Determining My Career Fit

What does a great career fit look like? It’s likely that your career interests will evolve over time and that many diverse paths could be fulfilling for you. You may take a job to get your foot in the door to start and be able to move into a great long term fit soon. Or you may think you’ve landed the ideal job only to discover 3 years in that you want to shift your focus. According to a 2018 report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average person changes jobs ten to fifteen times in their lifetime! Those job changes might be promotions, lateral moves within an organization or whole new paths.

You also will have life and circumstance changes that will take you in new directions. As a grad student, you may be confident in your next steps or you might still be fine-tuning. Here are some concepts to keep mind.

Elements of a Great Job Fit

1. PURPOSE: For example, let’s say that you know you’re really good with numbers. So you’re working on your MBA to be an accountant, but that might not be a great conclusion if taxes don’t create a sense of purpose for you. If a sense of meaning for you comes from working with youth, maybe you might want to be a math instructor or a financial advisor for the Boys and Girls Club.

2. ABILITIES: Some abilities are innate, but many can be developed. If you determine that there are skills you need for your chosen path, ensure you are prioritizing your time wisely during grad school to cultivate these. For example, many federal careers require specific graduate coursework—if government is your path, have you researched what credentials you need in advance (opm.gov)?

3. DEMAND: This is where reading job boards early on comes in. You might discover that there are not as many opportunities in your region as you initially expected. That’s a good insight! It’s important to investigate how market realities intersect with your desired path. (But that’s not to say you can’t be an entrepreneur and invent what the world needs, too!) O*Net is a great place to research current occupations, job outlooks, salaries and more.
Informational Interviews and Job Shadowing

An informational interview is a conversation with a professional from your field who can give you insight into a company, position or career path. This can be an HR professional, a recent graduate working at a company or an OSU alumnus—anyone who can serve as a connector in your field. Consider reaching out to your professors, family, friends, professionals you have met and/or alumni. Most informational interviews last about 30 minutes.

A job shadow is an unpaid opportunity to observe a professional in your field or position of interest. The time varies depending on availability and type of position—some shadows last an hour, others several days.

Informational Interview Questions

• How did you get started in this field?
• What do you enjoy most about your job?
• What are common entry-level positions in your field?
• What skills are needed to be successful in your role?
• How has the industry changed since you first began?
• What set of characteristics does your organization look for when hiring?
• What’s it like to work at your company?
• What advice would you give a person aspiring to enter your field of work?
• What has been the biggest learning curve for you in this role?
• **Who else should I connect with at your company or at similar organizations?**

Reaching Out

• Introduce yourself with your name, program and university.
• Describe your interest in the person’s field and/or position.
• Highlight why the contact is beneficial for you.
• Make clear that you want to conduct an informational interview and/or job shadow.
• Be flexible.
• Be clear on the amount of time this will take.
• Express your appreciation, excitement and passion. Remember, they are doing you a favor.
• Always respect the professional’s time and consideration and stick to your agreed schedule.

Informational interviews and job shadows are a courtesy to you as a developing professional.