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Professional Passion:

Do You Have What It Takes?

by
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Woody Allen once said that relationships are like sharks: if they don't keep moving they die. He was referring to personal relationships, but the same holds true in business. Nothing propels a relationship and a business more successfully than passion. Romantic passion fuels creativity, sees you through tough times and sustains long-term commitment. Professional passion can do the same for your start-up.

What Pushes Your Buttons?

Before you make the move from your vocation (what you are trained to do) to your avocation (what you pursue for sheer enjoyment), first determine what you would most *like* to do. Choose your start-up with the care of selecting a mate. Both endeavors, after all, look for similar qualities: a match that complements your interests, and a relationship that puts a spring in your step and inspires long-term commitment. Resist the seduction of the latest business fads; too often, infatuation with the temporary only leads to disappointment.

Career counselor Barbara Sher defines success as doing what you love. The author of *I Could Do Anything If I Only Knew What It Was*, Sher helps people figure out what they love and how to get it. "Benjamin Disraeli said that most people will go to their graves with their music still in them," says Sher. "That breaks my heart, because it just doesn't have to be that way. Success isn't about you changing, it's about you changing your life by doing what you love." Sher also underscores the parallel between entrepreneurial efforts and romance. "When you're newly in love, you're elated, you're driven. You're happy to overlook the little things that would otherwise annoy you. Passion brings that same essential motivation to your business."

Passion helps Dee Ennen, 40, successfully maintain Ennen's Computer Services. "I was tired of being just someone else's secretary, of practically running an office and getting little or no credit," says Ennen. "Running my own business since 1985 has taught me that success takes everything you have to give. And you need passion to stick with it. If the phone isn't ringing, you need to make it ring. When I started my business I hoped to make as much as I had working for someone else. Now I've tripled that amount and my hourly rate has increased from \$8.50 to \$30 an hour. Because I love what I'm doing, I always go the extra mile for my clients. They keep coming back, and gladly refer others to me as well."

Passion is a prerequisite for personal business success. While insufficient passion can undermine your success, professional devotion alone can't replace business skills and planning. "Entrepreneurs often don't spend the time doing enough research; they simply follow their hearts," says Bette Otte, whose consulting firm, Business by Design, specializes in start-ups and business growth. "But business is a head-heart marriage. To be successful, your bottom-line numbers must live up to your dream. You have to love what you do, but love alone is not enough to sustain you through the long haul. No amount of desire can replace expertise."

When to Quit Your Day Job

Like an ideal long-term relationship, the right start-up is something worth waiting for. Downsizing or unhappiness with your current job can be the motivation you've been waiting for, but don't let it drive you to the wrong start-up. You don't want to rebound from one unsatisfactory relationship (your employer's) to another (your own). You're ready to launch your start-up when you're adequately prepared—when you know what you want, have acquired the right skills, researched the market potential, developed a business plan and secured adequate funding.

Tarran McDaid, 53, and her husband Michael Riordan, 55, gave up successful careers for more satisfying pursuits. "Professionally, we had it all," says Tarran. "I was associate nursing director and Michael was project procurement manager for Bechtel. One day, we realized our financial rewards no longer offset our commute, business travel and long hours apart. It made us reassess what we really wanted from life." Along with their two closest friends, Barbara Farrell, 62, and Frank Watson, 62, the couple left their jobs to start their own country inn, incorporating all the things they love most: casual elegance in a natural setting, exceptional service and top-notch dining.

The result, built in 1985, is their award-winning 80-acre Timberhill Ranch on the spectacular Northern California Sonoma coast. "We did everything ourselves," recalls Tarran. "The market survey, prospectus, everything. When we went for the bank loan, we were four people with no hotel experience asking for a loan to build a hotel. But it was our passion for the land and our vision that got us that loan. Passion is essential. It fires you up physically and mentally keeps your energy and commitment. We make less money now, and we don't have our past job security, but we're doing what we love in a place we love—it's been a total lifestyle change."

Keeping Your Passion Alive

Like an illusive amour, nothing kills business passion faster than stress. Nurture your enthusiasm by being prepared for the unexpected. Set achievable goals and reward yourself appropriately. Strive to continually improve your skills, including those you may need in the future. Diana Ennen suggests, "Start fresh every day. If yesterday was a nightmare, think positively and go forward, full steam ahead." Passion alone won't solve all your business problems or guarantee lifetime profits, but it will set you firmly on the road to success, and keep your start-up moving.

Sidebar: Restructure Your Time to Pursue Your Passion

With a bit of maneuvering, you can accomplish much of your start-up preparations while continuing your day job. Use the time to develop your business plan, research potential markets, acquire special skills, or attend entrepreneurial workshops:

- Change your priorities. Turn off the TV, set aside every other weekend or spend three nights at the library.
- Off-shift your work schedule to provide larger blocks of time during the day to plan your start-up.
- Work part-time, establish job-sharing or take a leave of absence, if financially viable