
Your Dream Job May Not Exist, and That's Okay



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Anyone can grow passion and find fulfilment in a wide range of careers.

For decades, the mantra “follow your passion” has been one of the most popular pieces of career advice. Ever since Steve Jobs famously told Stanford graduates back in 2005 to **“find what you love”**, university students have been nudged to pursue careers that align perfectly with their personal interests. But this approach can be misguided.

For many of us who do not know exactly what we like or want to do early on, the pursuit of a perfect career fit can lead to anxiety and divert time away from accumulating actual work experience. This unrealistic expectation can also exacerbate social inequalities.

In her book, ***The Trouble with Passion: How Searching for Fulfillment at Work Fosters Inequality***, Erin Cech argues that students from underprivileged backgrounds are particularly vulnerable to the pitfalls of this advice. This is because they lack the financial safety nets and don't have the luxury to spend time exploring various career options before making a

definitive decision.

Encouraging individuals from every walk of life to pursue their passions might make them feel that earning a good salary and having job security are not important. This could steer those who are financially disadvantaged away from careers that are more likely to help them move up in society.

So, should we do away with this “passion principle” entirely? Not necessarily. But we do need to refine our perspective on passion.

Don't follow your passion, grow it

While most believe that passion comes from finding the right fit, [research suggests](#) that this is not the only route to attain fulfilment in a job. In fact, I'd argue it is perhaps more constructive and beneficial to “grow” your passion.

Many people are familiar with the concepts of [fixed and growth mindsets](#), which refer to implicit beliefs about whether our innate abilities are set in stone or changeable. While initially associated with our own abilities, these beliefs can also extend to how we perceive our passions. Some individuals hold a fixed mindset, believing that their passion is inherent and waiting to be discovered. Others adopt a growth mindset, viewing passion as an evolving trait that can be developed over time.

With a fixed mindset about passion, you limit yourself to a single career based on your personality, which is like trying to find the only person you can love in the world. Just as love can blossom in unexpected places, and couples can develop stronger attachments over time, passion can grow in diverse domains. Your personality should not serve as a limiting factor.

The idea of growing passion in any field might seem new and overwhelming, but it has existed long before Steve Jobs delivered his commencement speech at Stanford. Throughout much of history, the vast majority of working individuals have entered a job or profession not entirely of their own will, or at least without complete knowledge of what awaited them (some of our parents may fall into this category). Rather, their choices were – and are still – often dictated by necessity, responsibility or a form of serendipity. Although some do find their work unbearable and cannot wait to leave or retire, others develop expertise, identify their purpose and eventually experience fulfilment.

In short, growing passion is possible, and perhaps more ideal for those who cannot pinpoint where their passion lies.

How passion grows

Maintaining a growth mindset about passion while starting a new job can facilitate new discoveries of your potential and help you develop a deeper connection with the field. Passion evolves from an interplay of different factors, including performance and external validation. Demonstrating competence in tasks can fuel passion, and positive feedback from colleagues can further ignite it.

This doesn't mean that you can only grow passion in jobs you have a natural affinity for. A challenging first assignment or less-than-ideal performance does not signal the end of the road. Instead, it serves as a reminder to strive harder for success and an opportunity to develop new capabilities. Give your job and yourself another chance – it may spark new possibilities to unlock passion.

If a job lacks challenges and feels too easy, it's a signal that you may need to seek out more stimulating opportunities to allow your passion to sprout and flourish. A job that consistently provides opportunities to learn, grow and push your boundaries is more likely to provide deep and enduring fulfilment.

It is also possible to fuel passion for a particular field or line of work by identifying specific elements you find appealing and then engaging in a process called job crafting. This involves redesigning or customising your job in personally meaningful ways to foster engagement at work, job satisfaction, resilience and success.

You can craft your work tasks by identifying those that pique your interest and increasing your involvement in them. You can shape your work relationships by interacting more with those from whom you can learn. You can also craft how you perceive the meaning of your work. For instance, you can shift from viewing it as a simple means to earn a paycheck to a job that makes your family proud, shows your children the value of hard work or creates a positive experience for others.

Research shows that passion and fulfilment can grow through job crafting, even in jobs where it seems least achievable. For example, some janitors working in hospitals would bring flowers and comfort patients in distress. It is

not part of their job to interact with patients or their families, but many like to offer them support. While they may not particularly enjoy the task of cleaning, they see it as essential in facilitating patients' recovery and, as such, they find it fulfilling and meaningful.

Choose where to grow passion

The possibility to grow passion in any field does not mean you should disregard your traits or preferences. If you know your own personality, it can be valuable in narrowing down potential options. Perhaps the most effective starting point is to identify what you genuinely dislike. By understanding what you don't want to do, you can explore choices and focus on potential careers that don't align with those negative aspects.

A practical approach would be to create a list of activities or tasks that you don't enjoy and then eliminate job options that heavily involve those elements. This will simplify your decision-making process.

But don't be too quick to dismiss job options based on preconceived notions about their requirements. For instance, an introverted individual might mistakenly believe that all leadership roles are exclusively suited for extroverts, only to realise upon assuming a leadership position that they can bring unique strengths and perspectives to the role.

It's also worth considering opportunities that offer more immediate hands-on experience. For instance, if you have two career paths in mind, you may prioritise the one that best aligns with your academic background or previous experiences, as it may be more readily accessible.

Starting with this more feasible option allows you to get your hands dirty while you determine whether it aligns with your general interests and offers opportunities to grow passion. If not, you will still build skillsets and networks that can help you achieve your next career aspiration. Once you've established a foundation, you can then explore other career paths that may be more challenging or that you believe to be more fulfilling.

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Find article at

<https://knowledge.insead.edu/career/your-dream-job-may-not-exist-and-thats-okay>

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