

Career Plan

Self-Coaching Guide

How can I plan my career?

We often want our careers all planned out; to make the right choices in the right order to get on the right path. This is challenging and stressful because (a) we don't always know what gives us a fulfilling career or the opportunities available to us, and (b) it makes us anxious about making any mistakes. An approach is needed that more realistically reflects most people's experience of their professional life.

Planned happenstance is a deliberate approach that uses a growth mindset (i.e. willingness to learn and change) and open mindedness to opportunities that may be attractive and fulfilling. It suggests that even if you don't know exactly what the outcome of your actions will be, just by taking action and doing the right sort of things, great things can and will happen. This approach has two main elements:

1. Exploration – which generates opportunities:

E.g. Research, reading books and journals, networking, listening to experts, internships, shadowing.

2. Attitudes and skills – which prepares people to seize opportunities:

- **Be curious.** Explore new career opportunities. Career paths rarely travel straight. It is highly likely that you will change your job or career quite a few times during your professional life. By being curious, each opportunity will teach you what you like about a job and what you don't like, and this will guide you towards a fulfilling career. Career planning is a life-long learning process and some of your learning experiences may surprise you.

- **Be optimistic.** View new opportunities as possible and achievable. Many jobs and career paths will be suitable for you, not just the 'perfect one'. You probably have the skills, personality, ambitions, values and strengths that fit well with many careers leading to an extremely fulfilling one. Accepting that there is no 'perfect one' job or career for you releases you from the pressure and paralysis of having to make the 'best choice'. In fact, there will be many 'best choices', so enjoy exploring the journey.

- **Be persistent.** Keep going despite setbacks. Career paths don't need to be fully worked out early in your professional life. Developing your career plan is a gradual process which continues throughout your professional life and often into retirement. Your career path won't always go smoothly so following it will require determination, action and effort, especially when you face inevitable challenges.

- **Be flexible.** Embrace changing attitudes and circumstances. Once you have started a job or embarked on a particular career path you are not 'locked in'. Making a change is much easier than you may think. As you learn more about yourself and the world of work, you should confidently adapt your career path to reflect changes in your vision and values, personal circumstances, new technology, the economy etc. Be openminded. Careers are flexible and any decisions you make will be informative.

- **Be risky.** Take actions in the face of uncertain outcomes. You won't always have a clear vision of your career path. It takes time, curiosity, persistence, optimism, flexibility, and trial and error to learn to make better job and career choices. Some opportunities may come from chance encounters; others through hard work. Whatever opportunities arise, all will involve some risk. But 'nothing ventured, nothing gained'. How will you ever know what could have been if you don't follow up these opportunities?

This approach to your career plan will be much less demanding and, hopefully, a lot more enjoyable!

"Do not be too timid and squeamish about your actions. All life is an experiment." Ralph Waldo Emerson

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