

A monthly column about business and more—by contributing writers, pictured left to right, Laura V. Page, Lori Silverman, Eve B. Scheffenacker, Julie Hedlund and BJ Pfeiffer.



Living life with passion

By Lori Silverman

Have you ever been so excited and enthusiastic about a project, a hobby, an interest or a person that you lost track of time? (Think about your first love.) Or felt so compelled and driven to do something that your energy level around it increased significantly over a long period of time and was noticeable to others?

Books and self-help gurus talk regularly about living life with passion. But, what is passion, really? Is it something we should strive for? If so, how do we discover and grow it?

What passion is

For many people, passion equates to an unexplainable inner energy, motivation and conviction that translates into an outer commitment to and pursuit of something or someone that results in pure joy. While passion waxes and wanes over time, it can give us the ability to perform beyond our normal capabilities and to physically, emotionally and spiritually rejuvenate.

I experienced this in late 2003 when I came up with an idea for a book. I knew in my heart and soul that it was something I needed to do, no matter what. Nothing could stop me from achieving my goal. And there was plenty that could have — people who did not believe in my dream, diminishing finances (I found it difficult to engage in paid work while writing), and contributors who did not live up to their contractual commitments. Here I am four years later, with a best-selling business book and many speaking engagements about it. But the intense passion I once felt for the project has subsided a bit. In my eyes, it has become more manageable. When it consumed me, I did not eat or sleep well, I did not exercise regularly, and I became oblivious to almost all that was happening around me.

Some dangers

So, you might ask, “Is passion always good or healthy?” Goodness depends on our intent and its impact on others. For example, some fanatics such as Hitler and Hussein were driven by passion. But we condemn their actions. How about a woman who neglects her family out of a passion for her work? Is this behavior reasonable? If our intent is pure and our passion does no harm to others, then it appears acceptable to pursue.

But, what if it harms us personally? Sustaining passion, while energizing, can be exhausting. It could make us ill. Or cause permanent physical or emotional damage over the long haul. How do we tame our zealotry in the moment, especially if it brings us heightened vitality and accolades from others? While I have no answer, I do know that it is important to monitor these possible dangers.

Discovering and growing our passions

In Richard Chang’s article, “Finding Fulfillment by Living Your Passions,” he identifies four ways to discover your passions:

- Discovery by epiphany (an unexpected life changing experience or “wake-up call”),
- Discovery through change (examples include marriage or change of job),
- Discovery through intuition (an internal “sensing”), and
- Discovery through experience (through experimentation over time).

What each method has in common is that something “sparks” a passion in us. There is a trigger that sets it off, one we can choose to notice or ignore.

How do we grow a passion once it becomes apparent? One option is to align our energies with it. For example, you might stumble onto your purpose in life — your

“true calling” — and elect to focus all your resources on achieving it. A second approach is to create an action plan for pursuing it. Perhaps you have always wanted to run marathons. So you develop a detailed workout and eating schedule to endure this level of exercise. A third way is to go with the flow. Let the passion take you where it needs to. Your job then becomes removing blockages that may get in the way.

A passionate life

How can you go about living a life filled with passion? Pay attention to what occurs around you and the internal messages that you receive. Then, actively pursue, nurture and grow your passions. If you do not, they may wither. Do not be dissuaded if you cannot fully affect change — such as impacting global warming. A single person can make a difference in the world. When all is said and done, take time to bask in the joy that you receive.

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