

Article location: <http://www.fastcompany.com/resources/talent/bksje/passion-in-employees/070907>

July 9, 2007

When The Thrill Is Gone, So Are They

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Passion for work means that people find what they do to be so exciting that it sometimes doesn't even feel like work -- so exciting that it brings exhilaration, a "high." Granted, even those who have this passion seldom have it every day -- but they do know that feeling, and they know when they lose it.

Do you know what your employees are passionate about? Do you have any idea what gets each of them up in the morning feeling anticipation and eagerness about the day? When we asked dozens of people about their work passions, here is some of what we heard:

- "I love creating something new, something no one has ever seen or even imagined before."
- "I get a kick out of working on such an elite team. There is so much brilliance here."
- "I love drawing, welding, building something."
- "I love numbers. I'd rather work with them than with people."
- "I really get excited when I discover a new rule in math."
- "I love to help someone get better at something and get happier in the process."
- "I love managing others. What a kick it is to motivate and guide a team to do great things."
- "My passion is turnaround -- taking something that is broken and fixing it."

A common theme surfaces among these diverse answers: When people are doing what they love, they are at their best. If you help connect your employees' passions to their jobs, you and they will reap the rewards.

Passions are wired into the real world more directly than our workday routines are. If you love something, you'll bring so much of yourself to it that it will create your future -- Francis Ford Coppola.

Uncover and Discover

So what can you do to help people find work that engages them deeply? First, ask. Ask several ways because people respond differently to different words. Try, "What work do you really love to do?" or "What are you passionate about?" or "What gives you the greatest thrill or kicks at work?" As they answer, dig a little deeper. Then think creatively about how you might put their passions to work.

When one manager had the "passion conversation" with his employee, here is how it went:

- **Manager:** What do you love to do? What are you passionate about?
- **Tara:**
I've recently learned to use some desktop publishing software, and I've created brochures for my church. I'm having a ball with it.
- **Manager:** I wonder if there is a way we could use your talent and interest here at work.
- **Tara:**
I've been thinking about it and wondered if I could take on the layout of the new company newsletter we've been talking about.

- **Manager:** How would that work out with your current heavy workload?
- **Tara:**
I will definitely get my work done. You know that about me. This project will be above and beyond my current workload.
- **Manager:**
Let's give it a try. Keep me posted as you work on the first issue. Let me know what's working and what's not.

Tara was feeling pretty bored with her job. She'd been doing the same work for years, and the thrill was gone. She had even been thinking of leaving. She poured herself into the new project, teamed with colleagues, and turned out a first-rate newsletter. Her teammates and boss praised her and were astounded at her accomplishment.

Since that event, Tara has expanded her job to include multiple graphic arts projects. Her boss worked with her to restructure her job so that some of her former duties went to other people. Tara's energy and productivity have soared, and she wakes up eager to go to work. The key to her renewed enthusiasm is that her boss collaborated with her to uncover and then capitalize on her passion.

Passion Igniters

Most managers need a little help building passionate teams. Here are a few passion igniters to consider:

Hire for Passion

Why not select for passion in the first place? Find out if the candidate has a passion for making a difference or for your company's product or service. What about a passion for the work your unit does or for working on a team? If you build a team of passionate people, they'll not only produce for you -- they'll actually help retain each other.

Show Your Passion

"I see a world of possibilities where people who approach their work with passion, who take calculated risks for the good of the company, and who dare to test their own limits will reap unparalleled benefits in terms of excitement, fun, and personal satisfaction."-- *J.P. Garnier, CEO, GlaxoSmithKline*

What would it be like to work in an organization where leaders at all levels shared this CEO's approach? Share the passion you have for the work with your team. Your actions model what you expect from others.

Share a Meaningful Mission

Why does your team or organization exist? What is your mission? Share that mission with your employees. Then, clearly link employees' work to the mission. Tell them how their work contributes to it. Tell them how critical they are to you, to the mission of the team, and to the organization.

"I've been the janitor and maintenance expert here for 30 years. We take care of old people who need nursing care and help with their daily living. They deserve the best, after all they have done and given in their lives. I love my work. I help make this building beautiful and safe for the people who work here and the people who live here. The director here gave me an award for my service and told everyone how critical I am to serving our residents. That award hangs on my wall at home." -- *Maintenance expert, nursing home.*

This man is crystal-clear about the value of his work. He is inspired by the mission of the organization and the reason for his being there.

What prevents you from giving your employees different work or more of the kind of work they love? The list is often lengthy. You might think that in reality you don't have enough of the following:

- Time
- Money
- Staff
- Management support

These constraints may be real. But remember, if you don't help your talented employees find work they love in your organization, you will lose them. Do you have enough time, money, and staff to deal with their loss and replacement? People who do what they love usually do it very well. If passion is missing at work, your best people may not bring their best to work. So collaborate with them to uncover and discover what they love to do. Link them and their work to your mission, and help them remove the barriers to doing what they love. You'll gain enthusiastic employees who will stay engaged and productive -- and on your team.
