

managing books

Finding your passion, after hours

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Rana Florida is CEO the Creative Class Group, which promotes the ideas of her husband, urban development expert Richard Florida. (Tom Sandler For The Globe and Mail)

Upgrade

By Rana Florida

(McGraw-Hill, 234 pages, \$28.95)

Rana Florida's parents were immigrants to the United States from Jordan, and drilled into their five children the importance of education. Nothing less than straight A's was acceptable. They were expected to go to university and eventually become doctors or lawyers.

She got caught up, as many of us do, in the linear path of life. Go to university and graduate school. Take a job with a big company. Build your career and family. But the result for many,

she notes, is a treadmill of unfulfilling work, long commutes, and living from paycheque to paycheque.

Ms. Florida suggests you break free, upgrading your work and life. Now the chief executive officer of the Creative Class Group, which works to promote and develop the ideas of her husband, urban development expert Richard Florida, she also has a popular blog for the Huffington Post that allows her to interview famous people about the key to success in their own lives.

“The whole paradigm of work is changing, and many of us are still stuck under the thumb of the boss in our life when what we want is to be the boss of our own life. We crave the freedom to manage our own time, to be valued for who we are. We want a career that encourages risk and excitement, growth and personal development, learning and exploration,” she writes in her new book, *Upgrade*.

Her interviews led her to seven principles she believes will provide people with successful and fulfilling lives: envision your future, by deciding what you want and setting a course to attain it; find your passion; get creative, by bringing diverse people together to help you attain your vision; protect your time; collaborate; take risks; and embrace failure as part of the learning process.

None of this is new. But her interviews and own life experience manage to infuse the book with some unexpected and helpful touches.

Consider passion; we are commonly told the route to getting ahead is to follow our passions. But she acknowledges there are two camps. While a few lucky souls get paid to do things for which they have a great passion, most of us need to do something else to earn our living.

Take Andre Agassi, who won eight Grand Slam tennis matches and, on the court, seems passionate, enjoying every (winning) second. But when Ms. Florida interviewed him, she was surprised to learn that he doesn't harbour a great love of the game.

“When I realized that I wasn't born to play tennis, that I was made to play tennis, I searched for other things to which I felt more deeply and emotionally connected. Like education. I then made tennis part of that work,” he told her.

“Anyone can do this with any job. If you don't love the task at hand, make it about serving others, make it about simply being conscientious. Make it about something other than your own fleeting wants and needs, work at it with everything you've got, and then stand back – the results will be magic,” Mr. Agassi said.

He saw those magic results not only in his tennis victories, but also in his focus since retiring from the sport, the Andre Agassi Foundation for Education Reform, which opened a charter school in his hometown of Las Vegas. Its goal is to transform public education for underserved youth.

Ms. Florida struggled with trying to find the one thing she was passionate about.

Her interests and career have been eclectic, from working for fashion retailers, to trying her hand at restaurants, to serving on the board of Airports Council International (which brought her closer to the travel she likes), to various media stints, including working for a radio station and co-writing a relationship advice column with her sisters.

When she tried to name the one pursuit she was truly passionate about, she was disappointed, coming up empty time and time again.

Then she asked herself what makes her happy.

Again the list was long, including cooking, travel, family, tennis, arts and culture, fashion and film, and working with not-for-profit groups.

“I had worried that my passions weren’t passionate enough. And then all of a sudden I realized that doing things that gave me moments of happiness and joy were enough,” she writes.

So look for how to connect to your passions or times of happiness. If your passion is animals and you dreamed of being a veterinarian but got sidetracked into another line of work, you don’t have to quit and start again, as often is advised. Instead, she suggests upgrading your life by volunteering to help at an animal rescue shelter or a conservation group.

“You will find that any connection to your passion, be it small or large, can greatly enhance and optimize your life,” she declares.

If that means following your passions in your not-so-free time, she also has an excellent chapter about how to find the time. Her book rises above the somewhat-predictable list of seven key principles, thanks to her inquiring mind, diverse background, interviews with fascinating people, solid research, and honest, practical approach.