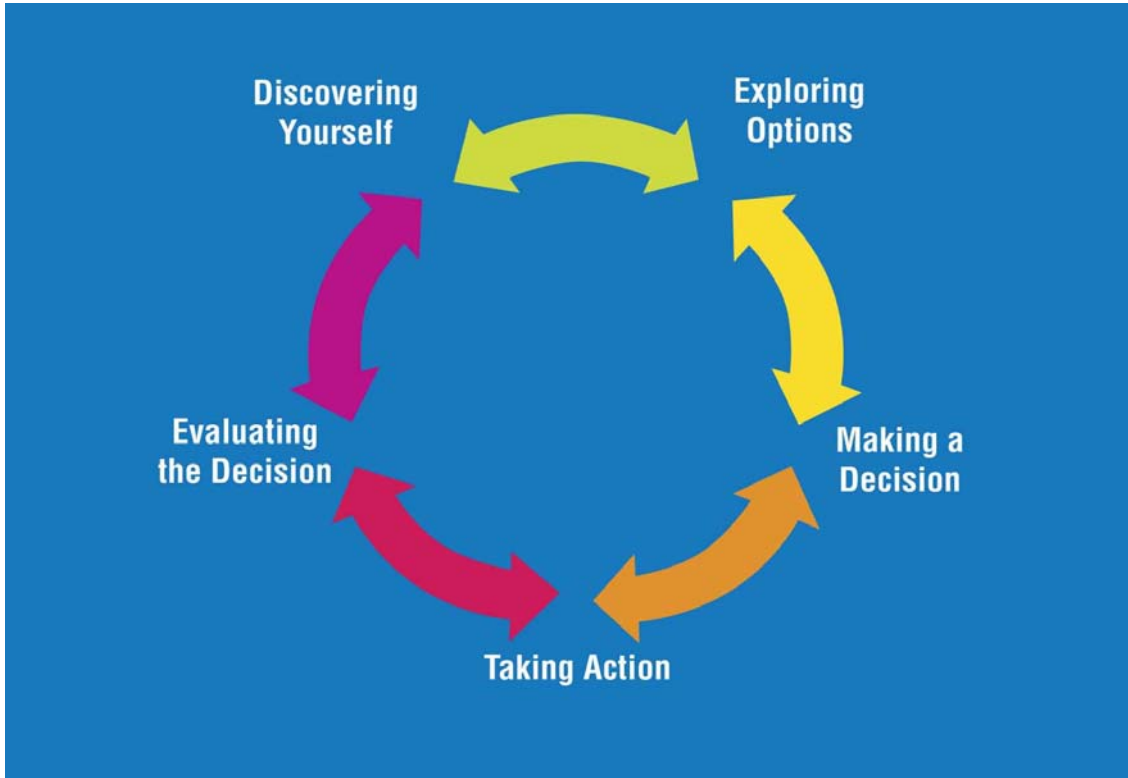


# Your Career Decision-Making Process



Your career-decision making is an ongoing and dynamic process. The arrows in the graphic point in both directions, indicating that there is movement in the process. Throughout your life, you may find yourself revisiting this process on several occasions. Since it is a lifelong process, there really is no beginning or end. Just as people and their individual situations change, so can their career decisions.

Making a career decision is unfortunately not as easy as looking into a crystal ball for answers. There are no quick fixes or sudden answers associated with the process. The career decision-making components explained below can offer valuable assistance in helping you make well-informed career decisions. Making career decisions requires a commitment of time and energy.

Since work and its related activities consume a major portion of your life, taking a proactive approach to your career decision making will help to strengthen the correlation between career fulfillment and life satisfaction for you. In reality, most of us will spend more time planning a vacation than planning or managing our career development.

Career decision-making is a process with five major elements or components:

- Discovering Yourself
- Exploring Options
- Making a Decision
- Taking Action
- Evaluating the Decision

## Discovering Yourself

Taking time to look within yourself and discovering, perhaps for the first time, *what really is important to you* can be a tremendous help as you consider your career options. Begin by learning where your greatest interests lie. What is it that holds your attention for hours at a time and motivates or inspires you? What type of things do you find yourself daydreaming about? Identify your skills, work values, achievements, personal preferences and talents so that you can find the best career options.

## Exploring Options

Similar to when you're taking a vacation, you can apply the detailed analysis and planning process when exploring your career options. The most beneficial career information will vary and depend upon the career options you are considering—job responsibilities, salary, education and training requirements, industry trends, job outlooks, typical workplace environments and employment qualifications. Securing accurate, current and comprehensive information is vital. A great way to get a first-hand look at careers is through job shadowing, informational interviews and internships.

It has been said that “if you have gathered 80% of the information required to make a decision, go ahead and make your decision. The remaining 20% of the information will probably not significantly add to the quality of your decision.”

## Making a Decision

According to Stephen Covey, author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, it is best to “begin with the end in mind” when making decisions. Starting with a vision will guide your career decision-making process. When identifying a career goal, incorporate the knowledge you have of yourself and visualize what you want your life to look like. Ask yourself—What kind of lifestyle do I want? Where do I want to live? What would I like to do at work? In my leisure time?

A thorough exploration of your career identity and research of your career options is essential for the best possible outcome. It is important to realistically assess your chances for success *before* you commit to avoid frustration.

An effective career plan may include:

- *Short Term Goals*—Goals you hope to attain within the next 3 to 12 months.
- *Long Term Goals*—Goals you hope to attain within the next 1 to 3 years.
- *Steps Necessary to Achieve Goals*—Details on each of the career milestones necessary for you to accomplish to move closer to your long-term career goals.
- *Strategy*—Steps for how you plan to achieve your career objectives.
- *Necessary Resources*—Education/training, financial aid, experience, support system.
- *Projected Time Frame*—An outline of realistic dates for achieving each career milestone.
- *Evaluation of Your Success*—Criteria to monitor your progress.
- *Back-up Plan*—Just in case: What will you do if your initial plans need to be altered?

## Taking Action

Once you've made a decision, you're now ready to focus on activities that will help you develop your interests and confirm that you've chosen a major or career field that you will enjoy. Experiential learning opportunities such as civic honors, internships, leadership positions in student clubs and organizations, and service learning offer you personal growth, skill development and relevant work experience.

Employers consistently state that they desire entry-level employees to have academic excellence, career-related experience and leadership experience. The top key skills/qualities that they look for in job candidates include communication skills, honesty/integrity, interpersonal skills, motivation/initiative, and a strong work ethic. Of the employers who screen candidates by GPA, the majority use a cutoff of 3.0.

## Evaluating the Decision

Is it what you expected? Do you need to revisit your prior steps? Should you expand your options or narrow them? Assure yourself of success by recognizing possible barriers to following through on your goals, identifying resources to assist you and realizing that you may have to revise your plans.

REFERENCE: Decision Time—*A Guide to Career Enhancement*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Michael Shahnasarian. National Career Development Association (2006).