

Dilettante Mojo – Or How To Balance Professionalism and Amateurism

n. Dilettante – a person who cultivates an area of interest, such as the arts, without real commitment or knowledge.

People tell me that I'm good at writing. It's a flattering thing to say about a dilettante like me. They also say or imply that they think I'll become a writer one day.

This is a normal expectation. Yet I'm pretty sure I never want to do this full-time – or as my primary job.

I'm only able to write some (occasional) good things about personal growth and startups because I'm living a life and career **1)** in the field with a growing company **2)** that requires constant personal growth and change. My daily experiences feed directly into my writing, giving it urgency, timeliness, and concrete backing.

What if I left all that for full-time writing?

I could be wrong, but I feel like I'd lose something in the transition. I'd be cut off from my source. Rather than telling truths first-hand (from daily experience), I'd at best be telling them second-hand. I might be more professional at the execution of the writing itself, but I'd be coming at it with a little less fire.

I feel the same way about recruiting. I'm pretty good at repping my company (and orgs like Praxis, of which I'm an alumni) to potential employees/participants/interns. But if I did recruitment all the time – without doing the kind of work I was recruiting for – I would lose some of the memories and passion that make me decent at recruiting in the first place. I'd be drawing on a well of past experiences, but I'd be cut off from the action that gives me new memories and new love for my company as a place to work.

If I went full-time in either writing or recruiting (and these are just two examples), I think I would lose some of the power of being an amateur (or what I'll call "dilettante mojo") in both. My full-time profession in startup marketing is the real source of (most of) my inspiration for writing and recruiting, and it's only because of that balance of professionalism and amateurism that I can be good with passions like writing and recruiting.

Finding balance seems to be the key. So if you want to keep it, identify the source activity

that will bring you the most growth and insight while giving you the most desirable impact on the world. Do that professionally. Then find the unique ways in which that source activity pills out into other areas of your life. Those of your areas of “dilettante mojo,” and you might find like me that they can live vibrantly alongside your main work.

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