



There's nothing wrong with being a Pollyanna—in fact there's plenty right about it when it comes to your career. But it needs a dose of reality. Passion Catalyst Curt Rosengren shows you how to blend the two.

Wild-Eyed Pragmatist

Do what you love and the money will follow." Feels good, doesn't it? It's comforting to know that all we need to do is skip through a field of daisies having fun and our dreams will come true.

Unfortunately, it happens to be complete bunk.

Here's a little flash of reality for you (cover your ears and hum if you don't want to hear this): The money's not going to follow just because you do what you love. There is no direct cause and effect.

Those may seem strange sentiments coming from me, whose entire focus is helping people find careers that light them up. What happened to positive thinking? Well, lest you think I've morphed into a hypocritical curmudgeon, let me explain.

"Do what you love, and the money will follow" is a lovely notion, but it's woefully incomplete. A more accurate version would be "Do what you love, work hard, be aware of the obstacles getting in your way, doggedly find ways around them, be persistent, stay open to opportunities, be creative—oh, and did I say work hard?—and the money will follow."

Not quite as catchy, I realize, but it's much more likely to get you where you want to go, because it combines dreams with reality.

Do I think that doing what you love is important? Absolutely! Doing work that makes you feel vibrant and alive energizes you and opens doors because you are going with the natural flow, rather than fighting it. But it's not a push-button recipe for success. At some point, you're going to encounter the bumpy, uncertain, sometimes gritty reality of actually making it happen.

The Middle Way

So how do you bridge the gap between dreams and reality? With what I call Pragmatic

Pollyanna-ism. It's a "middle-way" approach that is neither head-in-the-clouds dreaming nor drab-monotone practicality without a trace of dreams. It helps you bring dreams into your reality, and reality into your dreams.

Pragmatic Pollyanna-ism starts with a change of perspective. Think about it. What comes to mind when you hear someone described as a Pollyanna? Typically it is meant as a put-down, implying an unrealistically positive dreamer.

But that's a flawed view that ignores the amazingly positive impact that a Pollyanna perspective can have. As Henry Ford once put it, "Whether you believe you can do a thing or not, you are right." When you think about the extent to which the boundaries of what is possible in your life are defined by what you believe is possible, why wouldn't you want to cultivate that Pollyanna point of view? Of course, too much of that perspective can lead to an overly optimistic perception of what it will take to breathe life into the dream. It can run blindly on, ignoring any obstacles until a surprise "splat!" calls attention to them. It needs a practical partner.

On the other hand, pure pragmatism isn't all it's cracked up to be either—though it's certainly more societally admired. In short, Pollyanna-ism and pragmatism each miss the boat. Taken together though, the two are a powerful team. Far from being mutually exclusive, the dreamer and the practical can be very complementary, one the yin to the other's yang. Your dreams expand the scope of what you aim for, and your practical side figures out a way to realistically make it happen.

When Your Selves Compete

Being practical can take on many forms. For Sharon Kay in Issaquah, Wash., it was a momentary diversion off the path to her dreams. Kay, who had spent the last 15 years of her career in the technology industry, was

on the cusp of launching Elemental Elegance, a decorative finishing business painting faux walls, when she got a call from her former employer.

“I was just setting up my business, getting ready to go,” she recalls. “It was really exciting. And then I had this offer to come back to where I used to work, as a temporary contractor.”

“It was a really difficult decision,” she says, looking back at her back-and-forth thought process with a chuckle. “But . . . but . . . I’m starting a business,” said the side that wanted to jump headlong into the dream and start playing. “But . . . but . . . money coming in for a while would be really good,” said the practical side.

In the end she decided that the practical approach would give her more room to build her dream, even if it meant denying that immediate gratification. Taking the detour not only gave her more of a financial cushion, it also gave her unpressured time to lay the groundwork for the business so she could hit the ground running.

Sorting Through the Dreams

Like anything in life, pursuing your dreams is full of choices and compromises. Part of Pragmatic Pollyanna-ism is being able to recognize which of the potential compromises support the dream and which ones betray it. To do that, you have to understand what you really want.

For Penelope Trunk, Pragmatic Pollyanna-ism meant saying, “Maybe I can’t have it all. Maybe I need to have what’s really important instead.” For her, it was about looking at what she wanted out of life and making the hard choices that would let her get it. And that led to big change.

Last spring, Trunk was a syndicated columnist living with her husband in New York and raising her two sons. As she took stock of where she was and where she wanted to go, both in her career and her life, she saw a path that was clearly off kilter. She knew she wanted to write. She also knew she wanted to make her family a central part of her lifestyle, not something she squeezed in at the edges. And she loved living

in New York City. It was tough to make it all work together.

“I realized the things I love to do are not things that you get paid enough for to live in New York City,” she recalls. “And I also realized that the amount of time and energy you have to spend to earn tons and tons of money is not compatible with my vision of how I want to raise my kids.”

Writing was important. Family was important. New York City was fun and energizing, but not a central part of what was truly important.

So, she and her family moved to Madison, Wis., where the cost of living is more conducive to building both the career and the family life she wants. It was a hard decision to make, but ultimately worth it.

Pure Pollyanna might have said, “Gosh, I just know if I try really hard I’ll make loads of money doing what I love, AND have the time I want to spend with my family. I’ll just stick with it and I’m sure things will change.” Pure pragmatism on the other hand might have said reproachfully, “Stop dreaming, you chump. Suck it up and get a ‘real’ job that pays a lot of money.”

Taking a Pragmatic Pollyanna-ist approach let Trunk define what she really wanted and figure out a path that would take her there.

And that’s precisely what Pragmatic Pollyanna-ism is all about. It’s a holistic way of thinking in which positive potential is the star and practicality plays a supporting role. Both elements are important, and the story can’t unfold fully without each of them. **m**

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