

Hard is Not the Same as Hate

I love the mantra *don't do stuff you hate*. (I even co-authored a book with that title!)

A lot of people imagine this means avoiding all the tough stuff and laying around on the couch. Sounds like a dumb, unrealistic goal.

But stuff you hate is not the same as stuff that's hard. In fact, most of the best stuff is really hard.

If you did lay around on the couch all day, you'd probably start to hate it and hate yourself. The obsession with unthinking leisure and avoiding challenge probably gets baked into our brains through school. Because in school the concepts of 'hard' and 'meaningless' are combined. The hard stuff in school is stuff we're forced to do against our will and rarely has any connection to our own goals and desires. We learn to see escape from hated stuff as equal to escape from hard stuff. This is tragic.

Watch little kids play. The stuff they love most - beating a video game, building a fort or LEGO structure, achieving some physical feat - is often really hard work. They try and try, often visibly showing deep frustration with the challenge. They're playing and having fun, but it's hard.

The kind of stuff I'm referring to when I say don't do stuff you hate is stuff that has no meaning, depth, or deep joy. Stuff that slowly, dully sucks your soul and pulls the color from life. It often looks more like a bureaucratic paper pushing job with great benefits and security than it does ditch-digging. It's the dangerous kind of hated activity because it's so safe and stable and common sense and no one will judge you for not quitting.

The kind of stuff you love, or at least don't hate, is easy to miss too. It looks more like the high you get after a hard workout or completion of a painting or article or homemade meal than the lazy leisure of chilling with a beer. Again, we're talking longer term place-in-the-universe level love here. Everyone loves a lazy afternoon with friends and booze. But almost no one would really love their life if they did nothing else.

It takes a lot of self-knowledge and self-honesty to not do stuff you hate. You have to know what you really hate, not what you think you're supposed to hate. You have to be honest about what you find, not ashamed. If it turns out you hate being a doctor, it might be hard, to be honest about it, given how many people who envy you will call you crazy or selfish for abandoning such a lucrative, high-status activity.

Forget trying to figure out your passion. Go the other direction. If you want to create a life you love, stop doing stuff you hate. Be careful not to equate hate with hard. Think about

the stuff that makes you feel proud of yourself. It's usually hard, and it's the opposite of hated. It doesn't need to be *the* thing that makes you happy. As long as it's not something that makes you dead inside, you're moving in the right direction.