

How to effectively research new jobs and career paths

After considerable introspection and hard work you have selected one or more jobs of appeal to you and arrived at the point where you know which alternatives seem to have the potential to enhance your sense of well-being in your work life.

A common pitfall at this stage is to regard the targeting process as complete. Many initiate a vigorous job-searching campaign internally where they work or externally in the general labour market in order to bring about the transition to a more promising work setting without further delay. This confidence is deceptive. You may not have sufficient information to reduce the likelihood of an inappropriate change, nor accumulated all the evidence necessary to persuade others to hire you.

Before a career transition campaign is started, a period of reality testing should be carried out as it is an important self-protection component of managing your career. Furthermore, interviewers these days have much higher expectations that you know much about your profession, its career path alternatives and information about they- the employer.

There is another benefit from the hard work of your research. It can serve as a reality-testing process of using information sources in order to verify whether an alternative work setting and career content is the most appropriate for you. At the same time, you gather evidence from this exploration and research that can be used selectively to devise your career plan and later bolster the contents of your job application.

What inhibits many people from carrying through the reality-testing phase of career action step planning? First of all, you could be thinking that the true nature of a job within a work setting cannot be identified without actually performing the tasks. Or that the true nature of a work setting needs to be experienced to be understood. Neither are, in fact, obstacles to reality testing. Consider the wealth of information you can obtain from the following:

- **Publications:** Most industries and professional Associations publish information in print and on line about their activities. Annual reports, newsletters, house journals and codes of ethics are examples of data you can readily obtain. It would be very unlikely that an organisation did not respond to a polite request from you. There is very little which is kept secret about the nature of jobs or the trading activities and objectives of employers. It just requires effort on your part to obtain it.
- **Internet:** Here there are many web sites and search engines to facilitate your

research. If unsure how to utilise this resource for your information search, find a mentor or career coach who understands the research value of the Internet to your career. Consider starting with <http://www.onetcenter.org>

- **People:** You can make contact with people already in your proposed job role or work setting. You can tap the information sources of the professional - association for the work setting and the industry association which represents the employers in which it is located.

Imagine that you are an inquiring journalist or, if you prefer, a private detective. Put yourself in their shoes: How would such a person set about the task of obtaining information about work settings? The process of reality testing will become less inhibiting in this context. After all, you may be about to take a significant career action step by changing from one you know well, but no longer like, to another with all the financial, emotional and status risks that the transition implies.

Consider and act on the following three points:

1. Before you decide on a particular job role for your next career action step never be satisfied with just a title or label or printed description. Be sure that you know thoroughly the tasks and responsibilities which are within the job role that you are considering.
2. Talk and listen: Talk to a person who actually does the job role or one similar which interests you. Ask them to describe the tasks, the performance expectations and all that is associated with it.
3. Go in person, try to avoid using the telephone: Experience shows that during a face-to-face discussion:
 - the positive and negative aspects of an activity are described in far greater detail than during an interview by telephone or a series of emails
 - information on the nature of the activity is much more significant
 - the likely 'satisfiers' in this kind of work activity make more sense

In most situations, do not carry out your information gathering by telephone or email. Only as a last resort, use these methods to gather information.

Questions to consider asking in an information gathering session

1. How did you get involved in this job?

This question will please your information source because:

- it demonstrates that you are interested in the person;
- each person thinks their experiences and life journey are special;
- people like to talk about themselves.

2. What is it like doing this job?

This will help you verify if the activity really interests you.

3. What examples do you have of what this job is like?

This will give you examples of situations or incidents and show how the person behaves and what affect the activity has.

4. What do you like least about this job?

You can ascertain whether you will be able to cope with the inherent difficulties of this activity. Because the person has shared confidences by answering your first three questions, little will be held back. You will really benefit from this information. The truth now emerges about what the activity really demands.

5. What are the performance standards required from the tasks involved in this job?

With the help of your information source, note down the performance standards then later on, after this interview make a list of the talents, competencies, knowledge and behaviours necessary to carry out these tasks successfully.

6. What skills are needed to complete these tasks successfully?

This will help you identify the skills that will be transferable from your past experiences. This will be useful later when you select data about yourself for any job application that may be required.

All the above is just good career self-management and will go a long way to protecting your career future by making a job move that will contain less surprises than if you had not done this research.



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Paul's dedication to assisting adults in transition has been recognised in many ways – he is Fellow of the Australian Association of Career Counsellors (AACC) and in April 2000 was awarded their highest honour, Life Membership; former Research Fellow in Adult Career Development, University of Wollongong; former Member, Board of Governors, Institute of Career Certification International (ICC International); Member, Asian Accreditation Panel for Career Management Certification (AAPCMC); Fellow Practitioner and World Council Australian Representative, Association of Career Professionals International; Honorary Member, Professional Résumé Writing & Research Association; Board Member, The Career Development Leadership Alliance; Honorary Member, Elite Performers Lifeskill Advisers Association; Honorary Member, Asian Association of Career Management Professionals (AACMP); Director of Studies for the eLearning global facility, The College for Career Practitioners, recipient of the Career Counselling Excellence Award from the AACC in conjunction with its sponsor, New Hobsons Press; and Author and Designer of Worklife's CareerMastery® Virtual Career Centre. Paul Steven's is a regular contributor and author for Six Figures.