



The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything

Ken Robinson

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A *New York Times*-bestselling breakthrough book about talent, passion, and achievement from the one of the world's leading thinkers on creativity and self-fulfillment.

The Element is the point at which natural talent meets personal passion. When people arrive at the Element, they feel most themselves and most inspired and achieve at their highest levels. With a wry sense of humor, Ken Robinson looks at the conditions that enable us to find ourselves in the Element and those that stifle that possibility. Drawing on the stories of a wide range of people, including Paul McCartney, Matt Groening, Richard Branson, Arianna Huffington, and Bart Conner, he shows that age and occupation are no barrier and that this is the essential strategy for transforming education, business, and communities in the twenty-first century.

Also available from Ken Robinson is *Finding Your Element*, the practical guide to achieving your highest potential.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything Details

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Author : Ken Robinson

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Jen Marin says

I checked this out of the library because I was looking for interesting audiobooks and the name caught my eye. It wasn't until I started listening that I recognized the author from a TED talk he had given a few years back- (If you haven't seen it, look it up. It is absolutely worth the 20 minutes.)

I found this book to be inspirational, entertaining, and intimidating- all at the same time. Robinson is a good storyteller, and the book is chock full of interesting anecdotes of both famous and not-so-famous people who lived happy lives because they found their element.

What is the element? Robinson says: "The element is the point at which natural talent meets personal passion." By finding and nurturing this quality, we can ignite our creativity, and bring more vitality and passion to our lives and to the world.

Robinson tells many stories of famous folk who are famous mostly because they found their passion early and were able to follow where that passion led. I found this part intimidating; how could I ever be like John Lennon, or Ray Charles, or Richard Feynman? He answered this question by many tales of not-so-famous folk, folk who discovered the element late in life, or who do work other than their passion to pay the bills. These people were particularly interesting, as it was very clear that the fact that they invested energy into their passion helped them with the other work in their lives that they were not quite so passionate about.

As an educator, he really stressed the importance of discovering and nurturing these passions in our youth. He points out that the jobs of the future may not have even been invented yet, and that teaching kids a set of facts will not necessarily prepare them for this unknown future. Rather, fostering innovation, creativity, and collaboration can help them be ready for whatever the future brings.

I enjoyed this book as an audiobook. Robinson reads it himself, and his British accent made the stories all the more enjoyable.

Jackie says

I was very fond of Ken Robinson after seeing his Ted speech, so I followed my friend's recommendation to read this book. This was a mistake.

If you're wondering what wisdom lies in this book, don't bother; I'll summarize it for you:

"Little Johnny didn't like school very much. He sucked at math and couldn't concentrate and everyone told him he was a moron. But then he quit school and read my book and joined a rockband, and now he's a multi-billionaire who won at life. This could be you, and the only reason it hasn't happened to you is because you're not following my advice. So don't feel bad if you're an underachieving dumbass, because it's not your fault, you just never had the RIGHT education."

Basically, Ken Robinson tells a bunch of success stories of the one in a million people who end up making it big in risky industries, then insists that it was simply because they found their "element", a term he invented which is actually the same thing as "passion". If you're wondering how to find your "element", don't look

here, because Robinson never actually explains that. He does, however, tell you about all the people who found theirs and as a result are much prettier than you.

I gave this book two stars because, in the process of spacing out while reading it, I actually came up with some decent ideas of my own. But if you're seeking out a long-winded motivational speech, I recommend looking elsewhere.

Cigdem says

I respect Sir Ken Robinson and his message. However, I unfortunately, felt that if you listened to the TED talk, you did not need to read the book.

Kerfe says

My brother sent me a link to a video by Ken Robinson about education:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDZFcD...#!>

I liked it so much that I wanted to learn more, and found out about his books on his website.

"The Element" is for the most part a disappointment--pop self-help at its worst. We learn about many people and how they overcame adversity to find, and become successful and well-known, for doing what they love. Which is fine. But everyone can't be Paul McCartney or Monica Seles or Meg Ryan or Abraham Lincoln or Ray Charles. Robinson makes it sound like all you need to do is discover what you love and you'll reach this zone where everything falls into place--mentors and opportunities, fame and fortune.

It's actually kind of depressing, like "what's wrong with me?--I know what I love to do, but no mentor has shown up to help and support me, and meanwhile my attempts to support myself doing it have utterly failed." Ask anyone who loves to act: there are many more opportunities in restaurants and health clubs than on stage or screen.

Well then, he says: do it in your "spare time" and the drudgery you perform for 40 or 60 hours a week will become easier and more satisfying.

Of course you enjoy doing what you love more than most work you can get that will support you and your family. But I think he's wrong to imply that most of us can hope to do more than fit it into our lives where and when we can. In that respect, the book offers no help or insight at all.

At the very end of "The Element", Robinson does talk about education, and cover the same points as he did in the video. Here the book comes alive.

Still, the video is much better, and enough. Take the time you would have spent reading this book and instead spend it doing what you love.

Craig says

Although "The Element" was authored by Ken Robinson, this is the book I've been writing for the past ten years.

For a long time, I've been arguing that passion is a bridge between our unique human potential and our social responsibility. I begin almost every workshop, speech, and lecture by asking my participants to talk about one of their personal or professional passions.

Eyes light up and the temperature in the room rises as people connect to what Robinson would call "their element."

His book is a collection of stories about people who have discovered their unique gifts—their element—the point at which natural talent meets personal passion. His writing is like a having a coach in the pages of the book.

I wasn't surprised, in fact, I was waiting for his discussion of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's "flow state," a concept I've been including as one of the key ingredients for social profit sustainability in my recent talks.

I liked the book a great deal. It made me think. It helped me realize how lucky I am to be among the very few who get to do what they really love; and it reminded me of my responsibility in helping others to uncover their own path—their own element.

Wayne Osborn says

I loved this book. I was particularly touched by the various stories that are told in which people have struggled with academics in school, and yet found their passion and became wildly successful. Gillian Lynne was a bundle of energy in second grade, and couldn't sit still or pay attention in class. Her teachers were sure there was something wrong with her (this occurred in the pre-ADD days) and urged her parents to take her to a psychologist. After interviewing her, the psychologist became convinced that there was nothing "wrong" with her, she was just a dancer, and needed to be in dance school. Her mother signed her up, and soon Gillian was taking ten dance classes a week. Guess what? She grew up to be a very famous and accomplished professional dancer and choreographer, dancing professionally all over the world with the Royal Ballet Company (based out of London). Later in life, she also collaborated with a fellow named Andrew Lloyd Webber and helped to create a couple of very successful musicals you might have heard of: Cats and The Phantom of the Opera. All of this happened because someone recognized that she had a talent for dancing. I'm wondering that if in today's day and age, where sadly the arts are not valued in our schools, if she'd would have just been medicated in order to "calm her down", and her gift for dancing and choreography would have gone unnoticed. Sadly, creativity and innovation are traits that our school systems seemingly don't value at all.

There are many, many other examples given in this fabulous book that point out the magic of "finding your element", which means finding the thing that you are meant to do. Sir Kenneth Robinson says that "the Element is the place where the things we love to do and the things we are good at come together." I urge you to read this book and see if you can find your element. If you are an educator, you might want to read this book twice. I think I will.

Jay says

The author defines "The Element" as the thing you are both passionate about doing and good at doing. He offers some basic ideas on ways to find the element for yourself, drawing on examples as illustrations. On the whole, I preferred Marcus Buckingham's "The One Thing You Need to Know."

One idea from the book did stand out. In talking about standards for education, Robinson offers an analogy to standards for restaurants. Fast food restaurants have very rigorous standards which get applied to the letter. The results are predictable but don't lead to excellence. The other option is the Michelin Guide, which defines standards more broadly and leaves it up to each restaurant to interpret them. They are evaluated by experts based on Michelin criteria. In education, programs like No Child Left Behind are held to a fast food standard, but the author argues a Michelin approach would serve us better.

Deirdre Keating says

I don't really need to read a whole book on finding the crosspoint between passion and talent, but this is the quote that got me:

p. 238 The most powerful method of improving education is to invest in the improvement of teaching and the status of great teachers. There isn't a great school anywhere that doesn't have great teachers working in it. But there are plenty of poor schools with shelves of curriculum standards and reams of standardized tests. The fact is that given the challenges we face, education doesn't need to be reformed—it needs to be transformed. The key to this transformation is not to standardize education but to personalize it, to build achievement on discovering the individual talents of each child, to put students in an environment where they want to learn and where they can naturally discover their true passions.

If he can convince non-believers of that, then this book will be gold.

I actually had Aidan's teacher (2nd grade) tell me that since he's already so good at art, she doesn't want him to have the role of "artist" in his small group but instead to focus on his spelling. I know her intentions are good---she's aiming for well-rounded students. I just wish elementary teachers could spend time with "well-rounded" passionless high school students and realize their role in killing enthusiasm for learning. No one wants to do that, especially not teachers, but so often we do just that.

Ian Laird says

25 March 2016: minor edits to correct sloppy proofing

Like many millions (literally) round the world I am captivated by Sir Ken Robinson's TED talks on education.

He makes so much sense, by emphasising the need for education to be adapted to each individual, and pointing out that intelligence can manifest itself in a multitude of ways. He asked people in the audience to say how creative they are; usually they underrated themselves.

Sir Ken's thesis is that education is an industrial process which is applied in a one size fits all approach, combined with an emphasis on university entrance requirements and focussing on particular subjects (maths, science, English) with the humanities and the arts downgraded - even within the arts there is a hierarchy - visual arts comes in ahead of the performing arts, with dance last of all. This tends to distort intelligence and reduce creativity. Sir Ken uses many good examples to show the variety of intelligence and creativity. Despite narrowness and homogeneity in our education systems, a number of diverse individuals have led outstanding lives replete with achievements, even though their talent, skills and potential failed to be recognised in their schooling.

Some of the examples: a hyperactive child who became a gymnast, a pool player who fell in love with the magic of the pool hall and a boy who wanted to be a fireman, disparaged by a teacher for his aspiration, ultimately saving the teacher's life (and that of the teacher's wife) when he pulled them out of a crashed car.

So I went straight out and bought this book – you can probably tell there is a 'but' coming. Sir Ken introduces the concept of 'The Element', how to find it and the joy of being in it. The element is that calling, pursuit or activity which is an ideal match for a person's intelligence and creativity.

However, the concept rings slightly hollow. This is because 'the element' seems identifiable by a number of other already familiar names like 'passion', 'great love' or 'enthusiasm', the activity which occupies your time and attention and makes the clock stand still. There seems to be no added quality or characteristic which could distinguish the term from ones which already exist. This is a shame because this construct - if we could all find 'the element' we could be happy and fulfilled, is valid, but perhaps more valid when expressed in conventional terms. Sir Ken's educational observations are deep and profound; his attempt to add to that a new concept to find one's calling is not made out as well.

Perhaps I was looking for a silver bullet - to find out what makes me fulfilled and happy. Well no such bullet exists and Sir Ken probably knows that. I know that reading and writing and sharing my views with others puts me in a happy place.

Elementary, my dear Watson...

Denise says

Ken Robinson gave a lot of interesting stories and anecdotes in this book, but for some reason it fell flat for me in terms of igniting inspiration and sparking new motivation and thought. I enjoyed this book, but I was hoping for more.

There were many times it brought up good questions to invite you to ponder on different aspects of what you want out of life however (my favorite being "HOW are you intelligent?"). He then goes on to talk more about divergent thinking and how you can only inspire others if you yourself are working from inspired action in a field that flows with how you are wired.. However there were a lot of extra things added that continuously made me think where is this going?"

All in all still a good book, even laughed out loud a few times at some of his little quips.

"If a man speaks his mind alone in a forest and no one is around to hear him is he still wrong?"

This is one of my favorite quotes and I want it printed and framed so I can appreciate it for years to come
haha

H says

I had come across with Ken Robinson's speech on TED | Talks for TED Conference 2006. It was one of those *I'm lost, what should I do* afternoons. Every word, every sentence that he said has penetrated to my heart and soon enough my heart just couldn't help it and started to scream: "I told you several times! You are a teacher; please stop going against your fate, your true calling!" Though the epiphany has yet to come only after I have read his book – The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything. All my doubts, questions, and uncertainties about my true Element, Ken Robinson did not fail to reconcile each one of them through his book. And I know, this book is going to change my life forever.

Without a shadow of a doubt, after reading this book, it had helped me reassured what my true calling is. It did not fail to inspire me in pursuing my dream of becoming a professional teacher. This book is full of inspirational stories of how people found their Element and how they fought for their way to further explore their element.

The book has to be read not only with an open mind, but with an open heart as well. One must not be sceptical and circumscribe its thought by thinking "Isn't it what the book is saying obvious?" or "I've heard these stories a dozen of times already; what's new?" As you leaf through each page, uncover each chapter, you'll find yourself reconciling with your inner doubts and accepting of who you truly are. Or, at the very least, open yourself to the possibility of re-exploring who are you as a person. You must be patient when reading this book before internalisation and self-realisation will surface.

This book is a must to each and every one of us; imagine each one of us at our Element...

Arturo says

I really like Ken Robinson. I feel that he is a very insightful thinker into changing education paradigms (in fact, if you youtube "changing education paradigms, ken robinson" a very excellent video of one of his speeches comes up.) I love hearing his talks. They tend to be very enlightening, concise and entertaining.

Unfortunately, this book wasn't much of either of those. I felt that while some of the examples he gave were useful to help readers see how other people have reached their element, the fact that there were so many meant you had to trudge through example after example to get to the good stuff. While the points he did bring up were important, they were just to cluttered in filler (to give you an idea, my notes for the element covered a grand total of 3/4ths of a page, from a person that usually needs 3-5 pages for a 250 page book).

If you've got an empty afternoon, I think its worth giving it a short glance. I can see how it could be just what some people need to hear. If not, I wouldn't kill myself over missing out.

Wesjackson07 says

An amazing book. I first discovered Ken Robinson via Ted Talks and was absolutely captivated by his

speech, primarily because he spoke to something I've always believed was true but had never heard articulated so well. The specific chord that resonated for me was that schools are failing our students because of the hierarchy established in school subjects and how schools are only assessing certain types of intelligence. So many children are being told they're not bright or talented if their interests and gifts fall outside the realm of the valued subjects of math, science, or English.

In *The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything*, Ken Robinson elaborates on the themes touched on in the TED Talks. In many ways it can be viewed as a Self-Help book, one that aims at helping the reader find and explore their passions. However, Ken Robinson hits readers with good level of psychological and educational research, along with some great philosophy, which makes this book feel more grounded in truth than some typical self-help fluff. The book also includes great case studies of people who have found "The Element", celebrity and non-celebrity alike, and what their journey has been like. These case studies really give some practical life application for the principles Robinson talks about.

In helping readers find the calling for their lives, he asks not "How creative are you?" but rather, "How are you creative?" That question may be my favorite part of the book. He challenges the reader to do some digging and some turning inward to determine what sort of activities, passions, pursuits they really connect with and encourages the pursuit of those things inside or outside of a career. He argues quite well that we are all talented and creative in our own way.

I recently heard a commencement speech by Steve Jobs where he said the only way to do great work is to love the work you're doing. That's really at the heart of Robinson's book and I enjoyed every minute of it.

Kerrie says

Why am I reading stuff like this? I'm in a rut, where nothing interests me, my spark of interest in anything is gone and I want that spark back. Even when I have free time, I don't feel like working on my gazillion hobbies.

Of course, I'm in school at 38, juggling a job, homework, home life/chores, and preparing for a career change, but that's neither here nor there, right?

At the same time I'm reading *The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity* so I was interested in comparing the two. Both deal with the very real dilemma that so many people face - having an unfulfilling life, who wish that "Someday, I'll _____", but that someday never comes, whether from outside forces (family/friends who hold you back) or even some (unconscious) self-sabotage.

Of the two, I preferred this book because it was more grounded in reality with real-life anecdotes and some science rather than the eye-rolling woo-woo and New Agey crap that saturates *The Artist's Way*. There were no exercises or game plan in this book - the path was given by all the inspiring anecdotes of people (famous ones) who had found their Element and were living the dream.

Robinson's main target in the book is the old-fashioned and outdated education system which he feels stomps out the burgeoning creativity of children and forces them to conform to a certain way of learning. There is no room for those children who have a different way of learning and therefore fail in school and are then considered "problems" or not very smart. I liked his approach to the question of intelligence, that the question is not "How intelligent are you?" suggesting that there is an objective scale of measurement, but "**How** are you intelligent?" Amen, brother. Some of the "smartest" people I know are the dumbest people on Earth when it comes to basic survival skills. :D

What brought the rating down for me was buried within a paragraph in a chapter, after all the inspirational stuff, is the acknowledgement that "Yeah, your passion might not be able to support you, so you have to have a job that pays the bills and keep your passion as a hobby." Gee, thanks, tell me something I don't know already and am trying to learn to accept. >:-/

Not that I'm looking for An Easy Answer (though it would be nice), but there's a whole other book that addresses that Reality Wake-Up Call and isn't hidden as a "By the way, this is The Awful Truth, but aren't all these inspirational anecdotes AWESOME?" aside. Meh.

But apparently this guy's TED talk was amazing so he expanded it to an entire book.

Mahmut Homsî says

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