

TEN WAYS TO THINK ABOUT WORK

By Skip Sturman, Director of Career Services
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The choice of an occupation remains one of life's great mysteries. Somehow, after 22 years of "seemingly unprofitable meandering" (to coin John Gardner's phrase), upon graduation one is expected to suddenly chart a clear course for the future. Well-meaning parents and relatives often complicate matters by trying to spur things along, forgetting or repressing the confusion that surrounded their own career choice(s) many years ago.

So how should you think about work, besides endlessly or not at all? As both a parent and a career counselor, I would encourage you to think about it:

- SELFISHLY**: Selfishly, in the sense that it is really your own choice. You should be seeking your own pleasure and indulging your own passions when it comes to work. There is little point in satisfying others if the high cost you pay is your own misery.
- RESPECTFULLY**: Respectfully, in the sense that, having counseled you to find your own path, you must still acknowledge the enormous investment that others, particularly parents, have made in your education. Often they have invested their savings and hopes and dreams in your choice of an occupation. Listen to their advice and counsel.
- PURPOSEFULLY**: You are not making a lifetime decision nor an irrevocable one since you may expect to hold as many as 6-10 jobs in the course of your career. Still, you owe it to yourself to make your initial choice, purposefully, based on a careful assessment of your strengths and weaknesses. Most importantly, as you think about work, you should identify at least five baseline needs that have to be met in order for you to be happy.
- HONESTLY**: It does little good for you to sell yourself and others a bill of goods. No one else, including your peers, can determine for you what is important to you. If making gobs of money is your *sine qua non*, go for it! So, too, if 'prestige' or 'name recognition' means a great deal to you, admit it to yourself but do recognize that there really is no such thing as an Ivy League of Work.
- REALISTICALLY**: Realistically, in the sense that the vagaries of the job market may make it impossible for you to find work straight out of college that meets all your needs. Think long and hard about which needs –be it for high income or varied tasks or significant independent responsibility- can be compromised in the short term or better satisfied avocationally than vocationally.
- OPPORTUNISTICALLY**: As hockey great Wayne Gretzky is purported to have said, "Skate to where the puck is going, not where it is". Meaning? Meaning that jobs that once appeared abundant are contracting while others that once appeared to be contracting (e.g. federal government jobs) are growing once again. Don't limit your horizons to the puck that is fed to your stick here at Dartmouth. You do yourself (and society) a disservice by

concentrating *all* of your talents and energies in pursuit of the highly visible opportunities represented on campus while ignoring the vast constellation of emerging career opportunities just out of view.

•**SHORTSIGHTEDLY:** No sense in focusing on distant objects when the work you choose post-graduation is likely to be of short duration, be it 1, 2 or 3 years. Be prepared, as most alums have discovered, for a series of zigs and zags, chutes and ladders, that will lead you by circuitous routes to unanticipated destinations. By all means, determine a lifetime goal because, to quote a book title, “If You Don’t Know Where You Are Going, You Will Probably End Up Somewhere Else”. But, be prepared to end up somewhere else regardless.

HUMBLY: In thinking about work, remember Former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir’s words of wisdom: “Don’t be so humble, you are not that great”. With all due respect to the Prime Minister, you *are* that great but you will inevitably be humbled during the job search process. Think about work as the equivalent of running a gauntlet. Know in the end that you will emerge triumphant if you just manage to stay on your feet and keep moving forward.

COMPASSIONATELY: Not everyone has to become Mother Teresa but everyone has the opportunity to be a force for positive change through their work. As Ben Cohen (of Ben & Jerry’s fame) once exhorted people in my profession: “Let’s expose the myth that a business cannot afford to care about the community and be profitable at the same time. Let’s show our students what is possible and let them demand that the companies that they work for integrate the needs of the community into their business practices.”

JOYOUSLY: And, finally, think about work, joyously. As the bumper sticker says, “If it’s not fun, why do it?”