

Initial Steps for Job Changers



The people who come in to take our aptitude tests are often at turning points of various types. Some are just beginning to become dissatisfied with their jobs and are contemplating future moves within their fields. Others are extremely frustrated, feel they are in the wrong field, and are ready to explore an entirely new area. Still others are recently or are about to be laid off from their jobs and need to find a new position quickly, without the luxury of lengthy investigation of new fields. With these varying needs in mind, we offer some general advice on practical steps to take after completing your aptitude testing:

▶▶ READ ABOUT JOBS AND CAREERS

There are many sources of information available to you online, as well as in book form, about careers, fields, and jobs.

▶ Two very comprehensive sites with a wealth of information about a wide variety of careers and professions are:

1. The online version of the U.S. Department of Labor's *Occupational Outlook Handbook* can be found at <http://www.bls.gov/oco>. It contains a range of reports about practically any career imaginable.

2. For similar information, as well as statistics about wages and occupational trends, look at <http://www.careerinfonet.com>.

▶ Spend some time browsing through career and self-improvement sections of bookstores. *What Color Is Your Parachute?* by Richard Bolles is a regularly updated guide for job hunters and career changers. There are exercises you can complete to help you explore careers that might be a good fit for you.

▶ There are also interest tests available for the same purpose. We use the *Self-Directed Search* interest test, and many people are familiar with the *Strong Interest Inventory* as well as the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*. These tests are available online for a fee and an internet search can help you find sites where you can take them. In addition, career counselors often use these types of self-reporting tests as a part of their service. However, you should keep in mind that while interest test results can be informative and enlightening, it is more important to consider whether you have the aptitudes for a particular career, not just an interest in it.

▶ Look up professional journals and magazines related to fields that interest you, or to those for which you have the aptitudes. These types of publications contain information on new developments and opportunities in an industry or field. Also, browse through other publications that deal with jobs, such as *National Business Employment Weekly*, published by Dow Jones & Company, and the *Federal Jobs Digest*, which is also available online at <http://www.jobsfed.com>.

▶▶ JOIN GROUPS

Job seeking can be a disheartening experience at times, especially if it is done in isolation. Many job seekers and career changers benefit from established groups and services that are there to help people find jobs or simply to give support.

▶ In many locations, there are job centers funded by the state that offer free and low-cost services. For example, Massachusetts has a network of One-Stop Career Centers that offer a variety of

aids from job search workshops to one-on-one career counseling. Check out the government listings in the phone directory to see if your state government has similar programs.

▶ Other services can be found that are aimed specifically at women, mid-life career changers, executives over 40, veterans, etc. Such groups may offer seminars about specific careers or help with resume preparation and interviewing skills. You might investigate informal "job clubs" for moral support and information sharing. The phone directory or an internet search could help you locate such groups.

▶ Colleges often provide career information to their alumni and sometimes to the public. Contact your former college or university to investigate what kinds of services they offer.

▶▶ START NETWORKING

"Networking" may seem an overused term at times, but can be an important way to learn about jobs that are never advertised but are known only to people affiliated with certain fields.

▶ Tell your family and friends that you are looking for information about certain careers, as they may be able to provide valuable information and leads. Then talk to professionals, preferably in their work environment, to learn more about specific jobs and the tasks involved in them. Use this information to explore how these jobs could fit your aptitudes and interests and find out what education or training they would require.

▶ When reading the newspaper, look not only at the want ads, but also at announcements of job fairs and career conventions that come to your area. Talking with company representatives at job fairs can be a great source of information about specific jobs or professions. Look in the business/jobs sections of newspapers for weekly calendars of job-related events.

▶▶ TAKE COURSES AND SEMINARS

Consider enrolling in courses that help job seekers. The people you meet in these courses may be good connections for networking. Job seekers are often more than willing to help other people with information and encouragement.

▶ Check into learning centers, libraries, community or junior colleges, university extension schools, career counseling organizations, and evening courses at some high schools. You could take a class in interviewing techniques or resume preparation, for example.

▶ This might also be the time to take courses to develop new

skills. For instance, if you would like a job that includes writing or editing, you might find a variety of courses in technical writing, proofreading, and copy editing. If you are unsure of your public speaking ability, now might be a good time to take a course in it. This could also help you build confidence.

▶ If the business world is your goal, it can never hurt to take additional courses in management, accounting, sales techniques, or computer skills.

▶ For added confidence and effectiveness in almost any career direction, continue to build and refine your knowledge of English vocabulary. A large and precise vocabulary is one of the keys to success in any career, and is especially important for the “verbal” occupations such as law or teaching.

▶▶ KEEP YOUR EYES AND EARS OPEN FOR INFORMATION

The more resourceful you are, the more you can find out. Don't be afraid to ask questions.

▶ Whenever you see something in print or on television that sparks your interest, look for a telephone number, address, or website so you can request additional information. Then try contacting the author or producer.

▶ Try contacting people who run their own businesses in careers you are considering. Often they are willing to discuss what they do and how they have made it work.

▶ You can often conduct “informational interviews” with people in fields that interest you. Arranging appointments to talk with them for 20 or 30 minutes could help you learn more about their work. This is a way to find out what is required in a career that appeals to you, and what people like and dislike about this career. You might also learn about other options available in that field.

▶▶ TRY ALTERING YOUR PRESENT JOB TO FIT YOU BETTER

Not everyone is in a position to leave a job immediately for an uncertain new direction. The wisest choice for some is to work on altering their present situation to make it more satisfying, creating a more comfortable niche by adding or subtracting tasks from their job.

For example, one of our clients, working in the software industry, reported that he was reasonably satisfied in his current position but felt that not all of his abilities were being utilized. After completing the testing, his results showed that while he was in a suitable field for his aptitudes, there were certain areas of the industry that were a better match than was his current position. He planned to stay in the same job but try to do more work in certain areas, particularly the creation and development of new ideas, and less in others, such as programming and testing, and

felt that this would make his job more satisfying.

Before making a leap into a new field, see whether you can find opportunities to make your job suit you better: take on a teaching or training function, start editing a newsletter, delegate more bookkeeping tasks, or take on a creative or organizational project.

▶▶ VOLUNTEER OR WORK PART-TIME IN AREAS OF INTEREST

If you have decided that you need a change, but do not have the qualifications for the new direction you seek, consider taking on volunteer work or even a second job that will give you the necessary experience to make this change.

For example, if you are an accountant but would like to do more employee training, you might gain some credibility as a teacher by volunteering as a math tutor, or by giving seminars on topics such as preparing for the CPA exam or tax preparation. Part-time work as a lecturer for junior college business classes could also help you reach your goal of having a career in training.

Volunteering or adding on a few hours to your workweek may be difficult, but the effort can give you valuable skills to add to your resume. These activities can bring you into contact with professionals in the field who can give you advice and encouragement. Getting some hands-on experience can also help you determine if you want to pursue certain paths before you commit yourself to a new job or school program.

We hope your aptitude testing results help you to identify potentially rewarding and satisfying career fields for you to explore. The next step—persevering in the career change and job search process—is often challenging, but it can lead to greater fulfillment. Keep in mind that we are here for follow-up discussions if you have questions about the career you are considering.

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