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## Keeping Passion in Tough Times

By Dr. Woody

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With nearly 15 million Americans unemployed and millions more struggling through underemployment (discouraged job seekers and those involuntarily working part-time) talking about the notion of passion in your career pursuit may seem a bit silly.

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But passion is important, particularly during these tough times. The reality is that the job market is more competitive now than it ever has been in modern history. Finding a job and building a successful career will require separating yourself from the growing herd of job seekers desperate to get back in the game. An effective strategy for standing out from the herd is leveraging your assets, and passion is one of those assets.

### Why Passion Matters

At a job fair last year, I had a conversation with the former vice president of recruitment from a major car rental agency about the notion of passion. As we looked around the packed auditorium I asked him how he could differentiate truly viable candidates from those desperately throwing darts at the board.

His answer was simple: "I look for passion." He went on to say that he and his team focus on those who demonstrate genuine enthusiasm for creating a positive customer experience. To be successful at his company he really believed that agents have to have that inner desire to work with people to create solutions. Quite simply, passion matters.

On the flip side, think about the last time you were at the Department of Motor Vehicles (or any other similar administrative government bureaucratic entity for that matter). It usually starts with a long painfully slow line that culminates in a frustrating interaction with an emotionless bureaucrat robotically going through the motions. You can feel the apathy in the air, an apathy that only serves to enhance the negativity of the experience. Would it hurt to have just a little passion for helping someone through the process?

### Harnessing Passion

When it comes to behavior there are a multitude of factors that motivate how and when we act.

Just as your personality, culture, upbringing, and education influence your behavior, so too does your passion. Passion can be thought of as an emotion that compels one to take action, an emotion that is spurred by external forces that influence our perceptions.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary describes passion as an emotion that is "deeply stirring or ungovernable." In other words, passion is something that must be harnessed. Your passion can be as much of a detriment as it is an asset, which is why you must be mindful of its power. The ability to harness your passion for positive gain can provide you with a tremendous advantage. The first step is to explore where your passions really lie by asking yourself:

- What is meaningful to me and what gives me a sense of purpose?
- What generates excitement and enthusiasm in me?
- What types of activities truly engage me in a positive way?

### Aligning Passion and Work

Will your passions and your work always be perfectly aligned? Of course not!

Often your greatest passions will lie outside the realm of work. The idea is to find a way to close the gap between your passions and your careers as best you can.

This means figuring out what your passions are and then seeking out those opportunities that best allow you to align your passions with activities that generate income. The harsh reality is the most of us spend most of our waking hours working.

For those who are unemployed or underemployed, most of your time is spent working toward getting back to work. At the end of the day, focusing your energy where your passions are only makes sense. Having a positive emotional connection to your vocation will help create a better experience for both you and those around you.

Passion matters when you learn to use it to your advantage. If you can effectively demonstrate to employers that you have that energizing spark or extra edge, you become infinitely more valuable, and you stand out. Remember, recruiters aren't looking to hire people who need the job, they are looking for people who want the job. They are looking for those candidates who stand out and have something genuine to offer. Find your passions and learn how to use them to your advantage.

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