

Strategies for Developing a Career Path that Works



"The Things to do are the things that need doing, that you see need to be done, and that no one else seems to be doing."

BUCKMINSTER FULLER

"The only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle."

STEVE JOBS

"You don't have to love your job to do great work. Great work is about who you are, no matter what job you do."

DON PHIN

Maybe your job is not what you thought it would be, or you are burnt out, or something else seems more interesting... or you just got fired. Consider these strategies to find a job you can enjoy.

1. Nothing is wrong with you if you have not yet discovered your “passion” or “mission.” That can be as simple as “helping myself, while I help others.” You can do that in any job by looking to see where you can serve.

2. Nothing is wrong with changing jobs if:

- There is no opportunity for creativity or growth.
- You can't earn more where you are at.
- You want to work closer to home.
- You dislike your co-workers, boss, or customers.
- There is illegal or unethical activity going on.
- This isn't the third time you quit in the last two years. If that's the case, maybe *you are the problem*.

3. Nothing is wrong with changing careers if:

- The “story” of your career does not match up with the “reality” of your career.
- You have grown as far as possible in that career.
- There is the possibility of working in a career that allows you to earn more or work in alignment with your passion, mission, etc.
- You are financially set and want to do non-profit type work.

4. Get out of the “grey zone” of uncertainty.

Give yourself space and time to define your ideal career situation. Think both vertically and horizontally. For example, I'd like to be a lawyer for an environmental non-profit or I'd like to be a games programmer at Electronic Arts.

5. Interview people with your ideal career.

Invite them to a coffee or lunch, or even offer to pay for their time. Ask what they want and don't like about their job. Discover their story of how they came to be in this position. Ask what they think the future holds for their career. Last, ask what advice they would have for you. I wish I had been smart enough to do this when I was younger. Keep asking until somebody says yes. Getting 15 “nos” and 3 “yesses” is worth the effort.

6. Meet with a recruiter. Again, offer to pay for their time. Ask for an evaluation of your resume, and what they believe your opportunities are and possible compensation levels. Steps 4, 5, and 6 are all about gaining clarity. Get facts before you make a career decision.

7. Don't fear seeking part-time, temp or consulting work... if it's at the right company. Get your foot in the door and show them how amazing you are. Do that, and they will want you as an employee.

8. Don't quit your day job until you have agreed to a new job. Then leave your company gracefully. Provide them with two week's notice (and expect them to fire you on the spot when you do). Don't bomb them on Glassdoor. Don't do a YouTube dance video. There is no good reason to create enemies. Just move on.

9. Get creative! Throwing your resume at online applications is not enough anymore. Less than half of open positions are posted on job boards like Indeed, Glassdoor, or ZipRecruiter.

- Use your LinkedIn and Facebook contacts.
- Use your alumni and school contacts.

- Show up at industry association meetings.
- See if your industry association has a hiring page, many do.
- Knock on their door. This approach works best with smaller companies as you might get to meet the owner or president.
- Network, but when you do, spend your time learning about them. See how you can help them. That's what gets people's attention, not being needy. Besides, needy is creepy.
- Run your resume through a resume screener to make sure you are using the right buzzwords. An example you can use yourself is at <https://www.jobscan.co/>

10. Know the companies that fit your career path.

Research as much as you can about those companies, industry trends, challenges, etc. Many cities have a business publication that identifies the companies in your area. Then systematically figure out how you will approach your eventual boss. Send them an article you wrote or a blog post. Mail it to them. Offer to have a meeting to see how you can help them. I have often got work by doing this. "I'm curious about the work you do and would love to drop by with some of your favorite coffee to share some ideas I have for you. Fifteen minutes I think you will appreciate."

11. Know yourself. Look for a career that fits you. Know your skills and motivators. Take a few career assessments. Take a few skill tests (see shl.com). The better you know you, the more focus and confidence you will have. One simple way to focus is to identify the three things you do best and circle the one or two things you enjoy doing best. Find a job or career that focuses on those things, and you will find work nirvana.

12. If you are out of a job, then make finding a job your whole priority. Make it a 5-day week, 40 hour-week job. Make it your job! Be relentless. Go all in!

13. Keep learning. Lynda.com is a great resource for learning and free if you have LinkedIn Premium (which you want if you are job hunting).

14. Create a week in the life for yourself. In a year from now, when you are doing work you love. What does a work week look like? Spend a few hours designing this future with clarity and then bring that future into the present. I have learned that you get what you ask for – just not when or how you would expect to get it.

15. Be prepared. As the saying goes, success results from preparation meeting opportunity. Being prepared for an interview means researching the company website, news articles, LinkedIn profiles, Glass Door reviews and more. Practice your interviewing skills with friends. Interviewing is a sales job so know the questions you can be asked and how you would answer them. Short and sweet answers are best. Also, be prepared with questions you want to ask. Don't ask questions you can find by researching Manta, Hoovers...or the company website. Consider questions such as:

- Why is the position open? Did someone quit or get fired? Is it a new position?
- How would you describe the company's culture?
- Where do you get your greatest satisfaction in working here?
- What frustrates you working here?
- What are the common attributes of your top performers?
- What drives results for the company?

- How does your performance appraisal system work?
 - What would you expect me to accomplish in the first 60 to 90 days?
 - In one year from today, how would you know if my hire was a success?
 - What training programs do you offer employees?
 - Do you publish career ladders for the position?
 - What percentage of managers are promoted versus recruited?
 - What is the most exciting thing happening in the company?
 - How often does the CEO meet with the management team?
 - What type of company social events do you have?
- 16. Follow up, even if they don't.** Send a written thank you note and ask for the job.
- 17. Last, don't stress about the future, even if you are in a financial squeeze.** Cut expenses to the bone and focus on taking action in the present, the only real power you have.

Resources:

- <https://www.livecareer.com/> - resume builder, job search, more.
- <http://jobboardreviews.com> - job board directory
- <http://www.jobhuntersbible.com> - from Dick Bolles, author of What Color is My Parachute
- <https://www.shl.com/en/> - a great place to test your skills
- <https://www.asktheheadhunter.com/> - great advice on job hunting
- <https://www.careercloud.com> - job hunting advice
- <https://www.job-hunt.org/> - job hunting advice
- <https://www.forbes.com/video/4573540723001> - video from Forbes on avoiding the resume black hole
- <https://blog.linkedin.com/2016/10/06/now-you-can-privately-signal-to-recruiters-youre-open-to-new-job> - as the URL suggests, how to use LinkedIn
- <https://humanworkplace.com/q/find-your-path-assessment> - good tool from Liz Ryan
- <https://www.thriveyard.com/100-helpful-career-blogs-and-websites/> - good list of career blogs
- <http://money.com/money/5481691/resume-power-words/> - resume tips
- <http://money.com/money/5481438/how-to-ask-for-a-raise-get-higher-pay-2019/> - how to get a raise
- <http://money.com/money/5419301/best-job-hunting-books/>
- <https://www.donphin.com/tools/> - last but not least, some tools I've created that can help

Career Books

Unlock the Hidden Job Market: 6 Steps to a Successful Job Search When times are Tough

By Duncan Mathison and Martha I. Finney

Windmill Networking: Understanding, Leveraging & Maximizing LinkedIn

By Neal Schaffer

MOJO: How to Get It, How to Keep It, How to Get It Back If You Lose It

By Marshall Goldsmith

In Search of the Perfect Job: 8 Steps to the \$250,000 Executive Job That's Right for You

By Clyde Lowstuter

The 20 minute Networking Meeting

By Marcia Ballinger and Nathan Perez

What Color is your Parachute and What Color Is Your Parachute? Job-Hunter's Workbook

By Richard Bolles

OMG, I need a job

By Bob Braham

The New Job Search

By Molly Wendell

The Pathfinder: How to Choose or Change Your Career for a Lifetime of Satisfaction and Success

By Nicholas Lore

Repurpose Your Career - A Practical Guide for the 2nd Half of Life

By Marc Miller

About Don Phin, Esq.

Don has been a California employment practices attorney since 1983. He litigated employment and business cases for 17 years and quit once he figured out that nobody wins a lawsuit.

Since leaving litigation, he has written numerous books and presented more than 600 times to executives nation-wide.

Don was the founder and President of HR That Works, used by 3,500 companies and acquired by ThinkHR in January of 2014. He then worked at ThinkHR for two years as a V.P.

Now in his "wisdom sharing years," Don loves coaching executives and investigates challenging workplace problems. He continues to inspire with his speaking and training.

If you would like some career coaching please give a call or send an email! All the best, Don

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