

Planning for Passion

A step-by-step guide to staying energized & engaged in your career

By Curt Rosengren, Passion Catalyst™

When your work lights you up, you have more energy to put into success. Not only that, you have more energy to put into enjoying life. This article offers a no-nonsense, nuts-and-bolts approach to planning for passion.

There are a multitude of factors people use when planning their careers. Some are pragmatic (what career has a growing number of jobs?), others are skill-based (what am I good at?), while still others are ego-based (what career will make others admire me?).

But all too few people incorporate one of the most powerful factors of all into their planning efforts: **passion**. And that's a shame, because finding work that lights you up is one of the best investments in your career you can make.

When you tap into what energizes and engages you, not only are you happier (good for you, good for the people around you), you also have more energy to put into high performance (good for you, good for your boss, and good for your company). You also feel more confident, and the persistence to achieve your goals comes more naturally. Bottom line, when you plan for passion, *everybody wins*.

A methodical approach to finding passion

I'm a big fan of passion. I'm an even bigger fan of taking a no-nonsense approach to finding it. This article is based on a step-by-step system I developed called *The Occupational Adventure Guide™*. It takes passion out of the abstract and offers a logical, methodical approach to help you incorporate it into your decisions.

Whether you love the word passion or find it overused and trite, odds are good you want to *love what you do*. This article offers you a common-sense way to get there. Here is the nutshell version of the process:

1. Identify your Passion Factors: Reverse engineer the things you love doing. Identify *why* those things energize you and find the common themes.

2. Explore your passion paths: Identify the potential career paths that have a high density of your Passion Factors.

3. Evaluate your passion paths: Use your Passion Factors to evaluate potential career paths.

Passion:
The energy that
comes from bringing
more of YOU into
what you do.

Defining passion

At the heart of the approach is my definition of passion, "*the energy that comes from bringing more of YOU into what you do.*" In its simplest form, it's about figuring out what makes you tick and identifying the potential paths that align most strongly with that.

Think of water flowing along a riverbed. That water actually gets energy from the path it takes. It's similar with passion. When your work is in alignment with what naturally lights you up, doing the work becomes a source of energy.

On the other hand, if your work is out of alignment with what lights you up, it can feel more like trying to get water up and over a mountain. It's possible, but getting it done takes a lot of energy and leaves you feeling drained.

It's not what you love. It's why you love it.

To "bring more of YOU into what you do," take a step past what you love doing and explore *why* you

love it. Understanding *what* you love isn't accurate enough, because two people can both say, "I love ____" (I love cooking, for example) and be talking about two different experiences. The reasons *why* they love it might be completely different. Asking why you love it lets you drill down to what's unique and individual to you.

Reverse engineer what lights you up

Think of the process as reverse engineering what lights you up to find the source of that energy. Start by making a list of things you have loved doing over the course of your life – work or play. Those might include a job, a specific aspect of a job, a hobby, a class in school, extra-curricular activities, a period of time in your life, etc.

Pick one item from the list and start digging into why you have enjoyed it so much. For each reason you identify, ask yourself, "Why? What is it about this that is so appealing?"

Don't stop at asking why just once. Once you have your initial set of reasons why ("I love it because ____, ____, and ____"), loop back around to each of those reasons and ask, "Why is that so interesting? What is it about this that is so compelling? Why is that so enjoyable?" There is an amazing amount of insight to be had if you keep digging. Challenge yourself to dig four or five layers deep.

As you reverse engineer, you'll see similar themes

start to come up. Inevitably, the same underlying characteristics will be a part of multiple things you love doing.

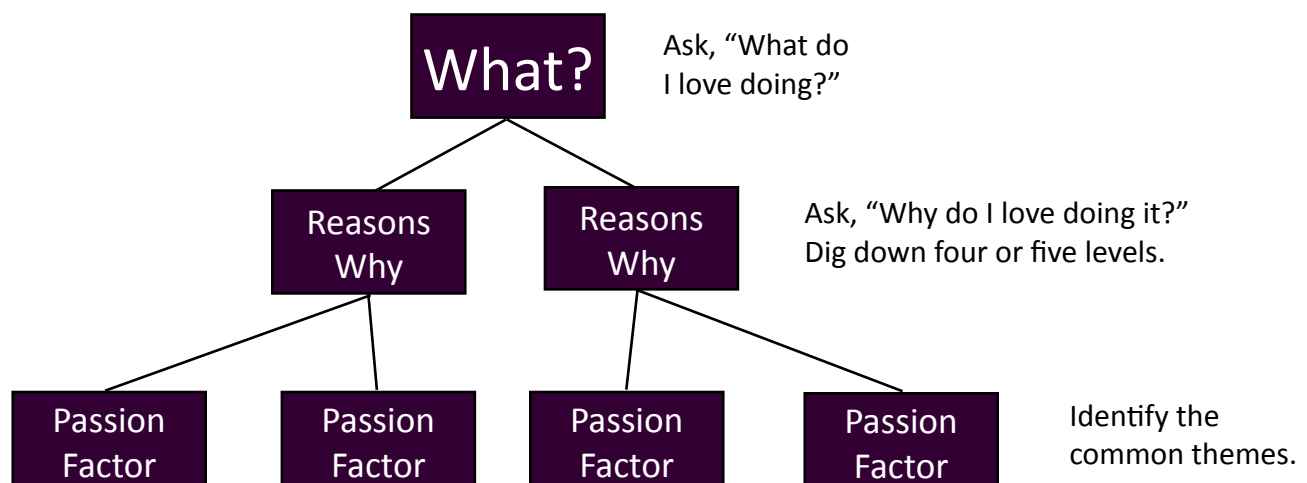
These recurring themes are your Passion Factors, the underlying characteristics that tend to be there when you're on fire.

In the years I have been taking people through this process, I have seen clients identify hundreds of different Passion Factors. Here are just a few examples of some common ones:

- Analysis
- Problem-solving
- Creating order out of chaos
- Deep connection with others
- Having a defined beginning and end
- Creativity
- Freedom and flexibility
- Discovery
- Understanding/working with systems
- Solving puzzles

This is by no means a comprehensive picture. I share them here only to give a small taste of what Passion Factors might look like.

By compiling your Passion Factors in one place, you create a tool you can use to consciously, purposefully bring passion into the picture. It's like having an internal compass that can point you in the right direction.



Planning for passion

There are several ways you can use that internal compass to take the guesswork out of your career planning.

Career path exploration

Use it as a springboard for exploration of potential career paths. Ask, "What are the career tracks within my company that are characterized by these Passion Factors? What other paths out there that line up with these Passion Factors? "

Decision evaluation

That internal compass also gives you a concrete and tangible way to evaluate your career decisions in terms of the question, "How likely is this to energize me?"

It's simple logic. If you identify the Passion Factors that tend to be in place when you feel energized and engaged, and a potential path is chock full of those Passion Factors, then the probability that that path will energize and engage you is high.

You can put this idea to work on the big picture level (here's this job opportunity – should I take it?) and on a smaller scale (e.g., recognizing projects that will tap into what lights you up).

Passion Guidance System

One last way you can use your understanding of the Passion Factors in your internal compass is to share them with your manager to help him or her guide you in a direction that maximizes the likelihood that you will feel energized by your work.

A savvy investment in your career

When your work aligns with what energizes and engages you, it can fuel your success, strengthen your confidence, and inspire persistence.

With benefits like that, planning for passion is one of the best investments in your career you can make.

As a speaker, writer, and coach, Seattle-based Curt Rosengren has been helping people create careers that energize and inspire them since 2001.

Curt is the author of the e-book, *The Occupational Adventure Guide* (which goes deeper into the process outlined here) and the book, *101 Ways to get Wild About Work*.

In addition to individual coaching, Curt brings his work to organizations through his *HR Passion Program*, designed to help HR teams consciously sculpt their work roles, both as individuals and as a team, to reflect what energizes each person. The result is happier team members, better performance, and greater team connection.

Curt also writes about career passion for the *U.S. News & World Report* career blog. His first blog, *The Occupational Adventure*, was named by Forbes.com as one of the Best of the Web. He currently blogs about Meaning, Abundance & Passion (M.A.P.) at *The M.A.P. Maker*.

Prior to discovering his Passion Catalyst work, Curt spent several years in the technology industry.

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