

Season 3 | Episode 17

Infusing Passion and Joy Into the Workplace



Rob Parsons

Host
Manager,
Content and Brand
Paychex, Inc.



Karen Putz

Passion Mentor and Author

Rob Parsons:

Welcome to PULSE, a Paychex HR Podcast, where HR professionals find insights on today's top issues and inspiration to build and lead effective teams in a healthier workplace. I'm your host, Rob Parsons.

Rob Parsons:

Hi everyone, welcome to PULSE. We're joined today by Karen Putz. Karen is known as the passion mentor. She's the author of multiple books including *Unwrapping Your Passion: Creating the Life You Truly Want*. Karen became deaf from a fall while barefoot water skiing as a teen, at the age of 44, she returned to the water and competed for four years. Karen teaches "Finding Your Passion" at the Rochester Institute of Technology. Karen, welcome to the podcast.

Karen Putz:

Thank you for having me, it's a pleasure to be here.

Rob Parsons:

Oh, it's my pleasure. It's nice to have an RIT individual here. I graduated there many, many years ago so nice to have that connection.

Karen Putz:

Okay, [inaudible 00:01:09].

Rob Parsons:

So passion is a pretty big topic. So, I would love to start with how you define passion, because I think that'll help set some guardrails around the conversation.

Karen Putz:

Sure. So, passion is often a word that's a hot trigger. When people think about, oh, I want to find my passion they usually, that right there is a big block. Because when we take the word passion, I've asked over 200 people what that word means and how they've defined it and I got over 200 different definitions of that word, what is

passion? But in the process of interviewing all of these people, the mother of a world barefoot champion said to me, passion and joy, is the essence of who you are. And passion flows like tap water, just turn it on, and it flows.

Karen Putz:

And that, if you think about it, passion, it's so simple. We know what our joy is. We can identify joy very easy. So, if we shift our focus to thinking about what brings us joy? What are the things that we like spending our time on? That's where passion starts appearing. But here's the catch, the root meaning behind the word passion is the willingness to suffer. Because most people think of passion as angels and butterflies and excitement all the time, and that's not sustainable. So, if we shift the definition of passion to joy, it's more sustainable. And if we understand there are different levels of passion, then all of a sudden, we realize that we can go up a level and down a level. And I can explain that a little bit more. But what I wanted to ask you is what's your favorite thing to do? What could you do all day long?

Rob Parsons:

All day long.

Karen Putz:

And still enjoy it.

Rob Parsons:

My favorite thing to do is to listen to music and make music.

Karen Putz:

Okay. So you like making music, right? But you had to learn to make music, at one point you didn't know how to make music. So, when you say make music, what do you do? What do you play?

Rob Parsons:

I'm a singer. I'm a singer in a rock and roll band.

Karen Putz:

Okay. So, before you discovered that passion, you had to learn to sing, right? And you probably had to practice for hours to get really good in your band. That is the willingness to suffer. And that's the level that most people don't really truly understand about it. So, let me take you through the stages of the passion. At the very bottom level, passion starts with curiosity. You were curious about singing, you liked it, you enjoyed it. The next level is the learning level. And then once you identify what you're curious about then you identify "I want to learn more about it." So you start learning more about it. Then the next level is that excitement, that enthusiasm on stage. You've identified what you like, you're learning more about it and, "Oh wow, this is amazing. It's fantastic." Then the next level higher is that awareness, that awareness of I want to do this more, this really is something that's part of me.

Karen Putz:

And the top level for passion is other people start seeing your passion. That's the recognition level. That's what I call the clear path. The C-L-E-A-R path to passion. Now, how come some people don't reach the top? They don't reach the top because they're not willing to suffer. They give up when it gets hard or they think they're terrible at it because they're at this level of skill. But to get to that top level of passion, you have to be willing to learn, to get better, to put in the time, to devote your work to it, your craft to it, to get to the top level. But most people don't, they give up. So, that's in a nutshell.

Rob Parsons:

That's a lot there and I'm really connecting the dots on a personal level. Every time we have to wake up early on a Sunday morning to rehearse, trust me, that's suffering. But I'm curious, how does this come into play in the workplace? How does this idea of passion, this idea of having to work for joy, come into play in business?

Karen Putz:

Think about the most passionate person you know in your workplace. That person has high energy, that person is probably authentic and real. They're open minded. They're self driven. They are resilient. Those are all the traits of people with passion. And so when you look at that, when you look at people that you work with in the workplace, you see passion because passion is an energy. It's how you choose to live, it's how you choose to work. So, it's not necessarily what you do. It's not your title at work. It's not where you are in the workplace. It's none of that. Passion is an energy and so every level of the workplace, you can see passion in action.

Rob Parsons:

Are there things HR leaders can do to bring out that passion? To keep them energized and inspired and engaged? I'm very fortunate, I have a very self-motivated team, very conscientious, very dedicated. They're bringing that passion. But I got to think not every company's like that, not every team is like that, not every organization is like that. Are there ways we can help encourage that passion?

Karen Putz:

When I think of the most passionate companies that I know and have worked with, I see one thing in common is that the companies really value the individuality of people in the workplace. And they find ways to bring that passion into the workplace that honors the individual people yet brings them together as a team. So, I can give you an example, think about it, every single day we come to work and we do the same thing pretty much, we do the role of our job. That can get boring and routine after a while, but good companies learn how to shake it up. They learn how to, what I call crossover their skills. If they see somebody having a passion in a certain area and an expertise, they bring them in on a different project, shake things up. I always encourage companies to think outside the box.

Karen Putz:

One of the companies that I spoke at, a billion-dollar healthcare corporation, had a humongous call center. And as I walked through this call center, I noticed that people were, they were enthusiastic on the phone. It was real. You could see it. It was real. And so I asked the manager, I said, "What's going on here? Why do you have such a happy team?" And he said, "Well, we draw out the individual passions of people." And one of the ways they do that in that company is that for example, the one example that he gave me, and he introduced me to this person on a call. Her expertise and her passion and the things she loved more than anything was to bake and she started bringing it in, the next thing they knew she was doing all the cakes for the celebrations. Everybody knew her as the cake lady. So, when she came to work, she not only came to work and brought that passion in her call center work, but it also came out in her teamwork with other people.

Rob Parsons:

I love that example and I love that approach. It's this idea that people aren't just employees, they're well rounded, they have a life outside of the office and we can't pretend that they leave that at the door. Just like we can't pretend you leave work at the door. So we've got to embrace that, encourage it, and celebrate it.

Karen Putz:

When you don't leave it at the door, that's when your company thrives. We tend to often emphasize the separation between personal and work. And yes, there is a line between that, but we also find that if you honor that whole individual, including what they're passionate about, it spills over into the work. They come to work happier, they come to work and they give that team spirit more because that passion is honored and recognized in their life.

Rob Parsons:

So, how about managers and leaders? I know with some of the research we've been doing, we're seeing a great deal of stress and even burnout at this layer, as they're trying to keep up and keep things moving amidst all the different challenges. How can we bring this idea of passion into play to help leaders and managers?

Karen Putz:

That's a great question. Especially coming off the years of COVID, two long, very stressful years of COVID and a pandemic. And now we've got recession, we've got gas at \$5, so there's a whole lot of stress and a whole lot of worries going on. And in the midst of all that, it's very easy to lose the energy and passion. So what can we do? Well, one of the things, there's two things actually, and the first one is vitamin R and that's rest and that's revitalizing and reviewing and then recommitting. So, that practice is almost like a pause. And to really get clear on who you are, what you want, what you are about, and let's stop, have some fun. Getting into that fun and then renewing and recommitting to your work, to your life, to your passion. So that's one.

Karen Putz:

The other thing is there are three clues to your passion. So those three clues, first one, you look back in the past, you think about the moments of joy in your life and then you recreate them. So for example, I had one coaching client that absolutely loved football. At 60, he was getting close to retirement. And so he said to me, "Karen, I can't really be a quarterback, but that was my moment of joy, being a quarterback in high school." So, we sat down and we remapped the plan for him. What does passion for football look like at 60? So we came up with what I call a passion quest. He decided that he was going to visit every single football stadium in the U.S. and enjoy every game. He decided that he was going to volunteer his time at the local football, traveling football team. And he also set up a fantasy football league and he's leading it with a whole bunch of guys.

Karen Putz:

So that's what I talk about. When we look back in the past, we think, oh, we're too old and we can't do things again. No, just do them differently. So looking in the past, the past has clues, but looking in the present, if you're sitting in a really boring meeting, where does your mind go? Are you singing in the mind? You don't have to tell us. But it's a clue. Now you have to get creative, could you bring your singing to work? Is there a group, do you think they could sing during lunch? Could you walk around singing a company song that you guys made up? See where we're going with this?

Rob Parsons:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Karen Putz:

When you have a clue about what you love to do, then got to start thinking about outside the box what can you do. If you come up with a company song and everybody can sing it, they're corny but it could work. The third clue is what the third clue is what is on your someday list? Give me one little thing that's on your someday list that you want to do someday.

Rob Parsons:

I still have yet to get to the Louvre in Paris and see the Mona Lisa.

Karen Putz:

Okay. All right. So, seeing the Mona Lisa. So what's stopping you from getting there?

Rob Parsons:

It's a combination of time, money, COVID.

Karen Putz:

We often think of that. Okay, so we think that we can't do what we can't do. Now, there's two things that you need to do when you have something on your someday list and you're passionate about it. One, could you take a class in painting Mona Lisa? Could you study something, research the top 10 unusual facts about Mona Lisa? See what I'm going with it?

Rob Parsons:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Karen Putz:

So, even though your someday list is someday, if you think outside the box, you can enjoy your someday right now, whether it's planning, researching, looking at it a different way, talking to somebody who's been there, researching an event that happen. So, I was sending new energy and new life to you. So, managers and HR people, think about ways that you could get those three clues from your employees and encourage them to think outside the box, especially when it comes to their work.

Rob Parsons:

I love it. And I love the view of the whole person, Karen. We've spent a lot of time here, really uncovering the fact that, as we put it happy, healthier employees lead to better business because they're bringing their best selves to the office and sharing it and raising everybody up.

Karen Putz:

Yep, absolutely. Way to go.

Rob Parsons:

Any last thoughts to share with the audience?

Karen Putz:

I have one story to share because one of the most kind things that comes up is people think they're too old, too disabled, or too young or too broke or whatever it is, whatever their too is, that they can't do something that they're passionate about. And often age is the one that comes up the most. And people ask me, "Can you really unlock your passion at any time, at any age?" I'm give you a story to wrap up. Down in Australia, there was a guy named Alfie who moved into a nursing home at the age of 109, and up the shore, 900 penguins got caught in an oil spill. So the nurses were going around to find out who wanted to knit little sweaters for these penguins. As it turned out, Alfie was passionate about knitting. Back in the 1930s, that's what he did professionally, he was a professional knitter. But at 109 there he was, teaching classes every single day until the day he died at 110. So, the next time you think it might be too old, too whatever, think of Alfie, because you're not.

Rob Parsons:

Thank you. Thank you so much for joining the podcast today. I really appreciate it Karen, this was very enlightening and I think it's something we as leaders and managers and HR professionals need to keep in mind if we want to keep everybody engaged and fired up and really doing their best.

Karen Putz:

Thank you for having me. And if anybody wants to read more, I do have a book called Unwrapping Your Passion.

Rob Parsons:

Sounds great. Well, we'll be sure to drop a link to it in our show notes when we publish.

Karen Putz:

Wonderful.

Rob Parsons:

And I also want to thank our listeners for joining us today. We'd love to hear from you what you want from this podcast also. So, go ahead and visit payx.me/pulsetopics to submit guest and topic ideas. That's P-A-Y-X.me/pulsetopics. Thank you all and please stay happy and healthy.

Announcer:

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