

The Power of Displaying Passion for Your Work

By Art Petty

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There's something infectious and likeable about someone who displays obvious passion for their work, particularly when the enthusiasm is anchored in fixing, improving or innovating around something meaningful to others and to the organization. For professionals climbing the rungs of the organizational ladder or navigating boundary crossing in highly siloed organizations, visible enthusiasm for your work will serve you well during your journey.

What you project about yourself, your attitude and your enthusiasm for your work are all important components of your professional presence—how people perceive you as a professional. Since others must choose you for more responsibility, it's important to have your presence working hard for you and not against you. Putting your passion for your work on display is one way of projecting a stronger, more positive presence.

Managers appreciate employees who show how much they enjoy their work. (Perhaps more than you will know.) Executives are hard-wired to notice people who seem to thrive and enjoy their work and new challenges. And peers and other resources tend to rally around individuals they perceive as genuine in their interest to right a wrong, fix something that is broken or do something new for the greater good.

Your showcasing your personal passion for your work is an admission ticket to the early stages of that precious asset we seek from others, known as trust. Your enthusiasm excites a similar emotion in others, something that is sadly often dormant in your many unengaged co-workers who have grown accustomed to accepting the status quo. Armed with the trust and support of others, you can move mountains.

Alternatively, a dour demeanor or one that seems to project a constant aura of boredom or worse, righteous indignation laced with "I'm just here to do my job and by the way, I'm right and you're wrong," has the opposite effect of the positively passionate individual. I've known, managed and coached plenty of both of these individuals over my career, and without a doubt, the individuals who showcased genuine interest in others and authentic enthusiasm for their work and their firm's work have grossly outdistanced their often very intelligent but less excited peers.

While putting a smile on your face and ginning up some half-hearted enthusiasm won't get you too far—people will see through your attempt at a façade. Those striving to grow and advance in their careers will be well-served by discovering (or re-discovering) what they love about their work and putting it on display. And by the way, if there's nothing left in the tank that resembles passion for your work, it's time to consider a new direction.

Five ideas to strengthen your professional presence:

1. Start with shifting your attitude from “I’m here” to “You’re here!” One of the great role models of professional presence in my career was an incredibly successful business owner who was widely viewed as the patriarch of his industry. He was a marvel to watch as he arrived at a conference or entered a room. Some people project the aura of “I’m here, and I’m important, please acknowledge it.” His approach projected “You’re here, and I’m honored to see you and I acknowledge you.”

Whether you were a senior executive or someone fairly low on the ladder, he sought you out, engaged with you and left you feeling like he appreciated you. Needless to say, that approach earned him widespread respect and massive cooperation for a number of his industry initiatives. The “I’m here” attitude projection is a derailment factor and the “You’re here” showcases interest and enthusiasm for being in the presence of others. It is indeed a powerful approach to leverage.

2. Execute on social blocking and tackling. The basics count. Smile more, engage with people with the “You’re here” attitude and practice and employ active listening techniques. The latter emphasizes listening more than talking, striving to understand the views of others by asking questions and then working hard to offer supportive ideas or direct help.

3. Seek first to understand. While much about passion is you putting your enthusiasm for your project or work on display, it’s imperative that you understand how your ideas fit with the interests and initiatives of others. Too often in the workplace, people are at cross-purposes over approaches. They focus and argue on “the what.” They fail to understand that they completely agree on “the why.” No one loves a pontificating blowhard who fails to listen to the views of others. Everyone appreciates someone who can listen and understand interests and blend or meld ideas.

4. Accept and project that you are there to solve problems. Too many professionals display a sense of righteous indignation over the problems they encounter—and of course these problems are always because others are too ignorant to get their part right. That’s bull. Your job is to enthusiastically seek out and engage with others to make things better (improved quality, reduced time or cost, improved effectiveness, etc.). Stop thinking and projecting that you are the only smart one in a sea of idiots and start recognizing and displaying through your actions that you are here to help fix and strengthen.

5. Turn the volume up, but remember, it’s not about you. Many good professionals struggle with articulating how important they perceive their work is and how excited they are to be engaged in it. And when they do find the courage to share their enthusiasm, the message comes out muddled or it seems self-serving to others.

Do find or create opportunities to share your genuine excitement. Project review meetings, executive updates and even workplace social situations are all appropriate venues to showcase your enthusiasm for your initiatives. Make certain however, to anchor your excitement in why the initiative is relevant/helpful/germane to creating something new, fixing something that needs fixing or doing something important more effectively. It’s not about you!

Showcasing your passion for your work sends a strong message to everyone around you. It screams, “I’m engaged, I’m here to help and to solve, and let’s do something great.” As an executive, and a coach, I love this attitude. I’ll move mountains to help these people. Sadly, this type of enthusiasm is either dormant in many or simply in short supply. Odd because it costs absolutely nothing. Try it on for size, you might just like the results in your career and your life.

Art Petty is a coach and consultant working with top executives and management teams to unlock business and human potential. He writes the [Management Excellence](#) blog.

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