

# Top 10 Career Myths

Keep in mind that the road to career happiness is usually full of bumps, curves and tangents rather than a straight, direct path from point A to point B. The following list will help dispel some common career myths with a good dose of "career reality."

## **Myth 1 - There is one perfect job for me.**

**Fact:** Many occupations have the potential to satisfy your career goals. Once you have clearly defined what you are looking for in a career, you will find that there are a number of paths that match these criteria. Your goal at this point should be to take the "next best step." For example, you may narrow down your search to healthcare professions. Then you must choose among dozens of occupations in this career field (e.g., physician, nurse, physical therapist, respiratory therapist, medical lab technologist, veterinarian, or pharmacist). As you explore each option further, you can compare what they offer in terms of advantages and disadvantages.

## **Myth 2 - My major is going to lead to my career.**

**Fact:** Most employers care more about your work-related experience (e.g., part-time jobs and internships) and the skills that you have obtained than they do about your major. Unless you are planning to enter an area that requires specific technical skills, such as mechanical engineering, you are free to choose any major that interests you. One major can lead to many different careers, and one career can be reached through many different majors. In fact, most people find themselves working in fields that are only remotely related to their majors, and **it is possible to work in almost any career with any major.**

## **Myth 3 - I will have only one career in my lifetime.**

**Fact:** Career planning is an ongoing process. You will probably re-address your career plans several times during your life; this is normal. Nowadays the typical person entering the work force will have as many as five or six different occupations by the time he or she retires. People continue to change throughout life and so does the job market. Many occupations that will be available within your lifetime may not even exist yet! While you can never know 100% that you are making the "right" choice at any given point, your goal should be to make the "next best choice" for now, and continue to evaluate and re-evaluate that career once you're in it.

## **Myth 4 - Liberal Arts, Humanities and Science majors are usually unemployable after college.**

**Fact:** Arts and Sciences majors usually have valuable training in areas such as interpersonal communication, writing, research, and critical thinking. These are called transferable skills, i.e., skills that are learned in one area that can be readily utilized in a wide range of other areas. The skills that one learns in the liberal arts are skills that are sought after by many employers. Arts and Sciences majors are employed in a wide range of careers. However, the job title may not be obviously related to the title of their academic major.

**Myth 5 - Most students know their major and career goals when they enter college.**

**Fact:** Some people may have a major or career in mind when they enter college, and a few may actually stick with these original goals. However, the majority of entering college students change their minds about majors and careers several times before graduation. In fact, the average student who enters college with a declared major changes it three to five times. On the other hand, the average student who enters college with an *undeclared* major changes only one to two times.

**Myth 6 - If I wait long enough, luck will eventually bring me to the right career.**

**Fact:** Most people will benefit from a plan -- a full investigation and thorough consideration of different occupations. It is unlikely that you will just "bump into" the occupation that will perfectly match your skills and interests or satisfy your most important values. The more information you gather about yourself and the occupations you are considering, the more likely it is you will make a wise career decision. It is true that some things beyond your control will influence your life, but you must take an active role to determine your own fate. Look around you - those people who are unhappy in their careers most likely just "fell into" something without careful planning.

**Myth 7 - Most people have a solid understanding of careers and the world-of-work and if I don't, then I am the only one who is confused!**

**Fact:** People's knowledge of occupations is often incomplete. Most of what passes as knowledge is really based upon stereotypes. The media may depict police work as an exciting occupation dedicated to putting the bad guys behind bars. They are less likely to show the hours spent doing paperwork, directing traffic, or responding to domestic disputes where there is no clearly defined "bad guy." As you narrow down your options, be sure you are getting a balanced and accurate picture of the occupations you are considering.

**Myth 8 - Career assessments will tell me exactly what career is right for me.**

**Fact:** Assessments can provide you with additional information that may be helpful as one part of the career planning process. No test, however, can tell you what to do with your life or serve up the "perfect" career match. Assessments take a sample of certain kinds of knowledge or attitudes and draw conclusions based on the sample. Test results can be confounded by many things: cultural differences, unrepresentative samples, and unintentionally biased items, to name a few. Use assessments with caution, and critically examine test results with a career counselor in terms of your own experience and knowledge. **You** know yourself the best.

**Myth 9 - I should choose an occupation based on my strongest skills.**

**Fact:** It is risky to consider only your skills for a career decision because skills are just one of the components of a full self-evaluation; interests and values are equally important in the decision making process. What you enjoy and what is important to you about life and work should also be taken into consideration. Just because you are good at something does not mean that you will enjoy doing that activity for a living.

**Myth 10 - The best place for me to start looking for an occupation is where employers are doing lots of hiring right now.**

**Fact:** The job market fluctuates constantly. Take for example the dot.com boom in the late 90's that led to a bust just a few years later, rendering thousands of workers without a job. Employment opportunities can change dramatically as a function of economic conditions, advances in technology, and the labor supply. Although projections are available from information resources, this data should be used with caution. There is an inevitable lag time between the demand for certain kinds of occupations and the response to this demand. As another example, today there may be a dramatic need for nurses. The demand outstrips the supply with a resulting increase in salary, fringe benefits, and opportunity as employers compete for the limited supply of trained workers. College students who decide they want to become nurses primarily because of this increased opportunity may be disappointed after years of training because they are competing with thousands of people with the same idea. The job market becomes flooded, and the supply now exceeds the demand. This kind of changing demand and supply situation can happen with any occupation. Nonetheless, job outlook trends can be useful information if used cautiously and not as the only factor in your career choice.

*The Career Center at the University of California Berkeley, May 15, 2009.*

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