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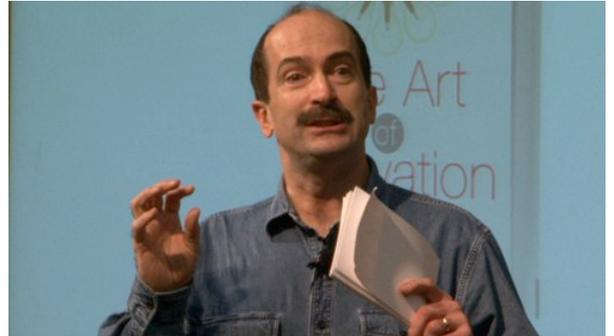
Do What You Love

Tom Kelley, *IDEO*

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/2105/Do-What-You-Love>

You won't just be happier when you follow your passionate career path; you'll be better at it. IDEO's General Manager Tom Kelley quotes author Jim Collins who identifies a Venn diagram in every career path - the overlapping intersection of what you're good at, what you're born to do, what people will pay you to do, and finding a happy group of co-workers with whom to work. In the pursuit of self-discovery, Kelley suggests keeping a laboratory notebook tracking the happiest moments in life to discover our own true passions.



Transcript

I met Francis Ford Coppola last year; we were both in the same speaking calendar in Buenos Aires, Argentina. And Coppola said this thing, it's kind of obvious but he said, "Look, this is really simple. Do what you love not because you just want to be self interested." He says, "Do it because you'll be better at it." He says, "I love wine and so I have a winery and I think it's pretty good. I love food and so I have a restaurant business and I have a pasta business." He's starting a resort apparently in South America and he says he uses all of those just to generate cash so he can finance his own movies. And so, pretty obvious but I hadn't thought of it in those terms. Do what you love because you'll be better. You'll be willing to put in the extra time, the extra mental energy because you love it. It's been several years ago I saw Jim Collins speak. Everybody read any of his books? He wrote two great books. Oh, a lot of people.

So "Built to Last" and then "Good to Great". And it's several years ago and he used no slides of any kind. He was drawing circles in the air like this but there was something he said that has stuck with me, I remember it was like it was yesterday. And at first it seemed he was talking about companies. But as he got into it, it really seemed like he was talking to us each as individuals. And he said, "Try to think of what you should do next." He says, "Think about these three circles. The first circle is what are you good at?" He says by the time you reach a certain age most people have a sense of what they're good at. He says, "But watch out for this circle because in this circle lives the curse of competence." Just because you're good at something doesn't mean you should do it. He says, "If you look around your school or your office, you might discover you're the fastest person you ever met on the keyboard." He says, "Does that mean you should be a data entry operator? Probably not." He said he was really good at math and everybody said to him, "Jim, you should be a math major." And so he listened to that advice and he got to school and he continued to be good at math but he ran into people living in the second circle. And the second circle is "What are you born to do?" When are you the happiest? When are you in a state of flow and he said he met people, I think it was mostly guys.

He met people who were never happier than when they were solving equations and doing proofs. And he said, "I realized that good as I was at math, this was not my true calling." And so he thought about those two circles. Then he thought about this third one. He says, "Don't over emphasize this one but you got to think about it." Which is, "What will people pay you to do?" Because he said, "They say do what you love and the money will follow." He says it's not literally true. He says his favorite thing is to listen to Brahms symphonies. He says, "There are Brahms symphonies I've listened to a hundred times and I have yet to find anybody who'll pay me a nickel to listen Brahms symphonies." So he says, "Think about this intersection. Think

about where you are," and by the way then he drew a little box around it and he said, "Then there's this other thing called 'who'." He said which is who are you going to work with? Who's on the bus with you? Because you can show up for work everyday and you can do stuff you're good at, you can do stuff you're born to do. You can do stuff that people pay you to do, but if you're working with people that you hate or that hate you or they have no respect for you, still not going to be a happy camper. And so that's his kind of personal formula for this thing. So he stops speaking, as I will eventually here in a few minutes.

And he stops speaking and I'm not kidding, he talked for an hour and this was a small part of what he talked about but 100% of the questions were about the three circles. In fact, 99% of the questions were about this circle here, "What are you born to do?" Because people kind of have a sense of what they're good at. There's a pretty efficient job market telling you what people will pay you to do but what am I born to do? That's a much harder question. And Jim said, "I can't answer that question for you but I can answer it for me." He said, "I was kind of a nerdy kid. When I was a kid I'd get out my magnifying glass and I would watch a bug." He says, "And I'll get one of these old style laboratory notebooks and I'd write down my observations. Everyday I'd watch that bug and how does he eat and does he sleep and what's the bug doing all day." He admitted up front he was a nerdy kid. Anyhow, so that's what he would do. So he said he found himself at this point in life, he was working for Hewlett Packard, great company which he openly acknowledges, but he wasn't happy. And so he said he got out one of those laboratory notebooks and he wrote on it "A Bug" at the top. And then he wrote "A Bug Called Jim".

And for two years he kept a laboratory notebook on himself. It wasn't a journal. He wasn't writing down the occurrences of the day. He wrote down during the day, during each day for two years when did I feel at my best. When was I in a state of flow? When did I feel the happiest because that's really important. And he said it took him two years of discovery, this is the tortoise mind again. It took him two years of discovery but he eventually figured out he was happiest when he was teaching and when he was working on systems, things with lots of little complexities and moving parts. And he said, "I figured out I should be teaching about systems." And so he did and I think he taught about systems at Stanford for awhile as well until he found another calling. But he kept a lab notebook on himself. So I've actually made this suggestion to somebody who's very near and dear to me and that person followed this advice and got some value on it.

And so if you're wondering, if you're drawing those three circles in your head and you're wondering, "What am I born to do?" I encourage you to try this lab notebook. It's an experiment. Can't hurt.