

Don't Do What You Love, Instead Do This

It is during these times where you hear a particular piece of advice: Do what you love. The optimism behind these phrases is well-intentioned, however, it is the worst kind of advice to give to anyone. Instead, I present in this article some possible alternatives to this.

Everywhere you look, you will find people who are not happy about their work. They wish to get more out of life or are undecided about what to do next in life.

It is during these times where you hear a particular piece of advice. You may have given it to someone else or you may have heard it yourself:

Do what you love.

This phrase comes in many forms:

1. Follow your passion.
2. With hard work and determination, you can live the dream.
3. Find your calling.

The optimism behind these phrases is well-intentioned, however, it is the worst kind of advice to give to anyone. Instead, I present in this article some possible alternatives to this.

Why Doing What You Love Is Bad Advice?

Before jumping into what you should be considering, it is worth considering why this advice is a terrible one. Again, you may be someone who dishes this out like it is candy or perhaps this is the only piece of advice you have heard.

Before getting into too many details, we first need to develop and explore what passions are. These are the things that define ourselves and give us meaning.

Where the issue rests with this advice is using it as an ideal for whether your life is fulfilled or fulfilling.

It Can Lead to More Confusion

This advice raises a lot of questions. The biggest one is 'what is passion? What does it mean to be passionate?'

Psychology Today contributor Allison E McWilliams Ph.D. wrote an interesting part about our relationship to work ^[1]. She described three key work orientations:

1. Job orientation – work is a means to an end, allowing you to pursue other things in life.

2. Career orientation – care about work that allows the person to get promoted.
3. Calling orientation – the work you do creates your identity. Your meaning.

The point here is that while some of us may not be passionate about the work, you are doing the work for a reason. The advice of 'doing what you love' falls more into a calling orientation and that might not be something you wish to pursue.

After all, there is nothing wrong with any of these orientations. Neither one of them is superior to the others. This can lead to confusion amongst people because they may have worked for completely different reasons.

Every Job Has a Sore Spot

Whether you are in-between careers or are feeling unhappy about your work, it can feel like the grass is greener on the other side. Following the advice of doing what you love feels great at first, but it can be short-lived.

It is because every job out there is going to have something that you are not going to enjoy. There is going to be something you have to do that makes it feel like busywork rather than something you are passionate about.

It becomes a chore and, in turn, you could lose the passion that is driving you forward to that path.

This raises another point.

Passions Do Not Always Need to Become Careers

People have multiple passions, which give us more options to do what we love. It seems great at first, but as mentioned, some things can cause our attitudes to shift.

Perhaps you have too many passions and you get lost, confused or frustrated with what you are trying to do.

Or maybe you run into something that alters how you view your passion. For example, cooking is a great passion. But if you decide to become a chef, you would be subject to making the same dishes constantly with little variety.

When people give this advice out, some of them assume that we only have one thing that we love doing. But that is not true. You have several passions. Not to mention, you can turn many hobbies or passions into businesses today thanks to technology and business tools.

What Options Should You Consider?

Following something based on your passion can lead to problems, but it does not change the situation. As such, here are some things you can keep in mind that can help you lead a more fulfilling life.

1. Look at Your Skill Set

You have various skills and talents that can help in various parts of a job. If you have communication skills, chances are you are good at any kind of job that requires you to be vocal.

The idea is to look at yourself and see what sort of skills you have and how it matches up to something you wish to do. When you identify your strengths or something that requires little effort from you to perform, it means you have an opportunity to develop it further.

For example, if you are skilled around a kitchen, you know you have a few key dishes that you can make. But you can still grow that skill by trying out new dishes, picking up a few new spices. This allows you to broaden the skill at your own pace.

When you are looking at your overall skill set, you will be able to get a better idea of what you could pursue and how you can scale it. By spending some time with it, you can even find a way to do more with that skill at your current workplace.

2. Apply Some Tests

In Cal Newport's book *So Good They Can't Ignore You: Why Skills Trump Passion in the Search for Work You Love*, Newport explains why passion is not something to pursue. Instead, passion is something that follows you after you have put in the hard work.

With this in mind, there are two tests that you can try out to determine whether a passion should stay a passion or whether you can turn it into a career.

The first test is a passion test.

Think of something that you are passionate about. But here is the catch: ask yourself whether someone will pay you to do that.

Going back to a previous point, money matters a lot and even if you are doing what you love, it is not going to fill empty stomachs or keep you warm at night. It is a harsh reality.

Not only that, but people do not necessarily care how passionate you are at something. Instead, they care about giving up money. Is the money they're putting in giving them enough of a benefit? It all comes back to whether someone is willing to pay for your passionate work.

The second test is the experience test.

For this test, you want to gauge how much experience you have in that area and how much you are willing to spend in that area.

With this test, our passion becomes something that drives us to spend time and effort on something. The people who are being paid for a passion they have are unlike those at the bottom of the industry barely getting by.

The difference between those who are thriving and those who are not is that the former ones have gone through a feedback effect. This is when you practice hard enough that you figure out you are better than others when it comes to this task.

You can get other feedback in other ways, but overall, it creates a loop where that feedback motivates you to practice more. You begin to develop a system or a process that allows you to progress more and develop your skills.

By conducting these two tests, you can begin to see in time whether this is something you want to be pursuing. With more feedback, you learn more about yourself and whether you can pursue this.

3. Be Practical, Not Only Passionate

In an article published in Quartz, Catherine Baab-Mugira talked about her reasoning for pursuing a career that pays well over doing something you love. ^[2]

She argues that when you are working for money, your purpose for work is clearer. Not only that, but money is also a problem that you can mostly solve, and it is a good goal to have overall.

Her philosophy is that the more money you make now, the less you will need later on in life and the less you will have to worry about it when pursuing those other passions.

It is a practical approach. After all, money cannot buy happiness, but it can lead to many happy events in life. Overall, it can be a good motivator for you, and it can shape how you are viewing your work now.

Passion is something that comes in the work that we do. It is something that follows us rather than something we ought to pursue. Instead of taking that advice, spend time looking at yourself and begin to ask questions.

What are you passionate about? What passion can help you make money? Is it something you know you can do for a long time?

Keeping a level head and thinking rationally about our passions can help us sift through what can bring us to a new and improved life.

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