A woman in silhouette stands on a narrow path of water at sunset, surrounded by a large flock of birds flying in the sky.

HSP Money Mindset, Volume 3

William Allen

The Sensitive Man - Following the Path with a Heart

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In the late sixties, a UCLA anthropologist named Carlos Castaneda coined the phrase "a path with a heart" referring to following one's calling in life. I read his books in the late seventies, although, I had seen them many years before in bookstores. His books intrigued me and I loved his writing style. He touched on so many of the questions I had about life at that time. In his books, he chronicles his time he spent apprenticing with a Yaqui Indian brujo (sorcerer), Don Juan Matus. Carlos was impetuous and hot-tempered and like most modern men, wanted logical answers to his logical questions about life. Don Juan on the other always found the cleverest ways of dismantling Carlos' structured thinking in order to help him see the errors in his "logic." It was all so perfectly sixties, but one thing did stand out to me: *the path with a heart*.

Don Juan answered Carlos' question about life's meaning and selecting a lifelong path, with a question: "Does this path have a heart? If it does, the path is good; if it doesn't, it is of no use." Carlos later intoned, "...both paths (or any number of paths) lead nowhere; but one has a heart, the other doesn't. One makes for a joyful journey, as long as you follow it, you are one with it. The other will make you curse your life. One makes you strong; the other weakens you."

That metaphor has always stuck with me. I had always been taught to believe that work was about making a living, earning money, and that work was not supposed always supposed to be pleasant. The notion that work could be aligned with life goals, and individual characteristics, was simply beyond the realm of my thinking. I spent the greater portion of my life; following what I was taught, but never really forget the message about "path with a heart."

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To follow a path with heart means basically to follow the path of knowledge (our true path) versus the path of materialism (ambition, money). One leads to an attainment of knowledge of one's true self and the other is a false path that leads to an over-identification with the material world, a false path that in the end can lead to enslavement. One means freedom, one imprisons us in a false narrative about what constitutes success in life.

So many practical folks will tell you to believe all this pie in the sky, new age crap won't put food on the table or meet your material needs. They like to simplify thinking by saying that it's all like ECON 101, with the supply and demand curve. Your life's work is about providing a service that is in demand, and the monetary rewards will follow. I'm not saying they are entirely incorrect. I'm saying that that is not the only option. This is especially important to highly sensitive people, where work environment and meaningfulness play important roles in happiness.

What HSPs need is a career path that utilizes their highest and best use. It is a value based concept on utilizing the strengths and talents of the individual in the area of greatest need. In real estate, this is referred to as HABU or highest and best use. The highest value comes from a properties best use.

While researching this blog, I found a Japanese term that really resonates with me. It captured the heart path concept precisely. The Japanese have a concept that one should strive in life for a state of *Ikigai*, or reason for being. It's the thing that you wake up for in the morning, the thing that drives you, the thing that gives life meaning and purpose. It plays into the heart path concept with immediate feedback. You do the heart path work and the feedback you receive is the feeling of value and worth. It is an intrinsic feedback loop that self-perpetuates as long as you follow the path with heart.

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This is all fine and well, but putting this into practice is not so easy. Yes, there are people out there we have all read about that find that perfect intersection between purpose and pay, but how do many of us still striving for that get there? For HSPs and I think in particular highly sensitive males, the leap into something that fulfills us is wrought with worries and fears. We are by nature cautious and thoughtful creatures that when confronted with making an important life decision, can often over deliberate and lead to analysis paralysis.

Since HSPs make decisions largely by weighing all the data, perhaps *ad infinitum*, we should use that analytical ability to systematically analyze our options and strategize to find the best fit, not necessarily the perfect fit. What that means is that there may not be a career option that perfectly fits our complex and intricate needs, but there is always a space where those needs, our core needs can be met. I have written before about trying to find the mythical place where we find bliss, sans conflict, obstacles, challenges, etc. Great goal, but not likely to happen in this world.

Yet, with that said, we can and should strive to find those environments, those places of work, where meaning, respect, dignity and some degree of comfort exist. Environments which are people focused, where creativity is prized, where you have more control of your work, where compassion and cooperation rule and you can feel a sense of self-direction and authenticity. And yes, create your own unique requirements for the right path.

Stay clear of environments that are people intense, pressure focused, needlessly competitive, uncreative and environmentally harsh. This will not likely work for you as an HSP and certainly not get you in line with your path with heart or Ikigai mental state.

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A good way to determine this is by creating a matrix or quadrant or comparison chart. An example may be to modify Stephen Covey's decision priority quadrant. He uses the terms, Urgent, Non-Urgent, Important, Non-Important as the box headings. You could use something like that to create your own decisions quadrant or matrix. List the qualities you wish to have in a job and their priority. For most HSPs placing an overriding variable of "What this feels like" should be your guide stone. That is your most important rating. If it doesn't feel right via your intuition, don't follow it. It has no heart for you.

This feeling component is no small matter. Because we as HSMs have very thin *membranes* for emotional boundaries and a hyperactive amygdala, the feeling of being in the right environment is perhaps the most critical element in deciding a career path. In fact, I don't believe we can be truly happy if we aren't following our life path. Can we exist? Yes. Can we be happy? Maybe. Can we be fulfilled? Not likely.

There have been many studies considering the effects on career choices because of gender expectation. Since this column is written primarily to address the needs of HSMs, I do want to make a brief comment on how this may affect highly sensitive men and career expectations. Numerous studies have shown that women tend to pick careers based on cultural norms for women. These career choices are continuing to change, as we continue to socialize girls and young women to avoid limiting choices based upon traditional gender lines of thinking. This is a good thing.

However, I wonder, how much study has been devoted to men following the inverse line of thinking, i.e., pursuing careers that have traditionally been considered to be female careers. These careers are in such areas as nursing, teaching, helping professions, etc. Is there a reverse bias against males making such career decisions?

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With the social expectation that men *must* work to provide for families, and that work is an *option* for women (please forgive single mothers, single females – not my expectation), are we forcing men into higher paying, higher pressure careers that may not necessarily fit with the individual's personality profile? Does this plague more HSM men, who tend to prefer soft skills careers, and is there pressure for many HSM men to make bad career decisions to fulfill this expectation? Are there any men out there, both HSM and non-HSM, who because of male ego concerns would not admit that their career in business or STEM jobs, is not very fulfilling to them? Would these men not want to admit the mistake for fear of appearing weak?

Money and happiness research shows that making more money may drive down the likelihood of sadness without necessarily increasing the feeling of happiness. Which seems to fly in the face of our societal expectation that happiness is tied to money, the acquisition of wealth and the procurement of things. Yet, the attributes of sadness and happiness don't seem to be correlated with this research. The absence of sadness does not mean that happiness increases, but rather moves independently of each other. Having a place to live, food on the table and a big bank account may mean you have avoided sadness, but can it really make for happiness?

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Ask the super wealthy. Perhaps, maintaining their huge caches of wealth is more anxiety driven than happiness oriented. It makes me think of the lowly Bob Cratchit in the Christmas Carol. His life was bleak, his work conditions were miserable, his monetary reserves were sparse, but, yet he found happiness in his family and the love that surrounded him. Whereas the miserly Ebenezer Scrooge, wealthy as he was, was lonely, his life was void of companionship, and his drive for money was a poor substitute for appeasing the lack of love in his life. Who was really happier? Truth be told, neither was pursuing their path with a heart, but at least Cratchit found happiness in his off time. And, one could argue that both were HSMs. One turned into a wretch by life circumstances, and the other living a wretched life by circumstance and poor opportunities. Thank God we don't live in that world...or do we?

Again, this focuses back on choices. To live life on a path with a heart and to be in the state of Ikigai each day, would be ideal. It would be ideal for everyone, but truly ideal for HSPs. As a clear minority in the world, we must choose our paths wisely. The world is not set up for our comfort or to accommodate us. It is incumbent upon each of us to seek our path with a heart. Yet, practical matters require that our idealized life merges with the intersection into the real world.

There was a wonderful graphic about living the life of Ikigai, see diagram page. A Venn diagram of four concentric circles in which the following elements intersect: 1) What you love (your passion), 2) What the world needs (targeting your passion), 3) What you are good at (taking stock of you) and 4) What you can get paid for (compensation of service). The ultimate intersection of the four elements is Ikigai or your path with a heart. This takes work to surmise this balance of all four, but in the end, the path is lighter, the walk gentler, and the heart happier. If you have not found this, keep looking. Your happiness may depend on it.

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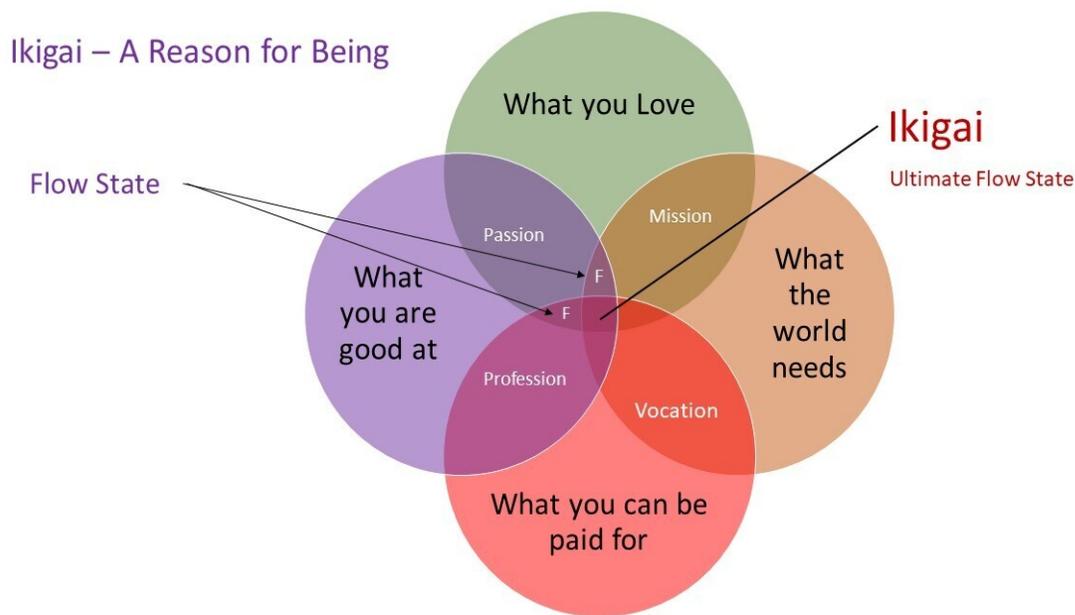
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The Zuzunaga Venn Diagram of Purpose

THE INTERSECTION OF SKILLS AND PASSION (IKIGAI AND HABU)

Ikigai – see diagram. A qualifier about *Ikigai*, as you see in the diagram. This is not traditional Japanese philosophy of *Ikigai*. The original is about embracing joy, the little things, being in the here and now, self-reflection, cultivating one's inner potential. It's not about money, more about connecting, growth, living your values.

Ikigai western version, is the Zuzunaga Diagram of Purpose, or a formula for achieving flow state. It is four main elements:

- What you love (your passion)
- What the world needs (targeting your passion)
- What you are good at (taking stock of you)
- What you can get paid for (compensation of service)

Habu is Highest and Best Use of YOU.

Meet William Allen - The Sensitive Man



William Allen is an author with a writer's heart and researcher's mind. After getting a degree in Psychology with an eye on doing psychology research, he recalibrated for a career in Information Technology. He found himself in a thirty-year career as an Information Technology manager at Wells Fargo who enjoyed managing highly intelligent, often difficult staff, many of whom were highly sensitive. He was awarded a prestigious Corporate Management Excellence award for his empathetic management style.

He retired early from his corporate job to found his Hypno-coaching and neurofeedback brain training business, BrainPilots, in Bend, Oregon. While in Bend, he co-organized the area's first Introvert/Highly Sensitive Person discussion group.

In late 2016, he began his blog, The Sensitive Man, about his experiences, as a highly sensitive man. The blog became the genesis of his book, Confessions of a Sensitive Man. He feels that HSP males need to take their keen insights and intuition and make them public. He would like to shed more light on highly sensitive males and the much-needed role they need to take in our society.