

Follow Your Passion

By Marie Spano, MS, RD/LD, FISSN, CSCS

The best career advice I can give every student is to find something you love doing and figure out how to make your living doing it – even if this means switching paths mid-career and following a dream outside of dietetics.

If you ever need a nudge or a little inspiration, look up Po Bronson – he has interviewed people from various parts of the world who are following their dream jobs. Bronson details a variety of inspiring stories – from a man who was a physician for years but gave up his medical career to start a bakery in Washington, DC to a woman who quit her desk job and started a horse park in Texas. Though the changes I made in my life are not nearly as dramatic as the stories and lives that Bronson covers, I also stopped mid-tracks and made a drastic change for the better and one that I am thankful for every day.

As a student finishing graduate school, I knew what I wanted to do – work in sports nutrition. I played sports in college (Division 3 soccer and softball before transferring to a Division 1 school where I ran cross country), worked with the student athletes as a graduate assistant at the University of Georgia (running the sports nutrition program) and clearly had a vision of what I wanted to do – work with athletes. And then, outside influences stepped in and I drifted away from my passion.

While I was finishing my internship in Atlanta, a woman I met asked me to apply for an internship at CDC. I had zero interest in the work I would be doing there but it was a job and my parents encouraged me to make my career in the government.

I ended up in two different positions at CDC and while I had fantastic co-workers and some interesting work, there was something missing. And to fulfill that unmet need I would spend a significant amount of non-work time reading about sports nutrition and writing.

After CDC I took another job working in nutrition – a job that I knew was a major mistake on day one. Fortunately, that experience was so awful that, like many of my colleagues, I hit a breaking point and left.

Having worked in a place where the managers try to stunt your career growth and reprimand you about anything and everything (eating at my desk, leaving meetings to use the bathroom) was a major turning point in my life. I had always done work outside of my day jobs counseling athletes, writing and staying active in my dietetic organizations. But after that horrendous experience, I decided it was time to do what I loved. I started working for myself doing a variety of consulting work, working with pro athletes, writing, teaching weight loss classes and more. I love my work and I appreciate, now more than ever, the wonderful people I work with every day.

If you are just starting out and you take a job you don't love, that's fine. But, unless you are a very content person, don't waste years doing something that you aren't passionate about. Work toward the career you want. Get involved in dietetic practice groups, network with other students and dietitians and volunteer. As a future dietitian, your career is wide open – you can choose one area and move to something different at any time.

If you don't know what you are passionate about or you aren't sure how to fit your dream job into your life, pick up the book *Don't Waste Your Talents*. It's the absolute best career book available and an easy read!

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