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Title:

Making Career Decisions Part 1

Word Count:

819

Summary:

One of the reasons that so many people are unhappy at work is lack of good careers advice or being influenced by well-meaning family and teachers. If you are looking for a new career, here are some tips to help you find one which you will enjoy.

Keywords:

career change,career choice,career decisions,new career,choosing a career

Article Body:

Spring is traditionally a time for new beginnings and as we start to springclean our homes, some of us may be considering springcleaning our careers.

Why are so many of us unhappy at work? There are probably as many reasons as there are unhappy people, but there are a few underlying factors which influence many of us. Think back to your school days and the careers advice you were given by teachers, advisors and your parents. Just how useful was it?

My own memories are of a half hour session with a teacher at the age of 14, when I said I wanted to be a nurse, because it was the first thing that came into my head, influenced by my parents� opinions. When I was 18, I had another half hour session with the same teacher, who expected me still to be planning a career in nursing. What was your experience?

Parents often influence their children by trying to live their own dreams through their offspring, especially if their kids have similar talents to their own. This might work if the children share their parents' dreams, but that isn�t always the case. Another common scenario occurs when parents are concerned for their children�s financial security and encourage them to �do something sensible�, by getting a job in an area where there will always be a demand, or where jobs are still considered "for life". It can be difficult to go against parents� wishes, especially if they have provided support, either financial or in the form of board and lodging, whilst you were at college. Some families have strong traditions in a particular field � everyone in our family does medicine or teaching, for example. Did you feel pushed into a career by your family?

How can a 14 year old, or an 18 year old for that matter, know what he or she wants to do for the next 50 years? In fact, how can anyone know they want to follow a particular career, if they�ve never tried it? The answer, of course, is that they can�t be sure � at least not one hundred percent sure. So, whether you are just starting out or contemplating a career change, it�s a good idea to try out your new job before committing yourself to years of training.

Obviously, it isn�t always possible to try out exactly what you�d be doing. No-one is going to let you perform surgery or defend an alleged bank robber if you haven�t got the training and experience. So you must do the next best thing. This will vary according to the career in question, but the aim is to find out as much as you possibly can before signing up for an expensive course of study.

There are several things you can do: first of all, read everything you can find about the job, including careers leaflets, books and relevant websites. If after this you are still interested, two of the most important steps you can take are: getting as close to the job as possible and talking to people already doing it.

Work experience and work shadowing are usually only offered to students, but that is no reason to reject the possibility if you are older. Contact the HR department of a company which specialises in the area which interests you and explain that you are planning a career change and would like to find out more about the job. Ask if it is possible to spend some time with them gaining experience or shadowing a professional. Alternatively, ask if it would be possible to meet someone doing the job or if the company has open days.

In some cases, if you have experience, say in administration or computing, it might be worth considering applying for a temporary job within the organisation to help you reach a decision. This will at least give you an insider�s view of the career, even if you can�t experience it first hand. In other situations, volunteering would be a good way to find out what a job involves, for example if you want to be a surgeon, working on a hospital ward as a volunteer will give you an insight into medicine and bring you into contact with doctors and medical students. If you are able to volunteer over a reasonable amount of time � it doesn�t have to be a full-time commitment, just a regular one � you will get to know people and, in the example above, you may eventually be able to observe an operation.

No-one can ever guarantee that a career choice will be the right one and you mustn�t forget that your interests will change over time. So be prepared to change careers at some stage. However, if you do your research thoroughly, you will have a much greater chance of finding a job you really enjoy.

� Waller Jamison 2006