

If Your RESUME Could Talk



Dig in and Prepare Yourself or Others for
What's Next Through Career Exploration,
Conversations, and Pivots



Evelyn Mok Lee, Ph.D.

A **Productivity Press** Book

If Your Resume Could Talk

The notion that one can work in a single company or job for an extended period of time has changed. Companies are in need of talent. People are in search of jobs and just “the right position” for themselves.

How do we find that perfect match? In years past, one might pivot once, perhaps even twice over the course of their career. Today, a person may need to pivot multiple times. Can a business adapt to the amount of change their employees may need to make over the course of their lifetime? Will an individual want to or be prepared to change jobs on an ongoing basis throughout their career? Sometimes, there is a need to pivot. Can the pivot be made, smoothly? Finding starting points for these conversations can be challenging. Is it a pivot or is it a career change? Both are acceptable. Pivots, if planned, can be easier to navigate. Career changes require more preparation. Either way, fluctuations can be daunting, for both the individual and the organizations they work for, especially when there is a lack of clarity in managing the complexities of skills, career aspirations, and interests. Having meaningful conversations that gather personal insights and reveal options either before or when it is time to initiate career exploration can ease the transition.

This book captures the insights the author has gained through her career and provides the valuable lessons learned from reviewing resumes, interviewing, and coaching those early in their careers, starting new careers, or in the midst of career transitions. The author also shares her personal experience with career exploration and navigating change.

Evelyn Mok Lee, Ph.D. has over 20 years of professional experience in the health care and biopharmaceutical industries and, additionally, insights into the food, business, and technology sectors. She leverages her human resources experience to offer a unique, analytical, and results-oriented approach to assess work experience and career opportunities from different perspectives. Evelyn holds a bachelor's degree from Northwestern University and a Ph.D. from the University of Illinois at Chicago.



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*This book is dedicated to my father, my children, and to those who want more
for themselves and others*



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Contents

List of Illustrations	ix
Acknowledgments	x
Introduction	1
1 Gathering Information	5
Developing Your Story	6
Getting Started: Discovering Your 5Ws.....	7
Building Your 5Ws	11
Monitoring Your 5Ws as They Evolve	12
Staying Informed About Job Trends	15
Learning from Others	21
Potential Topics for Conversation	26
The Importance of Having a Personal Network.....	30
What's Next?.....	31
Notes	31
2 Prepare to Tell Your Story	32
Before You Begin	33
Your Resume: Getting Started.....	34
Organizing Your Resume	38
Resume Writing as Preparation for an Interview	46
Cover Letters	47
Preparing for Formal Interviews.....	47
What's Next?.....	50
3 Getting to Know and Trust Yourself.....	52
Six-Square Collage	53
Experiential Learning.....	56
Your Learning Preference	59

Your 5Ws.....	60
Assessment Tests	62
Make Time to Listen, Learn, and Explore	65
What's Next?.....	67
Notes	67
4 Becoming Comfortable with Uncertainty	68
Accepting Uncertainty	69
Staying Grounded.....	72
Being Prepared.....	74
Doing the Work.....	77
Taking Action	78
It's OK to Ask.....	81
I Am Not Sure	81
A Word of Caution.....	86
What's Next?.....	86
Notes	87
5 Growth: Bridging the Gaps and Continuing to Learn	88
Different Types of Gaps	88
What's in the Job Description?.....	95
Shh...No One Knows.....	97
Bridging the Gaps.....	99
To Advance or Pivot in Your Career	105
What's Next?.....	108
Note	108
6 Progress Leads to Success.....	109
Know Yourself, Know the Job	110
Stay Informed	112
Preparing to Pivot.....	114
How to Pivot: Start Where You Are	118
Measures of Success	123
Making Progress at Your Own Pace.....	125
What's Next?.....	127
Note	127
Index.....	129

Illustrations

Tables

1.1	Template for a Master List	6
1.2	Template for Tracking 5Ws Over Time	11
1.3	An Example of My 5Ws Over Time	14
1.4	Occupation Groupings as Listed in the Occupational Outlook Handbook with Examples of Occupations Within Each Grouping	16
1.5	Sample Template for Comparing Occupations	18
5.1	Mapping Out a Job Description	95
5.2	Sample Template for Bridging Your Gaps	100

Figures

3.1	Template for six-square collage.	54
3.2	My six-square collage.	55
4.1	Facing a decision about direction.	70

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Introduction

When I was in college, I had a lot of questions as I was going through career exploration. At that time, I would talk to as many people as possible to gather information about their work, such as what they did and what they liked most about their work. It was a very difficult part of my career journey—not knowing what was right for me and yet being responsible for making decisions that I felt would be committing to a career—for life. It was overwhelming at the time, and there was no one I knew who could help me understand what I should explore or help me figure out how to make that decision.

After I graduated from college, attended graduate school, and started my first full-time job, I learned a lot more about myself and became more comfortable with new situations. Through a series of unique opportunities available within the company where I worked, I started to explore other career options and took pivots in my career, moving from technical roles to marketing and then, ultimately, to human resources. As people noticed the career changes I was making, they started commenting about them and asking how I made these career pivots.

Whether I was in a technical role, in human resources, leading a team, or working in other human resource capacities, one of the areas I most enjoyed was the opportunity to help people advance in their careers. These individuals included my team members, students/interns, job candidates, people who were interested in new job opportunities, and those who wanted to make a career change. I enjoyed speaking with these individuals, learning about their skills and interests, and exploring options to help them make progress in their career journeys. Sometimes progress meant an offer for a new job. Other times, progress would involve building awareness about themselves or being receptive to new opportunities they had not previously considered.

I learned that a resume can serve as a conversation starter. What I have observed is that whether one is at the beginning of their career journey, has been

working for years, or is interested in making a career change or pivot, the resume is a document that reflects one's overall past experience. When thoughtfully incorporated, one's resume can also convey information about an individual's current activities and future career aspirations.

If your resume could talk, what would it say... to the reader... to you ... about yourself?

The content of this book captures the lessons I have learned, the insights I have gained, and the messages that I believe can help you on your career journey. Through this book, the goal is to take some of the mystery out of career exploration, which can be a complex process. Each chapter provides an overview and framework for conversations supporting your efforts so that progress can be made. Whether your goal is to explore career options, advance in your current role, or make a pivot, there is information that can be helpful for you.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics is frequently asked about the number of times people have changed careers in their lives. The response to this question is that there are no estimates since "no consensus has emerged on what constitutes a career change."¹ Thus, in this book, a pivot may involve a change within a field or to a new field, a change to a new industry or function, or how you prefer to define a pivot.

With ideas for "what's next" at the end of each chapter, this book provides you with templates and conversation starters that make it easier to engage others in your journey.

The information in this book is also beneficial for those who are guiding others on their career journeys, whether you are a manager, mentor, family member, or friend—interested in helping someone in any field, at any phase in their career. If you are helping others on their career journeys, consider the questions in this book as tools to initiate conversations and offer suggestions.

This book provides different approaches to personal readiness and preparation for change, while providing a high-level overview of key components along the career exploration journey. This offering is my effort to share the approach that I have used for myself and have used in conversations with others in an effort to create a sense of structure for what can be an overwhelming process. This is the scientific and analytical framework I would have appreciated when I was early in my career journey, and my hope is that this will be beneficial.

Once you have put into practice the components as outlined in each chapter, the process becomes easier—because you have done it before. You might choose to spend more time on one component compared with another.

Being in a position to manage your career is what this book is about. Whether you are completing academic training, have been working for several years, or are interested in making a change, this book addresses topics that help you stay grounded and true to yourself, while leveraging the resources available to you.

Keep in mind, though, that your resume is one of the best resources that you have to understand yourself and present yourself to others.

I wish someone had told me that there are many aspects to career exploration and that this process is not linear. It involves periodic review and assessment. More importantly, you may choose to revisit certain components whenever there is a change.

Change requires effort; thus, the book is not intended to provide quick answers but to address in an analytical way the components that are important.

How do I know? I've been there.

Though I can't promise that you will find your dream job through these steps, what I can offer is that you will be led to ask more questions, seek to gather more information, and consider taking time to reflect on and analyze what you discover. The components described in the book are not intended to be done in a particular sequence, and some activities you may choose to do in parallel. My recommendation is to regularly review and adjust what you want to focus on.

This book is, by design, analytical in approach, with deep dives into key topics. The process applies across many different jobs; thus, examples are provided to help you understand how the concepts may apply. The career you are interested in will be unique to you and the questions you have will be specific to your specific situation. Since one size does not fit all, please keep this in mind as you read this book. There is space provided within each chapter for personal notes.

Components of career exploration described in this book include:

- Gathering information to explore and support your interests
- Leveraging tools to communicate your message about yourself and how you can contribute to a project or an organization
- Being able to discuss and describe yourself to others
- Being comfortable managing uncertainty and supporting others
- Recognizing skills that are important to the work you are interested in doing and developing the skills that are needed to address any gaps
- Defining what success looks like for you

Though I have highlighted six areas to focus on, they are not listed in a particular sequence. You choose. Some steps may be done in parallel as well. You will find, though, that once you have gone through each step, it will be easier to tap into your experience with each component. You will also find questions you may naturally integrate into your career assessment and decisions.

This book is for those who want to make decisions for themselves and take on new challenges while still being comfortable asking for help along the way. It is also for those who want to help others along this journey, whether you consider yourself the boss, manager, mentor, family member, or friend.

4 ■ *If Your Resume Could Talk*

While resources and technology designed to support one's career journey are widely available, this book offers topics and questions to explore when the next step in the journey is not obvious. These topics and questions are ones I have used myself and for guiding others towards making progress in their career journeys. Because each person's journey is unique, the process and amount of time it takes will vary. They will largely depend on the time commitment made and the individual's commitment to the journey.

Wishing you progress and success on this journey for yourself or those you want to support in their career exploration!

All the best,
Evelyn

Note

- 1 The Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) response to this FAQ: "Does BLS have information on the number of times people change careers in their lives?". <https://bls.gov/nls/questions-and-answers.htm>.

Chapter 1

Gathering Information

The more people I met and the more information I gathered, the more I learned about myself and the world of opportunities to explore and see what might be of interest to me.

Each of us has a unique story about who we are, our talents, and the work we do. When we want to share this story with others for the purpose of a career/job search, it is most often in the form of a resume. Your resume may be on paper, electronic, or shared through conversation when you are telling someone about your background and experience. The essence of the content in your resume is your education, skills, experience, positions held, places you worked, dates you did this work, and your contributions and accomplishments.

Whether I was the hiring manager, recruiter, or career coach who was reading to understand a person's work and experience, I would be led to wonder what might have inspired them to do one thing or another. When reviewing a person's skills, I would wonder how good they are at this work and what other experience do they have that may not be on their resume but that could be valuable to the work.

There's work you have done that may or may not be on your professional resume, like opening a lemonade stand when you were 8 years old or mowing lawns to save money to buy video games when you were 12. You may have experience and capabilities that may or may not be reflected in your resume. It's important to think about who the reader is and what is important for them to know about you.

Career exploration begins with gathering information to help you learn more about the interests that you have and factors that influence your decisions.

Although most of us do not think of our work and lives as a story, yet, when you have conversations about who you are, the work that you do, and the decisions that you've made, you are telling a story. Every time you explain the skills that you have or how creative you are, you are telling part of your story. When you are the listener and ask questions to learn about others, you are listening for their story.

When you are adding your experiences to the master list, add all of your experiences. To determine which experiences to share with others, keep in mind the job description and the skills and experience requirements to determine which of your experiences are relevant to include.

Getting Started: Discovering Your 5Ws

As we begin to look at the range of career options available, we will use an approach that is often used in journalism to formulate a story, and that is defining your 5Ws:

YOUR 5Ws

Who?

What?

Where?

When?

Why?

These pertain to the people, places, situations, decisions, and actions that have influenced your decisions. As you start to monitor these aspects relative to influences on your careers and decisions, your 5Ws provide reference points for you to refer to as reminders for the reason(s) you have made various decisions.

When we want to look at the path forward, we sometimes need to reflect on how we got to where we are. An approach to understanding our stories is to ask yourself the same questions that a journalist might ask if they were interviewing you. The difference is that you are asking these questions of yourself as a way to identify or clarify your reasons for the decisions you have made or will make. When you start to recognize the 5Ws that influence your career decisions, it will help you gain clarity on the choices you have made that have brought you to where you are today. Then continue to gather information for your 5Ws because it will help guide you as you make future decisions.

Exploring examples of factors that may have shaped where you are in your 5Ws:

Who?

The answer to this question comes from your life experiences, especially the people in situations that cause you to pause and take note, or perhaps even touch your heart. These individuals have inspired you or have been role models for you. These are a few examples:

- Family
- Friends
- Someone you admire
- Mentors/teachers/professors
- A particular group you want to help
- Coworkers
- Someone who does the work you want to do
- People you observe from afar

These people can be someone you know or even someone you don't know, but that you have seen or know about. As you watch them work or watch how they carry themselves, you want to learn more about the work they do and how they got there.

What?

Answers to this question may be based on something you observed or experienced that caught your attention or it could be the type of structure you find interesting:

- Was it something you would like to see yourself doing?
- Was it something that inspires you to take action to support or to prevent?
- What about it that motivates you to want to learn more?
- What do you remember most about what you observed?
- Were there particular skills or actions you noted that you would like to develop?
- What impact/goal are you hoping to accomplish?
- Did it occur in a specific organization type, size, or culture? For example, was it any of the below?
 - An academic institution
 - A large corporation
 - A small business
 - An entrepreneurial situation

Where?

Answers to the question of “where” may include the location of where the job is located, or the impact on your location or place where you do your work. Aspects to consider around this topic may include:

- Geographic location
 - City, state, country
 - Urban or rural environment
 - Preference for a variety of locations
- Workspace options
 - Physical location: office, hospital, manufacturing facility, laboratory, classroom, or a studio
 - Remote or hybrid

When?

Questions around “when” can help you with the anticipated timing of your career decisions. Although you can’t plan every aspect, timing sometimes stands out to you and you may remember making specific decisions:

- Before/after high school, college, or graduate school
- While working
- Before/after additional training or certification
- Before/after gaining more experience in current position
- Before/after promotion
- After gathering more information

Sometimes you can plan around these activities, other times you cannot, but giving some thought to the options allows you to be better prepared.

Why?

Your “why” is your reason for taking action and inquiring, for being willing to take a chance, and advance in the same field or pivot to something new. I have heard ...

- I wanted to learn something new.
- I wanted to take on leadership opportunities.
- It was the best (or only) job opportunity for me at the time.
- I feel like I have a special talent/skill in this area.

10 ■ *If Your Resume Could Talk*

- I have seen others move into these roles and really enjoy it.
- It sounds interesting.
- Someone I know does something similar and I want to learn more about it.
- Helping people is a priority for me.
- This work is needed in the world, and I want to help fill that void.
- A family member, friend, or someone I met in passing has inspired me.
- I am not sure why, but I feel like it is right for me.

Your “why” may highlight your passion, and it may be among one of the most important factors for making a career decision. You simply feel good and enjoy doing this work.

You may just be starting your journey or perhaps you’ve been on your career journey for years. Your 5Ws will evolve over time. You may put the information together and come to a decision, but you may gather insights on your 5Ws, each at a different time, since they evolve and are shaped by experiences, conversations, and information you gather over time. Understanding what motivates or inspires you will help you move towards those areas that are of greater interest to you over time. Realize, though, that sometimes the answer does not become apparent, even to yourself, until later, after you reflect on your experiences.

These are examples of some of the 5Ws that shaped decisions early in my career:

What: *I decided to go to graduate school.*

When: *I would apply my senior year in college and start in the fall after graduating from college.*

Why: *I wanted to further my education and learn through research.*

Where: *I applied to several programs within 150 miles from home and the decision was based on the program(s) that I was accepted to and the research projects available in the department.*

Who: *I was inspired by the people I worked with during my summer internships.*

Your responses to the 5Ws can be very simple words or sentences that capture what motivates you at that time in your career journey. If you don’t have a clear answer to any of the 5Ws, keep this in mind as a topic to explore further such as reflecting upon your previous experiences or you may need to wait a little longer for the reason to become more apparent. Over time, your 5Ws will evolve, and some of your responses will change and some will stay the same.

If your resume could offer suggestions...

It would remind you that your 5Ws are reflected in your resume and as you think through these questions, your resume reflects what you have done, where

12 ■ *If Your Resume Could Talk*

As you start to carve your own career journey, you may ask yourself questions such as:

- Are there any patterns in your decisions?
- Have you found your interests moving in a certain direction over time, or are you still considering options?
- What were you trying to accomplish? Did you make progress or achieve this goal?
- Did you learn more about yourself that has changed your outlook or influenced you to change direction and pivot?
- Were there any unique circumstances that have prompted you to change course?
- Have you gained any new insights that have changed any of your 5Ws?

As I reflect on my own 5Ws, there were several significant changes over the course of time:

My “what” evolved from interest in clinical medicine (M.D.) to pursuing research and earning a Ph.D. when I considered my personal career preferences and I learned more about another option. One day, I met with a professor after class and learned about innovative technology that was being developed to assist with disease detection that really tapped into my interest for non-invasive technology. With further investigating, I discovered that if I joined a specific research group, I could work with a professor who was doing research using this technology and could work with this instrumentation firsthand.

Over time, my “what” further evolved from aspirations to working in an academic research lab to working in research and development as a project manager in the health care industry and then to working as a project manager in human resources, all within the same health care company.

By reaching out and speaking with others, I learned that I had a limited understanding of the career options available to me. Once I started to ask questions, I discovered there were more ways for me to apply my experience, and I started to pursue and accept opportunities that were not on the conventional path for someone with my academic training or previous career experience.

Monitoring Your 5Ws as They Evolve

When one component of your 5Ws evolves, it is naturally accompanied by changes in other components of the 5Ws as well. Ultimately, your resume is a story that reveals the pivots you have made, whether they are a change in the same field or a change to a new field. Some pivots reflect natural transitions. Others are

more significant and may invite more curiosity and questions. One of the first and most significant pivots might have been during the course of your academic career and career decision. Another pivot may occur as you begin your career and explore job opportunities. Career pivots take place at all stages in one's career and if you have made any changes, your resume will reflect these pivots. Pivots do not just occur following major life events or world circumstances. There are some pivots that can be small changes in the approach you take to your work or taking on new assignments that are different from what you have done before.

In my career, the changes in my “what” evolved in parallel with my reasons for “why.” Though I describe “what” changed as the primary change, what was not visible or evident, even to myself at the time, was that my “why” was evolving: As I wanted to learn more, explore, and consider change before the opportunities, the “what” became available.

My “what” during my undergraduate years reflected my interest in non-invasive technology to diagnose human diseases. Learning about this new application of the technology, magnetic resonance spectroscopy, came about only because I took time to speak with a professor after class. This professor explained this new research that was underway, and with my enthusiasm for new technology, I did more research to understand where I could learn more on this topic. This is the reason “why” I pursued this path.

In addition to my “why” evolving, along with my “what,” in this situation, the focus of my “who” evolved over time as well.

As an R&D project manager, I realized that the 5 individuals on my team each had their own career goals and I was in a position to help them navigate their career interests.

I often asked myself: How could I be helpful to the people who reported to me? What additional information or resources would be helpful to them? At the time, being new in a leadership role, I don't think that I was as helpful as I could have been today. For example, I could have asked different questions to get to know their interests and help them learn more about themselves in order to explore career options.

As I gained more insight into working in a large organization, I became more intrigued by the opportunities, not only for myself, but for others. As a scientist, I started to ask questions and wanted to learn more about what it took to get from job A to job B. Having had the opportunity to gain exposure to various functions such as R&D, product development, regulatory, marketing sales, IT, finance and human resources, I could start to put together what career transitions and taking a career pivot could look like for myself and for others.

My career transitioned into human resources when a short-term assignment opened. In that role, I worked with scientists and engineers as they made the transition from one role to another. With this career pivot, the focus of my “who” changed from patients and customers to a focus on employees—whose work ultimately impacts the patient and the customer. My “where” changed as well, as my previous work in a lab evolved into working in an office environment. Table 1.3 shows an example of how my 5Ws evolved over time.

Table 1.3 An Example of My 5Ws Over Time

<i>Career Phase or Date</i>	<i>Who</i>	<i>What</i>	<i>Where</i>	<i>When</i>	<i>Why</i>
Freshman in college	Patients	Medical doctor	Hospital	After medical school	To help people feel better
Junior in college	Patients	Not sure	Not sure	After graduate school (4+ years) not sure which program	To understand the factors causing disease
Senior in college	Patients	Research	Research lab in a clinical setting	After graduate school	To be involved in early and non-invasive detection of disease
Towards the end of my Ph.D. thesis research	Global patient population	Project Manager	Research lab in the global health care company	After completing my Ph.D. studies	To be involved in developing products that would make a difference in people's lives
Pivot from research to human resources	Current and future employees	Recruiting top talent for global health care company	Office in the global health care company	After completing research project and product launches	To be a part of the Talent Acquisition team, starting with a focus on scientists and physicians

Careers can be amazing and unique in this way. Each person has their own path leading to change. I am always learning from those around me and hope that you can do the same. This chapter opened with gathering information about yourself, through your 5Ws, now let's shift our focus to gathering information from available resources and others.

Staying Informed About Job Trends

There are two readily available and in-depth resources available online to assist you with learning about job trends, occupations, job titles, skill requirements, and more.

1. The *Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH)*¹ published by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics is a comprehensive public resource for understanding the breadth of career options, and it provides an overview of the nature of work and the qualifications required for hundreds of occupations.

The OOH provides information about Occupation Groups, and Table 1.4 shows these occupation groupings along with examples of the occupations within each grouping. Using the Occupation Finder² you can also learn about over 800 different occupations within each of these groupings.

2. O*NET OnLine³ is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment & Training Administration, and developed by the National Center for O*NET Development. The O*NET system describes occupations in terms of the knowledge, skills, and abilities required as well as how the work is performed.

Of note, O*NET OnLine has a section devoted to Veterans interested in applying their military skills and experience to work in civilian life.

Though job availability and trends should not overly inform your career decision, understanding the anticipated job opportunities when you are looking for a job or making a career change could help you make better decisions. The numbers posted by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics through the OOH will show the percentage of increase or decrease in job opportunities projected over a 10-year timeframe.

Sections of the OOH both online and in the app offer information that is quite pertinent when you are making a decision about a career. Comprehensive information on each of these areas may be helpful as you are deciding on career options. Categories of information include:

- Occupation titles
- Job summaries
- Education requirements for entry-level positions

Table 1.4 Occupation Groupings as Listed in the Occupational Outlook Handbook with Examples of Occupations Within Each Grouping

Architecture and Engineering	Aerospace Engineers, Landscape Architects, Computer Hardware Engineers
Arts and Design	Graphic Designers, Art Directors, Special Effects Artists and Animation
Business	Accountants and Auditors, Market Research Analysts, Project Management Specialists
Cleaning	Grounds Maintenance Workers, Pest Control Workers, Janitor and Building Cleaners
Computer and Information Technology	Computer and Information Research Scientists, Information Security Analysts
Construction	Solar Photovoltaic Installers, Electricians, Construction Equipment Operators
Education and Library	Archivists, Curators, and Museum Workers, Postsecondary Teachers
Entertainment and Sports	Coaches and Scouts, Umpires, Referees, Other Sports Officials
Farming	Forest and Conservation Workers, Agricultural Workers
Food Preparation and Serving	Cooks, Chefs and Head Cooks
Healthcare	Athletic Trainers, Health Information Technologists and Medical Registrars, Nurse Anesthetists, Nurse Practitioners
Installation	Wind Turbine Technicians, Medical Equipment Repairers, Heating, Air Conditioning, and Refrigeration Mechanics
Legal	Lawyers, Arbitrators, Mediators, and Conciliators, Paralegals and Legal Assistants

Management	Medical and Health Services Managers, Computer and Information Systems Managers
Math	Data Scientists, Mathematicians and Statisticians, Actuaries, Operations Research Analysts
Media and Communications	Technical Writers, Film and Video Editors and Camera Operators
Military	Occupation specialty varies based on unit, branch of service and other factors
Office and Administration Support	Public Safety Telecommunicators, Customer Service Representatives
Personal Care and Service	Animal Care and Service Workers, Fitness Trainers and Instructors, Skincare Specialists
Production	Bakers, Food Processing Equipment Workers
Protective Service	Private Detectives and Investigators, Fire Inspectors, Firefighters
Sales	Insurance Sales Agents, Financial Services Sales Agents, Real Estate Brokers and Sales Agents
Science	Epidemiologists, Medical Scientists, Forensic Science Technicians
Social Services	Substance Abuse, Behavioral Disorder, and Mental Health Counselors, Marriage and Family Therapists
Transportation	Flight Attendants, Delivery Truck Drivers and Driver/Sales Workers, Shuttle Drivers

Source: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/>

- Median pay
- Descriptions of the work
- Work environment
- How to become.... (occupation)
- Job outlook for the next 10 years

Between the OOH, O*NET OnLine, and other published resources, there are ways to gather information online about various occupations. These sites can provide details that allow you to compare occupations and stay current about job trends whether you are beginning your career, currently working and exploring how to strengthen your skills, or considering a pivot and want to learn more about the options. See Table 1.5 for a sample template that can be used for comparing occupations.

In addition to various occupational groups, gathering information includes understanding the industries that one can work in. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics also provides data for more than 100 industries, listed in alphabetical order by industry or NAICS (North American Industry Classification System) number order.⁴

Organizations have many unique positions as well, and so as you are looking at various career options online, if you want to explore other roles, check the section Data for Occupations Not Covered in Detail in the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*.⁵

Each of the occupations listed in these resources provides a breadth of opportunities, from those that do not require a degree to those requiring a bachelor’s degree or an advanced degree. Developing a good understanding of the academic training required to meet job requirements is an integral part of gathering information for your 5Ws.

Table 1.5 Sample Template for Comparing Occupations

	<i>Occupation #1</i>	<i>Occupation #2</i>	<i>Occupation #3</i>
Median Pay			
Entry-Level Education			
Job Outlook			
Primary Tasks and Responsibilities			
Work Environment			
Similar Occupations			
Additional Insights			

Staying informed about job trends and keeping your 5Ws in mind may lead you to applying your skills and experience in different ways, based on your interests and the opportunities that become available. Depending on the type of opportunity you are looking for, some may be more readily available than others. Opportunities to combine your experiences are special, so watch for these unique positions that allow you to leverage many of the skills you have acquired.

A review of job openings for someone who is a financial analyst (as of the time this book was written) shows that there are job opportunities available in many industries including: Food, Finance and Insurance, Manufacturing, Health Care, and Education, just to name a few. Someone may describe themselves as a financial analyst working in the manufacturing industry. If they were to change jobs and work in another industry, they would be a financial analyst working in, let's say, the insurance industry. As one is monitoring industry trends, one may choose to work in one industry over another. Whether you would consider this change a pivot depends on your perspective and how significant of a change in direction this is for you. Though this would not be considered a career change, you may consider a change from one industry to another a pivot for yourself since this will involve a change.

Another person who has an undergraduate degree in music may choose to attend graduate school and teach, in which case they are working in the education industry. If this person applies their musical talents to performing, they may choose graduate school and work in the performing arts industry. One is not limited to be working in one occupational group or industry and thus based on your interests and experiences, you can work towards applying your skills and experiences in many types of positions.

You may come across trends or statistics on how many jobs or careers people have in a lifetime and you may wonder about how many times people actually change their careers. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) states on their website response to FAQs “The BLS never has attempted to estimate the number of times people change careers in the course of their working lives. The reason we have not produced such estimates is that no consensus has emerged on what constitutes a career change.”⁶ This is not to say that people do not pivot and take on new responsibilities and change their daily activities. Change impacts each person differently. What may be considered a change for one person may be considered a natural progression in their careers for others.

The content in your resume can be balanced to draw attention to the skills and experiences you have as compared to the number of jobs you have had if it is prepared with this intent. Creating a section that highlights your skills and experiences, in addition to the number of positions, allows the reader to see these skills as a broader skillset that is not specific to just one position.

Regularly reviewing the Employment Projections section⁷ of the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* online or using the CareerInfo app will help you identify job

trends. The numbers posted will show the percentage of increase or decrease in job opportunities over a projected timeframe, such as over a 10-year period. Though job availability and trends should not overly inform your career decision, understanding the job opportunities anticipated when you are looking for a job could help you make better decisions. Note that a person may work within a company or organization in one of these occupations, or they could be in a leadership role or an entrepreneur in any of the occupations. The occupation category refers to the definition of the work but not necessarily one's specific role or job title.

If you are early in your career or considering making a pivot in your career, as you are reviewing job sites and looking at job postings to gather information and determine what is of interest to you, if there are companies or organizations already in mind, start by visiting the websites for those companies to learn more about the people, the culture, the locations, and other aspects of the company. If you are not certain which company(s) do the work that is of interest to you, search for companies that are in that particular industry and you can readily find several to look at.

When visiting the website for the organization, look for the career section to see specific openings. You may choose to add your contact information to receive updates on job postings as well. Companies also post positions on larger websites. Both are ways to look at job openings. You can approach this either way—see the job opening and then look at the website or look at the company website first.

If you choose to look up companies first and then the job openings, one of the advantages is that even if the organization does not have any job openings at that time, you are learning about the company and can watch for future openings. By looking specifically at job posting sites, you have the advantage of applying online, directly through the site. If there are no jobs that match your interest, consider joining an organization's talent community to receive notices about new positions.

If the company(s) you currently work with or have worked with are at the top of your list of interests, seek to understand if there are positions or opportunities that would be a good match for your skills and experience. What is work that you would like to do that is not currently specified? Would there be an opportunity to speak with your manager or mentor or HR to explore options within your company?

Other resources for information that can help you stay current on industry trends include large and well-established hiring platforms and career websites, ChatGPT, blogs, recent news, books, and other resources. They may offer insights as well, depending on the information you are looking for. Staying informed is important because significant changes may occur and create opportunities you may not have considered as an option. For example, imagine the impact if you were thinking about going to college and then noticed a news that "More US companies no longer requiring job seekers to have a college degree."⁸ This

is a significant change and could have a positive impact on your career outlook, especially if the lack of a college degree has previously limited your career options.

These sources contain information that are intended for a broader audience. As you are gathering information through these sources, you may have questions that are specifically about your situation, and you may want to gather additional insights through conversations with others.

Learning from Others

At any stage in your career, finding a good person who has insights and is willing to give you even as much as 15 minutes of their time to answer your questions is invaluable. Though there are AI resources that can be quite beneficial and address your questions, a conversation with a person can connect you in ways that are different. People can connect you with a friend or acquaintance they know who works in an area of interest to you. There are advantages in gathering information from multiple sources, so if there are opportunities to speak with people who might be able to assist you, make the time if you can.

Ways to connect with people either in person or virtually include reaching out to schedule one-on-ones (1:1s), especially if a person works within the same organization as you. You can also invite people for a coffee chat. If you don't quite know where to start but want to meet people who are working in the same field, look for networking events sponsored by different organizations. To speak with people in a more formal, work context, you could ask someone if they would be open to job shadowing with them, to understand the nature of their day-to-day work. Informational interviews are a way to meet and speak with someone who works in a field or hires people into roles that you are interested in exploring. They are a way to have a conversation about specific requirements of the job without necessarily being considered for a specific role. They may also be willing to share their own career experience, which can be informative. One of the benefits of having a conversation with others is that it provides you with an opportunity to both ask and answer questions.

In preparation for these conversations, it might be helpful to leverage several resources to understand the scope of an occupation. For example, if one were interested in transportation, this is an occupation that has opportunities ranging from being a shuttle driver to a logistics analyst to a transportation engineer.³ Thus, the work of transportation is broader than one may realize by just taking a quick glance. Reviewing a combination of the OOH or CareerInfo App, O*NET OnLine and job search data engines can be very informative when preparing to speak with others.

These are suggestions for meetings to schedule or attend in an effort to get to know people and learn more about your career interests. Some are more formal

activities, while others are not career-specific, but they can still be a great way to meet new people and build connections with others:

■ **One-on-Ones (1:1s)**

Within each organization, there is a familiar term referring to informal conversations with others that are not formal meetings between a manager and a team member. As you feel more comfortable in your environment, explore options for scheduling these meetings. Understand the amount of time commitment that is reasonable for the other person, and ask for example, if 30 minutes be reasonable. Though it's relatively easy to schedule virtual meetings, realize that, sometimes, asking for a quick conversation over the phone may be an easier invitation for someone to accept.

■ **Coffee Chats or Lunch**

Depending on the person's schedule and the time of day they are typically more available, the invitation may be over a cup of coffee/tea or lunch. A coffee chat can be either virtual or in person and last perhaps 30–60 minutes. If either of these involves meeting in person, there is always the possibility that if you are having a good conversation, the meeting could last longer, though you will always want to be respectful of the other person's time and not keep your guest beyond their original time commitment.

■ **Job Shadowing**

If you have an interest in learning what someone does on a regular basis, consider asking if you may shadow for a half day or a day so that you can experience the environment that they are working in. If their environment is virtual, perhaps a meeting where you are able to view non-proprietary materials and have a walk-through of what they do and how they do their work will be informative. It's like experiencing "a day in the life" of someone in the role you are interested in.

■ **Career Fairs**

These can be virtual or in person. Attending them can provide opportunities to connect with employers who are participating and provide you with a means to interact with someone directly as you are exploring career options. A resume is typically required to attend these events.

■ **Informational Interviews**

An informational interview is different from a formal interview. A formal interview is initiated by a company/organization after you have applied for a position.

An informational interview is a conversation that provides an opportunity to gather information on topics such as the company or organization. You can also inquire about how your skills and experience might align with positions the other

person is familiar with. Ideally, the person would identify positions in the company or organization so that you would know what type of job titles to consider for current or future openings.

If you initiate this meeting, you are asking for an informational interview. If this type of meeting is initiated by the other person, one who has current or future openings, this may be called an exploratory interview, whereby they are scheduling this call with you to understand your career interests and experience.

In preparation for either an informational or exploratory interview, it is best to have your resume updated and available. Depending on the nature of the conversation, if the person you are meeting with expresses an interest and asks to see your resume and provide you with feedback, certainly have this available. If the person you are meeting with would prefer to keep the discussion more general and does not express an interest in reviewing your resume, then follow their lead.

When scheduling these conversations, understand and in fact be very clear and upfront that you have no job expectations and you know this is not an interview. Explain that you are appreciative of a good conversation to learn more. Consider it a form of a coffee chat or networking in a more personal, 1:1 context. This is an opportunity for you to learn about the individual, their experience, companies they have worked at or are currently working at, and for you to gather insights. The person who agrees to meet with you most likely sees potential as well. They may or may not have jobs or are in a hiring position; however, this opportunity to meet with you may be helpful if they are looking to hire in the future. These conversations are potentially mutually beneficial.

As you prepare for these conversations, you are also preparing for future interviews since there are questions that can overlap. Thinking back to your 5Ws, it is not unreasonable for someone to ask you about your experience in the forms of who, what, where, when, and why and then for you to assess whether your resume addresses the questions that the person you are meeting with wants to know. Are you finding that you need to add additional explanations to clarify something? Is there something that seems important that you forgot to add? Most importantly, do you feel like your resume is saying what you want it to say and providing an accurate reflection of your skills and experience?

Go into these interviews with a goal to learn and find answers to your questions, but at the same time, be prepared for any new suggestions or insights the person might offer you. This is important since you are still in learning mode—and possibly still in an information-gathering mode. If you sense new ideas or if the person you are speaking with has other ideas, an informational interview might be a good time for you to explore their suggestions.

Tips for informational interviews that also apply to formal interviews:

- Learn about the company, the people you will be speaking with, and the position. For the people you will be speaking with, learn about any information that is publicly available.
- Be prepared to talk about your experience and share examples from the work you have done, especially any experience or work, related to the job description. Most importantly, build rapport with your interviewer(s) and know that during the interview, their goal is to learn more about you and how you might be able to work with others in their company or organization.
- Take note of the questions you are asked, and keep in mind those you might have hesitated on in your response (either during this interview or in previous interviews). Think of what you said, and in retrospect, what you could have said instead so you can use it the next time that question/topic comes up.
- Interview preparation is important. Set aside time to practice with someone who can ask you meaningful questions.
- Send a thank-you note after the interview; interviewers always appreciate this personal touch. Send a handwritten note within 24 hours or send an email if that will arrive faster.

It doesn't take a lot. You might be surprised how helpful informational interviews can be. While you sometimes hear about things you are already familiar with, it's very possible to find a gold nugget. It may be a nudge, a passing comment, or an idea you follow up on, and it can make a world of difference in your life and career.

■ Networking Events

Networking events are organized to provide a forum for meeting new people. These are typically events scheduled around a theme, and there is typically a common thread among attendees.

Think of these events as being hosted for the purpose of bringing people together who might not otherwise have an opportunity to connect. It is an open forum for you and others to initiate conversations.

If the networking event is specifically focused on careers and meeting potential employers, remember to bring a copy of your resume. Even if you don't have a paper copy, be prepared to send it electronically, the same day or the next day, when you follow up after the event.

■ Professional Networks

Being a part of professional associations also provides a means to connect and meet people who work in a similar field. These networks can provide

information and education related to the field you are interested in or working in. They also allow you to connect with others for networking and job opportunities.

■ **Alumni Contacts and Resources**

Leverage your alumni network to connect with people. These can be academic alumni gatherings that are formally scheduled, such as those sponsored by the academic institution. These events may also provide opportunities to stay in touch with past coworkers, informally, through regular gatherings.

■ **Industry Conferences**

Opportunities to attend conferences allow you to learn more about your industry and connect with people who do work that is similar to what you do. Additionally, it's an opportunity to learn the most current practices and technology in your field. It's a way to get an up-to-date perspective on the work you do. If you want to learn about an industry, attending a conference can be a one-stop approach to gathering insights.

■ **Social Activities**

If your schedule permits, make time for these events. These can be after-work hour socials, service projects, etc. Some social activities are organized to provide people you work with an opportunity to get to know each other. Though these are always optional activities, making time to participate can help you expand your network, connect and meet new people.

Though reaching out and connecting with people you either do not know or are less familiar with may feel potentially awkward and uncomfortable, it is extremely effective in building connections with people who can help you on your career journey. Whether these meetings are called a coffee chat or an informational interview depends on mutually agreed-upon terms that are comfortable for you and the person you are meeting with. In addition to providing a means to gather information, such a meeting is a nice way to become more comfortable with presenting yourself and your experience and answering questions about your work. It also allows you to expand your personal and professional network.

Though these activities are informal in that they are not job interviews, these interactions could lead to future job interviews, so approach them professionally. Someone you meet could have job openings now or in the future, or they may connect you with someone who has a hiring need.

You may also learn during these conversations that what you thought you might enjoy doing no longer sounds appealing and you would like to consider other options. This is part of the anticipated outcome—that you can gather more information to determine what resonates with you or what does not.

Potential Topics for Conversation

When you have the opportunity to ask questions, you have a chance to learn something that is specific to your situation or gather information that can enhance your understanding. When you are in the position of being asked questions, it challenges you to articulate your thoughts, and the process of answering other's questions outside of the context of a formal interview is good practice. Sometimes the process of articulating your thoughts invites you to rethink how you are viewing your thoughts about different careers. It doesn't mean that others are right or have better opinions, but through the art of conversation, you can gain different perspectives.

If you are able to, connect with people who have the jobs you aspire to and ask to learn about their work. You may also hear stories about how gratifying their work is and how they have enjoyed doing this work for many years. These are all reflective of certain aspects of the job. As you listen to the remarks, can you easily see yourself in that space? While it is important to hear what people like about their jobs, it is equally important to understand the challenges so you can be certain you are prepared for all aspects of the career or job you are pursuing or thinking about pivoting to.

Knowing the job means understanding what a really good day looks like and having an idea of what a bad day in the position might look like. Keep in mind, though, that what someone else doesn't like about the job doesn't necessarily mean that you won't like that aspect of the job. Just think of it as gathering information—data points for your decision. Also, know that the way work is done at one organization may differ from how it is done in another organization.

People you meet during networking, presentations, conferences, blogs—whether you know them personally or not—can be good sources of information. Websites and blogs are another resource, especially if they include interviews with people who have managed a transition from one career to another.

Getting to know the job better is about going beyond what you think the job entails and learning from someone close to the job what types of problems they are trying to solve in their day-to-day work. To help prepare yourself for the good days and the challenging days, learn about:

- Inspiring aspects of the work
- Less pleasant but necessary aspects of the work
- Logistics (travel, weekends, hours per week)
- Problem-solving
- Skills and experience required to create effective solutions
- Skills that you want to develop or increase your expertise in

To be successful in a position involves understanding the full nature of the work, and enjoying what the job involves on good days, as well as on challenging days. Most people will tell you what they like about their jobs. Ask them what is hard about their jobs as well. As you are making career decisions, understanding all aspects of the job will help ensure that you are happy (or at ease) with your choice. Being able to adapt and grow with your job is important as well.

Knowing people who do the same job that you are pursuing has an advantage. The advantage is that you become familiar with the nature of the work. But be careful about making assumptions. If you see someone you know doing the work, and they seem happy, you might assume that you would be just as happy doing the same work. This may or may not be the case. Thus, knowing yourself, and knowing the job can help you build the confidence and assurance that you are taking a step in a direction that works for you.

As you are developing your 5Ws, be curious about everything and everyone you meet. Ask questions. Begin by asking people about the type of work they do and how they got their first job. Try to understand the education that was important in their careers. Take advantage of opportunities for job shadowing to get a closer understanding of people and their work. Ask questions, broad questions, that maximize your scope of understanding. Also ask what else they have noticed in the industry, including the skills and knowledge that are fundamental to the work, especially if there are changes in the industry.

While you are gathering information, try to take note of what is being shared with you. Keep in mind the information that is most important to you now and what insights are good to keep in mind and consider for any future decisions.

These are some of the many benefits of speaking with people:

■ Gain Exposure to the Breadth of Situations They Have Observed

What have they seen others do in their career journeys that were unique and effective? These conversations can reveal examples of what they or others have done and help you see beyond what you thought was possible. They can be a source of encouragement and provide ideas for other options you can explore.

■ Learn About Opportunities to Enhance Your Skills

Find out if there are people you can speak with to understand more about your skills. For example, can the work you do be applied in different ways? Develop an understanding of how to enhance your skills. Is it more beneficial through training or hands-on experience? What type of experience could be valuable for you to gain? How might you be able to find these opportunities?

■ **Improve Your Understanding of the Job Description**

Validate or verify your interpretation of the job description and your understanding of the job responsibilities, especially if any of the job responsibilities seem unclear to you. Try to understand what type of experience would be beneficial for you to gain. Consider these additional data points compared to what you have already learned about the position.

■ **Where Else Is This Work Being Done?**

You have been looking at certain organizations, but are there other industries where the work you are interested in is being done? Are there other departments within the company? Are you looking at all the right opportunities, or are there future openings anticipated that you were not aware of yet?

■ **Are You Really Going to Like This Job?**

It's one thing to read a job description and know people who do the work, but what are their days really like? Sometimes we think that job shadowing needs to be something formal where you ask someone if you can go to work with them for a day. It can be more casual than that. Some helpful questions:

- Ask them about their work
- Listen to their stories about their work or projects
- When are they working their hardest?
- When do they seem exhilarated?
- When does it seem stressful?
- Depending on the location where they work, you might be able to stop in for a visit, take a quick tour, or meet them for lunch

■ **How Do They See the Industry or Field Evolving?**

What changes have they experienced over the course of their career? What do they anticipate?

I am often surprised when I have these conversations with others. First, I am really appreciative of how candid people are willing to be. They are willing to share insights and offer opinions, typically beyond my expectations.

Understand that the person you are speaking with may not have all the information but appreciate that they will have a perspective that is different from yours. During the course of the exchange, you may learn something that will shape how you view situations and may lead you to ask other questions.

■ **Mutual Exchange**

When someone has graciously offered to meet with you, realize that there is an opportunity for a mutual learning and a reciprocal exchange

of information, thus be prepared to answer questions as well and provide insights based on your perspectives.

Resources for gathering information, building your 5Ws, and learning from others can come from many different resources. While speaking with others and gathering information, consider some of these topics to gain more clarity as you are making decisions:

- Determine the minimum degree requirements for a particular role and how that compares with what you have in mind, including any advanced degree requirements. Note that a requirement can range from 0 to 12 years after postsecondary/high school education.
- Become familiar with the terminology and options. For example, if you have an interest in helping others and being associated with helping people improve the quality of their lives, there are differences between “working in health care” versus “being a health care provider,” versus “working at a health care company.” You may also see the words “industry” versus “clinical” in descriptions of work related to health care.
 - Working “in IT” versus “working for a high-tech company”
 - Working “as an engineer” versus “working at an engineering company”
 - Working “in finance” versus “working for a financial/accounting firm”
 - There are some functions that exist at many companies, such as HR, Finance, and IT. There are some positions where a company hires many individuals with these experiences, such as software engineers or data scientists, research scientists, marketers, etc.
- People you meet during networking, presentations, and conferences, whether you know them personally or not, can be good sources of information.
- Podcasts and online resources can be beneficial as well.

How do you start to tell a story about yourself, especially your work and career interests, when you don’t know what you really want to do? How do you answer the question *Where do you want to be 5 years or 10 years from now?* You may be asking yourself the same question at any point along your career path if you are a student, recent graduate, employee in your first or second job, or even someone with a well-established work history. You may even be new to the workforce.

Career exploration is a very personal journey and that is what this book focuses on. The steps in your personal journey are based on curiosity, interest, and a motivation to do work that makes you happy, whether the work function is marketing, business, finance, or the sciences and whether the industry is health care, technology, manufacturing, service, or hospitality.

Though we don't always think of our life as a story, we each have our own unique story. When you are exploring career options, you will find yourself thinking about the way you have spent your time, the work you have done, and how best to convey this information through your resume, in conversations, and in interviews.

Other ways to expand your overall network:

- Friends at the gym
- Join community groups
- Volunteer
- Expand your sphere—talk to more people

All of this work will help you prepare to build a resume that speaks for yourself and says what you want it to say. Your resume can reflect that you have done your research and can tell a better story about your experience and interests. As you gather more information about how you would like to proceed with your career, you may find yourself better curating the content to match the requirements of the position.

The Importance of Having a Personal Network

By participating in any of the activities and events as described, you are building your personal network. Networking or having a network is not about getting a specific job. It's about getting to know people, making friends, and having people you can call with any questions about work, life, and careers. If they can't help you, they might know someone who can. Everyone can benefit from having help along their career journey. Just as other people are a part of your network, you are a part of theirs as well. It's mutual. You learn about the individual and they learn about you. You can't go into these conversations expecting something. It may or may not work out that way, but if you go in with a positive attitude, you'll learn or make a connection that may be the one you are hoping for.

Your first network likely started in school, whether it was in grade school, high school, college, or beyond. These connections sometimes last for a lifetime. Building your professional network is similar in that it starts with introducing yourself.

It is through insights and conversations that I found myself being introduced to and accepting opportunities that were not on the conventional path for someone with my academic training and previous job experience.

What's Next?

1. Consider your 5Ws. Which ones are the most significant to you at this point in your career journey? Which one seems to evolve or change the most? What insight(s) might help you address any questions about your 5Ws?
2. If you have spoken with people to gather more information, what insights have you gained that are particularly helpful? What are still some open questions you have before you are ready to take the next step on your career journey?
3. Which of your efforts to network and connect with others have you found most valuable and supportive of your efforts? If you have found individuals or groups that are a good match for you, how will you plan to stay connected? If you have not found the right connections yet, what other approaches can you take? Who can you connect with that you have not reached out to yet?

Notes

- 1 The Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH) is available online at <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/> or also through the OOH CareerInfo app (*available on iOS and Android*).
- 2 For the Occupation Finder within the OOH, visit: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/occupation-finder.htm>.
- 3 O*NET OnLine is available at <https://www.onetonline.org/>.
- 4 The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics also provides data for more than 100 industries, listed in alphabetical order by industry or NAICS (North American Industry Classification System) number order (see <https://bls.gov/iag/>).
- 5 For Data for Occupations Not Covered in Detail in the Occupational Outlook Handbook online, visit: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/about/data-for-occupations-not-covered-in-detail.htm#Business%20and%20financial%20operations%20occupations>.
- 6 The Bureau of Labor of Labor Statistics' (BLS) response to this FAQ: "*Does BLS have information on the number of times people change careers in their lives?*" <https://bls.gov/nls/questions-and-answers.htm>.
- 7 The Employment Projections section of *Occupational Outlook Handbook*: www.bls.gov/emp/.
- 8 "*More US companies no longer requiring job seekers to have a college degree*" by Megan Cerullo, published by CBS NEWS, **MONEYWATCH** on Dec 5, 2023. (<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/college-degree-job-requirement/>).

Chapter 2

Prepare to Tell Your Story

Tell your story.

It's your opportunity to share your experience.

Preparing your resume prepares your mind for career conversations. It is the foundation for conversations that you will have with others about yourself and your experience. Whenever I am reviewing a resume, I look to understand the individual to the greatest extent possible, piecing together the words that are in front of me and any other information that is available, such as a cover letter and a professional profile as shared via online platforms. The resume provides insights into the types of work they have done, the learning experiences they have gained, and the skills they have developed over time.

The best time to create or update your resume is when the thought first crosses your mind, whether you are creating your first resume or thinking about updating an existing one. You may not need it right at that moment; however, once you start to think about the content, you will start to think about your story and how you want to convey information about yourself. You may even choose to approach it the same way as you approach your 5Ws and ask “What has changed? What has stayed the same?”

You may be wondering about who will look at your resume. The first person is you. As you prepare to have conversations with others, as you apply for jobs, and as you prepare for interviews, a well-organized resume prepares you for what is ahead. A critical review of your resume allows you to take a closer look at what you have accomplished and to use this as a guide as you consider the next steps. How does this happen? As you are reviewing job descriptions, you may take a

closer look at your resume and start comparing the job requirements with your own skills and experience.

Your resume has a lot of information. It includes what you have done throughout your life. It will remind you of your accomplishments, and it is a placeholder for other things you might have done differently if you had known then what you know now. Keep in mind that your resume is not static and it evolves every day with all the actions you take. You can shape and reshape the story it tells over time. Your cover letter and online academic and professional profiles are additional tools to support your efforts to convey your story.

Before You Begin

Though there are many ways to express yourself—through your work, your writing, your art, your design portfolio, products you create, or code you write—your resume is a document that is conventionally accepted as representing you, your academic training, and your skills along with experience. It is a way of communicating to others, in writing, the story of your life/career journey. Your resume, whether written or outlined in your mind, is also the starting point for conversations about your career and aspirations.

In addition to being a record of your past accomplishments, it can be a forward-looking document and can be helpful in guiding you on your career journey, facilitating conversations about what you have done and what it may take to get to the next step on your journey. Using it as a forward-looking document and a conversation starter allows you to look at your life and career progression. You can use it to make decisions that will help you advance in the direction that you hope for, and it also helps others understand you and provide insights that may guide you on your journey.

This is your opportunity to write your story and to frame it as you would like to see it. If you like where you are headed, great! If you are not certain about the decisions you will be making, this is a good time to explore.

Elements of career exploration are inherently a part of each review and update of your resume, whether you are an early career professional, have been working for many years, are interested in moving forward to the next level, or are considering change from one industry or function to another. Each time you look at your resume there is an invitation to consider what is next in your career journey.

Your resume is a reflection of your skills, experience, and talents, and your willingness to work, learn, and grow. Your resume also documents the decisions, opportunities, and commitments you have made over time, and it will be the

starting point for career conversations. As you review and update your resume, also keep in mind your 5Ws since someone reviewing your resume is likely looking for your 5Ws. They are hoping to learn more about you such as:

- Who** might your work have affected?
- What** did you do in certain positions?
- Where** did you complete your education?
- When** did you gain the necessary skills or experience?
- Why** did you move from one position to another?

Several tools are available for communicating your story. Though your resume is the primary tool for capturing your experience and skills, your resume is further supported by the information you include in the professional summary section of your resume, if you choose to create one. Additionally, other tools that can support your resume include a cover letter and an online professional profile in LinkedIn.

Over time, as you gain new skills and experience, you can add and remove content from your resume, while keeping all of your resume history in your master list as described in Chapter 1. This cumulative record which includes your employment, volunteer, community, education, training experiences, and more will grow over the course of your lifetime. Reviewing your master list while you are working on your resume will help you ensure clarity, consistency, and continuity in the content.

- Clarity** in your choice of words to describe your role, responsibilities, and contributions.
- Consistency** in names, use of abbreviations and terminology.
- Continuity** in the order and sequence of items listed.

Your Resume: Getting Started

Though there are many resources available to assist you with resume preparation, the content and information you choose to include is still your decision. You can choose the format and font that best represents you. As you create a current version of your resume, ensure you use keywords appropriately and align your experience with the specific job description. Since you have just one (or two) pages available for a considerable amount of information, we are going to dig into the details and explore options. Resumes take on many formats, and there is no correct or incorrect way to prepare this document with one exception: review it carefully to ensure there are no typos.

As I have helped people prepare and update their resumes, questions often come up. Even though resume templates are widely available, each person's career experience is unique and that leads to questions about different aspects of a resume. There are no right or wrong answers, just different approaches to communicating your story.

Let's start with how you will introduce yourself. At the top of the page, your essential contact information consists of your name, email address, and phone number.

■ **Your Name**

Consider consistency in using the same name across professional platforms. Additionally, if you have a formal name and prefer another name in the work environment, you may include that name in parenthesis, such as:

Maximillian (Max)

Mary Beth (Beth)

■ **Your Phone Number**

Use a phone number that you can readily be reached at, ensuring that your voicemail is set up to receive messages and your greeting sounds professional.

■ **Your Email Address**

Use an email address that is professional, consisting mostly of your name, initials, or other letters and numbers.

■ **LinkedIn URL**

A link to your professional profile is optional and recommended, especially if you have created a profile and it is up to date. There is an option to create a custom URL for your profile that can make the link shorter and easier to include on your resume.

■ **Home address**

Perhaps you wish to include your address or perhaps just the city, state/province, or country. This information is optional; however, there are considerations when making a decision on whether or not to include this information. A practical aspect is space; however, there are other considerations.

Depending on your decision to include or not include your home address or city, state, or country on your resume, consider the message you might be communicating, based on the job description with regards to relocation and options for work location (remote/hybrid). Perhaps you are including your geographic location to indicate your proximity to the place of work? Realize that your decision on whether or not to include your address or geographic location may depend on who you are sharing your resume with and the purpose for including this.

Question: What else should I know before I get started?

Whether you are creating your own resume or leveraging AI-powered resources for assistance, select a format that is easy to edit, as this will make any changes or updates easier to incorporate.

- Your name, email, and phone number should be easy to read and readily visible on the top of the page.
- The length of your resume is ideally one page, two pages at most.
- Keep a margin of approximately 1 inch on the left and right sides with more flexibility on the top and bottom margins depending on the format, font, and content you are including. Look at the entire page of your resume from an arm's-length distance and consider the amount of "white space" on the piece of paper—is it too little, too much, or just right?
- The content can vary and to keep your content at one to two pages, you may be choosing to either remove much earlier career experiences from your resume or you may shorten the number of bullet points and the descriptions for earlier experiences. More suggestions will be provided on how to organize your resume content.

Question: Some resumes have a summary statement at the top of the resume. Is a summary statement required?

A summary statement at the top of a resume is not required; however, it allows you to provide an introduction about yourself in a concise narrative format, beyond what is described in the bullet points of your resume. The summary statement can also be described as a resume, professional or executive summary and included if you want to provide the reader with an overview of yourself.

For example, if someone works in information technology, their professional summary may have the title: IT Professional or IT Manager, depending on their level of experience. If someone has managed a large organization, they may consider themselves an IT Executive. If this individual would like to distinguish themselves and highlight their marketing experience, the header for the summary might read "IT Professional with Marketing Experience." This summary should be well-written, concise, and limited to 2–3 sentences. If there is interest in informing the reader of a career aspiration, such as making a pivot, a fourth sentence may be considered. For more information about summary statements as it pertains to career pivots, see Chapter 6.

Question: I have heard the term *CV*. What is this and is it different from a resume?

CV stands for *Curriculum Vitae*. This term is used most often for positions requiring advanced degrees and highly technical, functional, or specialized expertise, such as positions for scientists, physicians, lawyers, and architects.

A CV shows a progression and comprehensive summary over the course of a person's lifetime. Unlike a resume, there is no limit to the number of pages for a CV.

Additionally, a CV includes a detailed yet succinct description of research grants that a person has been awarded along with research projects, fellowships, scientific training, and certifications. For an experienced professional, this document can be well over 50 pages.

Key Content for a CV

- Name and Contact information
 - Full mailing address
 - Office phone number and email
- Education
 - Degree (completed or anticipated) and corresponding date
 - Include titles for dissertations
- Honors and Awards
- Publications
- Work Experience
- Teaching Experience
- Conference Presentations
- Service (Community, Campus)
- Internships
- Leadership
- Languages

The most notable difference between a resume and a CV is that a CV includes academic and professional experience, which lists peer-reviewed publications and presentations delivered at conferences along with any fellowships and grants. A CV is more applicable when pursuing an academic position (science, engineering, medicine, or law) or a position that requires an advanced degree, such as a master's degree, Ph.D., or M.D.

You will know when a CV is required since the job posting will specifically ask for a resume or a CV. You may be asked to present a CV in addition to, or in place of, a resume. In the scientific and medical community and those who are working in an academic community where grants, fellowships, and other experience are a prerequisite, a CV is often preferred.

Organizing Your Resume

The format of your resume will evolve, and the sections you place emphasis on will depend on which stage you are in your career. It is expected that your content will shift over time since as you continue to work, you will need more space in your resume to highlight what is important for your current or future opportunities. Though some positions and experience will stay on your resume throughout your career, other content you may decide is no longer relevant, but remember that it remains on your master list so that you can always refer back to the experience.

Question: How often should I review and update my resume?

Just as you tell a story differently depending on the audience, your resume will be continuously adjusted to make room for new information while retaining other important information. The need for these adjustments occurs as you progress in your career. You may have held new jobs or developed new responsibilities or skills so the content of your resume will shift over time. However, retaining select information from previous jobs is still beneficial. Reviewing your resume every 4–6 months allows you to monitor changes in your career or career aspirations. It is not intended to require a lot of time—even taking a quick look at your resume once in a while is helpful. Definitely make time to update your resume as you anticipate job or career changes.

Question: I find working on my resume overwhelming. Is there another way to approach this?

Many resume templates and AI-assisted programs are available to help with the process of preparing your resume. If you would like a different approach for working on your resume, visually divide your resume into thirds as a way to group your content.

The top (first third) will have the most important information you want the reader to notice. This includes your name and contact information, a summary section (optional), and your most recent position(s). If you are applying for a position requiring specialized skills, you may choose to highlight them closer to the top of the resume.

The center (second third) will have the core information and description of the work you have done. It tells the story of your overall experience—where you have worked and what experience you have gained.

The bottom (third third) will contain additional background information, including awards and recognition, language, and hobbies (if you choose to include these to provide the reader with some insight on your interests). The

positions you list in the bottom third of your resume will be those positions you held earlier or towards the beginning of your career, and it may include post-graduate internships. However, if you are still completing your internships, you would include them in the central portion of your resume. If you have been working full-time for more than five years, though, you may revisit whether or not your internships are still important to your resume.

Question: Where should my education be placed on my resume?

It depends. When you are still in school or early in your career, your education is your primary focus and most recent accomplishment and thus it is typically positioned in the top section of your resume. As you gain more work/professional experience, your education may shift towards the bottom third of your resume since your job experience and training take precedence. If you decide to return to school, you may choose to move your education to the top again. For example, if you completed your undergraduate degree, worked for several years, and decided to enroll in law school, you would want to highlight this new endeavor and consider placing it on the top of your resume again to be certain the reviewers are aware of this new degree you are working on and your job search will be in the direction of applying your law degree.

Question: If I am approaching graduation or have recently graduated, how do I indicate that I am eligible for positions designated for Early Career?

Ensure that your resume reflects that you are an Early Career Talent and if correct, available for positions based on the eligibility requirements in the job description. Positions that are specific for Early Career will typically have very clear parameters to describe acceptable graduation dates or the amount of time after graduation when one is eligible to be considered for the role. The terms you will see in the job description or title will include words such as:

- year one
- new college grad
- recent graduate
- new grad
- college grad
- entry level

When you see these in the job description or requirements, be certain to review and regularly update your resume, especially your graduation date, in case there are any changes, to ensure that you are eligible for these roles.

Place your education in the top third of the resume, be certain it is clear and indicates the month and year when you are graduating—if relevant and your eligible start date, especially if it is not immediately after graduation. Some positions will accept recent graduates up to 12 months or even up to 18 or 24 months after graduation.

Examples of resume headers and sample content for any resume:

- Education: School name, department, major, minor, and GPA (if early career)
- Certificates/Training
- Work Experience
- Computer or Technical Skills
- Awards and Recognition
- Language skills (fluency in one or more languages)
- Service projects

If you are still in a college or university program or you recently graduated and just started to work, it is reasonable to include:

- Campus activities or athletic programs and your roles or positions held
- Internships, Apprenticeships, and jobs (part-time, weekend, and summer)
- Relevant course projects or research activities

Note that these headers are not the only ones you can use. You can rename headers or create new headers that apply to the information you want to include in each section.

The content of your resume is always evolving.

- Know when to move/emphasize different sections.
- Pay attention to your 5Ws as you update your resume to be certain to highlight what is important to include.
- Refer to your master list for examples of relevant experience and remember that in any job, you have many responsibilities but highlight only a few in your resume. If your interests shift, you may choose to highlight different responsibilities that you had, while in the same position.

Realize that when your resume is being reviewed, you do not always know what aspect of your experience will be of greatest interest and capture the reader's attention. It may even be a combination of skills, training, and experiences that is a match for the position you are applying for. There may even be other openings a recruiter or hiring manager may suggest that you consider.

As you are reviewing and editing your content, keep in mind that the jobs and positions you have held are important and should be fully representative of your work and employment history and any gaps in time or employment acknowledged as such. As a professional, at some time, you will no longer include your internships in your resume; however, your employment history begins from the time you completed your education or started working full-time. Where you have flexibility is in the level of detail you use to describe these positions. Similarly, you may select which awards and recognition or other information are most significant for you.

Question: In addition to my education, what are the important sections of my resume?

Your accomplishments and experience can be organized by category with descriptive headers.

Question: How do I organize my resume if some of my categories have just one bullet point?

If at all possible, avoid having just one item in a category by grouping similar items so that there are two or three items under each header. Even though resume templates are available, select options that allow you to choose or create headings for your content.

Question: How do I select what to include on my resume? If I include all the bullet points that I have created, my resume will exceed one page.

You have one page to highlight your accomplishments, thus each bullet point on your resume should be unique. Try to show career progression with each position through the work you did and your results. Even though there are some core responsibilities that are similar within some positions, focus on showing increasing responsibility or a higher level of results and deliverables with each position. As the reader is scanning your resume, each bullet point is different and provides a broader perspective on your capabilities. Using two bullet points per position is reasonable unless it is your most current position and you wish to add more details. If you have been working for many years and two bullet points per position do not allow the content to fit on one page, you may consider a two-page resume, but it is better to keep your content within two pages.

Question: It is sometimes hard to keep all my positions in the right sequence when my resume is organized in chronological order by start date. Some positions I am still currently working in and others have ended. What is a good way to manage overlapping jobs to avoid any confusion?

Presenting positions with an overlap in dates can be challenging, so here are some suggestions:

- Start by referring to your master list for the start/end dates for each position and use the month and year for each position.
- If you might have had two positions at the same time and there is overlap, since positions are listed with the most current towards the top of the page, list the position with the earlier start date first, and then add the next position.
- If you are still working in one of the positions, then there is not an end date. You may include a dash and leave the end date open since it is ongoing. For a position that is completed, add the end date.
- Some jobs may be seasonal or part-time, so it may be easier to create a different section for this work and then describe it as such. For example, if you worked holidays in retail, then the description can be “part-time seasonal” between Nov, ___ to current or between Nov, ___–Jan, ___, if you are no longer doing this work.

Question: How important is the format of my resume?

The format is important to the extent that it is easy to read and update. The content is most important of your resume, and an appealing format is secondary. It’s easy to focus on “the look” of your resume, wanting it to stand out from others. Realize that if your resume is evaluated using AI algorithms, the content and usage of keywords relative to the job description is the starting point.

Question: How much should I focus on keywords?

It is definitely important to read the job description carefully to identify keywords. Job descriptions are carefully written to communicate very specifically the type of experience and knowledge a position requires. Resumes that are analyzed by applicant tracking systems (ATS) and AI will apply natural language processing (NLP) algorithms to evaluate the usage of keywords throughout your resume.

Pay close attention to keywords in the job descriptions for the positions that you are interested in. Look at the requirements for the job and how your work and experience match the requirements. While incorporating keywords into your

resume, be certain the use is reasonable and the keywords are used in the proper context and provide an appropriate representation of your experience. Overuse of keywords to capture attention or increase your score is not recommended. Once you are in an interview, you still want your resume to be a meaningful representation of who you are and your skill level.

Once you get past this general feedback, it's time to dig into the details, because you only have one or two lines to communicate your knowledge and experience. Be selective and clear in the words you use, ensuring that you use keywords and terminology that accurately describe your experience, accomplishments, and contributions. Focus on integrity, accuracy, and truthfulness.

If you tend to be humble, that is a good trait; however, for your resume, be humble *and* specific, communicating your role in a section or bullet point on your resume. For example, did you design or create something, or did you assist with design, or did you offer changes and improvements on designs? If you did something, say so. If you did not, try wording it to indicate what you actually did, describing it as accurately as possible.

Do keep in mind that even though a resume may not be read by a human in the early stages, this is not always the case. Depending on the size and resources available to the organization you are submitting a resume to for review the first reader may be a human. It is best to keep in mind that your resume should capture the attention of any reader.

Question: What should I do if I am knowledgeable about a topic and have taken coursework, but I am not necessarily proficient in that area? Should I still add it to my resume?

It depends on whether you are a student or you have worked for several years in that particular industry. You can include something if you think it demonstrates a breadth of knowledge or exposure on a given topic. Be clear, and differentiate where you have expertise versus familiarity with a certain topic.

Position items on your resume accordingly. For example, is the item an academic accomplishment or a certificate versus skill/experience?

Question: How does my resume differ from my LinkedIn profile or should it be different?

As you are revising your resume, consider also updating your online profiles, including your LinkedIn profile. The personal summary statement at the beginning of your profile is your online “elevator speech.” What would you tell someone about yourself if you had just one minute on an elevator with their undivided attention?

In this professional summary statement, you may choose to include your major and academic studies, your personal attributes, and your professional and career interests. Presenting yourself in an authentic manner, and in a way that is consistent with your resume and cover letter is important. Though the descriptions of your work may resemble your resume, an online profile is not intended to be an identical match (though it could overlap significantly). For example, you may choose to create a succinct online profile by listing only certain details. Review resources for how to update your LinkedIn profile. Your profile tells people how many connections you have and who you follow, and it provides a different type of insight into who you are.

Question: How can I indicate that I have advanced in my career when my job title is still the same?

When it seems as though you have been in the same position for several years since your job title hasn't changed, you can still show that you have made progress in your career by including bullet points and words to explain that your level of responsibility has increased while in the position. To describe your change in scope within the same position, you can indicate, for example, that "During my first two years in this role, I coordinated..." and "More recently, I have taken the lead in managing..." thus indicating your career progression.

Question: What if my situation is the opposite? I have a new title, but my responsibilities are largely still the same?

When your title has changed and your work is still similar, focus on the subtle differences in your new position. Perhaps the difference is the percentage of time spent on certain responsibilities or a greater level of accountability for the same work. The difference may also be that even though you are leading similar projects, you have a greater number of projects or the work is broader in scope.

Question: There are things that I am really good at and I don't know how to communicate this in my resume since it's not part of my work. For example, I am really good with people and I am a leader, even though I am not currently managing people.

If you want the reader to know that you have leadership experience and just not in the more recent positions you have worked in, you have a few options to consider. If the leadership examples are related to community service, you can list examples in that section. If the leadership examples are more related to activities earlier in your career, for example, when you were in school/college, you can

create a section for Leadership and add the examples there. This is just one example of how to dig deep and share examples that are important for your reader to know.

Question: Should I include hobbies in my resume?

Hobbies are optional. When hobbies are included in a resume, it provides the reader with more insight on the person. It is not a consideration for the job; however, it shows that you have other interests outside of work and may be a good topic to connect with an interviewer on. It can be a good conversation starter, especially if it is a hobby you are knowledgeable and passionate about.

Question: I have not had significant work experience and am just starting to look for a job; what else can I add to my resume?

Refer to your master list to think about the work you have done or the responsibilities you have had and the skills you learned and demonstrated while doing this work. Some examples include:

Babysitter/Nanny: punctual, organized, follow instructions, engaging, communication

Camp counselor: interacting with others, organization, leadership, problem-solving

Caregiver for family member: empathy, attentive to details, following directions

Dog Walker: responsible, handling difficult situations, dealing with customers

Fast Food: customer service, efficient, procedural work

Parenting: organization skills, time management, negotiation, relating to others

Retail: customer service, sales, computer/technical skills, product/service knowledge

Volunteer: leadership, fundraising, budgets, communication, project management

You will know that your resume is ready to share when you no longer find yourself explaining nuances around the timing, descriptions, or sequence of events in your resume.

Your resume can say many things about you but it cannot say everything. Your resume can open the door for you to be considered for an opportunity and then there are other aspects, including the interview process which provides you with another opportunity to present yourself for consideration for an opening.

Resume Writing as Preparation for an Interview

An interviewer most often looks at your resume and uses this as a starting point for questions during the interview. It's not all about your resume, but the thought process that goes into writing your resume prepares you for conversations about yourself, who you are, what you aspire to accomplish, why you are interested in this job, or even why you are changing course and making a pivot.

Preparing your resume helps you anticipate an interviewer's questions so that you can start to practice how you would answer them with a well-thought-out response. As you are reviewing and reflecting on your previous experiences, it is easy to gloss over some of the responsibilities you had; however, some of these situations may be good examples to share during an interview. Although you want to give examples of your most current actions, you may find yourself looking a little further back for specific examples that are relevant to an interviewer's questions.

Think of writing your resume as preparing notes for an interview. What would you want to highlight to the interviewer? What are some examples you would want to share? Writing your resume as if you were preparing notes for an interview can guide the information you choose to include.

Just as you might ordinarily ask a friend or coworker to review your resume, it is beneficial to schedule some coffee chats—in person or virtually—with people who are somewhat familiar with the type of work you do. Be mindful to include some individuals who will provide you with honest feedback and who are not as familiar with your work, so that they would carefully read each section. As these individuals are reviewing your resume, watch for their reactions and make note of the questions they ask about your resume. Do you notice they are spending more time on one section as compared with another section? To avoid any misinterpretations, it is worthwhile to take time to probe this section further to understand what is not clear to the reader. Which sections of the resume seem to require more clarification? Are there questions about terminology that is not commonly used? Your responses to these questions help you prepare responses during an interview.

You are the best person to determine what most accurately reflects the information you are trying to convey. Though your resume may be prepared in a format that is more easily read by AI algorithms, when you are in an interview or meeting face to face with someone, there is a human interpretation of what is in writing, thus making your document flow well for yourself and others is beneficial. Even when others tell you that your resume is “just fine,” if you are feeling a nudge to make a change or small edit just so you feel more comfortable with it, follow your instinct.

As you are preparing and reviewing your resume, review each bullet point and sentence one at a time and select your words carefully. The keywords are just a starting point. All of your other word selections are important as well.

Cover Letters

Though cover letters are not always required to apply for a position, if you are very interested in a particular role within an organization, I would encourage you to make the time to prepare a cover letter as it truly adds a level of professionalism to your application.

A cover letter provides a level of personalization and allows you to introduce yourself to the reviewer. In the first paragraph, you can include how you came across the position. Perhaps you were referred by someone who currently works in the organization or there is another connection you have to the opportunity. You can also include the reason you are interested in the position. Or perhaps there is no current opening and you are writing to be considered for future opportunities.

In the second and third paragraphs, you can describe your experience and how it is a match for the organization's hiring needs. If you notice that there is a requirement you have less experience in, this is your opportunity to acknowledge this and perhaps provide an explanation for the reason you hope to still be given consideration. You can also highlight the experience you have that may be particularly beneficial for the position. A cover letter provides you with the opportunity to present yourself and showcase your writing skills.

A cover letter is essential when making a career pivot because it will not be evident to someone reading your resume why you could be a good fit for the position. Though the change you are making may not be a significant change, providing the reader with an understanding of the experience you have and the reason for your interest in applying your skills towards a new opportunity will make your purpose for exploring a change more evident to the reader. A cover letter should be no longer than one page.

Preparing for Formal Interviews

The preparation for a formal interview is very similar to the preparation for an informational interview. Both require a certain level of formality. The same applies to a virtual or recorded interview or a phone screen. It is important to be appropriately prepared for any meeting that involves or could lead to employment discussions. In addition to preparation for the logistics, these additional tips can help prepare you for the interview questions.

Tips on interviewing (preparing in advance)

- Study your resume. Know what you have written, and be certain not to contradict what you have written, paying close attention to the dates, data, and accomplishments. It is tempting to generalize; however, know your own numbers. Know where to direct the interviewer to sections of your resume that have specific content. Be able to elaborate on any experience outlined in your resume and cover letter.
- Look at your LinkedIn profile, including your summary statement and photo, etc. Is it an authentic representation of who the interviewer will see at the interview? Would the interviewer be able to recognize you? It is not necessary to update your online photo every six months; however, if you look significantly different from your profile photo, consider updating this before starting an interview process.
- Know what's not on your resume. Be prepared to share examples from experiences that are very early in your career or that are not listed in your resume. For example, if something is not on your resume, it's okay to say "this is not on my resume; however, ..."
- Be able to describe your skills and how you have demonstrated them. In particular, be able to address your skill or competency level, for example, with a foreign language if the position has a language requirement or with coding skills if it is a software engineering role.
- Be prepared to discuss any gaps in employment and what might have prompted these changes. Sometimes your response is personal, thus be prepared to respond with an answer that shares what you are comfortable sharing that respectfully addresses the interviewer's question.
- Where you don't feel you have as much experience as the position is looking for, prepare to discuss the experience you do have and any growth opportunities you are considering (see Chapter 5).
- Be prepared to address any questions related to your 5Ws—who, what, where, when, and why as it pertains to the information on your resume.
- Be prepared with the duration of prior activities. I was in school for xx years. I worked in this organization for xx years, etc. Have the month and year for each item since the reviewer is looking for the duration of your work in any position. If the dates you were in a position were from April 2020 to July 2021, it would be easier for you to comment that yes, I worked in that position for "15 months" or there is another position you worked in for more than "3 years." While you are adding employment start and end dates to your resume, make note of the actual duration and perhaps add these to your master list. During an interview, it will make the

conversation flow more smoothly if you have job durations calculated as part of your interview preparation and ready to share with the interviewer during the conversation.

- There may be gaps in your employment, some by choice, others, not based on your decision. When there are business/organization changes, you may acknowledge them in your resume to help the reader understand the circumstances around the transitions. If they are personal choices, you do not necessarily need to document this on your resume; however, some people will indicate a reason such as: travel, parenting, care-giving, career exploration, sabbatical, for personal reasons, etc. An explanation on your resume is not required; however, it may be a question you are asked to address in person. You will want to be prepared for it since it may still come up in conversation.
- Have conversation starters ready. In an interview, especially a formal interview, the awkwardness of silence can be more uncomfortable than a difficult interview question. However, if the interviewer needs a minute to take a closer look at your resume before asking the next question, be comfortable with the quiet time and patiently be prepared for the next question.
- As you are preparing for interviews, also be prepared to react and respond to questions related to a potential offer. Even though you are interviewing for a position, it is not unreasonable for you to be asked questions pertaining to your availability to start and salary expectations, and if pertinent, you may be asked if you are open to relocation, remote or hybrid work options.

While reviewing job descriptions and preparing for interviews, make note of the qualifications that are required, and also those that are preferred. Carefully review the descriptions of the soft skills and the organizational skills that are important for each role.

These are various phrases from real job descriptions that capture the essence of the skills that are valued within an organization. These expectations overlap as they are valued across organizations. Whether the role is for a professional or early career level, the emphasis is the same. Though there are subtle differences, note the similarities in each of these categories.

Detail-Oriented, High Sense of Urgency

- Detail oriented with a high sense of urgency and exceptional organizational skills
- Detail oriented with an emphasis on quality work

Time Management

- Ability to effectively lead, manage, and prioritize multiple projects, while operating in a fast-paced, complex global organization with shifting schedules and priorities
- Ability to analyze, understand, and prioritize business problems
- Effective time management
- Well-organized and self-paced

Communication Skills

- Excellent written and verbal communication skills
- Excellent interpersonal and communication skills
- Strong technical writing, analytical and communication skills

Desire to Learn

- Desire to learn and continuously improve
- Curious and a self-starter, naturally interested in learning more
- Multi-task and demonstrate strong desire to take on new tasks and learn new things

Works Well with Others/Teamwork

- Excellent interpersonal and conflict management skills
- Great cross-team collaboration
- Maintains positive team relationships
- Thrives in a team environment, results driven, and self-motivated

How would you respond and what are good examples of how you have demonstrated these capabilities?

What aspects of your resume, summary statement, and your cover letter demonstrate that you have the overall skills required for the job and the experience for the responsibilities? Know that your resume and cover letter are just a part of your story and that as part of the interview process, you have an opportunity to interact with those who are involved with the hiring process, allowing you to share more about your experience.

What's Next?

1. Who might you meet with to have a conversation about your resume? Your boss, mentor, HR, family, friends, others?

2. What are some of your attributes that are most important to you that you would want an interviewer to know about you? If you asked the individuals reviewing your resume if they get the same impression, what would they say stands out as the most important?
3. Which section of your resume do you feel is not as strong as you would like it to be? Do you have experience that is not included on your resume? What additional experience or training can you do that would enhance your resume for the positions of interest to you?

Chapter 3

Getting to Know and Trust Yourself

Little by little, we learn more about ourselves along our career journey.

There were times early in my career when I had so many questions for myself around what I would enjoy doing as my career, what I am good at, and whether I could do this work for my entire life. Part of me just kept pressing forward, not certain of what the destination would be. There was so much to think about that it was hard to make a decision. In the midst of all the questions, I wasn't thinking about whether or not I would have a story. I wasn't even thinking about my resume. At that time, all I wanted was to have some self-assurance that I was doing what was right for me.

A large part of the power behind a well-written resume, authentic cover letter, and solid interviewing skills comes from knowing yourself and making decisions at each opportunity that allow you to honor who you are and what is important to you. “Knowing yourself” can sound like a cliché, something that is difficult to describe in words, but it is the foundation of a framework you can use for making decisions that have an impact on your career.

As you continue working on your resume, gathering information, participating in informational and formal interviews, having a solid frame of reference for who you are and what is important to you will be increasingly important. Though these seem like rhetorical questions, the responses to these questions can be difficult to articulate when you are speaking with someone in the context of work or a job interview. While you may be prepared to answer the most

detailed questions about your skills and work experience, when it comes to speaking about yourself as a person, it can be awkward, and then there might even be a moment of silence.

An important benefit of knowing yourself and your 5Ws becomes clearer when you are in a conversation with your boss or your mentor, or perhaps a hiring manager. The conversation evolves and you are invited to share a little about who you are, what you like to do, or where you see yourself in 5–10 years. You might have similar questions of yourself.

As you are thinking about advancing your career or considering your next career move, there are similar questions. These questions might start with “Are you...?” and this is a way for you to ask yourself if the organization or opportunity is right for you and you get to decide.

The answers to these questions are important particularly if you are questioning whether a certain career or job opportunity is going to be a good match for you. Will you be happy in a certain job? Will the work location provide an environment that energizes you? What is important to you in terms of flexible, remote, or hybrid work options? If the position requires you to be in proximity to the workplace, will the geographic location be a place where you will want to live? The answer isn’t always obvious, so we will dig in and explore several approaches to learn more about yourself and help others get to know you as well.

Six-Square Collage

To get to know someone better and discuss career exploration, I often begin a conversation by asking this question: “If I were to draw a frame with six squares, what are the six images or words you would put in each box to describe yourself and what’s important to you?” It’s amazing to watch people’s reactions to this question. Their faces often light up since they have an opportunity to talk about themselves, without necessarily using lots of words or getting too personal. In a very simple context, this opens up the dialogue for two or more people to have a conversation and share a little about themselves. Depending on the size of the template you create, you can place words, photos, or sketches of items that describe what is important to you. See Figure 3.1 for an example of the template.

You can use this template when you are mentoring or advising other people. You’ll find that you can get to know a person while being respectful of their privacy because the person chooses the topics and what they want to share. If you are filling in the squares for yourself, capture what is of utmost importance to you. If you are going through this exercise while in conversation with another person, or

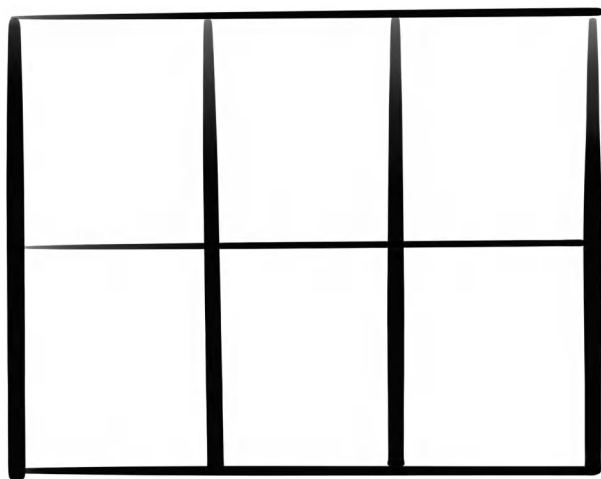


Figure 3.1 Template for six-square collage.

with a group, you might choose to be more simplistic in your responses while still authentic. This allows you to share about yourself while learning about others, especially if they are willing to share as well.

Whether you are just starting your career, have worked for many years, or are considering a pivot in your career, this exercise can help you identify what is truly important to you, and you may even learn something new about yourself. Your responses can provide insights on how you like to work, where you like to live, your personal preferences, what you hope for, and even your values. You may surprise yourself during this exercise, especially if you discover something new about yourself that might help you understand the direction of your interests and career exploration.

Looking at your own six squares enables you not only to get to know yourself, but when you can articulate what is important to you, you start to build your own confidence and trust and value where you are at that time in your life. You know it and you own it. It also allows you to prioritize. Helping someone else review their six squares creates a framework for an open dialogue so you can learn about and understand each other's concerns or priorities. Being able to share these with others helps them get to know you and build rapport.

As you think about yourself and your six squares, what would you tell someone about yourself—the things you like to do, the things that are important to you, and how you like to live your life? What are priorities for you? How do you make your decisions? What are your key factors? It's amazing what you can learn about yourself and others when going through this exercise. It is especially

interesting to connect your 5Ws and your six-square collage. These exercises will not automatically provide you with an answer to your questions about your career; however, the more you can acknowledge the things that are important to you, the greater the influence they might have on your decisions.

As I reflect on my six squares, I know that they have evolved over time but some of the priorities have stayed the same and I can say that they have shaped my life decisions, career, and the pivots I have made.

If someone wanted to get to know me better and I shared with them my six squares, I could talk for hours—yes, really! My six squares, as shown in Figure 3.2, have evolved over time and though I cannot say that I am always focused on all six areas, I can say that at any given time, my decisions about life, career, and how I want to focus my time are centered around one of these priorities.

Being able to articulate and share what is important to you can also help others support you in your priorities. Individuals have shared with me that they value their family and strive to be a good sibling, or good to their parents. They have shared their personal values, such as honesty and integrity when interacting with others, or their work ethic, or what they like to do in their spare time, such as enjoying time in nature and spending time with friends. Others have also included faith or an aspect of spirituality among their priorities.

Some aspects of yourself and your life are important parts of who you are, but they do not come to mind during discussions of your six squares with others. Even so, they are still important to you on a personal level. They can be unique

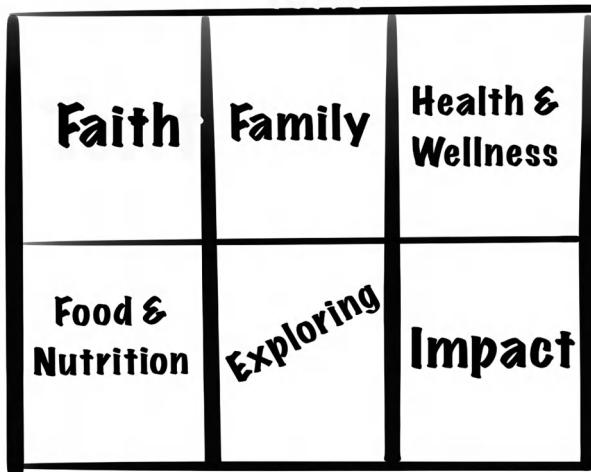


Figure 3.2 My six-square collage.

aspects of who you are that are not evident to others. They are still factors that affect how you view the world and the career decisions you make.

Though I was involved with the Asian affinity group at work, I never really shared with my coworkers that my parents were immigrants or that as a result of my upbringing, I saw the world from a different perspective. In fact, I didn't see myself as being different; however, I am certain there were and continue to be differences. Sharing my six squares allows me to share one part of who I am and what is important to me that is independent from my cultural upbringing.

Acknowledging important personal aspects of your life and sharing them with others can help you as you are exploring career options or if you are feeling a need to make a pivot. For example, how would you handle a situation that challenges one of your six squares—something personal that is very important to you?

The reason I raise these questions about getting to know yourself upfront is because there are times when you may be in a situation where you need to make a decision, let's say, about accepting a position that involves a lot of travel or relocating for a new position. If family is in one of your six squares, this is something you would need to give more thought to, even if the opportunity is of great interest to you. Your six squares may also influence other aspects of work, such as the industries you prefer to work in or the products you manufacture and sell.

If someone you value as a career resource or mentor gets to know you and understand your priorities then they might have an easier time approaching you about different topics and you can work together to come up with other options. Making connections between your six squares and career aspirations allows you to integrate your values into your career decisions. These connections are not intended to change what your career interests are; however, the comparison allows you to factor them into your decisions.

Experiential Learning

Hands-on experience is tremendously beneficial, whether you are in school or in the working environment. Having managed an internship program for many years, I can attest to the value of this experience as I have watched students being challenged to learn new things, encouraged to put into practice what they have

learned in the classroom, and interact with others in a whole new context. These are only some of the benefits of having an internship opportunity and gaining new experiences. When possible, opportunities for experiential learning and short-term assignments do not necessarily have to be limited to students.

I was fortunate to be offered work outside the realm of my regular work as a scientist and project manager. Even though I wasn't part of a rotational development program at the time, these opportunities were created for me to gain additional experience and leverage my skills in another area. The first 6-month assignment was in marketing. Several years later, I accepted another 6-month assignment in human resources, and that experience had such an impact that I made a pivot and changed the course of my career.

I truly appreciated having these unique opportunities to gain hands-on experience while learning about another business function. After completing major projects from a technical perspective, these assignments gave me the opportunity to apply my skills and experience in support of the business in a different way.

If you are sensing that you want to learn more or apply your skills in a different way, consider exploring options that may be of interest to you or provide an opportunity for you to apply your experience in different ways.

Different Assignments at Work

If you are currently working, start where you are and determine if there are people doing work you find interesting. Learn more about it and look for ways to get involved. Sometimes it is a matter of saying “yes” to opportunities you might have ordinarily said “no” to doing because the work didn't seem interesting at first, or you weren't sure if you could balance more work and still deliver on your current responsibilities. Is there something you are very interested in doing, even if it would involve taking on extra responsibilities or learning new skills?

Stretching Beyond Your Current Boundaries

Consider working on projects that are of interest to you. These can involve things that you really have fun doing or want to learn or get better at. You may choose to refer to these projects as a side-hustles, part-time gigs, or hobbies. As you choose projects, look for activities that may strengthen your skills, allow you to be more creative, and nurture innovative ideas.

As you are exploring options, keep in mind your 5Ws as a way to be certain that the activities align with what is important to you. For example, if your goal is to advance in your career, how does your time working on these project(s) fit into where you want to be? Does it strengthen skills you want to apply in the workplace? Is it a way to make extra money or something you hope to expand into a future career or business? Aligning these projects with your 5Ws might help you determine how much time and commitment you want to invest in one or more extra projects. I refer to these as projects since they all involve time, planning, resources, commitment, and work—even if they are hobbies.

In Service of Others

If you have an interest in learning more or gaining more hands-on experience, consider saying “yes” more often to opportunities to help others. You may find these opportunities at work or in your community. You may choose to help your favorite cause. A great way to start is by volunteering to help with small projects to see what sparks your interest. If you work on something outside of your normal scope, you may even learn something new about yourself or discover a hidden talent.

DIY—Create Your Own Opportunity

If you don’t have access to suitable opportunities for experiential learning, perhaps you can create one yourself or work with someone, such as your manager or even a friend, to explore ideas. Think about what you want to do and leverage your skills at to design your own learning experience. What would your dream assignment or position look like?

For Students or Recent Graduates

Many organizations recognize the need for learning opportunities for those new to the workforce. When looking for full-time positions, consider opportunities that are described as development programs since they provide experiential learning through rotations in different assignments and departments. Internships and apprenticeships also provide an opportunity to apply what you have learned in a classroom to a work environment. Additionally, an internship provides an

opportunity to learn about an organization, and the people in the organization can get to know you as well.

Within your academic major, also consider speaking with your professors to understand if there are any academic projects or internships available, on or off campus.

My summer internships were in the same lab each year. I really enjoyed the research I was doing and the people I worked with. In hindsight, even though I learned something new each summer, I probably could have benefited from trying something different at least for one of the internships. Then I would have had a framework for comparison even though focusing my experience on research better prepared me for graduate school.

Through any of these experiential learning opportunities, you can learn more about yourself and your preferences. I share these examples because of the misconception that experiential learning or internships are only for students. The reality is that everyone can learn through practical experience and there are many ways to gain this experience. These experiences can also provide you with opportunities to pivot in your career, so the more experience you can gain, the better. Through experiential learning, you can distinguish what you are capable of doing from what you really like doing.

The academic portion and early career portion of your resume can reflect how you have chosen to learn and gain experience. Though there may be factors that limited your options, such as the types of opportunities to choose from, the experiences you were able to have can provide you with something to talk about in your interviews and discussions with others.

Your Learning Preference

Work in many different fields requires continuous learning, and career exploration involves a learning component as well. Ask yourself under what conditions do you learn best. Some people like the formal academic environment of a structured classroom setting. Others prefer an approach to learning that involves both textbook learning and hands-on experience. Some people prefer to work and learn independently, and others prefer working in a team environment. Is classroom instruction provided in person or virtually a good fit for you, or do you prefer to learn at your own pace by reading textbooks, watching YouTube videos, or listening to podcasts? When the goal is learning, acknowledging your preference and being realistic about your options can help you choose the approach you take for improving your skills and knowledge.

Take into consideration how you like to learn and what it takes to learn the skills needed to do your work. When you have the option to select the learning format you prefer, the learning process can be much more enjoyable.

Physics was the most difficult subject for me to learn. I was required to complete three physics credits as a requirement for my major, but it was such a challenge for me. I am almost certain that I could have made this easier for myself if I would have looked into other ways to learn this subject. Perhaps pairing theory with hands-on experiments would have been helpful.

In addition to how you prefer to learn, consider your preference for processing and retaining information, such as your note-taking preference. How do you prefer to store and retrieve content that you want to review? Have you considered reformatting information in a way that is easier for you to understand?

Knowing your preferences for learning and retaining information will support you in your efforts to learn and take on new challenges.

The way I learn best is to take notes either on paper or on my tablet and then review and make notes of key points. This content is stored on a cloud-based platform that I can readily access. I'll even doodle and make diagrams or flow charts so that I can visualize the concepts I want to retain.

I also enjoy learning through videos so that I replay anything I missed or want to pay closer attention to. Once I feel reasonably confident in what I have learned, I just dig in and put into practice what I have learned. Being organized, having readily accessible notes and videos I can replay make it much easier for me to learn new things.

Your 5Ws

In Chapter 1, we explored your 5Ws as they relate to the choices you have made over time to acknowledge changes that have shaped your career decisions. This exercise is a way to monitor your preferences so that you can continue to learn about yourself and the rationale behind your decisions. If you are finding your answers to these questions are the same, and you are comfortable with the direction of your career, this review should help you feel more grounded and perhaps even ready to take on new challenges. If you are finding your answers are changing, this may suggest that it is a good time to think about what's ahead and consider gathering more information.

These are examples of questions that may help you dig deeper into what motivates you and what matters most to you as you are making decisions about your life and career.

Who?

- Who are you trying to help through your work?
- Who does your work impact?

What?

- What do you enjoy most about this work?
- What are you curious about?

Where?

- Where is this work being done?
- Where do you find yourself most inspired?

When?

- When might you want additional education or training?
- When would you want more responsibilities at work?

Why?

- Why is your work important to you?

Refer to your 5Ws and compare them with descriptions of the work that you can find in sources such as job descriptions that are posted on job boards, through professional organizations or as a part of industry conferences.

This time, the information to gather is from the descriptions of work you might anticipate doing. In reality, there are many other factors to consider; however, looking at what you are interested in pursuing in this same format may lead to questions you can ask yourself and others.

If you were to do a 5Ws assessment of an opportunity you are considering or being considered for, would the 5Ws for this position align with your interests?

Who:

What:

Where:

When:

Why:

As you review job descriptions, do not focus on the specific job title. Rather consider the nature of the work and whether you can see yourself doing it. How well does your assessment of the work align with your 5Ws?

As I reflect upon the time when I was considering a career in medicine, I realize that my resume did not show that I had pursued any experience working directly with patient care, whether in a volunteer or internship capacity. I can only describe this as not having shown any evidence on my resume that working directly with patients was a career that I might be interested in pursuing.

As you answer the 5Ws and reflect on your responses, do you learn anything new about yourself? Do your responses validate and support the work you are doing or plan to do? Understand that even with your 5Ws responses you may not find a specific answer all at once. Instead, it may involve weaving together motivating and memorable situations you have been in that helps you decide on your interests. Over time, your 5Ws may evolve or they may stay the same.

Assessment Tests

Over the course of your education and work, I am guessing that you have taken a number of assessment tests that have multiple-choice or essay-based questions. Some of these tests are scored and are a measure of your knowledge in specific areas, such as math, science, and reading, such as the ACT or SAT. Other standardized tests include those required for law school (LSAT) or medical school (MCAT), or graduate school (GMAT). Your score on these tests is a measure of your aptitude for certain subjects, and the value of the score provides a quantitative ranking relative to others who have taken the same test. Your scores may suggest you are “good in math or science.” Your score may also reflect how much you studied.

Looking at relative scores may provide a sense of confidence in your own abilities in certain areas, and the scores may correlate with how you feel about those subjects as well. These tests help you know yourself and determine the areas you tend to favor, but they should not limit your interests. The test-taking process can help you learn more about yourself such as what works or doesn't work when you are taking standardized exams and thinking under pressure.

You may be required to take technical tests that assess your skills in coding, or problem-solving. These tests are part of job requirements and allow an organization to determine if you have the skills needed for the position. The Wonderlic test is an example used to assess cognitive ability in the workplace.

Other standardized tests are required for different professions. Certified Public Accountants have taken and passed the CPA exam; workers in the health

care industry take board exams. People working in the performing arts have auditions. Many positions require some kind of test to compare your performance with that of others.

Although people take these and other tests to demonstrate job performance or qualifications, you can use assessment tests to learn about yourself, your strengths, and your skills. Additionally, they let you know how you handle the test-taking process, which can be useful information. How do you prepare for them? How do you handle the time pressure? Which areas are you better in?

Different from the technical assessment tests, Gallup® CliftonStrengths® Assessment¹ can help you build an awareness and understanding of your natural talents. The CliftonStrengths Assessment is available through the internet and after completing the online assessment, a report is provided based on the report(s) selected. The full report, CliftonStrengths 34 Report, provides you with a personal ranking based on 34 themes and another option is the CliftonStrengths Top 5 Report, which provides a personalized summary of your top 5 themes.

My first exposure to CliftonStrengths started with the book “StrengthsFinder 2.0” by Tom Rath.² After learning about the 34 themes, I wanted to know for myself how my talents were ranked and so I took the CliftonStrengths Online Talent Assessment¹ Reading my personal report was both revealing and reassuring to me since this was the first time I came to understand that Learner was one of my Top 5 talents. I came to this realization long after completing my graduate school studies, but this certainly validated for me the reason I chose to pursue higher education and an advanced degree. Knowing that Learner is one of my top themes also helped me understand why exploring is one of the squares in my six-square collage. This is a theme and a strength that has remained consistent in my approach to career and life.

I have found it to be quite a good experience to be able to share Top 5 themes in a group setting as well. When everyone is sharing their Top 5 themes, it allows everyone in the group to have an appreciation of each other’s talents. At the same time, we recognize that we are all unique in how we practice our strengths in our day-to-day lives and careers.

I also found that sharing my strengths allowed me to be seen more fully, especially since my other strengths are not always obvious to others.

Having a report that explains your natural talents can be quite helpful as you are preparing your cover letter and getting ready for interviews. For example, if you are asked to talk about your interpersonal style or how you might handle a difficult situation, you can reflect on your natural talents, which may also be your strengths. It then enables the conversation to flow much more easily, since you have this insight on yourself.

As someone is reviewing your resume, it is possible that your strengths may stand out based on the type of work you have chosen to do or the themes you have practiced throughout your career. When having a conversation about your

work experience or your career, let's say that empathy is one of your top themes, it is reasonable to say "I have worked in [this specific area] because I really like working with people, and empathy is one of my strengths."

Another type of assessment is a pre-employment assessment such as the Wonderlic Test. This is a Cognitive Ability Test, and it assesses a person's cognitive ability and problem-solving aptitude. It is just one type of pre-employment test. If you are accustomed to taking standardized tests or other tests to assess your skills/abilities as a pre-employment test, you may have some indication of how well you do on these. Some people consider themselves good test-takers; others do not. Whether you are still in school or have been working for several years, taking assessment tests of any sort on a regular basis can be beneficial, even if you are just practicing.

As you encounter change and new situations that you are less familiar with, being asked to take an assessment test may be one of them, thus these are some tips to help prepare.

Test-Taking Preparation

There are several approaches I suggest as ways to prepare for exams such as the GRE, LSAT, GMAT, and job assessment tests. These tests are formal/job-related, and timed.

Test-taking tips for taking assessment tests

- Getting familiar with the type of questions and the pace at which you need to work through the test is a good start in your preparation. Practice tests are always a good idea.
- Though your performance is intended to be a reflection of your skills and abilities, realize that there are other factors as well, such as your ability to perform within set time limits.
- Sometimes the test-taking conditions are not ideal. For example, the temperature of the room or the noise level may be distracting. Try to dress in layers. Select a seat where you are most comfortable.
- Be physically and mentally prepared. Have you eaten? Will there be snacks and water available? Did you get enough rest?
- Check the logistics.
 - If you are taking a test remotely, is your computer fully charged? Do you have a strong wi-fi signal? Is your test-taking space clear of distractions?
 - If you are taking a test on-site, at a physical location outside of your home, will you have time to visit the test-taking location in advance to be certain of the directions and able to locate the building entrances?

Knowing yourself and what you need to do or have available to perform at your optimum will be beneficial when taking assessment tests that are a requirement for employment rather than an assessment test just for information about yourself.

Preparation for Personality Assessments

For personality assessments, prepare by thinking back to various situations you have been in that involved interacting with others. When were you helpful? Did you feel good about how you handled the interaction? When did you interact with someone and wish you had handled the situation differently? Take note of both scenarios as examples of how you might respond to situations, keep in mind your best self and how you might ordinarily handle situations.

It is best to think of these tests as just one data point among several that a hiring manager might use to evaluate whether you are a strong candidate for the position. There isn't necessarily a right or wrong answer, so you just need to be yourself and not try to second guess what the right answer should be. After all, if you want to be your authentic self in the workplace, the assessment test can go both ways in determining if an opportunity is the right match for you.

The more assessment tests you take, the more confidence you will build in taking them.

Make Time to Listen, Learn, and Explore

Sometimes getting to know yourself involves asking questions of others and listening very carefully to their responses. Your listening skills are important in this process. If you feel that you are a really good listener, that's great. Ask more questions and learn more from others. If you feel that you could improve on your listening skills, practice having conversations with others with a focus on listening instead of speaking. If possible, paraphrase and tell the person what you heard them say to demonstrate (to them and to yourself) that you were focused on the conversation.

Listening attentively is so important because it is easy to dismiss what people are saying. Remember that a little bit of silence is acceptable as you are trying to listen and learn. If something causes you to pause, take time to listen, learn, and explore.

I still remember a classmate's face and how delighted she was to learn about a new major she thought was very interesting and she wanted me to explore it as well. We were both pre-med at the time and our classes were difficult. When she said "let's

explore this,” I was excited for her, but I couldn’t imagine myself making a change. I liked what I was studying. But years later, as I reflected on that conversation, I wish I would have taken time to listen and ask questions.

I was afraid to put myself to the test. I was comfortable with what I was doing and I didn’t want to make a change that would require me to do extra work, back-track, or complicate my situation.

If I were in the same situation today, I would take a moment to ask “Can you tell me more?” not because I was going to change my mind, but because I wanted to have as much information as possible to make the best decision for myself.

By taking time to listen and learn, I hope that you will learn to trust yourself and develop the confidence that you know enough about yourself to make a good decision. Even when others may not see your aspirations the same way you do, you know your own potential and trust yourself to carry through on your commitment to yourself.

When you know yourself and trust your experiences as well as the decisions you have made to move towards your aspirations, having a conversation with an interviewer becomes easier. You can explain:

- This is what I have done.
- I can learn best when....
- One of my talents is....
- I have spoken with people and learned....
- Some of the things that are important to me are....

Imagine being able to answer these questions in a very smooth conversational flow.

If you are considering a pivot, you can additionally put into perspective, your 5Ws, and say:

- When I saw..., it inspired me to....
- I was at a point in my life when I realized I would like to take my career in this direction.
- Watching a person do this work piqued my interest and I wanted to learn more.

The conversations around your interests or desire to pivot can become more authentic. Knowing yourself will help you build a strong connection to your work and livelihood.

Taking the time to explore and learn more about yourself is a gift you give to yourself as part of the journey.

What's Next?

1. Which of your six squares would you say you have focused on less than the others? Is there anything that you could do within your work or career journey that would help you connect more with what is important to you?
2. If you are aware of your talents, which ones are you comfortable discussing with others? How do you think your strengths factor into your work and career journey? Are there talents that you feel are currently underutilized?

Of the self-assessment tools available, which ones have you taken and which result(s) have been most informative to you? How have these helped you enhance your understanding of yourself and your preferences?

Notes

- 1 To learn more about Gallup CliftonStrengths® visit: <https://www.gallup.com/cliftonstrengths/en/home.aspx>.
- 2 Rath, Tom. *StrengthsFinder 2.0*. Gallup Press, 2007.

Chapter 4

Becoming Comfortable with Uncertainty

Be honest with yourself about what you don't know, and still move forward.

What allows me to share my stories with you is that with the benefit of hindsight, I can reflect on what I know now that I didn't know then. I can share with you that many of my experiences were a lesson in being comfortable amidst a sea of uncertainty. It can be hard to make decisions when you don't have all the information you want.

While we can anticipate some things, we can't anticipate everything. When it comes to careers, career exploration, and the work we do, uncertainty is inherent to the process. We can only hope that by reducing the level of uncertainty, we can venture into new areas.

Being prepared is one of the keys to becoming comfortable with uncertainty. Another important element is acknowledging that you are ready to learn and embrace what presents itself. Staying focused on why you made your decisions (your 5Ws) can keep you grounded in your endeavors.

All of us have managed through some aspect of uncertainty before, even if we didn't acknowledge it at the time. It's the same with starting a new job, any new job. Being comfortable with uncertainty is important.

How do you take the first steps when doing something new? What do you need to do first?

Many steps can help you prepare and plan for your career journey, and the first three chapters include many of them. Those chapters guide you to gather as much information as is reasonable for this point in your career, to put together a solid resume, and to take time to get to know yourself well enough to articulate to others what your strengths and interests are, but there are still unknown aspects of the career journey. Even with the best preparation possible, there will still be situations in which neither you, nor others, will have all the answers when you need them.

I will admit, though, that there were many times I wished that someone knew me well enough to tell me exactly what to do and which direction to take. I welcomed input from others and looked for mentors who could provide helpful insights, but ultimately, I held myself accountable for the decisions I made, and I wanted to always remain true to myself. Even when I trusted that I was headed in the right direction, I was aware that managing uncertainty would be an inherent part of the process. I knew that leveraging my 5Ws and all of my preparation up to that point would support me in stepping forward with confidence.

Accepting Uncertainty

A student once said to me, “I’m not sure why, but in school, I have always had this feeling like we are all supposed to have the answer. It would be awkward to admit you didn’t know something.”

Though there are resources everywhere, it doesn’t mean that the answers to your questions are easy to find. Despite all our best efforts, there are always some aspects of uncertainty, especially as we are making decisions that involve our careers.

Early in my career, as I sought answers to my questions about how the health care delivery models might change and how they would affect my career, no one could offer any definitive insights. I would ask people I thought should know or have more insights, and all I recall was seeing them shrug their shoulders, look down, and shake their head as they looked downward. They couldn’t tell me what was to come, in 5 years or 25 years. How could they know? With a lack of information, I could only make the best decision I could with what I knew at that time. I would have to move forward, knowing there would be change, and trust that I wouldn’t look back with regret because I did what was right for me at that time.

Sometimes the source of uncertainty is external, but sometimes you are the source of the uncertainty. Think about your decisions, understand the risks you are taking, and choose which risks you are willing to take. When you are faced with making a decision about the direction you will take, such as in the schematic

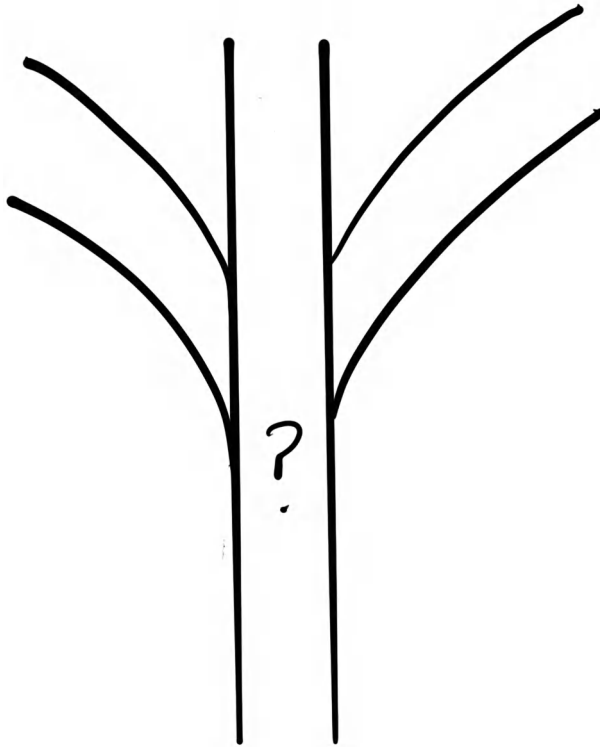


Figure 4.1 Facing a decision about direction.

diagram illustrated in Figure 4.1, it's not a time to be on autopilot. Be informed about what is happening around you and then proceed.

What I didn't realize was that when I changed my career decision in college, I was also letting go of what had been my safety net for so many years. I had held a vision for myself and had articulated this to others. When I changed my mind, I anticipated facing the fear and embarrassment of telling people the truth. I couldn't help but wonder what people would think or say. I couldn't keep these feelings to myself, nor was I willing to pursue a career that I was no longer certain about. So, I decided to take action and start new conversations even though they might be considerably awkward and uncomfortable.

I knew that depending on whom I spoke with, different emotions would be stirred up while I explained my decision. Yet I realized that I was ultimately the person responsible for my decisions and how they would affect my future. This is the reason for this book. Your manager or mentor can help, but you have to make the decision. All I knew at the time was that I would not be happy in a clinical setting working directly with patients. This was the decision early in my career, but later on in life, I would need to make other decisions, about my work environment, the day-to-day

work I was doing, and the amount of time I was working relative to the needs of my family. Though I seem to think of this decision that I made early in my career as earth-shattering, what I didn't realize was that I would be making these life-altering decisions throughout my life and career. It's as if the pivots started in my mind well before the pivots happened.

Uncertainty can be a big factor in our daily lives. There is the uncertainty of the world around us. There is the uncertainty about other people and how they might impact our lives. There is also uncertainty within ourselves about our decisions and the uncertainty we create for ourselves based on the choices we make.

General Uncertainties Related to Career Direction

The uncertainties can be different depending on where you are in your career.

When you are in school:

- How will my major support me in my job search/career?
- Do I need more education or an advanced degree?

When you have been working for several years:

- What is the next step for me in my career move?
- How do I prepare for what's next?

When you are considering a pivot:

- Do I have enough experience to make a change?
- What are the potential trade-offs?

At any point in your career, you can find yourself in one of these situations, two of them, or even all three situations. For example, if you have worked for several years, have gone back to school for an advanced degree that will change the direction of your career and you may consider a pivot—working in a new field.

In my career, I've been uncertain at almost every phase. When I was a student and thinking about medical school, there were industry-wide changes expected in health care delivery models. Change was a significant topic in the news and even those working in the health care professions were not sure what the outcome would be—especially for medical professionals. As a student, I didn't know what to expect if I were to enter this field of work.

As a professional, I experienced and observed changes in a company's organizational structure. Though I had a title and worked in a certain department, it was clear to me that, with upcoming organizational changes, my role could/would change.

After many years working in technical roles, I had the opportunity to leverage my experience in what would be a more significant career pivot. One of these opportunities was to be a project manager in human resources, assisting individuals with career transitions. Another was to consider working with attorneys in the review of patents, as a patent liaison.

Career journeys entail many uncertainties, including those related to the job search processes itself:

- **Application process:** Will your application be considered? Will you receive a response? What type of response will you receive? An email? A phone call? And how long will this take? If you receive a call, who will the caller be and what will they want to know?
- **Interview process:** What types of questions will you be asked? Is the interview in person or virtual? Will there be any technical/assessment tests? Who/how many people will you be invited to speak with? Will your availabilities overlap so that an interview be scheduled in a timely manner? Will you receive an offer, how long will it take, and so on.

Perhaps you have heard the saying *It's all in how you react to a situation*. With all these different uncertainties within and beyond your control, remember that it's all in how you react. Being able to manage how you handle these situations makes a big difference in the outcome.

Staying Grounded

Though it is tempting to think that these changes and uncertainties happen later in one's career, we face very important decisions early on, especially when we think about our education, the focus of our studies, our major(s), and the career opportunities it might lead to.

It started out as an ordinary day in my lab class. We were learning about distillations and as I was setting up an experiment, I overlooked a key step. Reacting spontaneously, I tried to add a liquid that was cold into the solution that was hot... Well, you might be able to guess what happened. I hadn't taken into account the flammability (flash points) of the two different solutions. Almost immediately, sparks appeared and then flames! Oh no, I had created a situation that would be any teaching assistant's worst nightmare—a fire in the lab.

Fortunately, no one was injured and we didn't have to call the fire department! The teacher's assistant ran to me with a fire extinguisher, and the experiment was contained within the lab hood. The only physical injury I incurred was on the skin

on the palm of my right hand which was a little tender from using my palms to pat down the flames on my favorite sweatshirt. After all, I had to save Mickey!

From that day forward, I had to reconsider how I would apply my chemistry degree, because even the thought of causing something to burst into flames made me uncomfortable. This shaped the “where” part of my 5Ws, and I was certain my “where” was not going to be in a chemistry lab.

In hindsight, I would have told my younger self that with more training and experience working in a chemistry lab, I would be better skilled and would not be making these types of mistakes. After all, that is what school/learning is all about.

I learned the practice of staying grounded through this incident. Though I was pre-med at the time, I was still a chemistry major who did not want to work in a chemistry lab. What were my other options? This was not a comfortable situation for me.

Though it would have been tempting at the time to start thinking about changing my major, it was not something I was ready for or wanted to do. I still like the subject and wanted to stay with chemistry as my major. Though I was uncertain about the career options for a chemist, outside of working in a chemistry lab, I was still pre-med at the time and wanted to complete my most immediate goal, which was to finish my undergraduate studies on schedule. What I learned was that it is okay to change something without changing everything. This keeps me grounded.

As much as I talk about being able to keep myself grounded, I really appreciate the times when others helped me stay grounded. During an organizational change, I had a manager who was very clear about setting expectations. This manager explained how the business changes would affect my workflow and their expectations of me. This clarity truly put me at ease as I was managing uncertainty that was beyond my control and realized that a change or pivot might be in my future. Holding steady and being comfortable accepting that I was heading into new territory kept me grounded.

Suggestions for Managing Uncertainty

- Read constantly, learn, and educate yourself.
- Follow up on your curiosity.
- Imagine yourself in different scenarios and how you would handle them.
- Prepare mentally with a virtual “walk through of where you are and what you may encounter.”
- Ask questions of those who have walked that path before you.
- Set parameters based on your comfort level and the amount of uncertainty are you comfortable with.
- Learn how to read people, the room, the situation, and yourself.
- It’s personal, so it’s best not to compare yourself with others.

Furthermore, depending on what is happening in the world around you, policies, global needs, or industry requirements may change. As the saying goes, change is constant, and with changes often come concerns. Being aware while staying grounded will help you weather the changes and address the questions that may arise.

Being Prepared

What should you do during this pause between the uncertainty of not knowing what's next and your landing spot, a place where you get a foothold and ground yourself? You prepare for what could be next, starting with questions.

You may question your decisions. Why did you pick a certain major, school, job opportunity, company, etc.? You may ask yourself whether you have made the right choice about any number of things. Other people may ask if you have considered other options. You may be asked why you chose to pursue one job/career over another. Or people may say nothing at all, leaving you to wonder if you have made a good choice. You are ultimately accountable for your decisions; thus, preparation is key.

Change in any industry is inevitable. Being prepared for change doesn't mean you need to make a change; however, being attentive to your work or the state of your industry can help you be more at ease in times of uncertainty, especially if you are in an industry that is evolving. Depending on the nature of the change, new guidelines or regulations may apply, or new ways of operating may disrupt an entire industry. Ultimately, these changes may affect the cost or value of a product or service you are rendering. Anyone working in an industry or occupation with major changes or disruptions on the horizon would feel challenged with uncertainty on a daily basis.

When you are anticipating change and times of uncertainty, what are some things you can do? Some people are perfectly comfortable with uncertainty and embrace this change.

At times I was truly hoping for change in many aspects of work and life. Yes, I wanted change and I wasn't feeling uncomfortable about it. This is the side of me that is always looking for process improvements. So even when there wasn't change, I was hoping that others would see what I saw and start to suggest changes. If not, I would evaluate what I was doing and how I was doing it and make changes with the hope of improving the process. This approach helped me prepare for change even when change was not imminent, and it even helped me to lead change.

Preparing for change is not always about looking for a new job. Preparing for change starts by looking at yourself, your skills, and the way you work. It also

involves supporting the people you work with. Imagine if you were the boss, what would you want people on your team to do to keep pace with change? How could they anticipate it, prepare for it, and be resourceful to those around them?

If you are interested in advancing your career or making a pivot, start by looking at the work around you or the opportunities that may be available. Speak with your manager or human resources. Develop an understanding of the skills that are needed in your work environment and understand where you have a strong skill set and where you could benefit by enhancing your skills or gaining more experience.

- Have your 5Ws changed recently?
- What are the skills you feel very confident about?
- What are the skills you would like to develop?
- What have you recently accomplished that you are particularly proud of?
- Who would you include in your support network?
- What can you do to maintain a sense of continuity during times of uncertainty?

When I am dealing with uncertainty, especially in the workplace, I make an extra effort to maintain a sense of continuity in areas where I can. For example, I make certain that the quality of what I am doing stays the same or improves. I look for ways to improve my approach to my work. I try to keep some things the same as a way to stay grounded during times of change. I adopt a positive attitude and look forward to what change may bring.

Realize that changes and business disruptions create opportunities as well. A major change or disruption creates a need for advancements in a particular area or for people with certain expertise. You could be a part of this evolution.

The reverse can happen as well. There can be a lot of hype and excitement around a certain job or line of work, giving you the impression that certain jobs are highly lucrative. Then, due to change, the number of opportunities may be reduced or the need may change overall. The same may hold true for work that appears to be uninteresting. The field may change, and how you do your work may be reshaped or changed altogether from how you anticipated it would be done.

If you anticipate that change may require you to look at new opportunities, be prepared.

Change that affects your life can be external to you, so stay close to your 5Ws. Reminding yourself of your reasons for the decisions you have made will help you stay grounded.

What Does Your Resume Say About Times of Change and Uncertainty?

Your resume content may be a little less dazzling during these phases. It may show less productivity and a little more status quo. Sometimes it reflects that you have been doing the same job for a while and that your accomplishments have been similar over a period of time. If you like what you are doing and are happy with where things stand, that's great. If you are looking at your resume and wondering if there is more that you can do, then it is time to explore and understand what could be next steps in your career.

Sometimes the changes in your resume reflect job/career changes that are part of a natural progression in a career, such as doing similar work at another company in the same or a different industry. Another change that might reflect a natural progression is a new job title. The title may reflect a career advancement or work that is similar to what you have done under a previous job title.

During times of uncertainty, whether you or someone else initiates the change, your resume may reflect these changes. You can address this change within your resume and include a few words of explanation. Pauses in the sequence of events due to life circumstances or career pivots are not uncommon. Reasons for pauses can indicate that you took time off due to:

- personal or family matters
- travel
- parenting
- care-giving
- education
- relocation
- a global health crisis

Granted, though these are not reasons related to your career, depending on the circumstances, if the pause led you to re-evaluate your career or consider a pivot, you may indicate your new interest on your resume. If you took some time to travel, and you were away for several months, this may be indicated as well so that any gap or pause in your employment is explained to the reader.

What you want to be able to explain is how you managed through and came out of a time of uncertainty. What did you learn about yourself? What new skills did you develop? These times of uncertainty, as reflected in your resume, create an invitation to share your strengths and how you navigated those times.

When the uncertainty that affects your job is a result of industry-wide or global changes, a brief reference to this change in your resume is acceptable. It provides the reader with a reasonable explanation, and if the reviewer stays up to date with general news reports or industry developments, they will likely

understand the situation. If the pause is due to a change in your company, such as a merger or acquisition, it is reasonable to clarify in your resume the reason for the change or what might appear to be a move to a new company. These additional comments in your resume help your resume speak for itself. Additionally, you can include explanations in your cover letter.

Each job requires a different kind of preparation. Review job descriptions for the types of positions you are looking for. While you are in waiting mode, are there some common themes that you can work on to prepare in advance? For example, some skills that are valued in many positions: innovation, creativity, problem-solving, communication skills, data analysis, and customer service. What are some of the key attributes for the positions you are considering? Can you list these? What skills/experience do you need to prepare for the work you want to do?

Have you demonstrated these skills in a previous role? If not, think back to all of your projects and volunteer efforts and any other types of interactions. Keep in mind some examples of these skills/experience that you could include in conversation, or in your resume or cover letter. If there might be an opportunity in your current workplace to gain this experience, consider exploring the options with your manager. Also, consider asking your manager or mentor for insights on how best to prepare for new opportunities.

Does your resume reflect that you have experience in skills that are valued for the type of work you are interested in doing? Especially if you are still in school or early in your career, what are the skills or academic requirements anticipated?

I distinctly recall where I was standing when I made a decision that I was willing to commit to four or more years after completing my undergraduate degree to attend graduate school. Since my focus was in the life sciences, I anticipated that I would be a working parent since science is one of the fields I would not leave for an extended period of time, especially if it were in the middle of a research project. At the time, there were no pressing reasons for me to think about family or children. Anticipating the kind of lifestyle I wanted and how I would balance a family and a career helped me with my confidence to move forward with pursuing graduate school.

Doing the Work

Doing the work is different from thinking about doing the work or imagining what it must be like to do the work. Taking the uncertainty out of the unknown of what the work is actually like can be the best gift you give yourself!

When you have the opportunity to experience doing the work or at least have a close-up perspective, you learn much faster. Gaining hands-on experience through a summer job or internship may take some of the uncertainty out of the question of whether you might like the day-to-day responsibilities associated with a certain career or job.

If you are already working, then perhaps your manager can provide you with a project that provides you with insight into what working in a different area might be like. If you are approaching a pivot and it seems like you may want to explore other options, it's even more important to test the waters and see if the work is something you would like to do. This type of experience can go a long way to reduce your uncertainty about a future pivot.

If you are not able to find an opportunity to try out work that is of interest to you, find people who are doing the work or have done the work recently and ask them questions. Their answers can provide valuable information and help manage any uncertainty or concerns you may have. Ask questions related to their 5Ws and include questions, such as:

- How long have you been doing this work?
- What does a good day on the job look like, and what does a bad day, a really bad day, look like?
- What keeps you committed to your job?
- What changes do you anticipate in this field over the next 3–5 years?
- How might these changes impact your work?

A willingness to embrace uncertainty has been instrumental to my ability to move across functions and take on new challenges. Doing research (and pivoting often) has taught me to be humble, accept that I don't know everything, and realize that others don't have all the answers either. You can start the questioning of yourself and others with "I wonder what the best way to approach this could be?"

As you ask these questions, remember that an individual's perspective is simply that. View your conversations as information gathering not as an absolute. It's not right or wrong, good or bad; it is simply information from their perspective. They are sharing information to help you glean insights for your career and decisions, and especially, to alleviate any concerns you may have. Getting perspectives from people who do this work will help you know what to expect and how to prepare for it.

Taking Action

As much as I encourage you to speak with people to learn more about their careers or an industry, I also advise you to follow your heart: if you feel drawn

to a certain type of work, then pursue that goal. Just understand that it's going to require hard work and effort to move forward, but taking action is the best thing to do. Whether or not it works out the way you want it to, you will learn something. It is ultimately better than always wondering about something you have never tried to do.

Some people you talk to may tell you "It's great, go for it," and in other instances, they may tell you "It's awful. It's so much work, I can't believe I signed up to do this." Depending on the day, the week, and their immediate circumstances, people may be enthusiastic about their work, or they may not. While you are trying to manage the uncertainties, simply understand that whatever you are trying to do, whatever endeavor you are going to tackle, expect that it won't all be easy. It's going to require effort. Then you won't be disappointed either way because you are doing what you want to do.

When I was considering graduate school, I didn't know what to expect. I didn't ask anyone about it since I had the feeling it would be a lot of work. So, I applied to several programs. I visited the schools, spoke to people at each school, and proceeded with registering for graduate school. I guess you could say that "I just went for it" and I am really glad I did.

It wasn't that I didn't care about what people had to say, I just knew that there were reasons I wanted to go to graduate school and I knew that I was willing to make the commitment. I wanted to learn how to make better decisions and I wanted to understand the nature of the human body and disease. With these personal objectives, I ultimately made what was the right decision for me.

My commitment and determination to obtain an advanced degree was stronger than the weight of the uncertainties I might face in the process. Each person's journey is different. If someone told me that graduate school was great and it was easy, I knew that my experience wouldn't necessarily be the same. If someone told me it was really hard and they quit, it wouldn't mean that I shouldn't try or give up on my dream.

Uncertainty and a Landmark Decision

As part of the job search process, attending career fairs, whether in person or virtually, is a way to learn about companies that are hiring and speak with recruiters who represent the organizations. Signing up to attend an event is just the beginning of stepping into the unknown.

It is customary, though not required, for research scientists to consider becoming a postdoctoral researcher (postdoc). So, I started to think about the type of postdoc position I would want for myself. Then, a family member forwarded an announcement for a career fair at a health care company and suggested I take a look at it. It was the first time I had ever attended a career fair and I had no idea what to expect.

I was hesitant at first. There were many thoughts and questions running through my mind:

- *Do I have time to be away from my day-to-day work (schedule)?*
- *Who will I talk to when I am there?*
- *What will I have to say about myself?*
- *How do I respond if they ask me about my availability or graduation date?*
- *How does my current research (work) prepare me for a job in industry?*
- *Will a postdoc be required?*

I could have selected any of these reasons as an excuse not to attend this recruiting event, but my family strongly encouraged me to attend. Deep down inside, I was curious and wanted to participate as well.

For me, attending my first career fair led to a major event in my life. Accepting this invitation to attend a career fair was just the first step.

Next, I needed to update my resume and be certain I had the right attire. Though it was not a formal interview, I still wanted to look professional—fashionable, but not overly trendy, a splash of color without being loud.

On the day of this in-person event, once again, I felt a lot of uncertainty:

- Who will I meet?
- Where do I go?
- Am I dressed appropriately?
- Will my resume show enough experience?
- What type of position(s) are they interviewing for?

Attending this career fair led to an interview and then my first full-time position. I would never have imagined that my first job would be as a scientist and project manager at a leading global health care company. Working for a company that manufactures laboratory tests for medical diagnostics turned out to be just right for me.

I enjoy working with people, so leading a team and working towards a common goal was energizing for me. In this project manager role, I was overseeing the development and launch of a new diagnostic test that was used as a marker for heart attacks. From this experience, I learned that I had to be comfortable and confident in my decisions, even when I didn't know what my next steps would be or what the future held for me.

As my career progressed, I experienced the importance of our team's effort more and more each day. With every test result, I felt that we played a role in making a difference in someone's life. It's almost as if the thought of having a positive impact on a person's life and the privilege of being a part of a team that

conducted research to develop new products for our customers made the day-to-day uncertainties involved with research less significant. When the result or impact is especially meaningful to you, you keep pressing forward.

To this day, I'm extremely thankful that I decided to attend this career fair, as it ultimately resulted in a job offer and an opportunity for me to work in the health care industry. This life experience showed me that **one decision amidst a sea of uncertainty can change your entire career trajectory**. One event led to a new opportunity, one that I never would have ever imagined possible if I had not accepted the invitation to attend an event.

You don't know where things may lead you but you have to keep doing the work and trust that doors will open for you along the way.

It's OK to Ask

As you are dealing with the uncertainty around your career decisions, sometimes you just have to ask questions. Your manager, mentor, or HR may be a good place to start. Since they may not know the range of your career interests, tell them what you are considering and explain your interests.

Sometimes the biggest question and source of uncertainty is what you could do next. Stay in the same company/position? Work towards a promotion? Ask what it takes to be promoted? Pivot? Stay in the same field of work? Enhance your education? Obtain a new degree? Work harder? Wait a little longer? Take another look at your 5Ws as you ponder these questions. Evaluating your responses to the 5Ws can also help you choose your next steps.

The reality is that there are questions that you are uncertain about and others may not be certain of your interests. It goes both ways. When you start to ask questions, the conversation can lead to insights that can be beneficial for you to know.

Imagine that you have recently started a new position. What would you want people to know about you? What would you want others to tell you about? By asking questions and starting a conversation, there is an opportunity to learn.

I Am Not Sure

At an early phase in your career, you may focus on academics—school(s), degree(s), major(s). Later in your career, academics may still be important, but they may not be. Regardless, exploring the connection between your academic interests and your career interests may be worthwhile, especially if you are looking for more options.

As you compare your resume with the job requirements for a job posting, it can be comforting to see that your academic studies are mentioned in the description of desired majors and that for one of the job requirements, your resume is well-matched with the job posting. If your major is not listed, the posting may list other or related majors or equivalent years of work experience. Thus, depending on the position and the organization, there is some flexibility in how an education requirement is met. When the academics are not an immediate match, review the description carefully to highlight the applicable skills and experience you have that match the job.

The *Occupational Outlook Handbook* has a section that lists occupational categories and the academic degrees or the specific majors that are common in that category. These Field of Degree (FOD)¹ pages can be accessed through the website. The pages also highlight data and information from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and the U.S. Census Bureau for a variety of academic fields such as:

- Agriculture
- Business
- Computer and Information Technology
- Engineering
- Liberal Arts
- Psychology
- Transportation

These are just several of the fields listed, there are many more available online.

A closer look at the 2021 data for the Field of Degree for Mathematics shows that 73% of people with mathematics degrees worked in occupational groups related to the fields as listed below. The remaining 27% worked in the category of “Other.” These are the actual data:

Field of Degree: Mathematics²

- Computer and mathematical occupations (23%)
- Educational instruction and library occupations (20%)
- Management occupations (14%)
- Business and financial operations occupations (11%)
- Sales and related occupations (5%)
- Other (27%)

Note: The sum of percentages by major may not total 100 due to rounding.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey

In the Field of Degree for Business, the 2021 data show that 75% of those with a business degree worked in occupational groups related to the fields as listed below. The remaining 25% worked in the category of “Other.” These are the actual data:

Field of Degree: Business³

- Management occupations (24%)
- Business and financial operations occupations (23%)
- Sales and related occupations (12%)
- Office and administrative support occupations (10%)
- Computer and mathematical occupations (5%)
- Other (25%)

When you want a broad overview of career options, the CareerInfo App (made available by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, BLS) provides an overview of information in the Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH), including jobs and occupations.

Depending on your interests, you may want to consider studies and work in fields related to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) or STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics). If you are interested in business, generally business studies and work are considered non-STEM occupations. Data science is considered STEM since it involves mathematics and data modeling to guide business decisions. Health care professions are also considered NON-STEM.

The *Occupational Outlook Handbook*⁴ and the OOH CareerInfo App provide a very succinct description of the work that is performed by people in these respective occupations. These are few occupation groups and several occupations within the group.

Business⁵

Workers in these occupations are involved in the day-to-day activities of running a business or with matters related to money.

- Accountants and Auditors
 - Prepare and examine financial records
- Financial Analysts
 - Guide businesses and individuals in decisions about expending money to attain profit

- Human Resource Specialists
 - Recruit, screen, and interview job applicants and place newly hired workers in jobs. They also may handle compensation and benefits, training, and employee relations.
- Logisticians
 - Analyze and coordinate an organization's supply chain
- Market Research Analysts
 - Study consumer preferences, business conditions, and other factors to assess potential sales of a product or service
- Project Management Specialists
 - Coordinate the budget, schedule, staffing, and other details of a project

Architecture and Engineering⁶

Workers in these occupations design and develop structures, products, and systems and collect information for mapping and other purposes have occupations that are in this category.

- Aerospace Engineers
 - Design, develop, and test aircraft, spacecraft, satellites, and missiles
- Agricultural Engineers
 - Solve problems concerning power supplies, machine efficiency, the use of structures and facilities, pollution and environmental issues, and the storage and processing of agricultural products.
- Computer Hardware Engineers
 - Research, design, develop, and test computer systems and components
- Electrical and Electronics Engineers
 - Design, develop, test, and supervise the manufacture of electrical equipment
- Environmental Engineers
 - Use engineering disciplines in developing solutions to problems of planetary health
- Mechanical Engineers
 - Design, develop, build, and test mechanical and thermal sensors and devices
- Robotics Engineers
 - Research, design, develop, or test robotic applications

Math⁷

Workers in these occupations use arithmetic and apply advanced techniques to make calculations, analyze data, and solve problems.

- Data Scientists
 - Use analytical tools and techniques to extract meaningful insights from data
- Mathematicians and Statisticians
 - Analyze data and apply computational techniques to solve problems

Health care⁸

Workers in these occupations help clients maintain and improve well-being.

- Athletic trainers
 - Specialize in preventing, diagnosing, and treating muscle and bone injuries and illnesses
- Nurse Anesthetists, Nurse Midwives, and Nurse Practitioners
 - Coordinate patient care and may provide primary and specialty health care
- Occupational Therapy Assistants and Aides
 - Help patients develop, recover, and improve, as well as maintain the skills needed for daily living and working
- Physician Assistants
 - Examine, diagnose, and treat patients under the supervision of a physician.
- Veterinarian Technologists and Technicians
 - Perform medical tests that help diagnose animals' injuries and illnesses

Computer and Information Technology⁹

These workers create or support computer applications, systems, and networks.

- Computer and Information Research Scientists
 - Design innovative uses for new and existing computing technology
- Information Security Analysts
 - Plan and carry out security measures to protect an organization's computer networks and systems
- Software Developers
 - Design computer applications or programs
- Software Quality Assurance Analysts and Testers
 - Identify problems with applications or programs and report defects

Art & Design¹⁰

Workers in this group create products and concepts that have practical or aesthetic purposes.

- Art Directors
 - Responsible for the visual style and images in magazines, newspapers, product packaging, and movie and television productions
- Special Effects Artists and Animators
 - Create images that appear to move and visual effects for various forms of media and entertainment

When you are uncertain about the next steps from a career perspective, I highly encourage you to do the research for yourself and take the uncertainty out of the unknown—review occupations in detail. Know what you are getting into and don't necessarily assume that someone else can provide you with all of the answers. Through the process of gathering the information, you may come across something that is of interest to you. Being comfortable gathering information helps you understand more about the options that are available to consider.

A Word of Caution

During times of uncertainty, people can often feel more vulnerable, so as you manage uncertainty about your decisions, remember to stay strong, positive, and optimistic. People around you may have the best of intentions, but they are not in your shoes—they can't see what you see. They may even respond to your ideas or actions with negativity: "You can't do this." "Don't do that!" Often these reactions come from a genuine concern for you. The reasons behind this apparent negativity are as varied as there are people. Maybe they wouldn't or couldn't manage this kind of uncertainty, so they can't imagine that anyone could. Maybe they just observe what you are doing and are afraid for you. Maybe they are worried that you will make the same mistake they made. They might think what you are doing is too hard. Perhaps they are not in a position to offer you the support you need. Maybe they saw someone else do what you are trying to do and that person was not successful. Try to learn what's behind any negativity. Then take steps to avoid the potential roadblocks.

What's Next?

1. If you are ready to work on some of the areas that make you feel uncomfortable, what are your top priority(s)? What can you do or practice that will make this easier for yourself to become more comfortable? What type of resources would be beneficial?

2. Are there any work-related situations that you are less comfortable with? What are some small steps you can take that may help you address these areas?
3. If you are exploring career options to begin, advance, or make a pivot, would you be considering a work in the same occupation or would you be interested in learning more about the types of work that are available to someone with your skills, experience, and interests?

Notes

- 1 To review the Field of Degree (FOD) section of the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, visit: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/field-of-degree/home.htm>.
- 2 Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, Field of degree: Mathematics <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/field-of-degree/mathematics/mathematics-field-of-degree.htm> (visited January 29, 2024).
- 3 Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, Field of degree: Business <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/field-of-degree/business/business-field-of-degree.htm> (visited February 15, 2024).
- 4 For the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, visit: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/>.
- 5 Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor (2019). My Career Guide, (Version 1.1) [Mobile application software]. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/business-and-financial/home.htm>.
- 6 Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor (2019). My Career Guide, (Version 1.1) [Mobile application software]. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/architecture-and-engineering/home.htm>.
- 7 Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor (2019). My Career Guide, (Version 1.1) [Mobile application software]. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/math/home.htm>.
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Chapter 5

Growth: Bridging the Gaps and Continuing to Learn

Learning changes the way we see ourselves, and the world.

When thoughts about taking a trip, meeting new people, learning a new game, trying a new recipe, watching an interesting movie, or listening to an engaging podcast come to mind, I am energized by the excitement of what I might discover, who I might meet, or what these new experiences could lead to. It's not on my daily to-do list to be learning, but just when I think I know what I need to know, I realize something that I was not aware of before. It is like taking a different route to a familiar destination: there is a possibility you might learn something new and then want to go farther next time around.

Different Types of Gaps

A gap is the difference between where you are and where you want to be. There is no judgment in this discussion about gaps. It's not about whether you are good or bad at something or whether you must do something. Understanding your gaps can help you work towards the next step(s) in your career journey. Using the word "gap" helps to call your attention to areas that you may want to work on.

These areas may be specific skills, education, or work experience. They may also be something less tangible, such as your perspective or understanding of situations, or your personal approach to how you face challenges or solve problems.

The reason to identify your gaps is not to make you feel that there's something wrong with where you are. It's to help you see the steps you might take to reach your broader and longer-term career goals. When you know what your gaps are, you can pursue opportunities to incorporate the learning and experience into your wheelhouse. These opportunities may be readily available to you, or you may need to reach out to others who can suggest ways and resources to help you achieve what you are working towards.

When you are numb to your gaps you may find yourself working towards goals that have changed; you may find yourself in a spot you hadn't planned on.

Gaps can be areas you wish you knew more about. They can also be items in a job description that you don't have experience in, that you feel you haven't developed all the skills for, or that you have never done before. These are challenges that you come upon in your life and career journey. Some people may tell you that you have a gap, but they may not be comfortable sharing this with you. People may not know you well enough to pinpoint a gap, and so they cannot provide you with helpful information. Or they do not tell you because they don't know how to tell you or they don't want to hurt your feelings. Regardless of the reason, you might have to identify gaps for yourself. Being attentive to where you are and where you want to be helps you to take intentional actions towards bridging potential gaps as you move along your career journey.

It's not always easy to know where the gaps are and where you want to focus, so let's first dig in and explore gaps from a general perspective.

Formal Education

These are the requirements for a position such as a high school diploma or GED, trade school certification, associate's degree, or bachelor's degree. If an advanced degree is required, the degree can be a master's, doctorate, or professional degree.

There are many different degrees one can obtain, and a way to explore the options is to look at the academics or academic catalogue sections of the school's website. Look at the websites for more than one academic institution since there are a variety of programs and specialties that each college or university offers—too many to list specifically and it is best to dig in to find what is of interest to you.

When it comes to your job and the formal education required, this information can most often be found in the job description. If you are exploring how to advance in your role and understand the formal education required,

I recommend that you ask for more information. It is important to be very clear on the requirements so that you can determine whether this is a requirement for the work you want to do or whether it is a personal achievement you want to pursue. Then you can determine if this is truly a gap.

If you are enrolled in an academic program but have not finished your degree yet, you could indicate that the degree is “in progress” with an “anticipated graduation date of month, year.” When in conversation with others about your work or career interest, though the degree is not completed, it is evident that you are pursuing your education and perhaps there are other similar roles with different academic requirements to explore.

Through my stories, I have shared with you how my career interests have evolved from a subject matter perspective, focusing on what I wanted to learn about research, the human body, and disease.

At that time, I was graduating from college, and I had a few options. I could either graduate and find a job, continue my education, or take a break and explore options. From a personal perspective, I was not ready to look for a job. It wasn't something I had considered while in school. Clearly, the Learner in me was a strong influence in this decision-making process. I didn't want to take a break from studies because there was so much more I wanted to learn.

No one told me I had to go to graduate school; in fact, no one even suggested it. During my undergraduate years, I didn't feel comfortable with my decision-making skills. During my academic years, my focus was on the coursework, so I wanted more time to focus on strengthening not only my analytical skills but also my problem-solving and critical thinking skills. Overall, I wanted to develop a broader skill set.

In graduate school, I knew that I was responsible for my learning, although I had support from my graduate school advisors. Independent research would involve staying current with newly published research, and I would be expected to critically analyze data and interpret the results. Being a part of a graduate advisor's research lab meant collaborating with others and sharing equipment and other essential resources. Though we each had our own research projects, we could also rely on each other for help.

Each week other graduate students and I would take turns presenting recent scientific articles for discussion. These opportunities to present in front of a small group prepared me for presenting data in my future work roles.

I could have taken other approaches to building this experience, but for me graduate school was the right decision.

A research-based graduate program is very different from a structured graduate program and has some inherent uncertainties. When conducting research, you're not able to determine when you will have generated enough data to publish the thesis required for graduation, thus there is typically not a firm end date. The program could take four years or more. It took me over four years to complete my thesis.

My graduate school experience taught me a lot about managing uncertainty, and I also learned other skills that were essential to transitioning from an academic environment to a corporate work environment.

After I finished my doctoral degree, students interested in research would ask me if they should go for their Ph.D. I always responded that they should think hard about it because it is a lot of work. I also share with these students that I am forever grateful that I made this choice. I learned a lot about science and I learned a lot about myself through this process. Most importantly, I learned to be resilient.

I wish I could tell you that you just need a specific set of skills. In reality, for any role, you and your organization can benefit if you have a broad skill set and expertise in many different areas. The full set of skills you gain are developed over time, transferable, and essentially additive. Having a broad set of skills also makes it easier to pivot in the future, whether you are moving from one job to another, one industry to another, working for a large or small organization, or even working for yourself.

Experience

Depending on the work you are interested in doing, the specific experience can be a requirement for the job, or there may be a preference for a certain level or type of experience. There are different kinds of gaps. A gap may be a complete lack of experience or not enough years' experience. If the experience is not closely related to or doesn't seem to apply to the job you are interested in, that's also a gap.

If you are currently doing work that will add to your experience, more time will enable you to gain exposure and thus it is sometimes truly a time-in-the-job consideration. If you are seeking your first opportunity, be persistent in looking for ways to gain the necessary experience. Perhaps you can find a special project with an organization that can help you get started. You may look for part-time or volunteer opportunities that can offer the experience you are looking for.

Experiential learning allows you to challenge yourself. Look around your community or school and see how you can get involved especially when you are expanding your breadth of experience or considering a career pivot. Experiential learning provides opportunities to develop valuable skills including:

- customer service—when interacting with others
- sales—if involved in fundraising activities
- leadership—committee chair, event chair
- financial/budgeting—treasurer role, other club leadership that involves budget

- communication/social media—communicating events, engaging followers
- organization skills—understanding how decisions are made and ways to get things done
- decision-making—as a volunteer, you may find yourself leading or guiding others
- decisions—you practice the process by fielding questions from others
- presentation/public speaking—as you have opportunities to present to others
- event planning—fundraisers, socials, etc., organizing people/activities
- technology—there may be new apps, equipment, etc. that are being used
- working under pressure—even though it is volunteer work, there are still timelines
- negotiating—not everyone agrees, how can you lead or impact how decisions are made
- listening—practice listening to others, asking questions to be certain you understand each person’s perspective
- problem-solving—how you work with others to resolve issues
- project and time management (job essentials)—involves an extra time commitment, so it shows that you manage your time effectively.
- working with others—you meet a lot of new people, so can get to know and understand others

During the course of an internship or apprenticeship, you can be challenged in many different ways, so you have an opportunity to learn a lot about yourself. Some challenges are due to the nature of the work, where you are striving to solve a problem or create an innovative solution. Other challenges can arise as you meet new people or communicate with leaders in the organization. At the end of internships, participants often deliver a presentation, so if you have not been in situations where you delivered presentations in front of a large group, presenting can be a challenge. Although internships are challenging, they are an amazing learning experience.

On the positive side, internships often provide access to people who are there to support you. You can ask them questions or practice skills you are learning, such as making a presentation, with them. These are all good skills to have and maintain at any stage of your career. In the end, internships teach you more about yourself. You create tactics to support your success and build confidence and trust in yourself and your abilities. That’s the benefit of experiential learning.

If your resume includes a broad range of experiences, it could demonstrate your versatility. Review your master list to determine if somewhere in your earlier

experience, even in high school or college or through an internship, you might have gained relevant experience.

Certifications or Training

Depending on the work you are doing, or want to do, certifications may be optional or required. If you are considering pursuing a certification or additional training, ask your manager/mentor how it may contribute to your current or future career opportunities. If you decide to pursue certification or training, be sure to plan ahead. Allow ample time to register, study for, and complete the programs.

Your resume can give your experience a little lift just by including your efforts to bridge gaps, such as:

- Training/Certification (*in process*)
- Online program (*to be completed by...*)

This shows the reader you are working towards your goals of increasing your knowledge and experience.

Other Gaps

Reflect upon the feedback you have received from others. Is there any feedback from a performance review you would like to focus on? Are there comments that colleagues have made in passing that you have heard several times that may warrant some further thought?

I have found that for me addressing any gaps that I am working on requires real time and it doesn't "just happen." I look at my calendar and reserve time for important activities, such as consistently reading relevant information or capturing new ideas. From what I have experienced, practice matters, and so if I set aside even 15 minutes a day to practice a skill I am working on, I feel like it is a good investment of my time.

As you are considering any gaps between where you are and where you want to be, what factor does time play into your decision to address the gap? What would you make a commitment to do for yourself if you could create blocks of time dedicated to working on your gaps?

15 min/day	_____
30 min/day	_____
1 hr/day	_____
1 day/week	_____
1 weekend/month	_____
3 months	_____
6 months	_____
1 year	_____

It may be easier to think of what you can accomplish in 15 min/day or 1 hour/day:

- research, read or gather information
- study for a class or certification
- watch a video
- attend a webinar

Larger blocks of time—months or years—may be needed for more structured commitments:

- weekend education program
- a semester or trimester for a set of classes
- completing a certificate program
- completing a formal degree

For the shorter blocks of time, you can use your own judgment and time-management skills to make this happen. For the larger blocks of time, depending on where you are in your career, it may be something you may put on hold until you are ready or explore ways to find the necessary time. If your circumstances change and you find yourself with this extra time you will be ready and know exactly what you want to work on.

Your resume could reflect your commitment to learning, especially if the reader notes indications of when you have taken time to bridge some gaps, learn, and develop yourself. It might show that while you were working in your part-time or full-time position, you also completed some online training. Or, if there was a gap in time between jobs, your resume may show you took time to complete coursework or a certification to improve your skills.

should not apply for a position that is of interest to you; however, it may help you prepare for opportunities and gain experience that might support you in your efforts to be considered for a position.

When you review your job description for a current or previous role or as you look at a job description for a position that you are applying for and map out your experience relative to the position, are there skills or experience that you would not consider among your top skills? Or are there certifications or academic requirements that you do not have? Dig a little deeper to gather information. Do many positions with this title have the same academic requirement or is this specific for this company/organization? Is this a new requirement, one that was not required in previous years? Job requirements change. The skills required for positions change.

Though it is tempting to wait until you want to submit your resume for a position before you update it, it will be beneficial to update your resume before you need it, even if it might only take 15–30 minutes. Having an up-to-date resume will make it easier to map out your experience relative to a job description. With the job description as a baseline, compare it with your skills and expertise and look for any areas that need additional development.

As you are going through this review process, be realistic. Speak with people to understand what is truly essential for the role to identify the skills you have that apply to the job. With this approach, you are not creating extra work for yourself, and you can prioritize your efforts in the area(s) that are most relevant.

For the opportunities that you are interested in exploring, are there any unique qualifications you want to work on that are specific to these occupations and job titles?

Examples may include: technical language skills, foreign language skills, social media, project management, sales, or advanced proficiency with MS Office tools.

If you work in the technology industry, consider the languages and databases that are in use relative to your experience level. Is it at a level you are comfortable with or, just the same, start to look ahead to see what technologies the organizations you aspire to work with are using and build that experience if you do not already have it.

If working for an engineering, fintech, high-tech environment or other roles that rely on technology, what would be to your advantage to be more proficient in:

Technologies:

- Databases
- Languages
- Frameworks
- Libraries
- Services

Marketing/Sales

- CRM (Customer Relationship Management)
- CMS (Content Management System)
- Email
- Lead Gen

People Operations

- Collaboration

Product

- Project Management
- Design
- Analytics

Shh...No One Knows

If your resume could provide suggestions, it might say to you, “Hey, I wish you had a little more experience in this particular area: _____.” Perhaps you are already aware of this mini-gap hoping that ...shh.... no one has figured this out yet.

It is very possible that when it comes to the work that you do, the people around you will notice, over time, what you are good at, and what you are less skillful at. You can hope that no one else has figured out what you are less skilled at. That may not be the case, but that may be ok. People recognize that everyone has to learn in the beginning. Over time, they learn how to get better. If you sense that you are not comfortable in a certain area and acknowledge it to yourself, you have a chance to work on the gap and try to improve upon it.

Skills that some people may have an aversion towards:

- Public speaking
- Meeting new people
- Talking on the phone

- Sales
 - Numbers
 - Marketing
 - Social Media
 - Data
 - Design
 - Coding
 - Writing
 - Technology
 - Others:
-
-
-

These aversions can resemble a feeling you may have had in school when you decided to avoid certain subjects such as art, math, music, or science. Or perhaps your lack of comfort with these areas may not have held you back. Either way, in the back of your mind you may wish you were better at them so they would be less of a nemesis.

I felt this way towards computer science and a few other subjects when I was in school. I wish I would have been more open to giving these subjects a try.

Try different ways to learn because a new approach may help you bridge this gap more easily. Find out how others develop their skills when approaching similar work. What skill level do you want to be at: proficient, expert, or rock star? What would it take and are you interested in doing that? Coming to an understanding and acceptance of the extent to which you want to bridge a certain gap makes it easier for you and others.

When I was in high school, I remember really enjoying our class on public speaking. For many years, I enjoyed any opportunity I was given to deliver presentations and speak in front of my peers, coworkers, and others. Typically, the audience was no larger than 50 people. Then, one day, I was invited to speak in front of a much larger audience, 250–300 people. For the first time in my life, I had butterflies in my stomach. I always thought this was just a phrase people used to describe being nervous or anxious about something. Oh no, two weeks prior to the presentation, I physically could feel the nervousness inside my stomach. I had never felt this level of discomfort before.

What I have since come to realize is that preparing to speak in front of a large audience of relative strangers requires significantly more rehearsal and practice. The level of preparation it took for me to speak to a familiar audience is much different than that needed for a larger audience. The introverted side of me was letting me know it was feeling just slightly ill at ease.

I delivered this presentation many years ago, early in my career. Would others have known that I was a bit nervous? It is possible, and I am guessing the answer is yes—and that’s okay, because I now understand what to do differently and know how to prepare for these situations. There are also organizations that help people strengthen their public speaking skills.

Bridging the Gaps

The amount of effort needed to bridge a gap depends on where you are and where you want to be (see Table 5.2 for an example of a template for bridging your gaps). Addressing gaps can involve incremental changes, learning something new, improving a skill, or changing your mindset on how you approach your work. A gap is not necessarily something required for your day-to-day work. Instead it may be something you want to work on or that you want to become a rock star at. Gaps can be what you want to achieve for yourself. People are often willing to help, so how can you enlist their help and get started?

Conversation Starters to Explore Gaps

A conversation with someone about your gaps or areas you want to work on may be awkward at first. Someone who is interested in helping you achieve your goals or who is receptive to a conversation may say:

- “How are you feeling about your experience with ...”
- “What can I/we do to help you with...”
- “I noticed you have been working on/at...”

Such conversations may be invitations to discuss topics you have questions about or that may be potential gaps that are on your mind. I use the word *potential* because sometimes you may perceive something as a gap, but others may not. It is beneficial to distinguish areas that you have identified as a gap for yourself as compared to areas that others might consider a gap for you. You may or may not agree with what another person suggests is a gap for you but it seems reasonable to listen.

Having an idea of what your gaps may be allows you to be prepared for these types of conversations. Imagine the ease you might feel if someone were to highlight a gap you are thinking about as well. Your response might be:

- “Yes, I was thinking about this as well...”
- “What might be some resources to help me ...”
- “How did you increase your experience with”

Table 5.2 Sample Template for Bridging Your Gaps

	<i>Job Description Parameters</i>	<i>My Experience</i>	<i>Areas I Want to Focus On</i>
Requirements			
Preferred			
Job Responsibilities			

There are many different ways to bridge gaps, strengthen the knowledge you have, and gain new skills, especially if you are considering a pivot. These suggestions are offered to help you get from where you are to where you want to be along your career journey.

Starting at Entry Level

There are stories about CEOs who started their careers working in the mailroom or entry-level roles. I have also observed individuals who started their careers in administrative, coordinator, or specialist roles who have since advanced to directors or vice presidents in their organizations. Learning from the ground up can really pay off if you are comfortable starting there.

Embrace Internships, Apprenticeships, and Trainee Opportunities

These opportunities can help you learn more about an organization, yourself, and the work you want to do. It goes both ways, though, because people who are hosting you for these opportunities want to learn about you just as much as you want to learn about them and their organizations. When in these roles, people understand that you are in learning mode and thus they are more willing to teach and answer questions.

Practice Persistence

Bridging any gap requires effort and, most importantly, persistence. I will always remember the story a student shared when he was looking for a position. He had been looking online for weeks and one evening, on a Saturday night, it was late, he was tired and almost ready to give up, but after mulling through more than 30 pages of job postings, he found a posting that looked just right for him, on page 34, the very last page. It ended up being his dream job, and he landed an offer.

Say “Yes” to the Work

A physician shared his story with me about a pivot in his career journey. He was newly married and had just returned from his honeymoon. His employer asked him to take on new responsibilities. Others had also been given this same opportunity and turned it down. He didn't have much time to think about it, but he thought, what do I have to lose? This decision to say yes has since shaped his life and career in so many positive ways. As he said, “Be willing to do the work that no one else wants to do, because you never know where it may lead you.”

Take on Special Projects

I will always remember a student who received an internship offer, in particular, because they had experience with programming that was unique at the time.

When I asked how they had developed this knowledge, the explanation was that they took on a project that their professor needed help with and no one else wanted to do it. The experience helped them land an internship opportunity for the summer. A special project, even if somewhat undesirable, may lead to a hidden opportunity to gain specialized experience. This additional knowledge and experience can become an advantage.

Strengthen Transferable Skills

Leadership, communication, and problem-solving skills can be applied in any job and across any industry. Having effective skills in these areas is always valuable. Look around your community and the people you interact with. Where and how can you step in and strengthen these skills?

Look for Resources and People Who Can Assist You

It is beneficial to engage the help and support of someone who can guide you through or help you brainstorm ideas for bridging the gap(s) you are working on. The key is to find resources and people who can support you and offer different perspectives as you are bridging gap(s). If you can take away even one golden nugget of insight that will be helpful, it is truly a good investment of your time and effort. Resources can include a mentor, coach, instructor, class, workshop, etc. Your learning sessions can be in-person or virtual.

You will have many questions along your journey. Know who you can go to or count on when you have questions or need help. Find people who are on your side and can lend you a hand through words of encouragement, advice, and support.

You may find just one person or several people. You may have different “go to” people for different questions. These individuals may be among your family or friends, your professors, peers, or people you meet along the way, such as at a networking event. If you pay close attention, there is something to learn from everyone you meet.

Be Grateful for Hidden Gems

My favorite way to describe special people who have stepped into my life for a short period of time, imparting tremendous help and gratitude is that they are my hidden gems. A gem begins as a rock until its beauty and essence is uncovered, as through tumbling in a polisher. I believe that everyone has experience and insights to share. Unless we think of them as a friend, mentor, or teacher what they have to offer can be overlooked because we meet them only in passing.

I first came to understand the concept of a hidden gem when I was in graduate school. There was a technical support scientist I spoke with when I ordered supplies for my experiments. It just so happened that during one of our conversations, I mentioned that I was considering a career working at a health care company. Though we had only spoken on a few occasions, I asked what it was like to work in industry versus academia, and with this question, we had a great conversation. I even learned how to prepare for my interview. As you can tell by this story, I found a hidden gem where I never would have expected.

Accept the Pause

There are times when what you are looking for does not happen when you want it to, and you have to wait. The pause can be overwhelmingly hard to handle since there is no activity and there is just silence. You are not receiving any emails, texts, or calls from the people you are hoping to hear from, and it seems as though all activities that you want to happen are on hold. There is only silence.

During this quiet time, whether it is a few hours, days, or weeks, take the extra time to reflect upon your 5Ws. Think about where you have been and the direction you are headed. Think about your experiences, what you take pride in, and what you look forward to. A pause does not have to be quiet time. It can also be time that you do or learn something, go somewhere, meet with someone you have always wanted to talk to but could never find the time for.

Acknowledging Potential Gaps Behind the Gap

Sometimes the gaps you are working on have underlying gaps that keep you from taking action:

- **Temporary gaps when new:** Maybe you just started a new job or are moving into a new position, and you realize you don't know how to do something. That's understandable, whether it is a part-time job, an internship, or a full-time position. You sort of know what to do, but you are feeling challenged. Reach out for information, ask a coworker or your manager for insights or guidance on where to find more information. Look into online resources for basic explanations.

Some things that you learn are obvious; it's part of the job and maybe technical or related to the equipment or processes. You might initially learn by observing others. Early on, it is helpful to be attentive to how things are done and to pay close attention.

How can you gain this experience on the job? What are other ways for you to build or strengthen your skills in this area?

- **Lack of financial resources:** You might be able to address certain gaps if you had the financial resources to support you. Talk to people, understand where there are grants or financial resources available to assist you. Ask how others found resources to fund their aspirations.
- **You are not comfortable with it:** Certain situations may make you uncomfortable and so you find yourself naturally avoiding them. It may be a situation that is new for you or you do not feel like you handle these situations well. Finding a safe space that allows you to practice being in these situations may help you develop strategies for becoming more at ease when faced with these scenarios.

As described in Chapter 1, work-related group activities are a great way to connect with your coworkers and get to know each other better. They support team building and build stronger relationships. I feel comfortable participating in some activities, but others can be a challenge for me.

Anyone who knows me today would be totally surprised if I said that I was once afraid of dogs. I didn't even realize I was afraid of dogs until my coworkers wanted us to sign up for a group service activity to visit a dog shelter and spend time playing with the dogs. I was totally uncomfortable and could not even imagine myself in this situation, so I didn't go.

Fast forward, a friend had a litter of puppies and after seeing the sweet little ones in a photo, I wanted to see these puppies in person. When I walked into the room, I was delighted to see seven puppies dashing around the room. When I sat down, my friend placed one of the puppies on my lap. This puppy (Minnie) gently looked into my eyes and we bonded. She became our first family dog.

Ask me now and I would gladly participate in this group activity.

- **It doesn't feel like a good fit:** You thought the work was going to be interesting and you were going to like it, but now that you have experienced it, you are not as enthusiastic about it as before. It's just not what you imagined it would be like. Is there more to the work that you are not aware of? Is there an opportunity to pivot and move into another area? Is there a perspective of the work that you did not realize? What questions or conversations can help you better align with where you are?

- **Not aware of other options:** In certain situations, it may seem like there are only two choices, and you are not interested in either option. What if there were more options but you are just not aware of them? Research and conversations with others may reveal other options that you are more interested in.
- **Effect of gaps in time:** Some time gaps are natural, such as the time in between graduation and the start of your first job, the time in between one job and another job. There are also gaps in time that may be more significant in duration, such as a year or longer. How do you keep your skills up to date? How would you stay familiar with the work and keep your skills current? Reminding yourself of your intention to stay current may prompt you to follow certain organizations, trends, etc., so that you stay current with your industry.
- **It's Not Really a Gap:** Thinking back to your various experiences, what may seem like a gap may not actually be a gap. Although your title may not reflect skills, you may have demonstrated them:
 - Leadership skills** could have been demonstrated early in your career through involvement with student activities, sports, volunteer organizations, work as a camp counselor, and leading fundraising activities.
 - Communication skills** could have been demonstrated any time you worked with others, created and sent emails, or uploaded social media posts.
 - Accountability skills** could have been demonstrated when managing community projects, being on time and present when you are supposed to be, and honoring your commitments.
- **I'm Not Sure:**

What if you feel like you don't have any applicable skills or experience, and there is a huge gap between where you are and where you want to be? When these thoughts come across your mind, take a moment to think hard about the things you have done. You may realize that you have done more than you thought. Maybe you have been out of the workforce for several years or have never really been employed, but you have taken on responsibilities. Maybe you are doing work that is not paid or not considered a job, but you have most likely demonstrated skills that are relevant to what you aspire to. Just dig in and dig deep into all that you have done over your lifetime.

To Advance or Pivot in Your Career

If your aspirations involve advancements or promotions in your career or a pivot in your career, extra effort and planning may be required. The gap you are working to bridge may require more formal planning. Reviewing the job

descriptions in the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*¹ can help you determine if you need additional formal education to advance your career. However, in some instances, more experience or demonstrated expertise will support you in your efforts. Depending on your field, just take note of when formal education above your current level is required. Then speak with others to find out when additional education is preferred or required.

- A nurse may advance their career by obtaining a master's degree in nursing.
- An engineer may choose to go to graduate school and obtain a Ph.D.
- An accountant can advance if they obtain their CPA
- Obtaining an MBA can help anyone who is interested in a business endeavor.

In addition to academics, strengthening your knowledge of your industry and understanding the intricacies of how it works will help you become more effective at the work you do.

■ **Keep Up With the Pace of Change**

Whether you are working in the arts, sciences, technology, design, consulting, or manufacturing, industries are evolving and changing fast. Identify the approaches you will choose to stay current.

■ **Read/Listen/Watch**

To follow the latest trends in the industry, learn from others who are openly sharing their experiences. Everyone's situations are different, so their approach to learning may also be different. From the many books, podcasts, and videos I select with the hope of learning, I find something to take away—a message, an inspiration. Even though my journey will not be the same as others', I see the world differently as a result of what I have learned from new content.

■ **Mentor Others**

Being a mentor is a good way to learn and build leadership skills. You may mentor others, but there is also reverse mentoring can occur as well. You may discover that someone more junior in experience can also be your mentor. Since you and your mentee can decide on the topics you focus on, this is a way to bridge gaps, enhance leadership skills, and gain new perspectives.

■ **Be Curious**

Ask for input, feedback, and suggestions. Look for ways to gather information if you want to learn more about something. As you move along your career journey, get to know the people you meet and build relationships with them—people at all levels of experience. These can be people you

know personally, or even people you admire, follow, read about, or listen to their podcasts. People are often very open about sharing about their life experiences.

■ **Be Observant**

Being observant and making a note of how other people handle the situations you have been in or will be in can be a learning experience in itself. Whether others respond the same way or differently than you would have responded, you can learn from them. Know that others may be, likewise, watching you for the same reason; thus, the observation can go both ways.

The benefit of watching others is that there are so many different scenarios that you might find yourself in. If you had to learn each and every situation on your own, it would take many years of practice. Thus, paying attention to situations and how others handle them enhances your learning curve. Learning from others could make it easier for you to respond when you are faced with similar scenarios.

■ **Continue to Educate Yourself**

If starting, continuing, or furthering your education or training is the way you want to bridge a gap, realize that there are many ways to learn on your own. Many options, such as online training videos, are low cost or free, and in addition, training can often be accessed in many different ways. Ask people you know about the options available, especially if resources are limited. Most importantly, select training that works best for you, fits your needs, and seems to offer you the most support through completion.

■ **Be Open to Stepping Stones**

There are times when what you are hoping to achieve is immediate and the opportunity is within reach. Other times, though the opportunity seems to be right in front of you, it is actually a few steps away. In other words, you might need a few stepping stones to get to where you want to be. It does not mean you are settling for less than what you want. To get to where you want to be may require more experience, or the opportunity that you want may not be available at the time you are looking to make a change. Being open to new opportunities that create stepping stones for your career journey and taking time to learn is not necessarily “settling” but maybe providing you with opportunities to continue to build your skills.

Sometimes I accepted an opportunity that wasn't exactly what I had in mind; however, it was a good opportunity. When I stepped into the role, I discovered there was a lot for me to learn. These opportunities were truly stepping stones for me as I progressed in my career.

■ **Stay Close to Your 5Ws**

Revisit your 5Ws as you are addressing gaps, and assess how the work and additional skills you are gaining fit into your interests. Realize that some

may, and some may not. Add any new skills you are working on to your 5Ws document as a reminder that you are building these skills and that you have a purpose for doing so.

Reasons can include:

- Career advancement
 - It's part of the job responsibilities.
 - I want to improve a skill or increase knowledge.
 - I'm not sure why but it seems like a good skill to have.
 - My manager/mentor suggests that I learn this skill.
 - I have always wanted to learn.
 - It seems interesting, so I want to give it a try.
 - I might want to work in this area one day (preparing to pivot).
 - Why not?
- **Don't Have Any Gaps?**

If you don't think you have any gaps right now, and you know what you need to know, then ask yourself if you are appropriately challenged or if you have all the experience and knowledge you need to be where you want to be.

A student who had recently graduated from college once shared with me that she felt quite comfortable in her work. Though she didn't feel as though she had any gaps, she came to realize that she had been limiting herself and intentionally not putting herself in spaces where she was challenging herself. She was playing it safe and keeping herself small, staying in her comfort zone.

What's Next?

1. If bridging a gap includes enhancing your education, what are some of the resources and options available to support you in this endeavor? Do you prefer to learn through videos, online courses, a lecture-style virtual classroom, an in-person lecture-style classroom or another approach?
2. If your gaps are in understanding certain aspects of the work, how might you gain a broader perspective?
3. If bridging your gaps involves interacting with other people, who would be most helpful to you? What would you want to learn?

Note

- 1 *Occupational Outlook Handbook*: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/>.

Chapter 6

Progress Leads to Success

Progress leads to success.
Success will lead to new questions.

Career pivots are a natural part of a career journey that might occur when you are in college, right after you graduate, or years later. It is tempting for people to question or be critical of such changes; however, these changes are much more common than you might realize. In fact, I have experienced and watched others make admirable transformations along this journey of self-discovery while pivoting. Interestingly, we often don't know that a person has pivoted unless they are a celebrity, and they share their career journeys through their publicist or during an interview. These are just a few examples of changes that people have made in their careers:

- a lawyer, who became a yoga instructor and then a news anchor
- a medical doctor who became a comedian
- a building contractor who became an ER physician
- a business person who became a midwife
- an engineer who opened a restaurant

When we are observing others from afar, what we see is the big change from what they were doing before to what they are doing now. If we were to retrace their footsteps, what looks like a significant career change may have occurred in small steps, over time. These individuals did not just wake up one day and think that they wanted to make a change. These individuals most likely began to see themselves in a different light because of their life situations or unique opportunities.

Someone may have noticed how they approach their work and invited them to try something new, and that is what led to the change.

Sometimes people have a passing thought about doing something different, or they have a hidden talent or a talent they don't get to use often, but the thought of making a pivot might not advance unless someone asks them about it or suggests it as an option.

If your resume could check in with you, it might say, "Your resume's all up to date, everything's looking good, what's next?"

What might your response be?

"Great, happy where I am."

"I want to get some more experience in..."

"Ask me in a few months."

"Not sure, I've been thinking about a few options."

"I've been doing the same thing for a while and would really welcome a change."

"Something has been on my mind for a while, but I'm not sure how to get started."

"I am ready to make a change."

Your response might depend on factors you have control over or factors that you do not have any control over. Perhaps you are waiting for others to make a decision. How might their decisions influence your decisions?

With progress comes success and potentially, change. Though you can initiate making a pivot that provides you with an opportunity for growth and development, there are also times when making a pivot is simply necessary due to circumstances. In either situation, making a pivot can be the start of new beginnings, aligning your interests with the work that you do.

There were times in my career when I sensed that my career, at the point and time, was not totally in my control. It was very clear that there were reorganizations or changes pending and I felt like I was in a holding pattern. The way that I managed through change was to think about hypothetical "if... then..." scenarios and be prepared to pivot.

In this chapter, we will revisit a few topics that were covered in earlier chapters and reapply the processes to career exploration if and when there is an interest in making a pivot. Realize that sometimes making a pivot, whether it is a skill-based change or a change in mindset, is required for you to continue in a current role.

Know Yourself, Know the Job

If you have been in your job for a certain amount of time and have made progress:

- Are you doing the type of work you thought you would be doing?
- Are the day-to-day responsibilities what you expected for the position?

- Does your position require skills that you feel particularly good at?
- Are there areas in which you wish you had more experience?
- What does continuation on your career journey look like?
- Do you continue on the same path?
- Are there possible changes you would make and consider a different path in the near or distant future?

Telling your family, friends, and others that you are changing course can be difficult. Some will be respectful and supportive of your decision. Others may challenge you or even make you feel bad or second-guess your decision. If you look into all of the options, feel strongly about trying something different for yourself, and are willing to put in the work and effort needed, these are some steps to guide you through the process.

Know Yourself

With progress comes success and also change.

Early in my career, my decisions were more about me since I didn't have any pets or children. Before making changes later in my career, I then took into consideration other life factors such as my family and time away from home due to business travel.

Over time, as my 5Ws and my six squares evolved (refer to Chapters 1 and 3), I became more aware of what type of career and work environment I would flourish in.

As for my 5Ws, though I always took family into consideration, even early in my career, my "Who" became much more focused on my family. In terms of my six squares, I found myself valuing and placing more emphasis on health and well-being. These two changes had a much greater impact on my career decisions than I would have ever expected.

When you are deciding what's next for yourself, review your 5Ws and your six squares. Have there been any changes that you should keep in mind?

Know the Job

As you are considering the next steps in your career, revisit the work you are doing and understand if and how the job has evolved since you first began working in the job or industry. For the work that you do, review the key skills needed to be effective and competitive in your line of work and/or industry. I recommend doing some research on this to explore beyond what you already know.

Questions to consider about your job and industry:

- Should I continue or start an online search? Has new information been published?
- When I speak with people, what are some new insights that they have?
- How will new technology, such as artificial intelligence, affect my work or industry?
- What are the requirements for someone in my current position? Have they changed or are they the same?
- How does the job description for an interesting role compare with your current job description and expectations? What experience will be beneficial for you to gain

Reflecting on my short-term assignment in marketing, I learned a lot and really enjoyed my experience. In fact, the people I worked with thought that I would want to leave my technical role and transition into marketing. However, at that time, I knew and trusted myself enough to make the decision that I was not ready to make a career pivot. It was not aligned with my SWs then because I really enjoyed my technical role. Learning about the work through my short-term assignment helped me make a better decision for myself.

My second 6-month assignment was in human resources. I was already working full-time at the company, but at this time, I was ready to pivot. Thinking back to my six-square collage, one of the attributes that I embrace is learning. I wanted to learn more about the business and see it from a different perspective. The perspective that I now wanted to gain was through human resources. As a scientist working in a health care company, I came to realize that much of our innovation came through the scientists, thus, I had to ask myself how I could utilize my own experience differently. The answer was through Human Resources and in particular a talent-acquisition role, leveraging my technical experience to engage and attract scientists to our organization. This was a major pivot in my career. It came at a time when I wanted to learn more and wanted to take my technical skills above and beyond to be able to partner with the business. Initially, my focus was working with scientists, and ultimately, I worked with people across all functions, including marketing, sales, engineering, finance, etc.

This work led to a major pivot in my career as I stayed and enjoyed a focus on projects and business operations involving people (HR) for many years

Stay Informed

Whether you are thinking about staying in your current role or making a pivot, it is beneficial to stay informed about your areas of interest so that you keep pace within your current role and broaden your scope of awareness so you understand how to make a pivot, if you want to.

People have many reasons for choosing to make a pivot or situations lead to making a pivot, including some or many of these reasons—or no specific reason at all:

- Downsizing or restructuring
- Want more or something different
- New interests
- Work location preference (in office, hybrid, or remote)
- Change in required skills

As you are reviewing and updating your resume, you may notice trends or repetitions in your resume.... It looks like, hmmm... you are repeating sections. There is no variety in the type of work or the places you have been for several years. On the one hand, it could be that you really like the work you do and are not looking for change. On the other hand, perhaps you could benefit by gaining additional experience. In such a situation, the exercise of writing your resume helps you gain insight into your career interests. It doesn't mean that you need a new job; however, it may mean that you might want to give some thought to other experiences you could gain that would strengthen your resume and experience and allow you to advance your career.

If your resume could offer reminders, it would highlight that you have transferable skills and skills that are highly valuable, regardless of the industry, title, or role because you are ready to pivot and can adapt to various situations. When an opportunity comes up to have a great conversation about you, be prepared.

Questions to keep in mind:

Which skills you could benefit from developing or enhancing?

What are some networking opportunities that will broaden your awareness and allow you to talk with others in areas you are interested in?

Who do you know or who might other people know and be willing to provide introductions?

To stay informed, stay alert and be more aware of changes within your organization. Read or scan industry-related reports and pay closer attention to details that you might otherwise have ignored.

A few examples of what you might do as you are trying to stay informed include:

- Opening a few more emails and reading content that ordinarily you might have deleted
- Going to an alumni event when in previous years, you have skipped these activities
- Attending a conference with speakers that will provide updates on your field of interest
- Reviewing job postings to understand if there are positions that appeal to your interests

Preparing to Pivot

Careers have natural progressions and inflection points. Organizations and the people within them change, and your life and interests evolve as well. The more you learn and grow, the more you might want to experience in your career. This interest in developing your career further may lead to making a career pivot—leveraging your skills and experience, expanding these skills, and applying them in a different context.

If you know someone who has pivoted in their career, as an observer it may look as if just one day, all of a sudden, they made a change. In actuality though, their change is likely the culmination of many small changes, opportunities, and decisions. Whether making a pivot is something you are eager to explore or you feel like it is the right thing to do, these steps can help you get started.

Step 1: Building Awareness

Being receptive to new opportunities is the first step to making a pivot even when a pivot is not on your mind.

Early in my career, accepting my manager's invitation to take on extra projects allowed me to learn more about a different business function.

A pivot may start out small, like a seed and can begin with a passing thought, like “I wonder if...” It may start with a compliment about something you do well that you thought no one else noticed. Just as a seed comes to life, when it has water and light, a pivot can also come to life.

A passing thought might sound like:

“I have always wanted to....”

“That looks/sounds interesting, I want to learn more about it.”

“I didn’t know ... is possible.”

“I wish I could....”

“I was really touched by....”

Comments that someone makes that might make you think twice:

“You’re really good at....”

“Did you ever think about...?”

“Did you know that there are opportunities to....?”

Your manager or mentor may have suggestions as well, offering new ideas to consider for future opportunities. These ideas may involve taking on special projects, attending a conference, or leading the roll-out for a new program. These are all opportunities to develop new skills and demonstrate your abilities in other areas. Being receptive to these thoughts and comments may be the first step in considering a pivot. If something catches your attention, I encourage you to stop, pause, and understand what might have piqued your interest.

Step 2: Self-Check on Skills

Gather information (Chapter 1) by talking to people who work in roles that are similar to the one(s) you are considering. What types of skills do they have? What skills do you have that are similar? Are they similar enough that you could see yourself applying your skills in that type of a position? If there are any gaps, how could you bridge the gap (Chapter 5)?

I didn’t expect to have the skills needed to move into a different area until I did a self-check and analyzed the skills I had developed. It turned out that the project management skills I had developed while leading a team were the same skills that I could apply to a new role.

Determine if the pivot you are considering requires you to obtain additional formal education or certification and if so, identify the cost that might be involved. If the cost for additional skill-building is a consideration, there may be cost-effective ways to gain additional knowledge and skills, such as online training programs and short-term assignments. If more formal education is required, there may be support available through tuition reimbursement, grants, or scholarships that you may qualify for.

Pivoting does not have to be a major change, so consider the transferable skills you have that you can apply to a new role.

Take a Personal Inventory

List all the skills and experiences you have acquired up to this point. You can use your resume as a starting point, especially your master summary (Chapter 1).

1. What strengths and knowledge have you acquired up to this point through your academic studies, jobs, internships, volunteer activities, and community service? Please be kind and generous to yourself in this assessment.
2. Take a look at your major, class projects, and work experience. Analyze and separate the experience you have gained into different facets: technical, life science, marketing, organizational, and communication/presentation skills. Identify all aspects of what you learned. Look at your capabilities and your potential to learn as demonstrated by what you have done, and start to compare your potential to the needs of the work that you are interested in pivoting towards.
3. Inevitably, there are things to learn, but you will not be starting from scratch. You will have experience to build on as well as knowledge and skills, at least some of which will be transferable.

By carefully examining the work you have done and separating your experiences into multiple categories, you can share examples that are relevant to a given position. You can then leverage your insights from one project into areas that are different, and pivot while still demonstrating experience in your core skills.

When reviewing your master list, which is the summary of all of the positions you have had throughout your career, assess what you liked and didn't like about each position. Maybe it was the work; maybe it was the people. We want to like who we work with and sometimes that requires more effort when there are differences. Remember what you like to do and the strengths you bring to the role. Keep in mind your interests, especially what you hope to learn and gain with the change.

Develop Skills that are Valuable in any Industry, any Profession

- **Accountability**—showing up, being on time, being responsible
- **Attention to detail**—remembering what needs to be done, how it is to be done, following through on commitments, being observant of yourself and others
- **Communication**—expressing yourself clearly so you are understood, speaking well 1:1 and in larger groups, presentations, and social media
- **Critical thinking**—processing information and understanding the complexities and nuances of the situation

- **Empathy**—putting yourself in another person’s shoes, understanding how another person might be feeling in any given situation, taking action to put another at ease based on their understanding of how another may feel
- **Language skills**—being fluent in more than one language
- **Listening**—seeking to understand, listening with an intent to understand and not to prove your own point, using what you hear to enhance scenarios
- **Being Organized**—being personally organized, keeping your work organized
- **People skills**—interacting comfortably and effectively with others
- **Problem-solving**—creating innovative solutions to meet the needs of the situation
- **Resourceful**—figuring out how to get things done
- **Time management**—having the ability to manage your priorities and responsibilities effectively

Resources and topics that can enhance your knowledge and prepare for pivoting include:

- Biographies and autobiographies: how did other people do what they did?
- Technical training resources: how can they enhance your technical skills in any given area?
- Business/Management books: what can you learn about yourself and how you work with and interact with others?
- Nature/Science/Engineering: how do these topics give you a different perspective on the world?
- Travel: What can you become aware of that’s beyond your immediate physical environment and culture?
- Arts/Communication/Design: How can you be more creative and improve these skills?

Leverage social media, interviews, and podcasts. Read magazines and journals related to the job or industry to learn about the work. Follow people and their careers, but not in an awkward way. Learn to take notice of what people in these jobs do and how they describe the way they got there.

Ask yourself, what skills you can combine to meet the needs of the position, especially since jobs require a blend of skills. For example, do you have language skills that are beneficial for the role such as English, French, or Japanese? Could you combine these skills with customer service skills for an organization that focuses on travel?

Step 3: Personal Commitment

Make a commitment to yourself to take action to move forward, managing the uncertainty of working in a different environment (Chapter 4). How will you be motivated to take action and pursue something different from what you are familiar with?

When an opportunity came up to explore making a pivot, I said yes because deep down inside, I wanted to learn more about the organization and apply my skills in a different way.

Make an honest self-assessment of your skills, commitment, and willingness to work hard towards your goals.

How to Pivot: Start Where You Are

Begin by getting exposure to the work that you are interested in doing. If possible, start with where you are currently working by having conversations with your manager, mentor, or colleagues to understand whether there are opportunities and support for you to explore other career options. Understand whether or not others have made career pivots within the organization.

Making a pivot within an organization and environment that you are familiar with eases the transition of moving from one role to another and allows you to build upon the experience you already have and bring this to another role. You have credibility established within your organization that will support you as you explore opportunities to pivot.

Prepare to Tell Your Story

When preparing to pivot, take a different approach to updating your cover letter, resume, and other ways to convey your story. Think of a way that will help the reader understand the experience you have, your transferable skills, and motivation for change. Let's review some of the key components in telling your story, originally introduced in Chapter 2, with a focus on conveying your message and aspiration to make a career pivot.

Fully utilizing tools such as your resume and cover letter helps others see you as a person and professional. Including your relevant aspirations reflects that you know who you are, where you have been, and where you want to go. It helps people understand how they can help you. Communicating your story can open the door for helpful conversations and most importantly, it helps others see the vision you have for yourself.

Consider these resume updates as you prepare to pivot: If you are enrolled in an academic program and anticipating a new degree, you may choose to place your education in the top section of your resume. Doing so highlights the new academic credentials you are pursuing to enhance your career, whether it is to advance or make a pivot. Certifications are a plus and can be added to the section where you describe your skills and training. When you are preparing to pivot, your cover letter and story become particularly important for communicating the value you bring to a new opportunity.

Let's focus on each of the tools available to convey your personal message:

Your Cover Letter

A cover letter written with integrity allows the reader to better understand your interest in a position. When preparing for a pivot, explanations may include:

- Interest in applying your skills and experience in a different context
- Completion of academic credentials or certifications which prepares you for new responsibilities
- Desire to gain experience working with a new technology

How would you describe your reason for making a pivot?

As you are considering a pivot, try to ensure there is a link, some sort of connection between what you have previously done and what you would like to transition to. This connection can be driven by the nature of the work, transferable skills, a life-changing experience, or education that expands your skills and knowledge. For example, an engineer who has completed their MBA has new options both in engineering and business occupations. Depending on their interests they may choose to pivot from an engineering role to a marketing position. This is not to imply that an MBA is required for one to make a pivot of this nature. If one has obtained business skills through other experiences, this may be acceptable as well.

There are no rules on how to pivot or what is required. Gathering information, learning from others to understand what might be possible can expand your perspective.

Being prepared to tell your story is a good place to begin.

Your Resume

Think of your experiences as being curated for your resume. Though your positions are grouped and listed in chronological order, your resume is not simply a sequence of positions listed by start date. You also want to show a progression of professional development and an expansion in the scope of your responsibilities. If you are staying in the same industry, the progression is usually clear. But if you want to pivot to a different industry or a different level, you want to show that your skills are transferrable. Highlight your deliverables; describe and quantify what you did, so that the scope of your work and the demands of the position are clear.

Though resume formats remain flexible, there are certain components to focus on, especially if you are preparing your resume for the purpose of a career pivot.

1. **Summary Statement:** Include a section on the top of your resume, below your name and contact information that has a header and provides the reader with a professional summary. In three to four sentences provide an overview of your experience and interests. You may include descriptions of what you want others to know about how you do your work, for example, *organized, data-driven, or customer-centric*.

The header for the summary can provide insight into the career pivot you are working towards. For example, if someone who has been an IT professional with project management experience would like to pivot into roles where the focus is project management not specific to technology projects, they might change their header from “IT Professional” to “Project Manager” and still convey their prior technical experience while explaining how and in which direction they would like to expand their project management experience.

2. **Skills:** When describing your skills, carefully review job descriptions to understand which skills you have previously demonstrated, which skills are transferable, and which skills you can leverage to take on new responsibilities, in essence, support you in making a pivot.

Seek to understand the most current set of skills that are most valuable for the work you are aspiring to do and will support you in being successful with your pivot.

For example, consider the skills that are high-income skills to learn as reported in an article published in *Forbes*¹:

1. Data Analysis
2. Project Management
3. UX/UI Design
4. Digital Marketing
5. AI (Artificial Intelligence)

- 6. Leadership
- 7. Web Development
- 8. Sales

What are the top skills that will support you in being successful in the work that you are interested in doing?

There are a range of skills that are important and beneficial for each career. Examples of skills that are valuable across many positions include: strong verbal and written communication skills, strong interpersonal and teamwork skills, and evidence of critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Does your resume reflect all of the skills that are required for the position(s) you are interested in?

- 3. **Look for Key Points:** Review your resume to be certain it accurately highlights your past performance and deliverables.

Since you are working towards a career pivot, it is especially important to accurately describe the impact you have and your capabilities. Does your choice of words clearly reflect your accomplishments and contributions? Being humble is important; however, being accurate in the description of your work and your specific contribution(s) is being respectful towards yourself and the work you have accomplished. Whether or not your title has or has not changed, does your choice of words reflect an increasing level of responsibility, and do your metrics reflect growth and improvements?

Note: While you are in the process of making a career pivot, it is possible that you will have more than one version of your resume, especially as you are exploring career options.

Your Interviews

In addition to your regular preparation for interviews, it would be beneficial to familiarize yourself with the terminology and vocabulary of the area you are interested in pursuing. In addition to reading or learning about the new field, participate in conversations. Use terminology common in the new field appropriately and share with others the work you would like to do. These conversations will help you determine if you need extra preparation.

When you are making a pivot, two aspects are key when preparing for interviews:

- Make sure you are familiar with the new field.
- Be prepared to share examples of your previous work that will help the interviewer visualize you doing work that differs from your previous work.

When Considering a Pivot:

- Follow the industry(s) of interest to you
- Stay active in your field of work or area of interest.
- Volunteer for different assignments.
- Envision yourself doing work that you aspire to do to help others see that it is possible for you to apply your skills in a different way
- Watch for opportunities to connect and meet new people
- Regularly assess what is important to you, your 5Ws
- Be informed so that you can make the right decisions for yourself and be mindful of the timing and impact of any changes you may consider
- Pay close attention to the job titles since they are not the same across organizations or industries. Even when the titles are the same, the job responsibilities may differ.

Be Prepared to Take Action:

- Let the right people know of your interest (people who will support you, who are knowledgeable about the field and can provide good suggestions)
- Refresh and enhance your skills, especially when preparing to pivot
- Step in when an opportunity comes up.
- Know what your most likely response might be to an opportunity—yes/no/maybe—even if you have some unanswered questions (think “If ..., then....”)
- Accept that there might be trade-offs and you might have to give up something that you are comfortable with in order to learn new things.
- Read the fine print in job descriptions, especially to see if an organization is open to those seeking to pivot. This is what one company included in their job posting: “Great for recent college graduates as well as someone looking to start out in a new industry”

Follow Your Passion

My interest in HR was sparked by a senior leader who spoke to our group at the end of a training session for managers. In her remarks, she conveyed the importance of people to our work and to this day, I remember her words.

Measures of Success

Just as success and the feeling of achievement varies by individual, what one person considers to be an indicator of success is unique to that person. as does their reason for making a pivot. Reasons that people have chosen to pivot and some of their motivating factors and measures of success (not in order of priority) include:

- Family and being a good parent, child, sibling, or friend
- Job, title, salary
- Lifestyle, including home and auto
- Helping those in need
- Recognition for or satisfaction in doing a great job
- Guiding and teaching others
- Capitalizing on opportunities to work and learn
- Developing one's career
- Advancing one's careers
- Working with likable and trustworthy colleagues
- Living in a city they want to live in
- Comfort with work boundaries and personal time
- Recognition for their efforts
- Flexibility to make decisions that are right for themselves and their family
- Opportunity to build and influence
- Investment in oneself
- Health and well-being
- Options for work schedule and location

Success is accepting where you are at a given time, knowing that you may strive for more. Each person evolves over time as partially reflected in the changes in their 5Ws. So do their priorities and the importance they place on specific measures of success.

I remember when I made the decision to move from a science role to human resources. I was able to refer to my 5Ws and how they evolved, not to justify this career move to others but to be certain I was grounded and confident in my own decision. This was important to me.

What is the value of a successful pivot?

- You bring more experience to the work you do because you have a different perspective.
- You pave the way for others to make a similar change.
- You can enjoy the accomplishment.
- It can enhance your personal life.

Accomplishing What You Set Out to Achieve

Each person evolves over time as partially reflected in the changes in their 5Ws and so will your priorities and the importance you place on specific measures of success.

People have many successes on a day-to-day basis. Your career successes start with your educational accomplishments, and achieving what you set out to accomplish. If you have enrolled in school, whether the program leads to a certificate, and associate's degree, bachelor's degree—or at some point, a postsecondary degree—what are your expectations for completing it? What is the education or experience you need in order to do the work you wish to do?

Success can be defined through different stages of career successes:

1. Day-to-day successes in your life and in your career that enable you to progress. Though they are seemingly small successes, they add up or create the foundation for something else.
2. Career successes with accomplishments worth noting that have an impact on your life and how you interact with the world:
 - a. Awards and recognition
 - b. Opportunities to interact with other departments or organizations
 - c. Genuinely positive comments people say about you when you are not present
3. A successful pivot means that you have made a change that allows you to use your experience in a different context

Your Impact

You could make discoveries that may help the world by understanding the impact of disease, or you may be a writer and ease the pain of your readers. It's not just about a salary or the time that you spend working. The impact you may have on one or thousands is much more than you might ever have expected when you started your journey.

Knowing that Others Believe in You

Having someone who knows you, trusts you, and creates opportunities for you is invaluable. Part of being successful is that people notice you and the work you do. When an opportunity comes up, they think of you. This person is called a sponsor. The sponsor can be someone you know, like a manager (current or previous). They can also be someone you don't even know but who knows you. A sponsor believes in you and your abilities, and they will open doors to create opportunities for you to learn and grow. On your career journey, people may advocate for you even when you are not aware of their confidence in you and

your capabilities. Note that a sponsor in this sense is different from a sponsor (like a company) in the world of sports. However, a sponsor is like a sports sponsor in that they put their name behind you and support your work.

From a personal perspective, success has meant having the ability to shift my focus between work, family, and service, ensuring that I can attend to the priorities for each and still have time for self-care. As my six-squares collage indicates, family is one of my core values, something very important to me. At a time when I was traveling a lot for work, whenever I was home (in town), the one expectation was that I would attend all of the children's sports activities.

Ultimately, success to me is being able to share my talents to make something better in the world.

Success may simply involve learning and developing professionally.

At the time, it seemed natural to me that anyone would be making the changes I made, but it was by no means easy. I had a lot of support from my managers and others. Though these individuals provided support and guidance as I made pivots in my career, I still had to do my part to be prepared for the new opportunities. I will forever be grateful to have had the support I had to learn and develop, both professionally and personally.

How You Do What You Do

The ultimate measure of success is the way you do your work and interact with others. What do people say about you when you are not around? There are many measures of success that we have explored, and this one is special, one that you, and only you, can shape/determine.

I once came upon these words posted next to the photo of a physician, beloved by his community. Those who knew him described this physician using these words. These words would be positive for a person working in any field. Think of the positive things you have heard people say about others:

Funny, Caring, Humble, Reliable, Inspiring, Energetic, Dedicated, Generous, Determined, Innovative, Empathetic, Compassionate, Knowledgeable

A few additional attributes that will contribute to a person's success might include: kindness, truthfulness, ethical decision-making, listening with an open heart and mind, respect for others, hope and building unity.

Making Progress at Your Own Pace

Make progress at your own pace, while keeping in mind ...

If you see a position that is of interest to you, move fast! You never know how long the position has been posted or when the posting will come down and you

will not have an opportunity to submit an application. If you don't have time to work on a cover letter, rather than delay submitting your application, skip this step if a cover letter is not required and start the application process.

Taking a Pause

Interestingly, taking time to pause is often referred to as a gap year or even a sabbatical. What if you are taking time to build new skills and learn things that you didn't have time to explore previously? What if your gap year or sabbatical was just the next year in your life? Your plans are simply different from others' and you are not going straight from school to a job, or straight from one job to another. since sometimes jobs are not available when you want to make a change.

If your resume could offer an explanation, it might say "There was something that was not work related that was important for me to fit into my life and so my jobs and work experience doesn't flow sequentially. There is a pause (or two, or more) in my resume as I took care of other responsibilities or as I sorted things out."

People are often transparent about time that they take away from work and it is reflected in their resumes. The advantage of providing an explanation is that it answers the question that is in someone's mind as they review your resume.

Other examples of reasons for making progress at your own pace include:

- Taking time for self-care or care or to provide care for others
- Honoring your commitment to your own learning, and taking time to reach your education goals

What If You Feel Like You Did Not Succeed ... Yet?

Everything might not always turn out exactly as you hoped it would. Failure is a difficult term and I don't use this word very often. Instead of calling something a failure, think of it as a success in investing the time and resources in yourself so that you can learn and grow.

I will accept that sometimes I have learned what not to do again. I have learned what to watch for and to ask more questions. I have learned to trust my gut. I have learned that there are other ways to get what we want to get done. I have learned that sometimes the timing is just not right, and the technology and other resources are not ready for what I have in mind, or I am simply not ready. I have learned that I am harder on myself than others.

Progress Takes Time

Stories of pivots and change are right in front of us because they involve people who are in the public eye. To name just a few, the medical doctor who is now on the television and has their own magazine. A scientist who became an actor and a game show host. A lawyer who became a yoga instructor. A musician who was once a management consultant. These individuals either tapped into their talents and developed new skills to do work they find interesting. As these individuals share their resume, they openly acknowledge what they have previously done and celebrate the new opportunities they are pursuing.

I was able to make the changes I made because I was paying close attention to what was around me and what I cared about. I was willing to step into situations that were new to me, trusting that I would do everything I could to learn what I needed to learn and take action to make progress. Though opportunities to pivot take time to present themselves, when the opportunity does come up, it is best to be prepared to move quickly and take action.

If your resume could talk..., may it reflect who you are and what you are capable of doing throughout your life and career journey.

What's Next?

1. If you feel like you want to achieve more, what does the next level of success look like for you? What can you do to achieve more for yourself? How can others help you achieve that?
2. From where you are in your career journey, is your focus on advancement or being prepared to pivot at some time? Are there skills that are important to learn that will support you in your efforts?
3. Who or what have you seen, heard, or experienced that has left a lasting impression on you? What have you come to recognize or appreciate?

Note

- 1 "8 High-Income Skills To Learn In 2024" by Rachel Wells, Forbes, Jan. 22, 2024. <http://forbes.com/sites/rachelwells/2024/01/22/8-high-income-skills-to-learn-in-2024/?sh=6ce377cb138e>.

Also by EVELYN MOK LEE, Ph.D.

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CAREERS IN HEALTHCARE AND BEYOND Tools, Resources, and
Questions to Prepare You for What's Next

Index

Pages in *italics* refer to figures, pages in **bold** refer to tables, and pages followed by 'n' refer to notes.

A

academics
 field of degree (FOD), 82
 interests and your career interests, 81
 variety of academic fields, 82
accountability, 44, 105, 116
address/geographic location, 35
advance/pivot in your career
 be curious, 106–107
 be observant, 107
 be open to stepping stones, 107
 continue to educate yourself, 107
 education, 106
 keep up with the pace of change, 106
 mentor others, 106
 read/listen/watch, 106
 reasons can include, 108
 stay close to your 5Ws, 107–108
applicant tracking systems (ATS), 42
architecture and engineering, 84, 87n6
arts and design, 85–86, 87n10
artificial intelligence (AI), 42, 120
assessment tests, 62–64, 72
 test-taking preparation, 64–65
awareness building, 1, 63, 112–115

B

Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), 2, 4n1, 19
business
 field of degree, 83, 87n3
 workers in occupations, 83–84, 87n5

C

career, 53
 assessment and decisions, 3
 general uncertainties related to career
 direction, 71
 know the job, 111–112
 success, 124
career change
 anticipating, 74
 examples of, 109
 making a pivot, 110, 114
 nature of, 74
 preparing for, 74–75
career decisions, 9, 11, 60, 81
career experience, 12, 21, 35–36
career exploration, 1–2, 5, 53–54
 components of, 3
 elements of, 33
 personal journey, 29
career fairs, 22, 79–81
career journey, 1–4, 12, 69, 88
 self-discovery, 109
 uncertainties, 71
career options, 1–2, 30
career pivots, 1, 13, 36, 76, 109, 118; *see also*
 career change; pivot
clarity, 34
commitment, 93
 personal, 118
communication skills, 77, 105, 121
computer and information technology, 85, 87n9
consistency, 34–35

contact information, 20, 35, 37–38, 120
 continuity, 34, 75
 conversation, 10, 21–23, 49
 art of, 26
 benefits of speaking with people, 27–30
 prepare yourself for good days and
 challenging days, 26
 starters to explore gaps, 99–100
 cover letter, 32–34, 44, 47–48, 50, 52, 63, 77,
 118–119, 126
 critical thinking, 90, 116
 curriculum vitae (CV), 37

D

decision(s), 68
 facing a decision about direction,
 69–70, 70
 making, 9, 29, 61, 90, 92, 125
 question your, 74
 DIY—create your own opportunity, 58

E

education, 39–40
 empathy, 45, 64, 117
 Employment Projections section, 19, 31n7
 experiences, 10
 ability to work with customers, 6
 adding, 7, 34
 personal character, 6
 professionalism, 6
 work ethic, 6
 experiential learning, 56–59
 benefit of, 92
 opportunities to develop valuable skills, 91–92

F

Field of Degree (FOD), 82, 87n1
Forbes, 120, 127n1
 formal education, 89, 106, 115
 formal interviews, 26, 52
 informational interviews to, 22, 24
 preparing for, 47–49

G

Gallup® CliftonStrengths® Assessment, 63, 67n1
 gaps, bridging the, 99, 108

accept the pause, 103
 acknowledging potential gaps, *see* potential
 gaps behind the gap
 be grateful for hidden gems, 102–103
 certifications/training, 93
 conversation starters to explore
 gaps, 99–100
 embrace internships, apprenticeships and
 trainee opportunities, 101
 experience, 91–93
 formal education, 89–91
 look for resources and people who can assist
 you, 102
 other, 93
 say “yes” to the work, 101
 starting at entry level, 101
 strengthen transferable skills, 102
 take on special projects, 101–102
 template for, 99, **100**
 between where you are and where you want
 to be, 93
 gathering information
 conversations, 26–30
 developing your story, 6–7
 discovering your 5Ws, *see* your 5Ws
 importance of having a personal
 network, 30
 other resources for information, 20
 other ways to expand your overall
 network, 30
 resources for, 29
 staying informed about job trends, 15–21;
 see also job trends
 ways to connect with people, *see* learning
 from others

H

hands-on experience, 56, 58, 78
 health care, 85, 87n8
 home address, 35
 human resources, 75

I

individual’s commitment, 4
 information technology, 36, 82, 85, 87n9
 internship program, 56–57
 internships, 92–93, 101
 introduce yourself, 47

J

- job
 - and formal education, 89
 - questions to consider about, 112
 - seasonal/part-time, 42
 - seekers, 20, 31n8
 - job description(s), 34–35, 42
 - communication skills, 50
 - desire to learn, 50
 - detail-oriented, high sense of urgency, 49
 - eligibility requirements in, 39
 - mapping out, **95**
 - reviewing, 49, 77, 105–106
 - time management, 50
 - works well with others/teamwork, 50
- job openings, 19–20, 25
 - job postings, 20, 95, 101, 114
 - job trends
 - categories of information, 15, **18**
 - comparing occupations, 18, **18**
 - The Occupational Outlook Handbook*, 15, **16–17**, 18–19, 31n1
 - occupation groupings, 15, **16–17**
 - O*NET OnLine, 15, 18, 31n3

K

- keyword identification, 42–43
- knowing yourself, 110–111
 - assessment tests, 62–64
 - different assignments at work, 57
 - DIY—create your own opportunity, 58
 - experiential learning, 56–57
 - make time to listen, learn, and explore, 65–66
 - preparation for personality assessments, 65
 - in service of others, 58
 - six-square collage, 53–56, 54–55, 67
 - stretching beyond your current boundaries, 57–58
 - for students/recent graduates, 58–59
 - test-taking preparation, 64–65
 - and your 5Ws, 53, 60–62
 - your learning preference, 59–60

L

- leadership experience, 44–45
- leadership skills, 102, 105–106

learning

- continuing to, *see* gaps, bridging the experience, 32, 58, 92, 107
- preference, 59–60
- learning from others
 - alumni contacts and resources, 25
 - career fairs, 22
 - coffee chats/lunch, 22
 - industry conferences, 25
 - informational interviews, 21–22, 24
 - job shadowing, 22
 - networking events, 24
 - one-on-ones (1:1s), 21–22
 - professional networks, 24–25
 - social activities, 25
 - ways to connect with people, 21
- LinkedIn profile, 43–44, 48
- LinkedIn URL, 35
- listening, 65–66
- logistics, 26, 64

M

- master list, 34, 38, 42
 - adding your experiences to, 7
 - creating, 6
 - template for, **6**
- mathematics
 - field of degree, 82–83, 87n2
 - workers in math occupations, 84–85, 87n7
- mutual exchange, 28–29

N

- National Center for O*NET Development, 15
- networking events, 21, 24, 102
- note-taking preference, 60

O

- occupation(s), 83–85, 87
 - groupings, 15, **16–17**
 - sample template for comparing, 18, **18**
 - The Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH)*, 15, **16–17**, 18–19, 31n1–31n2, 82–83, 87n1–87n4, 106, 108n1
 - OOH CareerInfo App, 83
- one-on-ones (1:1s), 21–22
- online profiles, 43–44
- opportunities, 59, 75, 95

organizing resume, 38
 accomplishments and experience, 41
 advanced in my career when job still same, 44
 breadth of knowledge/exposure, 43
 categories have just one bullet point, 41
 Early Career Talent, 39
 focus on keywords, 42–43
 format, 42
 graduation date, 39–40
 hobbies/interests outside of work, 45
 jobs and positions, 41
 leadership experience, 44–45
 LinkedIn profile, 43–44
 presenting positions with an overlap in dates, 42
 resume headers and sample content, 40
 review and update, 38
 subtle differences in your new position, 44

P

personal inventory, 116
 personality assessments, 65
 personal network, 30
 personal readiness, 2
 pivot, 71, 110, 118, 121–122
 building awareness, 114–115
 considering, 54, 66, 71, 100, 115, 119, 122
 follow your passion, 122
 personal commitment, 118
 prepare to tell your story, 118–119
 self-check on skills, 115–117
 start where you are, 118
 summary statement, 120
 value of a successful, 123
 your cover letter, 119
 your interviews, 121–122
 your resume, 120–121
 positions, 38–43, 95–96
 potential gaps behind the gap, 103–105
 pre-employment assessment, 64
 problem-solving skills, 102, 117, 121
 professional networks, 24–25
 progress leads to success
 knowing yourself and the job, 110–112
 making progress at your own pace, 125–126
 measure of success, *see* success measures
 progress takes time, 127
 stay informed, 112–114
 taking a pause, 126

projects, 6, 28, 44, 57–58
 choosing, 57
 special, 91, 101–102, 115
 with your 5Ws, 58

Q

questions/questioning, 52–53, 65, 78, 80, 113

R

Rath, Tom, 63, 67n2
 resources, 15, 18, 20, 36, 117
 alumni contacts and, 25
 financial, 104
 human, 75
 online, 21, 29
 resume/your resume, 3, 52
 about times of change and uncertainty, 76–77
 for career conversations, 32
 content of, 40
 conversation starter, 33
 cover letter, 47
 create/update, 32
 critical review of, 32
 efforts to bridge gaps, 93
 essence of the content, 5
 as forward-looking document, 33
 introduce yourself, 35
 length of, 36
 master list reviewing, 34
 organizing, *see* organizing resume
 pauses in, 76
 positions and experience, 38
 preparation for an interview, 34
 range of experiences, 92–93
 reflection of skills, experience and talents, 33
 reviewing, 38
 summary statement, 36
 templates and AI-assisted programs, 38
 tips on interviewing (preparing in advance), 47–49
 writing as preparation for an interview, 46–47

S

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), 83
 Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics (STEAM), 83

six-square collage, 53–56, 54–55, 67

skills, 19, 27, 32–34, 38, 40, 75, 108, 113, 120

- accountability, 105, 116
- communication, 50, 77, 105, 116, 121
- decision-making, 90
- developing in any industry, any profession, 116–117
- experience in, 77
- high-income skills, 120–121
- problem-solving, 102, 117, 121
- public speaking, 97–99

speaking with people, benefits of

- are you really going to like this job?, 28
- gain exposure to the breadth of situations they have observed, 27
- how do they see the industry/field evolving?, 28
- improve your understanding of job description, 28
- learn about opportunities to enhance your skills, 27
- mutual exchange, 28–29
- where else is this work being done?, 28

“*StrengthsFinder 2.0*,” 63

success measures, 123, 125

- how you do what you do, 125
- knowing that others believe in you, 124–125
- stages of career successes, 124
- value of a successful pivot, 123
- your impact, 124

summary statement, 36, 43, 44, 48, 50, 120

T

test-taking preparation, 64–65

time management, 45, 50, 92, 94, 117

trade school certification, 89

training/certification (in process), 93

U

uncertainty

- accepting, 69–72
- application process, 72
- becoming comfortable with, 68, 86
- being prepared, 74–75, 86
- changes and, 71–72, 74
- doing the work, 77–78

interview process, 72

- and landmark decision, 79–81
- negativity, 86
- question and source of, 81
- related to career direction, 71
- source of, 69
- staying grounded, 72–73
- suggestions for managing, 73
- taking action, 78–79
- your resume times of change and, 76–77

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 15, 18, 31n4, 82

U.S. Census Bureau, 82

U.S. Department of Labor, Employment & Training Administration, 15

W

Wonderlic test, 62, 64

work environment, 18, 18, 35, 58, 70, 75, 91, 111

work experience, 37–38, 40, 45, 53, 64, 82, 89, 95, 116, 126

work interesting, 57

work location, 35, 53, 113

work-related group activities, 104

Y

your 5Ws, 31–32, 34, 53, 55, 58, 60–62, 75, 103, 122

- building, 11–12, 29
- developing, 27
- example of 5Ws over time, 13, 14
- “how” questions, 78
- monitoring, as they evolve, 12–15, 14
- pay attention to, 40
- questions related to, 48
- responses, 62
- stay close to, 107–108
- template for tracking 5Ws over time, 11
- what?, 7–8, 61
- when?, 7, 9, 61
- where?, 7, 9, 61, 73
- who?, 7–8, 61
- why?, 7, 9–11, 61

your email address, 35–36

your name, 35–36

your phone number, 35–36



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