

## Chapter 1

# Your Cool Career Journey

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ A morality tale on career planning
  - ▶ Previewing your own career journey
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**I**n this chapter, I give you an overview of what works as you find and enjoy your own cool career, but first, I show you what doesn't work.

## *Julie Seeks a Career: A Cautionary Tale*

Sure, some people come out of the womb knowing what they want to be when they grow up — the 5-year-old violin prodigy comes to mind. But most people aren't so lucky — and they don't get much help.

Some parents tell you, "It's your life. You decide." Other parents go to the other extreme, expecting you to follow in their footsteps: "Hazardous waste disposal is a great career." Before you even learn how to tie your shoes, they're pushing: "Come on, let's visit Daddy's toxic waste dump."

In high school, you take a career test that asks what you're interested in. How the heck are you supposed to know? If you're like most teens, you spend most of your school life studying such career irrelevancies as the symbolism in *Romeo & Juliet*, quadratic equations, and the slave ships of 1628. After school, you play soccer and are forced to take piano lessons — a skill for which only your mother thinks you have talent. You spend summers at Camp Kowabonga, during which your career exploration consists of observing your counselor go postal. How in the world are you supposed to validly answer test questions about your career interests? It's little surprise that many high school students laugh at their career test results: forest ranger, funeral director, or "You could pursue a wide range of careers."

Many students remain undaunted. They figure that career clarity will come in college. Trouble is, most colleges proudly proclaim that their courses are *not* for career preparation but for general education. Worse, college courses are taught by professors — people who have deliberately opted out of the real world. So, many college students' career sights are limited.

As college graduation approaches, panic often sets in and the same students who procrastinated endlessly trying to ensure that they made the perfect career choice suddenly force themselves into a decision, often based on very little information. Their entire reasoning often fits on a bumper sticker:

- ✓ "I want to help people, so I'll be a doctor."
- ✓ "I'm lousy in science and I like to argue, so I'll go to law school."
- ✓ "I want to make a lot of money, so I'll go into business."
- ✓ "I don't know what I want to do, so I'll get a master's in something."

None of these reasons would work for Julie. She was sick of school. So she headed to her college's career center where she was pointed to a career library and encouraged to "explore."

That's inadequate guidance for most people. Julie did, however, fall into a job. Her cousin was the janitor at Western Widget Waxing, Inc., and put in a good word for Julie: "She has always been interested in widgets." Julie wrote a letter to Western Widget Waxing, Inc., that began, "I believe I'm well-suited for a career in the widget waxing industry." She got an interview. She wore that conservative suit she swore she'd never wear and told old WWW, Inc., that ever since childhood, she spent much of her spare time waxing widgets. She got the job.

Within days of starting at WWW, Julie realized that widget waxing wasn't all it was cracked up to be. Now what? Not surprisingly, WWW's human resources manager told Julie only about options in widget waxing. "Well, Julie, you *are* on track to becoming a widget waxing supervisor, and down the road, I think you have the potential to become a widget waxing director." On seeing Julie's face go flat, the manager tried, "Well, you could join our sales department. Would you like to sell widget waxing? How about the accounting department? Shipping? Well, what *do* you want, Julie?" That was the problem. Julie hadn't a clue.

In desperation, Julie decided to seek help from a professional — even though it used up the money she'd been saving for that vacation. "What's a thousand bucks if it can land me a cool career?"

Alas, when Julie showed up at her appointment with the career counselor, there were those tests again.

**Counselor:** Well, Julie, on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, you're an INFP. That means you're an intraverted, intuitive, feeling perceiver.

**Julie:** So what should I do for a career?

**Counselor:** Julie, you can't rush this. That would be premature foreclosure. We need to review the results of the Campbell Interest and Skills Survey. You're an RIC. That stands for realistic-investigative-conventional. Let's interpret that.

**Julie:** So what should I do for a career?

**Counselor:** Well, Julie, use the information you've learned about yourself from the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and from the Campbell Interest and Skills Survey by exploring in the career library.

**Julie:** Noooooooh, not again!

Instead, Julie returned to Western Widget Waxing, Inc.

Too often, career counseling is like psychoanalysis: You gain insight into yourself but your life is no better.

One day, Julie heard about a book called *Find Your Career Joy While Doing What You Love and the Money Will Come While Your Flower Opens*. So off Julie trotted to the bookstore, and although daunted by the book's thickness and its 66 worksheets, she figured it was only \$19.99 — the cost of two movie tickets. Such a deal. Julie bit.

Five years later, our hero was still on worksheet #4. Her father, her friends, and even her hairstylist were asking her, "Well, Julie, what *are* you going to be when you grow up?" Julie decided to get serious. She pulled out her aging copy of *Find Your Career Joy While Doing What You Love and the Money Will Come While Your Flower Opens* and actually managed to complete all 66 worksheets. This gave her a complete inventory of her skills, interests, values, job requirements, personality attributes, and inter-ocular focal length.

But doing all that still didn't tell Julie how to figure out which career fits best.



I swear I'm not exaggerating. Even the best-selling career guides don't take you through that crucial next step: showing you which careers fit your skills, interests, and values. The guides state or imply that if you do all their worksheets, you'll somehow divine your dream career.

Julie cried, and Julie stayed on at Western Widget Waxing, Inc. “Maybe I *am* meant to be in widget waxing,” she told herself. She worked hard, and indeed the human resources manager’s prediction came to pass. Julie became director of Widget Waxing. But still she wasn’t happy.

Then Julie was sure she found a solution: the computer. WWW, Inc., benevolent firm that it is, bought a career-finding software program and made it available to its employees. Julie was first in line. A couple of hours and voilà, 15 best-fit careers popped out. Some of the careers made sense but didn’t excite her enough to make her quit her now-comfortable job at WWW to go back and get retrained for a profession she wasn’t even sure she’d end up liking better. After all, Julie had become a director and was vested in WWW’s retirement plan. A few of the generated careers did excite Julie, but they were careers that excite too many people — TV broadcasting, for example. So what if Julie would love to anchor the nightly news? So would half the continent.



Although Julie didn’t know it, many computer programs often fail for another reason. They eliminate careers if the career seeker lacks even one ostensibly necessary skill or personality trait. In the real world, many careers don’t have such rigid skill and personality requirements. Take book editors, for example. Some succeed primarily because of their aesthetic sense, others because of their feel for the bottom line. And aren’t some editors introverts, others extroverts? Even if Julie lacked a key attribute, if she found a career that excited her, she may well have been willing and able to put the energy into compensating for her weakness. But the computer program never gave her the chance.

Krishna Rama (*nee* Julie) now resides at the Harmonic Transcendent Monastery in Berkeley, California, hoping to find career nirvana through meditation.

All jokes aside (at least for the moment), despite taking career tests, plowing through fat career guides, and/or meditating, many people end up falling into their careers more by chance than by choice. Not a good way to ensure career happiness. There has to be a better way.

There is. Read on.

## *Taking Your Own Journey*

There are two ways to use this book. You can simply flip to a chapter that intrigues you and start there. Or you can let me be your virtual career coach. After reading the overview in the following sections, just turn the page and I’ll take you by the hand and walk you through what, for most people, is the most

successful way to go from career clueless to career contentment. Reading this book all the way through simulates what my private clients pay me big bucks for.

## *Discovering your cool career*

Here's what you and I can do together to start your journey:

1. Our first hour or two will be especially exciting. In browsing Chapter 2's *Cool Careers Yellow Pages*, you discover fascinating information about 500 cool careers and self-employment opportunities. Even on the off chance that none of those 500 appeal to you, you understand the world more richly than you ever have before. But chances are good that one or more careers will call out to you.
2. I ask you the *35 Most Revealing Questions* in Chapter 3. Over my 20 years as a career counselor/coach, I've tried zillions of questions to tease out my clients' core skills, interests, values, and desires. These 35 are the ones that have been most revealing.
3. By this point, you likely have come up with one or more careers that intrigue you. Not so fast. Before committing to a career, you deserve to know more about it. So, in Chapter 4, I show you the smartest ways to learn more about a career. If, after that, you're still unsure, I help you gain the courage to make a decision.



If, after completing these three steps, you're still unsure of what career to choose, I've learned, over the years, that it's far wiser to choose the best of the options you've considered than to wait on the sidelines hoping for something better to come along. By choosing something, and then getting the best training, and doing a competent job search so that you can unearth a good job offer, you'll probably be further along on the path toward a cool career than if you took more career tests, visited a career library yet again, or even worked with a career counselor/coach like me.

## *Finding the best training for your needs*

In Chapters 5 and 6, I show you how to choose the right training program and make the most of it. Feeling like an expert is more central to believing you're in a cool career than the career itself. I've seen people who have ostensibly cool careers — for example, actors — who are miserable, because deep down, they're not sure they're that good. On the other hand, I've seen plumbers

who think they're in a cool career, largely because they know they can handle virtually any problem they're likely to face.

## *Getting a cool job*

The part of career-finding that most people hate is looking for a job. Some people will procrastinate until they're homeless instead of sitting down to start the job hunt. So, in the next part of our journey, I do everything I can to make that job search easy and pleasant. I start, in Chapter 7, by helping you get into the right mindset — by the time you're through, you'll practically laugh at getting rejected. In Chapter 8, I lay out the plan, step by step. I show you how to create a great resume in just a few hours (see Chapter 9), and the secrets of impressive interviewing — even if you've been slacking on your parents' sofa for the last two years. (Chapter 10 has the full scoop on interviewing.)

## *Making the most of your new career*

The last step in your journey is probably the most important. Choosing your career carefully and then not making the most of it is like giving the gas station attendant \$20 but putting only \$10 of gas in your tank. I show you how to take your off-the-shelf career and tailor and accessorize it to fit you. And I equip you with skills critical in nearly every career: for example, people skills so outstanding that you become beloved (see Chapter 11), overcoming procrastination (see Chapter 12), and the art of being entrepreneurial (see Chapter 13).

Okay. Onward to what may be one of your life's most exciting journeys.