



Getting Started

By Barb Kofman and Kaitlin Eckler

Q. I have no idea what I want to do when I graduate. I don't know where to begin. Can you show me how to get started?

It is not unusual to graduate without a clear vision of what you want to do next. Many graduates are uncertain about what career best suits them and how to begin an effective search.



Self-Assessment

The first thing to understand is that every career search begins with you-knowing who you are, what's important to you, your likes and dislikes, your dreams and aspirations. Each of us carries a specific set of innate characteristics, values, and motivators. In order to be happy in a job and successful, you must first figure out what these are for you. This is called “self-assessment.”

Self-assessment reveals your key drivers-what is important to you, what motivates you, and what you are good at--your strengths. Done properly, this will help to align you with certain types of jobs, and uncover symbiotic work environments.

Identify Your Values

Begin by identifying your primary values-the ones which will influence the context in which a job or career must be evaluated. To clarify your values, motivators and strengths consider some of these soul-searching questions:

1. What are your driving forces? Look at the list in the sidebar and check your top five values. These are likely fundamental elements that must be met in your career if you expect to be both happy and successful in it.
2. How do you describe yourself to others?
3. What do others tell you are your strengths?
4. Who are your role models, the people you admire most and wish to emulate in your own career?
5. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time that you'd like to have integrated into your work?
6. What would do if you could earn the income you require and had the talent to do it well?

Outline Your Experience

Next, systematically explore things you've done in your school, work, and personal life that you've really enjoyed and have made you proud. This is the surest way to identify your personal definition of success. Review your past accomplishments, starting with your earliest memory and

follow through year by year to today. Any situation that comes to mind is worth considering. Write them out using the following format:

- o Explain the background of the “story”-what was the opportunity or circumstance with which you dealt?
- o Describe each of the steps you took to address this challenge.
- o Explain the benefit or result realized.

Identify Your Skill Set

Now, for each anecdote identify the skills, competencies, and strengths that brought about the successful results. For example, if your story is about starting a new club that grew in membership and now is an established offering at your school, you might identify initiative, vision, organization, determination, and leadership as some of the competencies that this story illustrates.

Use the chart below to describe several of your success anecdotes:

| |
|--|
| Opportunity |
| Action |
| Results |
| Skills, competencies, and strengths applied to achieve the results |

continued on page 28

continued from page 14

Analyzing your accomplishments highlights the strengths you bring to the employment marketplace, and indicates what gives you a sense of achievement. This is the best way to move you along the path to identifying your career options.

Q. Where do I fit in? There are so many jobs out there: I don't know how to find the right one for me.

Today there are so many careers from which to choose, it's not easy to determine which one is right for you. So, how do you decide? Your question focuses on two important areas-finding the type of company or organization in which you fit, and determining which job is right for you. In the previous question we dealt with the latter - your career choice is based on undertaking a methodical evaluation that establishes your critical values, skills, and competencies.

Once they've been clearly identified you're ready to start narrowing down the career options that fit with these criteria. For example, if you like to work with your hands then you will explore careers that involve some form of manual work. Alternatively, if you are good with numbers, you will seek options that leverage your mathematical ability.

Finding the Right Fit

After narrowing down your career options, it's time to look at organizational fit and to find the best one for you. Career fit is based on matching your values, skills, and personality with both the right job and culture. A critical part of what constitutes a satisfying job for you is recognizing the type of company and work environment that best suits you. To do this consider the following questions:

- o Why do you need to work?
- o Where do your work values fit-e.g., is security or self-actualization more important to you? Is your primary interest to make money or is it helping humanity or something in between? Are you willing to work 24/7 to get ahead and get the job done or is work-life balance more important to you?
- o What kinds of careers use the competencies you want to use and directly relate to your areas of interest?

Once you've developed your responses to these questions and clarified what your ideal work environment looks like, think about what type of organization aligns with your attitudes regarding work.

We recommend questioning people about their work life experiences and finding out what resonates with you. Participating in a Co-op program or an internship is a great way to get a feel for where your best fit is. It's also important to be informed about the prevailing employment economy. The saying "fish where the fish are" in terms of a job search means that you can be much more selective when you are fishing in a well-stocked pond. Conduct some solid research about where the growth is in the economy. The "hot" sectors are more likely to be hiring. Additionally, remember that most organizations have a number of departments and functional areas requiring a variety of skill sets beyond the specifics of their industry. **JD**

Barbara Kofman of CareerTrails & Kaitlin Eckler of KE&A Consulting are career management professionals with extensive experience in the youth and employment marketplace. Barbara can be contacted at www.careertrails.com or 416 708-2880 & Kaitlin can be reached at career@sympatico.ca or 416 579-1508.

...What are your top Values?

- o Achievement
- o Advancement
- o Ambition
- o Autonomy
- o Balance
- o Challenge
- o Creativity
- o Education /Development
- o Equality
- o Ethics
- o Entrepreneurism
- o Expertise
- o Flexibility
- o Helping Others
- o Honesty/Integrity
- o Income/Money
- o Knowledge
- o Leadership
- o Leisure
- o Location
- o Mentoring /Supervision
- o Personal Growth
- o Planning
- o Prestige/Status
- o Recognition
- o Reputation /Type of business
- o Risk-taking
- o Routine
- o Security
- o Size/Structure
- o Socializing
- o Special needs met
- o Success
- o Teamwork
- o Travel
- o Variety
- o Working Conditions
- o Other...