

Finding the right job for you: a step by step

The Bureau of Labor Statistics warns that one out of four college graduates will not be able to find a job that fits abilities or expectations. If you're Black, figure it will be worse. Graduates will have to work harder at career planning and job hunting.

So where do you start? Instead of beginning with what's "out there," begin with who you are. Begin with an analysis of your interests, transferable skills, values, psychological needs and so on.

If who you are is in harmony with what you do, fulfillment is most likely.

Two-thirds of the working population are not happy with "what they do." So, begin by focusing on who you are. One of the best places to get help with this is your career planning and placement office.

Meet with career counselors at your college or university. Take advantage of individual and group career counseling. Ask for recommended readings. Attend workshops, seminars and courses. Let them help de-mythologize some of this career planning business with you.

Here are some tips to help energize your career planning and job hunting:

Develop your skills

1. Get Experience. When employers were surveyed about advice to college students on how to increase their employability, they said emphatically: Get experience. Paid or volunteer. Part-time or full-time. Work or internships or extracurricular activities. The successful always seem to have some experiences which serve as foundation building-blocks to bigger opportunities.

Actively seek out experiences that will enable you to:

- Develop responsible work attitudes and habits;
- Develop leadership skills;

- Handle responsibility
- Demonstrate your interests in living color
- Gain new interests
- Learn how organizations operate;
- Meet new people and contacts
- Expose yourself to new role models.

Good grades can be important. But when you enter the employment market, the second question an employer asks you (after your name) is, "What have you done?"

Market yourself

2. Take some courses that enhance your marketability. Especially if you are studying liberal arts, take a few electives to heighten your chances with a wider range of employers. Recruiters have recommended courses in accounting, computer science, statistics, management, technical writing, and so on. Even if you are aiming at the non-profit sector, you will quickly find that these organizations also use such business tools to get the job done.

Learn to communicate

3. Search out and conquer high levels of transferable skills. There are two specific areas that employers find most lacking in prospective job hunters: Human relations skills and communication skills.

Regardless of the field you enter, you will need to relate well to colleagues, the public and various constituencies, and your supervisor. And you will also be expected to speak articulately and write clearly and concisely. There is hardly a judgement job anywhere that doesn't revolve around these two areas. So, identify courses, activities, and experiences that will enhance your human relations and communication skills. Don't assume that they come only from courses,

although that's a start. Leadership roles, for example, often require you to learn how to interrelate with others, to make presentations, to complete proposals and reports, supervise others.

Career planners make a bad mistake to assume that they need only master some content (like marketing, Shakespeare, or engineering) to get a good job. In many cases, the content of a job can be learned on the job. It is the transferable skills—applicable in any number of occupations—that will contribute to success or failure.

Invest in your career

4. Determine to spend money and time on your career planning. The class of 1984 will retire in the year 2032 A.D. If you are twenty-two at graduation, that leaves approximately 48 years you will spend in the workforce, until mandatory retirement at age 70! We are talking about a sizable investment of your life and the fulfilling use of your talents, so don't assume it is going to be either easy or free.

A good rule of thumb: Figure on spending about the same amount of time and money on your career as you would for one college course (out of 36 to 40 courses). At a private institution, you would spend about \$500 for a course. And, if you're a sharp student, you would probably spend about 15 hours per week on a course, counting class time. Isn't your own career worth at least that much attention?

Don't be afraid to invest in career planning materials, non-paying internships, and—especially—travel to research your chosen career field. You are worth it!

Research opportunities

5. Pursue information aggressively. You can't choose

something you don't know exists! Most students who are planning a career are overwhelmingly ignorant about what possibilities are available. Please—don't take this personally. It's not your fault. A good 80% of the jobs are not listed anywhere: They're not in the newspapers (did you ever look to see what you could do), they're not in the employment agencies, and most are not in the placement offices. Yet these tend to be the more fascinating, the more meaningful, and the more lucrative jobs of society. Why aren't they listed? Because they tend to work through an "ol' boy network"—contacts. More on that later.

"Knowledge is power," said Francis Bacon. Empower yourself and your career planning by becoming knowledgeable about career possibilities. Research careers harder than you've ever tackled any term paper—the pay-off is much greater. Study the trends, the career information, the files in your career planning office.

The only other way you will ever find that "perfect niche" for yourself is luck. But why take the chance? Instead, pursue career information with "intentionality"—take charge of your life or happenstance will take charge of it for you.

Make wise decisions

6. Learn how to make decisions frontwards. That's right, many people make decisions backwards. Like when they let someone else hand them a decision—a parent, a teacher, a counselor, a book, a friend. But learn how to make decisions and make your own decision—you're the one who has to live with the consequences.

Study the decision making process. Again, your career counselor can help with this. Realize that there are some clearly defined steps to making good choices: Getting

ideas, researching information, calculating risks, weighing options and alternatives, prioritizing, making the choice and living with it, and continuing to modify. The alternative: impulse. Simply "grabbing onto something" because at the moment, you feel like it, is not good planning. Failing to plan is planning to fail.

Seek out advice

7. Interview people for information. Go out and interview people for information and advice—people who are doing what you would like to do someday. It's downright irresponsible to plan on becoming a biomedical engineer if you haven't ever talked to or seen a biomedical engineer.

In the job market of the 80's failing to plan is planning to fail.

Don't talk to the personnel specialists who are doing what you are preparing to do. Pick their brains. What courses to they recommend?

How can you ever really know what a field is like if you haven't researched it personally? Personal information is so much better than printed information. Never settle for one or two opinions—get at least a dozen or so. The real inside story.

Why would they bother talking to you? Human nature. People love to be interviewed about what they are doing. They enjoy giving advice, especially about what is most meaningful to them. Some typical questions you might ask are:

- How did you get into this?
- What do you like about? Hate about it?
- What is the mission of your organization? Goals and purposes?

- What are some of the problems you encounter?
- What dreams do you have for this function or department?
- What advice would you give someone like me who wants to enter this field?
- Can you give me the names of three other people who share our mutual interests?

Once you have started, one interview leads to three more. Three lead to nine, nine to twenty-seven...more than enough.

Along the way, you will make contacts. In fact, without even knowing it, you will plug into that network of contacts, the "ol' boy" system, and uncover some of those "hidden opportunities." That's not your purpose, of course. Not now. You are simply seeking advice and information. But as a by-product, you will make contacts that can be

helpful later.

To start, get some ideas, contacts, and names from your career planning and placement office, alumni office, parents, parents of friends and so on. Seek out people you admire and find out how the employment market really works. The information you receive will be well worth the investment.

Incidentally, a good book to explain this approach in greater detail is *Go Hire Yourself an Employer* by Richard Irish (N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1978).

Find good role models

8. Define criteria and prioritize what's important to you. Everyone has a different set of

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George E. Richardson, Jr.
Director of Corporate Budgets and Strategic Planning for Northwest Natural Gas Company.

"Use your own natural resources. If you really want to move ahead, you can. If you have confidence in yourself, and you're willing to work, doors open. All your work experience, plus formal education, will contribute to your reaching your goal."

George Richardson knows what he's talking about. After service in the U.S. Navy and several years' work with sophisticated electronic equipment for the Navy Department, he came to Northwest Natural Gas Company as a pipe-man helper. Three years later he was promoted to gas control supervisor. Then he became interested in the administrative side of business. Studying first by correspondence, then working nights and attending classes in the daytime, he earned a degree in Business Administration from Portland State University. Since then he has moved steadily up the corporate ladder. He has held the position of Super-

visor of Budget Control and at the beginning of this year he was named Director of Corporate Budgets and Strategic Planning for Northwest Natural Gas — the state's largest gas distribution company.

He has been involved in civic activities for many years, having served on the State of Oregon Television and Radio Advisory Board and the boards of the Opportunities and Industrialization Center, National Association of Accountants, and N.W. Gasco Federal Credit Union. He currently serves on the boards of Black Oregonians for Business Political Action Committee and Portland Energy Conservation, Inc. He was also one of the founders of the Senior Adult Service Center of Near Northeast Portland and has served as treasurer of the Center.

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