

# Start Now!

Inject your career with more passion through these six steps by Curt Rosengren



**C**ontrary to popular belief, career passion isn't available only to the privileged few who know the secret handshake. In my work as a passion-focused career coach and workshop leader, I have worked with hundreds of clients, and I tell each one of them the secret to a juicy, fun, fulfilling career: It's all about you.

Passion isn't some exotic, rare experience. Simply put, it's the energy you get by bringing more of you into what you do. So, for more passion in your career, all you need is two basic steps:

1. Identify who you are. What lights your fire at a core level?
2. Make choices based on that.

Need a little more? Read on. This article is based on "The Occupational Adventure Guide," the model I developed to provide a step-by-step guide to creating a vibrant, fulfilling career. It isn't about "career passion in six easy steps." The journey will take work, and everyone runs into barriers along the way. Some are internal: Fear of failing or the unknown. Others are external: Family or financial obliga-

tions or a lack of qualifications. But know that for each roadblock, there is a way around it – yes, even including the "how do I afford this?" question (hint: the answers for affording it start in Step 4 and really get rolling in Step 5).

## Step 1: Create your own compass

As we plot our career course, it's easy to get caught up in deciding our direction based on an external compass: what a career should look like, our parents' expectations, monetary definitions of success, etc.

Not one of these external factors has anything to do with what lights us up at a core level. Yet I see people repeatedly using them to point the way to careers then marked by boredom, frustration and a lack of inspiration.

The most important step is to jettison that external compass and create a compass of your own (I call it the Passion Core). Identify the underlying characteristics of the things that light your fire. Not just what you love doing, but why. That's where the energy comes from.

Say, for example, your excitement comes from taking creative and unexpected approaches to things, but you became an accountant because the money was good. My bet is you're often uninspired. Now imagine if you put "creative and unexpected" into a career: An interior decorator with a flair for the unusual, for example. Wouldn't that change the picture?

As you identify those underlying characteristics, write them down. You're creating an internal compass you can use to brainstorm new career possibilities and then to evaluate options and choices.

Often, people don't even realize their decisions are externally based. Before beginning her passion explorations, 41-

year-old Stacy Sipinen of Seattle had a notion of what she “should” do and a perceived need to be “practical” about work. The result: She felt chained to a software sales job that didn’t fit. But when she began to realize that those voices weren’t hers, she was able to give herself permission to seek something better.

She ultimately left the software industry and began a career as a mortgage banker, a path that offers her both greater control and an opportunity to apply her expertise in a consultative role – both key elements in her Passion Core.

### Step 2: Sculpt and scan

Where does your current job match the elements in your Passion Core? Let’s say you love the part of your job that entails teaching. Look around. Could you build more of that into your job; it could be as simple as telling your boss you want to do more of it. Conversely, where does your work go against the Core? How could you minimize that? If you like clear definition and your work feels too random, what opportunities are there to create more structure in your day-to-day routine?

Once you’ve taken the immediate steps, keep alert for opportunities. And yes, they certainly can be within your current organization.

It worked for Derek Baines. An enterprise corporate account manager at Microsoft, Baines cites decisions based on his Passion Core for a recent promotion. Though it fell outside his job description, Baines saw an opportunity: With a number of software licenses coming up for renewal for the first time – each averaging several hundred thousand dollars – he believed he could improve both the process and the effectiveness. When Baines outlined his ideas, his boss gave him the freedom to create a new system and communicate with customers. The result: an almost unheard-of 10 renewals out of 10.

The experience played to multiple elements in Baines’ Passion Core, including:

- Dreaming and asking, “What if we ...”
- Planning, preparation and implementation
- Helping/teaching (with customers)
- Making the impossible happen.

### Step 3: Where’s the fit?

If it’s time to move on, use your Passion Core as a tool to brainstorm new career possibilities. Ask what careers have one or more of these elements. Follow the standard brainstorming rules – there are no bad ideas.

The aim is to get beyond the blinders that the inertia of your past path, preconceived career beliefs and simple lack of awareness can create. The right career just might lie outside your current field of vision.

The key is to generate a full spectrum of ideas. Don’t evaluate yet – that’s the next step. Just fill the funnel. For example, in my own Passion Core, exploration and discovery are a huge element. What kinds of jobs have those characteristics? Journalist, photographer, research scientist, genealogist, private investigator, marketing researcher, anthropologist...

Some of those sound appealing, some don’t. Narrowing the list is part of the next step.

### Step 4: Whittle them down

Once you’ve filled the funnel with options, use your Passion Core to evaluate them. Discard what doesn’t match. Identify the likely possibilities and dig deeper. Research them. Talk to people who do that work. Shadow somebody.

As a technology company vice president, Steve Smith decided he wanted to make more of a difference. Teaching sparked his interest, but he needed to know more. So, he took a course on teaching and began helping in his children’s schools. That approach gave him the reality perspective he needed to make his decision – he now teaches high school math.

The money factor had to be evaluated too. While savings and investments eased the transition, Smith and his wife had to look more carefully at their finances. “We started asking ourselves, what do we really need?” In their case, it wasn’t the material things. It was doing what made them happy.

We can’t minimize the financial question but I often encourage clients to look at “personal return on investment.” In other words, if they got paid by the feeling they get from the job, rather than money, what would they do to maximize

the ROI on the time and energy spent?

When you’ve done the due diligence and have a deep understanding of each option, it’s time to pick a new career direction.

### Step 5: Map it

Once you have identified that new direction, set goals and make a plan. What steps do you need to take to get there? That will help determine how fast you can realistically move. Some people can make a single dramatic change. Most people can’t.

It’s critical to identify the internal and external obstacles. Being aware of them will help you find ways around them. In my own career, perfectionism has consistently been a huge boulder on the path. Confronting it, I started to see that imperfection – and the resulting learning – was a necessary component of my growth and progress. It was a mental shift that enabled me to take more risks and not waste energy beating myself up.

Money is probably the most common external roadblock. I’ve seen people circumvent that by saving money specifically to take the edge off the financial challenges of a career change or pushing the ultimate goal temporarily onto a backburner but always keeping it in sight. You can also look for short-term revenue streams to help bridge the gap.

Ultimately, there are many ways to get around the obstacles you identify. If you feel stuck, challenge yourself to brainstorm solutions.

### Step 6: Hit the road

If you don’t move forward, none of this matters. To begin, just take a step. Right now. As you head down that path, remember that passion is a process. Each person’s journey will unfold differently, at varying rates of speed.

If you can’t change immediately, build the foundation for change over time with a dual track. Take consistent baby steps, and when the time comes to change, it will be closer to stepping off a curb than jumping off a cliff.

In the end, finding a career you can love is simple. Look inside, make choices that are consistent with what you find there and you’ll inevitably find passion. **W**