

Follow Your Passion – and Let Go if Necessary

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

Some people are always criticizing other people's missions. For example, someone who is passionate about environmentalism might criticize others for not concluding that there is nothing more important than dealing with climate change. This critic might believe that unless we all work together to address the challenge of climate change, all other missions are pretty much a waste of time.

In reality, however, activists that commit their lives to a mission do not necessarily do so because they believe it is the most important cause in the world. Rather, they pursue their favorite interest because they are *passionate* about it. Indeed, if one is not passionate about a cause, she is not likely to do it much good. If she is not passionate about the environment, she will probably only be of limited value in committing her life to environmentalism. Therefore, considering how much work needs to be done to improve the world, one should never apologize for doing her part in an area she feels passionately about.

Someone once said that "every problem could have been solved when it was small." Yet many people believe that we should only give the bulk of our attention to large problems, regardless of how little enthusiasm we might have for tackling them. However, we should applaud people that are working on little problems before they get a chance to grow into major catastrophes.

There are critics that complain about people that help those in need in other countries. For example, some African Americans have criticized Oprah Winfrey for helping schoolgirls in South Africa pursue their educational dreams. These critics contend that there are too many Black people suffering in the U.S. for Winfrey to spend so much time, effort and money helping people in other countries.

First, Oprah should continue to feel free to follow her passion. Second, someone once said that "charity begins at home, but it should not end there." There is simply no reason that aid to others should be limited by geography, race, ethnicity, sex and so on.

A lot of people are especially critical of those working for animal welfare or animal rights. These critics complain that there are too many human beings in need for us to help animals from other species. However, do not the lives of other animals count at all? There are numerous animal welfare groups finding homes for pets, thereby brightening the lives of the pets *and* their human guardians. If someone has a burning passion to help other animals, help on!

Sometimes people fight battles within the proverbial war and burn themselves out. For example, I had long tried to persuade Black people not to use the N-word as a dysfunctional “term of endearment.” Moreover, I had long tried to persuade men and women to stop referring to women as bitches, hoes and other derogatory terms rooted in sexist double standards. However, after so many years, and after the frustration of having so little success in my personal endeavors, I found these struggles to be futile. I would still love to see the day when these epithets are kicked to the curb by reasonable people. But I simply no longer have the mental energy to keep fighting these important battles. I am not filled with guilt for having abandoned the struggles. On the contrary, sometimes the only way to maintain your sanity is to move on and fight other worthwhile battles. And to be perfectly honest, sadly, sometimes our little efforts just do not make a huge difference. Not every worthwhile battle is winnable. We should therefore choose our battles wisely.

Some humanitarians are hurt that they do not get credit or gratitude for the good they do. However, such is life. Sometimes great athletes, artists, actors, comedians, writers, poets, musicians and even ordinary people do not get credit where credit is due. If such is the case, deal with it. As someone once said, “do your duty, take your hat and go home.” Many of us will just have to be content with a job well done. That’s certainly not the worst that could happen to us.

On the other hand, we can all do more to give credit where credit is due, and appreciation is its own reward. People will love you when you show them your appreciation. And rest assured, we *all* want to feel appreciated.

Always remember to follow your passion, and do not worry about what haters have to say. Make the world a better place in your own way; and if and when you have had enough, do not hesitate to follow another passion. Live your life to the fullest on your own terms, or you may never know what true happiness is.

