Passion at work:
Cultivating worker passion as a cornerstone of talent development

Deloitte University Press

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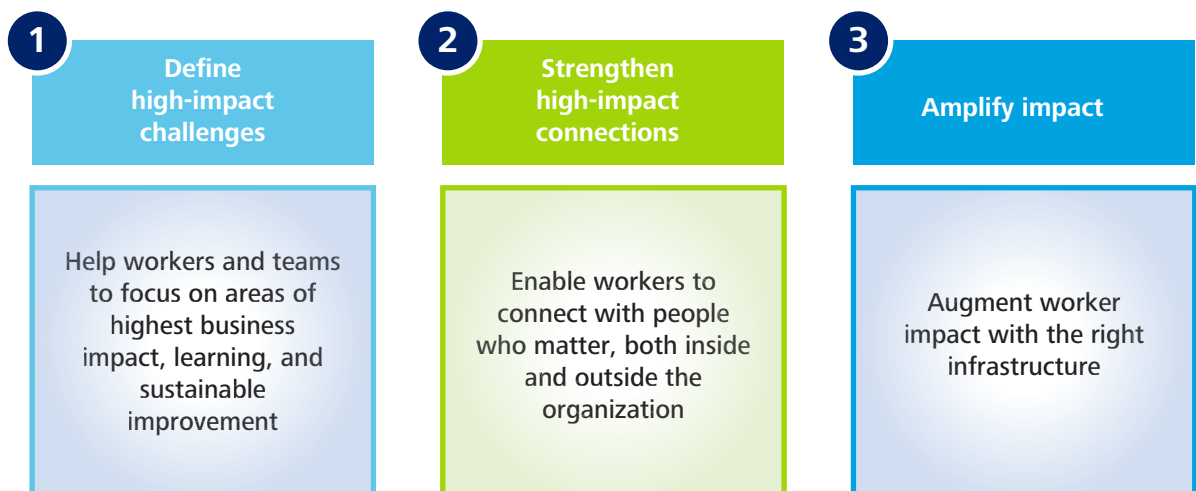
Cultivating passion at work

How to unlock the passion of the Explorer in your workforce

Passion either flourishes or disappears when put in certain environments. So how can companies create environments that unlock the potential of their employees? Organizations should rethink their work environments—from the physical space to virtual environments to management practices—to understand how policies, practices, and actions impact the attributes of passion.

From the analysis of our survey data, we have identified four organizational components that are most strongly correlated with a person being an Explorer. These are the organizational attributes that describe what passionate workers are likely drawn to in an organization and therefore have voluntarily opted into. At the same time, these organizational attributes illustrate work environment characteristics that are more likely to cultivate passion within workers. They are:

Figure 5. Goals of effective work environment design

1 Define high-impact challenges	2 Strengthen high-impact connections	3 Amplify impact
Help workers and teams to focus on areas of highest business impact, learning, and sustainable improvement	Enable workers to connect with people who matter, both inside and outside the organization	Augment worker impact with the right infrastructure

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A TALE OF TWO WORK ENVIRONMENTS

KimChi Tyler Chen doesn't shrink from challenges. In fact, she might be described as having a fearless, take-no-prisoners approach to pursuing her goals. As a communications manager at Intuit, she recently acted as the executive producer of a successful TEDxIntuit event, a role which took her well out of her comfort zone and occasionally made her question her abilities. It is also a role she asked for. "Getting opportunities like TEDx is the reward as far as I'm concerned," she said. "Intuit gives me opportunities, but also supports me— for instance, by making sure I had access to and support from the previous executive producer. As long as you don't fall too hard, you get new opportunities."

Yet interestingly, in her former career in broadcast journalism, Chen says that she was "in a service role—I delivered what I was asked. I didn't seek challenges." The difference she describes is a difference in the work environment. "In broadcast journalism, overall it was very high pressure, and if you failed, you felt like you might be fired or demoted, although individual managers were much more supportive." As a result, Chen focused most of her questing disposition on hobbies outside of work: on building a photography business and a video biography business, and on creating an award-winning documentary. Chen herself was able to parlay her passions into a more satisfying job, but her former employer didn't see the benefits. Most organizations could benefit from figuring out how to harness that kind of energy and enthusiasm for the company's benefit as well.[18]

1. Workers are encouraged to work cross-functionally (40 percent increase in likelihood to be an Explorer)[19]

2. Workers are encouraged to work on projects they are interested in, even on those outside of their responsibilities (34 percent increase in likelihood to be an Explorer)

3. Workers are encouraged to connect with others in their industry (17 percent increase in likelihood to be an Explorer)

4. The company often engages with customers to innovate new product and service ideas (14 percent increase in likelihood to be an Explorer)

These four characteristics are well aligned with the attributes of passion. When workers are encouraged to work cross-functionally and connect with others in their industry, they tap into their connecting disposition. When workers are encouraged to work on projects they are interested in instead of (or as well as) those they are assigned to, they tap into their questing disposition. When workers are encouraged to engage with customers and other ecosystem partners to innovate together, they are seeing the impact they are making, helping to cultivate commitment to domain.

While these four organizational attributes turned out to be the most predictive of passion in our survey, other tactics exist that companies can deploy to unlock the attributes of passion. In our study of various work environments and their impact on performance, we identified three goals that companies should work toward when building their physical and virtual environments, as well as in designing their management practices (see figure 5). First, companies should define *high-impact challenges* by helping workers and teams to focus on the areas of highest business impact, learning, and sustainable improvement. Second, companies should *strengthen high-impact connections* by enabling workers to connect with people who matter, both inside and

outside the organization. Finally, companies should *amplify impact* by augmenting workers' impact with the right infrastructure. By building environments with these three goals in mind, companies can help unleash passion in their workforce.[20]

Next, we will review some specific tactics that companies can use to unleash the attributes of passion while focusing on the three goals of effective work environment design.

Building commitment to domain

Helping individual workers understand the impact that they are having on the company's (and even the broader business ecosystem's) performance is a great catalyst for developing commitment to domain. Organizations should share the key challenges they are facing with all workers—from the executive suite to the front line. Workers should be given a chance to work on those challenges if they are interested, even if their job description does not call for it. For example, Geoffrey West, the theoretical physicist, knew early on that he wanted to learn more about the "basic forces of nature," which fostered a commitment to the domain of scientific research. His interests started in the field of fundamental physics. Through his careers at Stanford University, a national lab, and the Santa Fe institute, he was able to see the impact he was making on the field of science by solving challenges and moving his chosen area forward. Eventually, pursuing a personal interest, West explored the field of biology and then embarked upon understanding complex systems at the Santa Fe Institute. Thus, while West switched organizations and roles, he was still committed to the domain of scientific research, but he wouldn't have made the connections between his work and complex systems if he hadn't first had latitude to dabble outside his assigned field of expertise.

Connecting performance to impact is an important and often missing element. Companies often have corporate-wide performance metrics that are irrelevant to, or

misaligned with the goals of, specific units. The managers who were able to build commitment to domain were able to modify or interpret corporate metrics to make them relevant and meaningful for their teams. At Clif Bar, Diana Simmons developed a matrix of competencies and metrics that she believed were most important for her team: "We still use the company's 'five ingredients' (connect, create, inspire, own it, and be yourself) framework as well. But my team is an influence-based, cross-functional product launch team—it seemed obvious that we needed a unique set of skills and leadership tools to succeed in this role."[21] Similarly, at TripAdvisor, Fatema Waliji says her group created its own performance management system to reflect the most relevant metrics and goals: "HR is fully supportive of it, and it's easy for me to gauge my impact on my team because the metrics make sense to our work."[22]

Unlocking the questing disposition

To unlock a worker's questing disposition, companies should create experimentation platforms: environments that combine tools, processes, and management practices focused on rapidly prototyping solutions. Some companies, like Intuit, have excelled at creating these platforms. Intuit's Design for Delight program allows teams to work directly with customers in order to address an issue through a rapid prototyping process.[23]

Experimentation is often associated with failures: Not all prototypes work. The way companies handle these failures has a direct impact on whether workers will experiment. Environments where failures are not an option discourage any desire to experiment, especially if a worker's job is at stake. These are environments that value predictability and scalable efficiency and view questing as undesirable. However, Simmons found it hard to specifically define a time she failed: "Every day is a series of 'mini-failures,' I guess, because I'm

always testing my ideas and approaches with others. I always focus on the larger goal, and as long as this goal is still correct, even if the tactics you take toward that goal do not work, that is not a failure."[24] Her remark illustrates how Clif Bar's culture of innovation supports risk taking as long as it moves the company toward a larger goal.

Failures should be acceptable, especially if they are cheap and quick. Modular processes and products allow for experiments within each module, and even failures do not need to threaten the entire process, or product. Companies should try to redesign their processes and products to reduce risk and facilitate experimentation.

But in order to learn, experimentation is not enough. Workers should be given timely (as close to real-time as possible) and context-specific feedback. Additionally, workers should be allowed time and space for reflection and tools to capture and share lessons learned. The challenge at many companies today is how to make this process seamless. At many organizations, feedback, reflection, and capture are extra steps that workers have to take in addition to their daily activities. However, tools such as gamification platforms can integrate these processes more into daily work.

Unlocking the connecting disposition

Connections can lead to new learning. Companies should create environments—both physical and virtual—that help workers to develop new connections and also to strengthen their existing relationships. For example, companies can create environments that foster serendipitous encounters. Many firms already build their physical environments with the common areas strategically positioned to allow workers to "bump into each other." These environments should also be developed in virtual settings. For example, cameras could be located in the common areas where remote workers can see their colleagues and interact

with them. Additionally, screenshots from whiteboards in common areas could be distributed to enable a remote team to comment and add their perspectives, even if they were not part of the original serendipitous discussion.

Companies should develop platforms for collaboration with customers and other ecosystem players to share knowledge and develop solutions. A key aspect of such a collaboration platform is tools for connecting, including automatically generated reputation profiles. One example of a collaboration platform is that developed by RallyTeam, one of the start-ups that presented at the San Francisco Tech Crunch Disrupt's Battlefield competition. The company challenged the usefulness of corporate training programs and instead suggested a way to facilitate on-the-job learning. It developed a platform that connects workers interested in learning a new skill (often outside their job description) with opportunities in need of extra resources. The results are documented, and workers receive performance badges, share project snapshots, and record additional "skills" on their online profiles. RallyTeam provides both a platform for connecting workers to opportunities and tools for creating action-based reputation profiles. The emergence of companies such as RallyTeam is evidence of the need for workers to connect and learn both inside and outside the four walls of their enterprise.

Work environments and management practices that cultivate the passionate disposition will not only help stimulate and engage workers who are already passionate but also allow those who do not demonstrate all the attributes of a passionate worker to cultivate the missing ones. Sadly, many executives focus more on attracting and retaining talented workers than on designing the right work environment, even though an environment where workers can learn fast, unlock their passion, and improve performance helps attract and retain workers. Word will spread that the company develops workers more rapidly than anyone else, and people will line up to apply. And why

would anyone leave the environment where they can learn and improve performance most effectively?

When evaluating your work environment, consider the statements that the Explorers we interviewed made. How will your organization treat workers who think this way?

- I never ask for permission. I just do it.

- From one perspective, I have a series of mini-failures every day, but I don't view that as failure.

- I get restless often.

- I want my work to make an impact on something important to society.

- I like to know that what I'm doing matters to the company.

- I don't want to do anything that I can't learn from.

- I have a goal, and I'll stay as long as my management supports me in getting the experiences I need to move closer to that goal.

Recruiting Explorers

While developing the right work environment should be a priority, it is hard to ignore recruiting. Current recruiting practices at many companies are too rigid and often focus on analyzing a candidate's credentials, overlooking his or her potential. Instead, companies should understand how candidates have demonstrated commitment to domain, questing, and connecting attributes in either their previous jobs or outside their career. Evidence such as participation in online communities (for example, GitHub) and contributing to forums can show that the candidate is truly passionate about the field.

Additionally, both organizations and workers should seek to be aligned in terms of values or personal aspirations. For example, early in his career, Dave Hoover faced a choice: Join a well-established financial institution's technology group or a two-person start-up. At the time, he had three young kids and a mortgage, so the safety of the established organization seemed attractive and, in fact, would have provided an opportunity for advancement within the IT field. However, Hoover was also passionate about blogging and being a thought leader in the area of learning. He realized

that his interest in blogging and speaking at conferences would help further the business goals and mission of the small start-up, while at the financial institution it would, at best, be tolerated but might also be viewed as a liability and prohibited. "I really enjoyed sharing ideas," says Hoover. "So the right choice was clear for me. I wanted the organization that my passion best aligned with." Hoover's gamble paid off, and he has enjoyed a successful career as a cofounder of the start-up Obtiva, which was later acquired by Groupon. Hoover went on to cofound Dev Bootcamp, a short-term immersive "boot camp" program that transforms novices into web developers; this operation was recently acquired by Kaplan.[25]

Similarly, Clif Bar's Simmons has spent her career looking for work environments that aligned with her desire to impact the environment and improve sustainability. Over time, she realized that she also needed work that took advantage of her particular skills and strengths. At Clif Bar, a company committed to sustainability where she led a number of successful product launches and worked to make the corporate sustainability initiative part of every product, she found alignment between the company's goals, her skills, and her values. When the work environment and personal values and goals are aligned, workers are more likely to demonstrate the attributes of the passionate and make an impact on both the company and the broader ecosystem.

In the appendix, "Suggested behavioral questions for recruiting Explorers," we provide some situational questions that recruiting teams can use to identify the passionate.

Retaining Explorers

Designing the right work environment helps retain Explorers. After all, if they do not learn and improve their performance quickly, they will look for another environment where these objectives can be satisfied. Additionally, as we discussed earlier, retaining Explorers

with financial incentives is not sustainable because this tactic does not effectively impact Explore retention. Employers could use talent surveys to assess whether they are cultivating the passionate and to determine the impact of work environment initiatives.

We built a predictive model to help identify measurable characteristics that can best predict whether or not someone will be passionate. Listed in descending order, these are the top 10 predictors of whether a person is a passionate worker. These indicators could be used by companies in their worker surveys to understand the state of passion within the organization:

1. To what extent do you love your work?

2. In my job I'm encouraged to work on projects I am interested in, outside of my direct responsibilities.

3. In my job I'm encouraged to work cross-functionally.

4. I try to incorporate outside perspectives into my work.

5. I talk to my friends about what I like about my work.

6. I usually find myself working extra hours, even though I don't have to.

7. In my most recent performance evaluations, I was rated as meeting or exceeding expectations.

8. I choose to be available to work 24/7, sometimes even on vacations.

9. My company provides opportunities to connect with others in my industry.

10. My company often engages with customers to innovate new product/service ideas.

Used in corporate talent surveys, questions that assess these factors can help leaders assess the health of a firm's workforce and, in conjunction with a firm definition of worker passion, point to a set of levers that can help improve morale among passionate workers. Additionally, companies can cross-reference this talent survey data against performance evaluations to see if Explorers are getting the recognition they deserve. This could help companies fine-tune the performance evaluation process. Finally, the organization could engage the passionate workers identified through the talent survey to help redesign the work environment to cultivate passionate attributes in other workers.

One of the keys to retaining passionate workers is to make sure they do not feel alone. Connecting them with other passionate workers and allowing teams of Explorers to work together on challenges, coupled with a motivating recognition system, can help these workers feel energized.

The bottom line

In this report, we have made a number of recommendations on how firms can cultivate, attract, and retain Explorers while simultaneously advocating a new view of passion within the workforce. In aggregate, this challenge could seem overwhelming. However, at their core, our recommendations boil down to the following three principles:

1) Look for where your preconceived notions about the profile of a passionate worker are stopping you from identifying talent both externally and internally. Passionate workers come from all age groups, educational levels, and backgrounds.

2) Recognize that passionate workers outearn and outperform their peers because of their internal drive for sustained learning and performance improvement. Take risks to cultivate these dispositions, and passionate workers will take risks for you in return.

3) Cultivation of passionate workers internally is probably the most effective way to increase the proportion of passionate workers in your organization. Organizations should evaluate their work environments to understand where they cultivate or discourage passion. The right work environments will help attract, retain, and develop Explorers.

Appendix: Suggested behavioral questions for recruiting Explorers

Below are some questions interviewers could use to test worker passion. These are just suggestions. Each company should reflect on what the various attributes of passion mean for its work environment and develop its own approach to testing for attributes of worker passion.

Commitment to domain:

What is the market, area, industry, or function that you want to impact in 5–10 years?

What does success look like?

How can this job or position help you achieve the desired impact?

Individuals with commitment to domain will have an area that they want to impact professionally. For example, a person may want to build online learning communities or change the way diabetes education is conducted. To test further for commitment to domain, an interviewer can ask what the candidate has done to date in this area. A person with true commitment to domain will often already have taken steps in this area and see your job or position as a way to accelerate his or her efforts.

What roles have you taken on in your career to date?

How did these roles and experiences move you closer to achieving your goals?

Individuals committed to a domain often interpret their experiences both within and outside the domain as meaningful to achieving their goals. For example, a candidate who wants to make a difference in the developing world will likely view his or her experience at a technology start-up as a stepping stone. He or she may view the skills and learnings from managing uncertainty and understanding technology trends as important skills for helping communities in emerging economies develop.

Questing:

When faced with a new project or challenge, what is your first thought?

Look for candidates who view new challenges as opportunities to learn new skills and improve performance. Workers with a questing disposition will often welcome new challenges with excitement and anticipation instead of fear and concern.

Describe a situation where you failed. How did you adjust? What did you learn?

An individual with a questing disposition will often view failures as necessary steps to achieving a goal. Failures, they think, are a necessary part of experimentation. Moreover, passionate workers may not even see these as failures but as the steps that get them closer to making an impact. "I have many small failures every day," stated an Explorer we interviewed.

Connecting:

Describe your approach to understanding a topic of which you had no prior experience.

As a part of his or her approach, an individual with a connecting disposition will reach out to others—for example, communities and teams inside and outside the organization—to learn about a new area. For example, an individual may attend a meeting on a topic in digital health to meet others interested in the topic and tap into their knowledge. He or she may also join a discussion board where individuals share ideas. Finally, picking up a phone and calling a professor who is conducting research in the area is not a challenge for a person with a connecting disposition.

Describe a time when you helped someone solve a challenge.

An individual with a connecting disposition will have broad networks he or she can leverage to learn together and share best practices. Look for networks that are outside of the team or even the organization that an individual belongs to. The key is to find those who are proactive about building broad trust-based networks that help them learn and improve performance.

Bonus question:

Describe the last time you took on a challenge you were not sure you could successfully complete. What did you do? What did you learn?

This question could help test several dispositions at once. A passionate worker will first be excited by an unexpected challenge: "When I was asked to develop a new process, I was excited. This is an opportunity to learn a new skill and to make an impact!" Additionally, a passionate worker will tap into his or her networks inside and outside the company to get up to speed on the topic and share learnings and insights. A passionate worker will likely experiment rapidly, ask for real-time feedback, and reflect on the lessons learned. She or he will not be afraid to take a step back and reframe the issue or the underlying assumptions as needed. And most likely, his or her solution will be unexpected and extensive.

Endnotes

1. John Hagel III, John Seely Brown, and Tamara Samoylova, *Unlocking the passion of the Explorer: A report in the 2013 Shift Index series*, Deloitte University Press, September 17, 2013, http://dupress.com/articles/unlocking-the-passion-of-the-explorer/.

2. Theodore Roosevelt, excerpt from "Citizenship in a republic" (speech delivered at the Sorbonne, Paris, France, April 23, 1910).

3. Christopher Strieter, interview with Maggie Wooll and Mengmeng Chen, September 4, 2014.

4. See the collection of articles comprising the 2013 Shift Index report, http://dupress.com/tag/2013-shift-index/.

5. Molly Hoyt, interview with Maggie Wooll, Tamara Samoylova, and Mengmeng Chen, August 13, 2014.

6. Malay Gandhi (managing director, Rock Health), presentation delivered at Rock Health headquarters in San Francisco, California, July 25, 2014.

7. For these findings, odds ratio estimates from multinomial logistic modeling were done for different talent archetypes relative to workers showing no attributes of passion.

8. KimChi Tyler Chen, interview with Maggie Wooll and Mengmeng Chen, August 25, 2014.

9. While the 18.7 percent for ages 65 and older may strike the layman as being significant, a chi-square test determined no statistically significant difference in the proportion of passionate workers across age groups. The seeming discrepancy is largely due to the smaller sample size of workers 65 and over (just 150 of the 3,039 workers surveyed).

10. Fatema Waliji, phone interview with Maggie Wooll, Tamara Samoylova, and Mengmeng Chen, September 15, 2014.

11. Geoffrey West, phone interview with Maggie Wooll, Tamara Samoylova, and Mengmeng Chen, September 9, 2014.

12. Diana Simmons, phone interview with Maggie Wooll and Tamara Samoylova, September 10, 2014.

13. Mandar Apte, phone interview with Tamara Samoylova and Mengmeng Chen, September 17, 2014.

14. "Toyota Pulls the Andon Cord," Engineering Management Blog, January 27, 2010, http://cr4.globalspec.com/blogentry/11336, accessed September 29, 2014.

15. The test of proportions at the 95 percent confidence level came out to be statistically significant (p-value close to zero).

16. The test of proportions at the 95 percent confidence level came out to be statistically significant (p-value close to zero).

17. This conclusion is based on the results of multinomial logistic modeling done for different talent archetypes relative to workers showing no attributes of passion.

18. Chen interview.

19. For these organizational attributes, odds ratio estimates from multinomial logistic modeling were done for different talent archetypes relative to workers showing no attributes of passion.

20. John Hagel III, John Seely Brown, and Tamara Samoylova, *Work environment redesign: Accelerating talent development and performance improvement*, Deloitte University Press, June 3, 2013, http://dupress.com/articles/work-environment-redesign/.

21. Simmons interview.

22. Waliji interview.

23. Hagel, Seely Brown, and Samoylova, *Work environment redesign*.

24. Simmons interview.

25. Dave Hoover, phone interview with Tamara Samoylova and Maggie Wooll, August 14, 2014; Dev Bootcamp, "Frequently asked questions," http://devbootcamp.com/faq/, accessed September 14, 2014.

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About the Deloitte Center for the Edge

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Below the surface of current events, buried amid the latest headlines and competitive moves, executives are beginning to see the outlines of a new business landscape. Performance pressures are mounting. The old ways of doing things are generating diminishing returns. Companies are having harder time making money—and increasingly, their very survival is challenged. Executives must learn ways not only to do their jobs differently, but also to do them better. That, in part, requires understanding the broader changes to the operating environment:

- What is really driving intensifying competitive pressures?

- What long-term opportunities are available?

- What needs to be done today to change course?

Decoding the deep structure of this economic shift will allow executives to thrive in the face of intensifying competition and growing economic pressure. The good news is that the actions needed to address short-term economic conditions are also the best long-term measures to take advantage of the opportunities these challenges create.

For more information about the center's unique perspective on these challenges, visit www.deloitte.com/centerforedge.