

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

I have a job that pays pretty well. I don't completely hate it but I'm bored. I can't quit because I have a lot of financial responsibilities for my family but how do I feel passion in my work life again? I don't even know what I would do if I had all the money in the world. Help!

Lisa R.

Dear Lisa,

You are certainly not alone. A good friend of mine talks about “golden handcuffs” – being in a job that doesn't fulfill you, but pays the bills and affords the material things you need and desire in life. The secret to finding the way out of your present dilemma is to develop a plan that focuses on what you love to do, with a few clear steps to begin to make it happen.

First, explore the issue of what you are really passionate about by asking yourself two questions: (1) What would I do if I won the lottery and had all the money I would ever need to take care of my family and me? And (2) What did I love to do when I was about ten years old? The answers to these questions will help you discover the long-forgotten urgings of your heart. What did you love before you were socialized into becoming who everyone else thought you should be, rather than who you really are? If you won the lottery (after buying that new Jaguar, of course), how would you spend your time? Reflect on these questions and write down your thoughts.

When you have a clearer idea of your most deeply felt passions, begin to think outside the box and consider ways that you can incorporate them into your life. I'm not suggesting that, like Gauguin, you blow off your career, leave your family a farewell note, and sail off to Tahiti to paint. (No one ever talks about Mrs. Gauguin and the five kids left behind in Paris) Rather, find responsible ways to move toward your heart's desires. Sometimes that means following a new career path and sometimes it means incorporating your passions into your life as hobbies or part-time work.

I know of a woman who always wanted to be an artist, and imagined living in Europe, painting, and having wonderful conversations with other artists over cups of espresso. At midlife, she found herself in a successful career as an accountant for a large U.S. corporation. With a daughter in college and a hefty mortgage, she felt, as you do, that she couldn't follow her dreams because of her responsibilities. By honoring both her adult responsibilities and her desire for passion in life, she investigated her options creatively, and was willing to take some risks. Today, she lives in Rome where she is the financial manager of a highly respected art museum. She takes lots of art classes, paints on weekends, earns an excellent living (which allows her to take care of her daughter's tuition and more), and, yes, has wonderful conversations with artists over espresso.

This example shows the power of “both/and” thinking (I can BOTH meet my responsibilities AND find my passion in life) instead of “either/or” thinking (I must EITHER be a responsible adult OR take off to Tahiti). Can you imagine creative ways to

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meet both your responsibilities and your heart, and then set a plan into action?
Remember: You are the author of your own life.

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