

WHO ARE YOU NOW?

Of course, it's hard to shake off the urge to try to determine your life as soon as you graduate from college. We get it, because we've been there. Take Kathryn, for example. After majoring in international relations and French, she always dreamed that she would end up in foreign service or become a diplomat. Her interest in travel, her love of languages, and her natural inclination to jump in and solve problems seemed to fit exactly with the career she had imagined for herself. Yet a few weeks into what had seemed like a dream position working at the US embassy in Cyprus, Kathryn felt that interest wane. The problems her team was tackling were important, but solutions moved the needle by inches and progress could sometimes take years, requiring unbelievable patience. When colleagues noticed her penchant for offering to roll up her sleeves and get to work right away, they would laugh and suggest she consider a different field where she could make an impact more quickly. Kathryn's expectations ran smack into the realities of working in the foreign service, and she suddenly realized it might not be such a solid long-term fit after all.

It was as if a tether to her mental image of career satisfaction had been severed, and she was totally adrift. "It was incredibly frustrating," she remembers. "I thought I had it all figured out, and suddenly I realized that I didn't know what I was doing for the next year, let alone for the rest of my life. I'd invested so much in a career path I was about to walk away from. It's funny to look back and remember how much I was worried I'd "wasted" that time. But now I realize that those years were anything but. They were useful—time to test myself—and I'm not sure I'd be where I am today without them."

Alex had a similar experience. Growing up in France, a country where your high school choices still guide much of your career opportunity, she was forced to pick a direction at the age of fifteen. Between the sciences, literature, and economics, she picked the sciences. She was good at them, and they were valued highly in the French education system. Two years later, she again had to choose, this time between math, physics, and biology for her senior-year specialization. Alex chose biology and started learning about genetics by mating strains of fruit flies. She applied to college in the United States and moved across the Atlantic to start her studies where she declared a major of molecular, cellular, and developmental biology (a fancy term for genetics). But after many long hours spent toiling in the lab her freshman year, Alex realized that as much as she loved *learning* about genetics, she didn't enjoy the day-to-day lab work that would be a big part of her job if she continued down this road. Genetics was an interest, yes, but not the right career for her. Facing this fact was hard, but it was also a pivotal moment that forced Alex to question her assumptions and embark on a journey of exploration and learning that brought her to the consulting company where she met Kathryn. Without these two diverging paths and the twists and turns we took, The Muse might never have come to be.

The point is: often what we *think* we want in our heads is actually very different from what we can learn we want in the day-to-day experience of actually living our careers. So even if you think you have your dream career all figured out, it's really important to go through the steps outlined in the next few chapters. The goal is to dig deep enough to have a clear understanding of what kind of job or career will make you truly happy.

What's different about today's rules are that they are all premised on your having a much keener,

more concrete, and more nuanced understanding of your values, interests, and motivations. This requires not only understanding what you enjoy and what you're good at, but also how these interests and skills stack up against other important personal priorities. How much money do you need to live comfortably? How much flexibility do you want in your weekly schedule? How important is your job title, the name of your company, the size of your office? What kind of impact do you want to have on the world? We're going to help you zero in on all of these variables so that you can not only succeed at defining your path, but enjoy getting to know yourself a bit better in the process!

Knowing yourself in this way is a huge part of finding the right job, by which we mean, the right job for you, right now. So in this chapter we'll address the first of what we call the Three R's: *Reflect*. And by the time you complete the exercises and steps in this chapter, you will feel much more confident in your understanding of what you are looking for in a career or job. Even if you have absolutely no idea what you want to do with your life, these tools can help point you in the right direction. Of course, if you've picked up this book already knowing who you are and what kind of job you are looking for, that's fine, too. You will still benefit from the exercises, as the reflection will only serve to underscore your confidence and sharpen your drive. *Wherever you are, we're here to take you forward.*

It's time to develop a special kind of self-awareness: you are going to come to know yourself in an introspective yet objective way. We are big believers in looking inward before you can expect to create the outward success you aspire to.

To start figuring out what you want in a job or in life, it helps to start by reflecting on who you are today. One of the early steps of this process is being brutally honest with *how* you are feeling (frazzled and fearful, confident and competent, muddled but also excited?) and *where* you are (in a current job that you despise, in a current job that's fine but not quite right, out of a job, living with your parents and unable to pay rent on your own place, in between a rock and a hard place?). You're going to ask yourself a couple of hard questions, but trust us, it'll be worth it.

QUESTION 1: WHAT DO YOU VALUE?

Back in the 1970s, a few social scientists came up with a way for people to deepen their understanding of themselves by “clarifying their values.” You can probably hear a bit of that seventies vibe in the language alone. But they were on to something: clarifying our values really helps when we are trying to figure out what we want in our lives.

In the context of creating a successful career plan, the word *values* refers to what in your work provides you with meaning and purpose. That might be a deep sense of creativity, or it might be making a positive contribution to society. In many ways, your values are more important than the type of work you're actually doing; in fact, numerous studies have shown that most people who pursue work that aligns with their values feel more satisfied *and* successful in their careers.

When it comes to charting a professional path, clarifying our own values can feel confusing. There are so many outside voices and perspectives that can clutter this very personal process: parents' expectations and advice, friends' choices, society's collective ideas about the “right” path. It's time to shut all those out. Remember, we're talking about *your* life—and *your* values—not your well-

meaning mom's or dad's, not your favorite professor's, not your brilliant roommate's. They're yours, and yours alone.

The following exercise can help. We've created a list of personal values that often accompany work life; assign each value a number from 1 to 4.

1: Absolutely essential to me

3: Of neutral value—neither important nor unimportant to me

2: Desirable, but not essential

4: Not of value to me, I would prefer to avoid

Don't worry about spreading the numbers out evenly among the different categories—this isn't an exact science—but do try to keep the number of 1's to around three (which will help you with an exercise we'll walk you through later on!). Most important, though, just be honest and candid with yourself.

MISSION AND IMPACT

___ **Social change:** I want to make a contribution to society at large.

___ **Service:** I want to be directly involved in helping individuals.

___ **Influence:** I want my work to shape and influence the thinking of others.

___ **Decision making:** I want to have a meaningful role in deciding direction and policy in my field.

___ **Ethics:** I want my work to connect directly with my own principles and morals.

___ **Community:** I want my work to be of direct benefit to the community in which I live.

SOCIAL INTERACTION, COLLABORATION, AND TEAMWORK

___ **Sociability:** I want to engage regularly with people as part of my daily work.

___ **Solitude:** I want to work alone or mostly alone, without substantial engagement with others.

___ **Teamwork:** I want to work as part of a collaborative team on projects and assignments.

___ **Management:** I want to lead and directly supervise the work of others.

___ **Autonomy:** I want to work independently with minimal direction or supervision.

ROUTINE

___ **Deadlines:** I want to work under time-sensitive conditions, where there is pressure to deliver.

___ **Variation:** I want my tasks and responsibilities to vary regularly.

___ **Consistency:** I want a routine of tasks and responsibilities that remains largely the same.

___ **Detail:** I want to engage in work where attention to detail, precision, and/or accuracy matter a great deal.

___ **Flexibility:** I want the ability to influence my schedule in a way that works for me.

___ **Travel:** I want to travel regularly for work, experiencing new places.

REWARD

- ___ **Acknowledgment:** I want to receive public acknowledgment for my professional accomplishments.
- ___ **Security:** I want a position and a salary that are likely to remain secure.
- ___ **Compensation:** I want my work to deliver significant financial reward.
- ___ **Prestige:** I want to work in a role or at a company that is valued by others.

CHALLENGE AND EXPRESSION

- ___ **Expertise:** I want to work hard toward expertise and mastery in my field.
- ___ **Risk-taking:** I want to experience a sense of risk and adventure in my work.
- ___ **Creativity:** I want my work to have a strong element of creativity.
- ___ **Thrill:** I want my work to be exciting on a regular basis.
- ___ **Competition:** I want to work in an environment where my skills are tested against the skills of others.
- ___ **Physical engagement:** I want my work to involve being physically active and using physical skills.

Take all the values you've ranked as 1, or essential, and list them:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

These are the values that are most significant to you at this stage of your career. We say “at this stage” because our values don’t remain static throughout our lives. When we are in our twenties, things like glamour and thrill, a company’s mission, and opportunity for creative expression might be of the utmost importance. As we get older and maybe have a partner or children, security, flexibility, compensation, and a company’s culture might become more critical. Remember that it’s totally okay and normal for your priorities and preferences to change over time, so it can be helpful to revisit this exercise every two to five years to make sure your current path aligns with who you will have become.

QUESTION 2: WHAT’S YOUR CURRENT FRAME OF MIND?

When people sign up at The Muse, they are usually looking for something specific, whether it’s a job, contacts, opportunities, or advice. Musers are often at some turning point in their lives and are in the midst of a bit of soul-searching. From speaking to them, we’ve found that in addition to taking stock of who you are from a personality perspective, it’s also really helpful to know how you are feeling. Forgive the mini-therapy, and just hang with us for a few minutes as you respond to the following questions that are meant to tease out your frame of mind and take your emotional temperature:

1. On a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high), how would you rate your confidence level? Perhaps you feel confident about some parts of your life or self and less confident about others. Feel free to give yourself multiple scores for a couple of different areas of your life.

2. How do you feel today? Use three adjectives to describe how you feel physically, emotionally, or spiritually.

3. What was the last thing you did or accomplished that made you feel proud of yourself? This can be as simple or profound as you'd like. Maybe you helped bring on a new client last week. Maybe you showed up for your best friend or your grandmother. Maybe you sent out three résumés. These are all actions that one can be proud of. Don't judge yourself. Simply write down what comes to mind.

4. When did this event/achievement occur? Was it yesterday? Last week? Last month? Or years ago?

5. Do you feel the urge to change some aspect of your life? Your job? Yourself? Obviously, this is a big question that you can answer in many different ways. For your purposes right now at the beginning of this process, keep your response simple and choose one thing you wish to change. Be specific.
