

**EXERCISE: PASSION CUBE****AUTHOR: BRADLEY GEORGE****Description**

Passion has long been considered to be an important aspect of entrepreneurial behavior. More recently, researchers have built upon identity theory to develop a theoretical basis for better understanding the role of passion and its importance in various outcomes. Passion can foster creativity and aid in identifying new information patterns that can lead to the discovery of entrepreneurial opportunities (Sundarajan and Peters, 2007; Baron, 2008). In empirical research, passion has been associated with entrepreneurs' ability to raise funds from investors (Sudek, 2006; Cardon et al., 2009; Mitteness et al., 2012) and to hire and motivate key employees (Cardon, 2008). Cardon et al. (2009) conceptualize entrepreneurial passion as "a consciously accessible, intense positive feeling" that "results from engagement in activities with identity meaning and salience to the entrepreneur" (p. 515).

Despite the importance of passion to entrepreneurship, students often have a difficult time connecting their passion to potential opportunities or expanding their ideas to other areas that may provide the same emotional connection. Because self-identity is also associated with our perceptions of our unique skills, this exercise attempts to combine these factors to help students better understand their passions and identify areas in which they may discover new passions. This exercise addresses these issues by having students identify their passion, the drivers of their passion, and their own personal skills and strengths. These are captured on cards, which are then randomly mixed and assembled into a cube, which allows students to begin to think about what ideas or opportunities exist at the intersection of their passion and their skills.

**Usage Suggestions**

This exercise works for all audiences, undergraduate, graduate, or practitioner. It is appropriate for new venture creation courses, entrepreneurship bootcamps, or workshops. The session is best positioned early in the program during idea generation.

### Learning Objectives

- Reflect on and assess personal passions.
- Expand thinking around potential opportunities related to personal passions.
- Connect passion to skills as part of opportunity creation.

### Materials List (Include Handouts)

- Six squares of white paper (about 2 inch × 2 inch or 3 inch × 3 inch each) for each student – heavier paper such as construction paper or 3 inch × 5 inch cards works best.
- Several roles of transparent tape for the class to share.

### Pre-Work Required by Students

There is no pre-work required for this exercise, but it can be used in combination with a discussion of the book *The Monk and The Riddle* (Komisar and Lineback, 2000) about the importance of passion for entrepreneurs.

### Theoretical Foundations

- Baron, R.A. 2008. The role of affect in the entrepreneurial process. *Academy of Management Review*, 33, 328–40.
- Cardon, M.S. 2008. Is passion contagious? The transference of entrepreneurial emotion to employees. *Human Resource Management Review*, 18, 77–86.
- Cardon, M.S., Wincent, J., Singh, J., and Drnovsek, M. 2009. The nature and experience of entrepreneurial passion. *Academy of Management Review*, 34(3), 511–32.
- Komisar, R., and Lineback, K. 2000. *The Monk and the Riddle: The Art of Creating a Life While Making a Living*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Mitteneess, C., Sudek, R., and Cardon, M.S. 2012. Angel investor characteristics that determine whether perceived passion leads to higher evaluations of funding potential. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 27(5), 592–606.
- Sudek, R. 2006. Angel investment criteria. *Journal of Small Business Strategy*, 17, 89–103.
- Sundarajan, M., and Peters, L. 2007. Role of emotions in the entrepreneur's opportunity recognition process. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Academy of Management, Philadelphia.

### Time Plan (25 minutes)

#### Step 1

0:00–0:03 (3 minutes)

Start by passing around the square cards and have each student take six cards. You can also pass around some tape and tell them to tear off eight small pieces of tape.

#### Step 2

0:03–0:05 (2 minutes)

Instruct the students to take one of the cards and write down something they are passionate about. This can sometimes require some encouragement on your part. Ask them to think of something that excites them and that they really enjoy doing.

#### Step 3

0:05–0:10 (5 minutes)

Have students put that card aside and take two more cards. On each card have them write one thing that describes why they are passionate about what they wrote on the first card. You should give them a few minutes for this, as students have often not been asked to reflect on what drives their passion. You can prompt them with examples. Undergraduate students are often passionate about a sport, so ask them to think about why that is. Is it the performance in front of a crowd? Is it the sense of competition? Is it the camaraderie of a team?

#### Step 4

0:10–0:12 (2 minutes)

Once they have completed the two cards, have them put them aside and take the final three cards. On each card they should write a skill or strength that they feel they have.

#### Step 5

0:12–0:14 (2 minutes)

Next, have students take all six cards and put them face down so that they cannot read what is on them and have them mix them up. Once they have done that, have them lay the cards out (still face down) in a "T" or cross pattern, as shown in Figure 11.1, and tape the edges.

#### Step 6

0:14–0:15 (1 minute)

Have students make a cube with all of the writing on the outside by folding the "T" into a box and taping the final edges.

#### Step 7

0:15–0:20 (5 minutes)

Ask students to examine the various intersections of their skills, passion, and the drivers of their passion where the sides of the cube meet. Ask them to pick an intersection at random and come up with at least one business

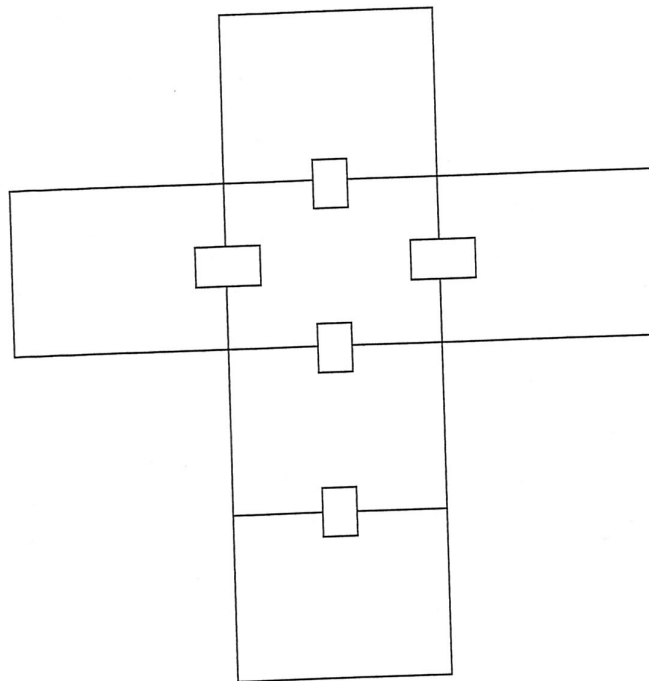


Figure 11.1 Layout of cards

idea that incorporates both sides of the cube that meet at that junction. You can have them repeat this for other edges of the cube if you want to spend more time.

### Debrief

0:20–0:25 (5 minutes)

Ask a student for an example from his or her cube. It is often helpful to build on this and add other business ideas that take advantage of the two aspects the student identifies. Ask if anyone had trouble coming up with an idea (there are usually a few of them). Call on one of them and ask him or her to pick two random adjoining sides (note that you want to be careful in this stage, because some students may be hesitant to share something very personal in front of the class). Ask the class for ideas that utilize those two aspects.

Don't spend too much time on this. It can take some time for students to reflect on this and really develop good ideas related to their passions and strengths – particularly for younger students. Emphasize that they should take the cube with them and use it to generate further ideas.

They can also modify the cube as they reflect more on their passions. Point out that, by considering the drivers of their passion, they may come up with numerous ideas they hadn't considered that may give them that same feeling and inspiration.

### Post-Work

As post-work the students can be asked to develop business concepts that build on what they have captured on their cube.

### Key Takeaways

- Understanding what drives your passion can open up a host of new ideas you might find attractive.
- There are numerous ways to combine your passion(s) and strengths.
- Following your passion can lead in numerous directions.

### Teaching Tips

The biggest thing to keep in mind in running this exercise is to emphasize that only the students will see what they write unless they choose to share it with others. It is also important to encourage them to feel free to write down what they feel they are good at, not what they feel others think they are good at – emphasize that this is a personal exercise for them and a way to help them better understand their passions and opportunities related to it.

Another common issue that arises is that students often take the idea of following their passion too literally (this is where the combination of skills and passion can be helpful for discussion). For example, I had a finance student who was passionate about sailing and felt that it was ridiculous for him to think that he should follow his passion and become a sailboat captain. This led to a discussion around how he could use his finance skills combined with his desire to be around boats and boating in potential business opportunities in yacht financing or investment and financial management for clients who live aboard their boats, sail the world, and do not have a fixed address. I now often use this example to illustrate how the cube can be used.

### Attribution

This is a variation of an exercise originally created by Mary Pinard at Babson College.