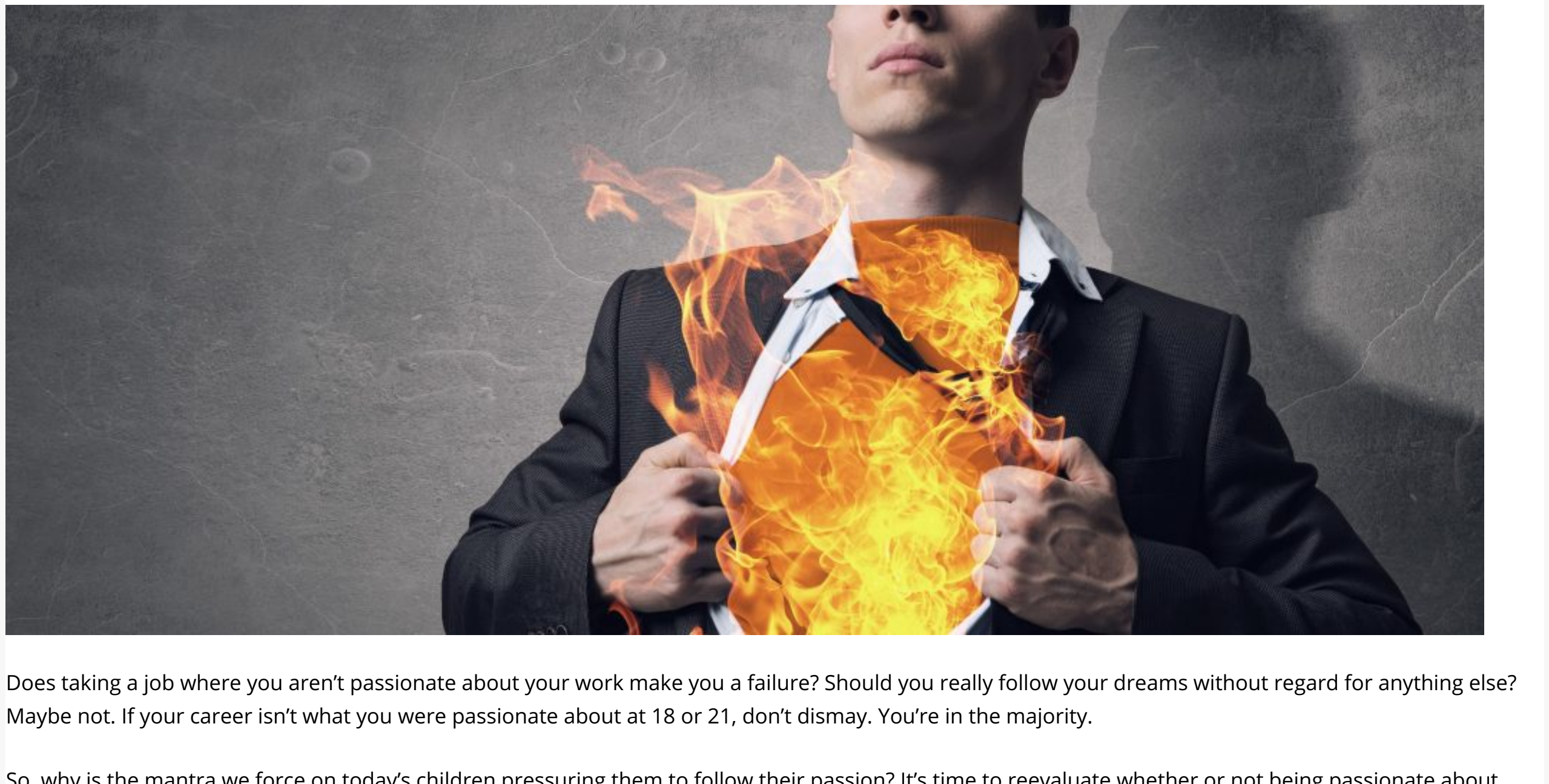


# Why Being Passionate About Your Job Isn't Everything



Does taking a job where you aren't passionate about your work make you a failure? Should you really follow your dreams without regard for anything else? Maybe not. If your career isn't what you were passionate about at 18 or 21, don't dismay. You're in the majority.

So, why is the mantra we force on today's children pressuring them to follow their passion? It's time to reevaluate whether or not being passionate about your job is really the be-all end-all. Check out these 11 reasons why being all about your work isn't everything:

## 1. If At Odds, Purpose Supersedes Passion

Passion and purpose sound interchangeable. However, understanding the difference between them could have a major impact between a fulfilling career and one that doesn't meet your expectations.

We grow up being told to follow our dreams, but when responsibility strikes and bills come due, work is typically how we pay them. Whether that work is something we are passionate about is another story. A recent [Deloitte survey](#) found only 20% of U.S. workers are truly passionate about their work. So is it still possible to have a fulfilling career if you aren't passionate about your work? It is! In fact, although a combination of purpose and passion is ideal in a career choice, purpose is a better predictor of a meaningful career than passion.

Research supports that focusing on a combination of passion and purpose when choosing work, while also stressing the stronger power of purpose over passion. Still, purpose on its own is more powerful than passion. Purpose holds up to the test of time and focuses on others. It's our reason for actions and choices, always asking "what can I contribute?" In a TED Talks symposium, [writer Leah Weiss](#) discussed the ability of purpose to boost our capacity to make an impact. It's a steady goal that transcends self and provides meaning.

So if "do what you love, and the money will follow" proves to be false in your case, don't fret. Instead, find purpose.

### Real-Life Examples to Relate to

A school custodian, for example, is likely not very passionate about cleaning. However, they may view their purpose as keeping children and teachers safe from easily-spread germs and sickness. They may not enjoy their actual work, but they see a need for it and therefore feel valuable.

An engineer may have gone into her work with dreams of developing prosthetics. While she may currently be a public health engineer, responsible for water and sewage pipes, she continues to do her best because her purpose is to provide clean and safe water to her city.

For others, their primary purpose comes in the form of why they're working at all and is more financially focused, such as providing for a family or supporting a spouse in the military. A man who is passionate about coaching high school football may continue his career in sales instead in order to ensure a nest egg for his family. While he may be interested in trying his hand as an assistant coach a couple evenings a week, he stays in a career where he does not prefer the work and works hard because his purpose is to ensure his family's well-being.

## 2. Career Passion Is A Cultural Concept

*"Work has become a status symbol." – Harvard Business School Assistant Professor Jon Jachimowicz*

Perhaps that's why in a 2019 Pew Research Center [survey](#), more than 60% of U.S. teens ranked having a career they are passionate about as their top priority, even higher than income and marriage. Strangely, this is uncommon in other parts of the world. Some blame the fact that people are starting families later and the decline of religious affiliations. What most experts agree on is that as the outlook on the value of one's work has increased, American involvement in hobbies and any other personal activities outside the office has dropped dramatically.

## 3. Passion is Not Fixed

As Americans, we often encourage our children and each other to "find your passion" or "follow your dreams." Unfortunately, these well-wishing phrases are based on a false assumption our passions are inherent from youth. However, [recent research](#) by Stanford University now suggests that people develop their passions rather than find them.

In a university news release, Gregory Walton, one of the researchers on the Stanford study, explained that a fixed view on passions could become problematic. The study sought to evaluate whether interests, often known as passions, are fixed, inherent qualities, or if they take time and effort to develop.

From the study, researchers learned that individuals who believe passions are fixed are less willing to explore new endeavors. Thus, they're less likely to grow in any other area of their life.

## 4. Working Outside Your Passion Protects It

Every job has drawbacks. That's part of why we get paid to do it. Work is work. However, by choosing to work in an industry we feel passionate about, we risk our relationship with that activity becoming more of a chore than a love.

Being passionate about your job if you're an artist may lead you to art school and a career. Intent on working in your industry, you land a job. The city is doing an outdoor redesign and has commissioned you as a street mural artist. It's exciting, and you're pumped to gain exposure and have the public view your work. Of course, due to traffic and other obstacles, you can only paint during the mid-to-late afternoon in the intense summer heat. You've had some compliments, which is encouraging. Then the city changes its mind on the theme of the design, and you have to start over. As the harsh winter afternoons arrive, each day feels more like a burden. Then one day, you go to paint for enjoyment, and you realize you don't love painting anymore. [You need change.](#)

Situations like the one above occur far too often. Even the most enjoyable jobs will have difficult seasons and negative aspects that are all part of the role. Keeping your passion as a hobby protects it from becoming something you no longer enjoy.

## 5. Passion Does Not Equate Talent

Whether you're sitting in your sophomore nursing class and realizing you don't understand a word, being let go from your accounting position for sloppy bookkeeping, or one of the unfortunate American Idol auditionees, the fact is simple: You may pursue something because of passion. However, that doesn't make you talented in it. If you aren't skilled in your passion, this isn't saying don't persevere and do your best to succeed. Still, your profession needs to pay your bills. If you cannot improve enough in your desired area of expertise to hold down a job, you should probably start considering other possible careers.

## 6. We Live in an Era of Mismatched Job Markets and Passions

Every year, thousands of teenage boys make plans for a career in the NFL or the NBA. Many are top-notch, highly skilled athletes that would be passionate about their jobs. However, the limited amount of roster spots force these young men to eventually pursue other directions.

As unfortunate as this seems, teen career goals do not match the current or projected job markets. [A recent study](#) by the Office of National Statistics Education and Employers Taskforce demonstrates just how large the gap between aspirations and reality is.

Among the top career aspirations for 16-to-21-year-olds was "Artistic, Literary, and Media (e.g. writer, actor, producer)." However, it noted only 1-2% of 22-to-29-year-olds actually work in those professions.

While this research focused on teens, it's likely somewhat representative of the adult population as well. Naturally, adults have to adapt and account for realities. However, adult dream jobs or passions may very well look similar to teens. Adults have just realized that survival matters more. If the job market isn't offering spots in coveted roles, they must adapt or fail.

## 7. Toxic Environments Are Not Worth The Trade-Off

If you've ever endured a bad boss, had co-workers that made you feel disrespected or uncomfortable, or repeatedly witnessed unethical behavior or terrible attitudes in the workplace, you know passion isn't worth a hostile, negative, or morally questionable office environment. Preference for a type of work is important. But many people who have tolerated unhealthy working environments would gladly forego a job they are passionate about for an environment characterized by positivity, safety, and respect.

## 8. Relationships and Culture Matter

### Trust and Relationships Create Meaning

Sometimes, relationships with those around us can create greater meaning in the workplace than doing work we feel passionate about. The University of California at Berkeley published a [neuroscience article](#) in its science-based online publication "Greater Good Magazine" explaining how oxytocin, the social bonding hormone, can make a job more meaningful. Researcher Paul Zak and his team found that the more trust people are shown, the more oxytocin is released in the brain. When high levels of oxytocin are present, people work better together.

"These laboratory studies showed that when trust between team members is high, oxytocin flows and work feels less like, well, work, and more like doing interesting things with friends." Paul Zak, director of the Center for Neuroeconomics Studies at Claremont Graduate University (as published "Greater Good Magazine").

Zak is also an ardent proponent for finding purpose at work—an opinion he developed from his research.

### Positive and Innovative Company Practices

Employee satisfaction and productivity are direct results of company culture. Even if it's for a job that they are less passionate about, innovative practices and perks can draw people in. The chance to join businesses with novel ideas is enough for some. Here are a few examples:

- No job titles (value commitment only)
- Four-day workweeks
- Parental leave
- Pet leave and pet-friendly workplaces
- Breast milk shipping
- Paid outdoor experience days
- Onsite fitness
- Tuition reimbursement
- Midday surf breaks
- Paid time off to volunteer
- Green spaces
- Non-traditional management structures

Through these company culture initiatives, you can foster a positive career choice that may not involve passion. However, this culture can create an enthralling atmosphere for professional and fiscal growth.

## 9. Work to Support Your Passion

In other regions of the world, working to support one's passion outside of their work is very common. [Recent data](#) suggests having a hobby you're passionate about outside of work makes you happier and healthier. It can even make you a more productive worker. Multiple hobbies and passions had even more positive effects, according to researchers.

## 10. It's Dangerous To Put All Your Eggs in One Emotion-Fueled Basket

Since passion is often the product of emotions rather than logic, it can't always be trusted as the primary indicator of whether you will find "happiness in a job." Individuals who are passionate about their work must be careful to avoid the emotions of passion pushing them too hard for too long, ultimately leading to burnout.

Research also confirms our inability to make accurate predictions about certain types of areas, including careers, based on our "gut feelings." When we focus all of our energy and identity and marketability in one area of our lives, we chance not being able to find another job if the market needs change. We might also feel like a failure for failing in the only area we believe we're "meant to do."

## 11. Flexibility is Valuable

Being passionate about your job also has many caveats that could make an opportunity you're less passionate about seem lucrative. For example, one in three workers say they would switch jobs to work remotely, according to a Gallup poll. An additional [99 percent](#) of workers said they would like to work from home at least some of the time. It's no surprise given that remote workers are more productive, happier, and save up to \$7,000 a year as a result of no commute, eating at home, and less of a need for professional clothing.

Being able to stay home with or help with the care of children is also a common motivator for those choosing a [remote work lifestyle](#) over a job they're more passionate about from the get-go.

## Bottom Line

Does passion matter in career development? Of course! But is it the most important factor in choosing a career? It depends on how you view passion, but there are lots of other considerations to think about when pursuing a meaningful career, and purpose might actually be more important in the long run.

*Are you a remote worker who keeps their passions separate from the office? Connect with Virtual Vocations on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [LinkedIn](#) to tell us what your thoughts. We'd love to hear from you!*

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