

The Passion Recipe: Four Steps To Total Fulfillment

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Over the past few decades, “passion” has been declared everything from the secret to successful entrepreneurship to the foundation of a meaningful life. It’s the magic pill alright, which is exactly the problem.

Now, sure, if you already know what you’re passionate about, well, this isn’t much of a problem. But for anyone who wants to, say, build a passion-driven business, not knowing what you’re passionate about is quite a hurdle.

This is a blog about how to clear that hurdle in a few simple steps, but before we get there it’s first helpful to demystify this term.

For starters, why is passion important? Simple. It’s a profound focusing mechanism. We pay more attention to those things we believe in.

But focused attention is the ultimate gateway drug. It drives performance, it increases productivity, and it triggers flow (which, in turn, further increases performance and productivity).

Moreover, since flow is among the most addictive states on earth, any experience that consistently generates the state is an experience we will go extraordinarily far out of our way to get more of. In other words, flow over time is a pretty straightforward recipe for passion.

Step One: Make A List

The easiest place to start is with a pen and a piece of paper. For reasons that have to do with the relationship between writing and memory, it’s better if you do this with pen and paper instead of laptop and keyboard.

The first thing you want to do is make a list of 25 things you’re curious about. And by curious, all I really mean is that if you had a spare weekend, you’d be interested in reading a couple books on the topic and maybe having a conversation or two with an expert.

The most important part here is to be as absolutely specific as possible. In other words, don’t be interested in football or punk rock or food. These categories are way too vague to be useful. Instead, be interested in the pass blocking mechanics required to play left tackle; the evolution of political punk from Crass to Rise Against; or the potential for grasshoppers to become a primary human food source in the next five years.

Step Two: Hunt for Intersections

Now look for places where these 25 ideas intersect. Take the above example. Say both grasshoppers as food and the mechanics of playing left tackle are on your list. Well, if you’re into pass blocking mechanics you’re probably also interested in the nutritional requirements required to play left tackle most effectively. Insects are exceptionally high in protein—would they make a good football food?

The point here is simple. Curiosity alone is not enough to create true passion. There’s just not enough energy there. Not enough focus or commitment. Instead, you want to look for places where three or four items on your curiosity list intersect.

If you can spot the overlap between multiple items on your list—well, now you’re cooking. There’s energy there. Why? It’s neurobiology. When multiple curiosity streams intersect you create the necessary conditions for

pattern recognition, which is the linking of ideas together.

Humans love pattern recognition. Whenever we recognize a pattern, the brain releases a tiny squirt of the neurochemical dopamine and, for cultivating passion, this is a very big deal. Dopamine serves a ton of different functions in the brain, but for this discussion three are critical.

First, dopamine is a focusing chemical. It helps us pay more attention to the task at hand. Obviously, this enhances learning and drives progress and both are key to cultivating passion.

Secondly, dopamine tunes signal to noise ratios in the brain, which is a fancy way of saying it helps us detect more patterns. Meaning there's a feedback loop here. We get dopamine when we first detect a link between two ideas and the dopamine that we get helps us detect even more links. This is why creative ideas tend to spiral—one good idea leads to the next and the next.

Lastly, dopamine is a feel-good drug. It's one of the brain's principle reward chemicals and is extremely addictive. This addiction is key to passion. The more dopamine you get, the more addictive the experience, the more addictive the experience, the more you can't wait to do it again.

Step Three: Play

Now that you've identified that overlap, play in that space for a little while. Devote 10 or 20 minutes a day to listening to lectures, watching videos, reading articles, books, whatever, on the topic. Feed those curiosities a little bit at a time, but feed them on a daily basis.

This slow evolution strategy takes advantage of the brain's inherent pattern recognition software. When you advance your knowledge a little bit at a time, you're giving your subconscious a chance to process that information. It will (automatically) start looking for connections between the bits you're learning. This means more patterns, more dopamine, more motivation, and—over time—a bit of expertise.

And make no mistake, the big point here is to develop that little bit of expertise. For a while—in step two—a lot of what you're doing is learning a bit of history about your new chosen field and the language spoken by experts in that field—as this is the only way to get to real expertise.

The history is important because it gives you an intellectual framework for all the ideas. Our brains love narrative. Once you have learned enough to organize the history of a field into a little story, that story will lock into place. This gives you a structural framework to attach new facts to. It also makes those new facts stickier—meaning you won't have to work to remember them, they'll immediately slot into place in the narrative—you'll start learning faster.

The language is important because it allows you to both think about these ideas more deeply and helps you converse with others about them—which is critical for step three.

Step Three: Go Public

The thing about cultivating real passion is it's not just enough to locate those spots where multiple curiosities intersect. Sure, those are spots with lots of energy. Sure, playing in that arena will help with cultivation, but to really seal the deal you need some "public successes" in the area.

What do I mean by public successes? For starters, positive feedback from others. Thus, once you're at this point in the process take things public. Join a meet up on the subject. Join an online community. Start a [Facebook](#) page. Talk to other folks. We humans are social creatures and adding social reinforcement to your passion is

key.

The reason you want to wait to take things public is you want to enter the conversation with ideas of your own and something to say. There's nothing very fulfilling (or passion cultivating) about being an absolute beginner. Knowing little feels crappy (often). But being able to add something to the dialogue—having a few ideas of your own and a few public successes built off those ideas—well now you're really starting to fuel this fire.

Step Four: Turning Passion Into Purpose

In my most recent book, *BOLD*, a lot of time is spent discussing Massively Transformative Purposes or MTP for short. Here's the thinking. Passion, for all its upside, can be a fairly selfish experience. Being all consumed by something means just that—you're all consumed. There's not much room for other people. Thus, it's critical to turn passion into purpose—that's both how you build businesses around your passion and how you guard against being swallowed whole by your new love.

Here's how it works. Get out another piece of paper. Take up your pen again. Now write down a list of 15 massive problems you would love to see solved. And by massive I mean something everyone has to deal with. Another of the points made in *Bold* is that the world's biggest problems are the world's biggest business opportunities.

Now look for places where your passion intersects with a grand, global challenge. A place where your passion is a solution to some giant problem. That linkage—now that's purpose. Suddenly, you're looking at both a golden business opportunity and a way to use your new found passion to do some real good in the world. Now you have a real deal Massively Transformative Purpose.

Go get 'em, tiger.