



## M.A.P.S.: The Four Pillars of Creative Job Fulfillment

Don't fall asleep at the wheel when it comes to your creative future. A quickstart guide to developing the career you want from the ground up.

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<http://99u.com/articles/6907/maps-the-four-pillars-of-creative-job-fulfillment>

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Tell me if you can relate to the following: You've been working for the last few years with your head down, putting one foot in front of the other, just following the path under your feet. But you feel that the career path you're on might not be the right one – that, somehow, you've drifted off course. You know it's time to take action, but you're not sure how.

The first step is to shift your perspective: To understand that a career is something that you *create*, rather than a pre-existing role that you step into. It takes considerable energy to plan your own future, but if you don't figure out what you want to become, someone else will define it for you. Hunter S. Thompson said it best: "A man who procrastinates in his choosing will inevitably have his choice made for him by circumstance." Don't be that man!

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In my own career as a Creative Director and public speaker, I have met many talented and extraordinary people. I have always been in awe of the passionate ones, who use their skills with confidence, who surround themselves with an atmosphere of inspiration, and who find true meaning in what they do.

These qualities – the ones that make for a fulfilling career – can be distilled down into 4 main categories, or "pillars," as I like to call them. They are:

Meaning, Atmosphere, Passion, and Skills – aka M.A.P.S., a career compass to help point you in the right direction.

Here's how the process works:

### **1. MEANING**

Why are you here? (And I don't mean at this website.) What drives you to get up every morning? What makes you feel hopeful about the future? This is what really matters to you. Make a list of your purposes, or goals in life. Start with a sentence like: "The reason I work is to..." and fill in the blank. Some possible answers are, "...continue learning," or, "...get to know amazing, talented people that expand my worldview." When you are done, rank your list with the most important purpose at the top.

### **2. ATMOSPHERE**

Where do you see yourself? Close your eyes and imagine your ideal work environment. Is it high energy or relaxed? Who are you working with? Or are you working alone? Be specific. What does your workspace look like? Are you working at home, in a shared space? Write it all down. Your surroundings directly affect how you feel. They can inspire you and keep your energy up, or they can drain you of all ambition. When you are finished with your list, prioritize it with the most important elements at the top.

### **3. PASSIONS**

Make a list of the things you absolutely love. These are the things you can't get enough of. Think of things you love to experience (beautiful architecture, vintage wine) as well as things you like to create (furniture designs, electronic music). Hopefully you will have a long list. When you are finished, restructure your list with the items you are most passionate about at the top to those you are least passionate about at the bottom.

### **4. SKILLS**

What you are good at? Write a list of your proficiencies, including specific tasks (copyediting) and social skills (good at motivating others). Remember that these don't have to be things you like to do, just things you are capable of. If you get stuck, try asking friends, family, and co-workers what your skill sets are. You might be surprised to hear what they come up with. Once you have at least 10 skills, re-write them in order of importance, with your greatest strengths at the top.

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Now take a good look at your prioritized lists; this is your new career M.A.P.S. (Meaning, Atmosphere, Passions, Skills). Does your current job pay off on the top few of each pillar? Ask yourself some tough questions:

- Are you utilizing your best skills?

- Are you exercising your main passions?
- Are you working in an atmosphere that is conducive to your creativity?
- Are you getting something meaningful from your job?

These are tough questions, and it might be valuable to go over them and the results with a close friend, a trusted manager, or a life coach. Most people have never done this exercise and are surprised by how far off the M.A.P.S. they have let their careers take them. But before you quit your day job, consider the following:

**1. You can supplement your current job with a project that brings the top qualities in your pillars to bear.**

Hugh MacLeod, author of *Ignore Everybody and 39 Other Keys to Creativity* emphatically states in #7: Keep your day job. Sex and cash are in direct competition, he says. So do the sexy, passionate stuff you love on the side, and earn a living to support it.

**2. You can attempt to course correct your current job.**

Talk to your manager or human resources person about how you can incorporate some of your new awareness into your current position. Or perhaps create a new position for yourself within the company. I know Tech Developers who have become Art Directors, and Art Directors who have become Strategists. A good company will recognize your passions and want to put your best skills to work.

If you still feel the need to look for something new, remember M.A.P.S. at your next interview. Ask about the things that matter to you, because you are interviewing them as much as they are interviewing you. It's your life and you have to work for it. Happy hunting!

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**How Does It Work For You?**

What role has finding your passion played in your career development?  
 How do you marry doing meaningful work with paying the rent?