Taking Control Of Your Career

About Making A Career Change

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About making a career change

Central to this course are four principles.

Principle 1: Career management is a self-directed process.
Career management is a self-directed process. You are responsible for realizing your career potential. Not your employer, not a supervisor or manager. No one but you. This means:

- You need to define goals that are consistent with your strengths and interests.
- You need to connect your abilities to the needs of the marketplace.
- You need to create job opportunities where none seem to exist.
- You need to create and sell a compelling vision of how your skills will help an employer meet their business challenges.

Principle 2: You are a free agent.
In sports terminology, a ‘free agent’ is a person who can sign a contract with any team. Likewise, you are a free agent to select and choose your career and your employer. This means:

- Employers do not owe you a job and you don’t owe an employer your life.
- You need to continually acquire new skills so that you always have more to offer.
- You need to continually manage the relationship you have with your employer. You are partners in a business contract that has to work for both of you. And,
- You must balance the obligations you have to others, such as your family, with your desire to pursue a specific job or career.

Principle 3: Approach your job search as a marketer selling a product.
Career management involves finding a job. And the best way to secure a specific job is to market yourself to prospective employers like a marketer sells a product. This means:

- Make a clear and memorable impression to an employer or hiring manager that demonstrates how your strengths and qualities address their most pressing business challenges.
- Clearly define your personal "brand." In other words, your most important and unchanging attributes such as your work ethic, honesty, credibility, and professional reputation.
- Do everything within your power to distinguish yourself from the many qualified applicants competing for any one job. And,
- When you finally get the job you want, deliver on your promises.

Principle 4: Take the employer’s perspective
Career management requires a lot of inward focus such as brainstorming what you want to do or reviewing your skills and accomplishments for a resume. But sometimes you have to adopt a different perspective. You have to see yourself and your job search through the eyes of a hiring manager or employer.

This means:

- Think about what the employer is looking for, not just what you have to offer.
- Think about the business needs and business problems that the employer faces. And,
- Think about the pressures that the employer faces during the hiring process. They’re sorting through hundreds of resumes. They’re trying to avoid making bad hiring decisions. So what can you do to help?

When you adopt the perspective of an employer during your job search process you will choose actions that set you apart from your competition and you will have ensure that employers know that you are the right person for the job.
What is your motivation to change?

**Step 1. Know your reasons for wanting to make a change.**

Which of the following applies to you?

- My financial situation has changed and I require more (or less) income.
- I feel underemployed (i.e. not using my skills, education, training).
- I am frustrated with office politics.
- My values do not match my company’s values.
- I have reason to believe that downsizing is going to occur.
- I am not treated fairly.
- I have other opportunities that I want to pursue.
- I’m bored.
- Relationships at work have changed and I don’t get along with my boss or other team members.
- I have education or credentials that could land me a better job or more senior role.
- I want to broaden my skills base.
- I have no pride in what I do.
- I do not know how to contribute to the overall success of the organization.
- Management does not acknowledge my contributions.
- I do not receive assignments that add to my career development.
- I do not feel I am on the right team in this organization.
- My work does not fit my lifestyle preferences.
- I cannot balance my work requirements with my personal health needs or the needs of my family and friends.

**Review your answers.** There are no right or wrong answers. However, patterns in your answers may emerge that tell you whether or not you need a minor or a drastic change.

If you have other reasons for wanting to change jobs or your career that aren’t listed here, write these in the space below.

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5.
Step 2. Explore your alternatives

If the negative points you reviewed previously can be resolved and you are committed to it, consider making a change within your current organization.

Here are some ideas that may help.

- Try to move vertically (e.g. promotion) or laterally (gain more experience, develop your skills).
- Look for job postings that better meet your needs or offer a temporary change.
- Pursue new learning and training.
- Redesign your current job (e.g. add or drop tasks and responsibilities).
- Challenge yourself by taking more initiative (e.g. volunteer for new assignments).
- Speak out for what you need.
- Constructively question policies and procedures (have possible solutions ready).
- Put more effort into becoming a team member and helping the company meet its bottom line.
- Become more politically astute by speaking with others in the organization who handle office politics well.
- Take steps to resolve conflicts in your workplace (or learn how to).
- Review your financial needs and make changes (e.g. distinguish 'needs' from 'wants'.

Step 3. Consider the implications of making a change

Before making any decisions about changing jobs or careers, consider the implications of change. For example:

- Can you afford to look for new work (e.g. time, finances)?
- How easy or difficult would it be for you to get another job that you like?
- Would you be content with another job in the same company if one became available?
- Are you being realistic about the benefits of moving on versus staying where you are?
- Are there any legal restraints that prevent you from seeking work with competitors?
- What do you like about your job?
- Why did you choose this job in the first place? What has changed?

If the negative points cannot be resolved, and you are not committed to trying to change your situation by making changes through your current employer, your choice of making a change may very well be a good one.

Once you are convinced that a job or career change is in order, go for it. If you are thinking there must be more to life, start making some of your dreams come true now.

A word of caution: Don’t change jobs while you are in the midst of other turmoil. For example, making a career move when you are experiencing the pressures of family or marital or health problems can be disastrous. Wait until you can concentrate fully on planning your career change and putting energy towards your job search.
Assess your values

The more aware you are of your values, the better your chances of finding and creating a career path that best fulfills you.

- Values are the things you consider important.
- Values are the guides that govern your day-to-day life.
- Values define your character. And,
- Values are the driving forces behind your priorities.

Dr. Roberta Neault, a career transitions expert (www.lifestrategies.ca) comments: “… when contemplating careers, I’ve found that values and personality generally have a bigger impact on career success and job satisfaction. Skills and interests may develop and change over time – values, on the other hand, tend to be more deep-seated and enduring.”

Determine your values*

Think about recent projects or events that brought you a great deal of satisfaction. What contributed to this sense of satisfaction (e.g. “I made my own decisions”, “I worked with people I admired and respected”? Read the following and place a check mark in the box of any that you are committed to live by now or in the future.

- Achievement
- Advancement
- Balance
- Challenge
- Community involvement
- Competition
- Creativity
- Doing good
- Entrepreneurship
- Fame
- Financial security
- Fun
- Harmony
- Health
- Helping others
- Independence
- Integrity
- Leadership
- Leisure
- Personal development
- Physical activity
- Risk-taking
- Safety
- Self development
- Self expression
- Social connection
- Spirituality
- Status
- Teamwork
- Wealth

Other values:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Next, narrow your list to the “top ten” values that you cannot live without.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.

These values will be useful as springboards for discussion in researching new jobs, networking and job interviews.
Define your interests

To reveal your interests consider these questions.

1. What subjects do you most enjoy reading about?
2. What television or radio programs do you most enjoy?
3. What are your favorite hobbies?
4. What type of volunteer activities do you like?
5. What subjects come to mind when you daydream?
6. What have been your favorite jobs?
7. What were your favorite school subjects?
8. If you won a million dollars, what would you do with it?
9. What tasks have brought you the most success?
10. What subjects do you enjoy discussing with friends?
11. What excites and energizes you?
12. What do you like to do even when you aren't paid?

Write some of your thoughts in the space below.
Personality

For the purposes of career change and job search, think of personality as your traits, tendencies, preferences and skills that make you unique. It is the summation of your distinguishing qualities. It describes the characteristics and attributes that you bring to your work and your interaction with others. Basically, personality is your answer to the question “describe yourself.”

If you are considering a major change in career path, your personal style stays with you even if you leave everything else behind. As Dr. Roberta Neault (www.lifestrategies.ca) comments: “Understanding your preferred personality style can help to reduce the guess work in finding work that fits. If you’re very expressive and outgoing, how comfortable will you be in an office that expects you to work silently and independently on a single project for months? … carefully consider your preferred style as you make your career choices.”

You most likely already know your strongest, most dominant, personality characteristics. As a clue to the more subtle aspects of your personality, read past performance reviews and recall informal feedback from supervisors and managers. Or ask trusted friends.

Choose between three and seven words or write a very short phrase to describe yourself in each of the following areas. Do not limit your choices to the examples given. Use the list of adjectives for ideas.

- Abstract thinker
- Active and outgoing
- Adaptable
- Analytical
- Communicative
- Concrete thinker
- Consistent
- Detail-oriented
- Diplomatic
- Disciplined
- Efficient
- Empathic
- Expressive
- Friendly
- Humorous
- Imaginative
- Intuitive
- Inventive
- Investigative
- Motivator
- Observant
- Open-minded
- Organized
- Perfectionistic
- Persuasive
- Precise
- Reserved
- Resourceful
- Sensitive
- Spontaneous
- Versatile

What is your thinking style? This is the way you approach a problem or opportunity (e.g. realistic, visionary, strategic, analytical, logical).

What is your communication style? For example, enthusiastic, cautious, persuasive, inspiring, etc.
What is your management style? For example, authoritative, democratic.

What is your subordinate style? How do you like to be managed? Are you self-reliant, consultative, a questioner, a loyal follower?

What is your team style? For example, innovator, organizer, leader.

What is your work style? For example, meticulous, process-oriented, team player, results-focused?

What is a good work environment for you? For example, office-based or outdoors?

What are you learning about yourself as a result of this exercise? Write some of your thoughts below.
Knowledge areas

For purposes of this assessment, your knowledge consists of everything you have learned, whether it is through formal education (e.g. college diploma) or informal education (e.g. experience gained through work or volunteering). It includes your understanding of various industries, companies, products, market segments, regions, regulations, cultures, special interest groups, etc.

Use this worksheet to surface some of your most significant points of knowledge. Think expansively and do not be restricted by the categories listed.

Note: Be certain to respect any confidentiality or non-compete agreements that restrict you from sharing your knowledge from a previous employment position.

Knowledge Inventory*

List your knowledge using the areas below as guidelines, but don't restrict yourself to them.

1. Formal education (e.g. high school diploma, college degree).

2. Additional formal training you have received (e.g. courses offered through your employers, workshops).

3. Anything you have learned through your own research, reading, online learning, experiences (e.g. online tutorials to learn a specific skill).

4. Industries you know well (e.g. advertising, banking, cosmetics, corporate finance, fashion, non-profit, retail, telecommunications).

5. Products you understand in depth (e.g. equities, fabrics, home appliances, mortgages, office supplies, personal computers, print ads, security systems).

6. Forms of organization you are familiar with (e.g. associations, contracting, franchise, joint ventures, partnerships).

7. Market segments you know well (e.g. baby boomers, Generation X, immigrants, infants, low income, disabled).

Skills and accomplishments

Knowing your skills and accomplishments is an important factor in finding a fulfilling job. Although employers often say they focus on “skills” they may mean different things. For the purposes of this course, think of your skills as any quality you possess that helps you get a job done.

Skills analysis


Communication skills (skillful expression and interpretation of knowledge and ideas).

- Expressing ideas
- Facilitating group discussions
- Interviewing
- Listening attentively
- Negotiating
- Persuading

Human relations skills (using interpersonal skills for relating to others, resolving conflict, helping people).

- Asserting
- Being a team player
- Cooperating
- Handling complaints sensitively
- Motivating
- Perceiving feelings and providing support for others
- Sharing credit and appreciating others

Organization, management and leadership skills (the ability to supervise, direct and guide individuals and groups to complete tasks).

- Being self-motivated
- Coaching
- Coordinating tasks
- Delegating responsibility
- Facilitating groups
- Initiating new ideas
- Motivating others
- Promoting change
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Research and planning skills (the ability to research and conceptualize future needs and their solutions).

- Analyzing
- Compiling data
- Defining needs
- Designing projects
- Forecasting, predicting
- Gathering information
- Setting goals
- Solving problems

Work survival skills (day-to-day skills that assist in promoting effective production and work satisfaction).

- Accepting responsibility
- Attending to detail
- Being punctual
- Enforcing policies
- Implementing decisions
- Managing time
- Organizing
- Prioritizing
- Multi-tasking

Next, review your list and determine which of these are ‘content’ skills (skills that are specific to a job or occupation and help you accomplish the duties of a specific job) versus ‘transferable’ skills (skills that transfer from one job to another regardless of the nature of the job).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My Content Skills</th>
<th>My Transferable Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: I can operate a front-end loader</td>
<td>Example: I'm a great multi-tasker.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Accomplishment Analysis

Accomplishments are the outcome of your skills translated into actions. Accomplishments are things that you did to improve a situation, solve a problem, or make a contribution.

Example:

Accomplishment: Modified the company website which resulted in a reduction of telephone help-desk inquiries by 80%. This represents a cost savings of 200 man hours annually.

Skills: technology, design, communication, planning, organizing, knowledge of business operations and organizational structure.

Accomplishment: Managed a staff of three with a budget of $120,000.00.

Skills: managing teams, budgeting, communication, leadership.

Make a list of accomplishments. For each, consider:

- What problem were you solving?
- What skills did you use, or actions did you take, to overcome the problem?
- What were the measurable benefits (for you, for the company)?

A good accomplishment will do one or more of the following:

- increase performance
- decrease costs
- increase profits and/or sales
- increase efficiency
- expand client base
- lower unit costs
- permit better decision-making
- help management to manage better than it did before
- make things more functional
- improve employee relations
- streamline operations
- improve working conditions
Guidelines for writing accomplishments

- Begin each accomplishment statement with an appropriate and strong action verb (e.g. “achieved”, “accelerated”, “streamlined”, “generated”). You’ll find lists of these verbs on the internet (use a search term such as “action verbs for resume” in Google).
- Use past tense (e.g. “improved product knowledge…”, “improved retention…”, “achieved sales targets…”, “reduced customer complaints…”).
- Add depth and detail to each accomplishment statement by quantifying wherever possible (size, volumes, percentages, dollar values, timelines).
- If you are unsure of an exact number, use qualifying words such as “approaching”, “approximately”, “in excess of”, “less than.”
- Where appropriate share your responsibility rather than take all of the credit, “assisted with”, “contributed to”, “participated in”, “worked with … to…”

My accomplishments:
Priorities and obligations

Career decisions are not made in isolation. Part of your decision-making needs to take into consideration the people who will be impacted by the career choices you make.

Spouse or partner

- Is your spouse or partner dependent on you financially?
- How supportive of your career plans is your spouse or partner likely to be?

Children

- Do your children have special needs?
- How much support do you get from your children's other parents or extended family?

Parents

- Are your parents dependent on you?
- Do your parents' living circumstances influence your career choice (e.g. desire to live close by)?

Friends and neighbours

- Do you have obligations involving friends and neighbours?

Remuneration

- What is the minimum income you must earn to maintain the lifestyle to which you are accustomed?
- Can you supplement your base salary with variable pay (e.g. bonus, profit sharing, commissions)?

Mobility

- Are you willing and able to relocate?
- Do you want to live and work in a specific location?

Commuting

- Do you have considerations about distance to your workplace?
- Is work-at-home an option to consider?
Benefits

- Do you need full insurance and health benefits from an employer or can you purchase what you need independently?

Physical environment

- Do you need any special accommodations?

Education

- What level of additional education are you willing to pursue?
- Can you afford the time, money and effort to earn more education or training?

Travel

- Would you consider travelling as part of your career? If so, how often?

Schedule

- Can you work in the evenings and/or weekends?
- Can you carry a pager?
- Would you like flexible work hours or job sharing?
- How many hours are you willing to work each week?

Your Future

- How many more years do you want to be working before you retire or cut back?
- What does retirement look like for you?

Health

- Do you have any health issues to consider when making a choice of job or career?

Other considerations
Purpose and meaning

What is deeply meaningful to you may matter less to someone else. To find meaning in your work you must first identify what you consider important and meaningful in your work.

**Step 1:** Before you learn to incorporate meaning into your work, come up with your own personal definition of ‘meaning.’

When you think about the things you find meaningful, what comes to mind? Read this list of meaning types, and check the ones that are important to you (think back on your top ten values if that helps).

- Rewards (e.g. money, appreciation).
- Interesting field or industry
- Expressing ideals and values (e.g. working for a company that openly supports women and minorities).
- Contributing, making a difference.
- Solving problems (e.g. working as a mediator).
- Changing your lifestyle (e.g. work from home to spend more time with your children).
- Innovating, creating, producing something new or original.
- Other:

**Step 2:** Begin to develop a sense of your purpose.

What are your dreams and desires? Look for themes that emerge from the exercises in these worksheets and also consider these questions:

- What have you not yet done in your life that you really must do?
- What kinds of work fuel your sense of purpose?
- How can you build meaning into your work?
- How would you evaluate the work you’ve done so far in your life? What would you want to do differently?
- What interests, values, and motivators would you like to incorporate in your working life?
Integrating your assessment: Putting it all together

You are now ready to begin identifying opportunities that will allow you to pursue your interests and capitalize on your strengths.

As you review your worksheets, make notes on this diagram. Good job matches can be found at the intersection of values, interests, personality, knowledge, skills/accomplishments, and purpose/meaning.
Brainstorm career ideas

Step 1.

Take a moment to reflect on which of these areas of self-assessment is the biggest consideration in your career. How much weight will you put on input from significant others? Your values? Your skills? Some people make decisions largely based on skills; others focus on finding work that matches values or sparks a passionate interest.

Step 2.

Think about the various roles that would suit your needs and wishes. Then, think about the markets, industries and organizations that have a need for people in such roles.

Step 3.

Describe your ideal employment opportunity.

List the kinds of work you think you’d most like to do. What career ideas are you thinking about? What careers come to mind when you consider using some of your favorite skills? What kinds of skills might give you the freedom that you want? Describe the types of people with whom you most want to associate in your work.

Step 4.

Describe the job that you want to avoid. This is the opposite of your ideal employment opportunity. Identify everything you do not want in a job.
Undecided?

Once you have completed the assessment process you might still be unclear about your job or career objective. This is normal and expected as you become aware of the many possibilities for a job or career that are open to you. To help narrow down the possibilities, do some research. For ideas, use the internet career planning resources (in the Resources section of the course).

If you’re still struggling with making a decision about your career path, there could be a number of possible reasons. Roberta Neault, PhD of Life Strategies (www.lifestrategies.ca) suggests the following culprits.

1. Emotional reasons.

Think about your feelings about making a decision. What are you afraid of? Common fears associated with career decisions include fear of criticism, loss, commitment, responsibility, making a wrong decision, failure, etc.

   • Make sure you are not stressed by other circumstances or pressures (e.g. being out of work and needing a job very soon, anticipating being laid off).
   • Think about what works for you to reduce fears and concerns when they crop up in other areas of your life. These same strategies may work for you here.

2. Cognitive (‘thinking’) reasons.

Sometimes we overthink our choices and get bogged down with inaction, or all of the available options are equally appealing and would produce the results we’re looking for. If you don’t have enough information to make a decision, gather more.

3. External reasons.

We seldom make career decisions in isolation. Thus, your indecision may reflect an underlying lack of support or conflict with other obligations. In these cases, you need to identify the root causes of your indecision in order to move forward.

Next Steps

The next step is to use your self-assessment information as a springboard towards another layer of self-assessment, this time directed towards revealing your key attributes and qualities in the interests of selling and marketing yourself. This next step isn’t about generating ideas about what might be an ideal job, it is about securing that ideal job.
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About professional career assessment

Sometimes it helps to have input from others to cement your conviction that the paths you are exploring and choosing are right for you. For more formal assessment, consider taking advantage of the many career assessment tests that are available through career counselling professionals.

Services

Most career counselors offer the same mix of services, in general:

- They administer and interpret tests and ask interview questions that help you get a clearer picture of your goals.
- They present you with a range of career possibilities that may fit your interests, based on research of what other people with similar profiles are successful doing.
- They help you put together short-term and long-term career plans.
- They may teach job-hunting strategies and skills and assist in the development of resumes.
- They may assist in understanding the integration of work and other life roles.

Keep in mind that no assessment can tell you exactly what you should do with your career and tests, alone, cannot tell you what to do with your career. Ultimately, whether you seek professional assessment or not, you are ultimately the best judge of the career you should pursue, and you have the final say.

Common career counselling tests

Each test has a unique approach so it is best to use more than one. Some examples of well-respected formal tests that require professional administration and/or interpretation, include:

- **Strong Interest Inventory.** The SII helps you understand work interests and shows you the kinds of work in which you might be comfortable.
- **16PF.** The 16PF (16 personality factors) is a personality questionnaire that allows qualified assessors to measure the degree to which a variety of different traits are present in your personality.
- **PCI.** The PCI (Personal Characteristics Inventory) is a personality questionnaire that allows qualified assessors to measure the degree to which a variety of different traits are present in your personality.