



Even in a dismal economy, follow your dreams – and perhaps the twain shall meet

As a junior at Rocori High School in Minnesota, John Stielow had his sights set on becoming an algebra teacher. “I’ve always loved to do algebra or even math in general,” he said. “It was one of the only subjects in school that I really liked to do and look forward to almost every day.” Stielow is lucky that his passion aligns well with a career that has remained pretty secure despite the poor economy and dwindling job market. He can find a job that is both enjoyable and promising for him.

Not all high school students can say that. Many are struggling with college and career choices based on competing drives: pleasure and money.

Factoring in the economy

This tension is intensified in the throes of a recession when hiring is scarce: Should students follow their dreams even if those dreams don’t pay the bills and make them nearly unemployable? Or should they stick to career paths that offer more job and financial security?

With his goal, Stielow seems to be following both passion and profit. He loves math, and, according to the Occupational Outlook Handbook by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of elementary, middle and secondary school teachers is expected to grow. Fortunately for Stielow, math and science teachers are expected to be some of the most needed.

Not all sections of the current job market, however, have favorable outlooks. Visit the Bureau of Labor Statistics website for the most up to date information by career.

Waiting out the recession?

So the job outlook is not hopeless, especially for high school students who have four or five more years (if they are going to college) to wait out the recession. Bob Bardwell, a guidance counselor at Monson High School in Monson, Mass., said the state of the economy today shouldn’t dictate your career plans for the future.

“In four years, things could be very different,” he said.

Bardwell encourages students to not get discouraged if their interests don’t match up with a profitable or secure career. The recession has made the job market more difficult, but the types of jobs available also come simply with a change in society, he said.

“Technology changes it, the economy changes it, and there are jobs that are hot regardless. It’s important to focus on where society is at

rather than if there’s jobs or not,” he said.

What are society’s trends now? Technology is booming, creating openings for computer specialists and biotechnology careers in the medical field. The world is also going green, opening up thousands of jobs for engineers and scientists to research and develop environmentally friendly energy. Baby boomers are retiring, leaving openings for young adults.

Go for the dream

Of course making a living is necessary, but counselors and students agree that following passions is extremely important. Marcy Morrison, a speaker and the author of “Finding Your Passion: The Easy Guide to Your Dream Career,” has worked with many adolescents in this area and warns, “If our work is not in alignment with our strengths and passions, we can find ourselves in some miserable situations.”

But, she said, “You should always strive to have a good attitude and do your best no matter where you are—you never know where it may lead you.”

Bardwell’s message to the students he works with has remained the same: Go for the dream. But he adds, “Go for the dream, but keep an eye on the reality of the job market.”

And keeping an eye on reality means that students need to understand that a recession makes the market “incredibly competitive,” Morrison said, so whatever students can do to stand out, the better. This includes completing internships and networking through teachers, coaches, or even professionals your parents might know. Morrison also emphasized the importance of students developing a short-term plan for getting a job that will pay the bills while working toward a long-term goal of a position they are passionate about.

Persistence will pay off

Although Stielow is willing to do the work, he echoes many of his peers in that he would like to be paid well for his work. To him, following your passion is doing something that you love and that you are willing to do almost every day. Morrison said people can have the best of both worlds—the dream job and the paycheck—if they have persistence and dedication.

“[They] need to realize that the long-term strategy of following their passions may mean that the money may not come right away, but if they stick with it, it will come,” she said.



Grasping passion requires reach

— by Bertel King

A graduate of the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, Bertel King, Jr. hopes to produce another novel this fall. Hometown: Newsoms, Virginia

Students do not need to be taught the value of finding a job. College freshmen stress choosing a major, trying to balance what they want to do with

what their parents want them to do – with what will make them money. College seniors prowls career fairs looking for the job most likely to offer the most money upon graduation. Interns observe the importance of a steady career path.

When it comes time to draft the great to-do list of life, making money is not something most people forget to add.

Our world is what we make it

Far more people need to be reminded, or told for the first time, the importance of following their passion. I know some do not have this luxury. I will not tell anyone to ignore the realities of the world, but the reality is that this world is what we make it.

I want to live in a world driven more by passion than profit; if the only things holding me back are inhibitions and fears, I am in the place I need to be to change the world. Or at least my world, or the worlds of the people around me, because that is all this world is, billions of little worlds trying to make sense of the lives they share.

I am an independent author. I cannot say I know how to make a living from writing, all I know is that I have been putting stories to paper since I was a child. During my senior year of high school I completed my first full-length manuscript, and I self-published it my senior year of college as an ebook.

Whether or not I sell a lot of copies is not the point. Whether or not I ever make a living from it is not the point. What matters is that I do not give up my passion for telling stories due to the pressures of living in a society driven by making profit.

Fulfillment feels good

Creating worlds makes me feel fulfilled, and what is the point of focusing on another career if the result is feeling hollow inside? It feels good to call myself an independent author; what that entails, well, I will figure that out as I go.

As a high school student, you might not have any idea how you will get from where you are to where you want to be. I understand; I still do not know how myself. But I have learned that the longer I aim toward something, the sooner it starts to become real.

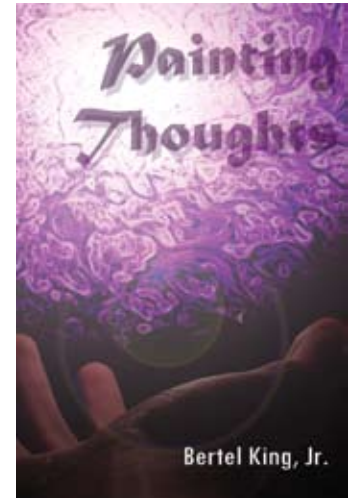
I asked teachers, professors and even past editors at Student Paths for advice on how to become a novelist, but each author's journey is unique, and I will not let uncertainty prevent me from making the journey. Besides, I have a book for sale now, so that makes me a novelist, right?

Reach for it

Ask yourself: What is it you want to do, and what would it take for you to feel like you have become the person you want to be?

A stand-up comedian is not a comedian because he is hired by Comedy Central; he is a comedian because he tells jokes whenever given the chance. All he has to do is reach for the microphone to be a step closer to living his dream.

I have said enough into the mic now; I am going to hand it to you. I hope you take it.



"Painting Thoughts" is Bertel King, Jr.'s debut novel.

What really is a passion? How do you know what your passions are?

Brett Farmiloe is a co-founder of "Pursue the Passion," a Web site that features interviews with professionals who truly have a passion for what they do and what that means in everyday life. Farmiloe told the blog UpMo, "Passion isn't just something that you 'love.'... It's what motivates and moves you to action."

And pursuing your passion now is even more important than when the economy was booming, he said. He summed up the "formula" for identifying and following your passion: taking ownership over your strengths, weaknesses and interests, and risk plus hard work.

"It's a matter of identifying where the passion comes from, knowing that passions do change over a lifetime and that you're not limited to 'one,' and balancing your life around that clarity," Farmiloe said.

**FOLLOW
YOUR DREAMS**

5 passions more likely to come with a paycheck

You might be able to marry your mission with money if your interests lie in one of these careers with staying power,



1) Senior health care – As retired baby boomers become a large part of our population, this aging generation will put a huge demand on health care workers and senior citizen caretakers. This means the need for registered nurses, physician assistants, physical therapists, and geriatric health specialists is growing and will continue to do so over the next 10 years.

needs.

2) Computer Science – From programmers to Web designers to IT specialists, every business needs a “computer geek” who can support and develop a company’s technology



3) Environmental work – Green is the new black—when it comes to energy, at least. So instead of relying on that oh-so-’80s oil to fuel our cars and homes, people are turning to wind turbines, solar panels, hybrid cars, and organic food. That means we need scientists, researchers, and engineers to meet these demands and reduce pollution in homes and workplaces.

3) Energy development– The pressure to fund and develop alternative and renewable energy sources like solar and wind energy is as high as ever. Scientific and environmental researchers are needed, as well as engineers and economists to develop new ways to run our world.

5) Biotechnology – Jobs in this field are growing as fast as technology, and employees report high job satisfaction and relatively low stress. A biomedical technician is in charge of maintenance and repair of machines such as heart monitors and ventilators. Another example of a biotechnologist, genetic counselors, analyze genetic predisposition to diseases or conditions, helping patients decide if they should have preventative mastectomies, for example, if they’re at high risk for breast cancer, or whether a couple who has genetic predispositions for risky diseases should try to get pregnant.

