

Do you want to advance your career? Obtain a college degree? Change jobs? Before you can act on your career aspirations, you should first get the facts.

# Fact or Fiction

## THE TRUTH ABOUT CAREER MYTHS

**M**any people have misconceptions about aspects of the career planning process that can delay or impede their ability to reach their goals. Often, these preconceived notions are based on false perceptions or limited awareness about career options, educational requirements, job-hunting strategies, and/or market demands. Don't let lack of information or faulty assumptions derail your career path! Challenge any debilitating beliefs, dispel any half-truths you may be harboring, and be on your way to achieving your personal and professional milestones.

*To help separate fact from fiction, here are ten common career myths to be aware of as well as some resources to expand your knowledge.*

**1. Myth: There is one right job for me; I just need to find it.**

**Reality:** The truth is there are many jobs and career fields that can potentially be "right" for you and satisfy your career goals. Because you have various interests and abilities, there are numerous occupations that will suit your skills and personality. Attempting to seek the one perfect job will limit you. Assess your interests, abilities, and values. Use career assessment tools to help define what you are looking for in a job or career. These tools can provide career direction and

ideas for a number of occupations that meet your criteria (see Related Resources). Explore your options thoroughly and consider advantages and disadvantages of each. Keep an open mind and maintain career awareness. As you gain experience and grow professionally, the type of work you want to pursue may change over time. Remember there is often more than one "right" road to reach your destination.

**2. Myth: I should choose my career based upon market demand and jobs that are currently "hot."**

**Reality:** The job market is constantly fluctuating. A "hot" job today may not be in demand tomorrow. Economic conditions, technological advances, and the labor supply can significantly affect employment opportunities. Job outlook trends can be useful as one facet of career selection but should not be the primary consideration. Statistics show most people will have an average of five to seven jobs and as many as three different careers in their lifetime. Your career choices will be most rewarding if they are firmly rooted in your interests, skills, and values, not dictated by market demand.

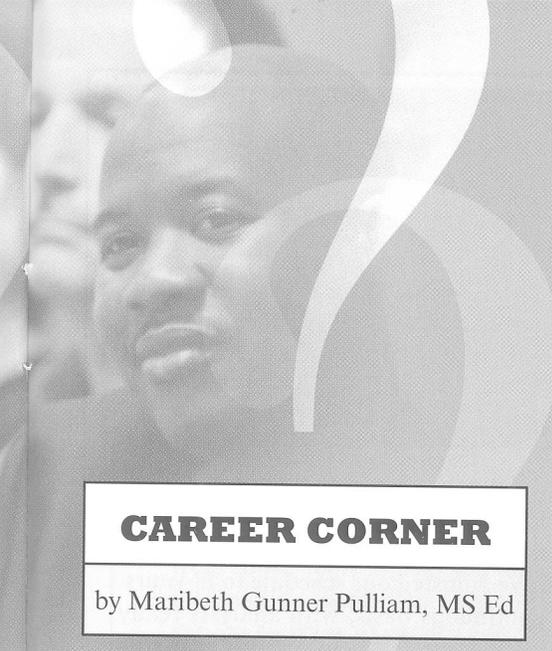
**3. Myth: My college major/degree will determine my lifelong career.**

**Reality:** Some degree programs such as nursing or accounting have prescribed courses and training that are intended to prepare you for specific career tracks. There are also other majors and degrees such as those in the liberal arts, which train you for a broad variety of careers.

Whatever your focus, your undergraduate degree is just one of the stepping-stones to your future goals. Work experience, volunteer positions, networking contacts, and positive personal attributes also enhance your employability. Often, graduates find themselves working in satisfying jobs that are not directly related to the degree they earned. Why? Interests and skills develop over time, which in turn affect one's career trajectory. For example, if your transferable skills include communication, interpersonal, analytical, and teamwork, you can apply them to virtually any occupation (see Related Resources). Studies show that many employers are hungrily seeking these highly valued skill sets. The bottom line? Your college degree, coupled with your portfolio of skills, experience, and willingness to learn, will collaboratively galvanize your career mobility.

**4. Myth: Planning my career is a one time exercise.**

**Reality:** Career planning is an ongoing process. As you gain work experience and enhance your knowledge and skills, you will most likely refine your career direction several times during your life. You may need to re-examine your goals, and revise your plan to take advantage of new opportunities. Workplace changes are a constant. Many jobs that exist today may be reconfigured or become obsolete in the future. For some occupational fields, there are jobs that do not even exist yet.



## CAREER CORNER

by Maribeth Gunner Pulliam, MS Ed

New jobs are created every year. Be prepared for change, continuously review possibilities, and carefully consider different directions as you travel your career path.

### **5. Myth: It's too late to change careers.**

**Reality:** Nonsense! You can shift careers at any time if it is something you truly want. No doubt this type of change is a challenge, but it's worthwhile if it results in a more satisfying career. When you think about the amount of time you spend working, you want to be sure it is something you enjoy. Take an inventory of your talents and abilities. Identify the skills that are easily transferable to any field, including leadership and interpersonal communication (see Related Resources). Changing careers may require that you gain new knowledge and skills. If you need to re-tool by pursuing an advanced degree, do research and seek out your options. An Excelsior College degree may be just the perfect fit. Perhaps you need to enhance your current qualifications. Want to improve your oral communication skills? Take a public speaking course. If cost is an issue, look for low cost community resources via your local library or adult education programs. Any career change will present a learning curve, but if you have the motivation to master the necessary skills and the conviction to pursue your goals, then you will surely navigate a successful career transition.

### **6. Myth: There is no way to "test drive" a new job or career.**

**Reality:** Wrong. There are many ways to learn about jobs and career fields without actually working in them. Taking the time to research is the key. There are various resources that you can

investigate. Use the Internet. The *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (OOH) is a bountiful online resource created by the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics (BLS), which provides detailed information about hundreds of occupations including the nature of the work, training requirements, salary range, and outlook through the next decade. For visual learners, there are Web sites that offer videos depicting a typical day for various jobs/career tracks. You can even view Web sites that post insider views of selected organizations. Another more personal way to gain firsthand information is by conducting an informational interview with someone in your desired field. This is not a job interview, but rather an in-person interview you initiate to learn more about the vocation (see Related Resources). To obtain experience in a specific area, try volunteering a few hours a week in the field.

### **7. Myth: Graduate schools require you to have specific undergraduate majors for admission.**

**Reality:** Graduate programs have varied requirements for applications, but the majority of graduate schools do not require a specific degree or major for admission. Some schools may require specific prerequisite courses, which you can obtain at the undergraduate level. If you are considering a graduate degree, it is a good idea to do some preliminary investigation to learn more about the program's criteria. It's also important to remember there are other factors that contribute to admission criteria such as your career goals, GPA, admission test scores, personal essay, and letters of recommendation. If a graduate degree is key to your personal or professional advancement, it is never too early to investigate a school's requirements. Get a head start on the process and seek the information you need to begin your graduate school journey (see Related Resources).

### **8. Myth: A resume should only be one page long.**

**Reality:** Not always true. If you are a new graduate or an entry-level job seeker, one page is ideal. However, if you have extensive experience, a two-page resume is perfectly acceptable. Your resume is the marketing tool that will introduce you and your professional qualifications. You may need two pages to include all pertinent information. It doesn't make sense to limit your resume to one page if you will be excluding potentially important information in the process. Having said that, do be sure the most important and relevant information is reflected on the first page. Regardless if it is

one or two pages, the basic rules still apply; your resume should be well written, concise, complete, visually appealing, and customized to the desired employer. There should never be any spelling or grammatical errors.

### **9. Myth: Cover letters are not essential and are rarely read by employers.**

**Reality:** On the contrary, cover letters are a professional expectation. They identify what job you are seeking and how you are uniquely qualified. They allow you to highlight a few notable items listed on your resume that you want to bring to the employer's attention. A cover letter also provides the opportunity to address a specific person—one who has the authority to assess your credentials and identify you as a viable candidate. Most importantly, cover letters illustrate your writing abilities to employers. They must always be well written, with no spelling or grammatical errors. They should be succinct. One page is sufficient. A cover letter is your first impression with the employer, so give it your best effort.

### **10. Myth: Job hunting in a tough economy is not a worthwhile endeavor.**

**Reality:** You will never get that coveted job if you wait for the economy to rebound. Higher unemployment rates, downsizing, and a slow economic recovery are daunting but not debilitating. During a sluggish economy, it is best to move forward at a quicker pace. Get out of your comfort zone and position yourself so you are in the right place at the right time. Create a personal brand and market it. Use your network to identify potential contacts for job leads. Become savvy with social networking and use online tools such as LinkedIn. Focus on building experience. Sharpen your skills and be ready to articulate to an employer how you can make an immediate contribution. When job searching, keep an open mind and cast a wide net. Research various employers. Even though the media may report negative news about larger, higher profile organizations, there may still be many small and mid-size companies that are hiring. Be sure you have a top-notch resume and practice your interviewing skills. Always follow up interviews with personal thank-you notes to reconfirm interest. You will have to dig a little deeper and work harder to navigate your job hunt in a tough economy, but with persistence and a positive attitude, your efforts can produce results.

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