

One of the most common questions I hear from job seekers and career changers is how to figure out what they want to do next. Let's face it, this kind of insight doesn't grow on trees. Sooner or later, most of us need a little help to clarify our job options and redirect our long-term career plans.

Before considering how to figure out what you want in a job, let's first delineate what you need to know about a job in order to evaluate it as a potential match. You need to know what **level of role** it is (professional, management, executive, and so on), the **scope of the position** (its key functions and responsibilities), the **industry(ies)** in which it can be found, and the **types of companies** that hire people to do that work. This is the level of clarity needed to apply for jobs, write resumes, and perform effectively interviews and is part of the process of [defining a realistic job search strategy](#).

If you have deeper questions about what kind of work, you should be doing or think you may need to change careers altogether, then you will find it helpful to dig deeper. For this deeper career excavation, you will need to identify your personal **meaning** and **pleasure** indicators as well as your strongest **skills**.

Of these three, your skills are usually the easiest to identify because they are the most obvious. Most of us can fairly quickly identify at least some of the things we're good at doing. If you need more help discovering your most important skills, you may want to consider completing a skills identification exercise.

Career pleasures, or likes, are easy to identify for those occupations and fields you're aware of but next to impossible to clarify if your awareness of career fields is limited – which is exactly why career assessments can be helpful. A career coach can be a great ally in this process, too, since an experienced one can shortcut your research and exploration dramatically by showing you possible life directions based on the patterns of your likes and dislikes.

Career meaning is the toughest of these three to identify on your own, though values assessments can point the way. Reflecting on the career choices you've made to date can streamline your exploration and aid you in focusing on the career options most likely to be of value to you.

The intersection of these three elements is the classic career satisfaction goal because ultimately a great career choice is one that creates meaning for you, gives you deep pleasure, *and* takes advantage of your strongest skills.

So, how can you figure out what you're looking for career-wise? There are six primary pathways to career clarity. Which ones are best suited to your personality, timeline, and budget?

PATHWAY	DESCRIPTION	TIMEFRAME	INVESTMENT
Books & Internet Resources	Richard Bolles' classic <i>What Color Is Your Parachute</i> is a how to guide for figuring out what you want to do with your work life. Other great options include <i>Do What You Are</i> , <i>Strengthsfinder 2.0</i> , and <i>The Pathfinder</i> . There is a wealth of free information about careers available on the Internet as well.	Do-it-yourself career exploration takes longer than working with a professional. This pathway could take 1 to several years.	Ranges from free to \$25.
Journaling	Figuring out what you want in a job requires self-reflection. As a self-reflective activity journaling can be a powerful ally. Introduction to Journaling shows participants how to leverage the power of introspection and introduces topics such as values clarification and career journaling.	Journaling is another DIY approach, but when pursued with a firm structure it place is likely to require less time overall, though it still may require 1 to several years.	Ranges from free to \$99.
Career Assessment	There are a wide array of options available, from instant online tools and quick checklists to validated and researched personality and career assessments such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, DISC, Career Key, and the Strong Interest Inventory.	Varies from instant feedback to custom reports available in 1-2 weeks. Generally the longer the turnaround time for results the more in depth those results will be. While results may be available rapidly, figuring out how to use them usually takes longer.	Ranges from free to \$500+.
Unpaid Work	Options such as internships, job shadowing, and volunteer work all allow you to sample occupations and careers before committing to them on a semi-	To collect skills and experience via unpaid work generally requires a	Free

	permanent basis. Each also offers some exposure to and experience with key skills.	minimum of several months to yield insight and connections.	
Paid Work	While not always advisable, it is possible to try occupations on for size AND get paid to do so. The downside is that if your choices are random this will produce a great deal of chaos in your work history and will limit your ability to land great jobs later on. When leveraged as part of an overall career plan, though, this option can yield great insight for kinesthetic learners.	As with unpaid work, this pathway generally requires months to years yield the needed insight and experience.	Free
Career Coaching	1:1 and group coaching options provide structure and guidance for career exploration. These programs vary widely in their content, so look for someone with strong credentials and experience.	Group options are generally time-limited and last from weeks to months while 1:1 coaching is ongoing and may stretch from several months to a year or more.	Ranges from hundreds of dollars for a short-term group program to thousands of dollars for long-term 1:1 coaching.

Although you can leverage full-time work as a means to figuring out your overall career trajectory, this option is really the costliest of the six pathways. I've seen many professionals who kept trying different career options by landing different jobs in different industries over a period of several years. The problem is that this many job changes creates chaos in the resume and makes landing a great job much harder to do.

That is why, if your budget allows, working with a career coach will likely yield greater insight and momentum than pursuing career exploration on your own. Many coaches offer group programs that give you a structured program, accountability, and direction at a fraction of the cost of working with a coach 1:1.

Read more at <http://www.careerealism.com/want-job-figure-out/#rf3XLxrfOYYH7Xcc.99>