

*Look. You can't plan out your life. What you have to do is first discover your passion — what you really care about.*

Barack Obama

If, like many, you are searching for your calling in life — perhaps you are still unsure which profession aligns with what you most care about — here are five recent research findings worth taking into consideration.

First, there's a difference between having a harmonious passion and an obsessive passion. If you can find a career path or occupational goal that fires you up, you are more likely to succeed and find happiness through your work — that much we know from the deep research literature. But beware — since a seminal [paper](#) published in 2003 by the Canadian psychologist Robert Vallerand and colleagues, researchers have made an important distinction between having a harmonious passion and an obsessive one. If you feel that your passion or calling is out of control, and that your mood and self-esteem depend on it, then this is the obsessive variety, and such passions, while they are energizing, are also [associated](#) with negative outcomes such as burnout and anxiety. In contrast, if your passion feels in control, reflects qualities that you like about yourself, and complements other important activities in your life, then this is the harmonious version, which is associated with positive outcomes, such as vitality, better work performance, experiencing flow, and positive mood.

Secondly, having an unanswered calling in life is worse than having no calling at all. If you already have a burning ambition or purpose, do not leave it to languish. A few years ago, researchers at the University of South Florida [surveyed](#) hundreds of people and grouped them according to whether they felt like they had no calling in life, that they had a calling they'd answered, or they had a calling but had never done anything about it. In terms of their work engagement, career commitment, life satisfaction, health and stress, the stand-out finding was that the participants who had a calling they hadn't answered scored the worst across all these measures. The researchers said that this puts a different spin on the presumed benefits of having a calling in life. They concluded: having a calling is only a benefit if it is met, but can be a detriment when it is not as compared to having no calling at all.

The third finding to bear in mind is that, without passion, grit is merely a grind. The idea that grit is vital for career success was advanced by the psychologist Angela Duckworth of the University of Pennsylvania, who argued that highly successful, gritty people have impressive persistence. To be gritty, Duckworth writes in her 2016 book on the subject, is

to fall down seven times, and rise eight. Many studies certainly show that being more conscientious more self-disciplined and industrious is associated with more career

passion comes from doing what you enjoy (which they say is encapsulated by Oprah Winfrey's commencement address in 2008 in which she said passions bloom when we're doing what we love), and those who see it as arising from doing what you believe in or value in life (as reflected in the words of former Mexican president Felipe Calderón who in his own commencement address in 2011 said you have to embrace with passion the things that you believe in, and that you are fighting for).

The researchers found that people who believe that passion comes from pleasurable work were less likely to feel that they had found their passion (and were more likely to want to leave their job) as compared with people who believe that passion comes from doing what you feel matters. Perhaps this is because there is a superficiality and ephemerality to working for sheer pleasure – what fits the bill one month or year might not do so for long whereas working towards what you care about is a timeless endeavour that is likely to stretch and sustain you indefinitely. The researchers conclude that their results show the extent to which individuals attain their desired level of work passion may have less to do with their actual jobs and more to do with their beliefs about how work passion is pursued.

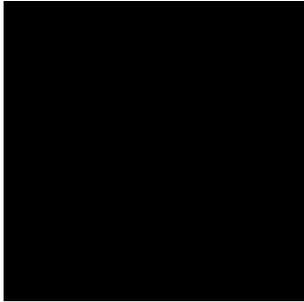
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