

The Paradox of Passion

By Mark Stevens

So much in life functions in a set of concentric circles. Like planets in orbit around the sun. The closer to the ball of fire at the center of the galaxy, the more intense the relationship with the heavenly bodies spinning in worship.



Life on the outer circles is generally passionless. It is like talking with strangers, with acquaintances, with the ebb and flow of humanity that passes through our days mostly nameless, faceless. We make conversation because it is impolite not to. Contrast this with the rush we feel to share secrets, emotions, to jump up and down and scream “I love you” to the few, the one, at the center of the circles. It is all a continuum: the further from whatever or whoever our sun is, the more sterile our communications, our actions—the closer to the essence, the more we are driven by passion. At the center, there is no script. No rules. No etiquette. It is a chain reaction out of control and so beautiful for it.

The paradox is that the work, the people, the pursuits we love the most, are also those that take the most from us. Because we more than care about them, we revel in them, we reach for the stars in ways to make the objects of our passions happier, more perfect, increasingly beautiful and successful.

You don’t take the loves of your life for granted. The people, the art, the business, the poetry: whatever you do or relate to in the center of the circles, are always—as long as you love them—on the short list of the passions you want to bestow with all of the heart and intellect and music you can muster. And then more. And once that is accomplished, more still.

That is how you know you are in love. You cannot adore the person more. You will never say the business is just fine as it is. You don’t put it on a shelf and say, “That’s all well and good. Job done.”

Not when you are close to [the sun](#). It is delirious. It is. Also deliciously relentless. A siren song you cannot resist. Wherever you are. Whatever the hour.

In Roman mythology, Janus, the god of gates, could see the past and the present simultaneously. That is a powerful gift. That is an enormous obligation. Something that reflects the way we behave with the people and the pursuits within the passion rings of our lives. In the company of strangers we look up or down. With the handful of precious things, we look to the past and to the future, remembering constantly how wonderful the former was and how [extraordinary](#) we want the latter to be.



Michelangelo painted half of Renaissance Italy but his Sistine Chapels, his Davids, gave him the passion that ran through his body at the same time depriving him of his sleep, his idle thoughts, as he focused on making his loves perfect. And knowing he could never make them perfect enough.

Passion is a paradox. It is the most exhilarating experience in life. And it is the most demanding. And it is both components of this equation that lead to doing, feeling and achieving remarkable things.

Ask Van Gogh. Ask Walton. Ask Salk. Ask Lincoln. Ask Ford.
On many nights they drank champagne. On others they could not rest.
Passion accounted for both.

Passion made them great. It is the universal exponent.

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