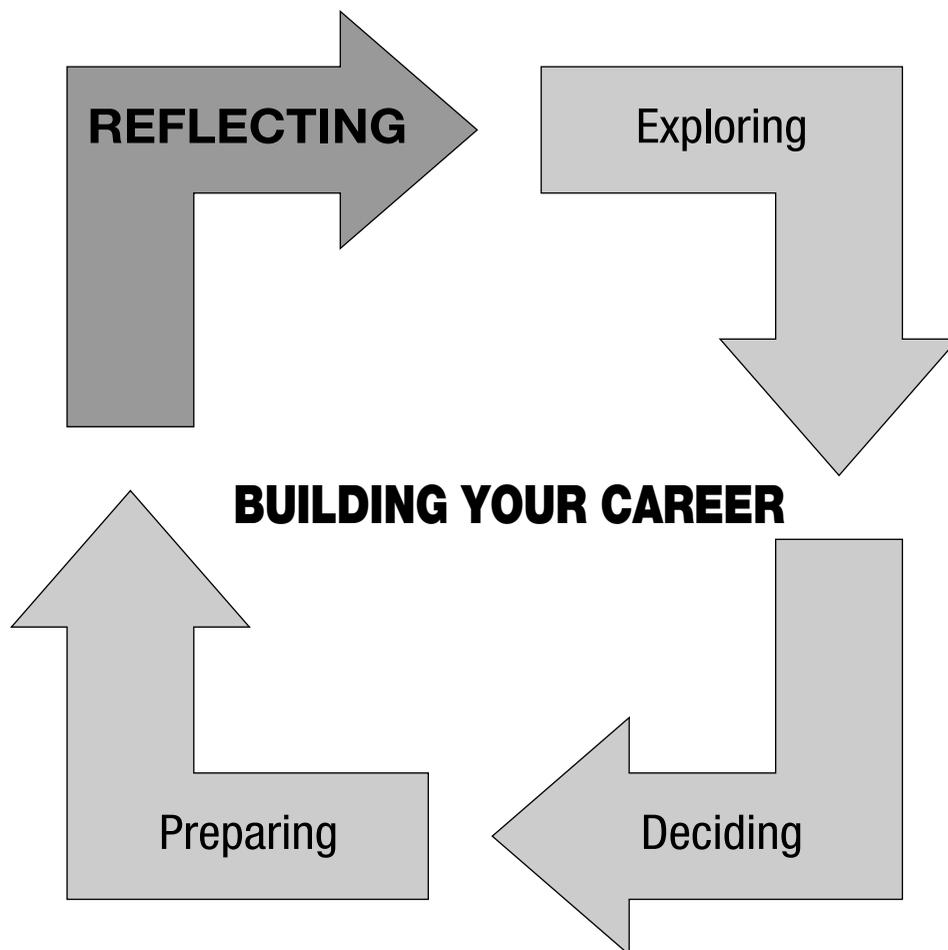


CHAPTER 1

Am I Ready?



*“Choose a job you love and you will never have to work
a day in your life.”*

CONFUCIUS

Is there a magic formula for choosing a career? What are the factors involved? Some career theorists think personal qualities, such as our interests and aptitudes or what we value, are the key factors in the process. An older theory that many still hold true is that you need to match these personal characteristics to compatible work environments in order to be happy with your work. Other theorists think our family and socioeconomic background and even our heredity greatly influence career choices. Still others think our perceptions of who we are, or our self-concept, influences the occupational alternatives we consider.

One widely accepted theory is that choosing a career is part of our overall development as individuals. The developmental approach takes into account the

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different stages we pass through from childhood to mature adult. The career development process, therefore, includes choosing, entering, adjusting to, and advancing in a series of career choices. Studies suggest that most people will hold six to nine jobs during their lifetime. In today's world, you will probably follow an ongoing career path that will involve many career decisions along the way. That is why, you need to learn about the career planning process now, so you are prepared to meet the challenges of our rapidly changing work place.

WHY DO I NEED TO PLAN?

As noted, the career planning process begins early in life and continues throughout your lifetime. The extent of parental encouragement you received, the kind of toys you played with, the myriad of experiences you engaged in, and the role models you were exposed to have influenced your perceptions of yourself and the kind of person you want to become. As you grew up, you probably created certain occupational fantasies; for example, you may have wanted to be a rock star, a professional tennis player, or an astronaut. As you got older and knew yourself better, you had additional ideas, perhaps more closely related to the reality of who you are. Your early fantasies, however, often reveal many truths about the kind of person you are now. Those fantasies offer clues about your basic interests, values, and abilities.

As you thought about different career choices, you might have asked some of these questions:

- What kind of occupations have I considered in the past? What attracted me to those fields? How are they different from my current ideas?
- What do I want in my work (e.g., to make a lot of money, to work where I can use my technology interests, to work where I can find mental stimulation)?
- What should I major in when I'm in college?
- How will I know if my career decisions are good?
- What kind of lifestyle do I want?
- Do I have what it takes to be a success? What does being successful mean to me?
- What do I really want out of life?

These are just a few of the basic questions that are involved in career and life planning. Although we do not have total control over every facet of our lives, we *can* increase our odds of obtaining a satisfying and productive career through ongoing and careful planning. Exercise 1.1 asks you to evaluate your readiness to begin this important process.

EXERCISE 1.1 Personal Factors

Certain personal factors will affect how ready you are to begin the career planning process. Evaluate how the following personal factors might influence your readiness to engage in the exploration and decision-making tasks contained in this book. Mark the place along each continuum where you think you are today.

Motivation. How motivated are you to spend the considerable time and energy required to be involved in the process of career planning?

Not Very Motivated *Somewhat Motivated* *Highly Motivated*

Responsibility. How able are you to take full responsibility for your involvement in the career-planning process and in your decisions, regardless of outcome?

Not Very Responsible *Somewhat Responsible* *Highly Responsible*

Compromise. How willing are you to examine (and possibly change) a strongly held belief or decision if it seems to be unrealistic or unattainable when new information indicates that a compromise is necessary?

Compromise Sometimes Difficult Sometimes Compromise Easily

Commitment. How able are you to commit to a decision once you are convinced it is the best one at the time?

Commit Sometimes Difficult Sometimes Highly Committed

Do you anticipate any problems associated with the personal factors above? Which ones, and how might they influence your career planning progress?

What other personal factors or attitudes might influence your readiness to begin the career planning process?

WHY DO PEOPLE WORK?

Have you ever wondered why people work? On the surface the reason seems obvious—to make a living—but there are other important reasons as well. Some people work for status, for the opportunity to be creative, or for the relationships work provides. Many people find their sense of identity through their work.

Attitudes toward work have a great impact on our aspirations and how we plan our lives. The quotes in Exercise 1.2 indicate the broad range of people’s perceptions of work. They reflect philosophical, psychological, practical, and even negative views of work.

EXERCISE 1.2 My Concept of Work

Check three quotes below that best express *your* concept of work:

- “Real success is finding your lifework in the work that you love.” *David McCullough*
- “It has been my experience that one cannot, in any shape or form, depend on human relations for lasting reward. It is only work that truly satisfies.” *Betty Davis*
- “All paid jobs absorb and degrade the mind.” *Aristotle*
- “Do not hire a man who does your work for money, but him who does it for love of it.” *Henry David Thoreau*
- “Work is a four-letter word.” *Unknown*
- “Nothing is really work unless you would rather be doing something else.” *James M. Barrie*
- “People who work sitting down get paid more than people who work standing up.” *Ogden Nash*
- “A working person is a happy person.” *Unknown*
- “You can take this job and shove it—I ain’t workin’ here no more.” *Popular song*
- “Work is love made visible.” *Kahlil Gibran*

Write your personal concept of work.

The younger people are when they choose a career, the better off they are.
 People know when they've chosen the right work because the job is fun.
 Certain jobs are best suited for men and certain jobs are best suited for women.
 Others know more about me than I do, so they will make a better career choice for me.
 Choosing an occupation is a once-in-a-lifetime decision, so it should be the right one.

Although a few of these statements possibly contain a kernel of truth, most experts agree that these statements are essentially false. In fact, some of these beliefs are unrealistic and may impede your progress through the career-planning process. Check out your beliefs and ask yourself, "Will any of my beliefs prevent me from taking certain courses of action or considering certain occupational areas?" If so, discuss your beliefs with your instructor, classmates, friends, and family.

OTHER BARRIERS

Other barriers can prevent you from making satisfying and timely career choices. Here are a few that could impede your career exploration.

- ***You may feel pressured to make a specific academic or occupational choice that family members, peers, or other important people in your life want you to make.*** If you agree with this choice, there is no problem. If you have different ideas about your interests and what is important to you, you should pursue these alternatives by actively gathering information about them. In this way, you'll have choices to compare with the original idea and later won't regret not having explored them.
- ***You may not be ready to make a career decision because of procrastination, lack of motivation, apathy, laziness, or a preoccupation with important events in your life.*** Career exploration and planning take place over a lifetime. You have been doing it since you were a child and usually are engaged in some facet of the process regardless of whether you are aware of it. Although you may not be "ready," you can gather information for future reference anytime and anywhere. For example, you might talk to upper-class students and faculty about majors or to workers in specific jobs. Work and volunteer experiences also are useful sources of career information. Personal behaviors and traits such as procrastination and lack of motivation may be habits that require examination in other contexts as well as in career planning.
- ***You may not know how or where to begin the career exploration process.*** Because we think about our future throughout our lives, it is natural to continue to collect, weigh, and absorb information that we can use eventually in the career decision-making process. Consulting with a career counselor or an academic adviser may be a place to begin if this seems like a barrier to taking action.
- ***You might be so anxious and overwhelmed with the prospect of beginning a search that you do nothing.*** If you are experiencing extreme anxiety when making academic or occupational choices, it may be helpful to consult a counselor. This is especially true if you have difficulty making decisions about other aspects of your life as well. In Exercise 1.4, you are to consider barriers to career planning on a personal level.

EXERCISE 1.4 Overcoming Barriers

What specific barriers do you think might affect *your* progress in career exploration and decision making (e.g., lack of information, lack of motivation, not knowing where to begin)?

What can you do to overcome these barriers now? In the future?

WHERE DO I START? THE CAREER CHOICE PROCESS

Since every person has unique personal characteristics, matures at a different pace, and lives in a specific environment, career decision making becomes an individual life journey. The type of work that interested you at age 18 may be quite different from your interests at age 25 or 40. Every day, scores of people change careers. The need to be open-minded and flexible, therefore, is critical to negotiating your career journey. This book will help you experience the career decision-making process, as shown in Figure 1.1 and will help you understand the critical factors in making satisfying educational and occupational choices.

Although most people move consciously or subconsciously through these phases, they travel at different speeds and levels of understanding. *Each of us will negotiate the process differently and not always in the same order.* You may be ready for the *Exploration* phase, for example, while another student may already be in the *Deciding* phase. Other students may need to return from the *Deciding* phase to *Exploring* because the choices they made proved to be unrealistic. Still others might be stymied in the *Preparing* phase because they skipped the *Exploration* and *Deciding* phases entirely.

Chapter One is just the beginning of understanding what the career-planning process is all about. In Chapter Two you will gather information about your interests, strengths, and other critical personal information. In Chapter Three you will use this personal information to explore occupational fields that might interest you. Chapter Four will help you explore academic possibilities. Chapter Five will help you examine the way you make decisions in general and will specifically guide you through the decision-making process. Chapter Six offers a picture of tomorrow's workplace and what personal qualities you will need to be successful there. Chapters Seven and Eight will help you refine your job-search skills, and in Chapter Nine you will review what you have learned and establish long-term goals. Exercise 1.5 will begin to familiarize you with the tasks involved in each step of the career planning process.

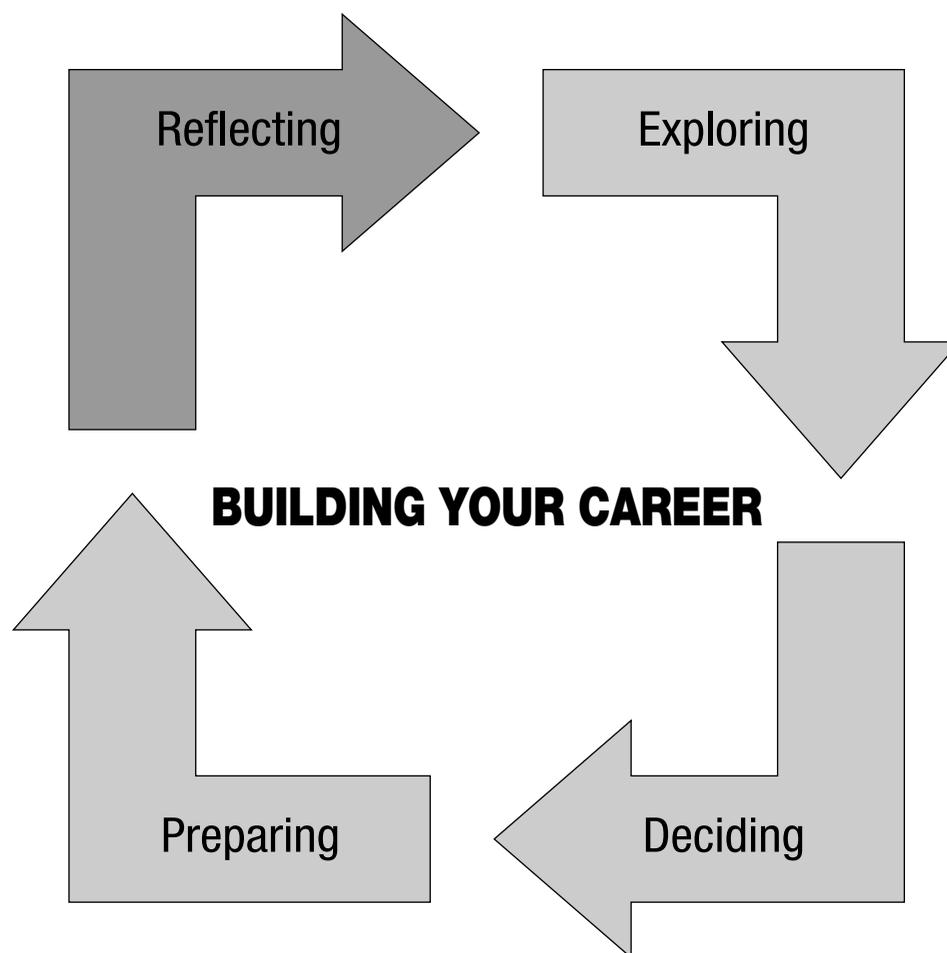


FIGURE 1.1 Building Your Career.

EXERCISE 1.5 My Career- and Life-Planning Checklist

This Career- and Life-Planning Checklist will give you a preview of what you can expect to learn about the tasks involved in each step of the career planning process. Think about the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors you will need in order to make educational and career decisions. The items are organized according to the tasks outlined in Figure 1.1: Building Your Career. *Check those items that you need or want to learn as you progress through each chapter.* At the conclusion of this book, you will check these items again (Exercise 9.3) to determine what you have learned as well as what you still need or want to know.

Chapter One: Am I Ready?

- _____ What is involved in career and life planning? Where am I currently in this process?
- _____ Am I ready to take the time and responsibility **now** to actively engage in career planning?
- _____ How might my perception of “work” influence my career choices?

Chapter Two: What Do I Need to Know About Myself?

- _____ How might my personality influence my occupational choices?
- _____ What are my occupational interests?
- _____ What do I value in a job (e.g., income, co-workers, self-employment)?
- _____ What are my current skills, and what new ones do I need to learn?
- _____ How might my family background affect my career choices?
- _____ How might my gender influence my career choices?

Chapter Three: How Do I Search for Occupational Information?

- _____ How do I find occupations that are realistic for me to explore?
- _____ How can I compare my interests, values, and skills to certain occupational alternatives?
- _____ Where can I find important information about specific occupations (e.g., salaries, required skills, educational requirements, employment trends)?
- _____ What are the best sources for finding occupational information (e.g., Internet, printed, electronic, personal interviews)?
- _____ What experiences will help me test my ideas about an occupational field (e.g., internships, volunteer work, study abroad)?
- _____ How can I evaluate and use occupational information once I have found it?

Chapter Four: What Do I Need to Know About Educational Alternatives?

- _____ How do certain majors match my academic strengths?
- _____ How can I find information about specific majors (e.g., talk to faculty, academic advisors, seniors in major, alumni)?
- _____ What occupational fields relate to the college major(s) I am considering/pursuing?
- _____ What type of education will I need to enter certain occupations (e.g., two- or four-year degree, technical degree, graduate or professional study)?
- _____ How can I identify the courses that will strengthen the knowledge and skills I will need for certain jobs?

Chapter Five: How Will I Decide?

- _____ Why is understanding my personal style of making decisions important?
- _____ How can I learn to become a more effective career decision maker?
- _____ How can I be more effective and realistic in setting short- and long-term goals?
- _____ How do I put into action an educational and/or career decision I have made?
- _____ Why is reevaluating career decisions periodically so important?

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Chapter Six: How Can I Prepare for the Future Workplace?

- _____ What are the factors that are influencing the present and future workplace?
- _____ What are the workforce and hiring trends for the next 5 to 10 years?
- _____ How can I search for information about the job outlook for the occupational fields I am considering?
- _____ What qualities will employers value in the future workplace, and how can I begin to make myself more marketable?

Chapter Seven: How Will I Advance My Career? The Job Search and Résumé Writing

- _____ What job-search skills do I need to learn?
- _____ What are the qualities of an effective résumé?
- _____ What are the essentials in writing a good cover letter?
- _____ What do I need to know about technology and other methods to search for a job?

Chapter Eight: Am I the Best Candidate? Job Leads and the Job Interview

- _____ How can I generate job leads?
- _____ What is the best way to prepare for a job interview?
- _____ What is good interviewing behavior?
- _____ Where can I learn about cyber-interviews and other electronic methods?
- _____ What does an interview follow-up entail?

Chapter Nine: Where Do I Go from Here?

- _____ Where am I now in the career decision-making process?
- _____ What action steps do I need to take to continue my career planning?

At the end of this book, you will find another copy of this checklist. At that time you will be able to determine what career planning knowledge you have acquired and what career and academic planning tasks you may still need to accomplish.

CASE STUDIES

Reflecting

JED

Jed is a first-year student at a moderately large college. He knows that eventually he will need to make a decision about a major, but doesn't feel strongly about any field. He feels frustrated, as he senses that his parents want him to make firm academic and career decisions soon. They have encouraged him to think about engineering because he seems to have a talent for math and science. Jed doesn't know much about engineering and is not sure he has the ability or motivation to pursue the difficult curriculum in this area.

His academic advisor has encouraged him to take a career course that is being offered, and Jed has agreed. He hopes that by exploring differ-

ent career fields in an organized, systematic way, he will discover what might be compatible with his interests and abilities.

MARIA

Maria has worked as a secretary in a high-tech firm since graduating from high school. Even though she completed a college preparatory track in high school, she didn't go on to college because she thought it would be too much of a financial drain on her family. No one else had gone to college in her family, and it seemed like a difficult goal to attain.

As a worker, Maria has been quite successful. Fortunately, she has a competent supervisor who was quick to recognize her skills. Even though

most of Maria's duties remain clerical, she has been encouraged to expand the scope of her work. She has discovered that she is quite good with computers. She is able to spend a couple of hours a day working alongside a computer programmer and is learning programming language. Her company has a college tuition reimbursement program that she has decided to explore.

Maria was divorced recently and is highly interested in improving her earning capacity so she will be able to take care of her young daughter. Maria has decided to take a career-planning course at her local community college to help her gather information and focus on making a timely decision. ■

Summary Checklist

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

- _____ The career planning process began in my childhood, and I will continue to make career decisions the rest of my life.
- _____ I need to be ready to commit a great deal of time and effort to this important work.
- _____ It is important to identify my personal attitudes and beliefs about work since they can affect how I will approach the career planning process and the choices I make.
- _____ The items I checked on the Career and Life Planning Checklist will guide me as I set goals and progress through this course.

HOW I CAN USE IT

I feel confident that by engaging in the process outlined in this text, I will be able to make educational and/or career decisions that will be realistic and satisfying *for this time in my life*.

The next step: If you are using this book in a course, you will have the opportunity to discuss all aspects of the career-planning process with your instructor and other students. If you are using this book for self-study, obtaining the services of a career counselor can be invaluable. Regardless, you are the one who needs to take full responsibility for “building your career.” *You are the one who will live it!*