

Unlock your inner nerd

Finding your passion is key to a long, healthy, active life — even when you're a master of nothing and nerd of everything

In the last several years, the word "nerd" has taken on a new meaning.

Once a mocking, derogatory slight at a person who is intelligent or educated, nerd is now almost used as a term of endearment. Whenever I call



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someone a nerd, it is generally a compliment and observation about their

passion for a particular subject matter. Those of you who know me all agree on one thing: Drew Mikita is the biggest nerd in Summit County. And I'm proud of it!

I remember once being tabbed as a nerd when I was in middle school. I felt embarrassed and ashamed of my nerdiness. Seeing my disgrace, a teacher I respected told me this little gem: Nerds rule the world! After about age 20, nerds suddenly became cool — or so I told myself.

I consider myself interested in many pursuits, a jack of very few trades and master of even less. I am activity-ADD, always changing hobbies, picking up crafts and trying new pursuits. Outside of my profession and primary passion as a psychology professor at Colorado Mountain College, here is a list of things that I "nerd-out" on regularly: writing, painting, Frisbee golf, crafting, Phish, skiing, knitting, biking, canning, gardening, yoga, mentoring, fantasy football, blogging, photography, Cleveland sports, reading and poetry. I think the appropriate title is, "master of nothing, nerd of everything."

'DID YOUR KID PAINT THAT?'

It's OK to be interested in everything. By no means am I an expert at any of these pursuits, although I'm decent at a few. I don't do them because I excel — I do them for enjoyment of the activity.

Take a recent conversation with a student about



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Get your nerd on.

one of my paintings: "Did your kid paint that?" "I have no children. I did." "Did you paint that when you were six?" "Nope, last week!" "Oh, my."

I know I am an awful painter, but there is something about the feeling of paint on canvas that invigorates me like nothing else.

WHY PASSION MATTERS

Having hobbies is very important to our overall mental health. Whatever your pursuit may be, it is an outlet. Athletic, artistic, musical, creative — it doesn't matter. It is an escape from your everyday. Stress, worry and sadness all seem to momentarily fade away when we are doing something we are passionate about.

Having a passion is one of the first things I recommend to a client when they are depressed, overly anxious or just in a funk. But, many people stop pursuing their passions as they get older. This happens for a variety of reasons:

- Fear of failure
- Time

- Cost
- Loyalty to other pursuits
- Thinking we're too old
- Children
- Technology
- Laziness
- Embarrassment with the activity

I don't know your life, financial situation, schedule or abilities. However, I know that you need to make time for yourself, and this includes passions. If you are one of those incredibly selfless parents who has relinquished all personal pursuits, good for you. Still, you need something for you. It is important to have activities you enjoy and that tickle your creative side. It is great to be involved with and dedicated to your children. But, sometimes being selfish is the most selfless thing you can do, as it sets us up to be better for the people around us.

UNLOCK THE NERD

Hopefully, you are saying, "Drew, you are so right, I need to be more of

a nerd! But how do I get my nerd on?" I've got you covered. Here is a quick checklist to help determine what type of nerd you should be:

■ What would you do if you didn't have to work every day?

■ Are there any passions you once had that provided some sort of fulfillment, but, for whatever reason, you stopped pursuing them?

■ What did you love doing as a kid?

■ If you are not in the greatest headspace right now, what did you do when you were happier?

■ What interests you the most?

■ What is your heart is telling you?

■ Simply ask a friend or family member what nerdy pursuits they would recommend for you.

GET OUT AND DO

Many people have fears of picking up a new pursuit. We are taught that we need to be good at something or else why do it? This is absolutely ludicrous! I am not telling you to quit your day job — I'm

just urging you to find an activity outside of work that you are passionate about, one (or two) that will be fulfilling. Plus, it can be really fun.

But, picking up something new can be slightly intimidating. Here are a few quick tips on approaching your new or rekindled passion:

■ It is OK to suck at your new hobby. You are not doing this because you want to be a professional painter — you are doing it because you love painting.

■ Approach your pursuit like a kid, with excitement, no fears of judgment and no concern of how you look. When I paint, it usually gets everywhere (It's pretty much adult finger-painting), but I feel so alive after I paint.

■ Focus on the process, not the results. Enjoy the activity for the activity, not just the end product.

■ Don't compare yourself to others. If I compare my artwork to my friend Malia, who is an amazing, talented, trained artist, I am going to feel awful about my creation. Your pursuit is for you and

about you and has nothing to do with someone else.

■ Taking classes are a great way to improve your abilities, meet people with similar interests and work with an expert in the field. CMC has classes for just about all interests and pursuits with amazing teachers (excuse my shameless CMC plug). However, you don't have to formalize the process. Paints, canvases and brushes can be purchased at any local craft shop.

■ If there's a friend you think can enhance the process of pursuing your passion, ask them to jump on board. Painting is now a ritual when my friends come from out of town or even over for happy hour.

■ Don't feel like you have to stick with your passion. Maybe the activity you chose isn't working, and that's OK. Find another hobby (see my list to unlock your nerd above).

■ Be proud of what you are doing!

So get out there and be a nerd, Summit County. I promise that you will find it rewarding, enjoyable and, most of all, fun.