

The Career Planning Process

By Nathan Newberger



Important Steps to Take for Your Career Development

Career development and the career planning process include a number of specific steps that help to identify personal skills and attributes. Finding out how those skills can be utilized in the job market is accomplished by researching a number of career fields that are of interest to you and then by gaining experience in those fields and/or speaking to people currently working in the field. Participating in some form of experiential education (e.g. internship, real life project etc) will help you to identify if the field is the right choice for you.

Step #1: Self-Assessment

Evaluating who you are as a person. This involves taking a personal inventory of who you are and identifying your individual values, interests, skills, and personal qualities. What makes you tick as a person. You will look at those personal attributes under a microscope and come up with key qualities you can identify and use in your search for the perfect career. Career assessments may be required to promote a better understanding of personal attributes and skills.

Step #2: Research (Career Exploration)

Obtain an insider's perspective about the career field you are considering. Contact with professionals in person, phone, or by email. Professionals enjoy sharing their expertise with people interested in the field. Perform informational interviews with alumni to gain

their perspective of the field and to listen to what they have to say. This strategy provides first hand knowledge from someone currently working in the field and gives you an opportunity to ask about their experiences as well as potential jobs and what one might expect if just entering the field.

Gain experience through internship or voluntary work, see what a typical work day entails and gain perspective of what the environment is like and the typical job responsibilities of someone working in the field.

Start reading Guides, Surveys & Handbooks related to Career Issues & to various industries (e.g. Career Guide to Industries, Employment Surveys etc). Search for career events, organized by Careers Office of your University or by HR companies.

Gain more information on certain industries or fields of your interest by reading specialized press (e.g. magazines, newspapers, newsletters etc). It is one of the best ways to have a clear & updated outlook of the field you are interested in that will definitely facilitate you in career decision making.

Step #3: Decision-Making

Once you've made a thorough self-assessment and have done research of career options, it's time to make a decision. This can be difficult since there may still be many unknowns and a fear of making the wrong choice. One thing for sure is that although we can do all the necessary steps to making an informed decision, there is no absolute certainty that we are unquestioningly making the right decision. This uncertainty is easier for some people than others but a key point to remember is that you can always learn from any job you have and take those skills and apply them at your next job.

Step#4: Search (Taking Action)

It's now time to look for prospective jobs and/or employers, send out cover letter & resumes and begin networking with people in the field. Keep in mind that cover letters and resumes are designed to make a favorable impression on employers (if done properly) and

the interview process is what will ultimately land you the job. In other words, make sure your cover letter and resume highlight your skills and strengths based on the employer's needs and that you are fully prepared to knock their socks off at the interview. Take time to research the employer's website prior to the interview, and be prepared to ask thoughtful questions based on your research.

Step #5: Acceptance

Wow! You've completed all of the steps above and you've been accepted into a new and exciting or different job. Congratulations! According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 64.1% of people change jobs between 5 and 14 times in their lifetime. Consequently, learning the skills above will increase your chances of gaining meaningful and satisfactory work as well as help you to avoid many of the stresses that occur with changing jobs. By recognizing that change is good (even advantageous), changing jobs can be viewed as a positive experience and need not be as anxiety provoking as it may initially seem. You will continue the process of self-assessment, research, decision-making, and job searching in order to make effective and fulfilling career changes throughout your lifetime.