

How to Find Your Dream Job

The Declaration of Independence states everyone is entitled to certain “inalienable rights,” including “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” We all love and fight for the first two...so why is that third one so hard for so many of us when it comes to our careers?

The authors of that famous line were all wealthy men. For them, the “pursuit of happiness” did not come into conflict with mortgages, kids, bills, and everything else that hinders people. Be that as it may, it does not make that statement any less worthwhile.

However, many people, myself included, reach a point in their lives when we realize the career we have chosen for ourselves is just not right anymore. There is something in us that yearns for more. Perhaps it’s an unfulfilled wish from our past that gnaws at us, or maybe it’s a recently discovered passion. But the question that faces so many of us is, I’m not happy and what now?

It’s a good question. There comes a point when that job that makes someone so unhappy is also the one that provides a comfortable lifestyle for them and their family. This is the classic “rock and a hard place” scenario: staying in a bad job leads to misery and heartache, but leaving it – even to pursue a dream job – is risky and terrifying. Given this choice, most people opt for stable misery over unstable risk. It’s sound thinking...but also flawed.

Here’s the truth: successfully switching careers is not a fast or direct process. It’s an incremental and multi-faceted course of action that takes real time to see it through to fruition. It is not an “all or nothing” option. You don’t have to just take a leap of faith and quit your job and hope you have made the right decision. In other words, there are lots of things that can be done *while still employed* to test out that dream job, and make sure the potential reward is worth the expected risk.

- Find a Mentor – Perhaps the most important step in pursuing a dream job is to find someone who already works in that field who can offer guidance and advice as you proceed. Believe it or not, this is not as difficult as it might sound. In my experience, many people express fear at the prospect of asking for help from a prospective mentor.

Why would they want to help you, after all? The answer is easy: **people like helping other people!** By asking a prospective mentor for help, they are being told they are admired for what they do, their career is in demand, and their experiences and insights are valuable to others. Not *everyone* will see it this way, but once you start asking, you’ll be surprised how receptive people are.

No matter what your dream job may be, there are other people out there who are doing it, but not all those people would be good mentors for you. How can you find a good mentor?

- Research the field and find out about the people who are in it.
 - Create a list of people who seem like good fits with you
 - Start contacting them slowly at first – a polite and formal email, for example – and see who responds.
 - Try to form a relationship, and get to know their personalities even as you try to exhibit yours. Like so many other things, when you find the right mentor, you'll know it.
- Plan a Mentorship – Once you've found a mentor, the next step is to plan a brief trip to their workplace, to shadow them and learn the “ins and outs” of your dream job. As we all know, while things may be perfect in our imaginations, in reality even the most perfect jobs have their downsides. It would be awful to dive headfirst into a new career, only to discover a few months in that it's not for you. By having a mentorship you can:
 - Get hands-on experience in the field
 - Learn about it from someone you respect
 - Get a taste for whether or not it's really the field for you

All of this can be accomplished without giving up anything more than a few paid vacation days. No rules would be broken, and no one at your “real” job even has to know what you're doing.

When planning a mentorship, make sure to make your mentor's availability your first priority, and take the time to prepare your questions in advance. When you're there, keep a notebook with you at all times, scribble notes throughout the day, then fill them out in detail each night. With so much to learn, you want to get it all, then retain it for later.

- Attack the Situation Head On – At the conclusion of your mentorship, one of three things will have happened.
 - You'll have realized the job you're in *is* the right one for you, in which case you have risked nothing and ended up feeling better about where you are.
 - You'll come back still determined for a career change, but with the realization that this one wasn't the right one either. In that case, no harm done, just start over!
 - You return from your mentorship determined to proceed, then

you can move forward knowing that the path ahead is the correct one.
Keep asking questions, and move forward one step at a time.

Life is a constant stream of choices, some harder to make than others. Changing careers can be one of the trickiest, especially when there are obstacles in the way. But if you can arm yourself with enough information and experience to be able to know that a dream job is possible and attainable, it goes a long way toward the pursuit of your very own sense of happiness.

Brian Kurth has contributed on-air advice on NBC's TODAY Show, CNBC, CNN, FOX News, ABC News, MSNBC and National Public Radio (NPR) and has been featured in articles in O, The Oprah Magazine; The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Globe and Mail, The Times (London), BusinessWeek, Fast Company, Fortune, Entrepreneur Magazine, MORE Magazine, Men's Journal, AARP Magazine and Black Enterprise Magazine, just to name a few.

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Test-Drive Your Dream Job: A Step-By-Step Guide To Finding And Creating The Work You Love: www.amazon.com