

The Passion Trap

Module 1: The Truth About Passion

Let's start with module one. The truth about passion.

Ever since I gave my popular TEDx talk in 2015, "Stop Searching for Your Passion," People have been reaching out to me from all corners of the globe. Were they inspired, motivated? Sure. But the predominant emotion? Relief.

We've all been encultured to believe that your life will have meaning when and if you find your singular passion and lock into it for life. As if everyone's passions are just lying out there waiting to be found like so many Easter eggs. But what if you don't know what to do next or at all? Are you one of those people who struggles with this idea that you haven't found your one passion, your one purpose, and you think you're doing it wrong? You're not alone.

There's a reason that Ted talk has millions upon millions of views because in it, I take a counter approach to this theory because I think it's a lot of BS and it causes more consternation and angst than anything else. Let's talk a little about why fixating on your passion actually limits you rather than helps and how to get out of a passionless rut and it starts with understanding what passion is and isn't.

Now you are gonna do a little writing later and I'll explain why, but for now, just keep a pen and notebook handy or you can type if you want. It really doesn't matter. It's whatever your preference is. First step is to reframe the way we think about and talk about passion. And if you ask me, it's not one passion per person that is, there is no limit like that on humans, but since we're young, we're told to pick a thing, right? To make these big sweeping decisions in the moment. Pick a major, pick an industry, pick a job, pick a passion, pick a partner. Fact is <laugh> if you live a long time and you're lucky, you'll get to work in lots of jobs in several different industries and you may even love more than one person.

How else will you know what you want to do with your life and your attention, if you don't try a lot of different things? It's the only way to discover what you like and what you loathe. You're not supposed to guess it right the first time. But this idea that we have to pick one thing and do it forever is fiction. You know how I know? Look around! Ask anyone you know, what they do and why they do it. And I'm telling you, it's not usually or even typically a linear path. It is circuitous, it goes off in a million tangents, it's part luck and happenstance, part interest, part curiosity, part accident. What I mean is, you can't predict, necessarily, what you'll do, or even what you'll like. How could you know? Imagine if you didn't have to choose just one thing, and then lock in like this.

What if you know, creating it, discovering it was the process. What if your happiness wasn't depending on getting it right, but on allowing yourself to be open to explore lots of things and also to create that life as you go. Not try to take perfect aim and then shoot.

Now I asked you to grab some paper in a pen or to open a blank page on your computer. Writing is part of how we discover what we really think and come up with new ideas, but also learn our own minds. I can't say it enough and I say it quite a bit. Writing is not for writers. Writing is a tool. Can you read? If you can read, you can write.

I'm not trying to make you like writing or turn you into a writer. That is not at all the point. Not everyone is supposed to be a writer, meaning they make their living from writing. That's not even, that's not the point. But I'm going to invite you to do a little writing because it's the only way that I know of the best way to metabolize what we're talking about until you apply it, like really apply it.

It's hard to see any change from it, and I'm pretty sure that the reason you went through the hoops of accessing this mini course and downloading it is because you are tired of feeling confused, stuck in a passionless rut. And the only way I know how to get outta that is for you to take this and put it to work and put it through the filter of your own mind. And I don't just mean kind of thinking about it for a second, I mean really committing it to paper. So for our time together, I don't want you to think about this as writing as homework or writing a paper or an essay or writing some kind of asset that you'll be judged on because actually that isn't the point at all.

The point is actually to do the writing. And I'm sorry for you and me that we weren't taught that in school because we're not. We're taught to write and then we get judged on what we write, but that's not it and this is not school.

What I want is for you to have access to this amazing tool so that you can access what's in your mind and start to see what thoughts, what ideas are blocking your way. Because when we talk about feeling stuck, what do you think you're stuck about? You think it's money and time and all these things? No, it's our own minds. What I want you to do is think of these writing exercises as simply a tool for gaining new insight because I can't, from here, tell you about you, only you know. So I'm gonna give you a suggestion of a time prompt wherein you hit pause and then go do the exercise for that amount of time.

If you wanna go longer, you can, but try not to go shorter. You're cutting yourself off. If you just write two sentences and be like, okay, I'm done with that. Next, what's next? You're not actually giving yourself the chance to really explore. That's why we have these time limits.

So I want you to think for a sec about your own relationship to passion, to even the idea of passion. Have you felt pressured in your life recently or in the past to find, articulate, or commit to one? Or did you think you were passionate about one thing and then it changed?

There's no right or wrong answer here, but I want you to write out what has that been like? Just talk a little as if you're unpacking your brain. You're downloading what's in your brain onto the page in no particular order. Your brain has its own storytelling function and it will give you information as you need it to write down. So don't try too hard to structure it perfectly. Just write down what comes up.

When I say passion, what comes to mind? What has your relationship to passion been and as it served you well or has it not? I want you to set a timer for 10 minutes and just keep going. And if you think you're done well, I think I said everything. No, you haven't said everything. Keep going and writing through it and see what comes up. You will be surprised if you allow yourself to kind of run free on the page.

So you can hit pause here and do the exercise and I'll be right here when you get back.

<Pause for writing break>

<Resume after writing break>

You've heard about the difference between a growth mindset and a fixed mindset, right? If you haven't, I'm gonna tell you.

Carol Dweck is the psychologist who's most known for her work around fixed mindset and growth mindset. And you can have these different mindsets about lots of things. We're gonna talk about it specifically as it relates to passion, but the belief in a fixed mindset is, I'm born set a certain way with certain limitations, certain abilities, and that's it. That you're limited, you're fixed, and there's nothing you can do to change it.

The growth mindset is one in which you see your life as a series of opportunities, evolutions, discoveries, and the belief that you can continue to add skills and discover new things and change as you go, right? You're not fixed or limited in any way. In her book "Mindset: Changing the Way You Think to Fulfill Your True Potential"

She writes, your basic qualities are things you cultivate through your efforts, your strategies, and help from others. When we apply this to the passion hypothesis, what this means is that having tunnel vision around the one thing you're supposed to do is going to be incredibly limiting and it can work against you because your mindset affects

how you think about and pursue things that you might wanna do or try. And it also may determine when you give up.

In a 2018 paper published in *Psychological Science*, Paul O'Keefe, along with Dweck and Gregory Walton wanted to explore the role these two mindsets have in terms of exploring and developing interests. What they found is this, and I'll read it directly, "people are often told to find their passion as though passions and interests are preformed and must simply be discovered.

This idea, however, has hidden motivational implications." The researchers conducted five different studies of college students to examine how a fixed or growth mindset affected their willingness to explore and develop their interests. Researchers found, are you ready for this? That if someone considered themselves, say only a science and techie person, they would be less likely to explore anything and the opportunity to learn about literature and the arts.

They found in this study that the reverse was also true, that you would also as a literary person be less likely to look into science. In other words, their fixed mindset would lead them to literally narrow their options. How? By limiting their exposure to other things that they actually might be interested in. Cuz they were so sure that this is the thing they do and this is the thing they're into in college.

Did you know anything in college? I didn't. Also, if you believe that you're meant to do this or that, this fixed mindset about what you should be doing could actually undermine your efforts to grow, evolve and discover who you are.

This is ironic, isn't it? But here's something that kind of blew my mind. The research also suggests that those who believe they're meant to have one passion are more likely to give up when things got tough. Isn't that ironic? Because we think of someone who's super passionate, they're just so persistent, they never give up, not when they think it's a fixed passion.

People with a fixed mindset were more likely to give up. Why? Because things would get difficult and they'd say, oh, this is too hard. I must have the wrong passion. And they would, oh, that's not for me. And go on to something else. Talk about setting yourself up for a failure. You would think you keep getting it wrong when really what you keep doing is quitting. According to this study, people who believe in a fixed mindset around passion, were not only more likely to give up.

They expected that when they found their one true passion, they would have boundless motivation. Does anyone ever have boundless motivation? No. That's not a thing. What about you? You might have a fixed mindset about food and a growth mindset about

reading. You might have a fixed mindset about relationships, but a growth mindset about exercise.

The point here is not to judge whether your fixed mindset or growth mindset, that's actually a fixed mindset approach right there. What I want you to do now is mine your own life for evidence of a growth mindset, because I'm sure you have it in some areas of your life. So jot down a list of things right now that you've gotten really good at that come easily to you. Maybe even things that were not originally easy for you. If something has always been easy, then you might just think, well, it's just easy for me.

Think about the things that were hard at first or challenging at first that then became easier. Maybe you even became great at it. Maybe you excelled at it and people came to you to ask you to do those things. It could be work stuff, it could be hobbies, it could be stuff you're good at around the house. Literally the field is wide open here. I'm not talking about just resume and jobs, which of those things, okay, so think of that.

You're gonna write down that list, but then I want you to go back to it. Which of the things did you know how to do a year ago? What about 10 years ago? If you went back in time and told yourself that one day you'd be great at X, what would you be most surprised about? Which of the things did you think you'd never be able to do or simply couldn't have imagined doing that you do now?

Okay, set the timer for 10 minutes. You can go longer if you like on this, but not shorter. You can hit pause here and I'll be here when you get back.

<Pause for writing break>

<Resume after writing break>

When you were a kid, did you think you knew what you wanted to be when you grew up? Probably people asked you a lot and you probably had a stock answer. Maybe it was teacher, mother, astronaut, rockstar, doctor. I understand the desire or the need to look back at what we thought we would be when we grew up and somehow reconcile that with where we are now. Like, oh, I thought I was gonna be a concert pianist and look at me now I'm the head of HR and think of that as a failure. It's not a failure, but sometimes I think we put a little bit too much attention and attachment to what we thought as kids.

But why? Do we all do what we thought we would do as kids? No. I got to do an interview with Chris Kresser, who is a real functional medicine superstar. His podcast is called Revolution Health Radio, and he told me about a kid he knew in like the fifth

grade who used to read the Wall Street Journal at lunch, read the finance section. And he remembers that. Obviously that's a pretty clear memory.

He said that's the one person Chris could think of when he thought about who knew what they wanted to be when they were a kid. Chris himself said he had no idea what he wanted to be well into high school. If you'd asked Chris Kresser as a senior in high school what he wanted to be when he grew up, he would've been like, I don't know, pro surfer, like who knows.

He definitely wouldn't have said, I'll probably be a functional medicine practitioner and have my own podcast and my own line of supplements. No, he, we definitely wouldn't have said that, but that is exactly what he does. Now let's stop looking back and assuming we were supposed to do a thing we thought when we were seven and have failed that. Can we just stop doing that now? It was cute that you wanted to be an astronaut, but it doesn't mean you're a failure that you're not like 10 people are astronauts.

Obviously the need to connect the dots in childhood is an attempt to understand our lives, right? And to find meaning, find some thread or shred of purpose in who we were and who we are. We look for clues there and that's natural to do, but I really think we need to not be hung up on that.

Could anyone have predicted there was no internet when I was a kid? How could I have possibly known that what I'm doing now, right now literally would be even a possibility? I mean when I had graduated college, I would've loved to be a content producer. That job didn't exist. That wasn't even a thing. Kids don't have the market cornered on career coaching. You know? I know because I don't see too many eight year old career coaches.

Okay, lemme go back to Chris Kresser. It wasn't until he was on a surfing trip. Well, he loved to surf. He still loves to surf. He was on the surfing trip when he was a young adult and encountered some really horrible toxic waste that was in that water. And he got really, really sick. Not just for a few days or weeks, but like years. It turned into this kind of long struggle with acute and chronic conditions that changed his life and that ultimately led him into a career in functional medicine, which he didn't even know existed before.

But he was frustrated with all that he went through and trying to heal himself of this illness. Now Chris had a particularly, he has a great story there, right? It's like here's what happened, here's what inspired this change. Not everyone has a death door moment. I know I didn't. I mean, yeah, I got laid off when I was a magazine editor and that did start me on the path to entrepreneurship, business ownership. Yeah, sure. But it wasn't like, and I will say this honestly, because for a lot of people losing their job is

traumatic and tragic. For me it was a shifting of gears. I will say that it was shocking, but it wasn't like a devastating huge moment. Like it was just the next step. And I'm lucky that it was able to not be traumatic. But my point is, you don't also have to have a singular life defining moment.

There are plenty of people who climb Mount Everest and lose a limb and climb back down and don't actually maybe have a lot to say about it. So this idea that something big has to happen is also not requisite. You will have many moments in your life, some will have a bigger impression than others and every one of those moments will shape your life like a river shapes land doesn't happen right away, but it happens over time.

Okay, you ready for your next prompt? What's one thing you do now or want to do that you could never have predicted? Literally whether you like it or not, you don't have to be at the best of it, the best at it, but I mean anything. Maybe you're living at the beach when you never thought you wanted to be at the beach. Maybe you shaved your head when you thought you'd never do that. I don't know what, maybe you run an ultramarathon runner when you never even liked gym class. Let's look at some of the things that you, you had no idea would happen.

What experiences or people, relationships, had a profound or significant effect on that one thing? Just pick one of them. I'm sure there's many, but just pick the one and yes, you got it. Hit pause and we'll see you in a few.

<Pause for writing break>

<Resume after writing break>

The last thing I wanna say about passion today is this. We give it way, way too much credit and responsibility. We assume that passion alone will do the work, that it will make life easy and boundlessly motivating. We think it'll just make things frictionless and all doors will open. But that's not really fair to think that or to assume it. It's not fair to you.

You know why we do this though? Why do we, why do you hear so often that it's passion, passion, passion. That's the answer. Why do we think that's the answer? I don't even know that any one person has said it, but a lot of people say it. I'm telling you, watch any interview with a rich, famous, privileged, entrepreneur or rockstar, founder or CEO or artist, how they got to where they are and nine times outta 10 they will say it was passion.

And it's not that they didn't have passion, but they had a lot of other things too. It's not that any one of those things does it, but what we don't say when you don't hear people

saying is, oh, how did I get to do what I do and have this great album or this great show on Broadway or this amazing unicorn startup? They don't usually say, oh, I knew someone. They don't. They'll say it was passion.

Passion has become this sort of easy trigger free un-cancellable democratic response, which denies or at least clouds the role that everything else plays. You can't copy paste someone's exact career so that you have the same result. It just doesn't work that way. But passion and accrediting passion for all of this is kind of an easy out, it's a great way to answer a question, but that doesn't mean that that's the truth.

I'm not saying passion doesn't play a role because it does, but so does discipline, focus, work ethic, resources, connections, education and luck. In his book, "How to Fail At Almost Everything and Still Win Big" it's a great book. Dilbert creator Scott Adams says that when he worked as a commercial loan officer for a bank, his boss said, never make a loan to someone who is following his passion.

<Laugh>. If some sports enthusiast wants to open a sporting goods store, that's not a great plan cuz he's just because he's passionate about sports, that is not what makes for a great business plan. <Laugh>, he said, you're far better off loaning money to someone who wants to start a dry cleaning business. Know what you're getting into is what I always say. A business has a very specific demand, you know, creating a business and it requires more than just liking the idea.

Adams is right. It's easy to be passionate about things that are working out and that distorts our impression, the importance of passion. Now, Adams became hugely famous for his cartoon Dilbert, but it's not like that was the only thing he ever cared about and did nothing else and it wasn't gonna stop till he was successful. That is not his story. And you can read his book and see he tried lots of get rich quick things. He tried tons of things that were, he says, bad ideas. It didn't work out. But when cartooning started to get traction for him, when it started to like work, he got more excited about cartooning. In his words, "success fueled passion more than passion fueled success."

Passion is an emotion just like ecstasy or anxiety or boredom. It's also a fickle bitch. You can channel passion. It's like a form of electricity and we all wanna feel it. There's not one person who doesn't wanna experience it. We can all channel it, but we don't need only one way to channel it. It's not like a lamp only works in one outlet. It can work in a lot of outlets, any outlet, as long as you plug it in. We are like that. We're not so precious and limited that we can only be passionate about certain things.

And if you think that you might wanna check that fixed mindset, passion will wax and wane over time. It'll show up and it will leave you. You'll feel it like riding high. You'll feel like you're flying on wings sometimes, and sometimes you feel like you're trudging uphill. That doesn't mean you're doing the wrong thing, always, and it doesn't mean that

passion is that you don't have enough or that this thing isn't the magic connection. We can't base every decision on that one emotion.

Start doing the work. Whatever the work is, whatever is interesting to you or curious or something you wanna learn more about, somewhere that you feel you can contribute when you do that, passion has a way of showing up. She's like a great party guest, but don't expect her to be the first one there.

Here's your last prompt for this module. Think of a time when you got lost in an activity, even if it wasn't something you were, you know, technically passionate about. What was it like to be in flow? How did you get into it? What led you there? What about that work or activity made you want to keep doing it? Take 10 minutes now and I will see you in module two.

<End of Module 1>