The Power of Passion in Higher Education

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Passion Thrillers and Passion Killers: How to Support and How to Thwart Employee Passion

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Abstract

In any work environment passion can be encouraged or discouraged; the authors refer to this dichotomy as passion thrillers and passion killers. An organization’s productivity can be affected by its employees’ passion for their job and place of employment. Studies reveal several ways to excite passion in the workplace and by doing so increase employee engagement and persistence. However, too often leaders fail to analyze what drives the passion of their employees. While there seem to be several ways for passion to be thrilled, this work also explores

[Continued on the next page]
TALENT ISN’T MUCH WITHOUT PASSION
History of Passion
The History of Passion

According to Plato (427-348 BC) passion was bad because he believed that passion overruled reason, and was a kind of energy that could lead to unreasonable and irrational behavior.

Vallerand, 2015, p. 15
The History of Passion

Aristotle (384-322 BC), however, did not necessarily see passion as bad, but as having the potential for good or bad, depending upon a person’s ability to control their passions.

Vallerand, 2015, p. 15
The History of Passion

The Stoics’ perspective, which became popular during Roman rule, rejected passion and sought instead to accept one’s situation regardless of the conditions.

Vallerand, 2015, p. 16
The History of Passion

Augustine (354-430) believed it was imperative to control one’s passions, which Aquinas (1225-1274) believed was possible through free will coupled with the knowledge of God.

Vallerand, 2015, p. 16
The History of Passion

René Descartes (1596-1650), in his book *The Passions of the Soul*, said that passions were “agitations of the soul caused by the animal spirits of the body” and therefore impossible to control.

Vallerand, 2015, p. 17-18
The History of Passion

Spinoza (1632-1677), proposed two kinds of passion: one which leads to hurt and frustration, and one which involves our true nature as humans leading to experience some happiness.
The History of Passion

David Hume (1711-1776) proposed that there were good and bad passions that could motivate appropriate and inappropriate behavior.

Emmanuel Kant (1724-1804) separates passion from emotions, in that emotions are fleeting, but passions are more permanent.

Vallerand, 2015, p. 20
The Romantics, spearheaded by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), embraced and promoted the importance of passion. He said passion could not be controlled by reason, but that only passion could control another passion.

Another Romantic, French Helvetius (1715-1771) argues that passion is crucial for intelligence. He writes, “One becomes stupid as soon as he (or she) ceases to be passionate.”
Hegel (1770-1831) believed that passion provides energy to persevere, stating, “Passion . . . pushes man to concentrate his energy on one object only. In fact, with passion, all other interests are put outside.”

Kierkegaard (1813-1855) writes, “To exist, if we do not mean by that only a pseudo existence, cannot take place without passion.”
The History of Passion

Within the field of psychology, the concept of passion has transitioned from the idea of passion as emotion, or passion as motivation, to passion as a "motivational force."
The History of Passion

Robert Vallerand was among the first to view passion as more than the love for an activity, but as a love for something highly valued and meaningful, in which one invests time in important ways. Furthermore, the activity becomes part of the person’s identity, so that the individual doesn’t say, for example, “I teach,” but “I am a teacher.” The passion, not the job, defines them.
Robert J. Vallerand

Institution
Université du Québec à Montréal

Current Position
Full Professor of Psychology and Director of Research

Highest Degree
Ph.D. in Psychology from Universite de Montreal, 1982

More than 280 publications by Robert J Vallerand
Passion for Work
Passion for Work

A conceptual shift from . . .

➢ work as a means to pursue passions outside of the workplace, to . . .

➢ work as a source of, and an outlet for, one’s passion.
Shifting the Paradigm

Work is not a curse.

• Before sin entered the picture, humanity was to partner with God by tending the garden. Work was a means of expressing one’s design.

• After sin, work became a daily struggle to earn bread by the sweat of one’s brow.

• But work itself is not a curse, and by embracing God’s original plan one can be passionate about what he or she does in the kingdom of God.
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

“If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.”
PASSION DEFINED – Robert Vallerand

... a strong inclination toward a specific object, activity, concept or person that one loves (or at least strongly likes), highly values, invests time and energy in on a regular basis, and that it is a part of one’s identity.

Vallerand, 2015, p. 33.
Furthermore, two forms of passion seem to exist. The first can be seen as being in harmony with other aspects of the self and the person’s life and should mainly lead to adaptive outcomes. The second form of passion may conflict with aspects of the self and the person’s life and should mainly lead to less adaptive, and sometimes, even maladaptive outcomes.
Robert Vallerand’s Dual Mode Passion Theory

- **Passion**: strong inclination towards an activity that people like, find important, and in which they invest time and energy.

- **Dualistic Model of Passion**: 2 types of passion (Vallerand et al., 2003)
  - Harmonious Passion (H.P.)
  - Obsessive Passion (O.P.)
# The Difference in Passions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Harmonious Passion</th>
<th>Obsessive Passion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Is the result of autonomous internalization of a highly valued activity</td>
<td>• The result of controlled internalization</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Allows for focused persistence in an activity</td>
<td>• Allows for focused persistence in an activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Allows for disengagement without guilt or anxiety</td>
<td>• Does not allow for disengagement without guilt or anxiety</td>
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Recent interest in “work passion”

- Passionate workers are perceived to be more productive and engaged than workers that are not passionate about work (Ayers & Cahill, 2012).
- Vallerand and Houlfort (2003) observed that the research provided empirical support to suggest “that passion matters” (p. 187)
Who should have passion in Higher Education?

- President
- Deans
- Faculty
- Staff
- Administration
- Students
- Community
Passionate Faculty

My conversation with students revealed that what they perceive as passionate faculty is that . . .

- they are **energetic** in presenting material - contagious
- they are **experts** on the topic – up to date
- they are **engaging** with students – field questions
- they are **enthusiastic** about teaching
Recent interest in “work passion”

• Ho, Wong, and Lee (2011) found that harmonious passion led to “a heightened cognitive state” and that such workers expend more “cognitive energy into their work” which “ultimately translates into higher work performance.”

• With respect to obsessive passion, Ho et al. found no significant improvement in work performance.
Ayers and Cahill found that while 85 percent of the workers were passionate about their work, only 48 percent were passionate about both the job and the organization. The difference of 37 percent is significant.

Ayers & Cahill, 2012.
The task of leadership is not to put passion into people, but to inspire and elicit it, for the passion is there already.

~ Ty Howard
Determinates of Harmonious Passion

• It is important to hire people who have passion for an activity, or understand how that passion can be transferred.

• The development of “harmonious” passion in one’s life is a combination of various psychological, sociological, and environmental factors including activity availability, autonomy in activity selection, the perceived value of the activity, and “the internalization of the activity in identity”

Vallerand et al., 2014, p. 96.
Determinates of Harmonious Passion

Vallerand et al. (2014) note that the intensity of passion can modulate depending on a number of social and personal factors.

- **Personal Factors:** development of harmonious passion include “emotional intelligence” and “self-awareness and engagement of personal strengths”

- **Social Factors:** Influencers in the organization, such as, transformational leadership, corporate culture
Determinates of Harmonious Passion

Ayers and Cahill (2012), propose that organizations:

- Train and encourage managers and supervisors to trust their staff and to treat them with respect
- Help all employees understand the purpose of their jobs and how it supports the purpose or mission of the organization
- Increase honesty and transparency in all dealings with employees
- Encourage a culture where employees feel free to express their own ideas and opinions.

Ayers & Cahill, 2012, p. 22.
Determinates of Harmonious Passion

Zigarmi, Houson, and Witt (2009) propose the following factors:

- **Meaningful work** — Employees perceive the organization’s larger purpose through products or services produced, consider their work to be worthwhile, and are proud of their individual actions and contributions that help the organization serve its customer.

- **Collaboration** — Employees perceive an organizational environment and culture that enhances collaboration, cooperation, and encouragement between all organizational members.

Zigarmi, Houson, & Witt, 2009, pp. 4-5.
Determinates of Harmonious Passion

Zigarmi, Houson, and Witt (2009) propose the following factors:

- **Fairness** — Employees perceive an environment where pay, benefits, resources and workload are fair and balanced and equitable, people treat each other with respect, and leaders act in an ethical manner.

- **Autonomy** — Employees perceive an environment where people have the tools, training, support, and authority to make decisions.

Zigarmi, Houson, & Witt, 2009, pp. 4-5.
Determinates of Harmonious Passion

Zigarmi, Houson, and Witt (2009) propose the following factors:

- **Recognition** — Employees perceive an environment where they are praised, recognized, and appreciated by colleagues and their leader for their accomplishments, where they receive monetary compensation for those accomplishments, and where they are contributing to positive relationships with others.

- **Growth** — Employees perceive an environment where people have opportunities to learn, grow professionally, and develop skills that lead to advancement and career growth.
Determinates of Harmonious Passion

Zigarmi, Houson, and Witt (2009) propose the following factors:

• **Connectedness with leader** — Employees perceive an environment where they trust their leader and where the leader makes an effort to form an interpersonal connection with them.

• **Connectedness with Colleagues** — Employees perceive an environment where they trust their colleagues and where their colleagues make an effort to form an interpersonal connection with them.
It’s a beautiful thing when a career and a passion come together.
Passion’s Power in Higher Education

- **Employees** – administration, faculty, staff who do not need to be micromanaged
- **Energy** – in the classroom or the office
- **Engagement** – beyond the clock hours
- **Endurance** – less burnout or employee turnover

Hargrove & Howard, 2017.
Feeding Passion

...passion can be ignited and the fires of creativity released when employees are respected for the talents they bring to the table, are given meaningful positive feedback, and are afforded the opportunity to excel at what they love. The key is, in part, about creating a culture that feeds the passion of employees, rather than feeding on the passion of employees. (Hardgrove & Howard, 2015, p. 21)
References


References


Stratified Focus Groups

Divide into groups of 5-6 according to work roles.

The question is, what do you believe the university can do to support your passion in your current role?

First brainstorm, on the back of the page, and then as a group identify three that you would say are most important.
Results from qualitative research at Beulah Height University

The following themes emerged from the various responses in their top three agreed upon suggestions:

1. 8 of 12 groups (67%) training/professional development
2. 7 of 12 groups (58%) team/community building
3. 4 of 12 groups (33%) incentives: increased pay
4. 3 of 12 groups (24%) better/more effective communication