

The Passion Plan: Discover, Develop and Live Your Passion

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This is the fifth of a series of articles based on Dr. Sanna's book, *Breakthrough Thinking*.

We may affirm absolutely that nothing great in the world has been accomplished without passion.
- Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

Most of us have been taught since childhood to fear passion and to view it as dangerous. We have been told that passion is dark and sinister; that it compels people to commit crimes in its name; that it is irrational and unpredictable; and that it brings heartache and regret. We are conditioned to believe that the pursuit of passion is also the pursuit of pain and uncertainty. Why put everything on the line when the payoff might be resounding failure or humiliation? Why take on risk when we can take a much safer and foreseeable path?

These lessons are reinforced by the example set by many celebrities. How many rock stars have followed their passion for music or fame all the way to self destruction? How many actors have sought acclaim and fortune, only to be rewarded with crisis and despair? All around us, we see people who have been led astray by their passion. History confirms our fears. What was the legacy of Hitler's and Stalin's passion? What good did passion do Romeo and Juliet?

Passion provides you with all the stamina and inspiration you need. When you act from your passion, you do not need to call on your reserves for energy or initiative. You could have a fever of 103 degrees, a stack of documents to review, or a party to attend, but if you are passionate about sailing and someone offers you an afternoon on a schooner, you'll get to the dock on time.

Symptoms of Lost Passion

Unfortunately, few of us discover all or even some of our passions, so too many buildings remain unfinished - the unfinished skyscrapers, cathedrals, warehouses, and monuments that mar our skylines.

Just as a laboratory test can signal illness to the doctor interpreting the results, your practice's statistics can signal lost passion. When your statistics are consistently declining or even stagnant - unchanging, month after month - it means you are no longer "mentally" there. You've quit, but the practice hasn't. You're just showing up and going through the motions. When you lose passion, you minimize all of your procedures, doing as little as you can to just get by ... and your stats show it. You may even stop keeping statistics or, if you do keep them, choose to ignore them because you don't care what they may tell you. Even when you are mentally in your practice, you may feel guilty about not being somewhere else! You divert your passion to other activities and take on other priorities - like golf and hobbies.

A loss of passion places a strain on the relationships in all areas of your life. From a professional standpoint, you avoid contact with your usual colleagues. On a personal level, you nitpick and look for reasons to be disagreeable, especially with your spouse and practice teammates. Because you criticize and complain so much, your practice suffers from a high level of employee turnover. You replace or drive them away. The ultimate symptom of lost passion is called the "buyout syndrome." This is when you can't wait for someone to purchase your practice from you, to put you out of your misery.

Causes and Cures for Lost Passion

There are many causes for lost passion. Let's take a little time to review some of the most common causes and what you can do to combat them. Work long or unusual hours and after a short while, you will feel as if your practice runs you. You'll keep your passion at a high level if you work early or work late hours - but not both. Work reasonably long days (8-10 hours) and don't take work home with you.

Another cause for lost passion is becoming "too busy" by filling your day with nonproductive tasks. This results in you becoming married to your practice. You engage in a lot of "busy work." For example, you change the placement of items on your desk, but don't really reorganize anything. Don't procrastinate by putting things aside for tomorrow that could be completed today. Eliminate or delegate! Rekindle your passion by shedding nonproductive endeavors and delegating low-priority responsibilities to others. Consider hiring an associate or additional practice team member.

Just as too much work can zap your passion, so can too much free time! Too much time on your hands causes your priorities to become distorted. You can avoid this by scheduling your patients' appointments into clusters for greater efficiency. Increase your productivity by raising the bar: Hold a "Patient Appreciation Day" that increases the flow of patients into your practice. Expand your efficiency by "stacking a day" - book an entire day's appointments into half a day and watch your capacities soar!

Stress is a major passion drain. However, much stress is self-imposed. You begin fighting the "solo battle." Your "self talk" includes statements like, "Why do I have to do it all? ... Nobody cares but me! ... Can't anyone do anything right but me?" You think no one else knows how tough it is. Combat the loss of passion that comes from carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders by sharing that weight with others. Attend seminars that provide you with a fresh perspective on how others are managing the constantly changing demands of their practices. Develop a brain_trust partnership of colleagues and mentors with whom you can meet to develop creative strategies and solutions. Visit other progressive practices to see first-hand the attitudes and procedures you can model in your own practice. Listen to tapes and read motivational books for inspirational role models.

Planning for passion includes planning your office procedures. Take a serious look at your practice; see what your office looks like. Sit where your patients sit; lie where your patients lie. Ask yourself, "If I were a prospective patient, would I come to this practice and trust my health to these people?" If you've lost your passion for practice, it may be that practice has become routine for you. You've gotten tired of "the same old thing." Add excitement by adding new services or profit centers. Most importantly, get involved in something bigger than yourself. Create a purpose for your practice that includes more than just earning a living. You will eagerly put your heart and soul into a purpose you love and believe in.

Commit to Passion

Is passion missing in your practice or other areas of your life? Do you want to bring it back? If so, commit to start with your heart. Do not disparage or deny your feelings. Accept them and move forward with them. Have big dreams. Don't let anyone else tell you what your dreams ought to be. Your dreams are yours alone. Henry David Thoreau writes in *Walden*, "When one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours." You are capable of greatness and entitled to it, but you and only you can bring it about. By embracing your passion and committing to your passions, you are vowing to take control of your life, and to create a self-fulfilling future of success and fulfillment.

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SEPTEMBER 2005