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Step 1

Getting started

Education is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today.

Malcolm X (1926–65)

This workbook has been prepared to give help, support, guidance and focus on the many and varied ways of entering the world of 'gainful employment'.

The workbook is not designed to make career choices for you. This is a highly personal decision and one that could be made in conjunction with one or more of the career advisory facilities that are available to you – see Step 3, 'Searching for Opportunities'. The timing of career choice is also up to you. Some organizations would suggest that taking advice before entering college or university will help you select the right establishment to best match your career aspirations. The workbook is intended to help with the process of carrying out the necessary research and to assist you in preparing yourself for the job selection process.

There is no instant formula for creating a successful career. So how do you start? Like most things in life there is no substitute for building on a solid foundation, and to help you focus your thoughts, the following principles will help you to establish your base line:

- Know what you want, and have a clear idea of your goals.
- Keep your senses active and be aware of your progress at all times.
- Finally, be prepared to adjust . . . until you get what you want.

You may change your mind, or adjust your goals. This should not be seen as failure or indecision, but rather as the product of an experience that has been learnt.



It is not a mistake to turn back if you are on the wrong road.

Most of these principles are embedded in techniques for positive thinking and self-empowerment through the use of language and behavioural changes. One such technique is neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), which

provides individuals with the 'know-how' to influence their own worlds. Dreams and reality can be very different, but when they combine, the result could turn 'just a job' into a rewarding and satisfying career. Further information is readily available on the internet – search for NLP or Richard Bandler (co-developer of NLP).

So do you know what you want to do?

Some of you will already have made your career choice. That's great. However, for anyone who is not totally convinced we suggest that now is a really good time to do a check on your thoughts, reasons and motivations.



If you don't know where you are going, how can anyone else know? And that really is an interviewer's 'turn-off'.

If you are uncertain, then seek advice from trained careers counsellors at your school, college, university, etc., or do your own research into career opportunities that appeal to you.

Uncertainty and/or lack of enthusiasm will obviously have an impact on your motivation in the job search, and will ultimately show up to an experienced interviewer. *You* need to decide what *you* want – because without total commitment you will fail to realize your goals. You cannot influence potential employers if you are unclear in your thoughts of what you want to achieve.

So check your choice by asking yourself 'Do I really want to do it? Are my reasons for wanting this career path totally valid – or are they a whim (a dream without reality)?' The decision is yours. If *you* feel the decision is right, then go for it.

Procrastination is the thief of time.

Edward Young (1683–1765)

Where do I start?

A useful approach is to treat your job search as if it were a marketing campaign or research project. Campaigns of this type will normally be based on well developed plans covering market research, identification of customers, product design, promotion and sales effort.

Translated in terms of your job search:

- **market research:** identifies career opportunities in your chosen field;
- **customers:** are potential employers you may want to approach;
- **product:** is 'you' and the skills which have been developed that may satisfy the needs of your customers (potential employers);
- **promotion:** is the style and content of your sales material (that is your letters, CVs, telephone manner, etc.);
- **sales effort:** is the energy that you put into the whole process of getting the job.

Remember that you are trying to sell yourself by promoting your skills, enthusiasm and effort to an employer. The employers are looking to purchase your abilities in order to add value to their business or organization.

Market research

There are many sources of information to access.

- trade associations;
- websites;
- employment agencies;
- job centres;
- libraries;
- targeted companies;
- employer 'road show' visits;
- professional institutions;
- educational careers offices;
- career advisory services;
- trade magazines and periodicals;
- newspapers – national and local;
- career fairs;
- your network of contacts.

The internet offers the most accessible and immediate response. Sensible use of search engines will produce a wide range of priceless company information. This data can also help you identify companies you may wish to work for, and if so will provide valuable information when you are applying for employment.

Your network of contacts is an area of research that often has surprising untapped potential. A network is simply a list of all the people you know well enough to ask them for advice on where to pursue your ambitions and who you might approach in your job search. Your network may at first seem very limited, but once you begin to list your current and past contacts you will be amazed by the number of people that may offer help.



Don't forget that when you ask your network contacts for help, you should ensure that you give them feedback on your progress and success.

Politeness and courtesy cost you nothing and will enable you to visit the network again.

This isn't a one-off exercise, and your network will continue to grow with you. You in turn will be on someone else's network, and in the future you also will be called upon to assist others. Guard your network well and treat it with respect – people will respond positively to genuine approaches for help and guidance, but be careful not to take liberties.

Your market research will give you an abundance of information. All information is valuable and you need to be able to retrieve it quickly at any stage during your campaign. Keep good records. A good record system enables you to:

- rank the opportunities in order of preference;
- keep track of all the leads you are pursuing;
- update your network of contacts; and
- avoid the risk of embarrassment (and perceived incompetence) as a result of going to the same contact/organization twice asking the same questions.

We have included sample forms in Step 3 (see Figures 6 and 7) to help you in devising a simple tracking system. Copies of the forms to photocopy are provided in Appendix A.

Customers

You already have a reasonable idea of the career path you want to follow. Your research will have identified potential employers and now you should collect as much data as you can on each company/organization.

What information is needed? Basically, at this stage, anything that gives you a clear idea of where the business/organization has come from, where it is going, how successful it is and what its policies and aims are. Sources of specific information include:

- the website of the company/organization;
- local newspaper business pages for comments (most also have websites);
- recruitment advertising (developing companies/organizations need people);

- published marketing material, financial information, annual reports and brochures (ring the company/organization and ask what is available);
- libraries – research using trade directories, etc.

The concepts are simple but if you assess the data available in these sources you should be able to get a clear impression of each business/organization and whether it can offer the environment in which you would like to start/develop your working career.

The product, promotion and sales effort

A good deal of the remainder of this workbook is devoted to helping you prepare yourself for entry into the 'world of employment'. Our aim is to provide you with a 'tool kit' designed to give you the best chance of success in the job market.

The tool kit embraces 'product, promotion and sales effort' and should, for example, help you in the transition from the academic environment into the commercial world, with its completely new set of disciplines, standards of behaviour, work ethics and attitudes, which you will need to handle – if you want to succeed. The kit helps you to develop your personal promotional material (application letters and Curriculum Vitae) and your presentation at interview to achieve maximum positive impact.

All good things come to those who wait . . . but only what's left behind by those who seize their opportunities.

Abraham Lincoln (1809–65)

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