

If you're a multipassionate, multitalented, multitasker, this is the book for you.

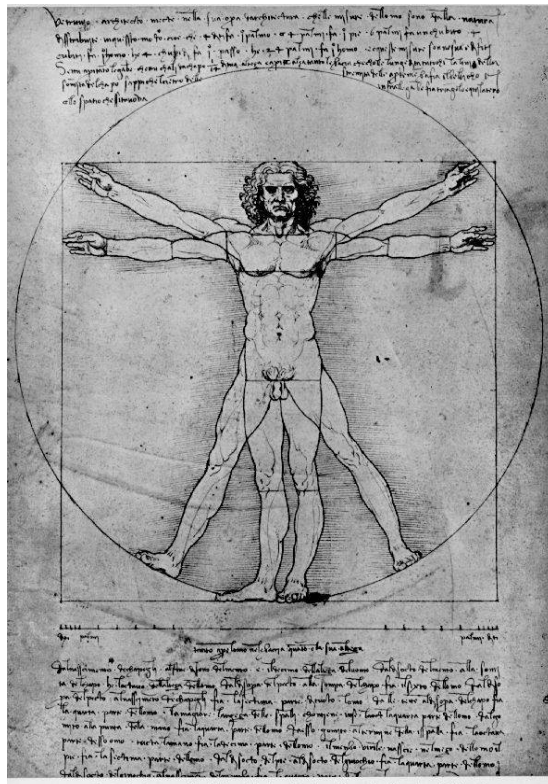
The Leonardo Trait: Living the Multipassionate Life

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# Leonardo Trait



Living the Multipassionate Life

Angie Dixon

*The Leonardo Trait*, by Angie Dixon, <http://www.leonardotrait.com>, [comments@leonardotrait.com](mailto:comments@leonardotrait.com).

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## Introduction

### *Why This Book and Why Now*

Over the last few years, I've done a lot of exploring into my personality, work habits and general uniqueness, as my husband would say.

In doing that, and talking to other people, I discovered that I'm really not that unique, that a lot of people share the qualities I have, of doing "too many things," not settling down, and generally being multipassionate, multitalented, multitaskers.

As soon as I realized this, I saw the potential for a book. And I wanted to write it because someone, and I think it was Toni Morrison, once said something like, "If there is a book you want to read and it hasn't been written, you must write it yourself."

Now is as soon as I could get it done. I'm sorry, for those of you who've been waiting for so long to find out that you're absolutely okay and that all hope is not lost. But here it is. I hope it helps.

### ***The "Aha" Moment for Me***

I hope this book will spark an "aha" moment, when you realize you're a Leonardo, that it's a great thing to be, and that you're not alone.

For me, that moment came slowly, but it did come, and I have led a fuller, richer life since realizing that I am a Leonardo and everything that means.

### ***When "Aha" is "Gotcha!"***

The other side of this aha moment, though, is that you realize that this is the way you're always going to be. The grownups aren't coming to save you.

You are the grownup. Even if you don't feel like it all the time.

Don't worry. You'll be great at it.

### ***What I Hope For You From This Book***

I hope you will read this book and discover that something you've always suspected is true - that you are a special, incredible, creative genius.

I hope this book will set you free to be your Leonardo self.

## Chapter 1

### Approaching Normal: Changing What You Expect from Yourself

Understand that you are different. Embrace the blessings and the curses that make you so. Realize that you are special. Not wrong.

#### *Pop Quiz!*

Oh, yes, I'm serious. I know it's not customary to throw a quiz into the first page of a book, but as you read on you'll find that I have very little use for "the customary" in my life. Now, if you need it in your life, I have no quarrel with that. There are other good books, that don't have quizzes on the first page, and you can find a list of some of them in the bibliography.

You're still here? Great. Let's take that quiz.

Quick, without thinking, tell me which of the following behaviors and habits would be considered "normal." I'm in the United States in 2006. Your mileage may vary a little bit, but probably not much; normal is pretty much normal.

1. Eating cereal and a banana for breakfast
2. Eating cold pizza and a flat cola for breakfast
3. Wearing shiny black wingtips to work at the bank
4. Wearing loafers that don't have to be tied because you always forget
5. Putting the mail in a designated spot every day so each person can look through and retrieve their own letters
6. Sorting the mail at the mailbox, pulling yours out and forgetting where you put everything else by the time you finish the letter from your college roommate
7. Graduating from college with a business degree, going to work for a bank, and earning your first promotion within two years
8. Graduating from college with a degree in music percussion and earning your first promotion – from busboy to waiter – within two years
9. Finding one thing that you're good at and doing it for as long as you're able
10. Finding one thing that you're good at, doing it for a while, and then finding something else and doing that for a while, and then...

Okay. We all back? Remember I asked for what would be “considered normal.” I imagine you mostly picked odd numbers, am I right? It's normal to wear shiny shoes, eat a good breakfast, work at one job for a long time.

*“Life is a process of becoming, a combination of states we have to go through. Where people fail is that they wish to elect a state and remain in it. This is a kind of death.”*  
– Anais Nin

### ***Bang Quiz***

Now, go through the following choices and tell me, in your mind, what feels more *natural* to you. Not normal. Not natural for anyone else. Just for you.

Ready? Here are the questions. Go.

1. Finding a topic that interests you, reading everything you can get your hands on, and knowing everything there is to know about it in a matter of six weeks.
2. Reading only in your chosen field, with perhaps a novel or a biography thrown in.
3. Having twelve projects going at any one time, and switching back and forth between them as the mood strikes.
4. Carefully choosing a hobby, investing time and perhaps money in it, and basically sticking with it for a while, if not your whole life.
5. Taking college courses that make your antennae quiver to find out what they're about, even if they're not *exactly* in your major.
6. Planning out your entire college career to get exactly the right number of credits for a business degree and not a single one more.
7. Getting a degree you'll actually enjoy.
8. Getting a degree that will get you a job on graduation.
9. Moving from job to job or even career to career on a regular basis.
10. Working in the same field for decades, the same job for years.

*"How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives."*

*– Annie Dillard*

Your answers may be a mix. Maybe you have had the same hobby for a while, but change jobs a lot. Or maybe you got a "useful" degree but have fifteen projects stacked in your garage.

I'm not by any means trying to pigeonhole anyone here. What I'm asking is this:

Does what is often expected of you feel natural to you? Does it feel like what you're supposed to be doing? If you chose "reading anything and everything," but your night stand is



stacked with books on rocket science (and you happen to *be* a rocket scientist), maybe there's something you're missing, something that's not quite right in your life. Maybe you're not doing what feels natural.

And if not, do you want to continue to do it, knowing it's not who you are? Or would you like to explore this not-normal, natural side of yourself more?

I've called it not-normal, because I don't really believe in "normal" and "abnormal." I'm not even sure I believe in "normal," but people talk about it as if it exists, so I guess for the purposes of this book I'll go along with that.

*"Life is a succession of events. To live each one is to succeed."*  
— Corita Kent

### ***Defining Normal***

As a working definition of normal, I have always used "what everyone expects," or "what everyone else is doing." Seems to work for me. But let's get a little more technical and see what Dictionary.com has to say:

"Conforming with, adhering to, or constituting a norm, standard, pattern, level, or type; typical: *normal room temperature; one's normal weight; normal diplomatic relations.*"

So, I was pretty close. Normal is standard. It's what everyone's doing. It's what you're "supposed" to do.

What happens if you don't do it? You're not normal. You're, by definition, different, and by definition, you don't fit in. At least, that's the general belief. But do you really have to be exactly like everyone else to fit in?

I'm not like many people I know, and neither is anyone else I know, for that matter. People are different, but we find ways, we find places, to fit. That may not mean having 50

friends and going to intimate dinner parties for 16 every week. Just the thought breaks me out in hives, to be frank.

It may mean having one best friend, a couple of other friends, and a close family, and being happy with that. I think the “being happy with that” part of fitting in is the key, and I don’t think you have to be standard-issue to be happy.

### **Is It Becoming Okay to Be a Jack of All Trades?**

I’ve noticed a trend lately of people referring to themselves as “serial entrepreneurs.” In fact, I refer to myself that way.

With technology, jobs and life changing so very quickly, I wonder if we’re moving toward a time when having a lot of passions and interests is more acceptable.

One example of this is in the field of web design. When I started as a web designer in 1995, you basically needed to know how to write HTML web pages, and if you could do your own graphics, that was a plus. When I got out of the business five years later, it was impossible for me to do and know everything. There were too many jobs.

“Web designers” had become “web developers,” which meant web coders, graphic designers, programmers, search engine specialists, and on and on.

I got out because those weren’t jobs I wanted to do, was good at, or wanted to be good at. But I know there are still people out there who

study, work and learn everything that comes along, and, where web development is concerned, they're "jacks of all trades."

I look forward hopefully to the next decade, and the next, when my children will enter The World and hopefully have the opportunity to make choices based on who they are and all the things they want to do.

*"To live is so startling it leaves little time for anything else."  
– Emily Dickenson*

### ***Career and Life Direction***

In the final analysis, I don't think the majority of people really care whether you can keep your shoes tied. Einstein wore slippers all the time so he wouldn't have to think about tying his shoes.

And I don't think people care how you sort your mail, what you eat for breakfast, or whether you like the same television show they do. I think people care who you are.

But there are people who care what you do with your life. These people include your parents, your loan officer, maybe your spouse, maybe your friends, maybe your boss.

Your parents care because they want you to "do well" in life—which generally means having the great family, the nice house, the boat, the cars, that stuff. Your parents want you to be happy, if they're like most parents, but a lot of parents honestly believe that if you get the right job and make the right moves in your life, happiness will come.

It's not that they don't want you to be happy. It's that they don't understand that you aren't made happy by the same things they are.

*What You're Supposed to Do*

There are things you do if you want to be successful in this world. Admittedly, Steve Jobs didn't do them, and Bill Gates didn't do them, but *you* are supposed to do them.

Those things include:

- Go to college and major in something worthwhile
- Get a job you can keep for your entire life, or at least until you've outgrown it and need to be promoted outside the company
- Buy a house, settle down, watch TV, play touch football on the weekends, maybe go to the lake in the summer
- Go along with everyone else
- Get along
- Drive the right car, wear the right clothes, belong to the right club
- Above all, be normal, because you're supposed to.

I'm betting that you're one of the people, like me, like millions of others, who don't want the life we're supposed to have. We want the life we want, and we don't want what everyone else does. In all honesty, I think that's everyone. I do not believe that anyone really wants a life-in-a-box. But what we're talking about here is the people who *really* don't want that. Don't want the useful degree, don't want to keep the same job for a lifetime, don't want to follow one path.

This is where, in terms of life and career planning, we run hard up against two big myths.

***The Two Great Myths***

The first myth is that once upon a time, people had jobs for life. That's not exactly a myth, because it's true, once upon a time, you could go to work at the bank or the factory and expect to retire with a gold watch at 55, never having worked anywhere else. You'd be a valued

employee, your employer would “take care of you,” and you would leave as a “success” because you’d been such a good employee for so long and done exactly what was expected back then—gotten a job and kept it for your entire life.

But there are two things people don’t talk about now, when they’re talking about those days.

First, you no longer have any reason to expect a job for life. If people do mention this fact, they mention it as something lamentable, which in some ways it is. But a job for life is no longer a given, and in many ways that’s a good thing, both for employees and employers.

But here’s my next point:

Second, why would you want to stay in the same job, with the same people, at the same company, doing the same thing, for fifty years and then retire? Why would you want to look out the same window, file the same reports, and never do or learn anything different?

Where’s your sense of adventure?

*“And we should consider every day lost on which we have not danced at least once.  
And we should call every truth false which was not accompanied by at least one  
laugh.”*  
— Friedrich Nietzsche

*The Second Great Myth*

Bear with me. I said there were two great myths. The second one is,

“Jack of all trades, master of none.”

You’ve heard it, right? It’s a disparaging way of saying you have to be good at one thing, or you’re good at nothing at all—and, by extension, basically good *for* nothing.

What if that's simply not true?

At least not of everyone?

I agree there are people who want, and need, to stay with one thing. My husband is a great example. He enjoys computer programming. He's been doing it for, if I'm not mistaken, about 25 years. He's been in the same job for 13 years, and loves it. He has no plans to leave.

Then there are people who stay in the same field, but change jobs every few years. My best friend is like this. She's a teacher, and she's been an educator for over a decade, but she's done several different jobs within the education field, and hardly ever stays at a particular job more than five years.

Then, there are the true jacks of all trades, like me. Except I'm really a jill of all trades. What have I done? Let me see. I write, which seems to be a pretty consistent theme through my life. I work on marketing my various projects. I draw, I read, I do altered book art, I do photography, I walk in competitive races when I have the desire and ability at the same time, I... I do it. Whatever it is. I do it.

I recently heard about a study that showed that people who multitask really are not as efficient as people who do one task.

I wonder, what if they're measuring wrong? What if, instead of measuring me while I'm multitasking against you while you're not, they measure me while I'm multitasking against me while I'm not?

Maybe they are; I haven't seen the actual study. But if they get the right people in there, they might find some surprising results about how efficient some of us can be at multitasking.

And I'm not just talking about multitasking at your desk, reading email and talking on the phone.

I'm talking about multitasking at life. Being a writer and a mom and a wife and a business owner. Being a dad and a musician and an advertising person.

## ***The Serial Lifestyle***

What if you could have a serial career, be a serial entrepreneur, even be, in every sense of the word, a jack or jill of all trades, doing multiple things at once? Does that appeal to you? If not, that's okay, we're not all alike.

But if you've just started trying to figure out how you can be a nurse and an Olympic figure skater at the same time, and you're 59 years old and have bad knees, you are in exactly the right place, reading exactly the right book, and I hope for exactly the right reasons.

So what if you could do everything you wanted, even if not all at the same time? What if you didn't have to settle on "one thing"?

Oh, yeah, your grandmother would spin in her grave.

But what if?

*"Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover."*  
– Mark Twain

## ***They Just Want The Best For You***

I'm going to go back to your parents, and your loan officer, who would like to see you settle down, "make something of yourself," et cetera et cetera and et cetera again.

I want to point out that they want you to be happy and have an enjoyable life, and they don't realize that you're never going to be happy doing one thing.

I think to really understand what will make you happy, we need to take a moment and think about what's involved in an enjoyable, pleasurable, happy life. Here are some of my choice ingredients:

- Love
- Honesty
- Self-examination
- Growth
- Loving what we do
- Chocolate

To some people, it seems you have to do certain things, certain ways, to have a “good” life. I say, hooley. It’s just not true. You have to do what works for you, in such a way that you meet your responsibilities to yourself and those around you, and that you accomplish those things in your life that matter most to you. Those things include loving, caring, sharing, doing, and eating chocolate. At least, that’s what they include for me.

I’m going to give you another exercise, this time not a quiz but more of an essay. But first I’m going to give you a hint about what’s in store for you in the rest of this book.

We live in a society that rewards conformist behavior. We’re told that the only way to ‘get ahead’ is to ‘settle down,’ ‘finish what you start,’ and ‘make something of yourself.’ If you don’t want to live a life full of clichés that don’t fit the way you work or feel, there is another way: The Leonardo Way.

*“It’s faith in something and enthusiasm for something that makes a life worth living.”*

*- Oliver Wendell Holmes*

### ***Exercises***

Now for that essay.

Please find a notebook, a journal, or the back of an envelope you can use for now. I would like you to keep a notebook or journal for the exercises in this book. Nothing fancy, just



some pages stapled together will be fine if that's all you have. But for now, use whatever paper you have, write with a crayon if you have to, and do this before you forget.

Tell me what you would do if you knew you could do anything you wanted, for as long or short a time as you wanted, without any worries about money, knowing you'd be successful at anything you tried.

Now tell me what you'd do then.

And then....

And then....

Keep going. Stop telling me and start telling *you*.

Then, when you're done telling yourself what you would do, spend five minutes telling yourself what you're going to do. Pick three things on that list that you can, and will, do this week. Maybe you can't sail to the Bahamas. But can you go to the library and check out every book they have on sailing? You say you can't learn to sing? Why not? People teach voice, don't they? Have you asked one of those people if your voice is trainable? Go do it this week.

What I want most for you this week is to start thinking about what you would do if you could do anything, anythings.

What would you do if you knew you could?

And you knew you didn't have to keep doing it?

## Worksheet: Who Do You Want to Be?

I would like you to take some time with this exercise. Really be thoughtful and creative with it. Ideally, you'll refer back to it as you read this book, and you'll give more thought to what you've said here, what you might want to change, and what you definitely want to hold onto.

1. We all have "roles" in our lives. We're parents, friends, spouses, employees. What are your major roles? List up to seven. Mine are mother, wife, friend, writer, businesswoman, individual.

2. If you were going to add a role, what would it be? If I were going to add a role, right now, it would be artist.

3. If you were going to subtract a role, what would it be? I had to give this a lot of thought. I love all my roles. But if I had to give one up, I'd give up businesswoman.

4. Which of your roles most defines who you are today? Not yesterday, or tomorrow, but today? For me, today it's mother, because even though I'm sitting here writing as I type, I had a teacher's conference this afternoon and a Girl Scout ceremony this evening. Tomorrow? Probably back to writer, or businesswoman while I make some calls.

5. How do you feel about switching between roles? Is it difficult? Do you do it well, whether it's difficult or not? Would you rather not?

6. Tell yourself who you are. Not what your name is, not what you do. Who are you? Deep down inside, when you're all alone and no one can hear what you think, who do *you* think you are?

You might want to review these answers frequently as you read this book.

*“Study as if you were going to live forever; live as if you were going to die tomorrow.”*

*– Maria Mitchell*

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