April 2019

Why Following Your Passion Might Not Be Right For You

Hunter Muse
hunter.muse94@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/marriottstudentreview

Part of the Accounting Commons, Business Administration, Management, and Operations Commons, Business and Corporate Communications Commons, and the Entrepreneurial and Small Business Operations Commons

Marriott Student Review is a student journal created and published as a project for the Writing for Business Communications course at Brigham Young University (BYU). The views expressed in Marriott Student Review are not necessarily endorsed by BYU or The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Recommended Citation
Muse, Hunter (2019) "Why Following Your Passion Might Not Be Right For You," Marriott Student Review: Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 3. Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/marriottstudentreview/vol3/iss1/3
The question “What do you want to be when you grow up?” used to inspire excitement and wonder when we were young; now it might make your palms sweaty and your heart rate soar. According to the latest Conference Board survey of U.S. job satisfaction, sixty-four percent of workers under the age of twenty-five say they are unhappy with their jobs. Many would like to avoid being part of that sixty-four percent. When you are staring into a daunting future with unlimited possibilities, your options seem restrained, and you need one thing: good advice. The popular adage you’ve probably heard is this: “follow your passion!” Whenever I hear this, I feel sparks of enthusiasm bubbling up inside. The possibilities! However, soon after this elation I find myself back in the same position I was in before, with the same confusing questions, not sure what to do next.

Observing this pattern sent me on a quest for better advice. I interviewed dozens of passionate professionals, studied career building, and experimented with different approaches to career moves. I learned a few important lessons. First, it’s vital to realize that crafting a meaningful career requires asking the right questions. Asking yourself what your passion is won’t cut it—in fact, it could lead you into what writer Cal Newport has called the “Passion Trap.” He states, “The more emphasis you place on finding work you love, the more unhappy you become when you don’t love every minute of the work you have.” The mantra to follow your passion is unhelpful and leads us to believe that work should be blissful all the same. Passion for work isn’t bad; it’s essential fuel for overcoming tough problems. Yet, putting passion above all else is a misguided endeavor. Spending time thinking closely about the better questions to guide your career is worth the effort.

Let’s go through a few examples of poor questions often asked when deciding a career path, and replace them with better ones. The purpose of these questions and theories isn’t to tell you what to think, but how to think about these decisions.

**Poor question:**
What’s my passion?

**Better Question:**
What do I (1) love to do, (2) that someone will pay me to do and (3) that I am really good at doing?

This better question comes from Jim Collins, author of business classics *Good to Great* and *Built to Last*. One of his core concepts is the “Hedgehog Effect.”

---

**Fig. 1 The Hedgehog Concept**
What do I love to do?

Poor question: Where do I want to be in my career in ten years?

Better question: What do I want to do next?

This poor question assumes that you find your passion before building the skills to do it. How easy would it be to pick a favorite sport if you’d never played any of them? Familiarity with sports is like familiarity with a potential job. Both require practice and dedication before any preference can be discovered. Think you don’t have time? Think again. According to research, only fifteen percent of what we know today is likely to be relevant in five years, so grab your laptop and start learning to take advantage of abundant online resources. Focus on mastering a rare, valuable skill and it will pay dividends because mastering skills will drive your career and your passion.

What is your passion? According to research, we are more likely to succeed if we do something that we excel at.

Poor question: Can I funnel into success.

Better question: What can I do well?

In ten years?

Where do I want to be in my career in ten years?

This can be as simple as connecting with people on LinkedIn and setting up a phone call. You can easily find people whose careers inspire you and ask questions. Ask them about their work lives and what they like and dislike. If you think nobody will talk to you because you’re a student, you’re wrong. Most people will take time to talk to you because you are a student. This process will help you bridge the gap between what you think you want and what you actually want.

To find his career path, Jim Collins took notes on himself throughout his twenties, making objective observations about what he liked and disliked. He called this book the “bug book” because he was observing himself like a scientist observes a bug. This allowed him to identify activities that he enjoyed doing and those that he disliked. This technique not only helps if you don’t know what you like, but it also helps to identify activities you should avoid in order to find your career.

3. Don’t just dream about what you want to do—go do it.

To identify what you want to do right now and do it. Don’t have the skills? Take a class that teaches the skills. Don’t have the experience? Do an on-campus internship. Don’t have the money to start a business? Opportunities and resources are available for you to build a fantastic career. Don’t think of your time in life now as a means to an end—make it an end right now!

Your time is precious. Don’t let the dream of distant goals rob you of thriving now—start thinking, connecting, and skill-building today. As you identify the skills you want to develop and the next step you’re excited to take, go all in. Use the techniques described to take control of your path and live passionately now. Using the perspectives shared will require you to take decisions one step at a time. Instead of knowing the end from the beginning, you’ll embrace a mindset of being open to the career opportunities that present themselves to you. Next time you hear the adage “Follow your passion,” you’ll know that you have the tools to do it.

BOOKS TO EXPLORE MORE:

So Good They Can’t Ignore You
by Cal Newport

How Will You Measure Your Life?
By Clayton Christensen

Deep Work
by Cal Newport