

My Book of Me

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Searching for a satisfying career? Ditch the want ads and look within.

I was cleaning out some old files one day when I stumbled upon one of my kid's elementary school relics. It was an assignment entitled My Book of Things and Stuff. As I leafed through it to determine whether it was to be kept or recycled, I was pleasantly surprised. Contained within its pages was a list of questions that had been designed to challenge my child to consider his strengths, areas of interests and values all the key elements of a meaningful career search.

I've often said that there's nothing new in career planning books. They're all just variations on the same theme. Their value typically comes from the wisdom of the writer's personal anecdotes layered over a predictable process for exploring career options. Finding this childhood questionnaire, clearly designed to help my son understand and explore his uniqueness and his place in the world ahead, has further confirmed this notion for me.

What struck me though, is how natural it is for children to answer these fundamental questions with just the right mix of honesty, imagination and hope and how this same act becomes much more challenging for us as we get older. What happens to us between the ages of twelve and twenty that clouds those visions of our future selves? Is it simply our self doubt or too many humbling reality checks that make us construct obstacles that get in the way of our dreams? Volumes of psychological and sociological analysis have been written trying to find the answer to this quandary. But while they may have provided us with a scientific explanation, they don't provide us with the insight that we seek to help us resolve those tough questions: Why am I here and what am I meant to do with my life?

Childhood Truths

To find out which future path to take, go back to the beginning. Revisit that list of questions from grade school and see if you can use it to solve any career conundrums you're currently exploring. With apologies to that unknown teacher who prepared this assignment, here for your personal edification are some of the questions that struck me a particularly relevant. So roll up those sleeves, get your crayons out and tap into the child you were in Grade 5 to answer these queries.

- If you could choose your own subjects to study in school, what would they be?
- If you could go to the library one day and write reports on any person, place, animal or idea, what would your reports be about?
- If you could be an author and write a book someday, what would the title be? Why?
- Pretend you could spend a day by yourself in any store you choose. What kind of store would it be and what would you spend your time doing?
- What kinds of games do you enjoy playing?
- What kinds of books do you like to read? What is your favourite book?
- Do you collect anything? Tell me about your collection?
- What is the best thing that ever happened to you?
- What is the worst thing that ever happened to you?
- What makes you an interesting person for others to know?
- How do you like to learn? a) Alone? b) With one other person? c) In a small group? d) In a large group?
- Have you ever asked a question nobody knew the answer to? If so, write the question here.
- Columbus was an explorer who discovered a new world. Thomas Edison was an inventor who invented a new kind of light bulb. If you would like to explore or invent something, write or draw about it here.
- If you could invite a person, living or dead, to be a teacher in your class, who would you invite and why?
- Sometimes we daydream about what we will be when we grow up. Draw a picture of what you will be when you are older.

How did you do? What "ah ha!" moments did these questions offer? Were you able to call upon childhood memories and summon up the hopes you had then? How does this help you with the decisions you are now

making about your career? Don't toss out those realizations, though. Like this childhood book, any new insights you've stumbled upon are true keepers.