

Finding a Satisfying Career is Knowing Your Personality Traits

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Until recently, career professionals believed a satisfying career was one that matched a person's values, interests and skills with the job.

While this sounds good, there's one problem: it just doesn't work for most people. For two reasons: as it turns out, these "big three" – values, interests and skills – are not the most important factors, and they all change over time.

In the United States people are asked to make important career decisions way too early. In high school, students have to decide whether or not to go to college, and once in college, are required to declare a major by their sophomore year. Thus at twenty-years old, students routinely make important life decisions that set in motion a career trajectory that many find difficult to change. This is not a knock on twenty-year olds! I'm just suggesting that most people don't usually get a handle on who they are and what's really important to them, until the late twenties, early thirties.

So, the lucky ones graduate, land a job in "their field" and begin working. As they get married and have families, understandably the values they held at twenty are often replaced by new ones. And as they experience more of life, they also develop new interests and skills.

Before they know it, they're in their forties with other mouths to feed, a mortgage and car payments to make with fresh worries about how to pay for their kids' education and their retirement. There are good reasons why so many people stay right where they are. But studies show that less than half of all workers would choose the same job if they could have a "do over."

Looking for a job can easily be a full-time job in itself, society applauds stability and disapproves of risk-taking, people grow accustomed to a certain lifestyle, and many just don't see a lot of viable options – especially in a tight job market.

So, they stay in unfulfilling jobs and "run out the clock" looking forward to retirement.

Unfortunately, due to the sharp economic downturn, it's not unusual for people to continue working well into their sixties and seventies. The point is that most of us will have to work for a long time: we might as well enjoy it!

"So, if matching a job with my values, interests and skills will not lead me to a satisfying career, what will help me find work that uses my natural talents and really excites me?"

Enter...Personality Type. You may be surprised to learn that everyone is born with one of sixteen different personality types. And although all individuals are unique, people of the same "type" are remarkably similar in important ways – especially with regards to their "career satisfiers" – those elements in a job they need in order to find satisfaction and success.

Personality Type is not new. It's been around for more than fifty years. Nor is it some whacky pop-psychology fad. If it were, it wouldn't be used daily by eighty-nine percent of the Fortune 100 Companies to help their employees be more productive and successful in their careers.

You might ask: "If matching a career with my values, interests and skills doesn't always work, why should knowing my Personality Type help?" For two reasons: first (unlike the other three) your Type does not change. Sure, you mature as you grow older, but your core needs, the way you're hardwired to think and act, what motivates and is important to you, your natural, in-born talents as well as those activities that energize and drain you, all remains constant. For example, the quiet, thoughtful ten-year old who loved reading science fiction and assembling model space ships, might grow up to be a very satisfied and successful scientist. Likewise, the outgoing, persuasive nine year-old who sold more Girl Scout cookies than anyone else in her

school, may well turn out to be a top business development person.

Second, when your job is a good fit for your type, it energizes you. You look forward to going to work and are much more likely to succeed. The opposite is also true. When your job is not a good fit for your personality type, your work drains your energy, makes you prone to burnout and you're less likely to be successful.

Let's face it, choosing a career path is one of the most important decisions you'll ever make—but how do you decide what is right for you? You may take a career path that uses the skills you have or the education you've gotten. You may even choose a career based on what you think you "should" do—because of what your parents or teachers have told you is right for you.

Think, for instance, about a carpenter versus a counselor. A carpenter works with concrete objects, according to specified procedures, and has a tangible result. A counselor works with people and their feelings; the counselor has to judge success and the results of the work based on abstract concepts. Which of these sounds more appealing to you? Do you have a strong preference for one or the other? Now, imagine if you had to make your less preferred choice your career, and you will get an idea of the impact that your personality has on your job satisfaction.

There is quite a bit of variation in how people think and process information, what they see as important, and how they make decisions. All of this variation can affect how happy or unhappy someone is in a work environment. Each one of us has different criteria for what a great job is, and to find your own perfect career, it is crucial to identify what is important to you.

The most common personality test used for career counseling is called the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). This personality test measures four facets of personality:

- How do you get your energy? By being with people (extraverted), or being alone (introverted)?

-How do you acquire information? Do you see what's actual (sensing), or what's possible (intuition)?

- How do you make decisions? With your head (thinking), or with your heart (feeling)?

- How do you like to live in your environment? By making decisions (judging), or keeping your options open (perceiving)?

Learning about your type can help you in real and concrete ways including, understanding just what you need in a career for it to be satisfying, determining which careers work best for you, knowing how to capitalize on your work-related strengths compensate for your weaknesses, and using your strengths to conduct a much more successful job search.

The official Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator is a scientifically validated instrument that will identify where you fall in each of the categories. This assessment can only be administered by someone trained in its application, and must include a consultation with a trained counselor according to its licensing guidelines. You can take the personality tests through a career counselor in your area.

Once you thoroughly understand your personality type, you will want to look at the careers you are considering and evaluate whether they truly fit what's important to you.

It's important to be realistic about what a job entails, and to ask as many questions as possible about prospective jobs so that you can evaluate how well they'll fit you. As you learn more about yourself, you will become better equipped to judge which jobs will bring you satisfaction through additional reading and informational interviews.