

Passion Drivers in Non-Profit Organizations

People who work in Non-Profit Organizations (NPO's) are more likely to be driven by the mission of their organizations than their For Profit counterparts. Said another way, in NPO's there is a heightened sense of meaning from organizational product than you would find in the For Profit sectors.

This creates a situation where values can become a key driver of passion from the perspective of alignment around meaning. NPO employees more frequently feel that they are living out their values in the process of their work. They feel like the work they do can make a difference in terms of helping to create an impact that serves a higher purpose.

So in NPO's when you see employees who are passionate, it is because they personally believe in the vision and values of the organization. It is this belief that allows them to sustain passion in the face of significant, systemic and endemic challenges to progress that exist in most NPO's.

But more than a personal belief system is at work here. It is the shared belief system that creates a special driver of passion in NPO's. When leaders, colleagues, clients, directors, volunteers and thought leaders all share a belief in the rightness of their cause, a culture of passion is created.

It's not all good news, while you do find lots of passion in the NPO sector, you also find a good deal of Gripping, Rushing, Dreaming and Obsessing behaviours. This happens because resources are limited, challenges are persistent, progress isn't linear, funders are demanding, volunteers are hard to find, governments change, corruption is present, expectations are high and issues are complex – and so many other things that make working in an NPO difficult!



NPOs need to focus on the progress side of the passion equation. The following tips may help your organization boost its sense of progress:

1. Step back and look at your current activities. Given the time, effort and resources invested in them, what actual results are achieved? Then evaluate whether it's worth continuing to invest in these activities.
2. If not, gather people together to do some creative thinking. What other actions could you take that might provide better results? Generating as many ideas and alternatives as possible will open up possibilities for you.
3. If you discover that, in fact, there are many benefits resulting from your programs or activities, then decide how you will measure your advancement so that you can stay grounded in the impact you are having. Sometimes our expectations for progress get disconnected from reality and we can begin to frame our work as pointless or excruciatingly slow. Finding ways to measure real progress so that it is visible can go a long way to supporting your passion.

The 7 Pathways to a Passionate Life!

1. Know what you care about! When the world is constantly telling us what we should care about and life is moving at the speed of light, it can become difficult to stay connected to our true desires and aspirations. What do we really want to create versus what do others want us to create? This isn't always an easy question to answer. Pressures from parents, colleagues and society in general to conform to what they value is real for many of us, regardless of where we live. Do yourself a favour and take time to reflect on what matters most to you. What do you truly value? What is a source of meaning for you? Your answers to these questions will become your drivers of passion.
2. To organize your life around those things that you care most about, you need a priority list. We love to think that we can do it all and we can multi-task. But, the reality is that we have to make choices every day about what to do and what not to do. So, once you know what matters most, it is essential that you know what item is more important than the other items. In other words, when it comes down to deciding between two pursuits or activities, you need to know which one matters more to you. It's the only way to make choices that leave you without regret. We all need a hierarchy of meaning. Things cannot be of equally importance. Which item matters the very most to you? What next? Work your way through your list until you are happy that your items are listed in the correct priority.
3. Put one foot in front of the other! Now that you have your list, it's time to take action. How can you best serve those things that matter most to you? Start at the top of your list. What could you do that would help you serve this priority? For example, if your family made it to the top of your list, you might decide to plan a fun weekend activity. Small acts can be very powerful choices. Don't underestimate yourself! If writing a book is high on your list, making a telephone call to learn about how to get started might be an action you could take to drive progress. The key is to organize your day around actions which serve your greatest priorities. And, if you are in a time crunch, always choose in favour of those things which matter most.
4. Learn to create momentum. As you complete one task, create another one. Momentum is often created through small, but effective, action steps. We often overwhelm ourselves by the magnitude of our goal or problem, rather than seeing what one thing we could do today that would advance us, even a little closer, toward our aspiration. There is power in action and action often generates energy which fuels further action. So get up off the couch and do one thing to serve what's on the very top of your list. You will be inspired!
5. See your progress! Whether we know it or not, each of us is sensitive to seeing how our actions have had an impact. Once we begin to act in service of what matters most, we want to know we're getting somewhere; or, at least, that we are on track. So we scan our environment for evidence that this is true. Using the example above, did your family enjoy the activity you organized? If you had fun and laughed a lot then that might have been a great signal of progress.

Or, if your friend introduced you to a published author who was willing to mentor you, you might see this as a wonderful signal of progress. Or, it might simply be someone saying “thank you” or “good job”! Each of us is looking for some indication that our action was effective; without it, our energy and passion will be decreased instead of amplified.

6. **Manage disappointments.** So what happens when our actions simply don't produce the results we were expecting and there doesn't appear to be any sign of progress? It's natural to feel disappointed. When your signal of progress relies on someone else or things beyond your control, you make yourself vulnerable to disappointment.

Although you may really want your family to laugh a lot, if they don't, look for other ways to measure progress. What was good about the time you spent together? Perhaps simply being together engaged in the same activity is a terrific step toward reinforcing family connections. If you are too attached to the signal of progress you were expecting, you may miss other meaningful signs.

If someone doesn't say thank you, this is beyond your control. Perhaps sitting back and enjoying what you have produced is a good alternative. Appreciating your own work is very powerful; and perhaps healthier than relying on others to do it for you! Stay flexible but always locate some evidence of your progress as it's the only way to sustain your passion!

7. **Appreciate and celebrate.** In our busy, fast-paced world, we often find ourselves running from one thing to the next, never taking time to breathe and rejuvenate. This is a quick road to burnout! And, it certainly doesn't uplift our spirit. We need to take time to rest and rejuvenate... and, play. Acknowledging our accomplishments, appreciating our results, and finding ways to celebrate them, energizes us for our next pursuit!

