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Finding the Sweet Spot in Your Life Can be More Than Just a Dream

By Bob Porter
UCF Forum columnist
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When I was a small child, I had a recurring dream that I ran and jumped out of my second-story bedroom window and began to fly. I would fly around the neighborhood to see my friends and help people, and I had a lot of fun doing it. I can't exactly recall how I learned to fly, but it was instinctive, and I just inherently knew it was a gift. I can still remember how my stomach would get jittery in the moments right before I took the jump in order to fly.

I am reminded of this vivid dream, and that powerful stomach-wrenching feeling, when soon-to-graduate students desperately ask me how to find their first job after graduation. As I take time to speak to them, I tell them about how to find a job, but more importantly, about how to find the right job by living in their "sweet spot" in life, which is a term that I often use to summarize the three criteria that help me make important career decisions.

I have the privilege of teaching in the college of business for UCF. I primarily teach in the executive graduate business programs (our executive and professional MBA programs), but there is one undergraduate class that I really love to teach, which is named Capstone. This class is usually taken by undergraduate business students in their final semester of coursework, and I usually have from 500 to 750 students in this class.

As the professor, I choose to run this class like a company, where I'm the CEO, students are employees, and we do "work for clients" (not homework). During this class, we have the opportunity to integrate many aspects of their coursework into projects, as well as

discuss career development. It is during this class that I encourage my employees (students) to find their sweet-spot in life and to choose careers that reflect this sweet spot. I've been teaching and sharing this concept for more than 10 years with students, employees and my consulting clients.

So what is the sweet spot in life? I define it as the intersection of three areas in your life, and these three areas of life can be summarized easily by drawing three different circles that intersect in one central point, which is the sweet spot. I have adapted this powerful model from the book "Good to Great" by Jim Collins, using the hedgehog concept to help explain how good companies become great companies. The hedgehog lesson comes from an ancient Greek parable about the fox, which knows a lot of small things, and the hedgehog, which knows one big thing: how to organize a complex world into a single idea that guides all decisions.

The first of the three circles describes your passions in life. This circle is probably the easiest to complete, because it represents the activities that you enjoy and would even typically do for free. The second circle contains the activities that you are very good at. You may be good at several things, and this circle typically contains the activities that people often ask you to help them with. The third circle lists activities that others value. This may include things that others are willing to pay you for, but the term "valued" can be more holistic. For instance, I'm not paid to provide career advice to students, but they find great value in receiving my guidance.

The area where these three circles intersect is called your sweet spot. These are the activities that represent the intersection of your passions, what you are good at, and what other people value. Understanding where these things intersect provide a great deal of insight into what career opportunities you might want to pursue and enjoy.

As an example, my sweet spot involves solving very complex problems that involve people, business strategy, and finances (numbers). Therefore, teaching business strategy and leadership as well as consulting with small and large companies while leveraging my prior industry experience is a perfect fit: something that I enjoy, others value, and that serves as my career.

I think that finding a career fit is very much like my childhood dream of flying. It may be frightening at first, but once you go for it, and find a good fit (your sweet spot), you do it naturally, with a passion and a purpose, and can actually live the dream!

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