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## Why Following Your Passion Is the Worst Kind of Career Advice

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### A career coach on what matters the most in job satisfaction

Standard advice on how to pick a career? Find one that amalgamates your key skills, interests and values. Alas, that too often doesn't work.

#### The standard advice often fails for one or more of these reasons:

- You have too many interests but none stand out.
- You have many abilities but none stand out.
- You think you have no worthwhile abilities.
- You can't come up with a career that amalgamates your skills, interests and values.
- You come up with too many careers that amalgamate your skills, interests and values.
- Your skills, interests and values are common, so you end up wanting a popular career, for example, ahem, journalist.

The irony is that even if you find a career that fits and you actually land a job in it, that's far from a guarantor of career contentment. Let's say you pick a popular career like the aforementioned journalist. Employers know that, with dozens of replacements panting for the opportunity to earn \$40,000 a year or even volunteer, not only can they pay poorly, they can treat you poorly. The result: an unhappy person with a "dream" career. Ill treatment is less likely if an employer knows it won't be so easy to find someone as good as you. So, paradoxically, following your passion into a so-called cool career may more likely lead to misery or at least poverty. Do what you love...and starve?

#### A solution

From having worked with 4,800 career coaching clients and talking shop endlessly with friends and colleagues, what seems to matter most in finding career contentment are these career non-negotiables:

- Work that isn't too hard or too easy
- Work that feels worthy and ethical
- A boss that treats you well
- Coworkers who you enjoy
- Moderate opportunities for learning
- Reasonable work hours
- Reasonable pay
- Reasonable benefits

- Job security
- A reasonable commute

Those are available in a far wider range of jobs and careers than if you're trying to find a job that amalgamates your key skills, interests and values. Take, for example, customer service rep for a utility. Sounds far from cool, not to mention devoid of status. Yet one of my happiest clients ended up in that job, and because it had those career non-negotiables, he's happier than most people with "cool" and lucrative careers.

### **The takeaway**

No one's suggesting you give up your dream, but might you want to pursue it as a hobby where it's more likely to actually be dreamy. For example, amateur acting in community theater is great fun and not difficult to land good roles. In contrast, if you expect to make a living as an actor, you face long odds against making a no-roommate income. Most professional actors live a life of endless cattle-call auditions, which usually result in rejection or a bit part in which you spend most rehearsal and showtime waiting.

Mightn't you prefer a career in a field less likely to have the masses fighting with you for a job and, if you get it, just waiting for you to screw up so they can take your place?

Status and coolness are enemies of contentment; career non-negotiables are contentment's best friend.

*Marty Nemko is an award-winning career coach, writer, speaker and public radio host specializing in career/workplace issues and education reform. His writings and radio programs are archived on [www.martynemko.com](http://www.martynemko.com).*