

Self-Assessment

The first step in making an employment action plan is to determine what you want to do. Once you know that, you can set a goal, establish the specific objectives to reach that goal, and figure out the details for carrying out the objectives.

Self-assessment – determining personal attributes, interests, values, and skills – can be difficult for some people. The key is to think about what gives you pleasure, what you would like to do as your life's work, and how you would like to be perceived. Then put those ideas down on paper.

Personal Attributes. Your personal attributes are those things that make you a unique individual. To understand their personal attributes, many people find it helpful to take the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator test (MBTI) to establish their individual preference styles. The theory behind this test is that each of us is born with certain preferences based on our personality. Knowing your MBTI type helps you to understand why you prefer certain working conditions or why you are skilled at certain tasks. For more information, see *Type Talk* and *Type Talk at Work*, both written by Otto Kroeger and Janet M. Thuesen. See Chapter 13, Resources and Bibliography, for the full citations for this and any other books mentioned in the text.

Personal Interests. Simply put, interests are those things that you find interesting: the things you like to do, to think about, to explore, to wonder about. They may also be areas in which you have a stake. They can be singular or wide-ranging, and can change depending upon your age, current life style, or circumstances. Interests certainly have a place in career planning – the greatest businesses, careers, and volunteer ventures grow out of work that incorporates a strong interest.

Personal Values. Your values can be defined as those things that are important to you. Values are not always static; they may shift with maturity, circumstances, and experience. Looking at them periodically is important because values are likely to affect consciously or unconsciously your attitudes and decisions about career choices, management planning, and personal and professional relationships. By clarifying your values, you are more likely to choose paths and objectives that are in harmony with your basic interests, concerns, and even passions. Your satisfaction, productivity,

and self-esteem may be enhanced to the degree to which your values fit in with your work and other activities.

Examples of Interests

AIDS prevention	Needlework
Antiques	News reporting
Building furniture	Pets
College admissions	Parties
Computer games	Politics
Conflict resolution	Pottery
Culture and history	Poverty
Drawing	Protocol
Drug rehabilitation	Public speaking
Elder care	Real estate
Environment	Religion
Fiction writing	Ozone layer
Gardening	Sports
Health care	Theater
Horses	Travel
Intercultural diversity	Troubled teens
Music	Young children

Examples of Values

Achievement	Power and authority
Advancement	Precision
Appreciation of beauty	Problem-solving
Approval	Public contact
Competition	Recognition
Creativity	Risk-taking
Demonstration of competence	Security
Excitement	Self-respect
Fast pace	Stability
Friendliness	Status
Helpfulness	Team player
Independence	Tranquillity
Influence	Variety
Moral fulfillment	Wealth
Physical challenge	

After assessing your personal attributes, values, and interests, you should look at your skills. After reading below about each kind of skill, write down all those that apply to you. The list of action verbs at the end of Chapter 9, **Applications and Resumes**, also can help you determine your skills.

Skills Analysis

Skills can be divided into three types: soft skills, hard or "work content" skills, and personal skills. Soft skills (also called functional or transferable skills) transfer from one career field to another and are used in many situations. Examples include writing, researching, maintaining records, telephone skills, organizing, budgeting, planning, public speaking, running a meeting. Some of these skills are learned outside of paid work—managing your home, running meetings, completing assignments.

Hard or "work-content" skills are those that are specific to particular job functions or professions. These skills are usually learned in school, in training, or on the job. They often require you to remember something in a particular order. Examples include speaking a foreign language, operating a calculator, using computer software, scoring an aptitude test, using a drill, interviewing and evaluating job candidates, proofreading technical works, writing a press release, giving an injection, using Japanese protocol when giving a dinner party, teaching a child to read, using a word processor.

The third skill type (personal skills) covers qualities or personal traits, character traits, or self-management skills. Examples include self-reliance, logic, adaptability, assertiveness, decisiveness, consideration, organization, open-mindedness, sociability, creativity, dynamism, frankness, thoroughness, poise, leadership, risk-taking ability, artistry, calmness, energy, imagination, patience, helpfulness, and strong-mindedness. Personal qualities are often acquired early in life as a result of relationships with our family, peers, teachers, and environment, but they can also be acquired later in life with determination, mentoring, or education. A common myth is that these skills are not relevant to the work world. On the contrary, many fields require these specific personality traits or strengths.

Transferable Skills

Howard Figler, author of a number of job-search books and articles, describes the best transferable skills.

- **Writing**—Putting sentences together that can be read and understood without a dictionary or grammatical interpreter.
- **Speaking**—Standing in front of a group and saying something intelligent and of interest without losing your composure.
- **Analytical Thinking**—Looking at a problem that has no obvious answers and developing possible solutions.
- **Researching**—Finding data or unearthing information that others need.
- **Valuing**—Sensing the effects that your work has upon others, and applying right-and-wrong, good-or-bad, do-or-don't to the possibilities.
- **Organizing**—Bringing order out of a chaos of bodies, resources, tasks, problems, information, or timetables.
- **Quantitative Reasoning**—Understanding mathematical concepts and statistical data and applying them in problem-solving.
- **Cultural Awareness**—Being sensitive to the cultural differences of other people, the history of their countries, and why they may not see things the same way you do.
- **Interpersonal**—Relating warmly, effectively, and consistently with a wide range of people.

Once you have a list of skills, values, and interests, you can brainstorm how to use them in a job or career. Be creative and search for unusual or unexplored possibilities. Using a grid like the one below may be helpful.

List your major skills on one side of the grid and your major interests on the other. Mark an X at every intersection where an interest can affect a skill or vice versa (e.g., writing skills with interest in child care issues).

	Interests					
Skills						

Looking at each skill-interest intersection, ask yourself how the two are connected and what you could do using both. If you can't think of possibilities with a given skill or interest, then bring in another skill or interest. Go back through previous employment, volunteer work, and hobbies, thinking about the elements of each activity, the contributions you made, and what you most enjoyed.

Part of the assessment process is also to define your ideal work environment, the one that best fits your work style, interests, and values. Work environment includes physical conditions, job conditions, compensation, and personnel conditions.

Physical Conditions

- length of commute
- indoor vs. outdoor work
- smoking vs. nonsmoking environment
- attractive office/building/location
- adequate parking/convenience to public transportation
- privacy vs. lack of privacy
- security/safety situation
- large vs. small organization

Job Conditions

- | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| workplace ambiance | glamour |
| flexible hours | chance to organize |
| opportunity for advancement | use of mental skills |
| variety of work | public contact |
| creativity | excitement |
| dress code | physical challenge |
| work alone vs. work with others | helping others |
| fast vs. moderate work pace | opportunity to improve world |
| overtime | tangible results |
| ability to make things | |

Compensation Conditions

good fringe benefits high salary
job security on-the-job training

Personnel Conditions

being the boss
recognition from others
opportunity to develop social relationships on job
competition
good morale
being treated with respect

Making an Employment Action Plan

Once you have looked at your personal attributes, values, interests, skills, and ideal work environment, you should have an idea of what you want to do. The next step is to set goals. Goals are the broad, long-range plans that you intend to attain. You must ask yourself, “Where am I now?” and “Where do I want to be in 1, 3, or 5 years?” After determining a goal or goals, you need to ask yourself, “How am I going to get there?” This involves setting specific objectives so you can measure your progress toward achieving your goal.

Then you should establish specific, short-term, action-oriented tasks or details for carrying out your objectives. Objectives and tasks must be attainable, measurable, and time-limited. This combination of goals, objectives, and tasks, with accompanying time limits, becomes your Employment Action Plan.

The time span of your action plan depends on what you hope to accomplish. If you plan to continue with the same work you are now doing, a 1-year plan may suit your needs. If you opt for a change of careers that could require extensive retraining, a 5-year plan may be more realistic. Regardless of the time frame, set deadlines and meet them!

Picking Up Skills

Once you have identified your goals and objectives, you may find that you need to learn new skills to build on your work experience. Howard Figler describes how to pick up some of the best transferable skills.

Budget Management—Find a budget, no matter how small, and take responsibility for it. Manage the dispersal of funds, control the budget, learn what fiscal control is all about.

Supervision—Take responsibility for the work of others in any situation in which there is some accountability. Expose yourself to the difficulty of giving orders, delegating tasks, taking criticism, and understanding another person's viewpoint.

Public Relations—Accept a role in which you must meet or relate to the public. Greet visitors, answer telephone complaints, give talks to community groups, sell ads to business people, explain programs to prospective clients, or even collect taxes.

Coping with Deadline Pressure—Search for opportunities to demonstrate that you can produce good work under external deadlines. Prove that you can function on someone else's schedule, even when the time frame is notably hurried.

Negotiating/Arbitrating—Cultivate the art of dealing openly and effectively with people in ambiguous situations. Learn to bring warring factions together, resolve differences between groups or individuals, and make demands on behalf of one constituency to those in positions of power.

Public Speaking—Take a leadership role in any organization so that you must speak publicly, prepare remarks, get across ideas, and even motivate people. Good public speaking must be practiced so you can discover your own personal style.

Writing—Practice putting pen to paper. Write letters to the editors of every publication you read routinely. Write a newsletter for a club or organization to which you belong.

Organizing/Managing/Coordinating—Take charge of any event in which you have the responsibility for bringing together people, resources, and events. The headaches of organizing events or managing projects can teach you how to delegate tasks to others.

Interviewing—Learn how to acquire information from others by questioning them directly. Interview your neighbors, friends, and other easily available people. Practice helping a person feel comfortable in your presence, even though you are asking difficult or even touchy questions. See below for more information on informational interviews.

Teaching and/or Instructing—You should become familiar and comfortable with passing information and understanding to others. Any position of leadership or responsibility gives you many chances to teach ideas and methods to others.

Work-content skills can be acquired in a variety of ways that are detailed in later chapters.

- Temporary or part-time jobs. See Chapter 4, **Job-Search Techniques**.
- College coursework (credit or noncredit). See Chapter 12, **Adult Education**.

- Volunteer work. See Chapter 11, **Volunteer Options**.
- Avocations and hobbies. See Chapter 8, **Portable Careers and Skills**.
- Self-employment. See Chapter 8, **Portable Careers and Skills**.
- Entry-level jobs in an organization (these offer a form of on-the-job training and enable you to learn of higher level jobs before they are advertised).
- Internships or apprenticeships – either academic programs or self-initiated.

Informational Interviews

One way to explore different careers is to do informational interviews—talking to people in the fields you are interested in. Informational interviews are not job interviews (discussed in detail in Chapter 10, **Interviews and Job Offers**) because you are not applying for a job at this point. In fact, the main difference is that you are the interviewer—you ask the questions.

Informational interviewing is not a difficult skill to learn. Everyone has a job or a skill that they know well enough to discuss. Practice on your spouse, your friends, the person you sit next to on an airplane. Even your children could be a source: “Tell me, Billy, what skills and qualities do you think a person needs to become an Eagle Scout?”

Networking is a good way to find people to interview. Ask people you know if they know anyone in your field of interest. Contact the professional associations in those fields. Most associations have directories of members and newsletters that contain articles about leaders in the field. Both networking and professional associations are discussed in Chapter 4, **Job-Search Techniques**.

Important Note

In today’s busy world, many people are unwilling to spend time giving informational interviews to strangers. It is better to forge some kind of personal relationship (e.g. through networking) before requesting an informational interview. If you do have a chance to interview someone, make sure you are prepared, do not take up more than 15-20 minutes, and always write a thank you note.

Informational interviewing should be thought of as research—a way to discover the realities of the work or life involvement you are considering. Such interviewing is also a way to discover a match between your self-assessment items and fields of work, jobs, and organizations. For more information about what you can learn, see “Questions To Ask in Job Informational Interviews” in Chapter 10, **Interviews and Job Offers**.