

So Good They Can't Ignore You

Thesis: The things that make a job great are rare and valuable. If you want them in your working life, you need something rare and valuable to offer in return. In other words, you need to be good at something before you can expect a good job.

Passion is Rare

- Compelling careers often have complex origins that reject the simple idea that all you have to do is follow your passion.
- A *job* is a way to pay the bills, a *career* is a path toward increasingly better work, and a *calling* is work that's an important part of your life and a vital part of your identity.
- The happiest, most passionate employees are not those who followed their passion into a position, but instead those who have been around long enough to become good at what they do.
- Passion is a Side Effect of Mastery.
- Three basic psychological needs—factors described as nutriment required to feel intrinsically motivated for your work: (1) Autonomy: the feeling that you have control over your day, and that your actions are important; (2) Competence: the feeling that you are good at what you do; and (3) Relatedness: the feeling of connection to other people.

The Clarity of the Craftsman

- Focus on how what you're working on can add something important to your craft.
- Don't focus on little details, but focus on becoming better.
- Have an obsessive-like focus on *quality*.
- All of these attributes are elements of the craftsman mindset, and irrespective of what type of work you do, the craftsman mindset is *crucial* for building a career you love.

- The craftsman mindset focuses on what you can offer the world, while the passion mindset focuses instead on what the world can offer you.
- When you focus only on what your work offers you, it makes you hyperaware of what you don't like about it, leading to chronic unhappiness.
- In adopting the craftsman mindset: It asks you to leave behind self-centered concerns about whether your job is “just right,” and instead put your head down and plug away at getting really damn good. No one owes you a great career, it argues; you need to earn it—and the process won't be easy.

The Power of Career Capital

- **The Career Capital Theory of Great Work**
 - The traits that define great work are rare and valuable.
 - Supply and demand says that if you want these traits you need rare and valuable skills to offer in return. Think of these rare and valuable skills you can offer as your **career capital**.
 - The craftsman mindset, with its relentless focus on becoming “so good they can't ignore you,” is a strategy well suited for acquiring career capital. This is why it trumps the passion mindset if your goal is to create work you love.
- **Three Disqualifiers for Applying the Craftsman Mindset**
 - The job presents few opportunities to distinguish yourself by developing relevant skills that are rare and valuable; The job focuses on something you think is useless or perhaps even actively bad for the world; and The Job forces you to work with people you really dislike.

Becoming a Craftsman

- There must be a focus on stretching your ability and receiving immediate feedback, this provides the core of a more universal principle.
- In “serious study,” materials can be deliberately chosen or adapted such that the problems to be solved are at a level that is appropriately challenging.
- In “serious study,” feedback is also immediate.
- **Deliberate practice:** An activity designed, typically by a teacher, for the sole purpose of effectively improving specific aspects of an individual’s performance.
- If you don’t practice deliberately and just show up and work hard, you’ll soon hit a performance plateau beyond which you fail to get any better.
- If you can figure out how to integrate deliberate practice into your own life, you have the possibility of blowing past your peers in your value, as you’ll likely be alone in your dedication to systematically getting better. That is, *deliberate practice might provide the key to quickly becoming so good they can’t ignore you.*
- You must constantly solicit feedback from colleagues and professionals.
- Attempt to throw yourself into a project beyond your current capabilities and then hustle to make it a success.
- **The Five Habits of a Craftsman**
 - **Decide What Capital Market You’re In:** Either winner-take-all or auction—i.e., when there is only one type of career capital available (writing in screenwriting) or many types (expertise in renewable energy markets and entrepreneurship in cleantech).
 - **Identify Your Capital Type:** Seek open gates—opportunities to build capital that are already open to you—i.e., working with one of your professors right out of school.
 - **Define “Good”:** You need clear goals to determine Good.

- **Stretch and Destroy:** Deliberate practice is above all an effort of focus and concentration. That is what makes it “deliberate,” as distinct from the mindless playing of scales or hitting of tennis balls that most people engage in. Deliberate practice is the opposite of enjoyable.
- **Be Patient:** Must be diligent, which is less about paying attention to your main pursuit, and more about your willingness to ignore other pursuits that pop up along the way to distract you.

The Dream-Job Elixir

- Scientific research has identified control—the dream job elixir—as one of the most important traits you can purpose in the question for a happier, more successful, and more meaningful life.
- Giving people more control over what they do and how they do it increases their happiness, engagement, and sense of fulfillment.
- Summary: If your goal is to love what you do, your first step is to acquire career capital. Your next step is to invest this capital in the traits that define great work. Control is one of the most important targets you can choose for this investment.

The First Control Trap

- Control that’s acquired without career capital is not sustainable. Thus, it’s dangerous to pursue more control in your working life before you have career capital to offer in exchange.

The Second Control Trap

- The point at which you have acquired enough career capital to get meaningful control over your working life is exactly the point when you’ve become valuable enough to your current employer that they will try to prevent you from making the change.

Avoiding the Control Traps

- Follow the **Law of Financial Viability**: When deciding whether to follow an appealing pursuit that will introduce more control into your work life, seek evidence of whether people are willing to pay for it. If you find this evidence, continue. If not, move on.

RULE 4: Think Small, Act Big

The Meaningful Life of Pardis Sabeti—The Importance of Mission

- Happiness comes from the fact that you build a career on a clear and compelling mission.
- Mission provides a sense of purpose and energy, traits that can help you avoid becoming cynical in your profession and embrace your work with enthusiasm.
- To have a mission is to have a unifying focus for your career.

Mission Requires Capital

- A good career mission is similar to a scientific breakthrough—it's an innovation waiting to be discovered in the adjacent possible¹ of your field.
- But you must first get to the cutting edge of your field, the process of which builds up rare and valuable skills and therefore builds up your store of career capital. Similarly, identifying a compelling mission once you get to the cutting edge can be seen as investing your career capital to acquire a desirable trait in your career.
- Advancing to the cutting edge requires you to focus on a narrow collection of subjects for a potentially long time. Once you get to the cutting edge, however, and discover a mission in the adjacent possible, you must go after it with zeal.

Missions Require Little Bets

¹ Newport explains the adjacent possible is a spontaneous formation of a complex chemical structures from simple structures. In other words, “we take the ideas we’ve inherited or that we’ve stumbled across, and we jigger them together into some new shape.” Understanding the adjacent possible and its role in innovation is the first piece in a line of argument that explains how to identify a good career mission.

- Great missions are transformed into great successes as the result of using small and achievable projects—little bets—to explore the concrete possibilities surrounding a compelling idea.
- Rather than believing you have to start with a big idea or plan out a whole project in advance, you must make a methodical series of *little bets* about what might be a good direction, learning critical information from lots of little failures and from small but significant wins. This rapid and frequent feedback allows you to find unexpected avenues and arrive at extraordinary outcomes.
- Example of little bets: Chris Rock testing new jokes at a lesser-known comedy club.
- If career capital makes it possible to identify a compelling mission, then it's a strategy of little bets that gives you a good shot of succeeding in this mission.

Mission Requires Marketing

- Great missions are transformed into great successes as the result of finding projects that satisfy the **law of remarkability**, which requires that an idea inspires people to remark about it, and is launched in a venue where such remarking is made easy.
- A good mission should be remarkable in two different ways. First, it should be remarkable in the literal sense of compelling people to remark about it (Purple Cow). It should also be spread in a venue that supports these remarks.
- **Summary of Rule 4:** The core idea of this book is simple: To construct work you love, you must first build career capital by mastering rare and valuable skills, and then cash in this capital for the type of traits that define compelling careers. **Mission is one of those traits.**
- Mission is one of the most important traits you can acquire with your career capital. But adding this trait to your working life is not simple. Once you have the capital to identify a good mission, you must still work to make it succeed. By using little bets and the law of

remarkability, you greatly increase your chances of finding ways to transform your mission from a compelling idea into a compelling career.

Career Capital Building Techniques

- Research bible: Once a week, requiring yourself to summarize in your bible a paper you think might be relevant to your research or area of study. For me this would be summarizing a law review article or case relevant to employment law, negotiation, civil procedure et cetera.
- Hour-tally routine: Tally how much you work on a given project.
- Theory notebook routine: Brainstorm a idea, concept, case (in my profession) you are working on, and use a notebook to formally record the results at the conclusion of the session.

Definition of Relevant Terms:

- Career Capital: A description of the skills you have that are rare and valuable to the working world.
- Deliberate Practice: Requires your to stretch past where you are comfortable, receive constant feedback and undertake a modification of your efforts when necessary, work intensely and give your full attention to the subject.
- Passion Mindset: An approach to your working life in which you focus on the value your job is offering you. This mindset stands in contrast to the craftsman persona. The passion mindset ultimately leads to chronic dissatisfaction and daydreaming about the better jobs you imagine existing out there waiting to be discovered.
- Adjacent Possible: The spontaneous formation of a complex chemical structures from simple structures. In other words, we take the ideas we've inherited or that we've stumbled across, and we jigger them together into some new shape. Understanding the adjacent

possible and its role in innovation is the first link in a chain of argument that explains how to identify a good career mission.

- Mission: Another important trait to acquire with your career capital when creating work you love. It provides a unifying goal for your career.