

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/in-brief/flare-and-focus/>

Referencing Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's book *Flow*, JetBlue Technology Ventures president Bonny Simi explains how she identifies areas where skills and passions are perfectly balanced. The key, she finds, is the design thinking principle of "flare and focus": you need to spend some time exploring with a wide aperture, and then focus in on places where passion and skill intersect. Sometimes passion in one area will wane, and taking some time to "flare" will reveal the next passion.



Transcript

- You can be very, very, very good at something 00:00:05,740 but not passionate about it, and if you aren't passionate about it, then you probably, long-term, will not be successful, because, ultimately, in most endeavors, I'd say it's about 10,000 hours.. Although, maybe I compressed it over four years, it was a lot of hours of training, and you have to really like it.. And so, go test these things out, see if you have some natural skill, if you really like it and you just can't wait to get to practice, or you can't wait to get to class, or you just can't wait to learn more about that.. You'll start getting into a flow.. There's a book called *Flow*, which I highly recommend people read.. It really helps you think.. When you're in flow of something, that is something where, ultimately, you could be very good, if you match that up with then the skills that you develop.. - So, a lotta people are super curious, 00:00:57,420 and I'm not sure if this is two things that they're conflating or whether this is true.. They're worried about the balance between saying yes and taking risks and then getting over-committed and overwhelmed.. So, are those opposite sides of a spectrum or are those different things? - Well, if there were, 00:01:16,300 one of my challenges, I mean, we all have, as my mother used to say, "You all have your assets and liabilities, "just hope you that you build upon your assets "and take care of your liabilities." So one of my liabilities is I do take on too much, and so I'm always having to kind of, okay, what can I low chat, what can I drop off? Because it is easy to go off in 27 different directions, but you do have to check yourself and begin focusing..

Tina, you do a lot in design thinking.. There's this thing called, you flare and then focus, and then flare and then focus.. And so, in that exploration phase, it's flare.. It's like all those Post-it notes that are behind you in your background.. Put out all kinds of different ideas and explore.. Find those things where you both have a passion and some skill and then start focusing on it.. I also think of doing things in chapters in life.. One chapter is a student, and another chapter is an athlete, and another chapter is a TV reporter, another chapter is becoming an airline pilot.. As passion maybe wanes in one area, you begin picking up in another area.. And so, I think just, life is too short to not love what you're doing..

The moment you feel, hmm, maybe I've been doing this too long, maybe I should do something else, that's a time to flare again and start exploring other items, other areas.. Then you can start latching onto things and do things in parallel to de-risk it a little bit, and then you can move on to the next area..