IKIGAI

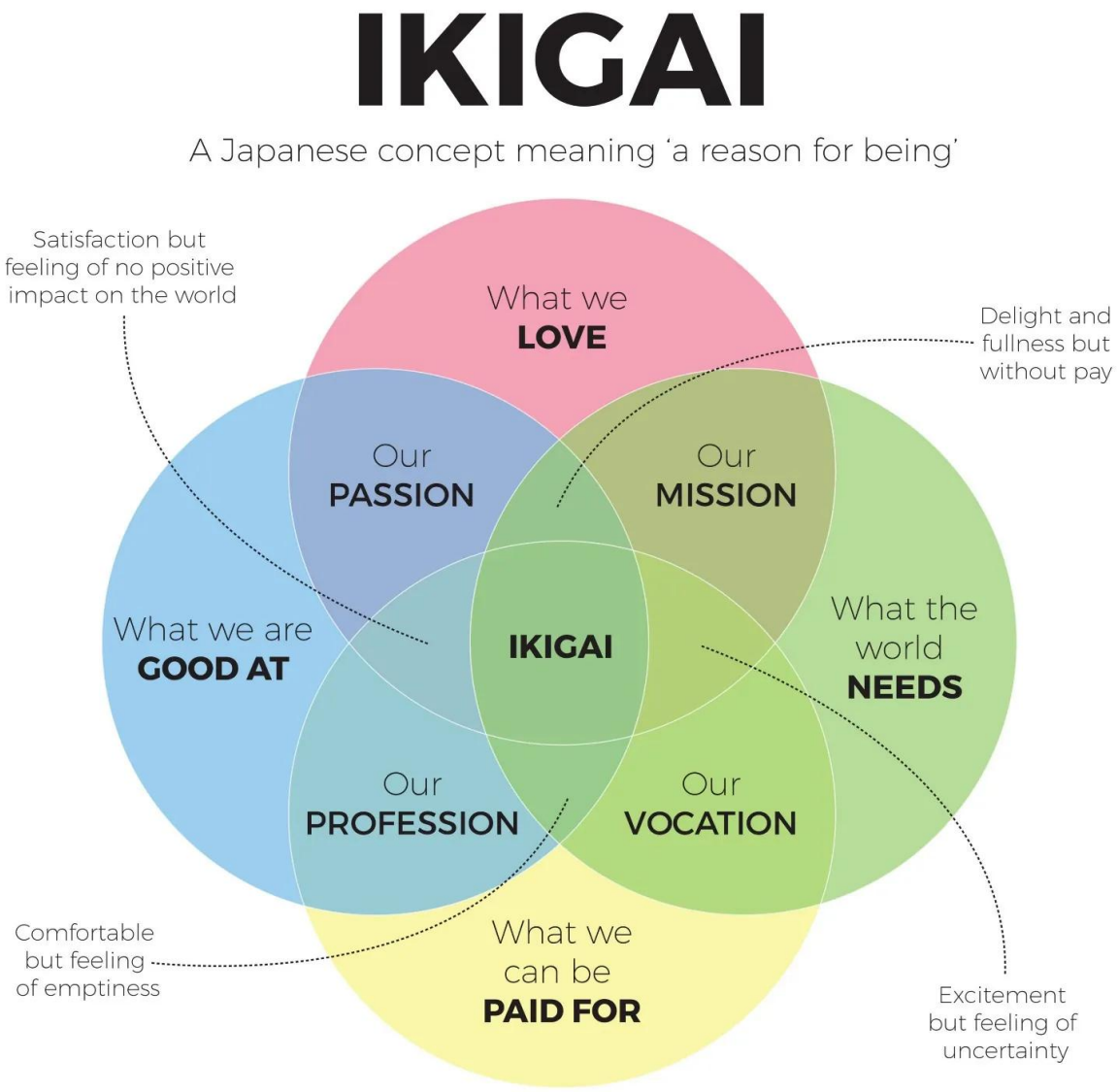
Idea In Short

Consulting, like Investment Banking or similar high-profile professional services careers, is hard. It is particularly tough if you're a junior consultant. If don't keep your clients & bosses happy, your days are numbered. Typically, consultants experience variety in their projects, jam-packed & exciting workdays, exposure & access to key decision-makers, etc. As this HBR article2 notes, a consultant's work usually involves providing information, solving problems, effective diagnosis, recommending actions, or implementing changes. Hence, there is never a typical day in the life of a consultant. But, it's also not the easiest lifestyle.

Consulting lifestyle entails frequent travel & sometimes, lengthy engagements. Consultants should be disciplined & tough enough to handle considerable workloads, prioritize tasks & put in long hours. It's certainly not for everybody. The Japanese model - Ikigai - helps you evaluate whether consulting is your vocation.

Up-or-out

In a report from Alexandra Michel, the ex-Goldman Sachs associate-turned professor found that junior bankers go through a cycle of physical abuse until they either dropout or take control. Consultants are engaged in something similar. Just as people leave banking because they can't stick the work & the lifestyle, so they quit consulting jobs too. As a consultant, not everything you do well is fun for you. Not everything you enjoy is paid for. what you want, what you are good at, what you find important is not necessarily congruent with what you can get paid for. That is why finding your Ikigai 3is important.



IKIGAI Venn Diagram

Ikigai

Ikigai is a Japanese concept made up of two words:

- Iki - which means life, and
- Gai, which means value or worth

In a nutshell, Ikigai is an intersection between these 4 pillars:

1. Profession: What you are good at

2. Passion: What you love to do
3. Vocation: What you can be paid for
4. Mission: What the world needs

Put together, these words mean value of life. In our consulting context, a reason for being. Our raison d'être.

Finding your Ikigai

This model works best if you make your own Ikigai model; there is no one-size-fits-all Ikigai. If you like to work with Post-its, then work with Post-its. Else, if you like to create mind maps , create a mind map. If you like to write or paint, then write or paint, then paint. Decide for yourself whichever format works for you. But, be completely honest with yourself; the shape must fit you. Once you've created your model, you may want to let your model marinate for a while. You can print out your model & hang it on the wall, use it as a desktop background, or have a photo of it on your phone. Then, work your way from the outside to the inside in the model.

Profession: What you are good at

For many, this is the simplest question. Ask yourself, what:

- Are you good at?
- Talents do you have?
- Are you better at than others?
- Have you always been able to do?
- Skills do you have through training / experience?

Write down everything that comes to mind. May be, you are an Excel superhero, bake the best cake or have a great eye for design. Write everything down. It can also be small or crazy skills!

Passion: What you love to do

That is the question we rarely ask ourselves is what:

- That you really enjoy?
- Can you do again and again without getting bored?
- Excites you most?
- Have you always enjoyed doing as a child?
- Can you talk about for hours?

Collect all ideas. Do not look at your answers to the questions from the first perspective. Look at each option as if it were the only one.

Vocation: What you can get paid for

Now the important question is: How can you make money? Not hypothetically & possibly, but very specifically. The skills that earn you money will change over time. As with everything in this post — and in life — there is no hard and fast rule. Everything is subject to change and evolution. Yet, reflect about:

- What jobs are there that you could do?
- What jobs did you already have or would you like to have?
- How will you earn income?
- If you could turn off your conscience, what could you do to support yourself?

Answer honestly again, unfiltered and as if there was only this option.

Mission: What the world needs

The fourth perspective is also about looking outwards. The questions you should ask yourself is what:

- Do you think the world needs right now?
- Topics are you concerned with?
- Problems do you want a solution for?
- Would you do if you were financially safe forever?
- Would you like to leave to the world?
- Moments make you feel fulfilled or vice-versa?

Hold on to your thoughts. Maybe it's a big thought like global justice. Perhaps, it's a small

everyday moments like if I can make my friends laugh.

Find the intersections

Congratulations! You have now accomplished the most important thing. Now it's about integrating everything. Keep working from the outside in. Find the overlap between the four perspectives. For example, what are you good at and can you make money with it? What do you enjoy and what is needed by the world? Maybe you can find examples from your current life; maybe you can think of other people. Let your thoughts run wild. Gradually fill in the various fields. Maybe you want to talk to friends about it too. Give yourself more time for the ideas to consolidate. You don't have to find the answers right away. Sometimes, it takes a while to figure out what your Ikigai is. If you feel that you are thinking too hard, put your model aside for a week & focus on other topics4. Good ideas are like good wine; sometimes they need time to mature.

Implementing your Ikigai

Of course, recognizing your Ikigai is only the 1st part. Now it's about actually making your way there. Be brave and create a multi-year plan. I recommend a 3-year plan.

- What do you want to implement?
- What else do you want to learn?
- Who can support you?
- What inner road blocks should you resolve?

That sounds like a lot of work - and it is. The good thing is that every step feels meaningful once you're on the path that's right for you.

Summary

On a more pragmatic level, the concept of Ikigai can help you find your vocation. What makes most people get out of bed every morning is their job. Some of them do it because they have to; others do it because they love what they're doing. The second group of people can be a huge source of inspiration for all of us. I believe that everyone is able to find

or create a job they love and that gives them a reason for living.