

I don't know what to do with my life!

8 hours a day, five days a week, for forty odd years, that's a lot of time! Considering how short life is, it would be great to love your job but at the very least you'd want to like it.

This essay is an attempt to help those who don't know what to do with their life, get started. I hope it helps!

Just follow your passion

'But what if I'm not passionate about anything?!?'

The trouble with the 'follow your passion' advice is that it's based on the belief that everyone comes into this world with a pre-existing passion.

And if you don't know what to do with your life you could waste an eternity soul searching for some kind of hidden internal passion.

Follow your passion sounds nice but it's not very helpful advice to the confused youngster. They clearly aren't passionate about anything in life, because if they were, they would already be busy making a career out of that passion and not be asking you for your opinion.

I believe that passion is not pre-existing but post existing.

That you don't start being passionate and then invest years of effort. You invest the years of effort and then you become passionate.

Cristiano Ronaldo's passion

Cristiano Ronaldo is arguably the best footballer in the world right now and it is blatantly clear he is passionate about what he does.

All you have to do is watch one of his games to see he tears himself apart to get the best out of the fans, his teammates and himself.

I think it's safe to assume Cristiano trains 40 hours a week, if not more, doing mundane repetitive drills in search of perfection.

Now you couldn't give this training routine to a child developing their interest in football.

Why?

Because it's completely devoid of fun!

In order to attain this level of passion and dedication you need to confirm your interest first.

Grit Quote

"Passion for your work is a little bit of *discovery*, followed by a lot of *development*, then a lifetime of *deepening*"

Angela Duckworth in 'Grit – why passion and resilience are the secrets to success'

Overwhelming options

In Anders Ericsson's great book 'Peak' he proves that with the right kind of practice one could get better at anything.

That, over time with enough deliberate practice, your mind will adapt to suit whatever activity you are engaging in.

As soon as I finished that book I was paralysed with fear.

If I believe what he wrote, and he makes a very compelling argument, then all my excuses are gone.

No more saying I'm not a creative person. No more saying I can't do maths.

Ericsson took away my hiding spot and proved I could be anything I want.

Anything I want.

All of a sudden all doors are open to me.

All of a sudden I have an overwhelming amount of options available to me.

Hence the paralysing fear.

How do I know I don't want to be a cashier?

Because I was one.

I experienced first-hand the stress of being a cashier. I know the pain of late night lock ups, of long hours for minimum wage and dealing with aggressive minors looking to buy alcohol.

Others might like it but it's just not for me. It's not what I want to do with my career.

And I may never have known that if I hadn't tried it.

The experience reduced the overwhelming career options by one and provided me with a valuable insight into my job preferences.

It was a great lesson in the benefit of trying things.

Knit a quilt

So my advice, for bringing the mountain of options down to a manageable mound, is to try things. To make a list of every career path you have ever considered and start trying them out.

Try them with tiny experiments.

By that I mean if professional knitter is on your list, start by knitting a quilt.

Then if you enjoyed the experience, try knitting a bigger quilt. Then if you enjoyed that, try selling a quilt you knitted.

Small incremental experiments to test your interest in the activity.

Learning by doing offers raw first-hand experience like no other method.

The best way to learn how to make a film, is to make a film.

The best way to test your interest as a personal trainer, is to personally train someone.

The best way to find out if you like sales, is to sell something.

The way I see it, it would be a shame to spend thousands of euros and a couple of years getting a degree only to find you don't like the day to day tasks of the job.

So it's better to try it now for free and know instantly.

No right answer

You're walking down the street minding your own business when up ahead you spot three charity collectors.

You quickly check your pockets to see if you have any cash.

The search was not in vain! You have found a single euro coin and you decide you'll donate it.

As you walk closer to the collectors you make out the charities they are supporting.

One is to help the homeless, one aims to end third world poverty and the other is to aid cancer research.

Now the question is - Who do you give your money to?

The thing is, there is no right answer.

They are all worthy causes. They could all benefit from your help.

The same is true for your career. There's no one right answer.

You could gain job satisfaction from multiple career paths.

You could be happy as a cupcake maker, or as a nurse or an engineer.

Each option will have its pros and cons, all you have to do is find the one that's right for you.

The resistance

The resistance is the number one reason why you haven't made any progress yet. The resistance as outlined by Steven Pressfield in his great book 'The War of Art' is the little voice in your head that sabotages your efforts. It lives in your amygdala and its evolutionary job is to keep you safe. Unfortunately in today's world it equates social embarrassment with flesh eating tiger level of fear.

'Don't do that they'll laugh at you'

It is a cunning opponent and its tricks are subtle.

Just before you ask a professional what their career is like the resistance steps in and convinces you some online research first will be better. In your research you see some local colleges have spaces in their classes and just when you think about applying the resistance intervenes and persuades you to try an online course instead. Then just before you start the online course the resistance distracts you with social media.

The seemingly innocent thought to quickly check social media results in hours of scrolling until its bed time. The resistance's work is done for the day. It has successfully stopped you taking any risks.

It doesn't have to be social media, any distraction will do. Anything to keep you leaving your comfort zone.

The thing is everyone feels resistance all the time. I feel great resistance writing this. You may be feeling the resistance right now convincing you what I'm saying is nonsense. The trick is overcoming it long enough to leave your comfort zone and make progress.

The alternative is the agony of being a slave to the resistance. Of having dreams of bettering your life but never finding the courage to quieten the voice long enough to take action.

Final question

Now I am very aware that you may have found the above completely useless but let me have one more crack at helping you get started with one final question.

The question is - do you think you're going to find your passion in life by doing nothing?

Recommended readings

Far more knowledgeable people than I have helped me out in this area and I hope they can do the same for you:

'The War of Art' by Steven Pressfield

'So good they can't ignore you' by Cal Newport

'Peak' by Anders Ericsson & Robert Pool

'Grit' by Angela Duckworth

'Linchpin' by Seth Godin

'Drive' by Dan Pink