

# Follow your heart as you pursue your career

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More than half of working Americans feel disengaged from their jobs, according to Gallup's latest State of the American Workplace poll. Unenthusiastic, uncommitted, and uninvolved, male and female workers alike are now, more than ever before, unlikely to be "doing what they love" at work. Should you pursue your passion or strive toward a secure living?

A new Tel Aviv University study published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* finds that the two objectives are not mutually exclusive—in fact, each feeds the other. Young people with strong callings are more likely to take risks, persist, and ultimately get jobs in their chosen fields, satisfying both their personal and professional career needs. The

researchers also found that those who exhibit a passion for these interests in their teens are more likely to be successful later on, regardless of their inherent talent.

The research was conducted by by Dr. Daniel Heller of TAU's Recanati School of Business, in collaboration with Dr. Shoshana Dobrow Riza of the London School of Economics.

## **The head vs. the heart**

"Given the economic reality today, people commonly face trade-offs as they make decisions that pit the two sides of careers - the 'heart,' or intrinsic side, and the 'head,' or extrinsic side - against one another," said Dr. Heller, "We wanted to examine people who chose to follow more challenging career paths, such as those in the arts, and assess their chances of 'making it.'"

Dr. Heller and Dr. Riza surveyed some 450 high-school music students at two elite US summer music programs over the course of 11 years (2001-2012) as they developed from adolescents to young adults to professional musicians.

"We found that participants with stronger callings toward music in adolescence were likely to assess their musical abilities more favorably and were more likely to pursue music professionally as adults regardless of actual musical ability," said Dr. Heller.

Even so, difficulties in pursuing their dreams were still evident. According to the study, participants who were involved in music professionally, even at a minimum, earned considerably less (a gap of \$12,000 per year on average) than freelancers or amateurs who pursued their musical interests outside of work. But they also reported similar or greater satisfaction with their jobs and lives. For those with strong

callings, personal rewards such as satisfaction may matter more than professional rewards such as income.

## Weighing the options

"If you experience a strong calling, you need to be cognizant of your relative preferences for intrinsic versus extrinsic rewards and potential trade-offs between the two, then decide accordingly," said Dr. Heller.

"However, we found that, in certain fields, one's drive or passion afforded a competitive advantage over others, even when unrelated to objective ability or talent.

"In general, society benefits from an excess of talented people competing for a limited number of positions in winner-take-all labor markets," Dr. Heller continued. "Individuals who 'win' in this market are exemplary. Although individuals entering this type of market eventually 'lose' in extrinsic terms by definition, they still benefit from intrinsic rewards and garner subjective value and well-being, such as the satisfaction derived from attempting to fulfil their calling, even for a short time."

The researchers are currently examining the implications of [career](#) choice on overall wellbeing.

Provided by Tel Aviv University

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