The 5 Elements of LIVING WITH PASSION

by Vlad Dolezal
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Hopefully, this will allow the information in this book to reach as many people (and aliens) as possible.

Of course, I would appreciate if you link back to my blog - Alive With Passion - whenever you use material from this e-book. But only if you want to :-)

P.S. I link to a couple of resources in this book that I think might be useful to you. I don’t get any benefit from you clicking any links in this book. I’m including them purely for your benefit!

P.P.S. Well, okay, I get a bunch of happy, fuzzy feeling, whenever you click any links that lead back to my blog. Yay!
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Introduction

Imagine waking up in the morning, with a big grin on your face, feeling excited about the day ahead. Then spending your day doing inspiring, meaningful things (whatever those are for you). Meeting fun, interesting people. And finishing each day with a sense of accomplishment and excitement about the upcoming days.

In short, living a life that makes you feel deeply, passionately alive.

Sounds like a dream, right? A foolish, unrealistic dream.

That’s what a lot of people would have you believe, anyway. They would rather have you get married, get a steady job, live a reasonably comfortable existence and save doing anything actually exciting until retirement.

Screw those people!

You don’t have to settle for mediocrity.

You don’t have to lead a life that’s “kind of okay”.

And you certainly don’t have to live your life the way other people tell you to!

Now, the people who tell you to settle for mediocrity don’t usually mean bad. They have your best interest at heart. Often, your parents will be among the people telling you that, and they certainly want the best for you!

They just give you the best advice they can, based on their own understanding of the world. Which, unfortunately, usually turns out to be pretty incomplete.

Let me explain.

Have you ever heard of the cargo cult?

The cargo cult is a village of people in a third-world country. Decades
ago, these people used to get air shipments from the West, with supplies of food and medicine. And for this purpose, the Westerners built a runway near the village, complete with an air traffic control tower.

But then, one day, the shipments stopped. The Westerners moved away, and stopped sending aid.

The villagers couldn’t understand. They just knew that the air shipments had stopped arriving. But they remembered what things were like when the shipments arrived, and so they tried to recreate those conditions.

They built a wooden replica of the air control tower, and got a person to sit there, complete with wooden headphones. Yet the shipments still wouldn’t arrive.

But even when people tried to explain the situation to them, the villagers didn’t understand. They thought they were simply making an insufficient effort. Maybe the headphones weren’t quite the right shape.

Based on this cult, I like to call most advice that people are likely to give you about living your life “cargo cult advice”.

It’s accurate within those people’s model of the world. But the model is just inadequate to explain the full dynamics of what makes a person tick.

The fact is, you can live a life that makes you feel inspired. A life that makes you feel excited. A life that makes you feel deeply, passionately alive, every single day.

It just takes a more accurate understanding of how your mind works, and what are the things that really make your heart sing with joy. And here’s a shocker - a big car and a high-paying job are not enough by themselves. Anyone telling you to focus on getting those to the exclusion of other, more fundamental things is giving you cargo cult advice.

What does lead to a deeply fulfilling life?

Well, that’s what this e-book is all about. In here, I summarize the 5 main elements of living with passion. The 5 most important, most fundamental parts of your life that allow you to feel deeply, passionately alive, every single day.
The 5 elements to make you come... alive with passion!
(Yeah, I had to throw in the name of my blog *somewhere* in this book ;).)

**The structure of this book**

To help you grasp the concepts I will talk about on a deep level, I have decided to share them along with a story. The story of Tim, a graphic designer.

We will follow Tim over the course of a single day, from one evening to the following evening, and watch how he fails miserably at each of the 5 elements of living with passion. After each scene, I will take a break to explain the relevant element, and exactly how Tim failed, and what you could do differently.

Then, at the end of the book, we will see how Tim’s day may have unraveled completely differently, if he’d just been living his life aligned with the 5 elements of living with passion.

Alright, let’s get to it. Here comes Tim!
Scene 1

Tim closed the door behind him. He kicked off his shoes, then walked to the living room and crashed down on the sofa.

It’s been a long day.

He didn’t even have time to take a deep breath when his phone beeped. A text message.

*Hey, you up for a game of tennis at 7? Mike will be there, too.*

Tim considered it, but decided he was too tired. He texted Harry back to that effect. And then, since he already had the phone in his hand, he decided to call up his favourite take-away and order a meal. Burger, fries and soda.

It probably wasn’t great for him, but hey. It was quick and easy. With the pressing issue of hunger handled, his thoughts went back to playing tennis with his friends.

*Hmm, now that I think about it, I haven’t played tennis with the guys in weeks. Or done any other major exercise. Shame, tennis is actually really fun.*

Tim sighed. *If only I had more energy.*

With that, he turned on the TV, and watched until his meal arrived. Then he gobbled down the meal while watching a game show - it was actually a LOT of food, so he ended up really stuffed. And then he continued watching, for another couple of hours, until he was exhausted, at which point he scrambled to bed and fell asleep.

... 

BEEP! BEEP! BEEP!
Tim rolled over and hit the alarm clock. He didn’t want to get up, but he’d already hit the snooze button three times. He didn’t have any time to spare.

He cursed, then rolled out of bed. Got quickly dressed. Shaved. Then he took his keys and went. His belly rumbled, but there was no time for breakfast. He was probably going to be late to the meeting anyway.

... Above, we saw Tim do several things that go against the first element of living with passion - your energy levels.

No matter how much you’re willing to live with passion, if you don’t have the energy, you’ll be flopping around like a fish on land. A dead fish. Pinned by a boulder.

I felt that very noticeably myself a few weeks ago (at the time I’m writing this), when I came down with a cold. No matter how much I wanted to get done, I had about 2-3 hours of energy during a day, spread over several shorter periods, and spent the rest of the time mostly lying around in bed, and occasionally reading a book.

Now, it’s perfectly fine to be lying around all day feeling drained when you’re ill. But it’s not something you want to be doing much of otherwise.

**Element 1 - Energy levels**

Have you ever seen somebody who’s truly, passionately alive? The energy in their voice, in the way they move, and in the way they deal with situations?

Part of that comes from the way they approach life. But part of it also comes from **having that physical and mental energy available in the first place**.

When you run out of energy, that’s it. You won’t feel passionately alive anymore, or be ready to take on the world. You’ll just want to sit in a comfy, cozy chair and relax.

Now, there’s nothing wrong with relaxing. I’ll go into more detail on
that in a second. But the fact is, if your goal is to live a life that makes you feel passionate and inspired, you can’t do that while flopping around in bed.

That’s where the first element of living with passion comes in. Your energy levels.

This element comes down to two main parts:

- increasing your overall energy levels
- recovering your energy faster when you run out

And to achieve that, there are 4 main pillars of your energy levels. Some of them help you increase your energy levels, some help you recover energy quickly, and some do both.

Tim, being the guy that he is, managed to get all 4 pillars of energy levels messed up in the scene above. So let’s have a quick look at exactly what he was doing wrong.

The 4 pillars of your energy levels are:

- exercise
- quality diet
- good sleep
- quality recovery time

If you’re already thoroughly familiar with some or all of the first three, you can skim those sections. I only go into a basic overview of those, and some simple methods to get them handled.

But I would strongly urge you to read about the fourth pillar, quality recovery time, even if you think you know what I’m talking about. It’s the most underestimated one by the majority of people. Actually, most people aren’t even aware of its existence.
Element 1, pillar 1 - Exercise

Before you throw your hands up in horror, I’m not asking you to spend hours in the gym every day.

I personally find gyms dull, to be honest.

But you can find a way to exercise that’s fun for you (one of my preferred ways is dancing). Or, if you’re not used to exercising much, even a brisk walk can be enough to get your heart pumping and blood flowing.

A lot of people make the mistake of thinking that they don’t have the time to exercise. But unless you spend 16 hours a day in a factory pulling a lever, time isn’t your most limited resource. Energy is.

And paradoxically enough, exercise INCREASES your energy levels.

That’s one of the reasons Tim finds himself so drained in the scene above, when he gets home from work. He hasn’t done any exercise in weeks.

Exercise also burns up excess adrenaline and releases endorphins, your body’s natural chemicals that give you that happy, glowy feeling after exercise. It also improves the quality of your sleep, which is another pillar of your energy levels. But we’ll get to that in a second.

In short, find a way to get some exercise that gets your heart pumping at least 3-4 times a week. If you can combine it with some fun time with friends (that’s another element of living with passion, by the way), all the better!

Element 1, pillar 2 - Quality diet

The second thing we see Tim doing wrong is his diet. In the evening, he gorges down a burger and fries, and gets himself stuffed. Then the next morning, he runs himself out of time, and has to skip breakfast instead!

What you eat has a huge effect on your energy levels. Low quality food gets you stuffed and lethargic, or gives you a short burst of energy followed by a sudden crash. Neither of those is especially fun or conducive to living a passionate life.

Good diet, on the other hand, leaves you calmly energized. It increases
your overall energy levels, which means you get more stuff done before getting tired. And it feels and tastes good!

Now, quality diet is a complicated topic, but there are a few simple elements to guide you in the right direction:

- eat plenty of fruits, veggies, and other plants
- don’t stuff yourself. Stop eating when you’re comfortably full. (This takes a bit of practice, as the signals from your stomach take a while to reach your brain. Eating slowly and mindfully helps.)
- avoid overly processed foods

I also have a trick I got from Paul McKenna that I like a lot - he calls it “finding your high energy foods”.

Basically, a high energy food is something that leaves you clear-headed and energized. It can be different for you than it is for other people. That’s fine, because there’s a simple way that you can figure out what’s a high-energy food for you:

Eat a food. Wait 30-60 minutes. Notice how you feel.

Do you feel clear-headed and energetic? You have eaten a high energy food for you. Don’t? Then you haven’t.

It sounds remarkably simple, but a little self-awareness (more on that later) and listening to your body goes a long way.

If you’re interested in the topic of eating well, I highly recommend the book *In Defense of Food* by Michael Pollan. He goes against the common nutritionist fallacy of trying to break down all food into its base components and figure out exactly how much you should eat of each individual compound, and instead takes a holistic approach to good food.

In fact, he sums up his whole book right on the cover in just seven words:

Eat food. Mostly plants. Not too much.

It’s not a coincidence that this chimes with my points above.
Element 1, pillar 3 - Good sleep

Another thing that Tim messes up regularly (though we only get a small glimpse of it in the above scene) is his sleep.

This probably goes without saying, but quality sleep lets you recharge your energy levels faster and leads to higher overall energy levels. It also improves your memory and your learning ability, and it’s good for your health too!

Good sleep comes down to two main things:

- high quality sleep
- enough sleep

To get high quality sleep, you need a good sleeping environment. This means dark, quiet, and roughly the right temperature (not too hot and not too cold).

For a dark sleep environment, you can get good curtains in your home that block the light. Or get a sleeping mask or find another solution for when you’re traveling and find yourself in a not-so-great sleeping environment. (If it’s too light to sleep comfortably, I like to put a rolled up t-shirt over my eyes. This may or may not work for you.)

As far as a quiet environment goes, I like to always carry around a pair of earplugs when I’m traveling. A good pair of earplugs can be invaluable, and you can get a large number of pairs of re-usable earplugs cheaply off Amazon. Just search for earplugs.

Lastly, there’s one more thing that impacts both the amount of sleep you get, and the quality of your sleep. It’s what you do before falling asleep.

You’re probably well aware that caffeine isn’t the greatest thing to consume in the few hours before going to bed. But another common thing in our lives has a surprisingly similar effect - screens. TVs and computers.

Now, you might claim that you fall asleep brilliantly well while watching TV. Sure you do. I do too. But it leads to lower-quality sleep. The blinking frequency of screens affects your brain waves, and when it comes to com-
puter screens, it can also keep you awake long past your natural bedtime.

We saw Tim make exactly this mistake, when he stayed up too late watching TV, and then had trouble getting up in the morning.

Instead, you can find something nice and relaxing to do before bed. Read a book, or talk to a friend.

[One important note here - if you follow all of the advice in this pillar, and still find yourself waking up groggy and unrested, talk to your doctor. There can be some things disrupting your sleep that you can’t do anything about yourself, and your doctor can point you in the direction of a sleep lab where they can test you to figure out exactly what’s holding you back. I had a friend with sleep apnea, which basically means you stop breathing at night at various points. Not fun. After months of bad sleep, he went to a sleep lab, got tested, and the doctors gave him a fancy device to give him air with a bit of extra pressure at night. He now sleeps like a puppy and wakes up full of energy.]

**Element 1, pillar 4 - Quality recovery time**

And here’s the last thing that has a huge impact on the amount of energy you have each day.

Taking quality time to recover your energy once your mind is tired.

We often neglect to do this. We feel that if we’re meant to be working for 8 hours, we need to spend every minute of that time working, instead of taking the time to recharge our brains.

Unfortunately, that’s not how our brains work. They get tired. The more intense mental work you do, the faster you deplete the resources in your brain. (Some types of activity can take you from fully energized to completely mentally drained in under an hour.)

But once we’re tired, a lot of us make the mistake of thinking that we should continue working. So we try to push on... except we don’t have the energy to get anything done. Best case scenario - we do things really, really slowly. Like, 10 times slower than when we have the energy. More commonly, you won’t be able to get anything done, and you’ll deflect to procrastination.
You see, procrastination usually *feels* like you’re doing something, even though you’re not getting anything done. It’s the only escape your brain has when you insist on trying to do mental work when you don’t have the energy.

You can easily waste hours like that. And the worst thing is - as long as you insist on being active (yet not productive), you won’t be able to recuperate your energy properly!

Luckily, there’s a simple solution. **Quality recovery time!**

Once you notice yourself getting tired, just take a break. Acknowledge that you won’t get much done while tired, and give your brain some *real* time off. Watching TV or browsing the web doesn’t count. (That doesn’t mean watch TV or browsing the web is wrong. They’re both fine in the right circumstances. But they won’t let you recover your mental energy quickly.)

Instead, gaze out the window for a few minutes while breathing deeply. Or go for a short walk. Or my favourite way to recover, **take a 20-minute power nap.**

This involves lying down, setting an alarm clock for 20 minutes, and then relaxing completely, and letting your mind wander. You might fall asleep, or you might not, but you will definitely get up much refreshed. And keeping the nap at 20 minutes helps you avoid feeling groggy when you wake up - that happens only if you wake up from deep sleep, and 20 minutes is not long enough for you to get to that sleep phase.

Of course, if you’re in a workplace, a nap might not be possible. You’ll have to find another way to give your brain some quality time off.

In any case, next time you get mentally tired, try giving your brain some *real* time off. And notice how much more quickly you recharge your energy.
Scene 2

Tim glanced at his watch. 5 minutes early. He’d made it on time.

He knocked on the door to the conference room.

“Come in!”

Then as soon as he entered -

“You’re late! Stop wasting my time!”

Tim was about to reply, but bit down on his impulse. This client might be an ass, but he paid well.

“You did a good job on the last contract. That’s why I’ve decided to call you in for this next job.”

The client dropped a big stack of papers on the table in front of Tim.

“See these papers? We’re doing a re-branding and need the design changed. We need the background to be Azure blue, the font to be changed to Verdana, size 14, and the company logo replaced on each of those papers. Also, make the top margin 25% smaller. I’ll e-mail you the electronic files of those papers. Except for these.”

The client took out a dozen or so papers out of the stack, bound together.

“We’ve lost the electronic copy of these. We need you to re-type them.”

There was a sinking feeling in Tim’s stomach. This was going to be another mind-bogglingly dull monkey job.

This is NOT why I became a graphic designer! he thought. There’s no creativity in this!

“When you’re done with this stack,” continued the client,
“we’ve got four similar stacks of documents to be re-designed. I’ll send you the details of what we need changed when you’re done with this one. And here’s how much we’re going to pay you.” He slid a piece of paper in front of Tim.

Tim stopped in the middle of taking a breath in to tell the client “no” and just stared for a few moments. That was a nice sum of money!

He ignored the sinking feeling in his stomach, and imagined all the he could buy with the money. *Mmmmmmm...*

“Alright, I’m in!” he replied.

“Good.” Said the client. “Go see Joanne in office 3B to finalize the contract. Bye.”

“Wait!” said Tim. “Can you repeat the re-design instructions?”

“Don’t waste my time! I’ve got more important things to do than deal with your inability to listen!”

And with that, the client strode out of the conference room. The door slowly closed behind him.

... 

Although there was some fairly obvious stuff happening on the surface in this scene, I’d like to draw your attention to something a lot more insidious, but far more important for Tim’s passion for life.

He just got himself into a job that’s going to drain his life. He will absolutely hate this job. And it’s all because this job is completely misaligned with Tim’s core values.

**Element 2 - Aligning with your core values**

Your core values are what’s really, *truly* important to you, on a deep level.

This is different for every person. And your values are brilliant for you, while my values are brilliant for me, and everybody else’s core values are brilliant for them.
That’s another reason why some people give you cargo cult advice. They make the usual error of thinking that your values are exactly the same as theirs. They’re not.

Core values are probably the most important thing I usually work on with my life coaching clients. Because when you live out of alignment with your core values, it doesn’t matter how much money, or fame, or things you get. You just won’t be happy, and it will drain your passion for life.

On the other hand, if you live a life aligned with your core values, you will feel deeply, passionately alive, and get up excited in the morning, looking forward to the day ahead of you!

Value conflicts

There are two types of value conflicts that destroy your passion for life and leave you unhappy. External value conflicts, and internal value conflicts.

External value conflicts are reasonably easy to spot, once you know your core values. (More on that in a second.)

These involve getting yourself in situations where other people, or the environment, go against your core values. Like getting stuck in a job that requires you to lie, if honesty is one of your top values.

One of Tim’s core values is creativity. That’s why he became a graphic designer, which is usually a great job for a creative person. Unfortunately, we just saw him get stuck in a job that involves no creative input whatsoever. No matter how good the money is, he’s going to be miserable in that job.

Also, let’s say one of his top values was respect. We don’t know if it is, but if so, then working regularly with the client he talked with above probably also wouldn’t leave him very happy.

The second type of value conflict, an internal value conflict, is harder to spot.

This happens when you yourself act in a way that goes against your core values. Maybe you value honesty, but you find yourself telling a lie in a stressful situation, to avoid an uncomfortable confrontation. Then you feel bad about it, because you value honesty.
Some value conflicts are easier to deal with, and others take a bit of creativity. But once you understand how important your core values are, you’ll know it’s worth putting in the thinking to figure out how to align with your top values as much as possible.

As an example, two of my top values are connection and freedom. These desires often go a bit against each other. But I’ve found ways to align with both of those values, often in quite unconventional ways. One example of that is that I’m polyamorous. This means I both really value a deep, intimate relationship with a girlfriend (or two), but I also really like the freedom of being able to flirt with and meet other people, should I wish to do so. All this in a completely honest, open way with everybody involved.

How to find out your core values

Unfortunately, finding out your core values isn’t as easy as snapping your fingers. Otherwise, you and most of your friends would already know what your core values are, and be living mostly aligned with them. Yet I’ve never, ever worked with a client who already knew what their core values were when we started working together.

I usually spend some 30-60 minutes with a client taking them through the process of finding out their core values. And most of my clients only hire me for 4 one-hour sessions, or 6 one-hour sessions (the two session packs I offer), so it’s not like that’s an insignificant chunk of time.

Unfortunately, the process I use is too complex to explain in this book. It would take a whole book longer than this one to properly explain all the intricacies of figuring out your core values. And trust me, it’s better to not know your core values exactly than do a shoddy job of trying to find them, and end up with a wrong list. Because following an inaccurate list, you would probably get yourself in the wrong job, wrong relationship, drink the wrong beer, and... well, you get the point.

This often happens when people focus on what they think should be important to them, rather than what really is.

Remember that your core values are your own, and they’re brilliant for you. Don’t let the society tell you that commitment should be important to you, if you value freedom more. Don’t let your family tell you that spiri-
tuality should be one of your values if it isn’t. Figure out what’s important to you, and live your life based on that.

On a related note, whenever you work on finding your core values, do so away from your family and friends. Your values are likely to be different from your friends’, or your wife/husband’s, and this can lead to a bit of conflict. Even though you will know that everybody’s values are just brilliant for them, and there are no “right” or “wrong” values. A lot of people don’t get that.

A fellow life coach of mine actually once (and only once) did a value elicitation session with a married couple. The wife’s top core value turned out to be family, while the husband only had family as his 6th most important core value. The wife immediately got very angry with the husband, and the session didn’t go very well, or very far, from there...

Anyway, with all that in mind, how do you go about finding your core values?

Well, the first and most effective way would be to hire a life coach.

(No I’m not just saying that. I honestly believe understanding your values is extremely important for a happy life full of passion.)

The second option would be to buy a book that covers core values really well. Luckily, a fellow life coach of mine recently published just such a book. It retails at $35 at the time I’m writing this, but it’s the best material on core values I’ve ever read, and you won’t go wrong with buying it. And no, I don’t get anything if you decide to buy a copy. I just honestly think it’s a kickass book.

Going with either of the above options will help you find both your top core values and your top anti-values, and order them from most important to not-quite-as-important. And then see how your life aligns with that.

But if you’re looking for a low-budget method, I’ve got a fairly simple approach that won’t give you any wrong answers. The disadvantages of this simple approach are that:
But hey, you will find out some of your values, and you won’t get any wrong ones on your list. And that’s still pretty damn useful. So here’s the process:

Think of something that’s important to you. Then ask yourself:

**What does this give me?**

Figure out the answer, and then ask the same question again and again, until you have no more answers to give.

For example, let’s say money is important to you. But what does money give you? What would it mean to you if you had plenty of money? It’s not important in itself. It’s only important because of what it gives you. (Money is never a core value. Trust me on that one.)

Maybe you think money give you the chance to go on more exotic holidays instead of always visiting the same old places. Or maybe you could finally buy a car.

In each of those cases, simply ask what that gives you. Maybe visiting new places would give you a sense of novelty? And no matter how much you think, you can’t dig deeper than that? If so, novelty is probably one of your core values.

Or if it was for getting a car, what would that give you? Freedom to travel when and where you wanted? If so, freedom might be one of your core values.

As I said above, this won’t give you an ordering of core values, so I’ll leave it up to you to figure out. A good rule of thumb would be to follow desires that you feel very strongly about - those tend to lead to important core values.

No matter which of the three approaches above you choose to take (or even a completely different approach), I strongly urge you spend some time thinking about your core values. Aligning with them is one of the most important things that will make you come alive with passion.
Scene 3

Tim sighed deeply, and sat back in his computer chair.

*Phew. Another piece done. God, this is mindbogglingly boring!*

It was early afternoon, and he was working on his project for the client he met in the morning.

He considered tackling the next part, but couldn’t quite get himself to get started right away.

*I mean... this job sucks, but hey, I’m getting paid! Quite a nice chunk of money, too. When this is over in another... ugh... week or two, I’ll finally be able to buy myself that HDTV. That will fit really nicely in my living room.*

He took a few moments to fantasize about that. Then he went back to his work.

*Man, I’m looking forward to the weekend. In just another three days. Three more days of this. Heh.*

He smiled a sour smile.

...  

Above, we see Tim do another big mistake that holds him back from living a passionate life.

He got himself into a situation he hates and now spends the whole time focusing on the destination rather than the journey.

Yeah, you’ve probably heard about “journey over destination” many times before. There’s a good reason for that.

**Element 3 - Journey over destination**

Being human, being *alive*, is about striving for some mighty goal. Doing
something to change the environment around you.

That’s the very definition of being alive. Deliberately impacting the environment around you.

Now, your goals will change over time. You’re probably not working towards the same thing today that you were working towards five years ago. But you’re sure as hell working on something!

The big mistake people make is thinking that achieving the goal is the whole point.

**It’s not about achieving your goals, it’s about striving for them.**

That’s the part that makes you feel deeply, passionately alive.

However, by that I don’t mean that you shouldn’t have big goals. Quite the opposite. Have huge, hairy, audacious goals that make you want to run on top of a mountain and scream them out to the world. But never forget that it’s not about the goals. It’s about **striving** for those goals.

I like to take rock-climbing as a perfect example of this.

In rock-climbing, you have a big mountain to climb, to give you a mighty goal to aim for. Without it, what would you have? Flat land. Nothing.

But rock-climbing isn’t about getting to the top. It’s about choosing an interesting way to get there.

In one rock-climbing class, the instructor had an unusual method to decide which applicants to accept into his advanced climbing course.

He asked them to climb a certain mountain side that involved an overhang. From below, the spot looked like you were about to reach the top of the mountain. But once you scaled the last few centimetres, you realized it was just a small plateau where you could take a break, and you still had quite a way to go.

The instructor then hid himself behind a boulder at the overhang, and simply watched the climbers’ expression as they scaled the overhang and realized they weren’t done with the climb yet.

Some of them showed disappointment when they realized they weren’t
at the top yet. They were politely, but firmly refused entry to the advanced course.

But the others... their faces lit up with excitement as they realized they weren’t done yet and had more climbing ahead of them! The instructor welcomed these with open arms.

...

Another common sign of people who live misaligned with their core values and focus on the destination rather than the journey is another thing we see Tim do above. Treating yourself to expensive things to make up for the life wasted doing things you hate.

Now, don’t get me wrong. There’s nothing wrong in itself with buying yourself a high-definition TV, or whatever else you’re into.

But using things to make up for spending a sizeable chunk doing things that drain your life - now that’s a problem.

A lot of the things you might want are nice, but not strictly necessary. A fast car, a big house, an expensive computer. Nice, but not necessary.

If you had the choice between spending most of your time doing things that make you feel deeply, passionately alive, despite having little more than basic comforts... and spending most of your time doing things that drain your energy and passion for life, but being able to treat yourself to expensive dinners and a fast car, what would you choose?

(By the way, I’m not saying that once Tim found himself in a contract that drained his life, he should abandon everything and run away. Once he found himself in that position, finishing the contract was probably the best, most mature choice he could make. His mistake was getting himself into that position in the first place.)

So how about you? Do you have big, audacious goals you aim for? And more importantly, do you enjoy the journey, or are you simply hoping to hit goals as static points in life, rather than enjoying the whole time you spend between goals, working on them?
Scene 4

Tim closed the door behind him. He kicked off his shoes, then went to the living room and crashed down on the sofa.

No sooner did he sit down than his phone rang.

“Hey Tim! You up for a game of bridge tonight?”

“Sorry mate, but I just got home from work. I’m completely shattered. Maybe next time?”

“Alright, no worries. Have a good one!”

...

Here we start to see even more how the different elements of living with passion go together.

I have tried to disentangle them as much as possible for the purposes of this e-book, but the fact is, most of them are deeply entangled with each other.

Because Tim fails to take good care of his energy levels, he finds himself too tired to meet his friends in the evening. This will dampen his passion for life even further, as social relationships are a key cornerstone of being human.

Element 4 - Relationships

We humans are inherently social animals.

Without good social relationships, we start to wither and die, like plants left without water for too long. (And when I say “relationships”, I mean in the general sense of the word, not just romantic ones.)

In general, quality relationships come down to two things:
1. Avoiding spending time with overly negative, energy-draining people, as much as possible.

2. Spending quality time with friends.

We have already seen Tim fail to do the first step back in Scene 2, when he was dealing with the toxic client, and decided to enter into a working relationship with him rather than ending things right then and there. This is a common trap self-employed people fall into - spending too much time with people who suck and drain your energy, because you think every single client is vital to your survival. Nonsense.

Now, there’s nothing wrong with being there for a friend when they’re feeling down or going through a tough time. But there are people who will consistently drain your energy by being manipulative, selfish, and just generally unpleasant. Those are people you should avoid like a smelly pile of garbage.

A friend of a friend of mine has a great term for those people - *emotional vampires*.

The idea is that, like vampires, these people drain your energy when you’re around them. But of course there’s nothing mystical about it. These people simply behave in a way that makes you expend a LOT of mental energy on dealing with them. Whether it’s by complaining, or attacking others, or always seeking your approval.

Once you realize some people are simply emotional vampires, you will start to notice them, and become better avoiding them. Just notice whenever you feel drained around someone (more on self-awareness in the next Scene), and then figure out how to spend less time around them!

... 

The second part of quality relationships is just as important, but often easier to overlook and miss.

This is because arranging quality time with friends is important, but not urgent. So we often fail to arrange quality time with friends, because more urgent things keep coming up.

Urgent things tend to stay at the forefront of your mind easily, by their very nature. They’re like a bright, red, flashing sign saying “pay attention
to me!” A lack of quality time with your friends, on the other hand, builds up slowly in the background. But it can be far more devastating to your general passion for life.

Remember, quality relationships are like water for a plant. Without them, you slowly wither away.

The key here is to make time for your friends. It’s important. Really important.

Take the time to schedule time with your friends in advance, like an important business meeting. It takes a bit of effort to organize things to do, but it will be so worth it.

Tim above actually seems to be doing fairly well there, since he’s had two different friends call him up on consecutive evenings, offering to hang out. That won’t happen to most of us. It will probably take a bit more initiative on your part to get some quality time with friends. But that’s okay.

Give it a bit of thought. What friends do you really enjoy spending time with? In what situations? How could you arrange to spend more time with them? When is the next convenient time you could suggest to them to hang out?
Scene 5

Tim put down the phone.
He exhaled a deep breath, and stretched.

Then, as he was sitting on the sofa, his mind wandered inwards. He noticed he hadn’t been feeling very energetic lately. He wasn’t feeling very passionate. You could even say, he didn’t feel very alive. His mind wandered back to the meeting with his client, which again brought up some frustration, and he wondered...

Tim’s wandering eyes caught the clock.

Ooh, it’s almost 9pm. Time for Doctor Who!

Tim turned on the TV and completely forgot what he’d just been thinking.

...

Here we see Tim nearly stumble across the fifth element of living with passion, but get deflected at the last moment. This element is another thing that comes naturally to people who live a deeply alive, passionate life, but is often missed by others. Self-awareness.

Element 5 - Self-awareness

One day back in high school philosophy class, we were talking about free will.

To make a point to the teacher, I waved a hand in front of a friend’s face. My friend blinked.

“See?” I said. “He blinked. That’s an automatic reaction. You can’t stop it.”

I obliged. This time, he didn’t even flinch.

This example actually shows several very important things. And no, not just that I was a bit of an ass back in school.

We often react to things automatically. Unconsciously. But as soon as we bring our conscious awareness to the matter, we can stop what seems like inevitable automatic behaviour, and choose to do something different.

The key here is awareness. If I hadn’t explained what I was doing out loud, I could have probably waved my hand in front of my friend’s face some 3 or 4 times, with him blinking every time. Until he got annoyed and punched me.

Self-awareness is easily one of the most important skills you can develop.

It helps you make more conscious decisions. To notice the things that bother you, and thus take action to get rid of them. To notice what you like, and think of ways to bring more of it into your life.

In short, self-awareness helps you build a life that makes you feel deeply, passionately alive.

How to build your self-awareness

You’ve actually already started building your self-awareness, by reading this book.

You now have words and concepts in your mind for many things you probably didn’t think about much before. This will help snap you into awareness the next time you encounter relevant situations, and you’ll be able to consciously change your habitual actions.

For example, you might find yourself thinking “Hang on. They’re asking me to be dishonest. That’s a core value conflict for me, I don’t want to do that.”

Or you might find yourself thinking “Hey, hold on! I’m procrastinating, because I can’t gather the mental energy to do this work. I need some quality recovery time!”

So, the first step towards self-awareness would be to take a bit of time.
and think about how all these 5 elements of passion apply in your life. The more thought you give it, the more thorough and accessible mental maps you will build in your mind. And that in turn will make it easier for you to bring those concepts to conscious awareness in the crucial moments of decision-making.

Another brilliant way to build your self-awareness is journalling. Yes, keeping a diary.

This lets you reflect on your thoughts, and how you felt each day. You can just write short entries each day, or write long, thought-out prose on days when you really feel like you have stuff you need to think through. But either way, keeping a journal is an extremely effective way to become aware of your emotions, and general patterns of thought and action.

Again, this will help bring all this to your conscious attention, so you can make changes to the things that drain your energy and passion for life, and do more of what makes you want to skip and dance!
Summary of the 5 elements

You now know the 5 elements of living with passion. Here’s a summary, to help you refresh the concepts in your mind, and to act as a nice, quick reference you can use later to remind yourself of the main concepts. And with each element, I also share some suggested actions that you can do to develop that particular element, and live a more passionate life.

Element 1 - Energy levels

Your energy levels are crucially important. No matter how passionately alive you want to be, if you don’t have any energy left, you will just flop around lethargically like a fish on land. A dead fish. Under a rock boulder.

Your energy levels come down to four main pillars:

- exercise
- quality diet
- good sleep
- quality recovery time

Some of them help you increase your overall energy levels, some of them help you recover your energy faster, and some do both.

Some things to try:

- make your sleeping environment quiet and dark
- stop eating when you’re barely full (and far from stuffed), and notice how you feel afterwards
- take a brisk walk or some other form of exercise at least 4 times in a single week. Notice how you feel
next time you feel mentally tired, take some real time off for your mind, instead of reading/watching/browsing

**Element 2 - Core values**

Your core values are basically what drives you on a deep level. They are different from other people’s values, but they’re perfect for you, as they are.

No matter how good your life seems on the surface, if you live out of alignment with your core values, it will drain your energy and passion for life. And conversely, you might not have many material things, but if you consistently live aligned with your core values, you will feel deeply, passionately alive, and satisfied right to the core of your being.

**Some things to try:**

- Find our your core values, whether by hiring a life coach, getting a good book about them, or repeatedly asking yourself what the things you like the most give you
- Notice when you feel unhappy with a situation. Figure out which aspects make you unhappy - these might point at your core values.

**Element 3 - Journey over destination**

Passionately alive people tend to spend more of their time in the moment than most people. Entering this state of “flow” makes you feel more alive, yet often strangely calm. Like a child completely engrossed in drawing a picture. Children know this element of living with passion very well.

Focusing on the destination, on the other hand, makes you feel more disconnected from yourself, and it will usually make you feel vaguely dissatisfied once you reach your goal and realize it’s just a short stopping point between long stretches of striving for goals. Enjoy the striving itself!

**Things to try:**
Think about what makes you feel completely engrossed and in the moment. Go do it.

**Element 4 - Relationships**

We humans are social animals. Without quality time with other people, we wither like plants without water.

This isn’t usually too hard to get, but we can often forget, as it’s something that builds up in the background, rather than a quick, urgent need like hunger. And it might take a bit of effort to organize some quality time with friends. But it’s well worth it.

**Things to try:**

- Which of your friends do you enjoy hanging out with? Which of those have you not seen in a while? Think of a time you could hang out together, and then contact them and suggest it to them.

**Element 5 - Self-awareness**

Self-awareness is the core skill that allows you to make changes to your life. It’s what allows you to *consciously* change your behaviour, rather than continue to be driven by your automatic reactions and habits.

Building up self-awareness will help you take conscious control of a lot more situations, and turn them into opportunities to change your life to help you feel more deeply, passionately alive.

**Things to try:**

- Spend a bit of time thinking about how the 5 elements of living with passion apply in your life. For a bonus vladpoint, write your thoughts down.
- Start a journal where you record your thoughts and self-observations. Try writing in it a little bit every evening for just a month, and see how much of a difference it makes.
Tim’s story, take 2

Tim closed the door behind him. He kicked off his shoes, then walked to the living room and crashed down on the sofa.

It’s been a long day.

He didn’t even have time to take a deep breath when his phone beeped. A text message.

*Hey, you up for a game of tennis at 7? Mike will be there, too.*

Tim looked at his watch. He was tired after the day at work, but... yes, there was still time. He texted Harry back to confirm.

Then he got up, changed into some more comfortable clothes, drew the curtains in his bedroom and lay down in bed. He set his alarm clock for 20 minutes later, and took a power nap.

He didn’t quite fall asleep, but relaxing completely and letting his mind wander randomly definitely refreshed him enough for some quality time with friends. Then he went to the kitchen and took out some food from the fridge he’d prepared at the weekend, so that he could quickly heat it up and have a quality meal even when he didn’t have the time to cook. He ate, then took his tennis gear, and went off to meet his friends.

... 

Tim got back home around 10, buzzing with good feelings from meeting his friends for tennis, and a pint and chatting in the pub afterwards.

He yawned. It’s been a long, but really nice day.
He took a shower and went to bed. He read a book for half an hour until he was too tired to keep his eyes open, and went to sleep.

... 

BEEP! BEEP! BEEP!

Tim hit the snooze button, and rolled over. He was fairly well-rested, but it still took him a few minutes to wake up.

As his alarm clock rang for a second time, he turned it off and got up. He had just enough time to eat some breakfast before going to meet his client. He knew getting enough food in the morning was crucial for him to perform at his best during the day.

He ate some cereal, and then he was off.

...

Tim glanced at his watch. 10 minutes early. He stood around for a few moments, and used the time to relax. Then he knocked on the door to the conference room.

“Come in!”

As soon as Tim entered -

“You’re late! Stop wasting my time!”

Tim was about to reply, but the client immediately launched into the details of the project he was offering Tim. As Tim listened, it became abundantly clear that he would absolutely hate this job if he took it.

The client finished his barrage of words, and slid a piece of paper in front of Tim. Tim did a double-take, as that was a nice amount of money. But it would mean doing a job that drained the life out of him for at least a week or two. So the answer was a no-brainer.

“No.” He said.
The client stopped dead. “No?” He asked.

“No.” Said Tim. “This job wouldn’t use my talent as a graphic designer at all. It’s all completely uncreative, mindless work. In fact, you could probably outsource it abroad and get it done for a lot cheaper than this. You don’t need highly qualified labour to redesign a bunch of documents based on simple specifications.”

The client mulled it over for a few seconds, and then went back to moving and talking without any stops.

“Well, you could have told me that at the beginning! Now you’ve wasted five minutes of my valuable time! Get out of my way...” And he strode out of the conference room. Tim blinked a few times, then shrugged and walked out himself.

...

Tim leaned back in his chair and stretched. He had a big smile on his face.

_Ahhhh. This is exactly why I became a graphic designer!_

After the meeting where he rejected the annoying client’s new work offer, he went back to work on a project for a different client. This involved designing a new website, and allowed him a lot of creative freedom. The pay wasn’t so great, but he had enough money to pay the bills, and he loved working with this client.

He took a few deep breaths, and went back to messing around with the header colours.

_Hmmm... this shade of blue isn’t quite working, let me try changing it..._

...

Tim closed the door behind him. He kicked off his shoes, then went to the living room and crashed down on the sofa.

He was exhausted, but with a big smile on his face. No
sooner did he sit down than his phone rang.

“Hey Tim! You up for a game of bridge tonight?”

Tim took a few moments to assess how he was feeling, and then answered:

“Sorry mate, but not tonight. I feel like taking a quiet evening at home. Maybe next time?”

“Alright, no worries. Have a good one!”

It’s nice to sometimes take an evening or day off and do nothing much in particular.

Tim sat around for a while, and just thought about his life. He had enough money coming in to pay the bills, though not much extra. He would need to find a new contract soon to make money, but he wasn’t especially worried. There was enough time for that.

And he was really happy with how his work was going, and feeling excited to meet his friends at the weekend.

After assessing that he was feeling good and had nothing particular that needed his attention, he went off to grab some food. His eyes caught the clock, and he realized he’d missed *Doctor Who* on TV.

*No worries, I can watch it online later.*

He ate, and then sat down at his computer to browse the web. He was taking a nice, quiet evening off, to top off a great day.