

Five Keys to Keeping Your Passion at Work

10/03/05



By Mark Sincevich

I could hear my father's voice saying, "What are the lessons of driving in a run-down neighborhood?" First make sure all of your doors are locked. The next lesson is to be keenly aware of your surroundings. You need to notice every detail, including the way you came, in case a fast getaway is necessary. Avoid looking at anyone for very long or not at all, and make sure not to leave any valuables in your car. Of course the last lesson is useless if you can't find a guarded parking lot. I repeated these things over and over in my head as I drove north on Interstate 295 looking for my exit.

I was worried about my safety as I drove past abandoned lots with an eclectic assortment of yard art, houses that stopped wishing to be painted, and working age people hanging out on street corners holding what I hoped were lunches in brown paper bags. I had been hired to photograph a Children's Memorial Flag Day Ceremony. I entered the school and passed through an early model metal detector manned by a security guard. When the honor guard brought in the stars and stripes to the auditorium, I started snapping away. I listened to teachers and dignitaries and to students that read poetry and rose to literary heights. One turned into an instant rap star! She motivated the entire audience with her message of 'living more each day.' The goose bumps on my arms reminded me of why I was there in the first place, to motivate others through my photography. I was now concentrating on how I was helping instead of how I could be hurt.

Why even in the safest of neighborhoods do some people barely say hello or smile as we walk past? Part of the problem is our rising dependency on personal technical appliances, but it also has more to do with not really feeling connected to ourselves. Technology is a frugal attempt to cover up the lack of rich interpersonal communication that has defined countless generations before us. How many people do you know that don't feel connected to the physical world around them or to the work that they do? We are searching for the connection "out there" when we need to establish a passionate connection to ourselves first.

I have discovered that there are five keys or concepts that will help you to keep your passion while at work:

Keep a File of Awesome People. One of the best ways to start learning about what you are passionate about is by keeping a file. When you read an article that is really inspiring, tear it out of the magazine and put it into a file. When you get an e-mail from a colleague that really inspires you, print it and put this into your file. I started doing this many years ago with a file called "Awesome People." It has now morphed into many sub-files, but the concept remains the same. If you want to have a rich life, start by studying

the positive lessons of others. The more examples you have in your file, the more motivated you will be to live your life in a similar way both at work and at home.

Also, organizations that encourage their employees to follow their passions will find workers who are more engaged, aware and contributory. I would rather have my organization represented by somebody who cared deeply for the mission instead of somebody who just wanted a job.

Reasons Why. Make a list of compelling reasons why you are doing your work in the first place and put it in a place where you can refer to it constantly. Concentrate on your top 5 reasons. If your list is less than positive, it will serve as motivation for you to keep looking for other motivating factors. Maybe you need to get more training or to work with a colleague in another department. I thought that if I could work for a high-technology start-up company with stock options, then I could "cash out" and do what I really wanted. I signed up to sell computer software as employee number 30 out of 180 people. I was lured by 40,000 options and a big base salary, but not for the type of work. For the first six months we didn't have a product to sell, the next three months we were still figuring it out, and by the last three months we attained half of our sales goal and half the company was laid off.

I realized that I was going after money and not the passion for the job. While I didn't get the opportunity to 'cash out,' I did get closer to discovering the work for which I was best suited. I kept a journal of my progress in order to remind myself of the personal discoveries and sacrifices I had made along the way.

Just Launch. Are you waiting for somebody to come along and give you more passion? It won't happen. It has to come from deep inside. Now that you have a file of people you admire and the reason's why you are engaged in the work that you do, you need to launch into some new ideas that will help inject additional passion into your work.

Sometimes just getting out of the starting gate is all that you need. I spoke to a friend this week that said that she really wants to start writing children's books. However, she wants to wait for the right idea. This would be a main character that will have a series of adventures over several books. Instead of just starting to write, she is already putting a mountain of pressure on herself to succeed wildly with a series. Many people have started successful divisions within their current companies with a great track record and the passion to create something really important. William Shakespeare said, "Our doubts are traitors that make us lose the good we might oft find by fearing to attempt."

I remember waking up in the morning with sore teeth before I left the computer field. I went to the dentist thinking that I had cavities, but he said that I was grinding my teeth. I was very tense as I ventured into the great beyond. However, the I focused on my passion, the more I learned to trust in the process.

Make a Commitment. Make a 'working plan of action' going forward to give you stability and comfort. I worked with a former employer to transfer to a different division within the same company. I made a commitment of at least a year to help me increase my passion. This is especially important when trying to deal with managing your stress when the road before you is not clearly laid out. It might take even longer depending upon the type of work. This commitment for a longer length of time not only gives you credibility, but it also takes into account The Law of the Harvest. Farmers know this very well. What you plant in the spring

will grow into a beautiful plant by autumn. This process can't be forced or rushed. However, all plants need constant watering, nourishment and a positive environment. Don't forget this! How many plans fail due to inattention and lack of support? Take this into account going forward and be open to constructive criticism.

Have Faith in Yourself. How can you accomplish this? A large part is attitude! Surround yourself with people who support you in your organization and when you are with friends and family. I asked a very successful neighbor who sold his first company for many millions how he was able to manage the stress of uncertainty as he followed his passions. He said, "I don't ask myself if something is going to work; instead, I ask how it is going to work?" With comments like these and a supportive work environment, you will start to feel more in control of your life.

Another way to have more faith in yourself is to go to bed every night and visualize how excited you are about the work that you do. Your subconscious mind will work 'behind the scenes' to help make your dreams come true. What is your dream for increasing your passion at work and how are you going to make it come true?

I was more than doing my job; I was taking passionate photographs in the press pool during a Senate Subcommittee hearing on appropriations when a low level alarm sounded recently on Capitol Hill. Capitol police rushed in and helped herd everyone out of the door and onto the streets. I was told that this was not a drill. Immediately, black SUV's with the blue flashing lights of the U.S. Secret Service zoomed through the crowd as they transported VIPs away from the Capitol. F-16's and helicopters patrolled overhead. I turned around and photographed thousands of people streaming down the hill towards Union Station, many passing me. I felt lightheaded as I imagined we were under a gas attack or that a dirty bomb had exploded. I fought back repeated tears wondering if I would ever see my family again.

In 20 minutes, we learned it was a false alarm and I called my wife to tell her that I loved her. Doing work that we love means being engaged in the world around us. We need to learn not to lock out the world, but to let it wash over us through our smiles, our voices and our hearts. When you increase the passionate connection to yourself, the quality of your work and life will greatly improve.

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