

*Starting or Changing Your Career? Three Steps Not to Miss*

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Question: *What can a book published 100 years ago tell today's savvy woman about career decisions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?*

Answer: *Everything you need to know about how to do it successfully!*

In 1909, Frank Parsons – founder of career counseling – identified three essential steps in what he called Choosing a Vocation. In the old fashioned but wise language of his day, Parsons wrote:

“In the wise choice of a vocation, there are three broad factors: (1) a clear understanding of yourself, your aptitudes, abilities, interests, ambitions, resources, limitations, and their causes; (2) a knowledge of the requirements of the requirements and conditions of success, advantages and disadvantages, compensation, opportunities, and prospects in different lines of work; (3) true reasoning in the relations of these two groups of facts.”

Much has changed in the world since 1909, but Parsons' three factors are as essential today as ever for making wise career decisions. And the fact is, many people skip or skim one or more of these steps, which leads to career choices that are not nearly as satisfying as they want.

Whether you are just starting your career, or want to move to a more satisfying one, it pays to approach this challenge in a *systematic* way, with *intention* and *purpose*. By investing the time and effort to do it well, you will reap the rewards of a good decision that will be enjoyable to you. Let's examine each step.

**1) Gathering information about yourself**

Chances are, you have some sense of jobs you've done well and tasks you've enjoyed. But it is important to conduct a comprehensive assessment of how the interests and skills you have acquired in each position (paid work and unpaid work, as student, homemaker, or volunteer) can be *transferred* into new, different, and satisfying occupations. Your values and lifestyle considerations should also be taken into account. Women, for example, often want to assess how their careers can mesh with other important commitments in their lives, such as raising children, running for public office, caring for an elderly parent, or traveling to Brazil each July with Habitat for Humanity.

**2) Gathering information on the many dimensions of various career options**

You are probably familiar with the occupations of your friends and family, and with the fields and industries where you and they work. But there are nearly 1,000 different occupations in the world or work. Most people are familiar with only a tiny fraction of these. Unless you take a systematic look at what's really available, you risk missing vital information about options that might be a

perfect match for the special combination of talents, skills, interests, values, and salary requirements that make YOU!

### **3) Putting the pieces together to reach a good decision**

This step is the most challenging...and fun! The most satisfying career choices emerge from thoughtful integration of what a woman has learned about herself and what she has learned about various career options. With all the needed information at hand, you are much more likely to see clearly, choose wisely, and map a direction to satisfying, fulfilling work.

How can you get started on this three-step process to your new career? There are many resources available that reflect our 21<sup>st</sup> century technological conveniences.

- To gather information about yourself, start in the career section of your favorite bookstore or library. Many books include inventories and assessments of your interests and skills, values and goals. Baltimore's Enoch Pratt Free Library has a career resources center that is also accessible online at <http://www.prattlibrary.org/locations/jobcenter/index.aspx?id=1174>. Valid, reliable interest assessments are also available online for a very small fee, showing you patterns in your preferences and matching these to occupations. For online use I recommend John Holland's *Self-Directed Search* at [www.self-directed-search.com](http://www.self-directed-search.com).<sup>1</sup>
- Libraries and online resources are also an excellent place to gather information about the characteristics of nearly 1,000 occupations you may not know about. From your nearest online computer, you can access the comprehensive, interactive source of occupational information developed by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, called the *O\*NET™ database*. In *O\*NET™ Online*, you will find detailed information on each occupation that includes: the *tasks, knowledge, skills, abilities, work activities, work context, education & experience needed, interests, and work values*, as well as *links to employment outlook and salary information for the U.S. and each state*. Information is also coded to match your results from the Self-Directed Search. You can access *O\*NET™ Online* at <http://online.onetcenter.org/>
- Usually, the most effective way to put the pieces together and make a wise career decision is to talk through with another person all that you have learned about yourself and occupations. Often a trusted friend has a very good understanding of what is unique about you, your talents and values, and can help by listening and supporting you as you choose your direction. A professional career counselor or coach can also guide you through each of the three steps, providing skilled assistance and support.

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<sup>1</sup> In my individual and group work with clients, I prefer to use the paper-based *Strong Interest Inventory*.

You can start today on the path to a satisfying career that is integrated with all the dimensions that lead to a rich and fulfilling life! Feel free to call or email me if you'd like to know more about how I can help you.

*Give yourself the gift of your life!*

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