

The Passion Paradox Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *The Passion Paradox* explains the risks of blindly following what we love to do the most and teaches us how to find a cultivate our passions in a way that can lead us to a fulfilling life.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



Nowadays “follow your passion” is common advice. Coaches and commencement address champions will tell you that pursuing your passion is the only way to achieve your full potential and be happy.

On the other hand, many people think searching for your passion will likely lead you to dissatisfaction or trouble. You may end up never discovering what you really love and being frustrated. Or you can find it and go all in for years, making yourself lonely, unhealthy, or poor. They suggest you just stick to what you do and learn to like it.

So, who is right?

All of them are, actually. *The Passion Paradox: A Guide to Going All In, Finding Success, and Discovering the Benefits of an Unbalanced Life* shows passion is a gift but can bring you to destructive behavior if you don't know how to deal with it.

These are 3 lessons I learned about being happy by doing what you love:

1. Handle passion with care to avoid its many pitfalls.
2. For your brain, passion is similar to drug addiction.

3. Harmonious passions foster your personal growth, instead of taking over your life.

By learning the biology behind it, you'll be able to find and cultivate a healthy passion. Let's see how!

Lesson 1: Pursuing your passion is risky and requires self-awareness.

When you love what you do, you often forget about everything else. If you try to turn your passion into a job, you can easily get very busy and neglect family, friends and even your own wellbeing. Even Mahatma Gandhi, whose entire life was dedicated to helping his people and advocating for non-violence, had a troubled relationship with his son.

Passion also means suffering and implies you sacrifice something to it. It will almost certainly take you to an unbalanced life. But putting forth too much emotional and physical effort is only sustainable in the short term. So, if you aim for the long run, you should pace yourself.

If you let it go unchecked, passion can lead you to burn out and loneliness or turn you into a slave to external validation.

Sometimes you start a project you really like working on, then you become increasingly focused on results and switch from the pleasure of doing what you love to the urge to be appreciated. Imagine you liked taking pictures and you decided to post them on Instagram. Easily, especially if your followers grow fast, you may become obsessed with the number of likes you get, forgetting why you opened your account in the first place.

Sometimes passion may simply slowly dim and even disappear. This is, for example, what happens to many people who manage to turn a hobby into their job. Often it starts to feel like work and it's not fun anymore.

Lesson 2: The biological mechanism behind passion ties it with addiction.

Isn't passion something that can help us achieve greatness? How come it may have so many bad consequences on our lives?

The answer is in the neurochemical processes behind it, which make it really similar to drug addiction. **Passion is so powerful because it triggers dopamine production, with positive and negative consequences.**

Dopamine is a substance produced by the brain to push us towards our goals. It is released, it makes us chase rewards. Unfortunately, once we get them, dopamine slowly decreases, leaving us wanting for more. Also, our tolerance for dopamine increases over time. We need higher and higher levels to experience the same feeling. Thus we need to set increasingly difficult goals to get satisfied.

This process, which fosters people's motivation, is the same that drives addicts to get drugs. It's useful but also dangerous.

Jeffrey Skilling was the founder of what was named America's most innovative large company: Enron. He only hired the most passionate people. Enron, valued at 60 billion dollars, was a model of organization and performance studied in colleges.

But one day the company unexpectedly declared bankruptcy and its managers were convicted of fraud. It turned out that Skilling's passion for growing Enron financial performance had led him to put in place unethical practices and falsify the balance sheet. And now he's a classic example of what happens when passion becomes obsessive and goes out of control.

Lesson 3: A healthy passion comes with the pleasure of improving yourself.

So how can you become a happier person by doing what you love to do?

First, your passion must be an end in itself. You should enjoy the pursuit of it, not the rewards that may come from that. Not only will this allow you to keep your passion healthy and avoid getting obsessed, it will also help you achieve results. It seems that if you love what you do regardless of external validation, you are more likely to succeed. This is called the Passion Paradox.

Being in love with learning and practicing something can be the beginning of what Stulberg and Magness call a harmonious passion, the one you should aim for. It raises your energy and is connected to the Greek concept of Eudaimonia, which calls for continuous self-improvement towards happiness, instead of a search for instant gratification.

Maybe you expect to love your job since the first day. But look at relationships: if you expect to find love at first sight, you'll likely to be disappointed. This is what the authors call a fit mindset, which you should abandon.

Take an incremental approach instead. It consists of trying different activities by practicing them and seeing what happens. If you get passionate you can put forth a higher amount of time and effort. Your commitment should grow accordingly with your mastery.

Finding your passion is just the beginning. Before going all in you must check your expertise and be aware of the consequences it may have on your life.

The Passion Paradox Review

The Passion Paradox gives us an unusual point of view on doing what we love. It shows that passion has its cons: following it will bring you joy but also the suffering due to an unbalanced life. Luckily there are ways to minimize the pitfalls and increase the benefits that come from finding what we love.

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Who would I recommend The Passion Paradox summary to?

The 23-year-old who hasn't found what she loves to do yet, the 40-year-old who's getting obsessed with her new hobby, and anyone who is thinking of leaving his job and try to make a living at their passion.