

THE PASSION MYTH

THE REAL ROAD
TO FULFILLMENT
IN WORK



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Intro

"Know Thyself" - Aristotle

We're are generation of children that have grown up with the notion that we should find **"our passion"** in life.

If you're able to find this unobtainable treasure, your whole life will magically fall into place.

You'd stop worrying about money, you'd have more free-time, your relationships will improve dramatically, you'll grow a six-pack and so-on.

The same holds true for discovering your **"one true purpose"**.

Viktor Frankl notoriously stated in his book; "Mans search for meaning" that; "Lack of purpose is the main cause of boredom, addictions, depressions, aggression and even suicide.

"He who has a strong enough 'why' to live, can endure almost any how"

You've been told that if you don't feel excited to get out of your bed - There's something seriously wrong with you.

Hereby you go on a wild goose chase to find that one thing. That one thing that would make everything fall into place. The magic ingredient that will make everything work.

The fix-everything-pill.

Understand what I'm getting at here?

Not yet? Here's some more;

We praise **"talent"** to a ridiculous amount.

Gifted children that have been born with great social skills, people that are genetically wired to do great in school, music gods that were given their destiny by birth.

Yet you don't have any of those. You're mediocre at best.

- Talents? I'm above-average at x, but nothing spectacular really..
- Passion? I like doing y but I'm not that good at it, really..
- Purpose? z sounds pretty interesting but yea.. I don't know.

"Jeesh, thanks mom & dad for giving me nothing."

You're stuck **in-between**. You have a gap between where you are and where you want to be and see no way to fill it.

This short guide will give you no-bullshit, straight-up answers and advice to bypass these problems.

Here's the short of it;

Stop looking.

Passion, purpose and talent does not exist (at least not in the form you're looking for).

There's no pre-made passion, no microwave purpose and especially no God-given talent.

There's only one thing;

Work.

The Three Biggest Lies Of Our Time

“Find Your Talents”

Talent does NOT exist.

They're justifications that allow you to explain why others are doing better than you. This way you don't have to face the truth that you've wasted your time on useless activities or even worse: that you're inadequate.

You often come to the conclusion that other peoples' good fortune is derived from a factor outside of their control, that their **favorable achievements** can be attributed to **circumstances**.

- Jim bought a nice car, what a lucky (insert displeased explicative)
- Wow, little Tommy passed all his exams. Yeah he got that intelligence from his parents!

Whilst you're inclined to blame **unfavorable circumstances** of someone else on factors like their **personality, work ethic and so-on**;

- Jimmy can't sit still in class? He's always been unruly..
- Jenny broke up with her boyfriend? Yeah, she's very emotionally unstable.

You might not do this out-loud, but subconsciously every person does this because we have an [excessive self-regard tendency](#).

Additionally we're mostly **oblivious to the inner workings/habits of other people** and **underestimate the influence of situational factors**.

And hey – it's actually necessary for increasing our self-image! Some studies suggest that [depressed people have a more objective self-image](#) whilst generally happy people have a more positively biased (read: delusional) view of themselves.

Point being: **Humans are poor judges of others' performance** by

1. Having an excessive self-regard tendency (which is necessary for your self-image),
2. By being oblivious to what goes on on the inside of another person's head.
3. By overvaluing situational factors in others' good fortune.

This obscures your view of talents and the actual work involved.

The things that matter most for expertise (the ability to provide consistent, near-perfect performance) is **deep domain expertise** (knowledge) combined with **hours and hours of beating on your craft**.

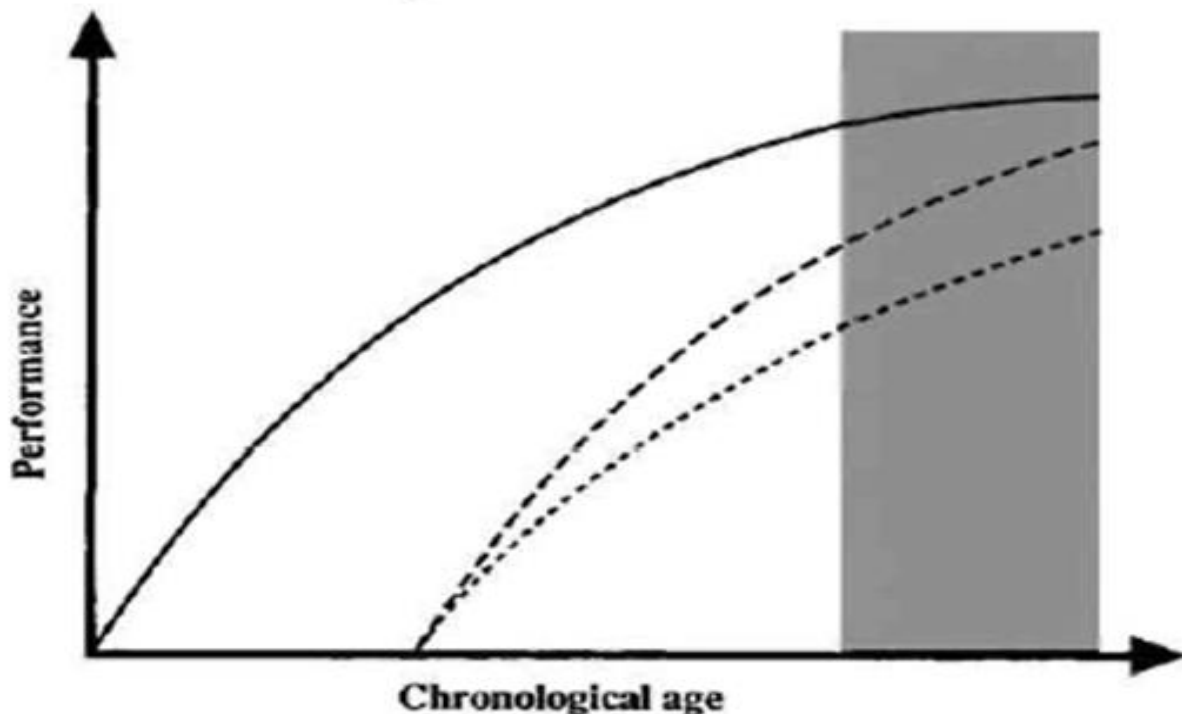
The most important accelerating factor for expert-performance being **the age you start**.

NOT talent.

Research suggest that;

¹"People who start young take less time: both onset and the rate of expertise acquisition are accelerated"

Figure 4
Relations Between Age and Performance



Note. Late period involving selection to the best music academies has been shaded. Solid line: performance associated with early starting age and high level of practice. Dashed line: performance for equally high level of practice but later starting age. Dotted line: performance associated with the same late starting age but lower level of practice. The slope of the dashed line appears steeper than that of the solid line. However, the horizontal distance between these two curves is constant. From "Can We Create Gifted People?" by K. A. Ericsson, R. Th. Krampe, and S. Heizmann in *The Origins and Development of High Ability* (pp. 222–249), 1993, Chichester, England: Wiley. Copyright 1993 by Ciba Foundation. Adapted by permission.

¹ <http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/Simonton/FSUnvn.ppt>

The Talent “Formula”

Child prodigies? Not so much.

Remember golf-god Tiger Woods? He must’ve gotten that wicked golf-gene-talent at birth! The most talented/naturally gifted player of all time?

Nope

The truth is that he **immersed** himself in the sport from early childhood. He accumulated more hours of golf at age 5 than any of you will ever do in your **lifetime**.

At age three, he shot a 48 over nine holes over the Cypress Navy course (which is ridiculously good)

Mozart? The musical genius and piano prodigy? He started composing **from age five** and was immersed in music from birth since both his parents were also in the industry

Bobby Fisher started playing chess at age 6 and had hours upon hours of free-time to indulge in deliberate practice.

It’s **what they’ve been wired to do** after constant exposure to these subjects. It’s **what they’ve been born to do**.

Another study concluded that;

“There is little evidence to suggest that any of the innate differences between people that might conceivably contribute to exceptionally high levels of performance in particular domains have influences that are predictable, specific to particular domains or skill areas, and identifiable in advance of the time at which unusual degrees of competence are exhibited, as is believed to be the case with innate gifts and talents.”²

There’s no way to predict talent and a total absence of evidence to prove a high inborn skill-level.

If we want to condense “talent” into a formula, here it is;

² <http://users.ecs.soton.ac.uk/harnad/Papers/Py104/howe.innate.html>
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"Talent" Formula



Start as young as possible and develop deep domain expertise by hours upon hours of deliberate practice.

THAT is how you develop real "talent"

Many people look for their talents not knowingly **they design them themselves**. Skipping from subject to subject, never really sticking with something long enough so that they can build up expertise.

- "This doesn't feel good, I'm going to try something else"
- "No, this isn't it either. What else can I try."

It's not supposed to feel good right from the start. Expertise develops by deliberate practice.

The next lie we've been told;

“Follow Your Passion”

Passion does NOT exist.

Forget passion completely - there's no such thing as “inborn” passion either.

Although that's what we're told to pursue by the media and celebrities (yes, I'm looking at you Will Smith and Steve Jobs).

Passion is the easiest, most accessible way to justify your success in hindsight.

But truth is this; They never initially thought about “passion”

They didn't pursue their passion from the get-go, but focused so hard on one thing that they eventually got a skillset so remarkable that they became word-class at their craft.

They continuously kept investing in it until they started to love that activity. The expertise came **before** the feeling of “passion”

Passion comes as a side-effect of mastery (high expertise/competence)

When we're positioned in an area suited to our strengths and we work patiently and diligently, that's when passion develops. So don't go on a wild goose-chase looking for “the one thing you love”.

Like Cal Newport stated in his book “So Good They Can't Ignore You”;

“The only sustained passions are the ones you develop, you get good at and the ones you see rewards from”

“The things that become your passion are the thing that you've put the most effort into (and didn't resent in the beginning)”

“When we work patiently and diligently, we fall in love.”

‘Force yourself to force the skills to come. Pick one skill, get amazing at it beyond belief. That's the hardest part. Passion is a side-effect of mastery ’

Passion – like talent - is something you create yourself through hard, deliberate work.

The final myth?

“Find Your One True Purpose”

Purpose does NOT exist.

The same thing holds true for purpose. People these days idealize meaning. As somehow, when you’ve found it, everything will magically fall into place and you’re set for life.

Dancing across the rainbow on your pink unicorn.

You won’t

And in the meantime you lose valuable years of your life in the fruitless pursuit of a mirage.

*“Finding passion and purpose in your life is a trial-by-fire process. You don’t simply wake up one day and become happy doing one thing forever and ever. Like death, it’s a constant work-in-progress. You must try something, pay attention to how it feels, adjust and then try again. Nobody gets it right on the first try, or the tenth or sometimes even the two-hundredth.” – **Mark Manson***

Here’s my suggestion;

If you haven’t yet found meaning in your life, just choose one thing that seems important for now and commit to it.

Viktor Frankl says we find meaning in people or meaningful work. Either pursue a project you like or by giving something back to others. That’s the two main things you can find fulfillment in.

- Keep a blog with interesting information
- Do some charity work
- Help out some friends with a skill you have
- ...

Whether it’s helping the homeless, making an effort to make people smile, sharing interesting ideas or helping someone with a problem. It’s all good, as long as you find the activity meaningful.

Re-cap

Remember: Passion – like talent - comes from investment in a skill and sticking with it, despite how you feel. Purpose comes from just picking something meaningful and adjusting as you go along.

Although talent, passion and purpose do not exist - you **will** excel better in a certain field because of your personality.

Temperament + Environment + Behavior = Personality

- **Temperament** refers to the innate characteristics you have ([Temperament psychology](#))
- **Environment** refers to the people/circumstances you interact with.
 - Through osmosis and observational learning you “become the average of the 5 people you surround yourself the most with.” They set the standard for what's acceptable.
- **Behavior** refers to the choices you make despite (or because of) your environment.
 - Your habits, emotional self-regulation, planning & prioritizing, # hours of practice, ...

You are the product of your **biology, environment** and **choices**. Point these three in the same direction and then you'll have **optimal performance**.

So...

How do we find what kind of work will actually satisfy us? What kind of occupation we can “lose” ourselves in? What kind of direction and meaning we want to give our lives?

Aristotle had it right when he said that **you should know yourself**.

Knowing yourself is the key to a great life. It allows you to see and correct weaknesses. It allows you to see and build on strength. It allows you to notice common emotional patterns so you can re-regulate them.

Knowing yourself (and consequently improving on that) is the key to a great life (and a great career)

How?

Build. On. Strength.

If you can read this, I suspect you've finished elementary school already (congrats!) - This means the largest part of your personality is already formed.

You're not going to excel at everything. Your personality defines the qualities in which you can perform above-average. Your so-called "strengths"

They are the things that come easy to you, whilst others might have more difficulty in dealing with these.

"A personal strength is the inclination to excel in a particular skill or situation because of your formed personality."

It's the result of your temperament, environment and choices in life.

Why Are Strengths Necessary?

Building your life around strengths will give you the "edge" you need to really make it big. People leave school without knowing the things they're good at nor in which industry they can perform the best.

They're unskilled encyclopedia's (at best)

They're either on a wild-goose chase to find their "one true passion" (which is retarded) or don't care at all and just settle for a steady pay-check (even worse).

This skipping from job to job (/lack of ambition) disables them to really develop **deep domain expertise**.

Many people (read: almost everyone) don't know how to leverage their strengths and therefore don't direct their natural talents and capabilities towards a more favorable direction.

It's the same reason why so many people get stuck in a career that is unfit for their particular skill-set and therefore they get demotivated, depressed and pretty much just "retire on the job"

Take in mind that the world is speeding up faster and faster; We have an unseen rate of technological improvements, a demographic explosion, declining fossil fuels, an economic shift to Asia and so-on.

Basically; the world is getting more and more competitive by the day and you don't want to be left behind, right?

If you discover and develop your strengths now, you're able to produce **optimal results** in the future.

Note: Strengths are solely a **performance indicator** (not unchangeable truths). You can stretch yourself - but simply not indefinitely.

*While it may be possible, with a considerable amount of work, to add talent where little exists, our research suggests that this may not be the best use of your time – **Tom Rath***

Conclusion?

The Best Career Advice EVER

1. **Find your strengths**
2. **Pick your industry** ([List Of Industries](#))

Work changes, your industry does NOT. Life is far too short to become **highly** knowledgeable about more than 2 domains of expertise.

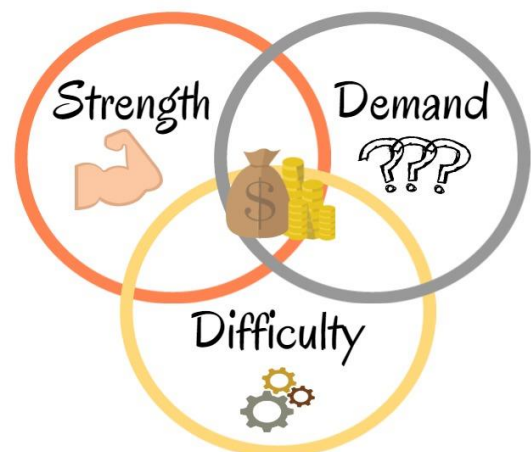
3. **Focus on skills** that are difficult, high-in demand and centered around your strengths
 - Building on strength will ensure you're working in an area in which you can "create your own passion".
 - By having an edge over others, you'll have few competitors (higher barrier of entry)
 - By choosing something in-demand you ensure that people are actually going to pay you for it.

Don't focus on passion, don't focus on talent, don't focus on money but **focus on the mastery of difficult, in-demand skills build around your strengths.**

Skills pay bills

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How Do I Find My Strengths?

The best way to do this is **by introspecting**. Deliberately ask yourself some key questions that will give you indicators where you might perform best.

Summary

First, read the summary of [Managing Oneself by Peter F. Drucker](#) and define for yourself some essential traits;

- Are you a reader or a listener?
- How do you learn best? ([Learning Styles](#))
- Do you work well with people or perform better alone?
- Do you produce results as decision maker or as an adviser?
- Do you perform well under stress or do you need structured environments?

Questions

- **In what activities/environment did you grew up around?** Strengths can arise from early practice, what types of activities were you involved in as a child?
- **What do strangers compliment you on?** Your direct surroundings often don't notice your natural strengths as much as others do. Ask around.
- **What did you want to become as a child?** What were the underlying trends?
- **What have you been doing the last 10 years?** Competence can arise from doing a certain thing over and over.
- **What can you effortlessly talk about without losing drive?** An interesting topic is most likely something you're highly skilled at or interested in.
- **What are the things you effortlessly excel at?** What comes easy to you?
- **In what areas do you learning quickly?** Some skills are perfectly suited to our temperament and therefore we're able to pick these up much faster and accelerate our expertise.
- **Who do you envy/admire?** Jealousy is a nasty but beautiful emotion as it shows us what we truly want. (As does admiration)

Personality Tests

A great way to explore further is by doing personality tests.

- [MBTI](#)
- [Enneagram](#)
- [DISC-Profile](#)
- [The Big Five](#)

Learn more about each type by **simply googling the results** you've gotten. Put all of these answers in a separate word-sheet and try to find professions/skills/work-places that are **optimally** suited for your strengths and interests.

Since the science on personality is still highly confusing/contradictory, I'd suggest taking these results with a grain of salt. How many "personality traits" don't become self-fulfilling prophecy?

The only real difference in temperament that can be measured is **extroversion/introversion**.

Introversion and extroversion is marked by **sensitivity to stimuli**. Whether these are sounds, scents, tastes, sights or touches (all the 5 senses)

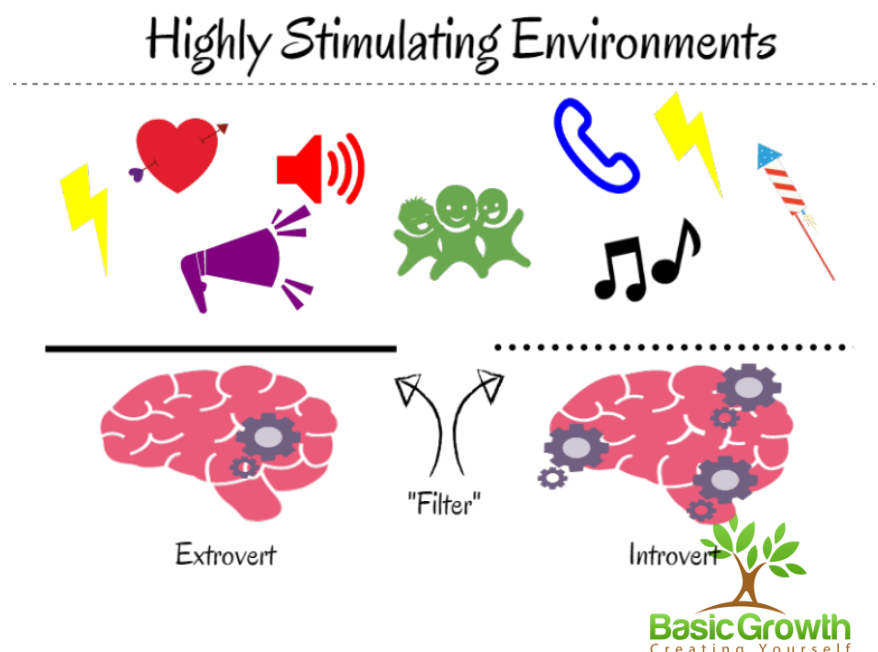
The source for this difference can be found in the amygdala of your brain which is part of the limbic system (an evolutionary **ancient** structure in the brain)

The amygdala is the part of the brain that receives your sensory input (5 senses) and tells the rest of the brain and the nervous system how to respond. Introverts react more strongly to sensory input because they have excitable amygdala's.

Why does this matter?

It indicates a lot about **the amount of stimulus a person enjoys**.

You can see introversion and extroversion as a "filter" from the outside world.



Introverts respond more heavily to stimuli which “drains” their mental batteries. They prefer calm environments to perform optimally and need to “recharge” alone. They become bored less rapidly.

Extroverts require higher level of stimulus to perform optimally. They “come alive” under people and heavy stimulating environments. They are bored more easily.

The point is **finding an environment that’s suited to your desired level of stimulation so you can perform optimally.**

A quick way to test your stimulation threshold is by squeezing a few drops of lemon juice on your tongue and see how heavily you react to that by producing saliva.

Do The Test

Compare it to your friends! – but you’ll probably have a sense of your type already.

The point of all this is finding a happy medium between over-stimulation (which makes you crash) and boredom to function optimally.

“Once you understand introversion/extroversion as preference for certain levels of stimulation, you can begin consciously trying to position yourself in environments favorable to your temperament.” – Susan Cain

You have no limits to what career you want to pick. Just keep in mind to intelligently manage your energy whilst you’re at it. It’s not about managing the job but **thriving at it.**

Outro

The world is an inherently competitive place. You'll **need** an edge to become indispensable & the only way to become indispensable is to **excel at things others cannot do.**

Skills pay bills

Competence at a skill will lead to enjoying the activity more – enjoying it more means you'll be doing it more, which in turn makes you more competent.

Until you've become "talented" at it.

It's a self-sustaining loop.

Eventually you'll start to **love** it and it'll become your "passion". So don't go searching for something until it "feels just right" but create it by **building on strengths**.

Note: Strengths are solely **performance indicators** (not unchangeable truths). You can still "be whoever you want to be", but you won't perform **optimally** if you build your life on weakness. It can be stretched – just not indefinitely.

It will probably take a while to get to a definite decision as to what your strengths and weaknesses might be, but don't let these hold you back. **Keep searching.**

Try something that's suited to your strengths and notice how fast you make progress at it, how challenging you find the work and if you can achieve a state of "effortless work" (a.k.a. flow)

I recommend to keep a list of all your personal strengths in a word file. This knowledge will help you tremendously in choosing your direction in life and achieving some form of success.

"Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control; these three alone lead one to sovereign power." – Alfred Lord Tennyson

If you found this book useful, I encourage you to share this free PDF.

Additionally, If you're having any thoughts, feedback or questions about this book feel free to hit me up at.; simonsomlai@basicgrowth.com

- Simon

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