

# Sustaining Passion for Your Day Job

Avoid burnout and find energy for the daily grind

*Maggie Johnson*

Bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, I walked into the building for my first day at the office. My outfit was carefully constructed and every hair in its place. I was ready to hit the ground running and become “Employee of the Month” on day one. I sat down to begin working on things that were sure to be riveting, engaging, and intellectually stimulating . . . only to find a stack of papers that needed to be filed in alphabetical order, folders that needed to be labeled, and a glitchy computer. This is the narrative every time I start a new job.

Passion for one’s job is a tricky thing to maintain. It can often feel like a firecracker that bursts into flames and quickly fizzles out. If you’re like me, the lows of passion are much more present than the highs. Passion is a powerful motivator, so what should we do when it wanes? How can we remain consistent in our work, parenting, volunteering, and church-going even when our feelings of passion fade?

## **Stages of Passion**

From the initial waves of excitement about a new job to the burnout stage where you’re contemplating quitting, we’ve all had our own experiences with attempting to live passion-filled lives at work. For me, it’s helpful to identify which stage of passion I’m in, which one I’m heading toward, and which one needs cultivating.

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The stage of passion that’s most identifiable is the eruptive kind. It feels like a churning in your gut or a fire shut up in your bones. It’s that obsession you just can’t turn off. There are many people in the Bible who display this type of passion, but my favorite is Jacob. Jacob was obsessed with blessing. He lied for it, cheated for it, worked for it, and ultimately wrestled God for it.

The next stage is what I like to call percolating passion. This is the gradual onset and continual maintenance of passion that simmers just underneath the surface. It doesn’t erupt; it quietly persists.

Neither one of these stages is inferior to the other. Each one has its own strengths and weaknesses. Passion is an emotion, which can make its very essence seem elusive and intangible. Like all emotions, it will ebb and flow. On the days of increased ebbing, we must find something to sustain our efforts. The key is to keep passion alive—no matter what form.

## Mama Said

As a Millennial entering the workforce, I'm learning how to be consistent. There are plenty of days when I lie in bed and internally reason with myself: *If you don't get out of bed, you don't get paid.* Even in a job that interests you, monotony has a tendency to set in.

Growing up, my mom had several short sayings that have stuck with me. She'd cock her head to one side and recite something like, "Delayed obedience is still disobedience," or "Pretty is as pretty does." One comment, in particular, sounds off like an alarm every time my performance mirrors my lack of interest: "You can't be faithful in the big things unless you're faithful in the small things."

A lot of growth takes place when we remain consistent in the small things. We are challenged to be women of our word—women who keep commitments and do good work, even when it's uncomfortable. We become more likely to cultivate an atmosphere of intentionality and purpose. When passion ebbs, commitment will sustain our work. Commitment is the nudge that keeps us chipping away at the mountain when it starts to feel immovable. I firmly believe that passion and commitment go hand-in-hand.

## Tunnel Vision

Passion and commitment are not things we can muster up all on our own. Monotony at work is tiresome enough to throw any passionate soul off the tracks. As Christians, I believe we are called to live lives of passion and to do our work with gusto—but it's a marathon, not a sprint. So how can we live a consistently passionate life at work? When it comes to keeping my fire ignited, there are four things that I have to do.

**1. Commit to community.** We cannot do it alone. The quickest way for passion to flee is for us to wander out into the desert by ourselves. We need other people by our side to affirm the work of our hands, to cheer us on in our victories, and to remind us what we're working for when we forget. Even in our creation, we were made to be in community with other people. Genesis affirms this truth: "Then God said, 'Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us.'" The *us* in this verse is the Trinity. We have been fashioned after a relational God. Community is part of our spiritual DNA—Adam and Eve were made to work alongside one another. We cannot sustain passion in our daily work without the support of a strong community of other people who are trying to do their best at work. A passion that's shared is a passion that lasts.

**2. See the "why" in your work.** It's easy to get caught up in the details of a job and forget why you're doing it in the first place. I'll be first to admit I'm often the person who gets so stuck in the little tasks that she forgets to look up. I forget to see the bigger narrative. The *why* behind our passion is just as important as the *how*. Intrigue fades when we forget our purpose. For me, it's important to take a step back and remember why I started my job. I have to remember that the value of my work isn't derived from how quickly a spreadsheet was updated but from the overarching purpose of my

company, which resonates deep in my heart. This is my motto: purpose over process. Focusing on your purpose instead of obsessing over the process will trump monotony every time.

**3. Wait at the well.** Passion for what you do will ultimately fade unless it comes from something other than us. As broken people, we do not have the means to uphold anything by ourselves. This is why it's imperative that we stay close to the well. Jesus is the source of salvation, but he's also the source of our passion. He modeled sustainable passion for us when he carried the cross to Calvary. Passion is a direct result of closeness to Christ. King David, one of the most passionate people in the Bible, reveals his greatest passion in Psalm 42:1–2 when he says, "As the deer longs for streams of water, so I long for you, O God. I thirst for God, the living God. When can I go and stand before him?" Passion in your day-to-day work remains when it is rooted in God.

**4. Reprioritize rest.** My professional passion scurries off quickest when I'm tired. Another phrase my mom used to say frequently was, "You can't pour out of an empty vessel." Feeling fizzled out? Take some time to rest and recharge. If you're totally spent and feel uninterested in things that normally excite you, both at work and in life, it might be because you're operating on empty. Try to build some intentional time of rest into your schedule. If you're like me, you might even need to write it down in your calendar so you keep yourself accountable.

It's easy to make sustaining passion in our jobs all about what we bring to the table and how often we can pick ourselves up by our bootstraps. The truth is that God is our sustainer. We don't have the gumption to get the job done on our own—at least not the way we *could* with God's help. The psalmist proclaims the sustaining power of our God in Psalm 73:26 when he says, "My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; he is mine forever."

My passion may wane and falter after that first day of work, but God is my great sustainer.

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