Self-Assessment

The only place to start the career adventure is with you. Knowing as much as possible about yourself is critical to the decisions you make in the future. This is your chance to discover and appreciate the things that make you a unique individual.

The adventure begins by examining different areas of your life and experiences, with the goal of making any fuzzy and vague aspects more real and concrete. These components of who you are will gain meaning as you learn to relate them to your everyday life and translate them into possible career choices. Self-assessment reveals who you are more clearly. Then you can connect with a career that brings you meaning and fulfillment.
To start, let’s dream a bit . . .

Your dreams, fantasies, hopes, or whatever you wish to call them, are essential elements in career decision making. You may have met people who say, “I’ve wanted to be a nurse (teacher, doctor, writer, and so on) ever since I was a child and here I am, and I love every minute of it.” Sometimes it’s that simple. Some lucky people have a dream or a vision of what they want to be. They pursue it and make it happen.

Think back for a minute about the dreams you had as a child. What did you see yourself doing as an adult? What did you dream about?

Jot down the idea(s) that you recall. How does it feel to think back to a time when anything seemed possible—a time before other responsibilities and obstacles may have eclipsed your dreams and made them unrealistic?

Do those dreams still appeal to you? Do they hold the same promise and excitement that they did when you were younger? Are they still possible as career choices? Or have you lost interest in the career that at one time seemed like the right one? Have you changed? Has the career you dreamt of changed?

WHO ARE YOU? WHO WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE?

A few years ago I worked with Jack, a young man who was struggling to decide whether to attend college or to find a job after high school. Jack had many interests and could not zero in on one specific career area. Finally I asked him just to imagine what he would do if he could do anything at all. He kind of snorted and said, “That’s easy. I’d like to be a baseball player for the New York Yankees.” His natural response revealed that he enjoyed athletics and competition. Now we had to identify some options that might utilize those strengths in the unglamorous world of everyday life. “Well,” I ventured, “if you couldn’t do that, then what else do you think you might like?” He said, “I could play football for the New England Patriots.”
Jack's dreams were understandable but probably unrealistic. He was focused on an idealized vision of himself, which made it hard for him to translate that vision into real-life terms.

Dreams allow us to see all the possibilities that exist within us. They give us insights into our true selves and what we want to be. Although it is enjoyable to imagine ourselves as superheroes, using our unique gifts to bring ourselves and others fulfillment, it is perhaps more important to identify realistic goals that encompass at least a piece of the dream. If you can't be Tom Brady, perhaps you can coach or perform in another athletic setting and still find satisfaction. You might discover that being a recreation manager or a trainer for a professional team would satisfy some aspects of your dream.

Exhibit 1.1 shows that at age 18, with luck, you can look forward to a career that may extend to the ripe old age of 70, allowing you over fifty years to get in touch with your true self. Inherent in that process is having time to make choices, rethink those choices, and possibly change them to achieve more satisfying outcomes—living and learning. Today an added dimension—the rapid rate of change in our culture—ensures that you will be challenged to reinvent yourself in new ways and in new professions to keep up with competition in the labor force. The trick is to keep your eye on the dream while learning and working with it so that it reflects your evolving identity.

I have also worked with people in their forties or fifties. People in this age range can expect to work for twenty to thirty more years. Older workers also have an advantage over 18-year-olds. They have lived long enough to have developed a sense of themselves, which helps them understand their needs, interests, and goals if they wish to seek a new career. In many cases, they have faced challenges in the course of their careers that have tested them and helped them acquire qualities of adaptability and resilience, which will serve them as they navigate the next transition.

Sometimes, however, their insight may be clouded. Many people who look for new careers later in life have often spent a great deal of time putting other people's needs first. Single parents, homemakers, adults with dependents, and people who were raised...
to be model children frequently struggle to discern what they want and how they feel, because they are unaccustomed to putting their own feelings first.

It may be difficult for you, too, to put aside the needs of those you love for the moment, but it is crucial, at least for the initial phase of the career decision-making process, that you allow yourself to be as free as possible to consider every option and every dream. Throughout the book, you will have ample opportunity to identify obstacles and to develop strategies for overcoming them. For now, your primary task is to look honestly at your needs and hopes and translate those into goals that will help you find meaning and fulfillment.

One final word. Now is not the time to start tallying your limitations and numbering the obstacles. Psychologists tell us that the ability to cope with and succeed in achieving our goals is fostered by resilience founded on hardiness. Hardiness is a perspective which is comprised by three qualities:

- **Commitment**—a belief that the things that you are involved in have meaning and value;
- **Control**—a belief that, of all the factors that influence the outcomes in your life, you have the greatest power in shaping those outcomes;
- **Challenge**—a belief that, even if problems or obstacles prevent the smooth progress toward a goal, you are capable of overcoming the obstacles and learning from the experiences so that you can be prepared for whatever life holds.

These qualities can be nurtured by supportive guidance and encouragement to persevere no matter what. The very fact that you have chosen to examine the issues related to careers and your own growth shows you are committed to engaging in your future in a meaningful, significant way. According to the most recent research in this area, successful career choice is more feasible when you approach the tasks associated with career decision making with hardy perspectives and can-do motivation. This will be your starting point as you move toward your goals, adapting as circumstances require you to respond to an increasingly unstable career landscape. The course you have selected will help you develop the abilities necessary to survive and move toward growth and success.

### Take a Closer Look

**CAREER ADVENTURE CAFÉ: A NEW CONCEPT FOR CAREER SUCCESS**

This edition of *The Career Adventure* suggests a new approach to achieving your goal, one that is founded on working together with a group that is facing the same challenges and has the goal of making career decisions. From among your own group of friends and associates or from the people who are walking this path with you in your class, come together with them in the Career Adventure Café, or the CA Café. This will be the group you turn to, work with, and, in turn, support as you move toward your goals. So, now, stand up and look around and see who would like to join you in the CA Café. Once you have formed, stand by for further instructions. More to follow.
If you don’t already have a Facebook page, now is the time to start one. Better yet, start a Facebook page that showcases your Career Adventure. Or have your CA Café start its own Facebook page. The page might reflect each stage, from self-assessment to job search. Use it to archive documents, pictures, notes, and thoughts and to ask friends, network contacts, and mentors to weigh in. Be creative with the space. Schedule CA Café events and keep each other motivated. This is the start of a new chapter, and it deserves to be documented and shared so you can celebrate your successes and support each other through your challenges. Get started by coming up with a great name for your launch on your Career Adventure! Keep your Facebook posts career related and make sure you are not posting information that is highly personal or that may reflect badly during your search for a job.