

Changing Careers: Converting Passion To Profit

Career changes can be exhilarating or terrifying, depending on the nature of the change and the motivation behind it.

I've been very fortunate, having made the transition from one profession to... to... well, I'm not sure what it is that I do, but I really love doing it. The truth is, I walked away from one profession within the legal community, to focus on Internet-based endeavors and to write. Writing has been my passion since the day I scratched my brother's name on the fender of my dad's 1952 Buick, and discovered what powerful reactions words can evoke.

Since closing the door on one career a few years ago, many people have asked me about the process of changing careers. "How did you decide what to do?" "How did you go about doing it?" "Was it scary?"

Addressing the last question first: No, the decision to change careers wasn't too bad—if you can overlook anxiety-induced night sweats and waking up screaming, "What have I done?" Actually, the decision to voluntarily leave a thriving career was scary. Very scary. But deciding what to do wasn't difficult at all. If you follow your heart, if you follow your passion, you cannot go wrong. And that begs the question: If you're contemplating a career change, should passion or market need dictate what course you should follow? Though elements of both must be present, without a doubt let passion be your guide.

Conventional wisdom suggests that success in business depends upon finding a need in the marketplace and filling that need with your own product or service. While it is important to have something to sell that people need or want (duh!), you have to begin by deciding what it is *you* love to do. Once you know that, you can then determine what market need you can fill by providing a product or service aligned with your passion. The key to successful career changing is finding that perfect match.

The good news is that it's really not that difficult, once you know what it is that stirs your passions, and what it is you really want. But how do you know what you really want? Many people assume that it's money. While most of us want to acquire some measure of wealth, if that's the driving force behind a mid-life career change, it's probably not going to work. The passionless pursuit of money would be a tragic way to spend the second half of one's working life.

Having said that, virtually every passion can be translated into a revenue-generating opportunity. H.J. Heinz translated his passion for pickles into a dilly of an enterprise; Henry Ford launched the industrial revolution as a result of his passion for tinkering; Bill Gates' passion for technology transformed the computer world—and rumor has it that he made a few bucks in the process.

Domino's Pizza, Apple Computer, WalMart, Netscape, Yahoo!, eBay, and just about every successful Web-based enterprise was started the same way: By a person with a passion. I'm not suggesting that passion alone can ensure success, because it can't. Success also requires vision, organization, creativity, marketing and motivation, among other ingredients, but the transition to any new career must begin with passion.

A positive attitude is also crucial. You must believe in what you're doing and not continually second-guess your decision to change careers, once you've made it. A defeatist attitude will guarantee failure. Jeff Bezos, founder of <http://amazon.com>, clearly was aware of his bookstore competition, but forged ahead anyway. Motivated by passion and his vision, he created a new and novel way to sell books on the Internet. A few billion dollars later, and he's well on his way to success.

My message is the same whether I'm speaking to a group of corporate executives or college students: If you are launching a career or contemplating a transition to a new one, you must love what you do. Without passion, you'll simply be going through the motions and your products and services will suffer.

After identifying your passion and your product, your challenge is to define your target market. Whatever product or service results from your passion, there is a need for it. There is a need for drivers, for carpet cleaners, for publishers, shoemakers, actors, writers, singers, doctors, lawyers and candle makers.

There is a need for hand-made greeting cards, home-sewn flags, hand-painted tiles, home-cooked meals, computer gurus, administrative assistants, accountants, closet organizers, life coaches, painters, trainers, therapists, flower arrangers, and as I discovered, career-changing writers like me.

My story is not unusual: I began by writing about things that were of interest to me and sending my articles to local newspapers, community publications, and Web sites. When requests for additional items *finally* began arriving, I charged a nominal fee. After a couple of years, I was asked if I was interested in writing a book. ("Gee, let me think about that—yes!") A contract followed, which evolved into additional books, newspaper columns,

syndication, a weekly newsletter, speaking engagements, a radio show and TV segment. Whodda think?

What the future holds, I have no idea, but that's part of the career-changing adventure. Maybe it holds great things, maybe it holds nothing. I only know that if I continue to follow my passion, no matter what the outcome, it's been the adventure of a lifetime and I'd do it all over again in a heartbeat.

So that's *my* story, but what about you? Can you identify your passion? If so, there may be an exciting new career just waiting for you to take the first step.

About the Author

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