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The 5-Step Plan For Working Out What You Really Want From Your Career

Only you can work out what's right for you. - by *Karen Gately*



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Do you listen to that colleague or friend who has their career plan all worked out and wonder if you're being left behind? Despite the ambition you feel to be successful, do you struggle to work out precisely what you want 'to be when you grow up'?

The truth is a lot of people struggle to work out what will make them happy in their career, let alone the steps necessary to get them there.

While it can be tempting to look for the answers outside of yourself, the reality is only you can work out what's right for you. While unquestionably friends, family or colleagues can offer invaluable insights and even inspire you to travel down certain paths, only you have the answers to what will make you happy and ultimately thrive. Among the most important steps you can take to work out what you want include these.

Step One: Know You

Priority number one is knowing you. Reflect for a moment on how well you really know yourself. Do you know what gives you energy, what grabs your attention and feels easy to do because you like it? Equally do you understand what drains you of energy or holds you back from being at your best at work? Pursuing a career that energises your spirit is key to success.

Understand what your core skills and innate qualities are; how have they served you well to date? For example, were you born with the 'gift of the gab' that allows you to comfortably speak off the cuff. Do you have a knack for calming people down when things are stressful? Are you the person stepping up to organise events when other people shrink into the background? Whatever your strengths, know what they are and own them.

Step Two: Be Brave

Discovering what you are truly passionate about, and moving your career in that direction, can at times take a great deal of courage. Start by being brave enough to want what you really want. If you're secretly dreaming of a future that feels too 'out there' to take seriously, give yourself permission to explore possibilities and go after opportunities.

Reflect back to when you were a kid and what you imagined you would grow up to be. It saddens me the number of people who far too readily give up on their childhood dreams in pursuit of more pragmatic career choices. One guy I know became an accountant because his parents believed it was a more secure career path than learning to fly. At 50 he became a pilot and his career finally took off. Pardon the pun.

Step Three: Build A Picture

Look for not only the must haves, but also the must not haves, of your career aspirations. For many people working out what they don't want is in fact easier than working out what they do. A common example is 'I don't want to be stuck in an office'. If that is true for you, work out precisely what that really means. Are you willing to work in an office if you also get 'field time' for example, or do you never want to set foot in an office building again?

Explore the extent which you want to interact with other people, and in what ways. Do you want to collaborate, lead or manage, or is your truth that you'd rather not work with other people very much at all. How important is using your mind and knowledge to get the job done. Some people prefer physical exertion over mental challenge, others want a bit of both.

Step Four: Explore

The only way to really know if you will enjoy something is to give it a go. Find ways to experience the things you suspect you may enjoy or be good at. Get creative. While you may have a full time day job, look for ways you can create the time and space to learn about new possibilities. One woman I worked with took annual leave to spend time volunteering in a sector that interested her. Another chose to take on a part time weekend role, while she worked through whether she wanted to make a more permanent career move. If work experience isn't an option, explore with other people the career steps they have taken and what they loved and learned.

Step Five: Keep Working It Out

I'm often asked if I've always known what I wanted to achieve in my career. While the answer is yes, the reality is I've also changed my mind many, many times. At school I wanted to be everything from a lawyer to a fighter pilot (forgive me it was the Top Gun movie era). Ultimately I chose Physical Education but then landed in the Financial Services industry working in client service. Eventually I found my way across to HR which I had no idea even existed when I was at university.

If you're struggling to imagine the future beyond a couple of years that's OK. For many years I had no clue people leadership would ultimately become my career passion and purpose. Don't get hung up on trying to work out your long term goals. The simple truth is life is full of change and opportunity. While its important to have a vision for your future, so too is remaining open and being willing to explore new possibilities that present.

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