

My Passion: I'm not Sure What It Is, but I'm Pretty Sure this Job Isn't It

By Rose Jonas, Ph.D.

Career literature is full of exhortations to discover and work your passion. For over two decades I have sat with the career-befuddled, helping them find their hearts' longing and pursue it. I have been way less successful than I thought I'd be. Make no mistake. I wholeheartedly believe the best way to approach to one's life work is what a recruiter once said, "Find something you like doing and get good at it." The theory is great; it's the people who mess it up. As do the people who write about seeking passion from our jobs.

Work isn't the same to all people. It may be what we do eight-plus hours of the day, but it isn't where we live. A carpenter client hated his job, but he appreciated the security it offered his family and the funding of his weekend hobby: all-terrain vehicles. An executive disliked his daily trek down corporate halls but treasured his off-hours as a volunteer fireman. For another, his job supported his ability to buy \$200 sheets (which he wouldn't stop buying when he got down-sized, but that's another story). Work, in other words, supported a desired lifestyle. It wasn't the end that mattered to these people; it was the means to pleasure.

Satisfaction from work isn't necessarily the driver. An invoice clerk drove a rattle-y car so her child could be the first in the family to get a college degree. A sales rep discovered that what he really wanted from a job was to be at it as little as possible so he could be with his gold-ringed baby. He felt guilty, having been raised in a large corporation about which he was not passionate. But, he did have passion. It just didn't live in a three-piece suit.

Seeking passion isn't always a choice. A New York cabbie, once a professor in Africa, worked two jobs to pay for his daughters' livelihood. What about him? he asked The Job Doctor. "You're doing what you have to do," I told him, "so your daughters have the luxury to do what they want to do." His has the immigrant's eternal drive to sacrifice in order to boost the babies.

Even if we do work at what we love, happiness and success don't necessarily follow. It depends on the individual and what energy, inclinations and talents get brought to the table. If you have a lazy streak, career passion won't automatically get you off that couch. If money is your marker of achievement and early child care is your passion, good luck making money at it. It tends — big time — not to be found in that field. If your passion is raising your family and you're a single working mom, you will be constantly batted between your love and the demands of supporting them. If you're a happy maker of surgical instruments, but don't have a fire in your belly to run things, you'll never be president of the company, unless you inherit it.