

Passion-seeker Sean Aiken, creator of The One Week Job Project, talks to the Star



thestar.com/business/2012/06/07/passionseeker_sean_aiken_creator_of_the_one_week_job_project_talks_to_the_star.html

6/6/2012

Thu., June 7, 2012

Q: What's the story behind The One Week Job Project?

A: From a very young age, it was always, 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' When I graduated, I had a lot of pressure to choose a career other people would consider successful. Basically throughout school, anything I did, I would always think about how it would be perceived by other people.

My idea with starting One Week Job Project was saying, 'Okay, let me first learn about what I need in a career to be happy. What is that foundation?' And at the end of the year, put all those different aspects together and then see what career comes out of it.

It's easy to think too far ahead, and then just arbitrarily choose a job title and not think whether it suits who you are, and if it's something that you'd be good at and also something that will fulfill you.

Q: After working 52 different jobs, did you end up finding your passion?

A: When I first started off, I was expecting my passion would be a job title. What I learned is our jobs are merely one means of pursuing our passion. So I discovered it's not our job title that's a passion; it's what our job allows us to do. I discovered my passion is to explore and help others.

Q: What job did you like the best?

A: Teaching pre-school in Meridian, Idaho was my favourite. Also, working at Steam Whistle brewery in Toronto was one of my favourites because it just had such a great working environment and the people were awesome.

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Q: And the least?

A: Picking cat tails out of a swamp outside of Montreal. Your job is basically 12-hour days in the Montreal summer. You know, sweaty, long day. Being in a smelly swamp, disgustingly hot heat and the bugs really got to me as well.

Q: Isn't it a luxury to pursue one's passion? What about those who can't afford to quit their jobs to pursue their passion?

A: When we think of finding our passion and living our passion, we think of career right away, and it has to be all in the career. I met a lot of people who were in a job they weren't necessarily passionate about. But a lot of them did their passions outside of work. The bottom line, the most important thing is in some aspects of your life, that you do give yourself permission to explore your passions. Our careers are only one means of doing that.

Q: What if you don't have the capacity to pursue your passion? For example, if a person with physical challenges wants to be a bungee operator.

A: What is it in the job that allows you to fulfill your passion? Is it actually jumping off of a bridge? Is it dealing with people? Is it dealing with people who are stepping outside of their comfort zone? What about that job is in line with your passion? What other jobs are you able to do, fit you?

When I was working as a DJ, I asked the radio DJ, 'Did you ever want to be the rock star? Now you're playing music on the radio.' And he's like, 'Yeah. I did. Truthfully, if you ask most radio DJs, we're all kind of failed musicians.' But being a radio DJ allows him to cultivate his passion for music. He deals with the same people, he works in the same industry and he gets to cultivate his passion in music.

Q: Do you think the need to do something that one loves is a product of the millennial generation?

A: I think that's just the way we've been brought up. I feel like there's this kind of shift taking place and a lot of our parents have brought us up thinking, 'Hey, look, I've spent 30 years of my life doing something that maybe I didn't necessarily enjoy, take the time when you're young to figure out what you actually want to do.'

Q: Do you have a full-time job now?

A: I speak at schools and companies about my experience and what I learned about work. I'm working with two teachers to develop a curriculum based on my book and documentary to help students find their passion, and I'm currently enrolled in courses to complete my Life Coach certification.

I'm also involved in One Week Job Australia which we started in December with a 24 year-old guy, and currently looking for a sponsor for One Week Job USA which will be a 59 year-old woman from Portland, Oregon taking on 52 jobs in 52 weeks.

Moses Znaimer's 13th annual Ideacity conference takes place on June 13, 14 and 15 at Toronto's Koerner Hall. Tickets are available at: ideacityonline.com