

The Power of Passionate Creatives



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We all have passions.

Some of us have been fortunate enough to pursue our passions as our professions. Most of us have not.

We learned that passions were something we pursued after hours—whether they were athletic, artistic, or intellectual; related to social or political causes; or simply hobbies.

We compartmentalized our lives. Work was something we did so that we could pursue our passions outside of work.

In extreme cases, we suppressed our passions. There just wasn't enough time—and passions tend to consume a lot of time.

Only one out of every five workers in the United States is really passionate about his or her work, according to the Deloitte Center for the Edge's 2009 [Shift Index](#) survey

At the other extreme, a Gallup poll recently indicated that another one out of five employees is so disengaged that he or she actively seeks to undermine colleagues at work.

Of course, most of us are somewhere in the middle of these two extremes.

But all too often those who are passionate about their work are frustrated with their employers and bosses. They are not satisfied. Far from it. They want to do more, but they feel held back.

This manifesto is for them—the “passionate creatives” of the world. Together, passionate creatives have more power than they realize.

But that power comes from a surprising place.

Who are the passionate creatives?

Passionate creatives are everywhere. They are not bound by geography, job description, institution, or demographic. They can be found anywhere from the frontlines of the largest organizations to the garages of entrepreneurs unleashing the next wave of innovation.

They are certainly not just knowledge workers. They include mechanics who are passionate about the machines they service, gardeners who see art where others only see plants, and craftspeople who create something amazing out of the most mundane raw materials.

What unites them is the desire to make a difference, to leave the world a better place than they found it, and to engage with those who share their passion so that they can get better faster.

These individuals go by many names. Some have adopted the label of pro-amateurs (or “pro-ams”), which was popularized by Charles Leadbeater. The label typically refers to amateurs who hold themselves to professional standards in their pursuit of their passion.

We seek to include those of us fortunate enough to be compensated for work we are passionate about, whether we are entrepreneurs, professionals, knowledge workers, craftspeople, or clerical workers who are searching for new and creative ways to do the most “routine” tasks.

Of course, these individuals have been around since the beginning of human history and played a more prominent role in some eras than in others. Our goal is to expand their ranks, and position them firmly in the center of the institutions that shape our professional and personal lives.

Passionate creatives are everywhere.

Passionate creatives are all around us. But they are not evenly distributed. They tend to gather on the edges where unmet needs intersect with unexploited capabilities.

Edges are fertile seedbeds for innovation. These edges include emerging economies like China, India, and Singapore. Other edges include demographic segments like younger generations with new sets of needs and interests. Edges also arise around the frontiers of technology, whether it is information technology, clean tech, nanotech, or biotech.

Edges naturally tend to grow “spiky” as passionate creatives seek out collaborators. In their quest for knowledge, passionate creatives gather together in dense geographic settlements to enhance their ability to encounter others they can learn from.

Up-and-coming software engineers go to Silicon Valley or Bangalore, screenwriters to Los Angeles, models to New York, and so on. Talented individuals tend to go where they have the greatest chance of running into what they need in order to take the next step, even if they don’t quite know what form that step will take or who might inspire it.

Of course, not all passionate creatives have the luxury of picking up and moving to one of these spikes. Many of them remain scattered throughout every community.

And to be certain, not all people fall into the category of the passionate creative. Many today are overwhelmed by the changes going on around them and seek stability, predictability, and safety. They long for the time when they knew exactly what needed to be done and what could be expected when they did it. This is completely understandable—change can be destabilizing and threatening, especially if we are struggling to hang on to what we have.

But all of us have the potential to become passionate creatives.

Everyone can be a passionate creative.

We all have the capacity to become passionate about some element of the world we live in.

And passion fosters creativity, especially if we have the discipline to master the practices required to drive performance to new levels.

Passionate creatives not only welcome new challenges—they actively seek them out. They take challenges and transform them into opportunities to develop new skills and perspectives. They are consumed with the desire to take their game to the next level.

Many people have suppressed their passions in an attempt to fit into a world that expected stability, predictability, and safety. But passion remains in the margins of our existence or in the daydreams that distract us from our daily tasks.

Our challenge is to rediscover and cultivate our passions, moving them from the margins into the center of our lives.

Cultivating passion requires three steps. We must:

- Make our passions our profession.
- Connect with people on the periphery.
- Turn passion into potential.

For it is our passions that will focus us and energize us in a world where those without passion will be increasingly marginalized and overwhelmed.

Make your passion your profession.

Most of us have passions we have developed over a lifetime. Even if we worked hard to suppress those passions—because we just could not see a way to pursue them—they still lurk close to the surface waiting to be called out.

Step back, reflect on those passions, and find some creative way to pursue them. Right now.

You can make a full-fledged career change. Or you can edge into your passion gradually.

Another option is to find the parts of your current work that are truly satisfying and engaging. In even the most pedestrian job, there are usually elements we find tremendously interesting and rewarding, even though we cope with boredom or bureaucratic obstacles in other parts of the job.

We can choose to focus on and develop these elements of our work. In the process, we will uncover the passion latent in our current profession.

However we do it, we must find a way to pursue our passion as our profession.

We all have the capacity to become passionate about some element of the world we live in.

Passion puts you ahead of the competition.

An interesting thing happens when we pursue our passions as our profession: We actually seek out more challenges. Rather than viewing them as sources of stress, we see them as opportunities to get better faster.

We want to push ourselves to the next level, and we get restless if we remain in the same place too long.

No matter what the area of work, some people are quite passionate about what they do. They can't wait to get to work and test themselves. They love to drive their performance to new levels.

Increasingly, these are the people you will be competing with in the future.

We'll say this a different way:

If you are not equally passionate about the work you do, you will undoubtedly get marginalized. The pressures will just be too overwhelming.

So what can you do? You can find or develop your passion. One way or another, you will need to pursue your passion as your profession. Until and unless you do that, you will remain vulnerable to competition from those who are pursuing theirs.

And even if you can prevail without passion, you will lead a stress-filled life that sooner or later will become intolerable.

Get real.

Some critics say this goal is unrealistic. It may even sound elitist.

It may be feasible for a research scientist or a software engineer to make passion their profession. But what about the legions of workers supporting our factories, distribution centers, and fast-food restaurants? Is it really realistic for them to become passionate about their work?

An interesting thing happens when we pursue our passions as our profession:
We actually seek out more challenges.

The truth is that virtually any type of work can become the focus for passion. Many auto-repair mechanics are passionate about what makes cars run. Carpenters immerse themselves in building things that are beautiful and enduring. As Matt Crawford, the author of *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, points out, working with one's hands can have deeply philosophical, even spiritual, meaning.

One of the great lessons that Japanese car companies taught us is that assembly-line workers in a car factory can become enormously passionate about their work. That is, they can have passion if they are treated as problem-solvers who can innovate rather than automatons that simply carry out detailed instructions that someone else defines.

It is actually elitist to suggest that someone could not be passionate about work in certain job categories. It reveals the low opinion we have of the work.

Connect with passionate creatives on the periphery.

Your effort to find passionate work will be more successful if you reach out to others who might share similar passions and find ways to connect with them.

Once we engage our passion, we also engage our curiosity, and we'll start to connect with what we find most meaningful. As our path becomes clearer, we'll want to seek out and connect with others who share these passions. In the process, we'll become better faster and drive our performance to new levels.

Once you make your passion your profession, you'll want to find the edges in your profession where the new thinking is going on and the new needs are emerging. The edges of our social networks represent the weak ties that connect us to people who can offer insights, experiences, and capabilities that provoke us to improve our own game.

Use those peripheries to focus and drive your passion. Find the challenging problems or opportunities that pull you to the next level.

As you develop your passion, you'll find that you want to reach out and help others with the same passion to get better, as well. Your passions will lead you to move quickly from conversation to shared initiatives that help you build much more meaningful relationships on the periphery.

Once we engage our passion, we also engage our curiosity, and we'll start to connect with what we find most meaningful.

Turn passion into potential.

What is deeply stressful for less passionate workers becomes profoundly exhilarating and satisfying for the passionate. As soon as we overcome one challenge, we begin scanning the horizon for another. When engaged with these challenges, we instinctively seek out others who share our passion and can help us succeed.

Because we share passions with others, we are more likely to develop deep, long-term relationships. We shy away from opportunistic, short-term transactions with less potential for a sustained exchange of knowledge and learning.

Something else interesting happens when we connect with our passion: We cannot remain silent.

We become more visible to others as we engage with people around our passion. Word spreads, and we begin to attract others who share our passions and who experience a similar need to connect around these passions.

Reaching out has the opposite effect than what you might expect: It draws people to you from the most unexpected places.

The knowledge that others share your passions, and the opportunity to engage with them around tangible and exciting problems, feeds your passions and spurs you on to greater achievement.

Passion may not define a destination—it is a constantly shifting horizon that we head toward. But it does provide a compelling direction and a tight focus. It also offers powerful motivation to address any challenges in front of us as we achieve our full potential.

Challenge existing institutions.

The journey will not be easy. Passionate creatives today still face enormous obstacles in pursuing their passions.

While our business and technological infrastructures are transforming at a rapid pace, the institutions around us are increasingly at odds with these new infrastructures. Most of the institutions that we must deal with—whether they are schools, firms, nonprofits, or government bodies—emerged in another era. These institutions were built to perform highly standardized tasks that were repeatable and highly predictable.

That approach led most of us to suppress our passions. We were taught to treat our work as a price to be paid to accumulate the material resources required to enjoy the rest of our lives. Passion in the workplace became highly suspect.

Passionate creatives do not follow standardized scripts well. They are constantly seeking to improvise, challenge conventional wisdom, and strike out in new and unexpected directions. Passionate creatives are not predictable and, as a result, undermine determined efforts to ensure predictability.

As a result, they often tend to be deeply unhappy in their current institutions. The daily roadblocks that they encounter at every turn are profoundly frustrating. They see all the possibilities, but experience firsthand the barriers that keep these possibilities far in the distance.

As a consequence, many people have fled these institutions. They have learned to build independent platforms for pursuing the work that they love. Others remain in their institutional homes, struggling to make a difference against enormous pressure.

Passionate creatives *change* institutions.

As individuals begin making their passions their professions, they will in turn exert enormous pressure on institutions of all types to change.

Institutions will be forced to find ways to make talent development the core rationale for their existence. Everything about these institutions—strategy, operations, and organization—will need to be reconceived through this talent development lens. Any institution that cannot provide a powerful platform for talent development will find its most talented people fleeing their cubicles and corner offices.

Embracing our individuality and passions, however, doesn't mean breaking free of all organizations. Nor are we suggesting an "end to the firm."

This isn't about the "end of the organization," but its transformation.

Institutions of all stripes have an opportunity to tap into, leverage, and magnify the individuals who work for them.

Institutions remain absolutely necessary as bases for people looking to develop to their fullest potential. They can significantly amplify the power of passionate creatives, making it far easier to connect with a broader range of people and resources and to learn faster from each other than individuals ever could have achieved without institutions.

We must therefore reclaim our institutions—whether we work from the inside at existing ones or create a new generation of our own.

We will build a new breed of institutions designed from the bottom up and from the edges inward with the goal of providing platforms for passionate creatives to amplify their passions.

The power of passionate creatives.

True to form, passionate creatives will not sit still for long, complaining about the impediments that stand in our way.

This manifesto is not directed at the barriers holding us back. It is a call to action.

To thrive, we need to find ways to rethink the roles and relationships that define how institutions function. Rather than treating us as irritants to be neutralized, institutions must be redesigned to address a totally different rationale.

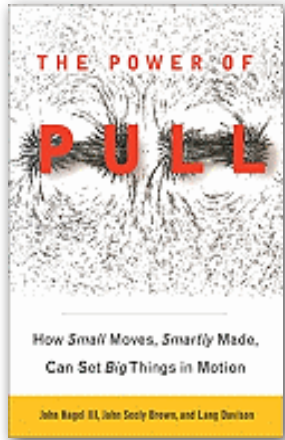
Institutions have an opportunity to evolve into truly high performing organizations by recognizing and addressing the needs of passionate creatives. Passionate creatives will go the extra mile individually and collectively because this shapes our meaning and identity.

Passionate creatives everywhere must now find each other and join forces to expand our impact. It is time to move from the margins of our institutions to the core.

The path is clear—we have an opportunity to move from passion to profession to periphery and finally to potential.

It's an exciting journey. As we make our passion our profession, we begin to see that our potential is far greater than we previously believed. We draw more people and institutions into the journey as we make our way through uncharted terrain. As more people join us, we discover that we get better faster. All this spurs us to attract even more people to help us move through more challenging territory.

In short, becoming a passionate creative is not an option—it is an imperative. There are real opportunities that lie ahead for those who master the necessary mindset. With passion at the core, there is nothing we can't accomplish. 🚀



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