

The CAREER FITNESS PROGRAM

EXERCISING YOUR OPTIONS

FIFTH EDITION



SUKIENNIK • BENDAT • RAUFMAN

The **CAREER
FITNESS
PROGRAM**
EXERCISING YOUR OPTIONS

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Introduction

On Your Mark . . .

Get Set . . .

The world of work is spinning at a dizzying pace. As we approach the new millennium the job market is more unpredictable than ever. Companies are downsizing, rightsizing, restructuring, outsourcing, and undergoing radical technological change. Bigger mega-mergers are occurring and more small businesses are being created. The globalization of industries and organizations presents us with competitive challenges and unprecedented opportunities. You can benefit from becoming aware of the changing job market, by keeping up with trends and identifying how they fit your personal preferences. Six major trends are shaping the workplace:

1. The majority of jobs are created by small businesses employing fewer than 50 employees.
2. The traditional hierarchical organization is changing into a variety of forms with a “flat” (reduced middle management) organizational chart becoming more common. Flexible networking of specialists who come together for a short-term project, then reform into a new group for the next project will be commonplace. (See the discussion of the virtual workplace in Chapter 6.)
3. Smaller companies are able to expand and contract with the changing economy by increasingly employing temporary and contract employees.
4. Just as manufacturing used to be our mainstay, we are now considered a “service economy” that depends on “knowledge workers.” (See Chapter 6: “the learning organization” and “knowledge workers.”)
5. Lifelong learning is the rule; getting a degree to get a job may get you an entree into a company, but if you don’t continually upgrade your knowledge you will lose your competitive edge. The winners are rethinking, reinventing, and re-engineering products, ideas, and services to meet continually changing needs.
6. Global competition and multinational corporations will influence more and more companies. The most valuable employee will be the one most familiar with several languages and cultural customs. The number of women and immigrants will continue to increase in the workforce.

Trends

A broad rainbow of possibilities makes this an exciting time in history. Yet many of us are overwhelmed by lack of knowledge about our choices and our place and purpose in the world. One thing that is certain is change. It is essential to prepare ourselves to expect change, accept it, and plan for it. We can best prepare for it by learning “who we are” in terms of lifetime goals and by

Understanding the
process of career
planning

taking responsibility for shaping our lives. As we gain information about ourselves and begin to make our own decisions, we acquire self-confidence. In a deep, personal way we begin to realize that no matter how drastically the world changes, we can deal with it.

The expectations and demands of today's job market require us to be physically agile, mentally alert, and psychologically able. *The Career Fitness Program* will prepare you to exercise your options whether you are planning for your first job, reentering the workforce, or recareering. This program will help you build the mental stamina and psychological strength you need to be successful and satisfied today. You will also develop the mind-set and acquire the tools for continuing success despite the inevitable surprises and challenges that will face you. *The Career Fitness Program* is designed to assist you in the process of self-discovery and realization. The main goal of this book is to lead you through the process of career planning, which includes self-assessment, decision making, and job search strategy; our primary objective is to assist you in making satisfying career choices. By following our chapter-by-chapter program, you will learn more about yourself and how self-knowledge relates to your emerging career plan.

Let's review the contents of this book to see how it will help you achieve your career goals. The career-planning process is divided into two main parts: personal assessment and career exploration, Chapters One–Eight, and job search strategy, Chapters Nine–Eleven.

- In Chapter One, you will come to understand how the process of self-assessment *begins* the process of career planning. You will explore the concept of *life stages* and give thought to your current life stage. Chapter One also discusses the difference between a job and a career.
- In Chapter Two, you will learn how building self-esteem greatly affects your actions. This chapter's goal is to help you develop a positive approach to life and career planning.
- In Chapter Three, you will identify your needs, wants, and values and explore how they influence your career choice.
- In Chapter Four, you will develop an understanding of and appreciation for your unique personality and interests—factors that will influence your career choice.
- In Chapter Five, you will learn about different types of skills; you will learn to identify and describe your own skills with job requirements in mind.
- In Chapter Six, you will explore societal and cultural norms and biases that may affect your career choices. In this chapter you will also read about workplace trends, promising occupations, and salary predictions.
- In Chapter Seven, you will investigate published and computerized sources of information about careers and specific jobs, including government publications and Internet resources.
- In Chapter Eight, you will identify how people make decisions and learn how to improve your own decision-making skills. This process includes learning to set and pursue short- and long-term goals.
- In Chapter Nine, you will learn about job search strategies, including informational interviewing, networking, and electronic job search techniques.

- In Chapter Ten, you will write an effective resume and cover letter.
- In Chapter Eleven, you will prepare for job interviews. This chapter discusses all aspects of the interview process, includes sample questions that you may encounter, and advises you about handling illegal employer queries.

Even if you are not yet in the full-time job market, the job search strategy chapters (Nine–Eleven) will be a valuable resource for you now. If you are in school, planning to work part-time, already employed, or seeking an internship, you can begin to prepare your resume and practice interviewing skills.

THE PROCESS

In many ways, the process of preparing to meet job and career challenges is much like the process by which athletes prepare to meet the challenges of competition in their particular sport. It involves establishing a fitness program in which the competitor sharpens existing skills, adds needed skills, and, most important, develops a mental attitude of success.

Meeting the challenges

Any good fitness program is a combination of theory and exercise, and our career fitness program maintains this balance. For each step of the planning process, we will explain the theory behind that step, how it relates to the previous and next steps, and how it moves us closer to our final goal of identifying career options.

The chapters conclude with a series of exercises designed to bring each step of the process to life. These exercises will help make you more aware of your strengths, weaknesses, and attitudes, and they will also help you summarize what you think is important to remember after each chapter. Remember that reading a chapter or a book is a passive activity. However, responding to questions makes you an active participant in the career exploration process. You may find that it helps to share your answers with at least one other person; a classroom setting in which group discussion is encouraged is even better because it adds to your own awareness and perspective.

Becoming an active participant: commitment

It is easy for someone to sit back and read about career planning and simply agree with the text, theories, and exercises. *But until you make the commitment to actually get involved in the process, to actively participate, and to experience both progress and occasional discomfort along the way, you will not be able to reap the benefits of the process.*

THE CHALLENGE

Yes, we did mention the word *discomfort* just now. What do we mean by that? Anytime you begin a new physical exercise program, even if you start cautiously and sensibly in relation to your current level of activity, new muscles are stretched, and they let you know about it. They feel awkward. They ache. You become aware of parts of your body that you may never have noticed before. You can also expect this to happen in the process of career planning. Along the way, confusion and some discomfort may occur. We will ask questions to help you dig deep into yourself for answers. In this process of enhancing self-awareness, you will discover much about yourself that you like, as well as some things that you would like to change.

The process of change and personal growth

Because of this self-discovery process, at certain points along the way in our fitness plan you may feel a bit confused, a bit anxious, a bit impatient. All of these feelings are normal. When you start out on a physical fitness program you idealistically hope that in a week or two you will have the body that you visualize in your mind, even though you know realistically that developing a good physique is going to take a lot longer. Similarly, with your career plan you may begin to feel impatient and want things to move along more quickly or more clearly. It is important to remember that any change or growth typically includes some discomfort, uneasiness, or anxiety. Frankly, if you begin to experience some of those feelings, it is a good sign! It indicates that you are stretching, that you are growing, and that you are moving toward a newly developed awareness of who you are and how you relate to the world of work.

COMMITTING TO THE PROCESS

*Benefits of
perseverance
and belief*

Whether you are taking the time at the beginning of your adult career to carefully and thoroughly examine your options, or are finding at midlife it is time to explore new directions, you will reap tremendous benefits in the future. The satisfaction you experience at “the finish line” will be directly proportional to your willingness and ability to deal with the anxiety and uncertainty you will experience at some points in the career-planning process. In essence, the more you put into any activity, the more you are likely to get out of it. Stories that we have heard and read about our cultural heroes and heroines, whether athletes, performers, scientists, or political figures, tell us that the results they achieve, which look so easy and so glamorous, are always and only the consequence of tremendous sustained effort, commitment, and perseverance. A statement attributed to famed artist Michelangelo seems to say it all: “If people knew how hard I had to work to gain my mastery, it wouldn't seem so wonderful after all.”

Your career search requires a similar commitment. It requires your willingness to go with the process; to seek out specialized assistance; and to move through points of frustration, uncertainty, and confusion in the belief that you will come out with more awareness and a good sense of the next steps to take along your career path. We invite you to participate in an adventure and endeavor that are every bit as exciting and rewarding as preparing for the Olympics. You are identifying your own mountain peaks and are setting out to climb them. Among your resources is this career-planning textbook, which incorporates the insights and experience of the authors and other successful career planners over several decades. Most of all, the important attributes of your own spirit, vitality, and intuition, together with the desire to improve yourself, will serve you well throughout your search. This career fitness program will help you master the inevitable changes that occur within yourself and are associated with your evolving career choices and the work world around you. It will help you identify options that are consistent with who you are. It will enable you to be the champion of your own career.

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