

How Ping Pong Helped Me Get Ahead At Work

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If you read this headline and thought, ‘What do ping pong and work have to do with one another?’ you’re not alone. I would have asked the same thing a year and a half ago.

I have always loved ping pong. My mother was allegedly the best table tennis player in Delaware as a teenager, so I grew up playing in the basement. I played in the dorms at college and at bars around NYC, but I always thought of it as just something to do in my spare time. Then, during my first job as a community events organizer, I produced free outdoor ping pong events and my passion for the game only helped it be more successful. At my next job, my coworkers joked with me about how much I love ping pong, but we ended up using the game as a marketing hook that helped us stand out at a legal operations conference in Las Vegas.

Whether you are a ping pong fanatic like me or have some other quirky hobby, here is how you can use your passions to get ahead at work.

Bring Your Whole Self To Work

Your passions are a part of you. All your interests that send you down a YouTube rabbit hole at 2am or compel you to attend meetups after work make you who you are. Just like a machine can’t function without a missing part, you can’t either.

In order to show up with your whole self at work, you have to own your passions unapologetically. If I had tried to keep my somewhat silly hobby from my coworkers, we would have never thought to use ping pong as our conference hook—and it was a huge success!

Showing your coworkers and supervisors that you do more than go to work and go home can also demonstrate your additional skill sets that you might be able to apply in other ways. Research shows that participating in multiple hobbies boosts creativity, the ability to solve problems and overall success at work. Just look at the next CEO of Goldman Sachs who also DJs on the weekend, or the Co-Founder of Cisco Systems, Sandy Lerner, who raises horses for jousting.

Maybe you love doing puzzles or salsa dancing. Playing frisbee golf or performing magic tricks. Own it. You never know how it might be relevant for your career success.

Excitement Shows

Chances are, you aren't working on anything related to your passion on a daily basis. Having two opportunities early in my career to incorporate ping pong was certainly rare. But amplifying your passion and letting it be a part of your everyday conversations can still help you bring that excitement you feel for your hobby into the workplace.

Showing enthusiasm for your hobby makes people want to work with you. You will begin to emanate something called "relational energy". It means you'll be more motivated, a better team player, and just generally more pleasant to be around. Furthermore, dedication to your passion will show your boss your ability to push yourself towards something. Your team may not share the same passion or hobby, but they will certainly want to share your positive attitude about it.

Making Unexpected Connections

When you're audacious and vocal about your passion, you're bound to find someone along the way who feels the same way about it. Not only is your passion a great way to break the ice at a networking event or at the office water cooler, you can also meet people in different and interesting careers through your hobby.

Just chatting about ping pong has brought me close to many incredible people who I wouldn't have connected with otherwise. You never know when someone will share the same passion as you. Allowing others to see that side of you helps you stand out and find common ground with people to grow your network.

I often laugh at the irony that ping pong has helped me get ahead in my career. It's a fun basement game that has found its way into my professional life in unexpected yet remarkable ways. It has become an example of the power of passion to fuel your life, both recreationally and professionally. I'm not saying I will quit my job to pursue professional ping pong any time soon, but I will continue to make room for it in both my free time and my career. So no matter what you're passionate about, own it. It may come back to help you in unimaginable ways.