

5 Steps to Smarter Career Exploration: Leave No Stones Unturned

By Juliet Wehr Jones, Vice President, Career Key

When choosing a career, it's easy to have a narrow mind about your choices. We're most comfortable with careers we've heard of and know something about, even if our only information comes from TV: think forensic scientist, real estate agent, fashion designer, crabfisher, those crazy Mythbusters guys making hovercrafts in their garage (job title anyone?) and the "usual suspects" doctor and lawyer shows.

But wouldn't you hate missing out on a great career just because you didn't dig deep enough? Don't be intimidated by massive databases of jobs or giant encyclopedias of career options. The Internet makes exploration a little easier. Here are 5 steps to be smart and efficient in your career exploration – without leaving stones unturned.

1. **Learn about Holland's Theory of Career Choice and how identifying your personality type(s) helps you choose a more satisfying career.** This theory will help guide your thinking about what careers might be right for you.
2. **Narrow your choices to careers that match your top two Holland personality types measured by a valid interest inventory.** Don't cross off a career because of concerns about your finances or abilities. You'll address those issues later when you have more information to make an informed choice. Ask yourself:
 - a. Are there any careers I think match my personality but are not listed anywhere? Write them down and do searches for their key words using our recommended resources below.
 - b. Am I interested in starting a business? If so, what kinds of business opportunities are related to the matching careers I see listed?
 - c. How do I combine personality types in a career? To see an example, read about how Dr. Lawrence K. Jones, the Career Key's author, combined his top two Holland personality types or "differing gifts" in one job.
3. **Start with, then go beyond the Occupational Outlook Handbook job titles for matching careers we provide on The Career Key website:** doctor, lawyer, engineer, social worker, accountant (not that there is any wrong with them). Remember that any job title you see anywhere (not just on The Career Key website) has many versions. Think about "social worker" and how many different types of jobs do "social work" that would fit a Social personality type. Recommended online resources:
 - a. Department of Labor's (DOL) Occupational Outlook Handbook has "Related Occupations" links at the bottom of a career description. If you find a related career you like, click on it and it will have its own "related occupations" link – follow these links as far as you want.
 - b. DOL's Career Guide to Industries. Explore the industries that most closely relate to your personality. Don't hesitate to look at an area about which you know little.
 - c. Use your favorite search engine. You might get more ideas from blogs, association websites, Wikipedia and Knol entries. Remember that just because it's on the internet doesn't mean it's true.

4. **Conduct informational interviews with people working in an industry that interests you**, but ask them about jobs related to theirs within it because there might be one that's a better fit for you. For example, a software developer career may be of interest to you, but software developers know a lot about other related occupations they work with like Program Managers and Quality Assurance/testing engineers, and can refer you to other people in those jobs to talk to. Don't know any software developers? Read my previous post on career specific networking – it's easy to meet some and interview them.
5. **About each alternative, keep asking yourself, how does this job fit with my personality?** Are there a lot of supervisory duties that make it more Social than I would like? Is there a way to combine my top two personality types in one career?

For more ideas, you'll find over 12,000 careers organized by Holland personality types in your local library; go to the Reference section and ask for the Dictionary of Holland Occupational Titles by Dr. Gary Gottfredson and Dr. John Holland. Unfortunately, you can only find it in book form, not online. But although it's a large book, you'll only be looking at a few sections and just skimming through it will spark some ideas.

Career information resources sometimes do not keep up with the pace of technology and workplace change; these databases take a long time to put together. But you need to start somewhere. That's why it's important to not only do your online research, but to also talk with people working in the industry that interests you. Only then can you say you've left no stone unturned – and you can make a decision you won't regret.

Web Resources:

Mythbusters (Discovery Channel)

<http://dsc.discovery.com/fansites/mythbusters/mythbusters.html>

“Differing Gifts”

<http://careerkey.blogspot.com/2007/11/differing-gifts.html>

Holland's Theory of Career Choice

http://www.careerkey.org/asp/your_personality/hollands_theory_of_career_choice.asp

Matching Personality with Careers

http://www.careerkey.org/asp/career_options/match_personality.asp

Social personality type

<http://www.careerkey.org/test/freetrial/careers.do?action=careers&goingTo=social>

Career specific networking

<http://careerkey.blogspot.com/2008/08/getting-best-career-information-meet.html>

Occupational Outlook Handbook

<http://www.bls.gov/OCO/>

Career Guide to Industries

<http://www.bls.gov/oco/cg/>

Learn More About Occupations

http://www.careerkey.org/asp/career_options/learn_occupations.asp

Self-Employment

http://www.careerkey.org/asp/career_options/self_employment.asp