

Career Options Self-Assessment Guidebook: Two Ways to Get Started

Look Back and Look Ahead
to Move Forward in your Career



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Two ways to begin aligning your work and life.

Do you wish that your work and your life were more closely aligned?

What would be different if you were engaged in work that you felt was really right for you at this point in your life?

When thinking about new career directions, it is common for individuals to start the search process by focusing first on the outside. Certainly this is a necessary part of a successful career transition. If you need work right away because you have just lost your job, or are anticipating losing your job, finding a short-term position must be your priority. But in the longer term, finding work that is aligned with who you are requires a different strategy.

The **5-step A.U.D.I.T.** process outlines the key components of a successful career transition.

	The 5 steps are:
1	A ssess yourself and your situation
2	U nderstand your world of work
3	D esign a strategy to fit your intentions'
4	I mplement actions through a step-by-step plan
5	T est and tally your progress

(Read more about A.U.D.I.T on www.careeroptionscoach.com)

You will notice that **the first of the five steps is self-assessment.**

Of course, you still need to spend time researching the work environment. You need to understand the field or fields that you are interested in.

- What opportunities are available?
- What are the trends in the market?
- What skills are needed for success?

But unless you take the time **to assess yourself and your needs**, researching the job market is a time-consuming and frustrating process.

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If you've been thinking about changing your career direction for some time, you are probably anxious to move forward. Are you questioning whether the time spent doing self-assessment is worthwhile? Consider the example in the box below.

Margaret is very skilled at handling crises. Because of this, people often come to her when things go wrong. She is able to help them solve their problems. However, she wants to change direction in her work. She is known and valued for her ability to manage crises. But helping others takes a lot of her time. One question that Margaret needs to answer for herself is whether crisis management is something that she wants to remain a central part of her work. **If her answer is NO, she needs a strategy to reduce the amount of time that crisis management takes. Otherwise, she may find that this ongoing demand prevents her from moving in the direction that she wants.**

If you can differentiate between those skills that you have and use now, and those you feel good about using or want to develop, you will be able to move forward more easily by being more focused.

Without this understanding, how will you make decisions about where to focus your search efforts? What fields or types of work can you eliminate right away because they don't fit with your goals or values?

This guidebook gives you a way to get started with assessing yourself and your situation.

After all, you are the expert on yourself. Nobody knows as much about you as you know about yourself. But sometimes this expertise and self-knowledge is not explicit. It gets covered up under the tasks and demands of everyday life.

Use these tools as a way to uncover knowledge that may be hidden because you haven't had the chance to step back and look for connections and patterns. Deepening your self-understanding will provide a strong foundation on which to build your plans for change.

The exercises are based on two simple principles.

1. Look back to review previous experience
2. Look forward to develop a vision for the future

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Applying these two principles give you two practical ways of increasing your self-knowledge for the purposes of aligning your career and your life.

1. Look back to review previous experience.

Looking back involves reviewing your own unique experiences to identify trends and patterns.

This is a powerful way of exploring information about yourself and seeing patterns that may not be immediately apparent

2. Look forward to create a vision of your future.

Looking forward involves creating a vision of your future through a structured process. Having a sense of direction is essential to be able to move forward towards your desired goals.

The step by step method described below will support you through the process.

Feel free to skim through the description of both exercises first.

Is one of these options is more attractive to you than the other? If so, start with the one that appeals to you the most. Then complete the second one.

Decide when you are going to do each, and set aside some time to complete it. Depending on your schedule, you may prefer to complete the exercises over several shorter time periods. The important thing is to decide what is realistic for you, and then to make it a priority.

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Exercise 1: Looking Back

This exercise guides you through a way of analyzing previous experiences. Identifying patterns from your experience provides information that is unique to you, and can be invaluable in helping you to evaluate your options.

It is difficult to be objective about our own experience. A structured approach can help with this. Everyday demands can prevent us from taking a “big picture” perspective.

To get started, read the tale of the two fishes below.

The little fish is searching. He approaches the older experienced fish for help.

Little fish: (asks excitedly)

“Excuse me, you are older than I. Can you tell me where to find the thing they call the ocean.”

Older fish: (replies)

“This is the ocean. The ocean is the thing that you are in now. Look and see, it all around you.”

Little fish: (disappointedly)

“Oh this? But all I see is water. I’m searching for the ocean”.

Before the older fish could reply, the little fish was already on his way to search elsewhere.

Adapted from Boissonnette (1994)¹

As you seek to make the changes you want, it is important not to miss the information you already have right now. You can learn a lot by reviewing your previous experiences. This exercise will guide you through an analysis of past experiences. Through this process you can gain invaluable information to support your career transition.

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Begin by thinking back to some of the projects you have been involved in. These can be things that you did as part of a job, in your community, or in your family.

Examples might be:

- manage a team
- organize a party
- host a family reunion
- design a product
- plan a campaign,
- sell a product
- design a service
- deliver a service
- redecorate a room
- remodel a house
- plan a trip run a meeting, etc.

It is not necessary to limit your choices to your paid work. Write down the three or four that you feel most positive about.

	Some of the projects that I enjoyed most/feel good about are
1	
2	
3	
4	

When you have your list, select one project to start with. You might want to begin with the one you enjoyed most.

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Describe the project in as much detail as possible, using the questions below as a checklist. If you would like more detail, read the example below.

- What was the project about?
- What was its purpose?
- What tasks were involved?
- What was your role?
- Who was involved?
- What specific things did you do?
- What were you responsible for?
- If there were others involved, what was your relationship to them?
- What problems did you solve?
- What obstacles did you overcome?
- What tools did you use?

Remember there are no right or wrong answers. The purpose is to record your perspectives.

Other people may see the goals, tasks, and priorities differently. Don't be concerned about other views for now. Just write from your own viewpoint.

Read the box below for a condensed version of one project example. Write as much detail as you can. Use whatever format works best for you – e.g. narrative, lists, notes.

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Analyzing a Project: One example

This project was

— a self-study program for health professionals who felt that they had reached a plateau in their career.

The main purpose of the project was ...

— to help the participants to make decisions about their future career (e.g. their strengths, options available for training and progression). The course was also externally accredited so that participants could satisfy continuing education needs.

The completion of the project required that the following tasks be completed ...

- ✓ find data on current labor market trends
- ✓ identify potential prospective students
- ✓ decide how to market the course
- ✓ write a course proposal and get approval
- ✓ identify the resources needed
- ✓ set up a team
- ✓ create a plan and timeline
- ✓ find out the requirements for accreditation
- ✓ monitor progress and meet deadlines
- ✓ submit the course to the accrediting body
- ✓ select and write the content for the course
- ✓ develop the assessment process
- ✓ etc.

My responsibilities included:

- ✓ writing the proposal
- ✓ analyzing the skills required
- ✓ identifying resources (project team, technology, advisers)
- ✓ writing the course content
- ✓ liaison with the accreditation body
- ✓ developing the assessment process
- ✓ etc.

Some of the problems that needed to be solved were:

- ✓ getting approval for the project
- ✓ finding the appropriate resources
- ✓ presenting the content in a user-friendly way for busy professionals

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When you have written a description of your project, review what you have written and complete the table below with your answers to 1, 2, and 3.

1. Review your description and **write a list of the skills** you used in the first column of the table.

e.g. writing, making a presentation, etc.

2. In the second column, rate your proficiency **in using this skill**.

Circle 1, 2, or 3 according to the rating that you think fits best.

A1=easy for me/feel very competent

A2=neither easy or difficult; reasonable level of competence

A3=find it difficult; don't feel so competent

3 In the third column, rate **how you feel** about using this skill.

Circle 1, 2, or 3 depending on how you feel.

1=really like it; want to continue using it

2=like it; happy to continue using it

3=don't like it; prefer not to use it very often

Completing this table with each of your skills and how you rate them will give you valuable information about the skills you feel most motivated to use.

You may want to analyze a number of the projects you have been involved in to get a better picture of your preferred skills.

Being clear about this will really help you to evaluate new opportunities and decide how best to leverage your time and effort as you move forward.

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Now that you have begun to analyze your previous experiences, what patterns do you see? Are there trends across different projects?

Even if you are still in the early stages of exploring a new direction for your career, this exercise is a great opportunity to begin with one small change right away.

Follow the directions below to take **one small step** in the direction you want to go.

Review your list of skills and list any that are in both the A1 and 1 categories. These are the skills that you have identified as ones that for you are **high in both competence and enjoyment**.

A1 and 1 Skills (feel very competent and enjoy using)

Look through your list.

Select **one skill** from your list that you intend to begin using more. Can you think of any ways in which can use this skill more frequently in your current situation? If not, try brainstorming with a friend or coworker.

Complete the sentence below and put it in a place that you see regularly as a reminder of your decision. (See also the example below).

The skill that I choose to use more is [name of skill]..... and I
 achieve this by[describe action].....on[when]..... I will
 start by[specific action]on[specific date]

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Example:

The skill that I choose to use more is building relationships. For the next three months I intend to build relationships with people in other departments in my organization. I am doing this by organizing a lunch or coffee meeting on the 2nd and 4th Friday of the month.

To achieve this, I am doing the following:

- ✓ make an appointment in my calendar
- ✓ make a list of people I want to meet with
- ✓ email/call to set up the appointments
- ✓ arrange an appointment for the 2nd and 4th Fridays of the month.

This is now part of my regular schedule and supports me in practicing my skill of building relationships.

Exercise 2: Looking forward

The second exercise is designed to help you create a vision for your future in which your work and life are aligned in the way that you want.

Read the box to enjoy a short anecdote before you begin the exercise.

A teacher looked around at her class of six-year old students in her drawing class. She noticed one girl was completely absorbed in what she was doing. The teacher was surprised. This was unusual for this child who never seemed to pay attention in class. After twenty minutes, the teacher asked her what she was drawing. The young girl said, "I'm drawing a picture of God." The teacher replied, "But nobody knows what God looks like". Without hesitation, the girl said "They will in a minute." She was completely confident in her imaginative abilities.

Adapted from Robinson (2009)²

How often do you set aside time to imagine?

As adults it can be more difficult to tap into the type of confidence in our imagination and creativity demonstrated by this young girl in the story. Do you have a picture in your mind of where you want to go in your career and your life?

Complete the exercise below to begin the process of creating a vision for yourself and your future.

My Ideal Day.

Let's begin by imagining your ideal day.

Set aside some uninterrupted time (or times). Find a place where you feel comfortable and relaxed. Imagine yourself spending your ideal day. Move step by step through your day. It might help to thinking of yourself as a tour guide describing your day in detail as you experience.

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Take a blank sheet of paper and begin writing a description of your ideal day.

Today is my ideal day and[continue]

If you prefer a more structured approach, you can use the set of questions below as prompts to do the exercise.

Make your description as specific and concrete as possible. Use all of your senses (sight, touch, hearing, smell, taste) to help you describe your day.

Choose a starting point, such as getting up, and describe the full 24 hours. Include all the details of your day.

Let your mind roam freely and record what comes to mind. If you find yourself analyzing, come back to focus on your senses and continue describing what you see, hear, smell etc. Try not to censor or edit yourself.

This account is for your use only, unless you choose to share it. Don't worry about spelling or other aspects of your writing. If you begin to evaluate what you are writing, just notice the fact, and go back to describing your day.

Questions to use as prompts for writing your description.

- What time is it?
- Where are you? (country, city, specific location)
- What do you see?
- What is the temperature like? Inside? Outside?
- What sounds do you hear?
- What are you wearing?
- Who else is there?
- How do you spend your time during this day?
- Where do you go during your day?
- How do you get there?
- Who do you meet?
- Who do you interact with?
- What do you do first? Next?
- What do you eat and drink?
- What are your thoughts and feelings at different points during your day?
- At the end of the day, when you look back, what do you see? How do you feel?

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Other options

If you'd rather express yourself in ways other than writing, feel free to use other media if you prefer. Here are some options:

- Talk about your ideal day and record it for review later.
- Draw your day.
- Create a collage using images from old magazines or whatever sources are available to you to represent the elements that you want to have in your ideal day.
- Have a trusted friend interview you.
- Use a combination of the above

Review your description

Read through what you have written.

What stands out?

Does anything surprise you?

How do you feel about your ideal day?

Take one action today.

Is there one small change that you want to focus on today?

What one thing can you put into place right away? Choose one.

Decide how long you will implement it. Make a commitment to yourself and record your progress. See the example in the box below.

Example

In my ideal day, I took better care of myself by eating healthy meals.

The change that I have decided to make is to bring my lunch to work on Mondays so that I have access to more healthy options that I like. I will do this for one month. At the end of the month, I will review my progress and make a list of other changes that I can make to take better care of myself by eating healthily.

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Congratulations! You have now reached the end of this guidebook.

By completing these two exercises you have taken important steps to assess your own needs and wants for your career.

By being more aware of your personal preferences for your future work, you are in a better position to focus your efforts in the direction that you want to go.

I'd love to hear about your experience of using this guidebook.

What did you find easy or difficult?

What did you learn from doing these exercises?

Feel free to contact me with your questions and suggestions.

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References

1. Bissonnette, D. (1994). *Beyond traditional job development: The art of creating opportunity*: Milt Wright & Associates Inc. .
2. Robinson, K., & Aronica, w. L. (2009). *The element: How finding your passion changes everything*. New York: Viking

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