There are people in this world that are different from others. These people are different in ways that are, philosophically, hard to explain. You may be wondering who these people are, and in fact you may be one of them. To explain this group of people, I will first give you an idea of the opposite of this group.

In this cliché example a person wakes up to their buzzing alarm, and groggily gets out of bed. They prepare for another 9-5 workday. It’s Monday, they are already exhausted, and all he/she can think about is what they want to do after 5 o’clock. Monday goes by, then Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, until eventually its 5pm on Friday and that person is excited for the weekend. This is a very banal but realistic example of what 80% of individuals are doing with their lives (Dinsmore). So what are the other 20% of people doing? This 20% is that special group of people that have found their passion. They wake up every day energized and excited about their work. I have met few people who fit this category, but I believe they are easily distinguishable in a crowd. So what is the difference between someone who enjoys their everyday life and someone that endures it? The key difference is passion. A majority of people in the world haven’t found what it is that they love to do, they are not in sync with their natural aptitudes. As more and more individuals begin to notice the difference between people who love their job and others that endure it, a question bubbles to the surface.

How do you get from working because you have to pay bills, feed yourself, and stay alive, to working because you love your job and you feel that you never work a day In your life? In other words, how do you find your passion?

Sir Ken Robinson is an internationally recognized leader in the development of creativity, innovation, and human potential. He taught for 12 years at the University of Warwick in the UK and is now professor emeritus (Robinson and Aronica). And in Robinson’s book, Finding Your Element, he aims to answer that exact question. How does one find their passion? The book refers to finding what you love to do as your “Element”. Robinson states that an individual’s Element is “…doing something that feels so completely natural to you, that resonates so strongly with you, that you feel that this is who you really are.” (xi). It’s about being “in the zone”. Being in your Element is where you’re staying up late at night trying to get something down. It may be a new music piece, or an equation that you’ve spent hours working out. Nonetheless everybody has an Element, and finding that Element is based off of three principles.

Robinson states in his book that everyone is unique (20). No two beings on earth are exactly the same, we all have our own interests, aptitudes, hobbies, likes, and dislikes. We are unique biologically, as in our genes and traits, as well as environmentally. Nobody grows up in the same place, time, and culture with the same family, wealth, and experience. Because of this, each and every one of us have a different passion or Element.

His second principle states that “You create your own life” (23). Human beings are naturally creative, they shape culture. Imagination is said to be the act of creating something that is not present to our senses. So what is creativity? Imagination is integral to creativity, creativity can be seen as “applied imagination” (Robinson and Aronica 24). Your world is created by what you choose (and choose not) to do. In Finding Your Element the author notes a quote from Carl Jung, “I am not what has happened to me, I am what I choose to become” (24).

Robinson’s final principle for finding your Element is that “Life is organic” (25). A study mentioned in a TED talk, “The Psychology of Your Future Self” by Dan Gilbert, asked thousands of people how much they think they would change in the next several years. What they found was that nobody, no matter what age, can make an accurate guess as to what their life will be like in 20, 10, or even 5 years (Gilbert). Every single person dramatically underestimated the amount of change that would occur in their lives (Gilbert). Life is not a step by step process, there is no list of what you must or must not do. Each step you make can be in any direction, and each direction you choose is not necessarily good nor bad. These directional decisions are based off one’s personal interests and ambitions (Robinson and Aronica 26).

These three basic elemental principles can help guide an individual into finding their Element. But many roadblocks can and will occur along the journey of finding one’s passion. A prime example of this is our education system. Education systems around the world are not built with these three principles in mind. Education is based off the assumption that life is linear (Robinson). In Sir Ken Robinson’s famous 2006 TED talk, “How Education Kills Creativity”, he highlights the fact that education systems need to be completely rebuilt. Everywhere you go there is the same education hierarchy. Mathematics and language are at the top, while humanities and arts are at the bottom (Robinson). Because of this, many highly creative and skilled people think that they are not intelligent or useful, because what they are good at isn’t valued (Robinson). We’re running education systems where being wrong is the worst thing you can do (Robinson). Ken Robinson states that “Creativity should be as important as literacy.” In 2005 Steve Jobs gave a commencement speech to the University of Stanford about his life decisions (“’You’ve got to find what you love.’ Jobs says”). Steve dropped out of college and it turned out to be “… one of the best decisions I ever made.” Free of the limitations of graduation requirements, Steve took the classes which he found interest in. This led to Steve creating as well as being fired from his own company, Apple. This was an open door for him. Being let go allowed him to focus creatively, and once again be free. He started two companies, one of which is the most successful animation studio in the world, Pixar.

To find your element you must first focus on what you’re good at, these are aptitudes or natural talents. This is exactly what Steve Jobs did, he sacrificed a degree for a refined focus on himself. These aptitudes are different from abilities. Aptitudes are the raw talents that people possess i.e. easily understand math concepts, or having a good visual sense. Abilities is something that requires education, work, and experience, and must be practiced in order to be obtained. Examples of abilities are a mathematician, artist, and a cryptographer. (Aptitudes is more the nature side, while abilities is more the nurture side). By combining aptitudes with abilities, and resisting the urge to conform to other beliefs about the “must-haves” in life, you can find a passion that will drive you for the rest of your life (Robinson 36).

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