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Discovering and Maintaining Passion in My Life

Introduction

After saying my thanks to the division and expressing the honor it has been for me to serve as the president of Division 51, I casually ask if anyone else is hot in here. I take off slowly my external presidential address type shirt and have underneath one of my favorite **mountain biking jerseys**. And with a smile on my face, let the audience know that today I will be talking about men discovering and maintaining passion. I define passion *as an emotion that is deeply stirring, a strong desire for or devotion to an activity, thing or person. For as many people there are in the world, there are just as many types of passion. Some are drawn to physical activities, such as sports; others show enthusiasm over music, or zeal towards a cause or campaign.* Below is an edited text of the speech.

Today I am not talking about sexual passion. I mean a passion to be immersed in an activity over a sustained period of time---that gives you meaning, perspective, identification and stories. A passion for something that goes beyond the normal expectations --- of work and family involvement. I often ask my male client what are you really passionate about. What adds fuel to your meaning engine? What do you do that allows you to feel the excitement of boyhood in an adult body? What allows you to feel the excitement of boyhood even though you have the heavy responsibilities of adulthood? Often there is a puzzled look. A curious look. A look that shows they sort of understand the question but don't know how to answer it. "Well I follow the Lakers or I play poker with my buddies every once in a while or I like to go fishing, but have not gone for a few years or I enjoy reading mystery novels every once in awhile."

What are some of the venues men can express and develop a passion?

- Collecting—coins, cards, stamps
- Fixing—cars and gadgets
- Creating—gardening, art, music, furniture
- Supporting a cause: religious , activism
- Following/Experiencing—sports, artists

- Physically Playing—scuba diving, camping, racquet ball
- Discovering- travel, bird watching
- Stimulating the brain—reading, cross word puzzles, games

So what holds men back from embracing or searching for a passion? Here is the list of answers I have heard to the question:

- Don't have enough time.
- Seems too self indulging—selfish.
- Comes across as too childish or adolescent.
- Not enough energy.
- No role models.
- Not certain where to begin.
- Lack of desire.
- Too many other obligations.
- Not sure how to negotiate it with my wife.

How do you know you have a passion in your life?

- You talk about it with others—people you know and strangers
- You carve out time to engage in your passion—there is intention.
- You find resources (money and people) to support your passion.
- It often feels like a reward.
- You live in the moment with your passion.
- You feel the loss when you are not spending time with your passion.
- You anticipate with pleasure your next encounter with you passion
- You are comforted by the day dreams involving your passion.
- You often can easily bond with people (regardless of individual differences) who share a similar passion.

What is the potential expected and hidden value of finding and embracing a passion for men?

- Often connects an important aspect of boyhood with adulthood.
- Allows the little boy (perhaps constricted) to come out and express himself.
- Often provides social connection.
- Often deposits relaxation into your core.
- Offers lessons for life.
- Helps to define who you are in some very tangible ways.
- Positive and sustaining anti-depressant (changes brain chemistry).

What is the difference between a passion and an obsession?

In my case if I would know the difference in weight (by grams) between an XTR derailleur and an XT derailleur or if I know who came in second at the 1967 Tour de France---I would be angling on the side of an obsession. The fine line between passion

and obsession is typically found in how consumed one is by the activity and what is being sacrificed. I like the way my brother-in-law from Borneo, Malaysia articulated (English is his second language) very succinctly his observation about my relationship to mountain biking—"you love biking, it is your hobby."

Connection with my boyhood.

Bikes at an early age for me served several functions: *pure fun*—learning to do wheelies, skidding, tying a rope to my bike and pulling my friends on a skateboard, racing friends. *Express myself*--- the type of handle bars, seats, color was important, the bells and whistles and the 1,000 dollars worth of Sandy Koufax, Don Drysdale, Hank Aaron, Willie Mays baseball cards I put in my spokes. *Transportation*--- to school, friend's houses, parks, McDonalds. Later as a teenager my bike served the primary function of being able to get around and feel a sense of independence. My adolescent invincibility during those days was quite high, riding without helmets or lights as the sun was going down and riding on narrow fairly congested roads. (Nothing I would want my kids to do today). These fond memories went dormant for 23 years when I traded my two wheeler Schwinn for a four wheel Toyota Corolla (side note, my Schwinn weighed almost as much as my Toyota 1200).

Connection with other men.

There are certain parts of the ride that offer great opportunities for male bonding and deepening of relationships. This occurs before the ride, riding up a not too steep climbs, rest stops and particularly after the ride. I started riding with three of my neighbors. I call them Matty and Ralphie and they call me Doctaree. I started riding after I tore my ACL and had to hang up my basketball shoes. So at age 38 I got back on the bike in a very different way than ever before. Got some front shocks and paid 750 dollars for a Bike. We were all new to the neighborhood and had some great mountain biking trails just minutes from our house. In the beginning we spent more time drinking coffee than we did riding on our bikes almost every Sunday morning. We called ourselves Team Torrepines (after the name of our street) and had bike shirts made with our logo. We felt like boys, got excited like boys, but talked with each other like men---our work, our health, our children, our wives, money and future dreams. There was one day that Ralphie and I were riding and talking about some aggravation he was having about the drapes he was going to have put up in his house and a woman overheard us and said with a smile I don't think I have ever heard two guys talking about drapes and mountain biking. But that was the polarity of the whole activity---strength and vulnerability, danger and the security of friends. Fifteen years later a 1,600 dollar full suspension bike, 2 lycra filled drawers, bike socks, packages of Gu around the house, hanging bikes and bike parts in the garage, a truck that easily transports 3 or 4 bikes, lights for night riding and a GPS system on my bike...I have made or deepened connections with other men via my passion...some in this room..Matt Englar- Carlson, Glenn Good, Mark Aoyagi, Chen Oren. Two guys of special note are Kent and Patrick. I have had the opportunity to get to know guys that are very different from me and probably would not if it were not for our love of biking. Playing basketball also offered an opportunity to get to know other guys without the lens

of class or skin color. What you saw was height and skill level. Everything else faded away. Biking is similar. It is just about getting up or down the hill, over the rocks and through the loose sand. Kent is a political conservative and devout Mormon. He is 6'3' now but was 6'7" before a slow degenerative disk problem has curved his spine. We have had many very respectful discussions and I have come to understand his religiosity more and really appreciate the aspects of his religious practices that translate into him being a dedicated family man and caring friend. I have an enormous amount of respect and admiration for his can do attitude and I would consider him one of my better friends. Two years ago when he discovered he had a heart attack at age 46, he thanked me for help saving his life. His doctor told him he would not be alive if he did not bike as much as he did...and Kent reminded me of how hard he had to work to stay with me. He is back on the bike and doing great. Patrick and I met at CSUN on a search committee for the director of our Center on Deafness. Patrick is completely deaf. He noticed I was wearing bike socks and asked if I rode. So we started to ride and more recently on a frequent basis. I am challenged how to get to know someone when our conversations are limited because of my lack of ability to sign. Yet our biking seems again to transcend our differences—I look forward to see how our relationship develops.

Connection with myself.

I have paid attention and learned (re-learned) some important lessons about myself through mountain biking. **Risk taking.** I like going slower than faster. I like uphill, more than downhill. While I get a rush from going downhill, I have given myself permission to go at a pace that feels safe and rewarding. I have learned to stretch my comfort zone, pay attention to my limits and not be critical about being less of a mountain biking risk taker than some of my biking buddies. Over the years I have become much more skilled at going faster and taking on bigger challenges. **Self care.** Mountain biking is good for my stress. I feel committed to taking care of myself and desiring to live as long a healthy life as possible. I like being alive and taking care of myself through mountain biking affirms my desire to live a life with less stress and more health. **Alone time.** Riding alone allows my mind to wander. I can plan, sort out and spend time with myself. Riding for several hours and knowing I may not see another person, can often put me in a philosophical mood or a mood filled with awe for my surroundings and appreciation for the wonderful opportunity of the moment. **Riding competitively without being competitive.** I grew up a competitive swimmer and basketball player. Engrained at a very early age was a strong desire to win. On our neighborhood block we kept score for everything we did. Competition was at the core of our sporting interactions. When I started biking I noticed this competitiveness emerge in my internal dialogue. It was not healthy and took some of the fun and ability to stay present out of the experience. A new internal dialogue emerged “Sometimes your leading, sometimes your following. And it is all good” While there is a sense of competitiveness around the degree of fitness I have acquired, biking has allowed me to better learn how to participate in a sport without caring too much about winning or losing. My mantra has been to get in shape, stay in shape so I can spend more time on my bike (without needing too much couch time after the ride). **Hill climbing and work.** In August of 2005 I started a new job with unique and difficult types of challenges. I gained a tremendous amount of perspective and

confidence about myself and the work road ahead, as I thought about the metaphor of hill climbing on my mountain bike. “Don’t start too fast. Pace yourself. I know how to absorb the pain of climbing—physically and mentally. Climbing shines light on my strengths and growth edges. Don’t allow the pain to be the whole of the experience. I have endurance and I have patience.” *Fear of the Boogeyman (or a Mountain Lion)*. Sometimes I ride my bike and hope to catch the sunset as I head back home. It was a beautiful spring evening. My timing was perfect. While I expect to get back before dark, I still bring a light just in case. Well, this is a story about my first just in case event. I had climbed about six miles from the start of the ride. Got to a wonderful overlook and the sun was setting. Nobody in sight, I was by myself. Quiet, the nighttime sounds were filling the air. My rear tire had a flat. While not the most mechanical person, I do know how to change a tube. I changed the tube and soon noticed the spare was defective. Two flats, six miles of downhill back to the car and it was getting dark. I was alone in the awesome hills of Cheseboro State Park. The noises of nighttime became louder. The rustle of the bushes, the frogs, the coyotes and the sounds of silence filled my ears. I also noticed my fear. Would I be a dinner entrée for a Mountain Lion? So I felt this internal energy of fear of “being attacked” and enjoyment of the beauty of the walk. I was reminded as a child the times I was afraid of the “Boogeyman”. Yet there was no place to hide and I gave myself the opportunity to allow my fears to emerge as fully as possible. There was great relief in doing so. What emerged was a sense of knowing that I did not have control if danger, in the form of a Mountain Lion or other critters, would come into my path. I planned in my head what I would do in the event and felt my anxiety melt away. I became more present with the sights and sounds of a beautiful spring evening. A wonderful lesson of putting the boogeyman in perspective and enjoying the moment.

I then opened up the conversation to the audience and asked the men to share something about their passions. The energy in the room was magical.