

Exploring Passion: The Art of Embracing Uncertainty

“Life is what happens to you while you’re busy making other plans.” – John Lennon

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I originally wrote this article in Chinese and used ChatGPT to translate it into English for convenience.

You may have come across this article by chance. But I would never claim to teach you how to find your passion in just three to five days.

Michael E. Gerber wandered through various industries and fell into a state of disillusionment in middle age before discovering his passion around the age of fifty, eventually becoming a mentor to American entrepreneurs.

Robert Kiyosaki, after more than a decade of entrepreneurial exploration, only realized his true passion was education in his forties (he stated that the wallet company he founded at 38 was not driven by passion).

Abraham Lincoln, likewise, found his passion only after the age of forty.

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You should not expect to find your passion by simply emulating others—this is, ultimately, a matter of deep personal inquiry. Indeed, its complexity rivals that of the most abstract mathematical problems.

The good news is that many methods claiming to help you “quickly” discover your passion are riddled with pitfalls. These approaches either peddle the superficial allure of passion divorced from commercial reality (i.e., success narratives repackaged for consumption), or they provide short-term motivational highs that collapse into deeper self-doubt.

This article aims to present a methodological approach—not a shortcut—that I myself use in the pursuit of long-term passion. I will share both the joy and hardship involved in this exploration. My framework will be divided into two major components:

1. The Search for Pure Passion
2. The Integration of Passion with Reality

Note:

There is overlap between “finding what you love” and “identifying what you’re good at.” While mutually informative, they are not synonymous. This piece focuses on the former—what one may love, even without proficiency.

Defining Passion

Philosophers and modern success stories often offer conflicting definitions of passion. For the purpose of this discourse, I adopt a neutral and inclusive definition: *“a strong human emotion that serves as a behavioral motivator.”*

However, the version of passion we seek is functional—one that can be cultivated and channeled to enrich our lives and bring fulfillment.

Saying “Python is my passion” may feel accurate, but it lacks conceptual rigor. If taken literally, Python—being a programming language—is neither emotional nor motivational. At most, it is a projection of passion, not passion itself.

For instance, if one’s core emotional driver is the desire to help others, or to build a world governed by logic and control, then Python may be an effective medium through which that passion is realized.

The key question is:

Was Python selected through internal exploration, or merely adopted from external comparison and trial?

The Limits of Enumeration

“Try more hobbies. Explore more careers.” This is generally good advice—but it has limits.

Common Case: You may fail to find a fulfilling passion within the finite window of exploration afforded by life’s constraints.

Extreme Case: What if no existing, concretized career offers a projection of your passion that exceeds, say, 50%?

The problem with purely enumerative methods—trying out predefined options—is that they resemble consumer behavior. You're browsing a marketplace of passions built by others. It's a process shaped by contrast, selection, rationalization, and bodily response, all heavily influenced by marketing.

Suppose you must choose a product (career) without prior knowledge of your needs and under time pressure. The result will likely reflect others' passions more than your own. Achieving even a 20% passion alignment is already a significant accomplishment under such constraints.

Thus, while this method has its merit—many people devote years to discovering what they can merely tolerate—it confines most to the options currently visible, often dictated by popular trends and external success. Such pursuits, driven by limited passion, are unlikely to yield sustained creativity or resilience.

Therefore, I propose an additional method—not to replace enumeration, but to augment it. The goal is to increase your agency in the search, potentially raising your passion alignment from 20% to 30% or even 50%. This method is elegant, introspective, and hard-earned. And yes, it requires patience and discomfort.

The Search for Pure Passion

Unlike MBTI or other typologies, my method creates a personalized classifier. The key principle is this: **abstract your passion with honesty.**

I maintain a dedicated notebook for recording reflections on passion.

At first, I wrote:

“My passion is Deep Learning.”

Looking back, this was misguided. Deep Learning, while intellectually engaging, is not an emotion. It’s a tool, a domain—possibly a projection of something deeper.

Then I revised:

“My passion is creating self-sustaining systems.”

Better, but still abstracted through my existing skillset.

Eventually, I wrote:

“My passion is filling my mind with novel experiences.”

Now we’re closer. This explains my years of immersing myself in English, quitting smoking through cognitive stimulation, and learning Japanese without practical need. These were not career choices—they were symptoms of a restless brain seeking novelty.

Forget the specific examples. The real takeaway is this **three-stage process of stripping away surface-level representations to approach the core emotional driver.**

Approach this like a scholar: with clarity, honesty, and an unfiltered lens. Later we will “recombine” passion with the world—but for now, we must isolate the ingredient. Just as clean ingredients matter for cooking, or clean datasets for AI, or proper pronunciation for language acquisition.

So I ask you: *What is your pure passion?*

This reflection did not come easily to me. Each layer of insight took me over six months.

Here are the key techniques that helped:

1. **Sustain your current passion until a new one emerges.**

Even Geoffrey Hinton, one of the founding fathers of deep learning, recommended this. Choose a passion that offers high transferability if proven wrong. That’s why many open-minded individuals advise choosing the path with the greatest future optionality.

2. **Outdoor physical activity.**

Exercise releases endorphins, enhances decision-making, and fortifies willpower. Outdoor settings amplify this effect for me. Choose the physical activity that energizes you.

3. **Interpersonal interaction.**

Through others, we rediscover pride, dignity, and emotional connection—three essential components of sustained effort. Whether online or in person, human connection anchors passion in reality.

4. **Logical reflection.**

I spent five hours weekly in 2024 summarizing life experiences—what I’ve been praised for, excelled at, enjoyed doing, or had others pay for. I then abstracted keywords—sharp, honest descriptors.

For example, “ambitious to a fault” is a revealing keyword for me. These self-defined traits are far more actionable than generic types like zodiac signs or MBTI.

5. **Reading.**

Seek narratives of passion, even when they're not explicitly labeled. I dedicated one full day per week to reading, even while working full-time.

6. **Dream journaling.**

This is a personal method with no scientific backing, but one I cherish. Dreams, I believe, tap into primal instincts. I record them within ten minutes of waking and meditate to extract insights.

Importance declines from top to bottom; the first three enable sustainability, the latter three enhance discovery.

Integrating Passion with Reality

For most people, “reality” cannot avoid the issue of making a living. Some passions do not need to be integrated with reality—your livelihood and your passion can run in parallel. But this text discusses applying passion to a career, which requires examining situations where passion and livelihood are coupled.

“Making a living” means meeting the basic needs required to exist in the world, including biological needs (food), psychological needs, and the habitual needs of modern life (housing conditions, transportation, etc.). A common way to address these needs is to obtain money. Although it is possible to individually satisfy these needs without relying on money, to simplify the problem, we take “directly obtaining money” as the approach. And if someone can live freely without relying on money, they still need to make their reality self-consistent—this has the same priority as “earning money,” only the methods differ. This text will not discuss that scenario further.

The “ways to obtain money” form an open-ended question. Literally, as long as you can obtain money, it counts. But in reality, we avoid approaches that would put us into trouble, so the options are constrained—for example, staying within legal boundaries. Some people also add the constraint of staying within their moral boundaries. After meeting the constraints, anyone can create their own way of obtaining money.

That is a separate topic. For this text, we simplify it by summarizing widely seen methods of obtaining money: people are willing to pay something for an expected result, and when they cannot (or do not want to) exchange through other means (emotion, relationships, ideology, language, etc.), they use money as a convenient medium of exchange. This type of payment generally appears in two common forms:

1. **Financing:** all contributors are willing to pay *investment-type* funds for something that is promised to be realized in the future. This can be an asset that will continuously generate profit, or a product. Note: crowdfunding is a form of financing.
The philosophy of financing deserves its own topic, but usually it requires verification—a working plan that convinces contributors to pay.
2. **Products:** buyers want to immediately obtain something they desire, receive a solution, or sometimes receive a service, and thus pay *transaction-type* funds. Products may target enterprises or individual consumers, and different types of products involve different philosophies of selling, usually involving research into target group needs and consumption habits.

These two categories cover many familiar methods of obtaining money. Stock market trading (essentially an extension of financing), product sales, consulting services, labor for hire, and so on can all be derived from them.

Engineering a Passion-Aligned Career

Based on the nature of your passion, you can derive multiple “ways of earning money” that match it. You can then apply your personal criteria to select among them, for example:

“I want a way of earning money that allows me to work only 200 days per year, reflects about 30% of my passion, and under these conditions maximizes profit per unit of time.”

Once the target is set, you must investigate all possible “ways of earning money” through practical research. For example, if the economic source is a consumer-facing product, you must conduct demand research. In this stage, you should avoid imagination and always rely on real-world situations.

Then choose the option that best fits expectations, for example:

“After research, the best way of earning money is: during the build-up phase, I need to work 11 months per year; once mature, I need to work 250 days per year. It reflects 25% of my passion, and among all options it provides the highest profit per unit time.”

Note: this is a relatively coarse-grained selection algorithm. The design of this algorithm varies from person to person. If you have already done sufficient self-exploration during the

earlier stage of “finding pure passion,” you will actually be able to set the target clearly.

Conclusion

At every stage, the ability to execute is paramount. Every successful biography echoes this: relentless follow-through trumps ideas.

My core thesis: **Identifying your most abstract, governing passion is the best way to unlock and sustain execution.**

And that, ultimately, is why I wrote this piece.