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# So Good They Can't Ignore You: Why Skills Trump Passion In The Quest For Work You Love



## Synopsis

In this eye-opening account, Cal Newport debunks the long-held belief that "follow your passion" is good advice. Not only is the cliché flawed—preexisting passions are rare and have little to do with how most people end up loving their work—but it can also be dangerous, leading to anxiety and chronic job hopping. After making his case against passion, Newport sets out on a quest to discover the reality of how people end up loving what they do. Spending time with organic farmers, venture capitalists, screenwriters, freelance computer programmers, and others who admitted to deriving great satisfaction from their work, Newport uncovers the strategies they used and the pitfalls they avoided in developing their compelling careers. Matching your job to a preexisting passion does not matter, he reveals. Passion comes after you put in the hard work to become excellent at something valuable, not before. In other words, what you do for a living is much less important than how you do it. With a title taken from the comedian Steve Martin, who once said his advice for aspiring entertainers was to "be so good they can't ignore you," Cal Newport's clearly written manifesto is mandatory reading for anyone fretting about what to do with their life, or frustrated by their current job situation and eager to find a fresh new way to take control of their livelihood. He provides an evidence-based blueprint for creating work you love. **SO GOOD THEY CAN'T IGNORE YOU** will change the way we think about our careers, happiness, and the crafting of a remarkable life.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Stop worrying about what you feel like doing (and what the world owes you) and instead, start creating something meaningful and then give it to the world. Cal really delivers with this one." --Seth Godin, author, *Linchpin*"Entrepreneurial professionals must develop a competitive advantage by building valuable skills. This book offers advice based on research and reality--not meaningless platitudes-- on how to invest in yourself in order to stand out from the crowd. An important guide to starting up a remarkable career." --Reid Hoffman, co-founder & chairman of LinkedIn and co-author of the bestselling *The Start-Up of You: Adapt to the Future, Invest in Yourself, and Transform Your Career*"Do what you love and the money will follow' sounds like great advice -- until it's time to get a job and disillusionment quickly sets in. Cal Newport ably demonstrates how the quest for 'passion' can corrode job satisfaction. If all he accomplished with this book was to turn conventional wisdom on its head, that would be interesting enough. But he goes further -- offering advice and examples that will help you bypass the disillusionment and get right to work building skills that matter." --Daniel H. Pink, bestselling author of *Drive* and *A Whole New Mind*"This book changed my mind. It has moved me from 'find your passion, so that you can be useful' to 'be useful so that you can find your passion.' That is a big flip, but it's more honest, and that is why I am giving each of my three young adult children a copy of this unorthodox guide." --Kevin Kelly, Senior Maverick, *WIRED* magazine"First book in years I read twice, to make sure I got it. Brilliant counter-intuitive career insights. Powerful new ideas that have already changed the way I think of my own career, and the advice I give others." --Derek Sivers, founder, CD Baby"Written in an optimistic and accessible tone, with clear logic and no-nonsense advice, this work is useful reading for anyone new to the job market and striving to find a path or for those who have been struggling to find meaning in their current careers."--Publishers Weekly

Cal Newport, Ph.D., lives in Washington, DC, where he is a writer and an assistant professor of computer science at Georgetown University. He also runs the popular website *Study Hacks: Decoding Patterns of Success*.

I've been following Cal Newport's ideas for a while now, so when I learned that he was coming out with a book, I pre-ordered it from . I was not disappointed. If you have a child or know someone in college who is trying to figure out what to do with their life, or even if you're north of fifty and still wonder what you'll be when you grow up, then this book is for you. *So Good They Can't Ignore You*, is so good that you shouldn't ignore it. The central premise that sets this book apart from so much life advice that is out on the market is that following your passion is terrible advice. There are two

main reasons for this: first, very few people at a young age know enough about life to choose something to be really passionate about, and even if they do, they are bound to be wrong. If Steve Jobs had followed his early passion, maybe he would have made a dent in the universe as a Buddhist monk. Second, while most people would love to have a job that allows them to be creative, make an impact on the world, and have control over how they choose to spend their time, jobs like that are rare and valuable, and the only way to get something valuable is to offer something in return. And the only way to be in a position to do that is to master a difficult skill. Passion doesn't waive the laws of economics, and if it's not difficult it won't be rare. The book cites the example of Julia, who quit a secure job in advertising to pursue her passion of teaching yoga. Armed with a 4-week course, she quit her job, began teaching, and one year later was on food stamps. Here's a hint: if a four-week course is enough to allow you to set up shop, do you think you might have a little competition? Taking the economic model a step further, the book argues that you must develop career capital, which comprises skills, relationships and a body of work. The long and arduous process of building your capital also opens up your options and refines your own understanding of what you really like to do and what you can be good at. Newport offers the craftsman mindset in place of the passion mindset. The passion mindset asks what the world can offer you in terms of fulfillment and fun; the craftsman mindset forces you to look inside and ask what you can offer the world. You have to create value to get value, and that takes time and deliberate practice. It's the only way to get so good that they can't ignore you. The nice benefit is that rather than being good at something because you love it, you love doing something because you've gotten good at it. (Note the similarity to Carol Dweck's growth mindset.) What's the little idea? Another idea that Newport challenges is the common advice that you should have a big idea--set a big hairy audacious goal for your life and then work backward from it. The master plan approach certainly works for some people, but how many people do you know who have actually lived their lives that way? Instead, you should work forward from where you are, taking small steps that expand your capabilities and build up your career capital. In this way, more options and possibilities open up. Newport compares career discoveries to scientific discoveries, most of which occur in what's called the "adjacent possible", or just on the other side of the cutting edge of current knowledge. The book is well-written. Newport emulates Malcolm Gladwell's technique of telling individual stories to illustrate the main point in each chapter. In addition, the arc of the stories follows a master story thread through the book, so that you feel like you are brought along on his quest to figure it all out. Here comes the part I did not like about the book, and I would not devote so much space to it if the author were not an MIT PhD, just beginning his career as an assistant professor of computer science. The methodology

in the book is suspect in two ways. While its stories are the book's great strength, the plural of anecdote is not data, and it's surprising how little hard data we're given. I certainly buy in because it makes sense and it matches my own life experience, but someone with a more skeptical point of view may be a tougher sell. In at least one case, where he does use a peer-reviewed study for support, he overstates the case. Citing a paper by Amy Wrzesniewski, he states that the happiest, most passionate employees are not those who followed their passion into a position, but those who stayed around long enough to be good at what they do. If you read the actual paper, you won't find that conclusion, and in fact the author stresses that the sample size of 24 is too small to draw any firm conclusions. That said, I strongly recommend this book to just about anyone, regardless of where you are in your career.

First of all, I would say that this is a fantastic book that I wish that I read right after high school. As someone who is always in the pursuit of becoming better, it is always easy to look back and wonder if you have decided on the right path. You could be successful in many different paths but deciding on a path and becoming great at it is far more fulfilling. So good they can't ignore you is a great model to base your life off of, whether professional or personal life. It can take a lot of hard work to build up the career capital needed to obtain this "status," but it is this hard work that differentiates people in this world. Coming from a new entrepreneur, being so good they can't ignore you is vital. There are many turbulent times in entrepreneurship, but always striving to become the master of your craft and build enough career capital will make it so that you can overcome this turbulent times. The only reason why I rated this 4/5 instead of 5/5 is that I wanted more. It's a fairly short read (took me 2-3 days) and it left me wanting more. I guess I'll just have to read Cal's other books!

originally gave this book a 3 star review, but read it again, and its definitely a 5 star read. sometimes its ones own frame of mind when absorbing content. a must read if you are considering building a career or following your so called "passion".

I was in a point of my life where I was not able to balance and focus on what i actually want to have as a long time career. In this modern world you do have to know how to do different types of jobs and have multiple skills, but what skills are your best is what you need to focus on. The best thing that this book taught me was when we do our job search we always approach thinking that what we will get from it instead we should focus on what we can give to the company through this job. This actually changed my point of view and my approach in my job search and even in my career.

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