

Career Exploration and Discovery

A New Approach to Exploring Your Career Choices

EXPLORATION is the design phase of the career search process. It is the hardest stage for most people in career transition. Hard to do because it is hard to grasp; exploration is uncomfortable in its intangibility. What *is* exploration? Why is it necessary? How does one know one is doing it right?

The other major reason for trying to skip over this stage of career searching is that we like our answers fast and our results faster. This culture tends to be extremely achievement-oriented. Being achievement-oriented requires clear set goals so we can get on with the achieving part. Because exploration does not have traditionally defined goals or clear rewards, it tends to be the overlooked, neglected and much scorned sister to the EXECUTION phase, which is (typically) the job search.



Career Exploration is a STAGE, a SKILL and an ATTITUDE

The Exploration phase is where most people have become deeply frustrated, depressed or resigned about their job search. **Exploration to most people means looking for a finite end result; that is the Ultimate Answer to the Great Career Question “What should I do with my life?”** Once you learn that exploring is a skill, nay an *attitude*, you can take control of this stage and, instead of feeling at the mercy of some elusive Answer; you can begin to enjoy the experience of exploring itself.

Think of your current career as an island you know well. Too well perhaps...you're bored, or you've been made Mayor and that's the end of the line, or maybe you never really liked this island in the first place. It's time to go – time to get away from the known – off to one of the many other islands out there. Islands you can see in the distance and some you can't.



In exploration, when it's your first time and you've never traveled anywhere else, changing islands might be a scary prospect. How will you know how to get there? What will you do? Which direction do you go? And then, once you get there, are you going to be some stupid tourist who asks silly questions and gets in the way? For beginner explorers it's all unknown. So the first skills to learn are to find out about different islands, and imagine what might be on each one. You might want to talk to others who've been there, or even go visit on a day trip. Even better, exploring can be about *imagining* the island that would be perfect for you, and then once you've got a vision of what might work, going to see if you can find something like it.

For slightly more experienced explorers, you might have had a bad experience or two. Maybe you thought you'd found the perfect island and it turned out to be populated with cannibals and toxic bosses. Perhaps you didn't take enough time to think the adventure through and your hasty decision has shipwrecked you on the reefs. Now you have no idea if the next best island is a degree away or a year's sailing. It can make exploring a nerve-racking experience.

Getting Under Sail in Your Career Exploration

The point is, when you actually go traveling, you instinctively know that though you might read a million and one travel guides, nothing replaces the experience of going and seeing for yourself. And when you do travel, there are some places in the world you want to go back to again and again and there are some that you'll shrug your shoulders and say “Aah, no big deal” and continue on your merry, adventurous way.



It's Impossible to Sail the Unknown with Set Expectations

We aren't that kind to ourselves in careers. **We make our careers so high stakes we think it has to be a perfect expression of who we are at all times.** But having that attitude makes it impossible to explore. We think that in order to "win" we need to pick the Perfect Island by sight, head right over, land, and settle immediately. And we think that once we've chosen something we can never go home again or else we're admitting defeat.

Everyone always forgets the first rule of exploring which is: it's *always* a win, even if the answer is "I don't like this place". You cannot know before you get there if it's you, and likely, even if it is you, at some point you will walk over the island and see another vista and another chain of islands, and that will become your *next* dream, your next challenge.

Plan for a Safe Passage

When you first begin exploring new possibilities for your career, you may be astounded and even frightened by the enormous chasm between your imagination and the realities of creating a safe passage to a new stage of your career. The goal with exploration is to be mature enough to take the time to plan a trip that works for you, without needing the end result to be a perfect destination. As humans, we are forever learning about ourselves and our world and thus our destination is bound to keep changing over time. So it's okay to get lost for awhile, and it's also okay to take the long way round.



Our need for a perfect destination can keep us stuck on our little islands. Doing it "right" isn't figuring your whole life and career out today, it's having the courage to start the journey in the first place. Here's how you know if you're doing the Exploration "right":

- 1) You are taking care of safe passage** - the basics of food, water, shelter and taking care of you and any family,
- 2) You give yourself lots and lots of time;** time to actively engage in your exploration, time to process what you're learning, and time to make a coherent, grounded decision for each next step, and
- 3) You keep reminding yourself that there are many islands out there,** some only a few small navigational degrees away, and some further than your imagination yet can reach, and each one has something special to offer or to teach or to experience on your personal career exploration.



As one Career Explorer said recently, "I finally know I can't know for sure, but I know there are lots of possibilities. And *that's* what makes me feel secure".

Questions for Contemplation

- 1) How much time have you allowed to understand clearly what your next step is?**
- 2) What has been your overall attitude about your Career Transition?**
- 3) Does thinking about a career as an adventure or an exploration change your mind about your approach? What will you do differently as a result?**
- 4) What are some other traits of explorers that might suit this attitude to a Career Exploration?**
- 5) How might you re-consider your journey if you were making sure everyone – including you - had safe passage?**
- 6) If you couldn't go a direct route to your dream island, what other course might you navigate to get there?**

