
FOREWORD

“What I do best is share my enthusiasm.”

—Bill Gates

The most important source of competitive advantage in the twenty-first century will come from individuals and organizations that unleash the power of passion.

Many summers ago, I conducted a research project on retail profitability with a well-known investment-banking firm. Our task was to uncover five indicators that could predict which retailers would have the largest growth in stock valuation over the next five years. The second most important factor was something we “felt” in the home offices of the most financially successful firms. At the time, we described it as “a buzz, an air of excitement, of people working together to do something important.” In a word, we were describing an enthusiasm that resulted from individual and team passion—a passion rooted in each person’s personal connection with the company’s missions and objectives and with each other.

Nearly two decades later—March 15, 2005, to be exact—I had lunch outdoors in the warm sunshine of Cape Town, South Africa with Colin Hall. Colin was a one-time boy wonder of

Passion at Work

South Africa Breweries and chair of Wooltru Retailing Group, now in his later years serving as a special consultant for presidents of countries and companies.

Colin had just finished months of exhausting, but ultimately successful work that had brought together dozens of tribal leaders from the Congo to end their warfare and agree on a new constitution. Noting my business school background, he was quick to point out that “the ‘head,’ the thinking, of the tribal leaders was secondary to their concerns of the heart, their feelings.”

“Nothing happens without first establishing trust,” Colin continued. “... and that only comes from the heart. So we started by praying together, holding hands, and telling stories about our families. The men smoked cigars together; they drank Johnnie Walker Black [scotch] together. The women learned about each other’s children and customs. The result? They became a single family of energized individuals who collectively found ways to transcend language and cultural barriers. And as those barriers fell, so did the political barriers to peace. That’s how they ended years of tribal warfare; that’s how they were able to establish a new constitution. They even stayed up night after night to get it done. No one ever complained.”

It’s what I call being of many minds, but *becoming* with one heart.

Involved over the years with Stephen Covey, Colin explained that Covey’s *Seven Habits* exemplifies the West’s emphasis on “effectiveness” in business. “As Descartes said, ‘I think; therefore, I am.’ That’s the West. Best practices, taxonomies, rules for getting things done more effectively, more efficiently. But what you are missing is something like ‘I *feel*; therefore, I am’—the heart, the energy that makes the system go—as I experienced with the Congo tribal leaders.”

Foreword

“Ernst and Young recently reported that 66 percent of all strategic decisions don’t get implemented. Similarly, we have found that 70 percent of all strategic initiatives are strong in terms of potential ‘effectiveness’ but have ‘low energy’ behind them. If you can’t capture the ‘energy’ of an organization through effective teams of impassioned people, nothing happens. At the end of the day, you end up with lots of paper but very little action.”

“The source of continuing aliveness is to find your passion and pursue it with whole heart and single mind.”

—Gail Sheehy, *New Passages*

So what is passion?

According to filmmaker John Boorman, passion is the “becoming of a person.” Are we less of a person, therefore, without passion? Or at the least, should we question what we are doing with the time that has been given us? Is it as Richard Bach of *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* fame hauntingly asked, “You gave your life to become the person you are right now. Was it worth it?”

In my experience with thousands of MBAs and other students of business, their primary challenge is of another sort: Most don’t have a clue what they are passionate about! The ways of the world, the rites of what we call “growing up,” have left them disconnected from what they cared about as a child, from what might have been nurtured through childhood into adulthood if we lived in a different world. Instead, what might have become a lifetime of passions was locked up long ago in a box in their attic.

Maybe you are one of the lucky ones. You do know. But then you ask yourself, “How can my passion be the basis of a successful career? How can I actually make a living doing things I love? And until I know that, how can I possibly risk giving it a try?”

Passion at Work

I facilitate five-day executive retreats that focus on a critical challenge facing a company. Also of importance to senior management, the retreat allows executives to get to know better the “real person” behind each other. When that happens, trust and mutual respect can grow, leading to improved teamwork and expediting implementation efforts in the future. But to do that, we must create a safe environment where the executives feel as comfortable as possible opening up and talking as a whole person to the group.

On Sunday night, I show a film to start our discussion of leadership, teamwork, and the results we hope to see by Friday. I give the executives an “easy” assignment for the next morning to get things started.

Each is asked to prepare a 3- to 5-minute speech to the group about their passion(s). There’s only one rule: No talk specifically about family or work. “What you’re passionate about may relate to work. You can talk about a hobby, if you wish. Whatever you like,” I offer. The truth be told, most spend the entire night in fitful sleep, not sure what they should say the next morning, concerned about how they might look to their peers.

At breakfast the next morning, many will come over to me with comments like, “I hope you don’t mind me talking about eating. I love to eat.” or “I really do love to play golf. Is that okay?” I know they are nervous, that they are testing me, so I respond with, “Whatever you talk about, make sure you tell us *why* you are so passionate about it.”

Tension remains high. Most either don’t know what they’re passionate about, feel it might be trivial, or are simply afraid to talk about something that they really care about—something that doesn’t directly relate to the “safe, acceptable” areas of work or family.

Foreword

We begin. Either a cofacilitator or I go first with a heartfelt speech about a passion deep inside us, often something that springs from our childhood or an emotional experience. Although the first executive to speak might follow with something trite, it rarely happens. The bar—a standard of relevance—has been set.

As the morning moves along, the atmosphere starts to change, almost unnoticed. We share some laughs and some tears. We hear of things like a love for the beauty of nature (and how they miss it by spending all day in their offices), a passion for great books (and how one particularly moved them), or a desire to develop young people (and how they feel when one does well and thanks them).

It is a profound experience. No one leaves the morning session the same as before we started. Even the room feels different. It becomes our primary meeting place, a “home” of sorts, for the next five days. Everyone knows that when they enter this room, truth and openness are now required.

In the next five days, we put together a “passion plan” for each individual, the team, and the organization. We look at their work and the jobs of those who work with them. We ask, “Is the challenge we face because we need people to be more passionate about their jobs, or more jobs people are passionate about?” One thing is clear: Anything done henceforth without passion is not worth doing—organizationally or personally.

*“Great dancers are not great because of their technique;
they are great because of their passion.”*

—Martha Graham

Lawler Kang is a man of passion. He is a man who also knows that bringing your passion into your LifeTime (as he calls it) is hard

Passion at Work

work. It is knowledge that comes from personal experience, from wisdom he earned at nearly the cost of his life.

In return, you have in your hands Lawler's gift to you—a gift that is actually two gifts, two books in one. The first helps you rediscover your passion; the second guides you to put that passion into practicality.

Putting passion into action—figuring out how to do it and then doing it—is a task to be shared with another person or in a group. Why? Like losing weight or ending an addiction, anything that requires you to change not only your attention but also your attitudes and behavior is hard work. And this book is hard work—hard work that offers you the potential of living your life passionately, or as Lawler says, “living a legendary life.” So use it in your book club or in your business unit at work. When you do it in a group, working on your plan can even become fun (and at times, funny!).

The personal inspiration of the first few chapters comes from survey data and engaging stories that help you open your mind and heart to the potential of passion. As someone who has faced his own mortality more than once at an early age, Lawler doesn't waste time or mince his words. He shows you how to “rock the boat”—that is, how to find your own way, your own path wide enough to fit just you, based on your individual gifts. He knows how important it is to make every day count. He knows that money is something you give your life energy for—and that it better be a good trade.

What can stop you from reaching out, from really going for it?

Lawler raises three issues that are central to my work as well:

- What is money?
- How will you measure success?
- What do you want written on your tombstone?

Foreword

I've found that the two factors that affect people's career choices and patterns most are their relationships with money and with their parents. Real or projected, it doesn't matter—all that matters is their perception of what money is and what their parents think (often transferred to others and society at large) about what is success and a life well lived. These forces can be positive or negative, freeing or controlling. The choice is up to you.

Lawler knows what it is like to have your most fundamental passion tested—your passion for life. He knows what it is like to be told you shouldn't do something, you can't do something, or it is impossible to do something. He also knows what it is like to prove everyone wrong. To this knowledge, he responds powerfully that we only get one chance, not the nine given a cat. He knows that we all have a strength deep inside us—what he calls the core—that cannot be destroyed unless we simply choose not to use it. Lawler challenges each of us to connect with that strength deep inside us and make it real.

Next, you get Lawler's toolkit to guide you in putting together a comprehensive plan. The plan helps ensure that passion happens—and *continues* to happen—throughout your life. Lawler also provides an illustrative case study to make it easy for you to work through your own passions, proficiencies, priorities, plan, and its proof (funding)—his Five Ps of this practical workbook.

In today's economy, if you want to find a job, you have to make a job. Whether you decide to go out on your own or work for someone else, you need to be able to say what it is you want to do, why you can do it well, and how it will add value for your employer or clients. As Lawler notes, "You create your destiny." Bring yourself to market. Turn *your* values into market value. After all, if you don't, who will? If you don't, what will separate you from

Passion at Work

others offering their services in the marketplace? After all, what makes you different is *you*. *All* of you.

It's important for all of us today to develop this alternate plan. It's not the plan you learned in school, not the plan of past generations, but a plan based on Lawler's tested Five Ps process—a plan that integrates practicality with passion. In the end, you'll discover that passion is not necessarily about doing great things. As Mother Teresa said, "We do no great things; only small things with great love." Instead, passion is about experiencing great love. It's more about being connected to something bigger than yourself, something that brings a bigger spirit and sense of "aliveness" into your life... and beyond.

It has been said that we are all angels with one wing, able to fly only when we embrace each other. I hope you will embrace Lawler and his work. Let him help you take your passion and put it first, ahead of what seems practical—and then make it real. I know it's not easy to do. Or I should say, *was* not as easy to do as it is now. Thanks to Lawler Kang.

"When you are inspired by some great purpose... you find yourself in a new, great, and wonderful world. Dormant forces, faculties, and talents become alive, and you discover yourself to be a greater person by far than you ever dreamed yourself to be."

—Maharishi Patanjali, founder of yoga

Dr. Mark S. Albion
Dover, Massachusetts
April 2005