

Introduction: A Formula for Impossible

They lie beyond our wildest dreams in the most literal sense.

the only thing more difficult than the emotional toil of pursuing true excellence is the emotional toil of not pursuing true excellence.

happy or sad is just what happens on the way to accomplishing the impossible or not accomplishing the impossible. More meaningful does not typically mean more pleasant.

what did all of this brokenness add up to in the real world? Time off. What would happen: I'd be hanging out, snap this or that, then be forced onto the couch for a few months. But when I returned, the progress I saw was eye-popping. It was amazing. And it didn't make any sense.

“Things that were impossible in the morning were possible by the evening. Literally.

the impossible as a form of extreme innovation

In our seven overlapping years of coexistence, nothing he'd yet done defied the laws of physics. There had been no accidental levitations

“Very little is impossible with ten years' practice.”

if I didn't stop chasing these athletes around while trying to figure out how they were pulling off the impossible, I wasn't going to live very long.

if we can get past the hyperbole and unearth the practicality, what does it take to accomplish the impossible?

Abundance was about individuals and small groups tackling and solving impossible global challenges such as poverty, hunger, and water scarcity, challenges so big that just a decade earlier they'd been the sole province of large corporations and big governments

Personality doesn't scale.

Biology, on the other hand, scales. It is the very thing designed by evolution to work for everyone.

when you get so focused on the task at hand that everything else disappears. Action and awareness merge. Your sense of self vanishes.

Scarcity of resources is always the largest threat to our survival, making it the largest driver of evolution.

. Flow is to extreme innovation

James's point is that the reason we're not living up to our potential is that we're not in the habit of living up to our potential. We've automatized the wrong processes.

Part I: Motivation

1: Motivation Decoded

we are witnessing

motivation, learning, creativity, and flow—expertly applied and significantly amplified.

a catch-all for three subsets of skills: drive, grit, and goals.

elite-level performers never rely on a single source of fuel to sustain them along the way

elite performers always try to get enough sleep and exercise and maintain proper hydration and nutrition. They “stack”—that is, cultivate, amplify, and align

scarcity drives evolution. Any problem regularly encountered on a quest to gather resources

when we talk about drive

psychological fuels that energize behaviors that best solve resource scarcity

Fear is a psychological driver

because it drives us to fight over resources

Curiosity is another driver because it makes us wonder if there might be more resources across that ocean.

Passion drives us to master the skills required to successfully sail that ocean. Goals drive us because they tell us what resources we're trying to find on the other side of that ocean and the reason we're trying to find them.

External drivers are fantastic, but only until we feel safe and secure—meaning that we have

enough money to pay for food, clothing, and shelter and have a little left over for fun

Once extrinsic drivers start to fade, intrinsic drivers take over.

After that basic-needs line is crossed, employees want intrinsic rewards. They want to be in control of their own time (autonomy), they want to work on projects that interest them (curiosity/passion), and they want to work on projects that matter (meaning and purpose).

Once baseline needs are met

you can devote yourself to

more resources—for yourself, for your family

“I'm doing what I love. If you're doing what you want to do all the time then you're happy.

You're not going to work every day wishing you were doing something else.

I get up and I go to work every day and I'm stoked

4/13/24 5:33 AM

As you can see, it's a tightly aligned stack. But built correctly, life will feel exciting, interesting, full of possibility, and thick with meaning.

2: The Passion Recipe

you want to look for places where three or four items on your curiosity list intersect. If you can spot the overlap between multiple items

4/13/24 5:45 AM

When multiple curiosity streams intersect

you create the necessary conditions for pattern recognition

whenever we recognize a pattern, the brain rewards us with a tiny squirt of dopamine.

detect more patterns.

There's a feedback loop here.

the dopamine that we get helps us detect even more links (pattern recognition)

crossword puzzle

the little rush of pleasure you get when you fill in a correct answer—that's dopamine.

The reason we tend to fill in multiple answers in a row?

one good idea often leads to the next and the next and the next.

By stacking

curiosity atop curiosity atop curiosity

we're increasing drive but not effort

In the study of creativity

What's actually happening is pattern recognition.

Automatically, the brain begins looking for connections between older bits of info you've already learned and the newer bits you're currently learning. Over time, this means more patterns, more dopamine, more motivation, and, eventually, a bit of expertise.

And it's expertise that arrives with less work.

We're letting our pattern recognition system find connections between curiosities that make us even more curious

increase your chances of making those connections, pay attention to two sets of details: both the history of the subject and the technical language used to describe that subject.

our brains love narrative

which is

pattern recognition over time

details together into a coherent story

link cause with effect.

as you recognize those historical patterns, and this will increase curiosity and amplify motivation even further.

this overarching structure

You don't have to work as hard to remember them.

This historical narrative

allowing you to take a brand-new piece of information and correctly slot it into its exact right place.

to really light that fire

you're going to need to amplify that passion with a series of "public successes."

positive feedback from others.

Any kind of social reinforcement increases feel-good neurochemistry,

feel-good nature of this reward feeds back on itself,

feedback loop that forms the foundation of true passion.

Taking things public doesn't require giving a TED Talk. Simple conversations with strangers will get things going.

it's important to do these steps in order. You want to spend a bit of time playing around at the intersections of curiosities before taking this public.

There's a lot of excitement that builds up as you start to investigate these intersections, but it's important to keep it to yourself for a bit.

being able to add something to the dialogue—having a few ideas of your own and a few public successes built off those ideas

it's time to transform the fire of passion into the rocket fuel of purpose.

"relatedness," the need for caring and connection, into the concept of "purpose,"

the desire for what we do to matter to other people.

4/13/24 8:06 AM

brain filters incoming information

protect against depression

Purpose shifts our attention off ourselves (internal focus) and puts it onto other people and the task at hand (external focus).

By forcing you to look outside yourself, purpose acts as a force field. It protects you from yourself and the very real possibility of being swallowed whole by your new passion.

decrease the activity of the default-mode network

in charge of rumination,

increase the activity of the executive attention network, which is the network that governs external focus.

other people provide actual help. Financial, physical, intellectual, creative, emotional—they all matter.

we're going to need all the help we can get.

When it comes to crafting your purpose, dream big.

“massively transformative purpose,”

A clear why behind the work being done

Massively means large and audacious

Transformative means able to bring significant change to an industry,

The overlap between passion and purpose, that's what you're hunting.

If you can zero in on that target, you've found a way to use your newfound passion to do some real good in the world.

Curiosity into passion; passion into purpose; and purpose into patient profit

how to make sure you stay in the game long enough to achieve your purpose

next