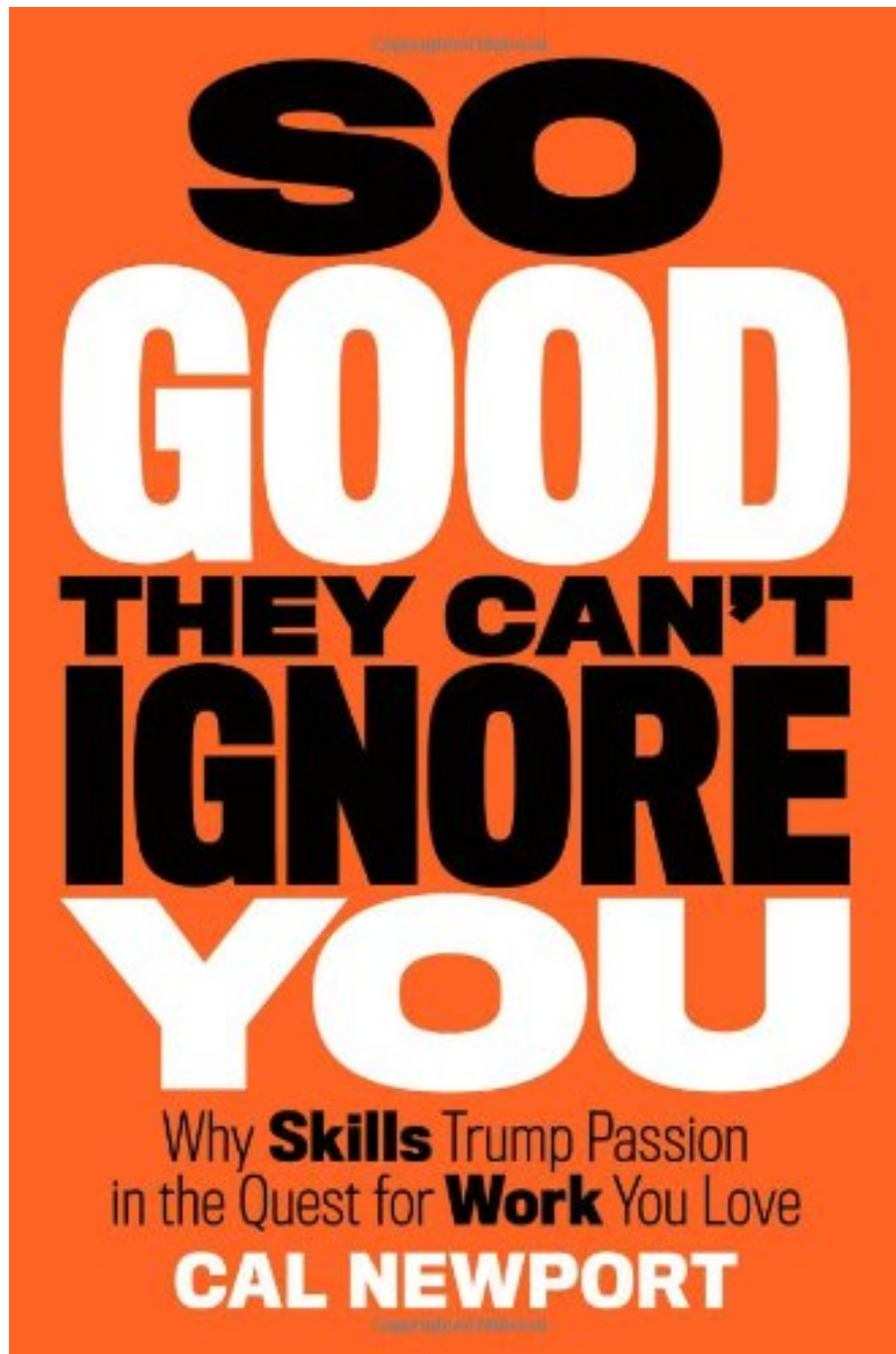


**SO GOOD THEY CAN'T IGNORE YOU: WHY
SKILLS TRUMP PASSION IN THE QUEST
FOR WORK YOU LOVE BY CAL NEWPORT**



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Review

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About the Author

Cal Newport, Ph.D., lives in Washington, D.C., where he is a writer and an assistant professor of computer science at Georgetown University. He also runs the popular website [Study Hacks: Decoding Patterns of Success](#). This is his fourth book.

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In this eye-opening account, Cal Newport debunks the long-held belief that "follow your passion" is good advice. Not only is the cliché flawed—preexisting passions are rare and have little to do with how most people end up loving their work—but it can also be dangerous, leading to anxiety and chronic job hopping.

After making his case against passion, Newport sets out on a quest to discover the reality of how people end up loving what they do. Spending time with organic farmers, venture capitalists, screenwriters, freelance computer programmers, and others who admitted to deriving great satisfaction from their work, Newport uncovers the strategies they used and the pitfalls they avoided in developing their compelling careers.

Matching your job to a preexisting passion does not matter, he reveals. Passion comes after you put in the hard work to become excellent at something valuable, not before.

In other words, what you do for a living is much less important than how you do it.

With a title taken from the comedian Steve Martin, who once said his advice for aspiring entertainers was to "be so good they can't ignore you," Cal Newport's clearly written manifesto is mandatory reading for anyone fretting about what to do with their life, or frustrated by their current job situation and eager to find a fresh new way to take control of their livelihood. He provides an evidence-based blueprint for creating work you love.

SO GOOD THEY CAN'T IGNORE YOU will change the way we think about our careers, happiness, and the crafting of a remarkable life.

- Sales Rank: #8749 in Books
- Brand: Business Plus
- Published on: 2012-09-18
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.38" h x 1.15" w x 5.75" l, .88 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 304 pages

Features

- Great product!

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Most helpful customer reviews

412 of 429 people found the following review helpful.

Don't ignore this book

By J. F. Malcolm

I've been following Cal Newport's ideas for a while now, so when I learned that he was coming out with a book, I pre-ordered it from Amazon. I was not disappointed. If you have a child or know someone in college

who is trying to figure out what to do with their life, or even if you're north of fifty and still wonder what you'll be when you grow up, then this book is for you. So Good They Can't Ignore You, is so good that you shouldn't ignore it.

The central premise that sets this book apart from so much life advice that is out on the market is that following your passion is terrible advice. There are two main reasons for this: first, very few people at a young age know enough about life to choose something to be really passionate about, and even if they do, they are bound to be wrong. If Steve Jobs had followed his early passion, maybe he would have made a dent in the universe as a Buddhist monk.

Second, while most people would love to have a job that allows them to be creative, make an impact on the world, and have control over how they choose to spend their time, jobs like that are rare and valuable, and the only way to get something valuable is to offer something in return. And the only way to be in a position to do that is to master a difficult skill. Passion doesn't waive the laws of economics, and if it's not difficult it won't be rare. The book cites the example of Julia, who quit a secure job in advertising to pursue her passion of teaching yoga. Armed with a 4-week course, she quit her job, began teaching, and one year later was on food stamps. Here's a hint: if a four-week course is enough to allow you to set up shop, do you think you might have a little competition?

Taking the economic model a step further, the book argues that you must develop career capital, which comprises skills, relationships and a body of work. The long and arduous process of building your capital also opens up your options and refines your own understanding of what you really like to do and what you can be good at.

Newport offers the craftsman mindset in place of the passion mindset. The passion mindset asks what the world can offer you in terms of fulfillment and fun; the craftsman mindset forces you to look inside and ask what you can offer the world. You have to create value to get value, and that takes time and deliberate practice. It's the only way to get so good that they can't ignore you. The nice benefit is that rather than being good at something because you love it, you love doing something because you've gotten good at it. (Note the similarity to Carol Dweck's growth mindset.)

What's the little idea? Another idea that Newport challenges is the common advice that you should have a big idea--set a big hairy audacious goal for your life and then work backward from it. The master plan approach certainly works for some people, but how many people do you know who have actually lived their lives that way? Instead, you should work forward from where you are, taking small steps that expand your capabilities and build up your career capital. In this way, more options and possibilities open up. Newport compares career discoveries to scientific discoveries, most of which occur in what's called the "adjacent possible", or just on the other side of the cutting edge of current knowledge.

The book is well-written. Newport emulates Malcolm Gladwell's technique of telling individual stories to illustrate the main point in each chapter. In addition, the arc of the stories follows a master story thread through the book, so that you feel like you are brought along on his quest to figure it all out.

Here comes the part I did not like about the book, and I would not devote so much space to it if the author were not an MIT PhD, just beginning his career as an assistant professor of computer science.

The methodology in the book is suspect in two ways. While its stories are the book's great strength, the plural of anecdote is not data, and it's surprising how little hard data we're given. I certainly buy in because it makes sense and it matches my own life experience, but someone with a more skeptical point of view may be a tougher sell.

In at least one case, where he does use a peer-reviewed study for support, he overstates the case. Citing a paper by Amy Wrzesniewski, he states that the happiest, most passionate employees are not those who followed their passion into a position, but those who stayed around long enough to be good at what they do. If you read the actual paper, you won't find that conclusion, and in fact the author stresses that the sample size of 24 is too small to draw any firm conclusions.

That said, I strongly recommend this book to just about anyone, regardless of where you are in your career.

305 of 333 people found the following review helpful.

Decent points, very poorly argued

By J Lord

The basic premise of this book is thought-provoking and very relevant to so many of us struggling through career decisions. The primary point which Newport gets across is unambiguously true: finding a "passion" before setting off in your career is extremely difficult, and perhaps even counterproductive. Developing a very solid set of skills which are somewhat rare and valuable is the only way to position oneself into a meaningful job with any sort of autonomy and humanity. This is essential, especially in the competitive world we live in. And competency itself is related to self-satisfaction—perhaps even moreso than any intrinsic interests we might have. Good points.

However, the book falls flat in almost every other aspect, from the explanations, to the real-world examples, to the relevancy for the vast majority of professional laborers sitting in cubicles today. This is not surprising given Newport's background in prestige and academics, and the quite unorthodox path he's taken. This issue follows through the entire book with example after example of people and their careers that can only be characterized as esoteric and extreme. The hyper-successful individuals he profiles as examples of people happy with their careers are starkly contrasted by the obvious hubris of those he interviews who are not. There is no middle ground, which is, unfortunately, the vast majority of us, who are neither ridiculously foolhardy nor overachievers to the extreme.

This book and its author smacks of the Tim Ferriss-style cure-all self-help trash which is all born out of an unrigorous, hyped-up, TED Talk-style, fast-food intellectualism which is so tempting to consume in the blogging age. Beware of the hype, remember this book was written in less than 6 months, work hard, and find a job you don't hate for Christ's sake.

100 of 106 people found the following review helpful.

What about the rest of us?

By bluedragon

First, I will say that this is an excellent book. In a world of so many different ways to make a living, this is a fresh new path to follow. It really is good advice. Just because people love doing things doesn't mean that people will pay you for it. The trick is to get really good at something and then people will come to you. Essentially, when people come to you, you are negotiating from a position of power and you can set whatever terms will make you happy. You not a morning person? Say you'll work from 12-8. Don't like Tuesdays? Take that day off. It all boils down to having control over your own life. It's the same idea about an encyclopedia vs Wikipedia. The more successful one is the one where anyone can add anything anytime they wanted. They're not even being paid, they just really want to add an article about mustard at 3am.

However, I started getting an elitist feel from the book about halfway through, and it's the reason I gave it only 3 stars. The people he talks about in his book are those business/computer people who: A) Know how to start and run a business, B) Can work from home (all they need is a computer), and/or C) have a skill that makes hundreds if not thousands of dollars an hour. Not to mention, most of them have PhD's. One person he talks about started a music company, sold it for 22 million, donated all the money, globe trotted for a few

years, then started another freakin' company. Would this book be worth something to a nurse? A teacher? A police officer? Or are these people who have followed their "passion" and this book is just for a select number of people who's highly paid skills are transferable?

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