Career, Communication, and Critical Thinking





PLANNING YOUR CAREER IN BUSINESS TODAY

Dr. Les R. Dlabay

CRITICAL THINKING GUIDE

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GUIDE TO COMMUNICATION SKILLS

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CAREER, COMMUNICATION, AND CRITICAL THINKING

A STUDENT GUIDE

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Planning Your Career in Business Today

Dr. Les R. Dlabay

SECTION 1



The Job Market and You

"What are you going to do with the rest of your life?"

This question can stimulate some exciting yet perhaps frightening thoughts. A basic assumption is that you will work, though you may not necessarily work full-time for a business organization. Contemporary lifestyles allow for many job alternatives and work motivations. Despite discouraging economic trends, volunteer service, part-time work, job sharing, flextime, and midlife career switches are all options in a dynamic employment environment.

As you pursue your occupational goals, you will have to assess many factors. The job market, future employment prospects, and your personal career plan are the three major components that must blend harmoniously to produce your greatest job satisfaction.

FACTORS AFFECTING JOB AVAILABILITY

No one can predict exactly what jobs will be in demand in the future. But you can do some of your own career forecasting if you are aware of the following factors:

- 1. Economic conditions. Interest rates, consumer spending, and employment levels are some of the economic facts of life that influence the job market.
- 2. *Technology*. New products and processes that change our working conditions will continue to evolve. Awareness of these technological advances is necessary when selecting a career.
- 3. Government actions. Changes in government involvement have and will continue to influence various career areas.
- 4. Foreign competition. The U.S. economy is intensely affected by the supply and demand of the world market.
- 5. Social trends. Smaller families, single-parent families, and an aging population are only a few of the broad social developments that may affect the number and types of jobs that will be available to you.

By observing, reading, and analyzing, you can learn much about the future potential of various careers.

CAREER PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

Although every career area will be in demand in the future, not every field will enjoy the same rate of growth. The career areas frequently identified as having the strongest potential are:

- 1. Computer technology systems analysts, programmers, computer operators and technicians, word-processing specialists.
- 2. Health care therapists, medical assistants, nurses, nursing aides, laboratory technicians.
- 3. Financial services—investment advisers, bank clerks, insurance agents, credit counselors, financial institution managers.
- 4. Sales and marketing—real estate agents, industrial salespeople, market researchers, and financial services marketing representatives.
- 5. Office administration—accountants, legal assistants, secretaries, office clerks, and administrative staff workers.
- 6. Technology-telecommunications, engineers, electronic specialists, and robotic technicians.
- 7. Government—local and state employees, especially those with technical, office, or administrative skills.

Do not let this list discourage you from aspiring to a career in a field that does not appear above. Your personal qualities, professional skills, and continuing determination can get you the job of your choice, regardless of tough competition.

AN OVERVIEW OF THIS CAREER GUIDE

This career-planning guide is divided into four sections:

- 1. The Job Market and You
- 2. Your Career Plan-A Ticket to Success
- 3. Packaging and Presenting the Product-You
- 4. Your Career Now-And in the Future

In addition to the material presented in each of these sections, a series of Career Exercises is available at the end of Sections 2, 3, and 4. These activities will help you to plan and implement various aspects of your job search.

Finally, the Appendix lists books, periodicals, and organizations that can provide information on business careers. This information will broaden your knowledge of the fundamentals presented in this guide.

THE CAREER-PLANNING PROCESS: AN OVERVIEW

In any aspect of life, and job hunting is no exception, there is no substitute for good planning. A plan will help you to make the best use of your time, energy, money, and skills. Different career guides or related sources will suggest different career-planning steps, but each will probably include all or most of the following:

1. Personal Assessment

A variety of easy-to-use resources exist that can help you to measure your vocational interests, work aptitudes, and personal preferences. A few of them are listed at the end of this section. This information will serve as the basis for your career search.

2. Goal Setting (Section 2)

Once you have developed your career profile, a specific goal is the next order of business. A career objective is a target toward which you can direct your actions.

3. Assessing the Job Market (Section 2)

After deciding on your objectives, you must determine where you can fit into the job market. While your occupational interests, abilities, and goals may indicate a certain career, other factors may not make this choice practical. Be sure to consider such influences as the economy, technological developments, and future demand for the career you select.

Your job search should include two strategies to develop your awareness of job opportunities. First, use available career information to assess the overall job market. Second, identify potential specific career opportunities through personal contacts, advertisements, and other sources. Both courses of action may help you to identify careers with good prospects.

4. Obtaining the Required Background (Section 2)

Every job has certain educational and training requirements. These entry-level competencies can range from a short onthe-job training period to four or more years of college. Once you select a career goal, you must plan to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to enter the field of your choice.

5. Getting the Interview (Section 3)

Jobs exist, but they will be offered to others unless you can convince prospective employers that you deserve their consideration. The basic ways to obtain an interview are a job-application form provided by the company, or a letter of application and résumé. Both the job-application form and the résumé demand a summary of your educational and professional experience. Whichever you use, you must be able to present yourself in a manner that will set you apart from the crowd.

6. The Interview Process (Section 3)

Once you are asked for an interview, you should think of it as a three-step process:

Preinterview activities. Before your interview, you should try to learn as much as possible about the company. In addition, your appearance and personal confidence may require preparation.

The interview. The actual meeting between you and a prospective employer can take place on one or more occasions. At the interview(s), you will be asked to discuss various aspects of your background and your plans for the future. You will also be expected to ask intelligent questions about the company and the specific position you are interviewing for.

Follow-up activities. After an interview, your acknowledgment that the company has considered you is always appropriate.

7. Accepting a Job (Section 4)

Once you are offered employment, should you quickly grab the opportunity? Not necessarily! You will need to consider several factors, including salary, benefits, working conditions, level of responsibility, and potential for advancement. You should also take your career goal into account when deciding whether to accept a job offer. Will the position meet your desires for the immediate future?

8. Career Success and Re-evaluation (Section 4)

As your working life progresses, you will experience successes, as well as various challenges and crises. As you gain experience, your interests, abilities, and goals may change. At any point in time, you must be ready, willing, and able to repeat the career-planning process outlined above. An attitude of continual re-evaluation can lead to a life of career successes and personal satisfaction.

ASSESSING YOUR OCCUPATIONAL PREFERENCE

Some people grow up with a very clear idea of the career they want, and they plan to achieve it from an early age. However, you may be one of the many others who are less certain about their career goals and preferences. After all, there are many occupations to choose among, and although you think you *might* like a certain career, you don't really know enough about the field to commit yourself to it.

Selecting a career is a difficult but necessary step on the path toward professional self-fulfillment. Although no guide can tell you exactly what field is the right one for you to enter, some resources are available to help point you in the right direction.

The Self-Directed Search, by John L. Holland, Ph.D., is a self-assessment inventory that allows you to evaluate your likes, abilities, and occupational preferences and then match these up against real careers. Psychological Assessment Resources, Inc., P. O. Box 998, Odessa, FL 33556.

What Color Is Your Parachute: A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career-Changers, by Richard N. Bolles, is widely acclaimed as a guide to choosing a career (and, ultimately, finding a job). The book is revised every year, with suggestions and information provided by readers. Ten-Speed Press, Box 7123, Berkeley, CA 94707.

Wishcraft—How to Get What You Really Want, by Barbara Sher, also offers sound advice in assessing your strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes. Ballantine Books, 201 E. 50th Street, New York, NY 10022.

Another resource is *The Truth About You: What You Should Be Doing With Your Life*, by Arthur F. Miller and Ralph T. Mattson. Ten-Speed Press.

TIME TO GET STARTED!

Your employment potential and career success will depend on your attitudes, efforts, and skills. This planning guide is a tool that you can use to achieve your individual career goal.

ALWAYS REMEMBER Only you can determine if you will be successful in the career which you select to pursue.

SECTION 2



Your Career Plan—A Ticket to Success

If you were to ask several people how they got their current job, you would probably get a wide range of answers. There is no single correct career-planning process. Rather, for any individual, this process will be affected by personal interests, geographic location, and educational experiences, as well as overall economic conditions.

But regardless of your background, you should devote an extensive amount of effort to your job search. After all, you are making a decision that you will have to live with for a period of time. This section of the career guide will help you to set goals, research the job market, identify career opportunities, and develop your employment skills.

FINDING YOUR "DREAM JOB"

Career counselors suggest the following when selecting a career:

- 1. Don't think only of money. Many factors—including responsibility, recognition, challenging work, and pleasant co-workers—lead to job satisfaction.
- 2. Consider the location. Where you live and your travel time are important. Relocating for a job (and being away from friends and family) can be unpleasant.
- 3. Learn to handle stress. Every job has certain pressures. Viewing a work problem as a new challenge can help to minimize a stressful situation.
- 4. Maintain flexibility. Be ready to change. New responsibilities, supervisors, and working conditions will be a constant part of your career. By adapting to these changes successfully, you will always have the potential for an enjoyable working life.

ALWAYS REMEMBER There is no best plan, but "you gotta have a plan!"

SETTING A CAREER GOAL

Your job search must be preceded by the determination of a career objective. A career goal should be as specific as possible; it should include all or most of the following items:

The working conditions you desire.

The salary level needed to satisfy you.

The skills and types of knowledge you want to use.

The size and location of organization that is best for you.

The amount of responsibility you want to assume.

The opportunities for advancement.

The types of colleagues with whom you want to work.

While a career objective is only one type of lifetime goal, it is a factor that will influence every aspect of your existence.

A PERSON DOES NOT LIVE BY WORK ALONE

Work is just one aspect of your personal goal setting. Every person has to make decisions regarding the following aspects of life:

- 1. Personal/family. To what extent will my parents, spouse, and children be a part of my life?
- 2. Mental/educational. How much formal schooling and supplementary learning do I want?
- 3. Career/financial. How important will money and my work be in my life?
- 4. Health/physical. Will I make an effort to keep in shape?
- 5. Social/cultural. What will be the roles of friends and of recreational activities in my life?
- 6. Ethical/moral. What beliefs will guide my life?

The decisions and trade-offs you make in each of these areas will affect your happiness and sense of fulfillment.

(Do Career Exercise 1, "Developing a Career Goal," p. 15.)

ALWAYS REMEMBER Without a goal, you may end up somewhere you don't want to be.

CAREER PLANNING MISTAKES

As your career search progresses, problems will arise. Your awareness of potential difficulties can help to minimize them. Some of the most frequent job-hunting errors are:

- 1. Not having a plan. A clear direction for your career goal is a necessity.
- 2. Failing to inform others of your search. You should not be the only one to know about your career goal. Tell others about your efforts and employment interests.
- 3. Limiting yourself to your "major field." Many competencies are transferable to other careers. Look at your overall abilities rather than your skills in one specific career area.
- 4. Looking for the perfect job. You must be willing to adapt your career goal to the current job market.
- 5. Using a conventional approach. Don't spend too much time answering classified ads. Most jobs are obtained through contacts. Also, make every effort to set yourself apart from the hundreds of people competing for the same job.
- 6. Giving up too soon. Don't be discouraged by rejection. The next interview could be the job offer you have been waiting for. Success is more often the result of effort than of luck.

SOURCES OF CAREER INFORMATION

One vital component of career planning is gaining information about both existing employment opportunities and prospects for the future. Happily, there is a wealth of comprehensive information available on career education, in the form of secondary sources (published materials and mass media) and primary sources (direct contact with companies and working people).

Secondary Sources

Libraries. Most school and public libraries have an extensive collection of career-education materials. Many reference volumes, kits, pamphlets, and periodicals dealing with careers are available. In fact, libraries often set aside a specific career information area.

Government publications. The federal government publishes a great number of career-information materials. The most helpful of these is the Occupational Outlook Handbook, which provides detailed information about hundreds of careers.

THE OCCUPATIONAL OUTLOOK HANDBOOK

The Occupational Outlook Handbook is published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor. This publication provides detailed information on more than 250 job categories and is updated regularly. Specific information about these careers includes the following:

Nature of the work - provides a basic description regarding what people do on the job.

Working conditions - discusses hours, physical demands, safety, and location.

Employment — presents data on the number of people currently employed in the field, what geographic areas they work in, and potential for part-time workers.

Training, other qualifications, and advancement—includes detailed information about required educational levels, certification procedures (when appropriate), career growth, and potential for moving into other career areas.

Job outlook - provides information about future employment prospects.

Earnings - includes current salary levels for beginning and experienced workers in the field.

Related occupations - provides cross-references to other jobs.

Sources of additional information — lists names and addresses of associations, government agencies, unions, and other organizations related to the career.

The Occupational Outlook Handbook is available in most public and school libraries. For further information, contact the Office of Economic Growth, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Department of Labor, 441 G Street, NW, Room 4860, Washington, DC 20212. The Handbook may be purchased from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. Also available is the Occupational Outlook Quarterly, which updates the Handbook four times a year. Subscriptions are available through the U.S. Government Printing Office.

Other popular career materials published by the federal government include the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* and the *Occupational Outlook Quarterly*. These are available from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, a division of the Department of Labor. State agencies also distribute career information materials.

Mass media. Most newspapers have regular sections or feature columns devoted to career planning and job opportunities. These articles are a valuable up-to-the-minute source of employment information. Several magazines regularly carry articles on careers (see Appendix for list), and television and radio news features are also good sources of career information.

Professional organizations. Every career field has at least one organization that promotes its interests. In addition to providing professional growth opportunities for current workers, these groups assist interested prospective colleagues. Seminars, conferences, and publications are the basis of career development materials. Two examples are Careers in Marketing, published by the American Marketing Association, and Careers in Finance, a service of the Financial Management Association. (See Appendix for a listing of selected professional organizations.)

Primary Sources

Working people. Personal contacts can be one of the most valuable sources of career information. Friends, relatives, and other acquaintances can shed light on employment situations. Most people are willing to share their work experiences, but be sure to schedule your visit at a convenient time for your contact.

Company contacts. Many businesses offer career-planning information to prospective employees. These materials contain information about the specific company as well as the career field in general. These publications can be especially valuable if you are considering applying to a particular company. A directory of U.S. corporations, such as the Standard and Poor's Register of Corporations, Dun and Bradstreet Directory, or Thomas' Register, can help you find the addresses of major businesses.

(Do Career Exercise 2, "Researching a Career Field," p. 16.)

ALWAYS REMEMBER Knowledge is power; information about a career field gives you an advantage for getting a job.

OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORIES

The Census Bureau no longer uses the terms "blue-collar" and "white-collar" workers to classify occupations. As of the 1980 census, the following categories are being used:

Managerial and professional specialty—includes executives, administrative personnel, managers, and professionals such as accountants, doctors, and lawyers.

Technical, sales, and administrative support—includes computer-related careers, marketing and sales personnel, and clerical employees.

Service occupations - refers to household-service employees, security personnel, and other service workers.

Precision production, craft, and repair - includes jobs related to manufacturing and maintenance.

Operators, fabricators, and laborers — includes machine operators, material handlers, transportation workers, and manual laborers.

Farming, forestry, and fishing – refers to people who work directly with natural resources.

IDENTIFYING CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Most available jobs are not advertised. In fact, many employment opportunities exist only as a plan in a manager's mind. Therefore, you must be willing to explore the market using sources of employment that may not be obvious to most job hunters.

Personal Contacts

As we have just discussed, a network of friends, relatives, and current co-workers can form a strong foundation for your job search. Make your skills and availability known to others. (A more in-depth discussion of developing contacts is presented later.)

Academic Contacts

Your college houses some of the most valuable sources of employment opportunities. Teachers, counselors, and the campus placement center frequently have leads about available jobs in various fields. Let these sources know about your interests and abilities.

Campus recruiters are a useful source of career opportunities. Visits with these prospective employers can give you an idea of your potential with a specific company or career field. Recruiters usually have a good knowledge of the current job market. Opportunities that are not yet advertised may be yours for the price of saying hello.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN SMALL BUSINESS

Several government and private reports estimate that more than 70 percent of all new jobs are in businesses with fewer than twenty employees. Based on Small Business Administration guidelines, more than 95 percent of the companies in the United States are small businesses. This indicates vast opportunities for those who desire small-business employment. Before making this career direction, though, you should consider the following:

Advantages of a Small-Business Career

You can directly affect the success of a company.

You can become involved in all aspects of the business.

You have personal contact with employees, customers, and suppliers.

There is relative flexibility of hours, working conditions, and career emphasis.

Disadyantages of a Small-Business Career

Individual pressure and job stress may be strong.

Poor economic conditions affect small businesses faster than they affect larger organizations.

Future career options may be limited.

Employee benefits may not be as generous as in a large company.

A small-business owner cannot call in sick or take vacations as easily as an employee of a large firm can. The best sources of jobs in small business are bankers, community organizations, and the local newspapers.

Business and Community Organizations

Membership in professional or civic organizations is an important source of job leads. Colleagues in your area of interest can frequently give you advance notice of job opportunities. The Chamber of Commerce, local chapters of labor unions, and other community groups are also sources of career information.

Media Sources

While classified ads are not always the best source of available jobs, they should not be overlooked. Major newspapers (Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Chicago Tribune, Los Angeles Times) have extensive listings of job opportunities. Other useful sources of classified ads are professional periodicals and trade journals such as Marketing News and Advertising Age.

News stories in the media can also provide leads for potential jobs. Newspaper, radio, and television coverage of planned business expansions or company relocations can be valuable career information, for example.

Employment Agencies

Agencies with listings of many available jobs are another good career source. There are basically two types of employment agencies: private agencies (for-profit organizations) and public employment services, which are government-supported programs designed to bring employers and employees together. Check the listings in your local telephone directory under "State Employment Service" or "State Department of Labor" for the public agencies in your area.

USING A PRIVATE EMPLOYMENT AGENCY

People often use employment agencies, which are for-profit businesses, to find a job. However, agencies should be used with care. When assessing an employment agency, consider the following:

Positive Aspects

The agency probably has contacts within certain career fields.

Career counseling may be provided as a part of the agency's service.

An employment agency can reduce your job search time and effort.

Many companies list available jobs with employment agencies.

Cautions

The agency's fee may be charged to you. (Quite often, though, the fee is paid by the hiring company.)

The agency may be more concerned with just getting you a job than with helping you toward a career goal.

Beware of agencies that "guarantee" a job.

Read and understand the contract before signing.

Be sure that the agency is licensed and meets state government regulations.

For further information, contact the National Employment Association, 2000 K Street, NW, Washington, DC 20006.

Your Personal Efforts and Interests

There are an unlimited number of techniques for finding job leads. Two important ones are:

Company contacts. Direct communication of your interest in employment to a business can be a valuable method of job hunting. A well-written and researched letter can be an effective "foot in the door" with a company that appeals to you.

Extracurricular interests. Your hobbies, clubs, and other extracurricular activities can form the basis for a career. People you see at activity meetings can provide job leads, possibly resulting in employment in an area that you especially enjoy.

(Do Career Exercise 3, "Assessing Job Opportunities," p. 17.)

ALWAYS REMEMBER Job leads can come from some very unexpected sources.

BUSINESS JOBS OUTSIDE BUSINESS

Business students need not go on to work for a corporation or other for-profit organization. Accountants, computer operators, financial managers, marketing directors, office managers, purchasing agents, and public-relations coordinators are also needed in the following areas:

Public administration. Federal, state, and local government offices require large numbers of employees to perform public services.

Nonprofit organizations. Charitable, religious, professional, educational, and labor associations offer a variety of career options.

Health care. Hospitals, clinics, and medical practices require the efforts of financial and administrative office support.

MAKING AND USING CAREER CONTACTS

While various social changes have made the statement "It's not what you know; it's who you know" less true, personal contacts are still vital to career development. A good network of contacts can serve you throughout your entire working life.

Benefits of Having Contacts

Since most available jobs are not advertised, contacts are a vital source of employment leads. The people who can tell you about trends, people who hire, and job openings in your field are the people you want to know.

Sources of Contacts

Developing your own network of people in your chosen career field should be an ongoing process drawing on various sources. One person in your career area will mention someone else you should talk to, and your network begins to develop.

You must continually try to expand your circle of acquaintances. Attend meetings, volunteer your time and effort in activities you enjoy, and call on previously developed contacts. These are just a few of the techniques you can use to update and expand your personal career network.

Personal acquaintances. Friends, relatives, and neighbors are a natural starting point for building your career network. Don't overlook former employers, co-workers, church members, and fraternal organization acquaintances.

Professional organizations. Associations of people involved in the same career area are a strong contact source. Membership in such an organization, attendance at its meetings, and involvement in its activities will usually lead to professional contacts.

Campus activities. Talking to guest speakers and participating in fundraising efforts and other school programs can result in career contacts. Campus recruiters from businesses may become professional contacts.

How to Use Contacts

Your initial efforts should be aimed at identifying people who actually do the hiring. Your first contacts may not hire; they should be able to tell you about job openings, refer to those who do hire, and inform you about company activities and industry trends.

Whenever speaking to a contact, make clear that you are asking only for information, not for a job. While a job may result, you should not put pressure on a contact who may not be in a position to offer you one.

Developing and using contacts should not stop after you land a job. Your personal career network should be of value throughout your working life. Keep a contact information file, and continually update names, companies, job titles, and other information about your contacts. Your file must be current to be helpful.

(Do Career Exercise 4, "Developing Career Contacts," p. 18.)

ALWAYS REMEMBER Every person you meet is one more possible career contact.