

4 Steps to Career Passion

As you look ahead, think of the rest of your career as a journey. That journey has the potential to be an incredible adventure, or the roadtrip from hell. Here are four steps to make sure you enjoy the ride!

1. Create your internal compass

The first and most important step is creating your internal compass. I call that internal compass the Passion Core (sm). In a nutshell, it is the answer to the question, what makes you tick? What are the things that are going to make your career feel rich, fulfilling and fun?

If you don't know that, you'll use something else to guide your career decisions - usually an external compass created from things like societal expectations, the tapes our parents planted in our heads (however well meaning), material visions of success, etc. And that's a surefire recipe for getting lost.

So how do you create that compass? The key is to start gathering all the information in one place so it becomes a useful guidance tool. Here are a couple ideas to help you get started:

- First ask, "What do I already know?" Write it down. You might be surprised how much you already know once you start putting it in one place.
- Pick something you love doing - work or play - and start exploring the underlying characteristics. Ask yourself, "why do I love it?" Think of it as reverse engineering to find the underlying characteristics. Write it all down.
- Repeat that process with other things you love doing.

There are many good resources out there for more questions to help you with your self-exploration. Keep exploring and add the additional insights until what you have feels "good enough" (i.e., it feels like it probably covers the majority of what's important). It will always be under construction as you refine it over time, so don't wait until it's perfect before you put it to use.

2. Identify your destination

Step One: Fill the funnel. Use your Passion Core to help you brainstorm new ideas on different career destinations that have some of the important elements you identified. This can help you get beyond the blinders created by your current career path and past experience.

Your Passion Core is like an erector set for your career. Once you have those pieces identified, you can put them together in any number of ways that will add up to a career you will love.

Try to come up with as many ideas as possible. You're trying to prime the pump and discover the opportunities that lie waiting outside those blinders. Look at it as filling a funnel with as many career ideas as you can - it's not time to evaluate them yet at this stage.

Step two: Once that funnel is full of ideas, you can start eliminating things - funneling your choices down to the ones that are most relevant for you. First toss out the ones that don't make sense. Then use your Passion Core as a filter to eliminate the ones that don't quite measure up. In the end, you will have a handful of closely matched possibilities that you can research and evaluate more carefully.

3. **Map it**

Once you have decided on that career destination, the next step in the game is figuring out how to get there.

The obvious piece is figuring out how to get from Point A to Point B. "I need to do this, this, and this." Make a list of steps you can see you need to take to get where you want to go.

Less obvious is a close examination of the topographical landscape. Where are the obstacles that are getting in your way, both internal and external. If you don't realize they're there, 1) you will probably run smack into them and 2) you won't be able to consciously figure out ways around them.

On the flip side, what are the places that will make your journey easier? We all bring skills and gifts to the table. Understanding how they apply to your journey can help speed you on your way.

4. **Hit the road**

None of the above matters if you don't start taking steps. They don't even need to be big steps. The important thing is just that you start taking action. Action creates action, while inertia creates more of the same.

One of the big misconceptions is that career change automatically equals taking the big plunge. The truth is, for the majority of people I meet, that won't work. Whether it's because they have financial obligations that make a drastic change impossible, or they lack the right experience, or even just because it's too dangd scary.

You need to take that first step forward. Maybe it's starting the "why" exercise described above. Maybe you already know what you want to do, but have just never put the ball in motion.

Now is the time. Identify a small step you can take this week - and then another you can take next week. Never let a week go by without taking some step in the direction of your dreams.

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