become a perfect person	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•••
Find your greater purpose (reach enlightenment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•••

Exercise 5: Meditate then ask yourself

Deepak Chopra suggests starting by meditating to reach a state of deep relaxation: “Begin by meditating for a few minutes and connecting to the experience of stillness and silence. Then ask what your heart deeply desires and yearns to express and listen quietly for an honest response. For the time being, don’t fixate on any one response, let the journey move wherever it wants to ... Ask yourself, ‘What are my unique gifts and talents? How can I use them to bring happiness to others and to myself?’ Answers always come, but what I have discovered is that many people have such a strong filtering mechanism ... The important thing when you are listening for an answer is to not to immediately reject what comes to mind just because it doesn’t match your preconceptions.” Read the full text of his exercise here:

<http://changeyourfrequency.com/positivethinkingpower/cool-finds/connect-to-your-passion-a-letter-from-deepak-chopra/>.

Your notes from Chopra’s exercise:

Exercise 6: Create space

President Obama shared in an interview last week that he dedicates 10pm to 1pm each night, while Michelle and his girls sleep, to work, read, and write. I find my think time while cooking a midnight meal in a quiet kitchen, when everyone else is in bed, or on long flights. When is your think time?

Exercise 7: Write until you cry

Steve Pavlina (<http://www.stevpavlina.com/blog/2005/01/how-to-discover-your-life-purpose-in-about-20-minutes/suggest>) suggests you write down the answer to “What is my true purpose in life?” Then, write another answer. Keep writing until you cry. “This is your purpose.”

What is your true purpose in life?	Did you cry? (if not, repeat)

Exercise 8: Envision your funeral

Michael Gerber, author of “E-Myth: Why Most Small Businesses Don’t Work” (www.michaelgerbercompanies.com/), includes a chapter on finding purpose in which he recommends you imagine your funeral and asking what you want your eulogy to consist of, your lifetime achievements to be, the difference you made. How many of these are you doing right now?

Describe your funeral:

What do you want your eulogy to consist of?

What do you want your achievements to be?

What difference do you want to have made?

How many of these things are you doing now and which do you want to start doing now?

Exercise 9: Answer 15 questions

The people at thinksimplenow.com offer a list of 15 questions you can ask to help connect with your purpose, including “What makes you smile?” and “If you had to teach something, what would you teach?” (See <http://thinksimplenow.com/happiness/life-on-purpose-15-questions-to-discover-your-personal-mission/>.)

1. What makes you smile? (Activities, people, events, hobbies, projects, etc.)	
2. What were your favorite things to do in the past? What about now?	
3. What activities make you lose track of time?	
4. What makes you feel great about yourself?	
5. Who inspires you most? (Anyone you know or do not know. Family, friends, authors, artists, leaders, etc.) Which qualities inspire you, in each person?	
6. What are you naturally good at? (Skills, abilities, gifts etc.)	

<p>7. What do people typically ask you for help in?</p>	
<p>8. If you had to teach something, what would you teach?</p>	
<p>9. What would you regret not fully doing, being or having in your life?</p>	
<p>10. You are now 90 years old, sitting on a rocking chair outside your porch; you can feel the spring breeze gently brushing against your face. You are blissful and happy, and are pleased with the wonderful life you've been blessed with. Looking back at your life and all that you've achieved and acquired, all the relationships you've developed, what matters to you most? List them out.</p>	
<p>11. What are your deepest values? Select 3 to 6 and prioritize the words in order of importance to you.</p>	
<p>12. What were some challenges, difficulties and hardships you've overcome or are in the process of overcoming? How did you do it?</p>	

<p>13. What causes do you strongly believe in? Connect with?</p>	
<p>14. If you could get a message across to a large group of people, who would those people be? What would your message be?</p>	
<p>15. Given your talents, passions and values, how could you use these resources to serve, to help, to contribute? (To people, beings, causes, organizations, environment, planet, etc.)</p>	

Exercise 10: Write your “ideal Self”

One of my favorite gurus on passion and purpose, Steven Pressfield, wrote, “We have an ideal Self in our imaginations ... This Self is a New York Times Bestselling Author. This Self stopped a bar fight with a witty joke. This Self sang the national anthem ... of the world. This Self saved babies from a burning building, then demurred when the TV news reporters sought them for an interview for their heroic valor. This Self is the most interesting person in the world” (<http://executingpassion.com/passion-profile-steven-pressfield/>).

Pretend you are setting up to write a novel or play with your ideal Self as the lead character. Who is he/she? This exercise really gets my heart pumping: the bestselling author, the inventor, the “guru” who fills a stadium.

You are setting up to write a novel or play with your “ideal Self” as the lead character. Describe this person. Who is he/she? What do people say about him/her? What impact does he/she have? What does he/she do? What is he/she passionate about?

Exercise 11: Find and seek out your fears

Pressfield also writes, “If you find yourself asking yourself (and your friends) ‘Am I really a writer? Am I really an artist?’ chances are you are. The counterfeit innovator is wildly self-confident. The real one is scared to death.” So ask yourself, “What is it I’m scared to death of? Where am I today? Is my comfort zone getting very uncomfortable?”

What are you scared to death of?	Where are you today?	Is your comfort zone getting very uncomfortable (or are you playing it safe)?
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Exercise 12: Write the “moments”

Stan Slap, author of *Bury My Heart at Conference Room B* (www.slapcompany.com/the-book), suggests you find a personal story that impacted you and start sharing it.

“The answer is that your story doesn’t have to be dramatic, only real,” said Slap. “True epiphanies often come from a series of small moments — visible, for instance, only after reflecting on the decisions that first caused you to need your values or become aware of them. Indeed, simply looking at your values consciously often helps connect them to the specific moments — big or small — that made a difference to you then and can again now.”

Name a moment you most remember from your past.	What value(s) or passion(s) did you become aware of from this event?	If you were to share this event with others, how would your story start?

Exercise 13: Watch TEDTalks

YouTube is now filled with them. Watch talks by anyone and you will see what it looks like to be deeply connected with a passion and purpose.

Name of TEDTalks presenter	What you noticed/resonated with

Exercise 14: Remove the cause

The Indian guru Jiddu Krishnamurti makes the distinction between what we often call passion and passion without a cause: “Our passion is for something: for music, for painting, for literature, for a country, for a woman or a man; it is always the effect of a cause.”

But this type of passion leads to attachment. “When passion has a cause, there is attachment, and attachment is the beginning of sorrow. Most of us are attached; we cling to a person, to a country, to a belief, to an idea, and when the object of our attachment is taken away or otherwise loses its significance, we find ourselves empty, insufficient” (<http://www.jiddu-krishnamurti.net/en/1962/1962-08-05-jiddu-krishnamurti-7th-public-talk>).

So ask yourself, “If I had nothing to prove, nothing to achieve, if I had all that I needed, what would I want to do?”

What passions do I currently hold?

Of these, which are “for” something (e.g., for a country, music, painting, man/woman)?

What passions might you have that are “without cause”?

Step 3: Choose it

A strategy is as much about what you decided NOT to do as it is about what you decide to do. So to achieve your purpose requires committing to it and saying no to the alternatives: the complacency, the easy path, the distractions. This is the beginning of action. As Peter Drucker said, "Unless commitment is made, there are only promises and hopes ... but no plans."

What will happen in the future if you do not commit to your passions?

Are you ready to commit to your passions right now?

Name three or more people you can tell about your commitment who will hold you accountable for pursuing your passion:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What (even small) actions can you take today on your passions?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.