

## **A Surefire Plan to Figure Out What You Really Want by Kathy Caprino**

From the feedback I receive from my Forbes, Huffington Post and AARP posts, I hear one type of comment over and over again, more than any other, and it goes something like this: “I just don’t know what I want. Despite all my efforts, I can’t figure out what I want to do.”

I find this fascinating - that so many Americans have lost touch with who and what they want to be professionally. I know – we like to blame the economy and our money problems for our unhappiness, but that’s not the root cause of this career malaise. There are other reasons for feeling disconnected from what you do for a living. Who would have believed that there could be millions of people working in jobs and careers they hate, not able to figure out how they want to be of service in the world?

Don’t get me wrong – I’m not judging anyone here, because this was me 12 years ago. I built an 18-year corporate career in publishing, marketing and membership services, and for most of it, I was outwardly successful. But throughout much of it, I was inwardly very unhappy and kept asking “Is this all there is? I loved my family life, but my corporate career was deeply unsatisfying and ended very badly. In short, I found my work lacking in any positive meaning or purpose, and I faced numerous challenges that later morphed into significant crises. Despite my efforts to determine what else I should do professionally (I saw a therapist and career counselor, took costly quantitative assessment tests [which I’m not a fan of, by the way], etc.), I could not find a way. I finally did figure it out and forged a very fulfilling new path, but it took years and some very costly missteps.

Now, after 10 years of serving as career coach and trainer helping professional women advance in business and build more satisfying careers, I’ve learned more about why people are so resistant to career change. And I’ve created a model for change to help professionals build a career that delivers both the “essence” of what makes them happy, along with the right “form” of it to suit their financial needs, values, life intentions, standards of integrity and more.

So how do we do it? What are the six keys to figuring out what you really want?

1) Hoist yourself out of the tiny box you’re trapped in

All people who are stuck feel this way because they’ve made some costly or rigid assumptions about what they need to be happy or what they’re capable of creating. These assumptions (often unconscious) keep them trapped in a tight little box with a lid that won’t budge.

Some of these limiting assumptions are:

- I need to earn \$XXXXXX to live the life I want
- My marriage or family won’t survive my making this change
- I’ll be too old by the time I make this change
- I don’t have what it takes to reinvent myself or even repurpose what I do
- I’m a loser and a failure – I can’t compete

- I'm too unskilled or out of touch with current trends
- I have nothing important to offer
- I'm not special
- I'm too beat up and burnt out
- Nothing else will be better

How can you get out of the box?

Well, certainly not by yourself. You simply can't identify your special talents, capabilities and potential alone and in a vacuum. You've got to involve someone else in the discussion about your life, and make it someone you respect, who's knowledgeable, successful and fulfilled in what they do, and who doesn't have an agenda about where you net out. Find someone today who can mentor, advise or coach you about what's possible, and help you see what's holding you back from identifying the power you have to make a difference, and the vast number of options that are truly available to you.

If you're trying to do this all by yourself, you just won't make headway. We can't solve a problem on the level it was created.

2) Don't throw the baby out – look at what IS working along with what IS NOT

Many people wake up in midlife and realize that their careers are dissatisfying and unsuccessful, and they're so upset about it, they want to chuck the whole thing out. Don't make that mistake. Conduct a thorough assessment of what you would like to preserve and maintain in your current career, and get rid of only the parts that make you feel angry, sad, frustrated, and thwarted. After all, you've been in this career for some time now – it's not all bad. You were attracted to it once, and you are utilizing some talents and skills that you want to continue to draw on.

As an example, I spent years as a copywriter and marketing professional in publishing. I didn't enjoy writing copy for scientific books and journals, but I was good at it. Now, I use all of those copywriting skills daily (and enjoy them), for my own business, and as a marketing consultant helping career women, entrepreneurs and small businesses promote their brands and services.

3) Address your problems now, before making a change

I make this a mandate in the career coaching work I do – that the client begin today to address and resolve what's making them miserable in the current job or career before they leap. Until you feel more empowered and become more controlled, authoritative, and masterful in your current situation, you can't expect to attract a better situation in the next chapter. You've got to do the inner and outer work to earn a "fantastic" career – it's not just going to fall in your lap.

I've found that once my clients do the work to address their problems in the current situation (such as terrible bosses, or cut-throat competition), their challenges tend to evaporate and often they don't need to leap to something completely different.

#### 4) Develop a supportive network and community that loves you

At the risk of sounding like a broken record, the reality is that you cannot get where you want to in life and work if you don't have help. No matter where you are in your career, you need people to help you launch to the next level. Start building a more powerful network of loyal colleagues who admire and appreciate you and would be more than happy to help you do what you want. There are many ways to develop a community that will support you, including utilizing LinkedIn fully, offering endorsements and testimonials to people you respect, attending association and networking meetings of professionals in your field, reaching out to former colleagues who you admire, taking a class with other exciting, like-minded professionals, and the list goes on.

#### 5) Build your personal brand and tell your story well

Before you can figure out what you really want and get it, you have to know who you are and tell a compelling story about yourself. Of the thousands of professionals I meet and work with each year, only a tiny fraction can answer these questions in a compelling and engaging way:

- What are you known for, and fabulous at?
- What do you offer and do that is significantly different from what the best in your field do?
- What were you noticed for back when you were a teen and young adult?
- What skills, talents, abilities make you stand out?
- What life experiences have shaped you in special ways?
- What are your Life Intentions?
- What are your core values – the non-negotiables you need in life to be happy and fulfilled?
- Whom do you love to serve and support, and why?
- When you're 90 years old looking back, what do you want to have given, contributed, stood for and achieved?

If you can't answer these questions, you won't figure out what you really want because you just don't know yourself well enough and others won't know how to help you.

#### 6) Now...connect the dots

After you've done all this work, it's time to connect the dots (listen to the amazing Steve Jobs TED Talk about how to live before you die and "connect the dots"). Figure out what paths will truly make sense for who you are and what you want to achieve in life.

Gain clarity about the best path for you by conducting online, offline, passive and active (in-person) research, to answer these critical questions:

What are my passions, and which of these make sense as a livelihood and which are better as hobbies?

Based on the passions, talents and skills I have, what are the careers best suited to me?

What are all the factors I need to address in planning my next direction (money, timing, energy, geography, family needs, support, enjoyment, health, etc.)

Am I making any erroneous assumptions about myself and my life that I need to rethink?

Do I know what it takes to be successful in this new direction, and am I committed to it 100%?

Do I really want to start my own business, or am I just running away from something?

How will I fund my career change or transition?

Where will I find the ongoing support I need?

Don't make the same huge blunders that so many career changers make. Do the inner and outer work required to 1) discover who you are and what really matters to you, 2) overcome the obstacles in the way of your success, and 3) identify and "try on" the paths that make the most sense for you and your life.