

New York City Bar Association

Career Fulfillment – Finding Work You Love

By Irina Gomelskaya¹

How many people do you know who often complain about feeling bored, over-stressed, not valued and appreciated, under-paid or simply not fulfilled at their current job, and yet they stay there for years? Are you one of them, perhaps? A new survey conducted by Harris Interactive found that 31% of employees are not satisfied at their current jobs and 74% of workers would consider leaving if approached with another offer (for attorneys, these percentages are likely to be even higher).

Despite these statistics, most people fail to take a proactive approach to their careers and prefer misery to change, especially in this economy. We are often caught in our survival needs and dealing with the stress of a situation, rather than planning long-term. We are focused on “fixing” the problem as soon as possible and moving on.

The process of exploring what we really want, what we are passionate about, and what drives us seems a bit vague, impractical, and even selfish. And yet, we know deep inside that there must be something more than the daily routine, merely working for a paycheck, accepting another job that feels familiar and safe, but not rewarding.

What is the alternative? Well, the good news is that it is definitely possible to find a fulfilling career. And it begins with the process of self-evaluation: determining what you really want and then going after it. Sounds simple? Not at all! Most people get stuck because they cannot answer with clarity and conviction what they really want to do and also because they rush to “fit” themselves into available job slots before they engage in the process of self-exploration. Instead, I encourage you to look at your life and your career as a giant puzzle. First, you need to collect all pieces of the puzzle and arrange them to create the whole picture – this is when you will arrive at your life’s work. Follow these seven steps to help you clarify your idea career:

Self-Exploration: The first and most important step is to undertake a thorough self-exploration. You can begin this process by asking yourself what elements you want in

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your ideal career. These elements include the skills that you have and would like to utilize in your next job, your unique gifts and talents, your preferred work environment and the types of people you work best with, your personality and natural qualities and other factors, such as your desired salary, benefits, and work schedule. Try to be as specific as possible. Instead of saying that you want to “help people,” think about how exactly you want to help, what population you want to serve (age group, gender, area of need), and what skills you can contribute to make a difference in other people’s lives.

Researching Career Options: After you develop a clear vision of who you are and what you want, you are ready to consider a few career options (perhaps one to five) that you may need to explore further. Gather information about those career options by reading books and professional journals, doing Internet research, going to professional events and meetings and just talking to people who work in those fields. An informational interview is often the best way to determine whether a certain career path may be a good fit for you.

Strategic Plan: After researching your career options, you are ready to further clarify your career goals and develop a step-by-step strategy on how to achieve them. Be sure to set realistic goals for yourself that are specific and time-limited. Then, break down those objectives into smaller, more manageable and concrete steps. And remember that, while some people may prefer to take immediate action and jump into their new life right when they determine what their “dream job” is, for most people, a dream job may be in their long-term plan and they will need to take a few intermediate steps (jobs or additional training) to get there.

Overcoming Blocks and Fears: It is important to recognize that a career transition is not an easy process. It takes courage to even recognize that what you are doing now is not what you want to do, what you were meant to do, what gives you satisfaction. It takes even more courage to do something about it. Fear of failure, fear of the unknown, self-doubt, self-sabotaging thoughts and behavior often creep up. In addition, there may be valid concerns one has to address, including lack of necessary business skills to make the desired career change, money issues, time issues, family issues. Whatever they are, don’t deny or push aside those feelings and thoughts. Deal with them, address them, have compassion for them. Overcoming these blocks and fears will be critical to your career success, so be sure to seek professional help, if necessary.

Master the Skills: If you are planning to start a business, you need to learn how to be a successful entrepreneur, which obviously includes developing a strong business and marketing plan, finding ways to reach your ideal customer, and running a viable business. If you are looking for a new job, you will need to make sure that you have the skills required for that new job and that you also have the skills to find that job. Since most jobs are not advertised directly and are found through networking, learning how to effectively play the job game is the key to getting a job. So, identify what new skills you

need to develop or gain and focus on mastering those skills.

Tailor-Make a Career: Think outside the box. If you cannot find a job that you are passionate about, create a job for yourself. Do you have a unique skill that can be highly desired and marketable? Have you explored all career alternatives? Can you create a new role for yourself at your current job? Get your foot in the door through volunteering? Do you need one job that encompasses all you want to do and to be, or do you prefer several part-time jobs that allow you to make a living while doing a few things you enjoy, pursuing a few career directions, instead of being forced to choose only one? This is the age of an entrepreneur, so be creative and resourceful about your career.

Continue the Process: Setting personal and career goals and achieving results is a continuing process. You may find the need to redefine what truly matters to you as you journey through life. You may find that you want to master new professional skills to advance in your career. You may simply want a change of pace, a career detour, for family, personal or other reasons. And even if things are going great on all fronts for you, it is still good to ask yourself where you see yourself professionally five years from now, how you want to grow, what you want to achieve. So take charge of your career this year - I wish every one of you continued success and fulfillment in your professional careers and your personal lives.

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