

HOW TO FIND YOUR PASSION



by Ben Rosenfeld

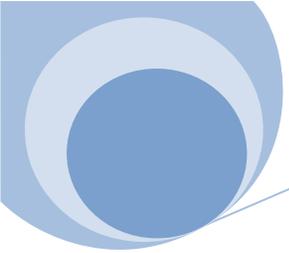


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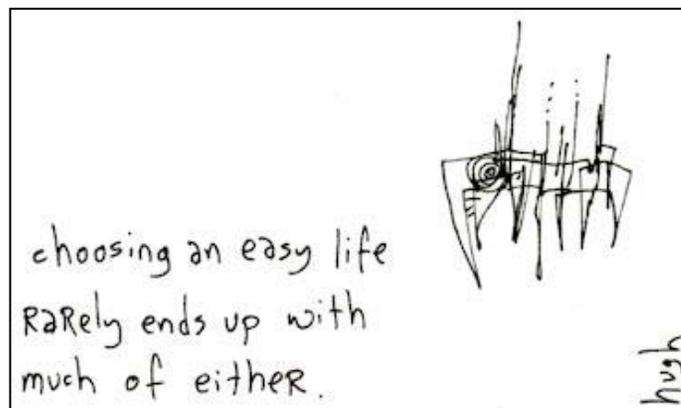
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This book is for you if you have **no idea** how to answer the question:

“What do you want to be when you grow up?”

I recently found my passion and it’s made my life crystal clear. Until I turned twenty five I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life. I couldn’t even answer the “grow up” question when I was five years old. But once I realized my passion, life became a lot easier because:

Once you find your passion, your life and work makes much more sense.



To start, honestly answer the following questions:¹

- Was the major you have now the same major you planned to have your first week of college?¹
- Did you declare your major right around the last day possible to declare a major?
- Did you find your major boring?
- Would you have studied something else if you weren’t worried about getting a job?
- Do you know what you want to do after you graduate?
- Are you done with school but not sure what you want to do with your life long-term?²

If these questions made you queasy, keep reading.

¹ This was originally written with college students in mind. Keep reading, the rest of the book still applies to you.

² If you had no clue what you were going to study when you got to college, your answer is no.

² Don’t confuse this with what you think you’re supposed to do after you graduate.

I'm guessing you want to "succeed" in whatever way you define "success", or else you wouldn't be reading this. Well, I have great news!

The formula for success is easy:

Work really hard at something, and twenty years later, you'll be really good at that thing.

Don't worry I'm not going to rehash Malcolm Gladwell's Outliers book for twenty four pages.³ If you're not familiar, Gladwell argues that most talent isn't innate so much as it is an instrument of deliberate practice, and that it usually takes around 10,000 hours of an activity to get really good at it. Tiger Woods might have had a slight advantage at golf when he was four, but without practicing every day for the next twenty years you wouldn't know his name.

I bet I can name any sort of occupation, doctor, lawyer, actor and you can tell me how to become successful at that job. So why are you reading this instead of becoming the next Tom Cruise or Johnny Cochran?

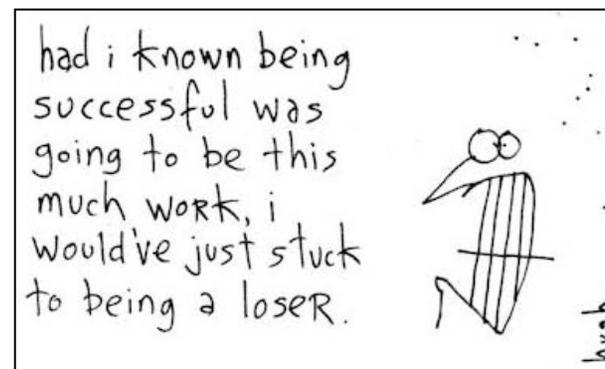
³ Although you should read it.

Hard work.

Between deciding you want to become something and becoming the best at it, there's years and years of hard work.

And to get through all that work, you need to have a passion for the work you do.

And if you're not sure that's what you want to do for the next twenty years, you'll almost never put in all the work needed to become successful. But even worse, you might put in all that work into something you don't love because you couldn't think of anything else to do and twenty years down the line you'll realize that you're completely miserable. The technical name for most of these people is "lawyer."



Tack on a spouse and kids, and now you're stuck, bitter and on antidepressants. I don't mean to be a Debbie Downer or anything. Almost everyone, including me, has had the fear of making the wrong choice. This is why we're delaying making a "career choice" for longer and longer. And when we don't delay, we switch careers, starting the twenty year process over from scratch. I've already done that twice myself.

Before I get to the good stuff, I have some devastating news:

There's no shortcut to busting your butt.

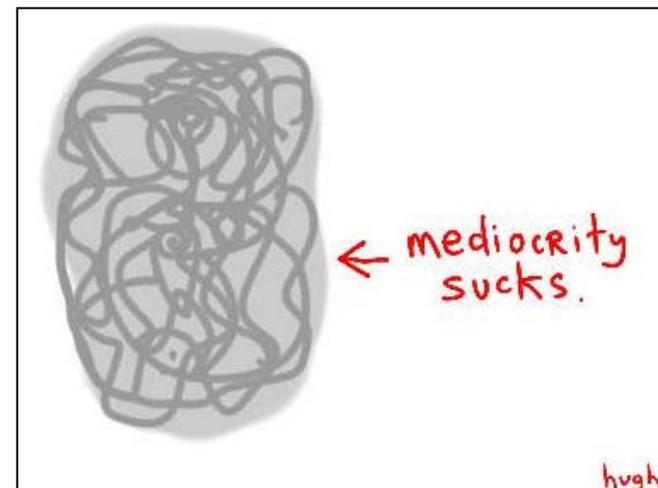
Unless you want to be mediocre, you're going to have to work hard. And hard work sucks!

BUT there is a shortcut to not minding hard work:

Passion.

If you love what you're doing, you lose track of time and you power through the hard work because you can't imagine doing anything else.

You also save money this way because you're not buying trinkets to distract you from the meaninglessness of your day to day existence. You're right -- that's cynical and our economy depends on buying worthless trinkets.



Let me tell you about two people.

Bob graduated in the top 5% of his class in high school, top 1% in college, went to work for a prestigious consulting firm, and then quit the consulting firm to attend a top 5 PhD program on full scholarship. Sounds pretty impressive right? Parents must be proud.

Well, Bob never cared about all of this stuff, but he did it because it sounded good around adults at dinner parties. And besides, for Bob, all of this stuff was the path of least resistance.

The *path of least resistance* is going along the easiest possible route that's already planned out for you and not thinking about where you'll end up when the path ends and you're facing the vast open space.

For most middle class kids in America the path of least resistance is something like:

Get good grades in elementary school, so you can get good grades in middle school, so you can get into the honors classes in high school. Get good grades in high school and do the "right" extracurricular activities so you can get into a good college. Get good grades in college so you can get a good job, get a good job so you can make good money, make good money so you can retire good, retire good and soon you'll be good and dead.



And of course, before you die, pop out some kids and then train them to do the same. I'm not saying that this path is bad or evil, but it's just the standard path you're probably on right now without realizing it. This standard path is not for everyone.

Okay, enough about Bob and his path. Here's Betty's story:

In college she started a parody website of her university and would pour hours into writing articles, designing the site and selling custom made merchandise. Within a year, everyone at school had heard of the site. Betty was also managing her friend's stand up comedy career and would be at comedy clubs frequently. Two years after graduation, Betty tried getting on stage herself, and she's been performing constantly ever since. You haven't heard of her... yet... but you will in five to ten years, after she keeps busting her butt. Of course, she's not usually invited to dinner parties with adults, but even if she was, she'd decline because she'd rather perform comedy every night.

Who can you relate to more, Bob or Betty?

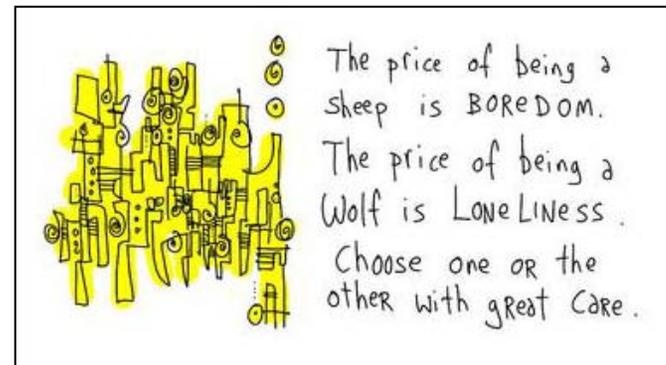
Now let's try a different question:

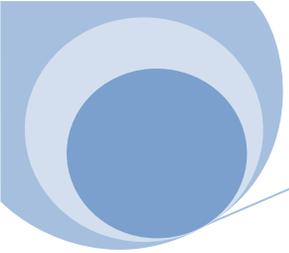
If you don't have to choose, can you relate to both Bob and Betty?

You know, the whole doing things to impress adults on one hand and then doing what you find interesting on the other. I know I can relate to both. But that's because the story of Bob and Betty is my story:

I'm both Bob and Betty.

I'm going to write about myself for a few minutes, because almost everyone loves to talk about themselves. But after that, unlike most people, I'm going to show you how my story applies to your life.





MY STORY

Like I mentioned in Bob's story, I got high grades in undergrad, a "prestigious" job coming out of school, was promoted at the first chance, and I started attending a top five university on a full scholarship. Sounds awesome right? Nope.

Someone was paying me two grand a month to get my PhD and I was completely miserable.

It took six weeks of misery for me to drop out of Caltech.

Before dropping out, the grad school math did take me to new heights. 125 New Heights Ave, my psychologist's office. I'd never gone to a shrink before but I was sleeping fifteen hours a day and couldn't force myself out of bed to learn the material grad school wanted me to learn. And whenever I'd try to learn, I'd end up thinking about comedy instead. And why I wasn't doing enough of it. So I dropped out. My parents were not happy.

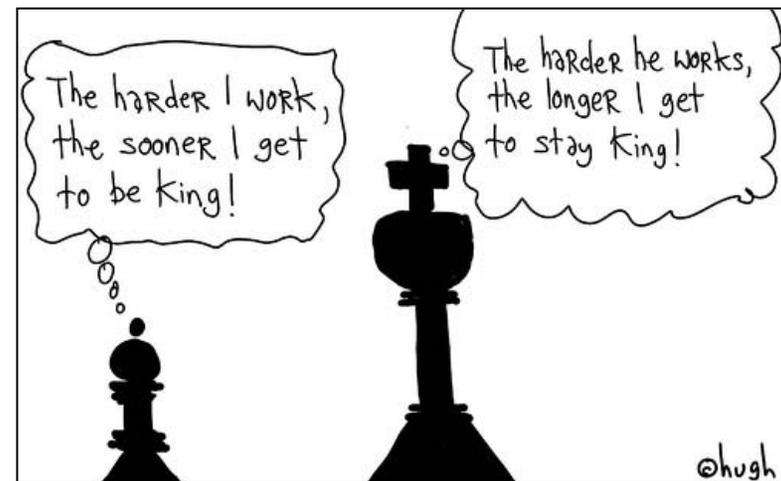
Do you know how to spell parental disappointment?

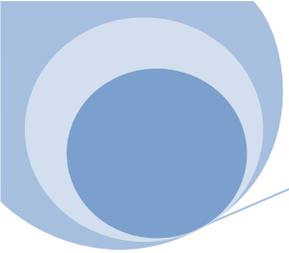
P...hD Dropout.

Before I dropped out, I was considering taking antidepressant pills and/or ADHD pills in order to try to force myself to concentrate on something I had little interest in.

It's a lot easier to medicate yourself into complacency than to make a big life change. Psychiatric pills can make you feel (falsely) good, but making a big, positive life change will make you feel a hundred times better.

Well, unless you take ecstasy... just kidding!





MY STORY

The day I made my decision to drop out, I went to the Caltech career fair. All the “hot companies” are there hiring, Google, Hulu, Goldman Sachs. And I’m there sweating, in my gym shorts. Cause I stopped in after a ninety minute workout. I went up to every recruiter that was smiling (most looked miserable), and said, “Hi, I’m not looking for a job. I actually just decided to drop out of Caltech to become a comedian. Are you guys looking for entertainment at this year’s Christmas party?”

This is the only time I’ve genuinely smiled at a career fair.

And no, I didn’t get any gigs from that. You can’t even get a comedy job in shorts and a stinky t-shirt. But that wasn’t the point of me going.

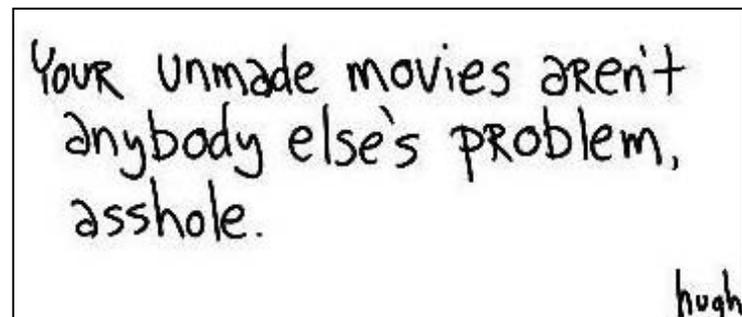
I had to hear myself say it out loud:

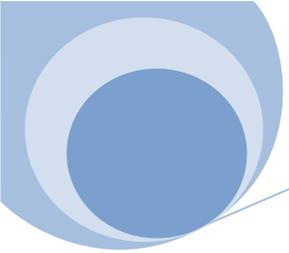
“I’m dropping out of Caltech to become a comedian.”

And you know what, it sounded really good.

It still sounds good.

This might be obvious but I want to mention it anyway: the older you get, the harder it is to make a big life change. Just like it’s easier to change majors from computer science to theatre arts your freshman year than it is to do when you’re six credits away from graduating, it’s easier to change careers and lifestyle when you’re one to five years out of college than when you’re middle aged with kids and a mortgage. Although if you’re forty five and reading this, you should still make the big life change if you’re miserable -- just don’t do it as abruptly.





MY STORY

Do you think that once I made the decision to drop out there were plenty of people telling me I was making a huge mistake and would regret it for the rest of my life?

I sure thought there would be. But actually, the most common thing I've heard is:

“Wow, I really respect that. I love music but never had the courage to fully pursue. And I don't really love what I'm doing now.”

The day I knew I made the right decision was when a professor told me:

“There is no better job in the world than being a professor at Caltech.”

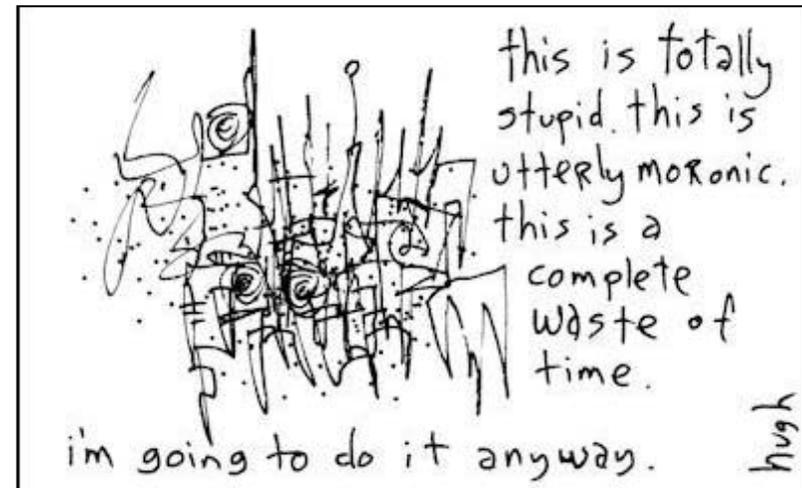
And my first thought was:

“I'd rather do five minutes of jokes in the basement of a Mexican restaurant.”

I did get one anonymous email telling me I wasn't funny. And I'm like, of course I'm not funny, I got eighteen more years of hard work to go!⁴

There were signs I shouldn't have even gone to grad school, but I ignored them because the grad school story sounded too good.

I'd been saying for months that as soon as comedy was paying me the same two grand a month as grad school, I was quitting. This is the same logic as, “I'll stop eating hot fudge sundaes, right after I lose twenty pounds.”



⁴ You can send your anonymous hate mail to Ben@BigBenComedy.com

Another sign that pointed me to comedy was how I broke up with my girlfriend of six years. After this story, male readers will probably think I'm awesome and female readers will think that I'm a jerk. Both are partially true, but neither is the point.

A year and a half before the first time I ever got on stage, my consulting company decided to do a comedy night event where they brought in professional comedians to do an hour of material. And I was going to pick up my girlfriend and bring her to the event. But a few hours before the show she calls me and starts with: "I don't want to go. Why can't you just come up here and hang out with me? Why don't the two of us just go do something alone?"

I thought about it for a few minutes, and then I told her, "I don't want to choose, but if I must, I'd rather go to the comedy show than see you. And if that's how I feel, we probably shouldn't be dating."

For the record, I don't advocate breaking up with someone over the phone. But the point is:

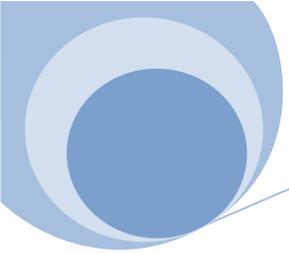
If there's something you'd rather do than have sex, you should figure out



a way to make money doing it.

There's a book about happiness appropriately titled "Stumbling on Happiness." In it, the author says in order to find out if you'll be happy in a given situation, whether it's working a certain career or buying a new pair of jeans, you should:

Find someone very similar to you in age and background that has already gone through with that decision, and ask them whether they are happy or not.



MY STORY

This sounds counterintuitive, but give it a try. Whenever you come across someone similar to you who does something that sounds interesting, ask them “do you like what you do?” Then pay attention if they hesitate or shift their eyes around a bunch before answering.

You’ll notice when you ask most investment bankers or other large salary earners this question, they’ll either flat out say “no, I hate it” or skip that part of the sentence and go straight to “I enjoy the money that comes from it.”

I’m going to quote from my blog, and I want you to guess when I wrote it:

“I hope for two things: 1) That a job in academia will allow me to do comedy, teaching and research without having to give any of those up and 2) If I can’t do both, I’ll man up and go for the chance at comedy.”

Did I write this:

- a) Right after I was admitted to grad school
- b) Sometime between accepting their offer and enrolling
- c) After enrolling

Pick an answer.

So that was actually a trick question.

I wrote those words a month *before* I filled out my first grad school application. I didn’t even know I was going to grad school yet and I was setting the terms for when I’d quit to do comedy.

Now, besides showing I might have mild psychic abilities, I think this shows that if you look around enough, you’ll notice something similar about an activity you like doing. It doesn’t matter if it’s playing the latest Madden video game or cake decorating.

I bet there’s some activity you actually enjoy doing, besides sleep.

Once, you identify this activity, no matter how weird, stupid or scary it sounds, you have to try figuring out how to make money doing it.

So here's where I continue the let down train. I know the title of this book is, "How to find your passion."

Well, I never actually found my passion.

I tricked you, huh? See, I never found it because I was already involved with my passion long before I was able to recognize it.

My eighth grade English teacher spent a few months assigning creative writing stories and then had us read them aloud. I wasn't exactly popular in middle school but my stories always got laughs and kids who didn't talk to me otherwise would comment on how good my stories were.⁵

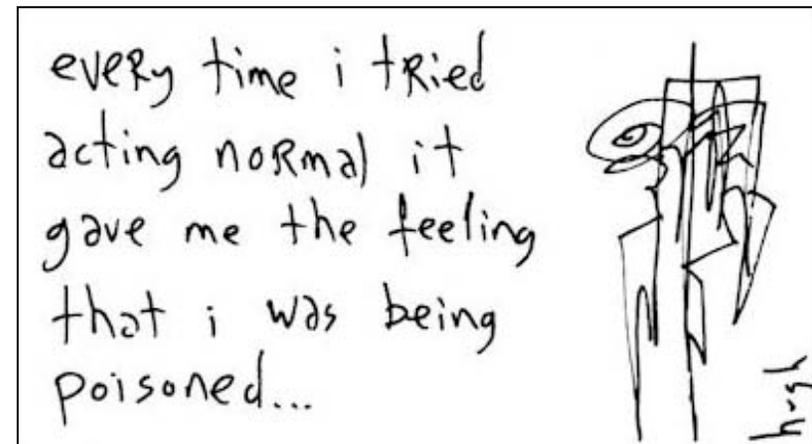
My point is that I've had some sort of comedic writing and performing ability since I could speak, but I never thought I could make a career of it.

⁵ They weren't that good.

I'm sure you're good at something.

Try to take a look at what you're already good at, then try to figure out what kind of careers use that.

Let's say you're really good at Madden, here's some possible "respectable" careers, assuming you're not getting drafted into the NFL: video game designer, video game tester, NFL executive, NFL scout, medical trainer, video tape guy, football coach, strength coach. I'm sure you can think of others too. Now all of those careers have a lot of work behind them, but if you like what you do, you'll get through that hard work.

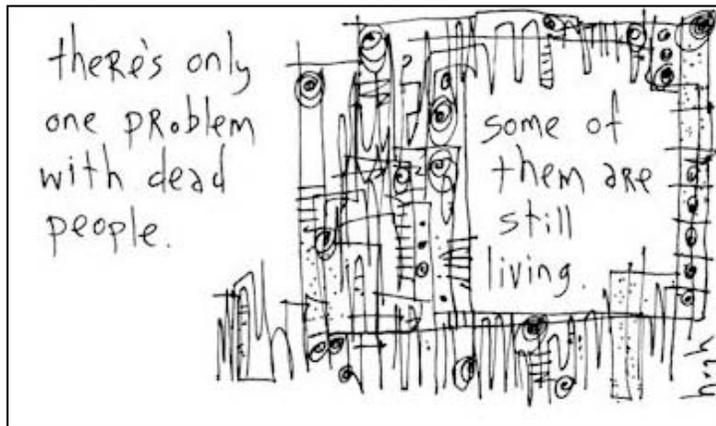


I'm in no way unique with figuring out how to apply my passion to make money, here's one example:

Alicia wasn't doing well in college studying political science because she was spending all her time organizing sorority events as the sorority president, which she really enjoyed doing. What kind of career can you envision for her?

No, she's not a thirty year old still going to sorority formals. She became a college administrator whose job is to organize lots of on campus events.

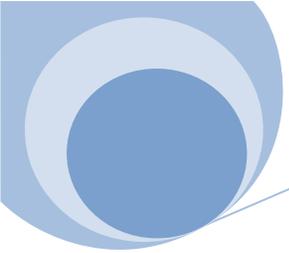
She has a respectable job and loves doing it.



Here's another example:

My friend Laura is hysterical when critiquing things and she loves to eat. Like obsesses with trying new restaurants and new bars and talks about food all the time. She studied communications and is doing some public relations stuff during the day, but at night she started a [food review blog](#). She's been at it a year, posting daily reviews and meal deals, it's not paying her bills, yet, but it's already one of the top ten food blogs in New York City and she's started getting free meals and food samples all the time.

I have a feeling it's only a matter of time before she figures out a way to make a living critiquing food.



“KEEP CHOPPING”

Besides performing comedy, I’m also a huge college football fan. In particular: Rutgers Football.

Coach Greg Schiano has a metaphor the team has been using for years, which I like as well. He says:

“Imagine you’re in the middle of a dense forest of trees. It’s all dark, you can’t see. All you have is an axe. The only way out is to pick up the axe, pick a direction, and then keep chopping.”

If you ignore the panicky feeling and the denseness of the forest, and just focus on the task at hand, eventually, you’ll get out of the forest.

This is a great metaphor for anything, especially for a potential career. Your first few months in a new work environment, you have no idea what’s going on. You’re in the middle of a forest and just have to keep chopping and making whatever progress you can.

Doing this will work real well. However, remember that every once in a while you should ask yourself:

“Is this the forest I want to get out of, or would I rather chop my way out of somewhere else?”

Because believe me, after you make your way out of one forest, you’re not going to want an axe for a long time. But if you’re enjoying the forest you’re in, you won’t want the chopping to end.

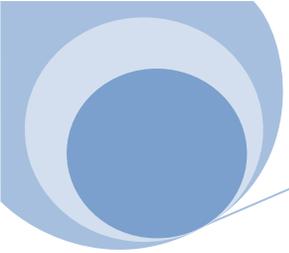
In other words:

People only want to retire when they hate their jobs.

Bill Cosby and Robin Williams are millionaires in their 60’s and 70’s that are still doing comedy because they love it.

The sad thing is, a lot of people will retire and then have no idea what to do with themselves because they always put off discovering their passion. And now they fill their days with Murder She Wrote reruns.

Please don’t become one of those people.



F-U MONEY

Imagine logging into your checking account and seeing you have one hundred million dollars in there. That's \$100,000,000!

If you're really imagining it, you should have a huge smile.

Alright, so you have what's called F-U money.

F-U money is where you no longer answer to any bosses and can do what you please. If they demand something of you that you don't feel like doing, you can just say, "F-U, I quit."

Here's the hard part. You got your hundred million, now I want you to imagine what your day to day existence is like. Not the first thing you'd do, and not the trip to Europe you'd finally take, but after all that.

- You wake up in the morning and what do you do?
- Where are you?
- Who are you surrounded by?

Look at those questions again and really try to answer them.

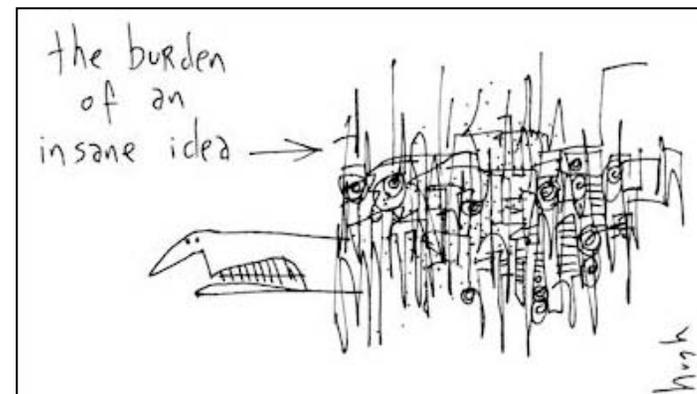
If I was a really bad author, this is where I'd end the book. I'd tell you to go ahead and do that. And then figure out how to make money doing it.

Lying on the beach all day? Create the most private beach club in the world.

Playing golf every day? Bust your butt to become a PGA player.

But that's not enough. This is only the start. Only the general path towards which you should TRY taking a few steps towards.

Besides, I bet a lot of you very honestly answered, "I have no idea what I'd do day to day." Hell, if you asked me this in college, I would've never have said "be a comedian".



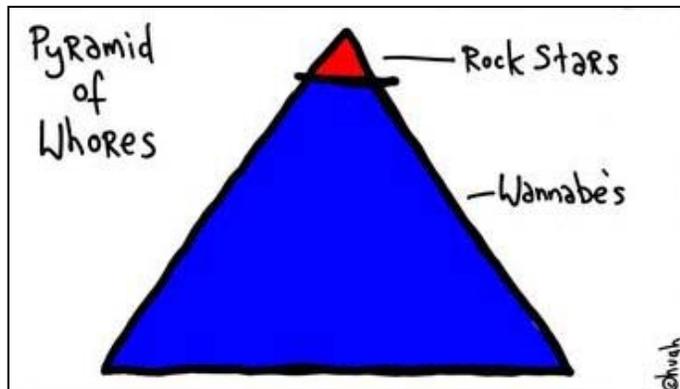
I think I can summarize everything I've been saying in another way:

You don't want to look for an occupation; you want to look for a lifestyle.

I like waking up late, am most alert at night and like to be around people for a few hours a day (but not for too many) so comedy works for me. Try to figure out the kind of lifestyle you want to live, and that might help you figure out what to do with your life.

Time for more questions:

- Do you think you want to go to more school?
- Do you actually know what for?
- Do you have no idea, but think it sounds like a smart plan?



Colleges and society might get mad at me, but don't go to more school unless you're at least 90% certain you want to turn that extra education into a profession.

I almost went to law school. I took the LSATs and did well, but luckily I got too busy interviewing for jobs to send in my law school applications. If I had gone to law school, I'd owe at least a hundred grand and I have a feeling I'd hate being a lawyer even more than I hated consulting and grad school. At least consulting and grad school were paying me money to be there, so it was easier for me to get out of there without worrying about enormous debt.

Don't do more school unless they pay you, or you're sure you want to be in that profession.

If you're considering going to law school, please to god be a paralegal for two years first, talk to and observe the lawyers, then see if you still want to do it.

My point is:

Keep your options open, and when you're not sure, choose the option that pays you money.

I know you're still struggling to find your passion, and no matter how good of a book I write, this struggle will probably take some time. Hopefully you're at least getting some ideas. My goal is to get you aware of how important passion is, and to help you start asking the right questions so you can find your passion and put it to work.

Think of something really stupid you could decide to do with your life.

Not suicide or becoming a drug addict, but something else that as soon as you think of it, your inner voice says, "No way, that's stupid." What activity or career would really piss off and disappoint your parents? I bet you came up with some pretty good answers.

Now imagine having earned \$100 million doing the thing that would really piss off and disappoint everyone in your support system.

Are you smiling yet? There's your passion.

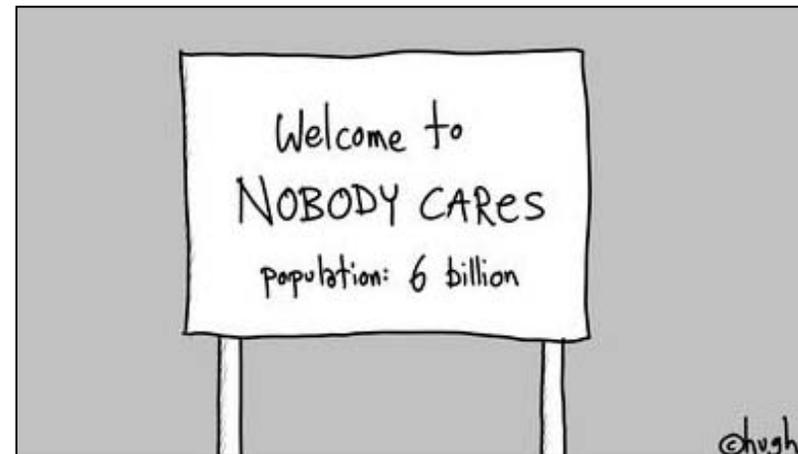
Alright that still didn't work? How about:

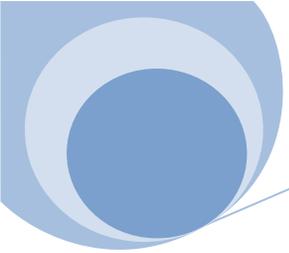
Imagine **NOBODY** cares.

I mean nobody. An asteroid hit the earth, and everyone you know is dead. Miraculously, society is back to functioning like normal, minus everyone you know being dead.

Would you keep doing what you're currently doing?

What would you do instead?





Here's another idea. Keep trying new stuff that sounds interesting and see where it leads.

Always keep your brain open for ways to turn that something interesting into a career.

Also, every once in a while try something scary. Scary means you're veering off the path of least resistance.

My first time on stage, my hands were trembling and my voice was shaky, and I could barely read the jokes I wrote down. But when I got off stage, I had never felt better. And I didn't even get many laughs.

Here's another question:

What are five things you would do if you knew you'd succeed?

Write down five things.

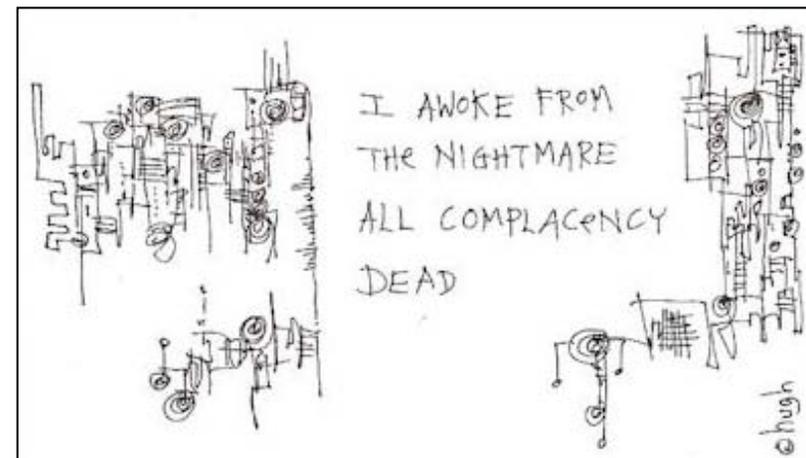
Seriously, write it down.

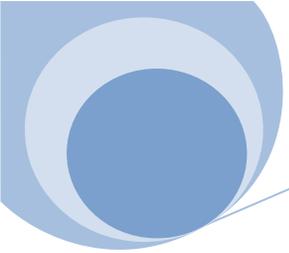
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Now, how many of these have you tried?

If you haven't tried some of these five things, as soon as you finish this book, go try them!

If you've tried them, try to brainstorm how to make each of those five things a career.





Let's discuss reality, and how it might punch you in the face.

You might love to paint but you have a serious concern: "What if I work really hard, and twenty years later, I still suck at it? Or what if I'm really good but nobody recognizes it, and some hack with less talent gets all the money and fame. I might as well not try and at least have a nice house."

If you haven't had such a thought yet, I'm sure you will in the near future. Hell I've had it about comedy lots of times. I'll watch some comedians on TV and think, "This isn't funny or original, how is he on TV and not me?"

These are the wrong questions to be asking at this point.

That's your negative adult voice talking. Here's some better thought processes for you realists.

Try doing the activity you like for ten straight days.

Then ask yourself, do you still want to do it?

I used to want to be a snowboarding instructor because I love teaching, snowboarding and nature. My family has gone to Vermont for three days every year for the past ten years. It was my "quit corporate America and become a snowboarding instructor" fantasy. Then I snowboarded for seven straight days.

By day five, I didn't want to get out of bed, let alone get on the slope.

This leads to Ben's number one rule of careers:

If you can't do something ten straight days and be happy doing it, you shouldn't make it a career.

But let's say you pass that test, you might still suck in twenty years. Here's what you do:

Try doing the activity for a year, then reevaluate.

Have you noticed considerable improvement?

And do you still like to do it?

If you can say yes to both, bust your ass for the next five years. By that point, you should be able to honestly answer:

“How close am I to making a living off of this? And do I still want it?”

Make sure you're still improving too.

By this point, if you're not honestly getting much, much better, it might be a good time to quit, get a normal job, and pop out some kids. Then hope your kids have more talent than you... just kidding.

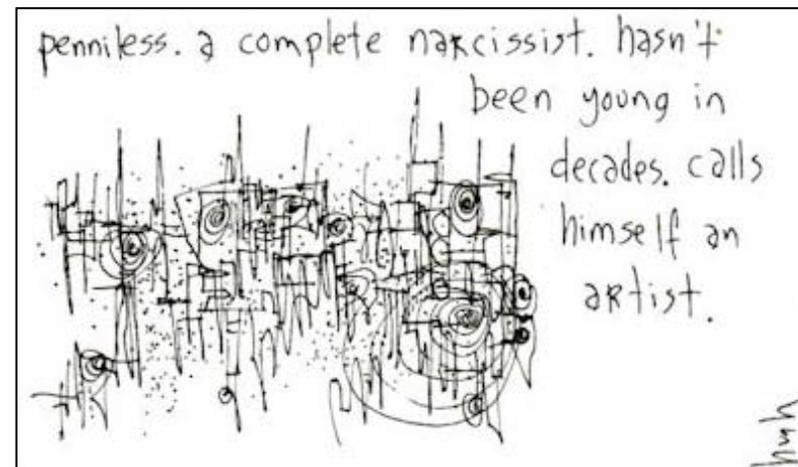
At this point, if you're not close to making a living off your passion, re-open your eyes to other possible careers that are related to what you've been doing but that you might be a little better at.

Not succeeding as a stand up comedian?
Maybe you should become a comedy writer.

Can't get promoted past junior varsity football coach? Try becoming an athletic director.

Can't earn better than C's at an Ivy League school?
Run for President of the United States.

For example, in high school I thought I wanted to be an NFL quarterback. So for four years, I worked really hard at becoming better at football. Four years later, I learned that I can't even start as a high school quarterback, let alone an NFL one. See, that didn't even take five years.



You might be thinking, “This was all nice and dandy but I got bills to pay, especially those college loans coming due. I’m going to get a real job.”

My first response?

I never once mentioned not having a standard nine to five office job.

Although these days, most of those jobs are eight to six, or longer. So get an office job, but get one you actually like. I’m know they exist. If you think your heart is dead set on being an accountant, that’s fine, but you love basketball too, so why not become an accountant for the NBA instead of for the local hardware store?

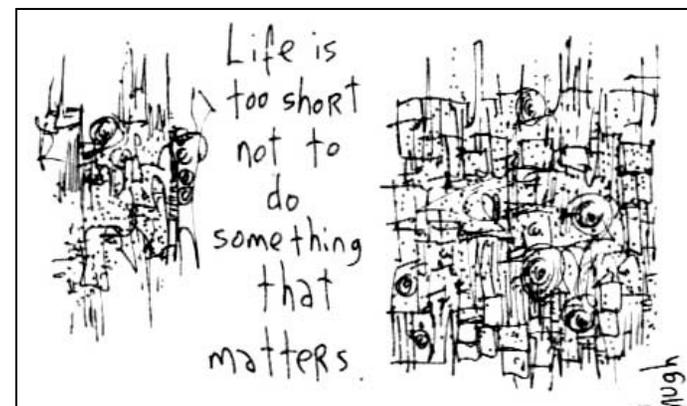
But let’s say you’ve completely ignored me and got a nice high paying job that you hate. Now what?

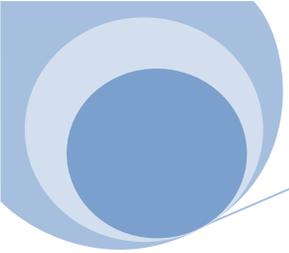
Figure out a way to make a difference doing that job.

Make an actual impact.

The only time I was happy doing consulting was when I spent two weeks in middle of nowhere Texas training a hundred middle aged, high school dropout, warehouse workers how to use a new scanning device. They’d come in scared about learning something new and would usually be thinking “what does this twelve year old know?” But by the middle of the training they’d start to “get it” and appreciate that someone was taking the time to teach them. It’s the only time I felt I made an actual difference while being a corporate sellout. So if you can do that all the time, you’ll not only save your soul, you’ll get to save a nice paycheck too.

I made a similar point with my mom. She was saying how having a PhD is vital, and I was like, “In your day to day life, who’s made more of an impact? Albert Einstein or Jerry Seinfeld?” Ben one, mom zero.





CONCLUSION

So before this book ends, you're probably wondering, what happened to me since I decided to drop out?

Well, I spent the first month in Los Angeles, mostly because I had already created some comedy shows at Caltech, and I didn't want to let down the other comedians by canceling the shows. So I spent my time booking gigs for when I'd get back to New York, as well as writing this book, and writing new comedy material. Right now, I'm freelancing as a web designer, video editor and small business consultant during the day while doing comedy every night. I've also started giving interactive motivational talks on the same subject you just finished reading about, "How To Find Your Passion."

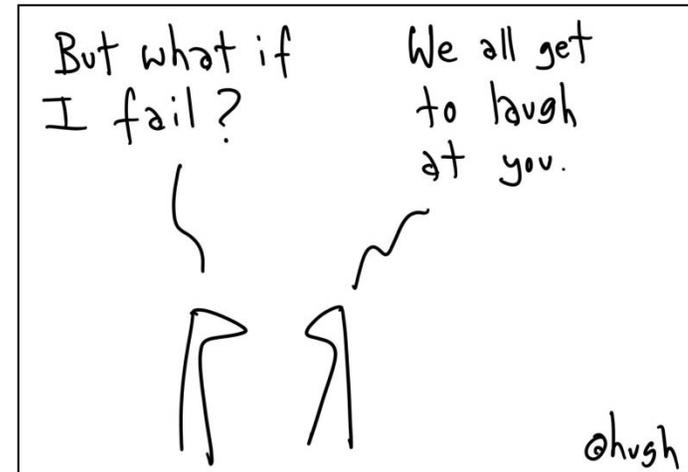
This is my really complicated way of saying:
Ramen Noodles have never tasted so good!

If you're interested in scheduling my motivational talk, [email me](#).

If you're interested in watching me perform comedy, check [my website](#) for my schedule.

Most nights, I can get you in for no cover charge if, at the door you tell them, "I dropped out of Caltech to become a comedian."

It'll sound really good, trust me.



About Ben Rosenfeld:



Ben is a New York City based comedian and motivational speaker. His passion is stand up comedy. Ben also performs improv, writes and performs sketch comedy, and runs a [comedy blog](#) that includes helpful hints for new comedians, video critiques of his performances and interviews with other comics.

Before realizing his passion for comedy, Ben was on the middle class path to “success”. He worked as a management consultant for a Fortune 500 company, Accenture, and attended a PhD program in Neuroeconomics at Caltech on a full scholarship.

Special thanks to:

Hugh MacLeod

for allowing his wonderful and thought provoking cartoons to be used throughout this book.

Please checkout his website at www.GapingVoid.com

If my eBook struck a chord and got you thinking about your life, here are some articles, videos and books from some very competent, smart people. These resources have influenced me on my path and I highly recommend them to you on your journey.

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