

Chapter 1

Evaluating Your Current Situation

In This Chapter

- ▶ Checking in with yourself and your life
- ▶ Assessing your current work situation
- ▶ Evaluating the work you do
- ▶ Getting a sense of your priorities

Did you know that you're sitting on a gold mine? The very same job that frustrates you or bores you to tears holds a number of valuable clues about your future career. In the same vein, the points of stress in your life can, with a little thought, prove to be enlightening, as well.

This chapter helps you assess where you are today. Taking some time to get a sense of yourself and your life at this point in time creates a foundation for building your next career. The more you know about what you want and need in your life, the more you can create a new career that fits you and enhances your life. To make this process as easy for you as possible, a series of worksheets walks you through this discovery process one step at a time.



If you aren't working, use your last job as your frame of reference for this chapter. Or if you've been at home raising your children, recovering from an illness, or caring for a relative, think of your current experiences as your "job" in the following worksheets.

Making the Worksheets Work for You

Each worksheet in this chapter consists of a list of elements in the left-hand column that are relevant to your personal life or your current job. When you rate each element, put an X into the appropriate box:

- ✓ **Good:** This element enhances your life or work.
- ✓ **Okay:** This element could be better or it could be worse. It either fluctuates or is generally mediocre.
- ✓ **Not So Good:** This element in some way diminishes your quality of life or your enjoyment of your work.

After you make your rating, note the reasons why you rated each element the way you did, using the following guidelines:

- ✓ If you marked an element "Good," explain what's working.
- ✓ If you marked an element "Okay" or "Not So Good," indicate what's not working in this area of your work or life.

If you see any elements that aren't listed but are relevant to you, add them in the blanks at the bottom of each table.

In Worksheet 1-8, you have an opportunity to review your responses to Worksheets 1-1 through 1-7 to get an overview of yourself and your life. At that point you identify the elements of your life that are most important to take into account as you create your new career.



As Sarah, a photography studio manager from Connecticut, completed Worksheet 1-1 later in this chapter, she discovered some very important information about how her personal life impacts her career. Review Figure 1-1 to see her responses. As you can see, Sarah is feeling stretched to the limit right now as she juggles her family responsibilities and her work tasks. Her time is so limited that she rarely has time for herself and her needs. What she takes away from this worksheet is that she definitely needs to take her new family situation into account as she envisions her next career.

Elements of Who and How You Are	Good	Okay	Not So Good	Why?
Your state of health	x			I'm healthy and have energy.
Having time for yourself			x	My infant and my work leave me little time for myself.
Exploring your interests and hobbies			x	I spend more time doing activities with my family than doing my own activities.
Reaching for your dreams			x	Who has time! Yet I often find myself thinking of a better future.
Understanding your own personality and style		x		I think I understand my own personality and style pretty well.
Living in alignment with your values		x		Definitely wish I could spend more time with my children. Yet at the same time I feel it's important to fulfill my responsibilities at work.
Balancing your needs and those of others			x	I'm not handling this very well due to the points I've made above.
Improving my appearance			x	I know I'd feel better about myself if I could update my image and lose the weight from my last pregnancy.

Figure 1-1:
Sarah's
view of
herself.

Looking at Your Personal Life

Because you're reading this book to create a new career, you may question why I start out by asking about your personal life. The way I've always looked at it, a career works best when it fits with your life. The more you know about yourself and how you want to live, the more you know about your new career.

If you've been working too hard or totally focusing on how frustrated you are with work, you may have lost track of yourself in the process. To make clear decisions about your future career, you must reach in to find the true you again. Looking at your life through different lenses can help you see yourself more clearly.

- ✓ Take a moment to think about the last time you really let go of work. Perhaps you took a long weekend or an extended vacation. How did it feel to relax and enjoy life?
- ✓ Now, think about how you feel at the end of the day or after a week at work. Do you feel like yourself or does it take you a while each night to re-find yourself?

Rate the elements of how and who you are in Worksheet 1-1 to take stock of how you are these days. Evaluating this information helps you clarify what's working and not working in your current situation. Later you use this information to verify that your new career idea is a good fit for you.

Worksheet
1-1:
Evaluating
various
facets of
yourself and
your life.

Elements of Who and How You Are	Good	Okay	Not So Good	Why?
Your state of health				
Having time for yourself				
Exploring your interests and hobbies				
Reaching for your dreams				
Understanding your own personality and style				
Living in alignment with your values				
Balancing your needs and those of others				

Before you can focus clearly on the future, you must also take a close look at your current lifestyle. If some aspects of your life work well, you want to keep those aspects intact. If certain areas of your life are not satisfying, you can find ways to alleviate the problems by making different decisions about your future.

Put your career and time at work on the back burner for a moment and think about your personal life. As you scan your life, answer these questions for yourself:

- ✓ How do you live your life? What do you like about it? What could be better?
- ✓ How do you socialize with others?
- ✓ What do you do for fun?
- ✓ How do you and your family spend time together?
- ✓ How is your financial situation?
- ✓ How happy are you with where you live?

Think about your work and your life over the last month and ask yourself the following questions:

- ✓ Does your current work arrangement allow you to live the life you want?
- ✓ Have you missed any opportunities due to the demands of your job?
- ✓ How has your schedule worked for you?
- ✓ How does your workload impact your life?
- ✓ What do you like or dislike about the way your work is structured, whether you work full-time or part-time?

Worksheet 1-3 lets you clarify how you feel about how you work. Evaluating your current work situation helps you pinpoint ways your new career can improve your satisfaction at work.

**Worksheet
1-3:**
Thinking
about how
you work.

Elements of Your Time at Work	Good	Okay	Not So Good	Why?
Your work schedule				
Your contract				
Your vacation time				
Your sick time				
Your ability to handle personal appointments during work time				

Your income and benefits also impact how you live your life. Think about the past year, both the high points and the low points. Ask yourself the following questions:

- ✓ What have you been able to do as a result of having the income you do?
- ✓ Did you use any of your benefits this year? How did they work for you?
- ✓ Did your pay schedule meet your needs?
- ✓ Did the form of income you received (salary, commission, overtime pay, or stock options) have any effect on your lifestyle?
- ✓ What haven't you been able to do as a result of your income or benefits?

Worksheet 1-4 gives you a space to jot down your thoughts about important issues regarding your pay and benefits. Being clear about your needs helps you set your sights on a career that's a good fit.

**Worksheet
1-4:**
Evaluating
your
pay and
benefits.

Elements of Your Pay and Benefits	Good	Okay	Not So Good	Why?
Your income				
Your benefits				
How you are paid				

For some people, the environment in which they work is more important than what they do on the job. By looking at what does and doesn't work for you in your work environment, you gain valuable clues that help you evaluate the fit of future work environments.

In your mind's eye, think about your day at work — from the moment you leave your home to the time you return. Ask yourself the following questions:

- ✓ What is your commute like?
- ✓ How do you feel arriving at work?
- ✓ How does your body respond when you enter the building?
- ✓ How do you feel while you are at work?
- ✓ What is your return commute like?
- ✓ How do you feel when you get home from work?

The sensations and impressions you feel as you answer these questions give you insights about how specific elements of your work environment affect you on a daily basis.

Use Worksheet 1-5 to rate how happy you are with specific aspects of your current work environment. In addition to noticing what doesn't work in your current job, remember to take note of elements of your work that you enjoy and want to re-create in your new work setting.

Worksheet 1-5:
Judging your state of mind about your work surroundings.

Elements of Your Work Environment	Good	Okay	Not So Good	Why?
The kind of company				
The size of your company				
The industry you are in				
The company culture				
Your commute				
Your company's surroundings				
The interior of your building				
Your personal work space				
How you have to dress				

At first glance, you may feel as though you have little choice about whom you work with. You can, however, choose a career that allows you to interact with the kinds of people you enjoy most, whether they're colleagues who share your interests or clients who receive your services.

To discover more about what does and doesn't work for you in your current work community, take an imaginary walk through the halls of your office. Think about the people you work with on a regular basis:

- ✓ Envision stopping at each office or cubicle to get a sense of your interactions with each person.
- ✓ Revisit the meetings you've attended this week.
- ✓ Take a mental look at your e-mail inbox. Whose names show up there?
- ✓ Who comes to mind when you scan your telephone log or messages?

With your impressions fresh in your mind, rate the following categories of people you interact with at work in Worksheet 1-6. Your response to the question "Why?" may, in this case, be a person's name.

**Worksheet
1-6:**
Rating your
satisfaction
with the
people
in your
work world.

Elements of Who You Work With	Good	Okay	Not So Good	Why?
Your co-workers				
Your employees or support staff				
Your manager				
The management				
Your customers or clients				
Your vendors				

What's Working and Not Working about the Work You Do

Obviously what you do on your job impacts how you feel about your career. Think about the tasks and projects you've worked on this year and ask yourself the following questions:

- ✓ How do you feel when you do your work?
- ✓ What bores you?
- ✓ What excites and motivates you?
- ✓ When do you feel engaged by your work?

Take some time to write down your thoughts in Worksheet 1-7 regarding the elements that make up your work tasks. Although you may be fed up with your current job, you may find, upon reflection, that you actually enjoy some pieces of what you do. Understanding your current situation in detail gives you insights about what elements of your current work may be worth carrying forward into a new career.

**Worksheet
1-7:**
Assessing
your work.

Elements of the Work You Do	Good	Okay	Not So Good	Why?
The tasks you do				
The skills you use				
The topics you address				
The process you follow				
The meaning you find in your work				

Recording Your Key Needs

Look over the worksheets in this chapter to get an overview of what's going on in your work and life. Then take it deeper. Identify five factors that, if resolved, would allow you to love your life and your work more than you do now. By identifying these issues now, you know what issues you'd like to resolve with your next career. In fact, in Chapter 16 you return to this list to find the right fit between your personal needs and desires and your potential career ideas.

Use Worksheet 1-8 to write down your key needs. If you can, state your needs in terms of what you want rather than what's lacking in your life right now. For instance, write down "I need more flexibility" rather than "I don't have enough flexibility." If you recognize that something isn't working for you but you don't know exactly how you want to fix the situation, don't sweat it. Just record your observation the best you can. As you explore the upcoming chapters, you may discover a new perspective that allows you to articulate your needs more clearly.

**Worksheet
1-8:**
Recording
what
matters
most to you.

Your Key Needs
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.



Although you picked up this book to identify your next career, the worksheets in this chapter may show you that another part of your life isn't working very well. If you feel desperate to leave your current job, living situation, or relationship, you may be in a toxic situation. If you're so worn out by the end of the day that you can't think straight, you may find it hard to make progress on your career change. The fact is that just making it through the day takes all you've got. You have two possible strategies: Minimize your exposure to the person, setting, or situation that feels toxic or just get out in whatever way you can create. Reach out for support from a friend or a professional if you don't see an immediate way out. After you feel safer, you can focus on your goal to change your career and make much more progress.