

Chapter

6

Career under Construction - Investing in You

"WHICH WAY DO I GO?... WHICH WAY DO I GO?"

To begin this section, take a look at the set of figures below and select the one that doesn't belong.

This set of figures appeared in a book entitled *A Whack on the Side of the Head* by Roger von Oech. In that book, he gives the following response to the "test" you just took.

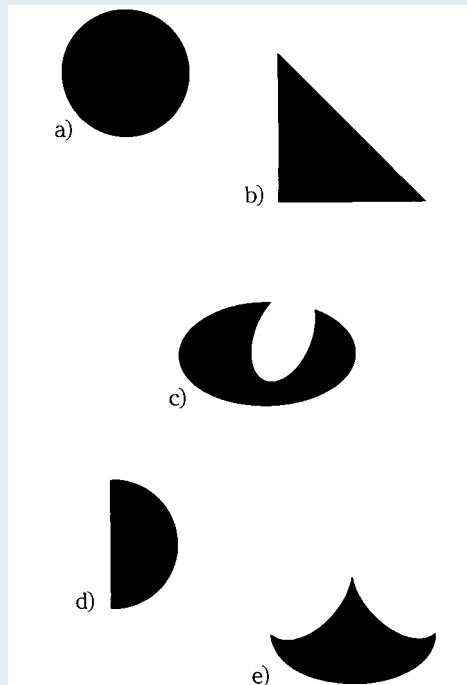
"If you chose figure B, congratulations! You've picked the right answer. Figure B is the only one that has all straight lines. Give yourself a pat on the back!

Some of you, however, may have chosen figure C, thinking that C is unique because it is the only one that is asymmetrical. And you are also right! C is the right answer. A case can also be made for figure A: it is the only one with no points of discontinuity. Therefore, A is the right answer. What about D? It

is the only one with both a straight line and a curved line.

So, D is the right answer too. And E? Among other things, E is the only one which looks like a projection of a non-Euclidean triangle into Euclidean space. It is also the right answer. In other words, they are all right depending on your point of view.

Much of our educational system, however, is geared toward teaching people the *one right answer*... the "right answer" approach becomes deeply ingrained in our thinking... if you think there is only one right answer, then you will stop looking as soon as you find one."



von Oech, Roger. *A Whack on the Side of the Head*. New York: Warner Books, 1983

This is particularly true for those who have come through a school system that focused on “right answer” learning, test after test, quiz after quiz, and exam after exam. The student who entered school full of excitement, creativity, and hopes for the future may have had those hopes drift away with “A’s” turning to “B’s,” then to “C’s” and who knows where eventually. As the famed educator Neil Postman said: “Students enter school as question marks and leave as periods.”

There is no doubt about it, the school system works very well for many students. But it also does not work particularly well for many others. Some students, for example, may have many talents but not do well in written exams. They often end up on the lower end of the grade scale. They are put on a level somewhat below others — others who were able to take notes, study from books, and score well on tests. What is the impact of this?

How do you feel about you? Are you self-confident? If not, why do you think that is the case? What do you think would help to improve your self-confidence? If you are self-confident, what contributed to that self-confidence?

There is probably nothing that affects a person’s career choice, and chances for success, more than self-esteem and self-confidence. How you feel about yourself will affect your plans, your expectations, your hopes, your effort, and your determination. If you have low expectations of yourself, then you have already built a big roadblock to your future success. People tend to live up to, or down to, their level of expectations.

First, the dreams and hopes of some students are affected. They lose self-confidence. They lower their expectations of themselves. They start to “give less” and as a result “get less.” Their overall self-esteem takes a beating. The reality of this is shown by the drop-out rate from many schools. Some young people decide that school is not working for them. It isn’t providing what they need, or perhaps what they want.

Another key thing to consider are your accomplishments. Many young people have little appreciation for the things in life they have accomplished.

Therefore, they lack a sense of accomplishment and a belief that they *can* accomplish things. Many youth consider only long-term goals such as careers and families. Think about the things in life you have already accomplished — in sports, in school, in theatre, in dance, in the community, with your family, at work, and so on. When we put our minds to it, most of us can identify many things we have accomplished. Recognition of those accomplishments helps to build self-confidence.

So, hold on to your hopes and dreams. Work on your self-confidence. Think of your successes and accomplishments — large, or small, or anything in between.

Set some short-term goals and achieve them. Prove to yourself you can do what you put your mind — and hard work — to achieving.

One key thing to remember is that research has shown that one of the most important factors influencing a person's success is passion. Caring about, and loving, what you do is an extremely important factor to consider when it comes to career choice.

CAREER PLANNING: SOME SUGGESTIONS TO CONSIDER

The following are some suggestions and tips related to the consideration of a career. Review them and note the ones that may be helpful to you.



Possibilities from Your Passion

What two things do you enjoy most in life? What career possibilities are there in these two areas?



Talent Time

What are you "best" at in terms of your own abilities? Are there career possibilities that fit with this talent?



Stepping Stones to Success

What mistakes/failures have you experienced over the last year? (Go back further in time if you have to!) What was the most important thing you learned from each mistake/failure?

- Apply the decision-making model to the consideration of career selection. Few decisions are more important for you than selecting the career that's best for you.
- Do volunteer work to gain experience and broaden your outlook. Get a sense of a career area through volunteering and determine whether or not you would enjoy it. Furthermore, volunteer activity generally makes a positive impression on a résumé.
- Consider careers that might be related to a hobby or something you enjoy (for example, sports, movies, music, science, camp, computers, travel).
- Be honest with yourself in assessing your talents and abilities. You should never lower your sights below your true potential. And you should avoid setting your sights so high that you are likely to be frustrated and disappointed.
- Set goals. Set your sights on what you want to achieve. Work toward something. Don't meander down the road and occasionally stop to see where you are. That may be a nice way to see Europe, but it's a poor way to find a career. Furthermore, don't set only long-term goals. Set some short-term goals, too. Give yourself a chance to succeed.
- Learn from your mistakes and disappointments. Mistakes are powerful learning experiences. They are stepping stones to future success. Apply that attitude to everything you do.

- Talk with people. You can learn a great deal about many career options from talking to someone who is already involved in a particular career.



The “In” Thing

Identify a “trend” you believe is just getting started. What types of jobs do you think would be helped if this trend really developed? Can you identify two or three trends that have been big over the last two years that led to career and employment opportunities for many people?



On Target?

If you are working now, why are you working? What goals are you working toward by working?

- Talk with a range of people. Don’t judge a career on the basis of discussions with one or two people.
- Plan for the future, not the present. Look ahead, not to the side. Observe trends. Watch for changes. Look where everyone else is going, and realize that if they are all heading there, it’s likely to be pretty crowded.
- Know why you want to work. What are you wanting out of your career? Are you working strictly for an income? Are you concerned about the working environment, how mobile you can be in the job, opportunities for advancement, job satisfaction, the people you will work with, the benefits that may accompany the income? There are many possible factors that might be related to why you want to work and the type of work you want to do. Include these in your career plans and decisions.
- Regard your career as a path of lifelong learning and development. Keep on top of developments in your field. Pursue new training if you are able/interested. Lifelong learning is a valuable concept, and many people will have four or more different careers in their lifetime.
- Keep your options open. Make sure you don’t slam the door on yourself by making poor course or training selections.
- Look beyond the most obvious career options. Some of the less known careers can be the more interesting ones. Furthermore, far fewer people may be preparing for them, which may help when hiring time comes along.
- Look beyond your own front door to see what’s going on. Look at what’s going on in the country and around the world.
- Don’t be your own worst enemy. Don’t get down on yourself. Get off your back. You control the machinery in there, and you can run like a Porsche or a jalopy. Attitude means so much. Be your own biggest booster.
- Know your strengths and work on them. Recognize the talents that you have, and then build on and develop them.



Network Problems? Or Opportunities?

How effective is your network already? If you had to identify ten people in your network to call upon for career advice, who would they be?

- Network. Make contacts. Keep in touch with those contacts. Use your contacts to keep aware of developments, changes, possible problems, opportunities, and so on.
- Learn how to cope with stress. Identify what puts pressure on you. Do what you can to minimize those things. Deflect the pressures. Learn how to relax. Avoid burn out.

SOME TIPS ON FINDING A JOB

There are many different approaches to looking for a job, and we encourage you to read up on some of the different methods. The following represent a number of general tips for your consideration.



- Recognize that finding a job is hard work. Develop a plan and a schedule for yourself in terms of what you are going to do on a day-by-day or week-by-week basis to find a job.
- Make contacts. Make as many contacts as you can with people who work in the type of business in which you are seeking employment.
- Don't rely on a résumé (see the section on résumés). A résumé should be a partner in your job search, it can't do it all for you.
- Don't count on seeing ads for employment in the newspaper. The majority of jobs are probably never advertised.
- Don't waste time on gimmicky approaches. Be direct, truthful, and businesslike.
- Set non-employment goals for yourself. A job search should not be singularly focused on getting a job. Set targets for number of contacts, number of interviews, and other related tasks.
- Recognize that finding a job takes time. Don't wait until April or May to find a summer job. Start in January.
- Contact local, provincial, and federal government placement centres to explore the programs that focus on youth.
- Watch the local papers for announcements regarding the activities, plans, and growth of local businesses and industries. Some developments may mean that a business will be looking for workers.

- Maintain a good appearance. This does not mean that you can't be yourself. However, you may have to face certain realities in the workplace. Some styles popular among youth may not be as popular among potential employers. Just as you have the right to be yourself, they have the right to hire those they feel will be best for the job. You may be forced to decide on the degree to which certain styles are important to you versus the prospect of getting a job. This is often a difficult decision, especially for youth who are very much involved in trends, fashion fads, and so on. As much as you may be attempting to convey a message about yourself through style, businesses have their own priorities, and dealing with some of the more unusual fads and trends of youth are often not one of them. Once again, it is up to you.
- Be confident in yourself. People will be hesitant to hire someone who doesn't convey the message that he/she is able to do, and right for, the job.
- Be persistent and dedicated to the task of finding a job.



Personal Job Search Strategy

Assume that you are about to begin a search for a job for next summer. Make a list of the steps/actions you could take that would help you find a job. Note such things as who you would approach, what offices you would visit, what businesses you would contact, whose advice you would seek, for what information you would write, and so forth.

- If you are turned down for a possible job, try to learn from the experience. Ask interviewers for a review of how you did and suggestions for how you could improve your performance in a job interview or your résumé.
- Consider doing volunteer work to gain experience.
- Don't pressure yourself to "know" what it is that you want to do. Give yourself the chance to fully explore various options and alternatives. Avoid pressure to make some decision at an early age about what you are going to do for the rest of your life.
- Be organized. Keep clear and thorough notes and records. Keep track of your contacts. Keep files on companies in which you are interested. Collect articles providing advice on résumés and job search techniques.

TIPS ON PREPARING A RÉSUMÉ

A résumé is the term used to refer to a written summary of your work and education experience as well as other abilities you have that make you a candidate for a particular job. It is your "ad," if you like, illustrating your strengths and abilities.

Most young Canadians have had little experience in preparing résumés, yet

they are an important partner for you in your job search. There is no standard format, and you should investigate different approaches to develop the résumé that best suits you and the job for which you are applying.

It is important to note that you should never send your résumé out alone. You should always include a covering letter. The covering letter should be specific to the job for which you are applying and should introduce you, state why you are interested in the position, and why you think you are particularly suited for it. It should be no longer than a page or a page and a half. Therefore, conserve words, be clear, be concise. Then let your résumé take over.

Again, your résumé should not be long. It should be anywhere from one to three pages. Once again, it is important to be clear, concise, and to the point. No potential employer will want to read a long résumé or a résumé full of poor grammar and spelling or lacking organization. Potential employers will likely receive many applications and résumés. Yours should stand out if it is well-written, well-organized, brief, and to the point. Following are some general tips for preparing a résumé.



- Your objective with your résumé should be to sell yourself. It should represent you well, covering all of your strengths, skills, accomplishments, and abilities. You want it to show, as best it can, how you stand out from other applicants.
- Don't trivialize your accomplishments. Some things that may seem small to you may be a sign to a potential employer of particular skills and abilities. For example, babysitting may seem like a trivial thing to note. However, considerable babysitting experience shows responsibility. It also shows that you took the initiative to get out and work and earn some income. The responsibility of looking after a child is far from trivial and can reflect the confidence that other adults have had in your abilities.
- Be proud of things you have done. Think of what they may imply about you and your abilities.
- Avoid gimmicks. They usually do not impress. Furthermore, it is the content, rather than the style or format, that will make your résumé stand out. Therefore, don't go to a great deal of effort and expense to have your résumé prepared in some fancy fashion.
- Although content is more important than format, format is important too. Prepare your résumé neatly on good quality paper if submitting a hard copy.
- Do not include a long list of personal statistics such as height and weight. This is excess information. Simply indicate your name, address, contact numbers, and any abilities you have in speaking various languages.

- Keep in mind that your résumé should answer the following questions when a potential employer reads it: Why should I pick you? Why are you right for this job? Why are you better than the other applicants?
- When you can, present your résumé in person rather than by mail or e-mail. It puts a face to the paper and may provide you with an early opportunity to make a positive impression.
- Quantify your accomplishments where possible. How many children did you sit for or supervise? For how long? How many children were you responsible for at camp? How many papers did you deliver? When the numbers help to convey the scale of your activity or responsibility, use them.
- Use action words to describe your responsibilities and accomplishments, words such as: organized, created, demonstrated, supervised, managed, co-ordinated, developed. These words imply particular abilities and skills. Furthermore, even if the activity that you co-ordinated is unrelated to the job for which you are applying, the fact that you have served as a co-ordinator could be very relevant.
- Keep the structure of your résumé as flexible as possible so that you can easily change it. You may recall something you want to add, or you may want to tailor it for a specific job application.



Writing a Résumé and Covering Letter

Assume that you are applying for a job as a camp counsellor at Camp Buckhorn. The Camp specializes in offering programs for children with discipline problems. Write a covering letter outlining why you are interested in this job and why you think you are suited for it. Then develop a résumé to accompany your letter. If an employment counsellor is available locally, ask for a review of your letter and résumé. If no employment counsellor is available, a teacher or a family member should be able to offer a knowledgeable review.

- Offer references upon request, do not include them on your résumé. Do not put a great deal of reliance on letters of reference. In fact, it is often advisable not to bother including them unless, for some reason, you believe that they will have an impact. Most employers feel that it is the rare person who will not be able to find someone who will say nice things about him or her. Besides, it is often difficult for employers to know if the letters are from friends.

Suppose now that you have organized your job search, you have prepared an effective résumé, you have developed a network of contacts, and you have managed to reach the stage of being asked in for an interview. The following are some tips related to job interviews.

TIPS ON JOB INTERVIEWS

The interview is usually the last step in the job search process. Everything up to that point — contacts, résumé, and so on — has been designed to give you a chance to meet with the employer and show why you should be hired. Virtually no job will be attained without going through the interview process. It is a fearful experience for some, an enjoyable experience for others. If it is a fearful experience for you, you have got to change that. When you are fearful or overly nervous, you will seldom put your best side forward. The most important piece of advice regarding interviews is to be yourself.

Many young Canadians, in their early interviews, try to give the interviewer the information they believe the interviewer wants to hear. Nothing could be worse. You rack your brain and fumble around trying to find the right answer. You look unsure of yourself, you look weak, and, most important, you will never really know what the interviewer wants to hear. The interviewer's objective is to find out about the real you; trying to second-guess the interviewer may work against you.

If you go into an interview trying to give the “right” answers, you will almost always enter in a nervous state, lacking confidence, aware of the uncertainty you face. If you go in knowing who you are and what you believe in, then you can feel confident that you will always give the best response you can based on what you truly believe.

Therefore, be confident

about who you are and go into an interview prepared to be yourself and answer questions on the basis of what you honestly believe. That's a key recommendation. Now here are some others.

- Dress appropriately. You are out to make an impression. Don't work against yourself by giving the impression that you don't care or that you don't respect the people who are interviewing you.
- “Mind your manners.” Once again, you are selling yourself.
- Be prepared for different interview styles. You have to realize that it is not easy to hire good people. Employers will use a variety of methods to try to ensure that they hire the best person for the job. Hiring is an important responsibility for any employer.

Some interviewers use the “good cop, bad cop” technique. This is an interview by two people, one of whom appears to be friendly and supportive of things that you say while the other will tend to disagree with you and be somewhat unfriendly. The aim of this may be to see how you cope in both

situations and how you react to criticism. Sometimes you will be interviewed by a team of people. Each member of the team will have something in particular that he or she is looking for. A team interview means that you will face a variety of approaches and objectives all in the same interview.

And there are other interview techniques. Be prepared for a variety of approaches. This is another reason to be yourself — you never know the type of situation that you may face.

- Know your rights. There are certain questions that you cannot be asked and certain things that employers cannot do in screening potential employees. Refer to government booklets and brochures that outline your personal rights in interviews and job search situations.
- Go to as many interview situations as you can to become familiar with the processes/styles and to become more confident. Each interview can be a learning experience.
- If you are turned down after an interview, try to follow up. If the interviewer will take the time, ask for suggestions about how you could improve your interview skills, ask if you might be considered again in the future, and so on. As much as possible, learn from each experience.
- Role play in advance, that is, rehearse interviews with someone. Ask a parent, teacher, counsellor, or friend to ask you questions so you can practise your responses.
- Be enthusiastic. Appear as if you want the job.
- Don't be long-winded. Keep your answers informative, concise, and to the point. Be sure to answer the question asked. Try to avoid yes and no answers. The interviewer is trying to find out about you and will become frustrated by yes and no responses.

Don't be afraid to ask your own questions. If you have particular questions about the job, ask them. This shows you are interested and have put some thought into the job. At the same time, don't be overly anxious about asking questions about raises, holidays, and so forth. These are important questions, but you will have a chance to ask them once you have been offered a position. Most employers would consider it appropriate for you to ask about the starting wage/salary if you don't already know it.

- Don't be afraid to have, or take, notes but not to the point of distraction.
- Give yourself time to prepare, time to think, time to organize yourself. Avoid running from some activity right to an interview.

- Don't oversell yourself. Be forthright and honest. Put your best foot forward, but avoid the "hard sell" of you.
- Maintain your self-control at all times. Don't argue. Keep cool and keep your composure should any disagreement arise.
- Enter an interview assuming you will receive equal treatment with others. Don't assume that the employer will not be fair. If he/she isn't, it will probably soon become apparent. At the outset, give the employer the benefit of the doubt, which will make you feel more confident, too.



Thanks for Coming in!

Suppose you have been successful in getting an interview for the job at Camp Buckhorn. Imagine how you would answer the following questions.

- ▶ Why do you think that you would be able to work effectively with these children?
- ▶ What do you think are your greatest strengths?
- ▶ Do you foresee any situations in which you would have problems?
- ▶ What experience have you had with children?
- ▶ If you are given the opportunity to develop some programs for these children, give me an example of something you might do.
- ▶ What would you do if a child refused to do what you told him/her?
- ▶ Do you feel your education has prepared you in any way for this job?
- ▶ What would you see as your major responsibilities in this position?
- ▶ Do you take criticism well?
- ▶ In which situations are you "your own best friend"? In which are you "your own worst enemy"?

That concludes our tips on career planning, résumés, job search, and interviews. These have assumed that your goal is to get a job working for someone else. But maybe you are interested in creating your own job. That is, maybe you are interested in becoming an entrepreneur. Let's turn our attention to the area of entrepreneurship.