

How to Plan your Career

Choosing a career is a difficult matter, in the best of times. Add to this opinions of friends and parents, and the young person is caught up in a confusing situation where making a decision is almost impossible. Here a model which can help young people to choose a career, gain competencies required for it, make decisions, set goals and take action. The decision for each individual is different, since everyone is a distinct individual. This model is helpful not only for freshers but also throughout one's life.

Self-Assessment

This step involves gathering information about yourself to make a decision about a career. By developing an understanding of self (values, interests, aptitudes, abilities, personal traits, and desired life style) you should become aware of the inter-relationship between self and occupational choice.

One can start by (a) Learning interests, abilities, skills, and work values, (b) listing accomplishments, (c) Understanding physical and psychological needs, (d) Assessing aspirations and motivation level, and (e) Deciphering personal traits and characteristics.

As you begin to develop a better understanding of yourself, you will gain self-awareness, improve self-confidence, understand the importance of time management and also develop personal as well as professional management skills.

For self-assessment one can take exploratory classes or attend workshops for study skills, or join activity clubs or professional clubs. One must be careful that one should allow regular time for leisure, hobbies and friends and not get involved in work all the time.

One should identify one's personality style and see what one is best suited to. Also identify work values and gain a positive attitude. For instance, one should develop interpersonal skills in expressing feelings and ideas and interact with people. Self-defeating behavior should be got over with.

Academic and Career Options

After you have completed your self-assessment, you must identify academic and career options available. This step allows you to investigate the world of work, narrow a general occupational direction into a specific one through an informed

decision-making process. You will begin to identify potential careers, gather information about those careers, and match the career information with the results from your self—assessment. After this one should learn about academic and career entrance requirements. Explore how and where you can get the education and training required. Identify institutes where you want to apply. Also assess job market trends and have a second plan ready, consisting of academic and career alternatives.

Competency Areas

It is important to improve competency all the times. One must gain research and investigative skills, practice decision-making develop problem-solving skills and take up critical thinking exercises.

To gain competency, one should interact with professionals, meet academic advisors and career counselors, or attend courses and workshops in areas where one can learn skills. Skills that can be thus acquired are: communications, computer knowledge, foreign languages and international studies. A youngster must make it a point to attend job and career fairs, participate in the Study Abroad programme, or take up a part-time job.

The next step helps you to evaluate occupational choices and gain practical experience through internships, cooperative education, summer jobs, volunteer work and campus activities. You will begin to make more specific decisions about occupational choices. Here too, increase your competency levels by learning communication and interpersonal skills. Confidence –building is very important at this stage. Time management techniques should also be picked up.

Ideal Life-Style Inventory

Mark each item that best describes how important these things are to you. This inventory is designed to help you identify values. If is not scored.

Live in a House, Live in a Rural Area, Entertain at Home, Spend Money, Frequent Travel, Have Many Possessions, have Lots of Money, Live Close to Recreation, Live Near Cultural Centers, access to Movies, Restaurants, Time Alone, Active Member in Community, Access to Education, Live Near Place of Work, Work Only for Money.

Are the above points are important, very important, moderately important or not important?

Once you have answered the questions above, you will be in a good position to select the job you want. Of course, it is not always possible to get a job that perfectly matches what you have in mind.

Meet Professionals

Now start finding out about your occupational prospects. Find out about the major duties and responsibilities involved, products made or services provided by this occupation, specialization within the occupation and the tools used in the occupation. Find out also about the education, training or experience needed for the occupation. Match personal qualifications, skills, and abilities required for the occupation and fill in the gaps where you do not have such skills, such as typing or computer knowledge.

Assess whether you like the working conditions: some jobs may require odd hours of duty or frequent travel. Are you up to facing these? Find out about future prospects and outlook for the occupation. The normal methods of entry into the occupation will be found in newspapers and magazines. Observe the people in the occupation and see the personality characteristics of typical people working in it. Sales jobs, for example, require extroverts and you should be able to match your personality with what you observe.

Make an informational interview questionnaire and talk to people in the occupation. The following questions could act as a guide:

How did you get into this occupation/organization?

How did you become interested in this occupation/organization?

What entry-level jobs might qualify a person for this field?

What is the progression of jobs from the beginning to the top?

What responsibilities and duties do you have in your work?

Who are your customers? Who are your competitors?

What essential abilities are needed to do your job well?

What preparation, education, training, or background is required entrance into this field of work?

What is the guiding philosophy of the organization?

What personal traits, values, and interests are necessary or to succeed and advance in this occupation/organization?

What are the major frustrations, annoyances, or sources of in the occupation/organization?

How much time do you spend at work

Meeting professionals helps a lot and clarifies many doubts in one's mind. However, it is necessary to know someone for honest answers. If you do not know a person, chances are that you will not be able to get honest answers.

Matching Skills with Requirements

The basic idea of the above model is to match one's skills with what is required for the job. Once an assessment is made, one will be better able to know one's personality and choose a career accordingly. Very often, this is not done. Thus, people find themselves in jobs in which they have no interest in. A person who has been involved in books all his life, is suddenly asked to deal with customers or a person who has been an extrovert may find himself in a banking job where all he has to do is keep ledgers. It is to avoid this kind of a thing that building. Inventory helps.

At the same time, the model helps you assess the skills needed to work in certain careers. If you want to do management, for example, it is advisable to take up jobs so that one acquires confidence and also knowledge about the industry. This will also help in selecting the kind of industry that you want to work in.

The model is not perfect, but gives invaluable pointers about one's personality and indicates how to choose a career.