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Finding your passion

Once you have a vision for your life, it will help you to make some difficult choices about the way YOU spend your time and money. This will be especially true in the early days of your saving and investing career, when you need to make sacrifices because your financial resources are likely to be very limited. How you save and invest is only half of the story; the other half is what you do to earn an income.

There are many people who work in careers they hate, for bosses they despise or for companies they don't respect. It probably goes without saying that it is very difficult to be good at a career when you hate it.

Ideally, you should try to earn your income doing something that you are passionate about. It follows that if you are passionate about your work, you will probably be happy to work hard, and this is the secret to being good at what you do. If you are good at what you do, you are more likely to increase your income more rapidly, and this will enable you to build up your savings as fast as possible.

It is surprising how few people manage to get this right, and I believe it is partly because they don't find work that they are passionate about. It doesn't matter if you own your business, work for a corporate or work on contract – you need to enjoy your work. Most

of us spend more time working than we do with our families and friends. If you don't enjoy your work, it is very likely that you will

be unhappy, and this will affect other parts of your life.

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By definition, work isn't meant to be 100% fun. If it was fun all the time, it wouldn't be called work. It's not realistic to think you can have a career where you only do what you love – no matter how much the self-help gurus

might tell you otherwise. You should be working in a field that interests you and, if possible, DOING something you're passionate about. While you don't have to love your work 100% of the time to be successful, passion and enjoyment will help a lot.

HOW TO FIND YOUR PASSION

I have been to a few Berkshire Hathaway annual general meetings where Warren Buffett and his partner, Charlie Munger, talk about the company, the underlying businesses and how they have fared during the year. Once they have finished talking about their business, they answer questions posed by analysts, journalists and members of the audience.

The questions are very wide ranging, from detailed questions about their accounting policies right through to broader issues like finding your passion in life. You see, Buffett and Munger invest in companies that are managed by people who are absolutely passionate about their businesses.

I remember one young man who asked them how he could find his passion for his career, as he was a bit lost. The question stumped Buffett, who said that he had always been passionate about investing. Fortunately Munger was on hand to provide some sage advice. He said that you should start by excluding jobs for which you have no talent or natural ability. For example, if you are hoping to be a professional basketball player but you are only 1.5 metres tall, then it

probably makes sense to look for a different career. Similarly, if you would like to work at NASA as an aeronautics engineer but you are poor at mathematics, then you should consider a different path for yourself. By a process of elimination, you can narrow down your range of career options until you have a more limited, realistic pool of careers that will suit you. From there, you can select the career that interests you the most and also provides you with a chance to play to your strengths. This is important, because you will never enjoy something and be properly financially rewarded if you are not good at it.

Even if your ultimate aim is to stop working for money and to do something in the field of philanthropy, it is still worth focusing on your career to ensure that you spend your time as wisely as possible so that you can build up your savings as quickly as possible.

In no particular order, here are some 'ingredients' of successful careers. One or two may not suit you, but they are worth bearing in mind as you embark on your career path.

Specialisation

A notable characteristic of successful people is their ability to develop a craft of their own. Most people who have had a long and successful career have developed a certain set of skills and expertise that they have honed over a lifetime.

When you are starting out in your chosen career, don't be afraid to spend the first few years finding what suits you best and then working as hard as possible on building your experience and skills in your chosen field. In other words, the first few years are not necessarily about chasing the maximum income if it means that you are sacrificing the possibility of honing your skills and experience.

Starting in your twenties and early thirties, you should try to get to a position where you are working consistently in one area, so that you can spend the time becoming proficient in your chosen field. Malcolm

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Gladwell's brilliant book *Outliers* relates many examples of how top musicians, businessmen and tech superstars spent approximately 10000 hours becoming experts before they became globally successful.

While you are building up your skills and expertise, it is vital that you do your current job brilliantly. It is the only way for others to judge your abilities and hopefully see your potential. Too many people enter the workplace and are so focused on their own potential and ambitions that they find their first jobs demeaning and beneath their abilities. As a result, they do poorly in their 'menial' job, which limits their careers, because their colleagues and managers can only judge them on how they are currently performing. So work hard and take every task seriously. You never know who is watching and judging you.

Very few generalists are able to retire successfully. A good example is a middle manager in a large corporation – what is the manager's craft? What skill set does this manager have that makes him or her valuable and unique? People working in large corporations often strive to move into management positions, but is this necessarily a wise ambition? While the fancy titles and potentially higher salaries may seem attractive, you need to realise that a manager holds an essentially generalist position. And it's very difficult to specialise in something non-specific. How do you hone your craft when you don't have one?

My impression of people who have worked as high-level managers in corporates and then retired is that they seem dissatisfied with their careers and relieved that they are no longer in the rat race. Many of them struggle to quantify what they have actually accomplished after all those years of work.

A better alternative might be to develop the necessary skills and experience in an area of specialisation that will make you valuable to employers or clients. For example, an experienced engineer is generally more marketable than the general manager who manages the engineering company. And remember, during times of company turmoil like mergers or financial difficulties, it is often the managers who are fired first.

But aim to keep a balance – there is as much danger in becoming too super-specialised, because you can specialise yourself out of a career. This is particularly true in the tech industry. If you are going to specialise, be sure that your skills and experience can be adapted to a changing world.

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Be a revenue generator

As mentioned earlier, in bad times, companies very rarely get rid of the people who actually bring in the money. As a revenue generator, you have a high degree of control over your own destiny, and to a large extent your income will be determined by what you can produce for your employer.

Revenue generators are usually in sales – not the career that most parents would wish for their children, as professions such as law and medicine are perceived to be more prestigious. Ironically, it is often the salespeople who have the better lifestyle, because sales cannot be done 18 hours a day, and good salespeople earn great incomes.

Leverage yourself – don't sell your time

There are many wealthy people who have made fortunes by selling their time. The most obvious examples are lawyers, advocates and accountants, but these careers all share one drawback – in order to be successful, those lawyers, advocates and accountants had to sell many, many hours.

The extra hours they sold came at a high cost, because it meant that other parts of their lives suffered. They sacrificed family time, exercise, social activities and outside interests. Often, by the time these people retire, they are socially isolated (often divorced) and suffering from poor health – this can't be the kind of success anyone in their right mind would aim for!

If you can leverage your time successfully, you have the ability to earn an income even when you are not working, which means

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you can achieve balance between work and the other important aspects of life.

Writers, musicians, actors, asset managers, software developers, financial planners and academics are examples of vocations that are not solely driven by selling time. As an example, a lawyer who charges an hourly rate for his work is limited in how much he can earn from clients. By definition, there are only a fixed number of hours that you can work in a day. This means that you can increase your rate per hour, but you will not earn money if you are not billing someone.

In contrast, an asset manager who manages money for people will earn an income irrespective of whether she is working on a particular day or not. As long as she is managing money for people and they remain clients, she will earn an income.

Similarly, a writer of books or software only needs to write the items once. Thereafter the items will be sold and the writer will earn an income repeatedly from the same piece of writing.

VISION AND PASSION ARE A POWERFUL COMBINATION

I cannot think of a better way to live than doing something I mostly enjoy every day, knowing that I am steadily realising my dreams at

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the same time. It is amazing how your overall happiness and motivation can improve your ability to handle setbacks more easily. Without a clear road map provided by your vision, and the fuel provided by your passion, you are more likely to drift around letting life and

everything around you determine your future.