

PassionWorks!™

Your Guide to Passion in the Modern Workplace

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Have you had your annual job review lately? It might not have found its way in just yet, but my research indicates you just might soon be measured on the passion you bring to the job. Your boss might just say: “We need you to get more passionate about the work! We need you to bring your whole self to the job, to give 110%! You’re at a 7 and we need you to be a 10 in the passion department!” If you’re working in sales I bet you’ve heard that said of you or others more than once. If we are going to be recruited for it, and measured on it, we had better understand what we mean by the word “passion” in our work place. What exactly is it we seek when we use the word passion, and why is it important to us?

Those are the questions I set out to answer when I started interviewing people. I wanted to understand the personal perspective on passion in the work place. I wanted to understand how passion operated in people who were considered by others at their place of work to be “passionate.” At first, I planned to interview 20 people from the private sector. Then I started to do the interviews and they took on a life of their own. Eventually, I ended up with over two hundred people from the public and volunteer sectors as well. I still do them informally, just for fun.

Here is a copy of a letter I sent to the Chief Executive Officers of a number of organizations that got me started.

Dear So & So

My Ottawa-based company is in the process of conducting research interviews for a new book I am writing tentatively titled “**PassionWorks!**” I am looking for interview candidates and am hoping that you or your designate would be able to identify some people or places within your organization that simply stand out from a Passion Perspective.

We see Passion as a common denominator in successful organizations. Throughout history people have accomplished great things despite weaknesses such as meagre resources, poor advertising, weak communication, mediocre management skills, average ideas or low remuneration. Our working hypothesis is that Passionate People are in fact the central, consistent element within these successful endeavours. We have come to believe that leaders and followers should be overtly seeking to create passion at work; that from it comes the success and fulfillment we are all after. Our research will help us to identify the internal and external conditions that create and negate passion within each of us at work.

How do you and your people benefit from helping us to research my book on Passion? You will receive the cumulative, anonymous, results of our research study. Our passion interviews are highly stimulating experiences; people enjoy them and say that by talking with us they discover a great deal about themselves and passion. They demonstrate your support for developing passion at work and they're free with coffee/tea included!

Please help point us to Passionate Spaces in your Organization! Our experience with this process so far indicates that you may well need to get some answers and more information before you offer to suggest some passionate people and so I very much look forward to hearing from you or your designate soon.

Passionately yours,
David Jones

The subject and approach really grabbed people and continues to do so. I was amazed that very busy people freely gave me an hour of their time to talk about passion. They consistently recommended that people they respect talk with me. Interestingly, in response to that letter, almost no one asked for any additional information. They just sent me lists of passionate people who worked for them and who had volunteered to talk with me face-to-face or over the phone for a full hour, and frequently more.

Once I started interviewing people, I began to realize why they had so readily agreed to meet with me. These were passionate people and their energy was contagious. They were committed to their work and very active in pursuing their goals. Talking with them about their work and overtly discussing passion created a noticeably positive and creative climate during the interview. You could sense an increase in intensity as the time passed and the depth and breadth of the conversation increased.

I started to like doing them so much, I found myself thinking, "Whether I get published or not, I'm just going to keep on doing this." I was so jazzed after each interview; my head filled with big things and my heart filled with purpose. I felt privileged to have the experience, and that's exactly what many of the people I interviewed said about their work. "If they didn't pay me, I'd have to do it anyway. I love it; it's important to me."

I was doing the interviews for free, so I knew what they were talking about! It's funny; the best jobs I have ever had, I have never thought about the money I was making while I worked. Perhaps after the odd rough stretch I thought about it briefly, but other than that not at all. I have worked for

\$4.50 an hour and thousands a day and never gave any less of myself in either situation. I did it because it mattered to me. A good lesson to learn, and very related to our subject of passion at work.

Some of the people I interviewed consciously saw themselves as passionate and believed strongly passion was key to their happiness, fulfillment and success. These people had a passion for passion, yet many of them reported they had never had the opportunity to talk overtly about passion in their work. The interview experience helped them to bring clarity to some of their beliefs. Our conversation created a palpable, nourishing energy.

Some of the people I met came to the interview wondering why they were meeting me; as far as they were concerned, they weren't a "passionate" person and they said so. For some reason I never expected this. When it first happened, I thought, "Oh well, let's make use of our time and find out why this person isn't passionate."

By the end of their interviews, however, these people came to realize they are, in fact, quite passionate when they are working; it just doesn't always manifest itself in an extremely extroverted way. I've met quite a few of these folks, people with quiet passion whom you might more frequently find in professions such as biology, engineering, meteorology, and medicine. But of course, truly you find them everywhere. Many of these people had this revelation during the interview; it made for a unique and highly instructive experience for me.

As a trainer, facilitator and keynote speaker over the last two decades, I have met thousands of people. I can say with conviction that the people I interviewed were "very high-quality" folks. This may sound prejudicial, as though I judged participants. What I actually believe is that they were having a superior working experience. One thing's for sure: my experience leads me to believe that a great many people lack what these folks appear to have. Unlike those who talk a good game but fail to deliver, the people I interviewed were actively living out their values at work. We can't all say that. These stated values were strongly supportive of a just and fair work environment that spawned excellence. Not only that, but they expected and achieved superior results – they made a significant impact on things that mattered to them. It was obvious to me the people I met with believed strongly in what they were doing and how they were doing it. They conveyed a brilliant sense of the importance of persistence, purpose, progress and process. These were passionate, committed people.

All told, I met with 212 people and they were a diverse group. There were small business owners, health care professionals, fire/rescue people, scientists, high-technology professionals, accounting/finance, financial planners, economists, sales people, policy analysts, wildlife biologists, educators, politicians, volunteers, non-profit folks, religious leaders, human resource people, advertising gurus, law enforcement folks, artists, musicians, actors, coffee roasters, bakers and chefs. I met with people who manage people, who do jobs you've never heard of, accomplishing things you never even thought about. I met with people of all ages – from folks in their 20s, with the energy that comes from starting out, to those in their 60s having the time of their life, experiencing the best days of their career with no good reason to fully retire.

As the age range implies, my interview subjects held a wide variety of positions and degrees of authority within the organizations they inhabit. I met senior leaders, front-line folks at the bottom of the hierarchy, and everywhere in between. I met with people from large, multinational organizations, medium-sized regional ones, and small, local outfits. I met with folks who worked on a team and managed no one, people who led small teams, still others who were leading an organization with many thousands of people, and, at the other end of the scale, people who worked largely by themselves. They came primarily from Canada and the United States, but also from Bermuda, Great Britain, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, France, Norway, and Poland.

So I would say that this book is written with a western perspective on passion at work, and perhaps with a noticeable North American viewpoint at that. It comes with the territory, unfortunately. Yet, my research suggests that what you read will translate quite well to other cultures. There is something about this thing called passion at work that is quite core to who we are as human beings at this point in our collective history. I suspect it will not be exactly the same in some ways. Perhaps we don't all express our passion the same way. Perhaps the specific things that galvanize our passion differ. Still, I think when you get to the heart of passion, you will see there are far more similarities than differences. I look forward to hearing from you on culture and to any other thoughts you might want to share.

Just go to www.passionworks.ca to add your thoughts to the mix and read what others have to say about passion at work!

Passion Is as Passion Does

Would you like to have the same rewarding interview experience yourself? After all, 212 passionate people can't be wrong! In this chapter are the questions I asked them in our one-hour interviews. Here's my suggestion to you: Think of someone whom you trust and believe is a passionate person at work. Book some time and ask the questions together.

Try to conduct a dialogue rather than a discussion or a debate. The purpose of a dialogue is to completely understand each other's point of view, not necessarily to agree with it. The purpose of a discussion is generally to come to an agreement. This usually means that a compromise is worked out, where neither side gets exactly what they want, or one side wins and the other loses. A discussion environment makes it difficult for you to hear other people because someone will likely want to have it their way. A dialogue environment limits your expression of your views to one half of your purpose; the other half is asking questions so as to hear and understand other people's viewpoint.

In your next formal meeting on any subject at work, try starting with some dedicated time for focused dialogue around the issue you are addressing, before you move to discussion and decision-making. It makes for a much more effective use of your time.

Having a dialogue about passion in your work is an uplifting and expanding experience. People seem to really value it, and I have completely treasured it. I think you would gain from the experience, too. So, stop reading this book now and invest the time to do at least one one-hour passion interview with a colleague, family member or friend. Then come back to the book. I believe this will help to create a truly personal experience that will resonate with you much more strongly, both as you read the book and after you finish it.