

How to find your entrepreneurial purpose with Ikigai

Description

Stop asking if you have the â??right genesâ?• for business. Instead, use the Japanese concept of Ikigai to build a company that aligns with who you are.

Are entrepreneurs born or made? We explore the Ikigai framework to help you align your passion, skills, and market needs to build a purpose-driven business.

Introduction: The question every founder asks

At some point in the lonely hours of building a business, every founder asks the same question:

â??Am I actually cut out for this?â?•

We often buy into the myth of the â??born entrepreneur,â?• the visionary genius who started selling lemonade at age four and never looked back. If you didnâ??t do that, you might feel like an imposter. You might wonder if you are forcing a path that isnâ??t meant for you.

But the truth is far more encouraging. Entrepreneurship isnâ??t a genetic trait; itâ??s a practice. And finding satisfaction in it isnâ??t about luck; itâ??s about alignment.

This guide uses the Japanese concept of **Ikigai** (â??a reason for beingâ?•) to help you answer the â??born or madeâ?• question and find the specific business model that fits your life.

The reality of entrepreneurship: The data

Before we dive into the philosophy, letâ??s look at the hard numbers. Entrepreneurship is **uncommon**, but it creates outsized value.

- According to the **Global Entrepreneurship Monitor** (GEM), participation in early-stage entrepreneurial activity (starting a new business) ranges widely: In the US, rates hover around **9%** of the adult population. In highly developed European nations (like the Netherlands), rates are often near **8-9%**. The global average is lower, as these figures include many developing economies. This confirms it is a unique path, but not an unattainable one.
- However, those who align their business with a deeper purpose outperform those who donâ??t. A study by **Deloitte** found that purpose-driven companies witness higher market share gains and grow **three times faster** on average than their competitors.
- The â??born entrepreneurâ?• is a statistical myth. Research shows that the average age of a successful startup founder is **45**, suggesting that experience and learned skills matter far more than innate â??youthful genius.â?• (All Statistics Verified)

The debate: Are entrepreneurs born or made?

This is one of the oldest debates in business. Do you need a special â??risk geneâ?• to succeed?

The overwhelming body of modern literature supports the assertion that entrepreneurs are **made, not born**. While certain **personality traits** (like openness to experience) help, the core abilities of a founder, innovation, leadership, and strategic thinking, are learned skills.

This view is backed by the research of **Anders Ericsson**, famous for his work on â??Deliberate Practice.â?• He argues that what we call â??talentâ?• is often just the result of intense, focused practice over time. You donâ??t start as an expert CEO; you become one by solving problems day after day.

> *â??If you put in the work, you see the results. As Carol Dweck states in Mindset, a **growth mindset** believes abilities and intelligence can be developed through dedication and hard work, which is the foundation of becoming a successful founder.â?•*

Here is a breakdown of the key differences:

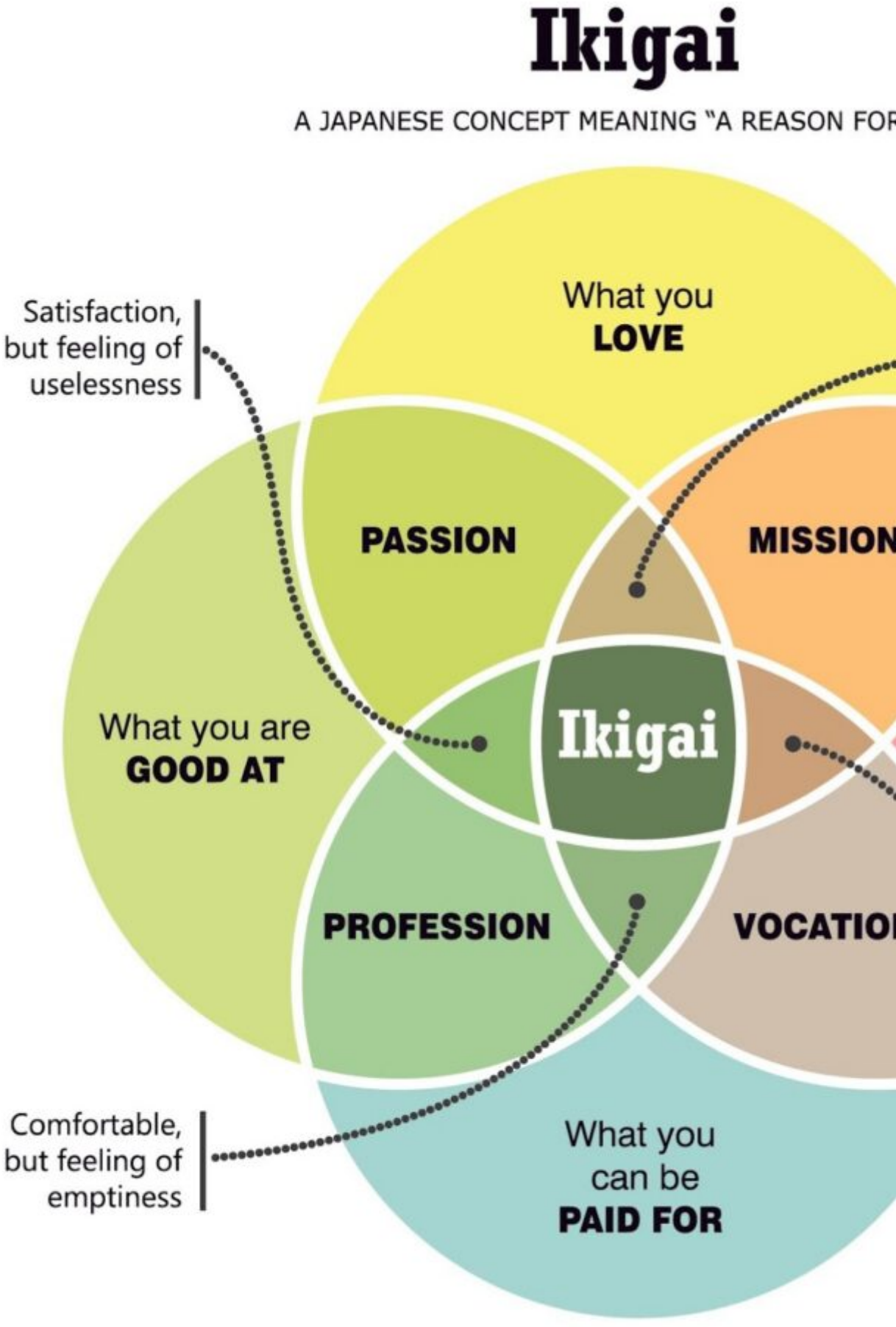
Trait/Skill	The â??Bornâ?• Myth	The â??Madeâ?• Reality
Innovation	â??You either have ideas, or you donâ??t.â?•	Learned through observation, problem-solving, and connecting disparate ideas (e.g., Steve Jobs connecting calligraphy to computers).
Risk Tolerance	â??You must be a reckless gambler.â?•	Learned through calculated risk assessment. Successful entrepreneurs manage risk; they donâ??t seek it blindly.

Leadership	â??You must be a charismatic extrovert.â?•	Learned through emotional intelligence (EQ) training, mentorship, and practice. Many great CEOs are introverts, **Bill Gates** being a prime example.
Resilience	â??You must be tough as nails.â?•	Developed through facing failure, iterating, and learning from mistakes (â??Deliberate Practiceâ?•).

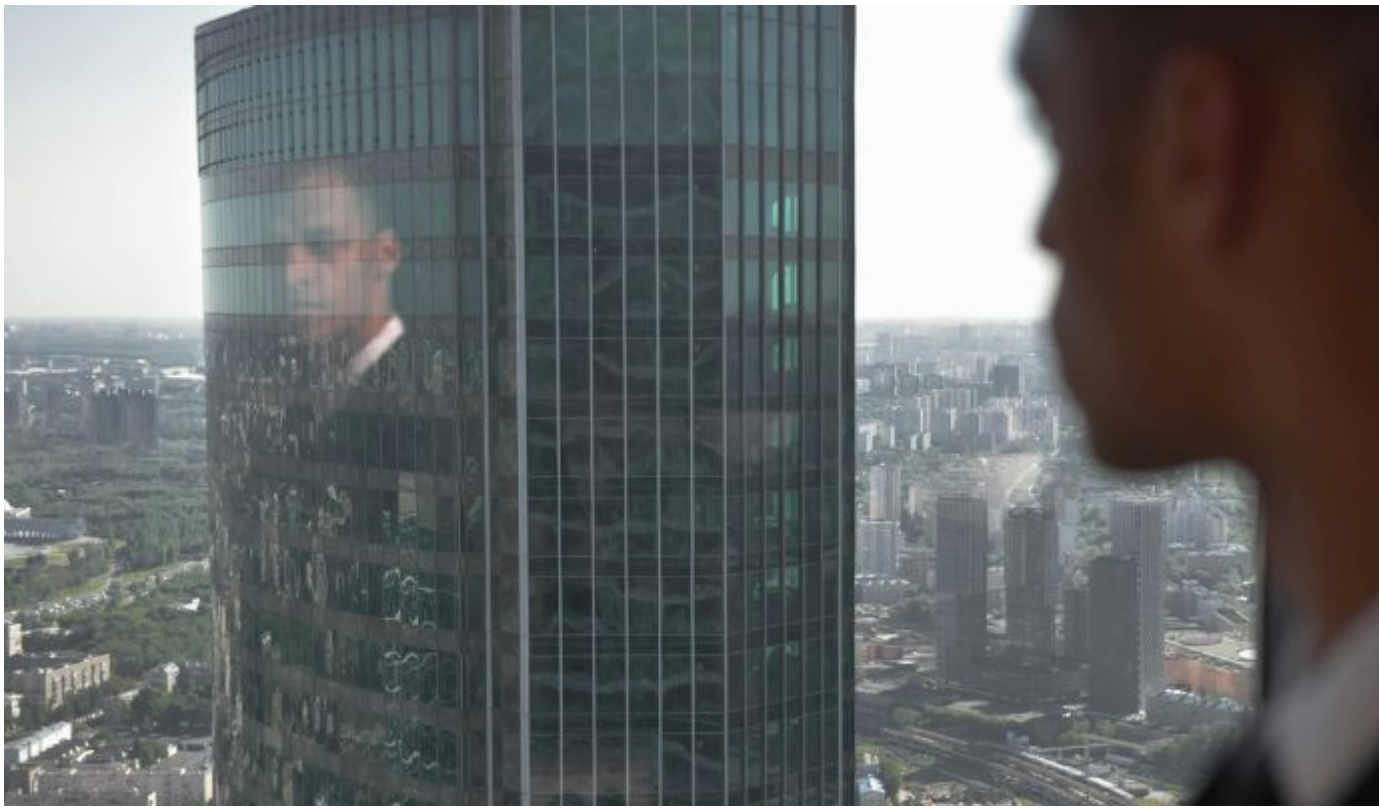
The barrier isnâ??t genetics. Itâ??s alignment. You can learn the skills, but you wonâ??t stick with the practice unless the business matters to you. That is where Ikigai comes in.

The Ikigai model for founders

Ikigai is the intersection of four distinct circles. Most struggling entrepreneurs are only operating in one or two. To build a business that lasts, you need to find the sweet spot in the middle.


Ikigai
A JAPANESE CONCEPT MEANING "A REASON FOR
What you
LOVE
Satisfaction,
but feeling of
uselessness
PASSION
MISSION
What you are
GOOD AT
Ikigai
PROFESSION
VOCATIO
Comfortable,
but feeling of
emptiness
What you
can be
PAID FOR

1. **What You Love (Passion)**
   This is your domain interest. What topics do you read about on a Saturday morning? If you start a business solely for money in a field you hate, you will burn out when times get tough. Example: A coffee lover starting a dry cleaning business will lack the vital passion to push through tough times. Passion is your fuel.
2. **What You Are Good At (Profession)**
   This is your â??madeâ?• talent. These are the hard skills you have developed through your career or deliberate practice. You may be an excellent writer, a coder, or a salesperson. A successful business must leverage its actual competencies, not just its dreams.
3. **What the World Needs (Mission)**
   This is the market gap. Itâ??s not enough to be good at something; there must be a human need for it. Does your city need another coffee shop? Does the market need another marketing agency? This circle forces you to look outward at the â??impactâ?• on your community.
4. **What You Can Be Paid For (Vocation)**
   This is the business model. You might love painting, be good at it, and the world might need art, but if no one is willing to pay for it, you have a hobby, not a business. This circle grounds your purpose in economic reality.

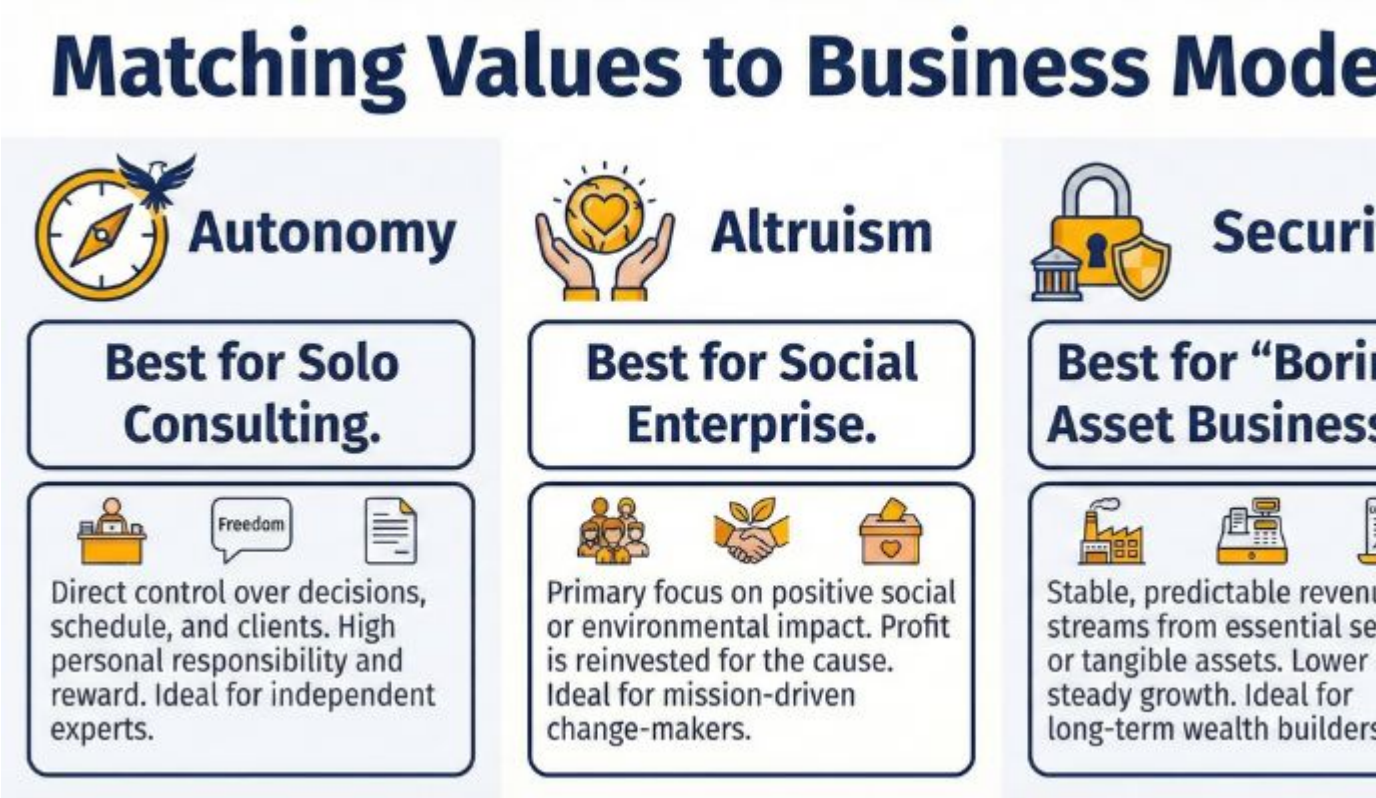


The Sweet Spot: *When you find a business idea that fits all four, something you love,* ***are good at****, is needed, and pays well, you have found your Entrepreneurial Ikigai.*

How to tune your compass: The personal values test

Finding your Ikigai requires deep self-awareness. You need to know what actually drives you, not what you think should.

A practical tool for this is the **Personal Values Test** available at 123test.com. This assessment helps you rank your core motivators.



- If you value **Autonomy**, a solo consulting business might be your fit.
- If you value **Altruism**, a social enterprise or non-profit might be better.
- If you value **Financial Security**, a high-cash-flow â??boring businessâ?• (like a laundromat) might be your Ikigai, even if itâ??s not â??sexy.â?•

Use this test to â??tuneâ?• your business idea until it resonates with your personal values.

> *â??The two most important days in your life are the day you are born, and the day you find out why.â?•* â?? **Mark Twain**

Final thoughts

Donâ??t just build a business; build *your* business. The myth that entrepreneurs are born with a special gift is just that, a myth. The reality is that successful founders are simply people who have found a way to align their learned skills with a market need and a personal passion.

By using the Ikigai framework, you can move from â??chasing trendsâ?• to building a company that gives you energy rather than taking it away. Start by mapping your four circles

today. The intersection might surprise you.

Ready to define your mission? A clear sense of purpose is the first step in a solid business plan. Download our complete Business Plan Template to write your Mission Statement and formalize your Ikigai.

Frequently asked questions (FAQ)

- **What is Ikigai?**
  Ikigai is a Japanese concept that translates to â??a reason for being.â?• In a business context, it is used as a framework to find the ideal balance between your passion, your skills, what the market needs, and what the market will pay for.
- **Can anyone become an entrepreneur?**
  Yes, the evidence suggests that entrepreneurship is a set of learned skills (â??madeâ?•), not a genetic trait (â??bornâ?•). If you have the willingness to learn (deliberate practice) and can find a business model that aligns with your values, you can succeed.
- **How do I find my business purpose?**
  Start by listing your skills and interests. Then, look for problems in the world that overlap with those lists. Finally, validate if people are willing to pay for a solution to those problems. The intersection of those lists is your purpose.
- **Is passion enough to start a business?**
  No. Passion covers the â??What you loveâ?• circle, but without the â??What you can be paid forâ?• (market demand) and â??What you are good atâ?• (skills) circles, you will likely have a struggling hobby rather than a sustainable business.

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