

Chase Your Passion (Not Your Pension)!

by Denis Waitley

Lisa, our youngest daughter, recently earned her master's degree to start a career as a high school English teacher. I doubt she was more excited about her graduation than her parents were.

As we entered the stadium for the commencement services, it dawned on me that after putting seven children through college and graduate studies, I'd finally be able to fund my retirement plan.

It was very hot in the concrete arena. A midday sun beat squarely in our faces. I suspected that the exercises would be long and merciless. As the graduates filed in, I was amused to see slogans taped to their tasseled caps. "Will work for food!" "Get my room ready, Mom!"

Our daughter's read, "Thanks Mom and Pop." Some wore bathing suits beneath their gowns. Some blew bubbles with a pipe and soap. Most were ecstatic about finally leaving school, visibly impatient for that night's parties and for freedom and the opportunity to earn.

Olmos "Stood and Delivered"

As the warm-up speakers droned on about politically correct issues, I wondered whether any time would remain for the main speaker. In fact, his address lasted barely ten minutes, which may have set a national record for brevity.

(Winston Churchill holds the international record: thirty seconds to repeat "Never give up!" nine times.)

That main speaker was Edward James Olmos, the actor-activist who played Jaime Escalante in an inspiring movie about inner-city students called *Stand and Deliver*.

Olmos stood up, removed his cap, and regarded the graduates. "So we're ready to party?" he asked. "Yeah, let's party!" they answered in unison. "I know, thank God it's Friday," he resumed.

"But commencement means to begin, not finish. You've had a four-year sabbatical from life, and now you're ready to go out there and earn. You're only beginning Real World 101 in your education.

"One more thing before we leave," he continued. "Please never, ever work for money. Please don't just get a job. A job is something that many of you had while you worked your way through college.

A job is something you do for money. But a career is something you do because you're inspired to do it. You want to do it, you love doing it, you're excited when you do it. And you'd do it even if you were paid nothing beyond food and the basics. You'd do it because it's your life."

What he was saying, which I have tried to recall and interpret in my own words is that many of you will go out and try to get the highest-paying job possible, regardless of the industry, regardless of the opportunity, regardless of the service or product the company may provide.

If you chase money, it may catch you – and if it catches you, you'll forever be its slave.

By letting money pursue you but never catch you, you'll always be its master. By always doing what you love, loving what you do, delivering more than you promise, you'll always be underpaid – which is how it always should be.

For if you're paid more than you're worth, you may be restructured, reengineered, replaced, fired, declared obsolete, disposed of. Overpaid people are overdrawn in their knowledge bank account.

People who are *underpaid* for the level and quality of the service they provide are always in demand and always ahead of the money in their knowledge and contribution. So money and opportunity are always chasing them. This is what I got out of the commencement speech that day.

Olmos concluded with a charged voice and moist eyes. "Chase your passion, not your pension! Be inspired to learn as much as you can, to find a cause that benefits humankind – and you'll be sought after for your quality of service and dedication to excellence.

This passion will make you oblivious of quitting time and to the length of your workday. You'll awake every morning with the passion of pursuit, but not the pursuit of money

Those who do more than they're paid for are always sought for their services. Their name and work outlive them and always command the highest price. Chase your passion, not your pension!"

The graduates were stunned. Many cried with joy. I was speechless, which is rare indeed. Olmos was no actor speaking for an honorarium. He was all passion, pure and simple. "Maybe we should have taught that in a class," I heard a faculty member say.

Motive in Action

Motivation is a contraction of *motive* and *action*. An inner force that compels behavior, it comes from within, not from any external circumstance. You know where you're going because you have a compelling image inside, not a travel poster on the wall, a financial statement with a big bonus, or a slogan in the hall.

The performance of many externally motivated individuals begins declining as soon as they win contests of one sort or another. I've personally witnessed this among Super Bowl champions and World Cup teams that lost the incentive to maintain their excellence after winning the cup, the honors, and the cash.

If you're really committed to peak performance and leadership, you must motivate yourself from within. Studies of achievers show that inner drives for excellence and independence are far more powerful than desire for wealth, status or recognition.

The Inner Drive

Behavioral scientists have found that independent desire for excellence is the most telling predictor of significant achievement.

In other words, the success of our efforts depends less on the efforts themselves than on our motives. The most successful companies, like the most successful men and women in almost all fields, have achieved their greatness out of a desire to express what they felt *had* to be expressed.

Often it was a desire to use their skills to their utmost in order to solve a problem. This is not to say that many of them did not also earn a great deal of money and prestige. William Shakespeare, Thomas Edison, Estee Lauder, Walt Disney, Oprah Winfrey, Sam Walton and Bill Gates all became wealthy.

But far more than thoughts of profit, the key to their success was inspiration and inner drive by creating or providing excellence in a product or a service. All were motivated by the desire to produce the very best that was in them.

Go for the Inner Applause

The late Ray Kroc, a former neighbor of mine who founded McDonald's Corporation when he was in his fifties, stressed the importance of people working for the inner satisfaction, not just for the money.

Ray said most people find it difficult to associate applause with their work when they can't hear literal applause – but the important applause should come from within. It is the faster heartbeat, the pride and satisfaction of accomplishment.

Kroc told the University of Southern California's Business School that the first thing a business executive needs is love of an idea.

If you don't love your concept, drop it. If you prostitute yourself at an early age by taking a job where the money is, you'll be working for money all your life. Loving their work is particularly important for younger people. If they lose that love early, they may never grow to anywhere near their potential for self-actualization.

Hire People Who Have Empowered Themselves

An inner drive for excellence motivates you always to be the best you possibly can in whatever you do. Leaders and managers should take special note here.

They must be careful in their use of external motivators – money, perks, prestigious offices and titles – in trying to inspire their team members and employees.

Enduring motivation must always come ultimately from within the individual.

That's why empowerment and vision are so crucial to team performance and quality. *Their* power and *their* vision, not those of the leader must compel team members.

Interviewing potential members, you should look for internally motivated individuals who hold their work important for its own sake, who love their field or their industry, who seek the exhilaration of testing their limits and contributing to the world. Be wary if they show more interest in your compensation package than in their **contribution** package.

Put Your Signature On Your Career

No one exemplifies the concepts in this article better than Antonio Stradivari, an Italian violin maker who lived from 1644 to 1737. Stradivari died at the age of ninety-three, at a time when the average life expectancy was a little over thirty-five years.

He taught himself his trade. His tools were primitive, and he usually worked alone until later in life, when his sons joined him. Stradivari had a passion.

He put the best of himself into every violin and viola. When he was finished and was certain that his craftsmanship measured up to his personal standards, he signed his name on the instrument.

Nearly three hundred years later, his violins sell for hundreds of thousands and even millions of dollars, and Stradivarius is a synonym for quality throughout the world. But far from every man or woman with uncommon standards of excellence become celebrities.

At this very moment, thousands or tens of thousands are working unknown and unsung in industry, the arts and the sciences. The public has never heard of them and probably never will; yet they refuse to turn out shoddy work. They are in the minority, but that's where they've always been – playing for a gallery of one, for their own inner applause.

Remember, people who consistently do things well set their own standards and make themselves measure up. In so doing, they:

- Give the best of themselves to benefit others, making their work a source of joy and satisfaction while they experience deep self-respect from being uncommon contributors.
- Build a kind of security that lasts a lifetime or beyond, because respect for quality always abides and will always command the highest price. If you accept nothing but excellence from yourself and feel entitled to put your name on your work, both will endure. The bitterness of poor quality lingers on long after the sweetness of low price.

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