

Looking Ahead to 2012 » The Glass Hammer

By Melissa J. Anderson (New York City)

This year on The Glass Hammer, a topic we've discussed frequently is passion – why uncovering your true passion about your work can help advance your career and can make you happier. The value of passion really comes down to being “authentic” – when you're doing what you truly love, it shows, and helps influence others to follow you or pull you forward.



In his new book *Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level*, Joel A. Garfinkle explains why passion is so important for leaders – it's a lot easier to get other people to follow you when they believe in you, than when they don't. He writes:

“Be passionate and excited by your objectives, and share this excitement with others. This kind of enthusiasm propels people toward your point of view and prompts them to connect emotionally with your passion.”

“Besides passion, you also need to display confidence. Even if others doubt your ideas, they embrace them because they trust your confidence.”

Enthusiasm and confidence are two qualities that stem from passion, but there's a lot more to it than that. According to a recent study, the wrong kind of passion can stand in your way, while the right kind can propel you forward. How can you manage your own passion and use it to gain more ground in 2012?

Two Kinds of Passion

In a recent Harvard Business Review blog post, NYU cognitive scientist Scott Barry Kaufman explained the findings of a recent University of Quebec study that explored two different kinds of passion: “harmonious” and “obsessive.”

He explained:

“Those with harmonious passion engage in their work because it brings them intrinsic joy. They have a sense of control of their work, and their

work is in harmony with their other activities in life. At the same time, they know when to disengage, and are better at turning off the work switch when they wish to enjoy other activities or when further engagement becomes too risky. As a result, their work doesn't conflict with the other areas of their lives."

On the other hand, he continued, obsessive passion is detrimental to your career – people with this type of passion have an almost uncontrollable desire to work, and they report feeling emotionally dependent on working. Kauffman explains, "They report higher levels of negative affect during and after activity engagement; they can hardly ever stop thinking about their work, and they get quite frustrated when they are prevented from working."

The big picture, he continues, is where this passion leads you. "People with harmonious passion come to work refreshed and ready to tackle new problems, whereas those with obsessive passion are at much higher risk of experiencing burnout."

How to Better Leverage Your Passion

Where are *you* on the passion continuum? And what are you passionate about? Is your passion climbing to the top of your company? Is it pulling women up the ladder behind you by mentoring or sponsoring them? Is it doing your best every single day? Is it providing for your family? Is it engaging in the effort for gender equality?

Whatever you are passionate about, the University of Quebec study reveals how important it is that your passion comes with flexibility. This enables you to magnetically lead others, even through adversity, and keep coming back for more with a smile on your face.

As Sherrie Bourg Carter, Psy.D. wrote last week in Psychology Today:

"Pursuing a passion requires that you adopt a 'journey' mentality, not a 'straight line to a destination or bust' mentality. Simply embrace what you enjoy and create opportunities to explore these parts of yourself. Some may fit you well; others may not. That's okay. Also, it's important to be flexible in the sense that what excites and inspires you now may not necessarily be what excites and inspires you in years to come."

Passionate leadership means being prepared for the long haul, despite the challenges you may come across. As we each pause at the end of the year to look back on our achievements (and reflect on the things we can do better), it would serve us well to consider where our passion comes from – and ensure us that it is leading us forward to a place of joy.

The Glass Hammer team is taking a week off to celebrate the holidays and renew our own passion for building this community of women leaders. In 2012, you can expect some

energetic events, fantastic new research, profiles of women breaking the glass ceiling, career advice, and more. See you in January!