



PASSION VS. MONEY – WHY YOU SHOULD PLAY IT SAFE

I recently Googled the words “passion vs. money” and received over 30,000,000 hits. Must be a hot topic, eh? Following one’s passion vs. chasing money is a source of personal anguish that has taunted human beings, seemingly, since the earliest days of civilization when people had to work for a living. Confucius, over 2500 years ago, stated “Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life.” The implication or interpretation is that only if you are doing what you love can you consider it to be non-work. It further implies that work, or even feeling like you are doing work, is somehow a negative thing. The Internet and YouTube is full of content suggesting that you can’t possibly be happy if aren’t doing what you love all the time. This leaves me wondering if this quest for loving one’s work is consistent with living a safety lifestyle?

Let’s start with some basic terms to get on the same playing field for this discussion:

- PASSION is that thought, pursuit, or activity that you can’t imagine yourself not doing. With passion you may feel that you are not fulfilled unless you are doing some particular activity. Passion could be interchangeable with saying “I ‘love’ to do activity X.”
- INTERESTS are things that we want to learn about or are somehow fascinated by. Interests could be interchangeable with saying “I want to learn about topic X.”
- CAREER is, for the sake of this discussion, that activity that you make money at in order to meet your desired standard of living. Career could be interchangeable with saying “I make money by doing activity X.”

Do you notice that each word could be used simultaneously for the same activity X? That means, right from the start, that passion, interest, and career are not mutually exclusive. They can actually happen at the same time, but that is probably rare for most people’s real-life experience. For most people, they have a passion X, an interest Y, and a career Z.

Passion, interests, and careers are interchangeable terms between different people. One person’s passion X is another person’s career X. One person’s interest Y is another person’s passion Z. There is no one size fits all. These are not static and they may change over the course of one’s life. Further some people have multiple passions, interests, and career. My passion is playing the guitar, I have an extreme interest in personal finance, and my career is being an engineer. Brian May, the guitar player for the legendary rock band Queen, has his career in playing the guitar, but his passion (or perhaps, other passion) lies in studying astronomy (he happens to have attained a Ph.D. in Astrophysics long after his career with the band Queen) and he has had a lifelong interest in stereo-photography. You see, the labels that one assigns to be one’s passion, interest, or career are indeed very individualistic. Only you can answer what it is that defines your passion, your interest, and your career. Further, these are changeable and evolve over time.

Now the question becomes to what extent should these align? Was Confucius right in his famous quote? It seems that, more often than not, passions are associated with art and creativity, with helping others, serving a god, serving a cause, or somehow giving back to the world. Interests tend to be associated with simply wanting to learn about something,

to try something new, or become good at something. Often passions and interests may lead into meaningful work that can produce money to live on and result in a career. But this is rare. There is typically a relationship with how much focus and effort you put into a career with how much money you end up making. Most doctors get more focused into a specific type of medical practice. A doctor would not study how to be a car mechanic as part of a medical career. That would not contribute to the career of being a doctor. This is true even if the doctor has a passion for fast cars and studies car trivia.

A career is what you make money at to pay your bills. You can call it a job or employment or a career. The implication is always that you exchange your time and labor for compensation. Compensation is money, health insurance, vacation, and retirement. There is nothing wrong with this. I have never met anyone that was thrilled to be unemployed. When a job was finally found, they were thrilled to have a job, even if they don't necessarily like the job. This meant, once again, they could eat, make their house payments, and get braces for their child.

I like to test theories by taking them to an extreme. The reason for this is that sometimes concepts seem appealing in the immediate situation, but the answer might be different when you consider the effect of other factors like time, scope, and purpose. See if you can answer these extreme questions for yourself. Answer them honestly, and you will find out where you stand on your passions, interests, and career preferences.

1. If money were not a concern, would you do nothing but devote time to your current passion or interest? Are you even honest with yourself about what your passions and interests really are? Or do you find yourself at work just wishing for something different because you are feeling bored?
2. If you say you love your job so much, would you do it for free? Or is there something else keeping you there, like that paycheck and what it brings you.
3. If you say you hate your job so much, would you be willing to make a long-term commitment to stay at your job if it would mean a huge increase in your pay?
4. You may be really good at what you do, based on feedback from others, but feel like you don't enjoy it. Is this really true?
5. If you hate your job, would you be willing to walk away from it if it means lowering your standard of living? Reducing one's expenses is equivalent to getting a pay raise. It stands to reason that you only need to make half of what you currently make if you cut your expenses in half. Would you do it?
6. If you are doing what you are passionate about, would you give it up to do something that you can at least tolerate, but for 2 times the compensation? How about 10 times or 100 times the compensation? There is nothing wrong with seizing opportunity and some trade-offs are simply worth it.
7. If you had to pay for a child's college bill right now, would you pay for a degree that had no serious earning potential or would you require that the degree have a good chance of making your kid some money? Another way of asking this question is would you go into debt to get an education in a career that would not pay for the debt, even if the career fully satisfied passions and interests? How would your conversation go with an 18-year old about to start college?



8. If your passions and interests are so important to you, would you take classes or earn credentials in those areas, even it means going into debt or investing a significant amount of your time. In other words, if you have an interest in music, would you get a degree in music? Would you do this at the expense of stagnating progress in your career? This is important because getting credentialed in something is a measure of your true commitment to that something.
9. If you dig deep, can you find some aspect of your passion and interest that you can transfer over into your career, or some aspect of your career that you can transfer over into your passion and interest? They do not have to be separate, nor do they have to be integrated in some grand way. Perhaps a little bit of cross exposure is all that is needed to make you content with your life?
10. Consider passion, interest, and career. Which one do you need to survive?

If these questions made you think about where you stand on your perceived need to align passion and interests with your career, that is a good thing! One aspect of safety is having financial solvency. Money pays for your food, your shelter, and your health. That is how the world works, unless you would rather farm and hunt your own food, live in a cave, and forgo modern medicine. Another aspect of safety is peace of mind. This may come in using some of your passions to find satisfaction and purpose, even if you don't make money at it. Another aspect of safety is to constantly learn about the world so that you can better survive in it. The perspectives that you gain from your passions and interests will surely help you understand the world, and possibly even help you in your career. Safety also means that you achieve your full potential in life. I once read that it is difficult to make the world a better place if you are poor or a drain on society. This does not mean that you have to make a fortune, but it does mean that you contribute positively to the world and don't drag it down by becoming a burden on society.

Consider an integrated approach to balancing passion, interest, and career. In other words, you really can have some aspects of doing what you love and making money in everything that you do. Above all, be honest with yourself. Perhaps you really don't need a Lexus and can be satisfied with a Toyota? If you need the Lexus to be happy, then own your decision and be happy about it. Either enjoy the Lexus and give up some of your energy to get it, or, enjoy the Toyota and give up a little bit of luxury. Both require giving up one thing in exchange for another. If you love writing songs, think about song lyrics based on experiences at work, you just might find inspiration! If you love your job as a teacher, then think about using your interests in gardening to incorporate into your lesson plans, your students may find this fascinating. Own your passion, interest, and career choices. You really can have it all if you just change your perspective. You may already have it all!

Check out my safety books and other safety resources and information at <http://www.markkowaleski.com> for more insights to guide you on your journey to living a healthier, wealthier, happier, and more successful life.

Remember: keep TABs on your safety: Think safe, Act Safe, Be safe!

- Mark M. Kowaleski