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Pursuing Passion
Volume One

"The Power of Pull examines the 'how question'—how can we effectively address our most pressing challenges in a rapidly changing and increasingly interdependent world? In *The Power of Pull*, John Hagel, John Seely Brown, and Lang Davison highlight fascinating new ways in which passionate thinking, creative solutions, and committed action can—and will—make it possible for us to seize opportunities and remain in step with change." - [Bill Clinton](#)

"The Power of Pull will do for our 21st-century information-age institutional leadership what Peter Drucker's *The Concept of the Corporation* did for industrial-era management. This book begins to create a body of learnable principles that will revolutionize our ability to access and work with knowledge flows." - [Newt Gingrich](#)

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Reshaping Relationships through Passion

I have always been shy. As a child, I learned to turn inward as a way to protect myself against an environment that I perceived to be very threatening. I saw relationships as temporary at best and full of turmoil at worst, and would frequently retreat into a personal world with a good book rather than interact with new people. I had such a severe reaction to my first day at kindergarten, for example, that my parents decided to give me a reprieve until first grade. Shyness is a survival mechanism and it helped me to navigate through some very challenging times.

The Big Shift suggests we are moving away from a world where stocks of knowledge and short-lived transactions are the key to success. In its place, we find a world where participation in many, diverse flows of knowledge and long-term, trust-based relationships determine success.

For shy people like me, the Big Shift can be deeply challenging. The Big Shift suggests we are moving away from a world where stocks of knowledge and short-lived transactions are the key to success. In its place, we find a world where participation in many, diverse flows of knowledge and long-term, trust-based relationships determine success. In this new world, shy people can be at a significant disadvantage. We run the risk of becoming increasingly stressed and marginalized by the extroverts who welcome the opportunity to broaden and deepen relationships. They thrive in crowded rooms while we are deeply uncomfortable with exposing and sharing.

The need to reshape relationships

For everyone, whether shy or not, the Big Shift poses other challenges. We generally treat relationships as sources of stability in a confusing, complicated and rapidly changing world. We seek out people who share our backgrounds and experi-

ences, those who can make us comfortable and reassure us that our ways of viewing the world are valid and enduring. Once we find these people and connect with them, we develop relationships that comfort us rather than challenge us to achieve our full potential. The strength of these relationships also becomes a vulnerability. Lulling us into complacency, they insulate us from new perspectives and practices far more appropriate to the changing world around us.

In sharp contrast, passion holds the key to creating and shaping relationships that will help us thrive in a rapidly changing world. It motivates even the shyest of us to reach out and connect with others in ways that become catalysts for creativity and growth. Passion fosters a uniquely strong and productive bond that provides both the stability and stimulus needed to continue to grow and succeed in a constantly changing world.

Overcoming inhibitions

Though passionate people may be socially awkward or shy, their passion compels them to step outside of their social comfort zones to find others who share their passion and who may be able to help them reach new levels of performance. Passion is a powerful driving force. The internal momentum it fosters gives passionate people the will and enthusiasm needed to overcome social inhibitions that otherwise discourage them from connecting with new people.

If there is any doubt about this, consider the area where the force of passion is best understood: love. The archetypal “laying it on the line” in pursuit of romantic connection is understood by even the shyest or most conservative of people. An uncomfortable or risky overture of some sort is necessary to the formation of virtually every new relationship. Each one of us has experienced the drive of passion in this way, which makes the

analogy—while limited—a powerful illustration of how passion enables connection irrespective of social ability.

However, the key difference is a very important one: the relationship sought by a passionate creative (as opposed to a passionate romantic) is a means to a common end, and not an end in itself. When creatives form a productive connection based on shared passion, they feed each other's energy and build momentum toward greater achievements than would have been possible independently—something that all talented individuals intuitively understand.

Passion plays another role here as well. In addition to motivating us to seek out others who share our passion, it becomes a beacon attracting others to us. Passionate people speak and write about their passion. They share their passion with others. They can't help it – it is their passion after all. This

makes others aware of our passion. We soon find others approaching us because of something that we wrote or said. Before we know it, even more connections are established and relationships built around these shared passions.

I found intriguing evidence of the role of passions in expanding our relationships in the Shift Index that the Deloitte Center for the Edge published last year. This research discovered a striking correlation between the degree of passion that employees have in their work and their participation in knowledge flows of various types – measured by such proxies as participation in conferences, professional associations or social media. Passionate people are much more connected than those who indicate little passion in their work.

Shy people can experience a virtuous cycle. In overcoming their inhibitions to forge these energetic connections, they find that they are indeed able to

pursue their passions more effectively than if they remain isolated in their own shells. As they experience this success, they are motivated to reach out even more broadly to build expanding networks in search of new relationships with people who share their passion. Though their instincts may still encourage isolation, they yield instead to the much more powerful force of passion.

**Come together, right now:
The diversity of passionate communities**

Through passion, the kind of people we connect with changes as well. Whether shy or not, we all have a tendency form bonds with people who look, believe and act as we do. Rather than helping us to overcome conventional geographic, demographic, ethnic and professional boundaries, our relationships often serve to harden and strengthen these boundaries. Romeo and Juliet's love was so taboo because it compelled them to transcend conventional social boundaries (note that, even

here, it was romantic passion that gave rise to this inspiring exception).

In times of rapid change, this tendency becomes even more pronounced. In a previous essay, I discussed the research of Bill Bishop, in his recent book, *The Big Sort*. He documented a sustained and significant population shift in the United States as people increasingly congregate in neighborhoods with others who share their demographic attributes, lifestyles and values. Many have worried about the polarization of society occurring in the virtual world of the Internet, while remaining relatively oblivious to the much deeper polarization occurring in the physical world.

Passion, however, is blind to social background, political beliefs (unless the passion is related to politics), experiences or lifestyles. As long as someone shares our passion and is actively engaged in pursuing it, we seek them out and welcome

them into our fold. Passion brings together unlikely groupings and these communities have a tendency to create dynamic and innovative “creative spaces” not in spite of their member’s diversity, but because of it.

In Susan Sontag’s 1965 essay “On Culture and the New Sensibility,” she associates genius with the “*personalities* and music of the Beatles” (emphasis mine). Sontag is right in placing the cultural significance of John, Paul, George and Ringo’s personalities beside the music they made together. The individual characteristics and inter-group relations of these four passionate creatives are seared into cultural memory because of the dynamism of their distinction.

Relationships built on passion are extremely strong and often defy the incentives of traditional bond formation. When they traveled to Hamburg Germany for one of their first big gigs, The Beatles’

line-up was John, Paul, George, Stewart and Pete. With a grueling performance schedule to maintain, only the most passionate—not necessarily the most popular—would remain. Stewart quit to follow new passions, Pete was replaced by the more talented and enthusiastic Ringo, and The Beatles, as we know them, were formed.

As an exemplary passionate community, The Beatles continued to seek edges. They constantly reinvented themselves through the influence and collaboration with other passionate creatives on the edge, people as diverse as Bob Dylan, Brian Wilson, Ravi Shankar, and Yoko Ono. Though these influences had discernable impact on The Beatles as an artistic team, the most significant key to their success was the unlikely partnership between John Lennon and Paul McCartney—whose personalities, talents and sensibilities are extremely divergent and even at-odds. Yet together, they became one of

the most important artistic teams of the twentieth century.

Growing through sustained relationships

Shared passion helps the relationships we build to strengthen and grow. While reaching out to others in expanding networks can be fruitful, one of the most important fixtures of a passion-based relationship is its want to become a rooted, stabilizing force, while at the same time challenging each of its members to “keep their end of the bargain” as an innovative contributor to the creative momentum of the bond.

In this way, passion-based relationships are not just resistant to the status quo—they are incompatible with it.

The Lennon-McCartney partnership held strong at the height of innovation throughout the tumultuous Sixties in large part because of the continuous

challenge John and Paul posed to one another to grow as artists. This quasi-competitive dynamic is a fixture of most cultural, social, artistic, political and intellectual movements throughout history—where talented individuals continually set the bar higher for one another, making these relationships a source of forward-moving momentum for their passions and creativity.

But “movements” have another important characteristic: they are highly community oriented. Passionate creatives gather physically in neighborhoods, cities or districts (what Richard Florida calls “spikes”), or maintain connection through correspondence in some form, to fortify connections with one another as community members. Think of the Harlem Renaissance, the High-Modernist Ex-Pats, the Berkeley New Left, Greenwich Village Beats and today, Silicon Valley’s digerati.

It had been the case up to very recently that this rootedness was typically imposed from without (as is the experience of many people “pushed” into the religious communities of their parents), which can be a stifling and repressive force. Conversely, passion provides a pull-based foundation for community building that liberates, for those who may feel alienated or different in traditional community settings.

In a constantly changing world of shift and flows, finding (or founding) a passion-based community may be one of the most significant factors to staying oriented, rooted, and poised to grow.

The dynamics of passionate relationships are powerful elements of success in an era of continuous instability. Passion trumps inhibition in the service of new connections; shared passion provides a foundation for diverse relationships; and these

relationships provide both stability and inspire growth for its members.

Lessons learned

This is not just theory. This perspective is deeply informed by my own personal experience. Connecting with my passion has helped me to overcome my shyness and to build a rapidly expanding network of deeply rewarding personal relationships, especially with people on a variety of edges, who have helped me to learn and grow continuously. Over the years, I have learned that my shyness was a coping mechanism. It is not who I really am. I have come to believe that we are all passionate and social beings, but we learn to become otherwise as a result of childhood experiences. Connecting with our passion can help us to recover our natural sociability, inspire us to connect with others and grow as individuals within the dynamic and nurturing bonds of passion-based relationships.

Pursuing Passion

We often talk about passion, but we tend to use it very loosely. We usually refer to passion in passing – it is rarely the primary focus of discussion or analysis.

I am just as guilty of this. A couple of months ago, I composed a manifesto for passionate creatives and never explicitly defined what I meant by passion. In talking with people about this manifesto, I discovered that passion has an infinite variety of meanings. It set me on a quest to find a systematic treatment of passion, especially in a business context, but I have yet to find anything that is very satisfying. Even outside the business context, surprisingly little explores in any deep way what passion is and the role it plays in our lives. (If I am missing anything out there, by all means reach out and let me know.)

So, this is an early attempt to offer my own perspective on passion and why it occupies a more

and more central role in my research and work with clients. I am writing this in the hope that I can spur a discussion that will help all of us to sharpen our understanding of passion and its growing importance.

One view of passion

So, what is meant by passion? For many, it simply means strong emotions of any kind. In this context, it is often suspect because we perceive it to mean that clear and rational thinking becomes overwhelmed by intense emotions. In fact, for many it is viewed as a sign of shiftlessness – passions coming and going with the blink of an eye. For others, passion simply means happiness – pursuing activities that make us happy in the moment. In other contexts, it is used to mean loss of control – we surrender to passion.

I want to use the term more narrowly, to refer to strong emotions that motivate us to move beyond

our comfort zone and to achieve the potential that resides within us. Passion comes from within each of us; it cannot be imposed or mandated from

outside. At the same time, it compels us to move outside, to engage with the world around us.

Passion, in the sense I am using it, orients us; it provides us with focus and direction. From this perspective, passion is long-lived. It may be ignited quickly but, once ignited, it endures and even grows as we discover how much potential there really is. Passionate people are rarely distracted for long; their passion keeps them on track and calls them inexorably back to the quest ahead. Passion is about perseverance.

Passion is also about pursuit. It is not passive. People with passion are driven to pursue and create. They may read books and observe others, but they are not content being bystanders. They feel

an overwhelming urge to engage, to experience for themselves and to test their own capabilities. Passion compels us to act.

In this context, there are two kinds of passion – the passion of the true believer and the passion of the explorer. Here in Silicon Valley we have many examples of the passion of the true believer – great entrepreneurs are truly passionate about a very specific path and many of them are notoriously not open to alternative views or approaches. Their passion is enduring and it does focus, but it can also blind – leading the entrepreneur to reject critical input that does not match their preconceived views.

I am focused on the other kind of passion – the passion of explorers. These are people who see a domain, but not the path. The fact that the paths are not clearly defined is what excites them and motivates them to move into the domain. It also

makes them alert to a variety of inputs that can help them to better understand the domain and discover more promising paths through the unexplored terrain. They are constantly balancing the need to move forward with the need to be present in the moment and reflect on the experiences and inputs they are encountering.

Passion is certainly not the same as happiness, unless we move beyond the transitory happiness of the moment and seek out a much deeper happiness that ultimately comes from achieving our potential. Passion comes from the Latin word “pati,” meaning suffering or enduring. We forego a lot when we pursue our passions; significant sacrifice is often required. We are often deeply frustrated – we have an intense desire to move faster and deeper but we encounter obstacles on all sides (including within ourselves) that seem to inhibit our movement. The unhappiness does not discourage us – it is a natural consequence of de-

siring something so deeply that we are motivated to confront any obstacle, no matter how challenging, and persist until we find away over, around or under it. **Passion is about discipline** – self-imposed discipline that drives passionate people to persist and not get discouraged in the face of enormous obstacles.

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Passion is about performance. People pursuing their passion have a clear sense of performance metrics. These are not externally defined and imposed metrics, but individually adopted metrics that help passionate people to keep track of their own performance on a continuing basis and identify performance gaps. While many passionate people are amateurs in the sense of not yet integrating their passion with their profession,

passion is professional in the sense that people pursuing their passion are deeply committed to the domain that has engaged them, they have a deep sense of integrity about their quest and they have demanding expectations about themselves in terms of performance. Passion is ultimately driven by intrinsic motivation rather than extrinsic rewards. External rewards like recognition and cash compensation are certainly welcome, but they do not drive passionate people.

Passion is about progression – passionate people constantly seek new challenges and opportunities to drive their performance to new levels. For passionate people, achieving their full potential has little meaning. They see that their potential is constantly being expanded by new possibilities. Explorers are very adept at discovering new ways to test themselves and discovering new possibilities along the journey. In fact, passion brings with it a willingness to fail repeatedly in the quest for

performance improvement, compellingly illustrated by any extreme sports participant. Passionate people see that progression demands failure – if we are not failing, we are not taking enough risk and learning fast enough.

Passion is about connecting. We all know stories about lone inventors who are deeply passionate about their quest and spend much of their lives locked away in their basement workshops tinkering and experimenting with new approaches to driving performance. These stories are the exception rather than the rule. More generally, passion leads us to seek out and connect with others sharing our passion. We intuitively understand that the best way for us to advance is to connect with and learn from others. Passionate people often seek to connect with others in related domains in a quest for insight that they can bring back into their own domains – witness the big wave surfers who also wind surf or skate board in an effort to understand

techniques and technology that can improve their performance on big waves.

Passion pulls. Passionate people are deeply creative in seeking out and pulling in resources that will help them to pursue their passion. But passion also pulls in another dimension as well. People who pursue their passions inevitably create beacons that attract others who share their passion. Few of these beacons are consciously created; they are by-products of pursuing one's passion. Passionate people share their passions and creations widely, leaving trackers for others to find them.

Passion is not predictable. Because it comes from within and drives people to embrace unexpected opportunities and explore uncharted territories, it does not deal well with prescribed routines and scripts. It is pursued in the moment and engages with unexpected encounters in ways that may lead to unforeseen twists and turns. Passion is also

about urgency – passionate people have limited patience. They are driven to move forward, regardless of the obstacles put in their way.

Passion is about risk-taking. Passion diminishes perceptions of risk and amplifies perceptions of reward. In a curious way, risk becomes reward for passionate people. They see that risk is the only way to discover new things and explore new territories. For this reason, passionate people thrive in times of high uncertainty and disruption. It is also why passionate people tend to come together on various edges of our society and business environment – peripheries that are rich in unmet needs and unexploited opportunities. Passionate people embrace the edge in order to get an edge on their performance.

Passion is about authenticity. Passionate people have little patience with pretense. They present themselves as they really are because they intuitively

tively understand that is the only way to explore and discover. Passionate people discover and develop a uniquely personal voice that provides a deep sense of meaning and personal identity, shaped by what they contribute to the world and how others build on and learn from their contributions. Their identity is not about consumption; it is about shared creation.

Why it matters at a personal level

Passion is becoming increasingly important for our professional success. If we have not found a way to make our passion our profession or to discover passion in our profession, we will very quickly succumb to the growing economic and competitive pressures that are shaping our global business landscape. The pressures will inexorably mount. Without passion, we will increasingly experience stress, our energy will be steadily drained and we will ultimately burn out under the mounting pressure. At best, we will be marginalized as we find

ways to achieve “balance” and safety valves for the mounting pressure at work.

On the other hand, if passion and profession can be integrated, stress turns into stimulus. All of those unexpected challenges suddenly become ways to develop our capabilities more rapidly – we begin to seek out these challenges, hungry for the opportunity to test ourselves and get to the next level of performance more rapidly, like the big wave surfer constantly searching for a bigger, more challenging wave.

Corporate ambivalence on passion

Most executives have considerable ambivalence about passion. Their speeches often call for passion. Passion can be great if it is harnessed to serve the purposes of a business – it motivates people to work longer and harder than those who lack passion.

On the other hand, passion resists harnessing –it is about extremes and unpredictability, something that most companies have a very hard time dealing with. Passionate people are loyal to their passion but they are often deeply dissatisfied with the institutions that employ them. They can see all the possibilities and are greatly frustrated at all the institutional obstacles that prevent them from achieving these possibilities.

Unless one's passion aligns completely with one's role and the institution's mission - a very rare situation - considerable friction is often the result as passionate workers struggle to achieve the potential that their passion demands. A strong argument can be made that our 20th century institutions – especially schools and firms – were explicitly designed to suppress passion because it undermined predictability and created friction where scalable efficiency was the imperative. As a result, the day to day practices and processes of the firm seek to

contain and mute the very passion that executives so eloquently celebrate.

As a result, it is not surprising that passionate people often flee the confines of larger firms. Indeed, our 2009 Shift Index discovered that the presence of passion diminishes among the workforce as the size of the firm increases. Scalable efficiency is very effective in containing and diluting passion. As a result, it is perhaps not surprising that the most passionate people are those who are self-employed.

This flight of passion from our institutions is deeply troubling because we are in the midst of a Big Shift where passion is becoming increasingly important for institutional success. As I have written elsewhere, the rationale for our institutions is changing from scalable efficiency to scalable peer to peer learning as a natural consequence of the Big Shift. In this context, passionate individuals are

essential to driving the quest for scalable peer to peer learning.

As discussed above, passionate people are risk-taking explorers driven by a desire to learn and drive performance to the next level. They naturally seek out others who share their passion and collaborate to address challenges and obstacles to performance improvement. They have a sense of urgency and a long-term commitment to their passion. How will institutions harness scalable peer to peer learning without passionate people? In fact, in the Big Shift, a strong case can be made that the institutions that create a welcome home for passionate individuals will be the ones that thrive in this challenging new world.

Some open questions

As I have thought about passion at the level of individuals, a number of questions remain to be explored and I would welcome input and ideas.

- Clearly, many people do not display passion in the specific form that I have described above—they are consumed with the day to day challenges of life and have not discovered a passion that can focus and drive them. Does this mean that not everyone is capable of this kind of passion or even wants to have it?
- Or does everyone have this kind of passion latent within them waiting to be developed or discovered? My instinct is that the latter is the case.
- If the latter is the case, what does it take to discover or develop passion of this type? Too many writers (including myself at times) have been guilty of advising people to find their passion without offering any particular perspective on exactly how one does this.

- On a related note, I am convinced that we all need to make our passions our professions. Many of us have not yet discovered a passion. For those people, are there ways to discover and nurture a passion within the context of their current profession?
- Can one have multiple passions? If so, how many? My suspicion is that most of us have the capacity for multiple passions. On the other hand, given the kind of intense engagement and pursuit described earlier, I am skeptical that one can have a lot of passions, at least in the sense described here.
- When does passion become obsession? Passion as I have described it is very healthy and helps us to achieve our potential. On the other hand, we all know that passion can become obsession and have a very dysfunctional impact on our

lives. How do we avoid this outcome and pursue passions in the most productive way possible.

More generally, I encourage all of you to comment on what I have offered above. My perspective is all very preliminary and somewhat tentative, but I have a sense it will become increasingly central to all of us. This is just the beginning of a much longer journey. I think I am becoming passionate about passion.

Endorsements for *The Power of Pull*

"The authors have given us a provocative and insightful look at the power of today's knowledge flow. If you want to meet the challenges of working and living in the 21st century, this book should be your guide." - [Eric Schmidt](#), *Board Chairman and CEO of Google*

"*The Power of Pull* is a powerful new meme for navigating and networking in the 21st century. Any one of its 36 key questions (in the 'Bring It Home' sections) could change your life and the world." - [John Doerr](#), *Kleiner Perkins*

"*The Power of Pull* is a roadmap of how to get from where you are now to where you really want to be. Read it and be inspired. (You'll probably want to surf too.)" - [Marc Benioff](#), *CEO of Salesforce.com*

"In times of unprecedented change, we as individuals and institutions can have extraordinary

leverage and influence if we marshal the passion, knowledge and resources necessary to achieve great things. *The Power of Pull* empowers and guides us to make the most of today's enormous possibilities." - [John Naisbitt](#), *author of Megatrends*

"Stop whatever you are doing and read this amazing book. The authors totally nail it. Digging beneath the surface of stuff that distracts us on a daily basis, they unpack the deep forces that really truly matter and provide a guidebook each of us can use to unleash passion, transform how and why we work, and restore destiny and dignity to our lives." - [Richard Florida](#), *author of The Rise of the Creative Class and The Great Reset*

"This brilliant and exciting book shows how to pursue your passions by harnessing the power of networks. Success no longer comes from possessing knowledge; instead, you have to participate with others in creating a flow of knowledge. The

power of 'pull'—the ability to draw out people and resources for each endeavor—can transform both individuals and institutions." - [Walter Isaacson](#), *President and CEO, the Aspen Institute, and author of Einstein: His Life and Universe*

"Connecting many important threads through beautiful metaphors and wonderful narratives, the authors provide both a mind expanding view of how the world is changing and a solid framework and context to approach the future for anyone interested in surviving and enjoying it." - [Joichi Ito](#), *CEO of Creative Commons and Internet venture investor*

"We live in a global village, where borders are blurred, where all humanity could and should be responsible for the well-being of others. *The Power of Pull* proposes fresh insights that coalesce into a powerful way forward in this new world. This erudite manual for change is a testament to

the creativity and insight of its authors." - [Mark E. Tucker](#), *Former Group Chief Executive of Prudential plc, Member of the Court of the Bank of England*

"This is a seminal work that explores the personal and professional implications of a powerful convergence of technologies, ranging from in memory databases for speed, massive parallel processing in the cloud, access via telephone for anything, anytime, everywhere. We are just beginning to understand what this means for us. The authors help us to understand where and how pull will change our lives and our work given the new digital infrastructures re-shaping our landscape. It offers us a roadmap that we neglect at our peril." - [Hasso Plattner](#), *Founder and Chairman of SAP Supervisory Board*

About the authors



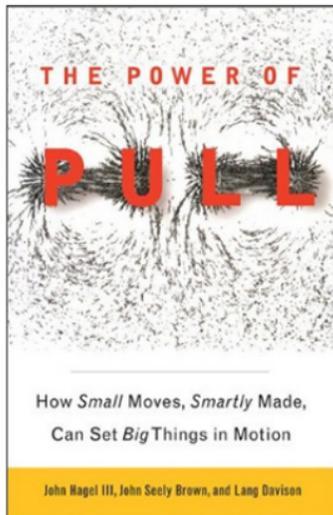
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Volume One: Pursuing Passion

This volume consists of two blog postings from John Hagel and is part of a larger body of work that is discussed in the book, *The Power of Pull*. Other topics in this series include:

- Shaping serendipity
- Passion versus Obsession
- Talent: The Dilbert Paradox
- Three Levels of Pull
- From Passion to Potential

For more information and to read about these other topics, please visit:

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