

Finding Your Career Passion

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Passion may seem an odd word choice when paired with career, but rest assured that one of the most important elements of personal happiness is being passionate about your career and your job. You do not want to be one of those people who live for the weekends and dread Sunday evenings. Life is too short to not love the work you do.

Will you love your work and your career as much as your passion for other things and people? Why not? It is completely possible to not only find the career that is a perfect match for your skills and interests, but one that also inspires you and fuels your desire to perform better, work harder.

Do you think you're too old, too entrenched in your current career? Or maybe too young and filled with too many ideas (or doubts) about what you want to do with your life? Or maybe a recent college grad who now realizes you chose the wrong major and career path?

Regardless of where you are in life -- where you are in your career -- there is always time to discover - or rediscover -- what you're truly passionate about and turn that interest and passion into a new career.

Finding a career that you have a passion for is all about obtaining fulfillment. Some of these jobs may also not be the highest-paying jobs in the world, but career passion is not about the money, it's about how the job makes you feel inside. Loving your job and career will go a long way to loving your life -- so, take the time to find your career passion. The ideal scenario is one where you find a career that combines what you love to do with you're great at doing.

One of the best tools for clarifying your underlying interests, passions, and possible career paths is to sit down and reflect on a series of questions about how you have lived your life thus far. These questions are designed to really make you think and reflect on who you are as a person and what you want to become.

So, find a place where you can sit down for a while, grab a pen and some paper, and start the process. You don't have to respond to all these questions in one sitting... and it might be best, once you have answered all the questions, to take a break before you try to determine what your answers mean for your future. The only real rule for this exercise is to be honest with yourself.

About your favourite activities. What do you love to do in your free time? Try to brainstorm 5-8 activities. Don't count activities you have to do or are doing to make yourself look better to college admissions folks. Identify the activities that you truly enjoy. Once you're done writing them down, look for a theme.

About the skills that come naturally to you. What are the skills that come to you without thought and effort? Are you a math whiz who can easily add and subtract large numbers in your head? Can you hear a foreign language and immediately be able to replicate the inflections? What are some of the things you are a "natural" at? Brainstorm 3-5 of these skills.

About your favourite classes and subjects. Looking back through your school years, what were the classes -- or specific subjects -- that you enjoyed the most -- that inspired you to learn more? These do not need to be the classes in which you received the highest grades; rather, these are the classes that you actively attended because you loved the course material. Make a list of your favourite classes and subjects and look for some themes.

About your dream jobs and careers. If you could do any job in your life, what would you choose? You may have done this exercise in elementary school, but it's time to do it again; however, you can keep the same ones you chose then and any others that interest you now. The key is to ignore any

roadblocks and simply choose dream careers. So, for example, even if you always wanted to be a fighter pilot but are not eligible because of health reasons, still put it on your list. Write down at least five careers that you think you would enjoy.

About discovering the types of things that energize you. What types of things energize you? Think about people, places, and activities. For example, if you are a diehard competitor who rises to the occasion no matter how tired you are, then competition should be on your list. If visiting the zoo is still something that gets you excited, put it on your list. Try to develop 3-5 examples.

About examining your lifelong interests. Examine the past 5 or 10 years for activities, subjects, or causes that you have been deeply involved with at a personal level. What are some of your long-term interests? For example, if you have always loved bicycling, have a poster of Lance Armstrong (or one of his wristbands), ride your bike as often as you can -- and for as long as you can remember, put biking on your list. Record your list of interests -- and then look for themes and connections.

About areas where you are already perceived as an expert. What are a couple of areas where your friends and family see you as an expert -- or at least as someone who is knowledgeable about the issue? Are you the person in your family whom everyone finds when they are having a problem with their computers? Are you an expert on all things related to baseball? Write down as many examples as you can think of where you are an expert.

About removing outside influences and pressures about what others think should be your career. Sometimes we think we want a career in a certain career field simply because we have been told so many times that we're perfect for it (even if we hate the thought of ever doing it). So... try and separate true interests from ones where you have been influenced by others -- or ones you are pursuing because you feel you should to please someone else. Write them down your true interests (if you have not done so already earlier).

About the values you most cherish. What are the values you hold dear and that help guide how you live your life? Make a list of them. This one may be the toughest for you to tackle, but think about the core values and principles with which you live your life. Typically, these are most influenced by your upbringing -- your family's values and your religious beliefs. This question is critical because you will never be happy or satisfied in a career that does not offer the same values that you possess.

About the subject areas you most enjoy reading about. When you are in a bookstore or the library, what are the subjects of the types of books and magazines that you are drawn to? What Websites do you visit the most and devote the most time to? These subjects can be related to your classes and schoolwork but should not be ones that you are required to read; rather, these are subjects you enjoy reading for your own pleasure and knowledge. Develop a list of your favorite subjects.

About discovering the best types of work environment for your personality. What type of work environment fits you best -- the fast-paced, always changing, or the slow-paced, predictable? If you're a student, this question might be a little premature for you to answer, but you could also think about the various classroom or teaching styles you have experienced in the past and see if you prefer one style over all others.

About reviewing your volunteering and community service experiences. What types of volunteering have you done or wish you have done? Again, as you make this list, think about experiences you would participate in even if you were not using them for college applications. What types of community service appeals to you? Look for a theme in terms of the types of organizations, types of people, or types of service you perform.

About examining the majors and prospective career paths taken by your friends. Make a list of the careers that your closest friends work in (or plan to work in). See anything that really grabs your interest? Write them down. Please note that this examination is not about copying what your friends are doing, but rather, because friendships are formed around common interests and bonds, examining their plans may provide some insight into your interests.

About understanding your deeply rooted beliefs -- your life's calling. Have your friends and family told you repeatedly that you would be excellent in a particular job or career? Do you have a deeply held desire for a particular career? Do you think about your calling in life? It sounds corny -- or maybe even sacrilegious -- but some people are born for certain careers. For me, it's about being a teacher, about empowering people and making a difference in their lives. What's yours? Write them down.

About the types of things you currently do to help people. When your friends or family ask you for help, what are the types of things they ask you to help with? What are the types of things you wish people would ask you to do? If you're still struggling with this one, use this prompt: People I know often ask me for help with... Make a list.

About the goals in life you want to achieve. What are some of the big goals you want (or still want) to achieve in life? Do you want to save lives? Make lots of money? Be a movie star? Live in a big house? Save the Earth? Become president? Think big here -- and think about the top couple of goals that mean the most to you right now. (Note, of all your answers, these will probably change the most as you move through life.) What types of careers might help you accomplish these goals? Write down answers for both goals and careers.

Finally, it's about putting together all your self-discovery results. Gather your assessments, preliminary research, and answers to the questions and see if you can find a couple of obvious themes running through them. Don't rush this process... contemplate. Make a final list of potential jobs and career paths.

Final Thoughts

Everyone deserves the opportunity to live a life of fulfillment and passion. Whether you are a student struggling to find a major or someone later in life looking for a new career and a fresh start, you can (or should) always find time to discover the right career for you -- the career that will fulfill your career passions and lead to a life of happiness and fulfillment. Look deeply inside yourself and remove all obstacles (real and perceived), and you will be on your way in your journey for finding your career passion, achieving career success, and living your life.