



Factors to consider when deciding on a career

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As I offer career counselling to anyone from high school right up to whatever age you are (yes, you are never too old to consider your career direction or even to change it), I generally recommend that you consult a career counsellor if you are thinking of changing your career or because you are finishing off your education and need to find a career direction for yourself. If for some reason it is not possible for you to see a career counsellor, then these are some of the aspects you want to take into account when deciding what career is right for you.

1. Your **strengths**. Generally speaking, the right career for you will be one where you can play to your strengths. There are different ways to learn what your strengths are. Firstly, you may know what these are from feedback from the environment and from other people. Secondly, you can go and ask people who know you well what they think you are good at. Thirdly, there are online assessments that you can take to determine the areas you are talented in. In considering your strengths and talents also consider what people generally come to you for advice on. Are you the “go to” person when people need help on some issue? You want to be in a career where you can use your strengths. You certainly don’t want a career that requires you to be good in areas you are weak in.
2. Your **personality** will also influence what the right career choice is. Careers are practiced in different settings, and for a particular career the work environment may not suit your personality type. You may already have a good idea of your personality. If you have worked or studied, you may have had to complete personality assessments. If you still have the reports then dig them out. If they are more than one year old, I would definitely recommend you do a new personality assessment. Personality doesn’t always change a lot, but it can. Look for online personality assessments which will score the test for you and give you your results. Regarding personality you want to consider:
 - a. Am I outgoing or introverted? If you are introverted for example, then a career where you are constantly engaged with people every minute of the day could be exhausting for you.
 - b. Do I have good people skills or not? If you have very good people skills, then consider a role where you will work with people. This includes careers where you need empathy, good communication skills, persuasion, and mediation skills.
 - c. Am I open and friendly and easy to get along with?
 - d. Am I flexible and spontaneous?
 - e. Do I need variety in my daily tasks?

- f. Am I a big picture thinker or only focused on detail, or do I take both into account?
 - g. Am I structured and organised?
3. What are my **interests**? Some of the questionnaires used in career counselling are based on psychological theories which consider six areas – realistic (which can include physical work), conventional careers (such as accounting, administration), scientific based careers, enterprising (typically sales and business owner/business development), artistic, and social. Think about which of these areas you are most interested in. Often people fit into more than one category and often careers will span more than one interest group.
 4. What matters to me – which is another way of saying what are my **values**? Ideally you want to pick a career that will allow your values to be fulfilled. If ethics are very important to you, then don't pick a career where honesty is not important.
 5. Am I **academic** or do I do better with a more **practical** career. This is also relevant when it comes to considering what you want to study. If you hated academics at school, you probably don't want to spend years studying.
 6. What **lifestyle** do I want? If you want a comfortable lifestyle and financial freedom (which lots of people tell me they do), then you need to consider the earnings possible in the career. You also want to consider work-life balance and the importance of it at various stages of your life.
 7. From a **geographical perspective**, where do I want to work? Do I want to be able to work remotely and from anywhere in the world? Do I want to work in different countries?
 8. What is the **demand in the job market** for such positions. And linked to this is how important is job security to me? You can research the demand for various jobs, as well as the projected demand into the future for jobs you may be interested in.
 9. And finally, if **advancement or professional development** is important to you, then look at careers that offer one or the other or both.

When I do career counselling for individuals, we look at all these factors and more. Making a decision about the career you want to be in is important, especially if you need to invest time and money in training, such as at university. So, you want to be reasonably clear that you have the right career for yourself in mind. Generally, when advising clients, I suggest as a first degree doing something more general if you are not certain of the career you want to follow. Eighteen years is quite young to make such an important decision. Choosing your career is also a challenging exercise because jobs change. And with the technology changes and advent of AI, the job market, and the availability of existing and new jobs is ever changing. You need to familiarise yourself with what careers exist as well as ones that could exist in the near future. If there are careers which could soon become obsolete you also want to know what these are.

And then my final word of advice, when you are selecting a career, is to find out more about that career from people who are working in it. Job shadow if you can. I have even had clients job shadow anaesthesiologists and homeopaths. Because a lot of schools have days for job shadowing, often people are more than happy to have you observe them at work. Talk to people doing those jobs and find out what a week on the job is like. Find out what they like and dislike about it. Find out how they got into the job. Ask them if they would do that job again if they were starting out on their career journey. Often jobs are not what we think they are. We might pick a career because of earning potential or status conferred, but actually hate the work. So, spend some time looking at how that job is done in the real world, and only then, make your final decision.