You have many demands on your time and although your career is clearly an important part of your future, most students procrastinate and postpone putting time into their career development. Your career success is an incredibly daunting and challenging issue and it is normal that you would want to postpone something like this until the last moment, where you either have much more information or someone miraculously provides you with the opportunity of your dreams.
I was working with a student about his career direction and trying to help him identify the career role that would be a great fit for him. We spoke at length and I could tell he was struggling to find that perfect role. He was clearly feeling the pressure of this basic career question.

He spoke to me about several things he absolutely did not want to do in his job when he graduated with his undergrad business degree. These items were:

- Did not want to work in a large company environment
- Did not want to work in a heavily financial-based industry
- Did not want to work exclusively indoors
- Did not want to be sitting in front of a computer screen or on the phone all day
- Did not want to work 65 hours a week

He also said there were things he wanted to do:

- He did want to help others and make a difference
- He did want to earn a decent salary, however money was not the most important thing
- He did want to know that his work was appreciated and others sought him for support
- He did want to work outdoors at least a portion of time
- He did want to have beneficial training and development and be a recognized subject matter expert within his area of responsibility.

I had the benefit of knowing this student personally. If I had not known this student and had only taken his input at face value in order to solve the career role challenge question, I might have suggested the perfect role for him would be a forest ranger in a national forest/park, a store manager in a sporting goods or outdoors-based retail environment or some type of career in a nonprofit or government role. However, buried deeply within this student was his core interest, which was to make a difference in others as well as to be recognized as the go-to person for help and support.
The irony of this story is this student accepted a job with a firm that IS a large company and IS in the financial industry. His job IS in a corporate role and he IS in a cubicle and in front of a computer on the phone the majority of his day. His job is Client Relations Coordinator and he loves it. The company he works for has strong faith values and cares deeply about their clients. He is well trained and is the first point of contact to people who have a problem. He is the subject matter expert and he is completely energized by making a difference to the people he interacts with.

Let’s look back at what he wanted originally. If I would have asked him to focus on this job type and to actively apply for it and others like it, he would have fought mightily against it. The reason he would have fought against it is because it was all the things he thought he didn’t want in a job. Yet, after learning more about it and accepting the job, it was truly the right fit.

Does this mean that you should just forget any career direction and jump at the first opportunity that comes your way? Absolutely not. But you should have an attitude of flexibility and curiosity. Do not become so wrapped up on what is your perfect career role that you miss opportunities that you will enjoy. After all, we learn far more from having taken the journey than just being at the destination.

The more you understand about your core interest, the better you can position yourself for opportunities. Seek ways to stretch yourself and to push yourself to learn more about what you like and what you do not like. Have an attitude of adventure and curiosity. Students who have this attitude have a much better chance of career satisfaction and enjoyment.

Take heart if you are nervous, anxious, and prone to procrastination due to your fears of potential failure or making a bad career decision. Understanding what really drives you and being open to challenges will help you position yourself for success. Going through this college career survival guide will help you with the fundamentals to discover those core interests and to turn them into a bridge to your career success.
I cannot think of many items more important to your professional development than clarity on your career dreams and a game plan to make those dreams a reality. With that said, let’s look at the practical aspect of your college career.

For the most part you, or your parents, are paying a large sum of money and you are dedicating years of your life to a process that, on one hand can create incredible fulfillment of your life dreams or on the other hand, can create a huge amount of stress and frustration as you worry about what you are going to do when you graduate. Many college graduates fall into the stressed, frustrated, underemployed, seriously unprepared, or unemployed category. It’s a sad statistic considering how much time you will spend in your career over your lifetime. What is sadder is when you realize the potential impact and difference it can make if you are prepared, informed, and accountable. Spending just a few hours a week can be a game changer with respect to realizing your career dreams. Unfortunately, students don’t make their career management a priority nor do they take advantage of all the career resources that they have available to them at their colleges/universities. Why is that?

Possible answers:

(A) The career resources seem outdated and ineffective.
(B) Students think they do not have the time to utilize the resources because of other commitments or demands.
(C) The student has a multimillion dollar trust fund, so why worry?
(D) The student is planning to make their career a priority as they get closer to graduation.

The answer most selected is B, followed by D.

Let’s dive deeper into your career and college. What is your purpose of going to college? You know you need a college degree to have an improved chance of financial security, but have you honestly researched the career or industry projections in your major field of study? Why are you taking that core class or that elective and why are you enrolled in that major? What
Chapter One Understanding the Career Development Process

is holding you back from having more career awareness and personal accountability? You are ultimately going to be the one that enjoys or that is frustrated by the opportunities that present themselves for an internship or a full-time position once you graduate. You should know or at least have an interest in the industry trends or career projections in your degree field.

My hope is that when you finish this book you will have a much better perspective on your overall career management. You will also better understand the following “questions” and “answers.”

**Q:** “When I get my degree, what do I want to do for the rest of my life?”

**A:** The answer to this is incredibly hard and isn’t specific to job role, company of interest or industry field. It is an answer of attitude.

**Q:** “Am I preparing myself for success and self-reliance or am I assuming that my career is just going to work out?”

**A:** While the opportunities for college graduates are increasing in most areas and the potential for professional success is as great as it has been since the economic crash in 2008, the majority of students do not take their career interests or career preparation seriously. Nor do they take advantage of the career potential in the improving professional job market.

To be clear, this book will do you no good sitting on your shelf or sitting in your computer’s hard drive if you don’t honestly make an effort to become more informed about your career and the challenges you will likely face. I want you to understand your potential as well as your need to be personally accountable. To realize your potential you need an honest, straightforward understanding of the career process. This book is your career survival guide and it will help you navigate through the confusion, chaos, and uncertainty of your academic and early professional development.
In order to give you a road map of what to expect with this book and to prepare you accordingly for career success, we segmented the career management process to seven (7) basic career processes.

1) **Understand your interests, your motivation, what drives you and what interests you.**

This discovery process can be assisted by many of the self-assessment tests that are available today. Fortunately, there are numerous Web-based, free or low-cost self-assessments which I would certainly encourage you to try. However, if I was to pick one career assessment tool for college students, it would be CareerLeader. It is not free, but it is reasonable and it is comprehensive. The CareerLeader orientation presentation would tell you that the self-assessment tool is recognized by its ability to identify your core interests, abilities, skills, and motivations as well as identify career paths you will likely enjoy and find success. In addition, the assessment identifies the company organizational culture or environment that you will likely enjoy. It also alerts you to potential career issues where you may have shortcomings. CareerLeader is a great tool and if your university does not provide access to you, it would be worthwhile for you to engage it on your own.

With many of the students I work with, the CareerLeader assessment highlights areas they thought they might be strong in and gives them additional confidence to pursue these areas. It also refines their understanding of the major drivers in their career satisfaction. Think of this stage as a gap analysis. You gain an understanding of where you are and you gain clarity on where you want to be. You also understand the gap between where you are and where you want to be and what is required to turn that gap into a bridge. I consider this step one of the most critical parts of your career development. I know for sure it is probably what many of you struggle with the most. Do not panic, we will go deeper into this section in later chapters.
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It is my hope that you come away from these career tools with a much greater sense of clarity and understanding about yourself and how to target careers that will energize you and give you a renewed purpose for making that potential commute to work and back each day.

2) Target career areas of interest through research.

This becomes especially challenging when you consider (for the most part) that you have no professional experience in the areas you “think” you are interested in. This would be similar to ordering food from a menu that is written in a foreign language you do not understand. You honestly have no idea what you are ordering until it arrives at your table. You truly do not know if you ordered the house special or something better served on a reality TV show.

Consider your background and work history as again, you most likely have little or no professional experience in the specific career area in which you think you are interested. You want to be a teacher, accountant, coach, CEO, physician, marketing manager, project leader, scientist, biologist, politician, salesman, preacher, entrepreneur, and so on yet, honestly, you really do not know a thing about these roles. How are you going to select something to spend the rest of your life doing when you have actually never done it before? Align yourself to your interests and start there.
In addition to the uncertainty of your career direction, what about the constantly changing job market, highly volatile economy, and the fact that much of your potential job satisfaction could be lost when either the boss you really enjoy working for goes to another company or the group you love to work with is reorganized due to the latest corporate merger and acquisition (M&A). There was even a time where individuals went to work for the government or in education because they felt that was a very steady and stable environment. We know now that the government can actually be downsized and school systems can have their budgets slashed. The only thing that we can depend on in the future is change. I know this does not give you a sense of comfort, but hang in there it will get better. I, for one, believe you are far better knowing what to expect when you graduate because you can prepare for it.

So how do you select a career with so many unknowns? You more than likely do not know what you want to do and you, for sure, cannot predict the future; so how do you select your career area of interest? The answer to that is to research career areas and become much more informed on the future development in the fields of interest that you have. In addition, be willing and committed to work a little each day to broaden your employable skills. Continue to develop, evolve, and adapt. I could give you several career fields that are in high demand today such as oil/gas, information systems, or healthcare consulting, but there are no guarantees these will be booming when you graduate. Also, what might be booming in one region might be declining in the region in which you want to live. So, know going into your career decision that there are no guarantees and many unknowns.

When talking with students, alums, and executives, they often share similar stories about why they selected a particular career or selected an area of personal interest. Think about where you are today with your specific interests. Most individuals play a specific sport, enjoy a specific extracurricular activity, or have an interest in a specific class or major because someone noticed them and encouraged them. The majority of people
I have spoken with and talked to do not continue in areas that are especially challenging when they do not experience at least moderate success. True, there are some incredibly determined individuals who keep pushing forward no matter what they face, but the majority will stop soon after they experience struggles. This is important to know and understand, because it helps you select your career interests. It may also help you understand that maybe what you are doing is not what you really want to do, but in fact it is something others want you to do. Please do not misunderstand what I am saying. I am not saying do not listen to those more experienced then you with respect to your career interests (parents, older friends, professors, etc.). What I am saying is, just be clear why you are choosing a particular area. If you are choosing this field for others or at the direction of others, make sure you have at least an interest in it as well as a willingness to give it your best.

When you were in high school, for example, after you selected an interest area in sports, music, school, and so on, you most likely saw progress in that area. It also shows within your respective interest area your ability to adapt, develop, and succeed within that specific area or areas. When you pick the sport or musical instrument or class, hobby, or activity, it is very similar to selecting a career field. You select it, then work at it, get better through work and dedication and become more proficient, and if you are willing to work hard enough you may rise to the top of your field. As with most things, the better you become the more satisfied you are. It is important that you are able to look at yourself in the mirror and be excited you selected your career field. Just know that a good decision comes after preparation and do not expect something to miraculously work out for you. You need to dig deep and thoroughly review what you know about yourself and your interests. What I see most often when students struggle in this second process comes from a hesitancy to explore career areas and an even greater hesitancy to make the commitment to give their best and attempt to excel.
One question I ask my students is what would you do if you won the lottery? You win $50 million and you travel, buy some great things, and enjoy yourself. At some point you decide to do something that is meaningful to you. The reason is you no longer have to do something for money. Money is very important; do not misunderstand what I am saying. It is just that if all you want is money, there will never be enough. After you win the lottery and have some fun, you would eventually end up wanting to do “something.” You might build something or work with others less fortunate than you, start a business, write, become a musician, or work to create a cure for a disease.

Thinking about these things allows you to dive deep into areas that are truly an interest for you. If we break that down to your career; while you may not be a professional athlete (no matter how much you love it), how exciting would it be to work in the sports industry in some professional capacity? If you want to start a business then working in a start-up to gain experience and a deeper understanding, as well as credibility, would be a perfect scenario for you. I think you see the point; you can align yourself to your interests. Do not be fooled to think there is only one place for you to work and only one specific role or else you will not be happy or fulfilled. That is just not the case. Always seek career areas that interest you. Research them to be as informed as you possibly can be about the career roles, hiring trends, market influences, and growth projections. Understand what it takes to be successful in these areas and work as hard as you can to be the best in your field of interest. In addition, speak to people who are in this career field and gain a deeper understanding into their roles. Target not only individuals who are doing the job that you hope to do upon graduation but also talk to those that are several levels above. We will talk about how to perform this “contact connection and analysis” later.

3) Prepare an effective resume and establish your professional brand.

Many students look at a resume as a chronological, biographical picture of you which is fact-based and that
is great, but they fail to realize that a resume has but one objective. That objective is to gain you an interview. Your resume could tell a wonderful story about you, but if it does not show a strong fit for the opportunity (internship or full-time job) you are seeking you will most likely not be successful securing an interview. A simple way to verify that your resume shows a strong fit is to identify and select keywords within the opportunity you are seeking under qualification or requirements. Once you identify the keywords then hit Ctrl + “F” with your resume open on your computer screen and see if you have any matches. Sophisticated companies establish formulas or key word searches and scan your resume when you apply. You could be the greatest fit in the world, but if your resume does not show a fit, your resume could go into the “we received your resume and thank you for your application, but at this time we have selected more qualified candidates” trash can. We will spend time on your resume and other tactical career skills later in the book.

Many students ask if they can use the same resume when applying for different jobs. If the jobs are the same, then the answer is yes. However, since that is highly unlikely, you need to modify, reframe, adjust and refocus your resume to each opportunity. Also be sure to use your name in the file name, otherwise the recruiter or hiring manager may have difficulty finding you. Do not title your resume file “Resume,” but instead title it with your name, the company name, the date you applied and possibly the job I.D. Remember that it must show a strong fit or your chances of being selected for an interview are slim.

Your professional brand is vital. Today, you may only have a Facebook page, but to be taken seriously as someone who is looking for gainful, professional employment you need a LinkedIn page/profile. I spend most of my time with business school students and many of them have well-established social presences via Facebook and other social media forums. That image may be who you are or who you think you are or who you want to be, but it likely does not represent and articulate why
someone would compensate you for working for their company. LinkedIn is actively used by recruiters and hiring managers and this percentage is growing. There will come a time in the near future that a LinkedIn profile will suffice for a resume. There may be new professional social platforms that are even more beneficial than LinkedIn, but at this time, as an entry level candidate into the job market, you must have a LinkedIn profile to be taken seriously. LinkedIn has an excellent Web site for assisting students (Undergrad and Grads) with the development of their LinkedIn profiles as well as how to use all of the LinkedIn resources to maximize their career success.

When you review the LinkedIn profile checklist from the LinkedIn college student development web site, you will see many sections that may seem strange to you. Those sections show a connection to the career area you are interested in. Establishing your profile is only half of the process. The other half is connecting with “influencers.” You want to connect with individuals with whom you share a common interest. This could be an alumnus, an individual who is in a specific career or industry area or job function, a person that shares a common experience or connection like working for the same company you worked part-time, co-op or interned with you or your professor, teacher, friend, family, church member, coach, and so on. We will spend additional time on this later in the book.
4) You need a strategy for your job or internship search.

It is easy to apply to jobs and internships on the internet and it is quite ineffective unless you approach it strategically. There are literally thousands of job postings and you can spend a significant amount of time and effort searching for opportunities with little success. Part of your search strategy is breaking down your interest to searchable and distinguishing key words. Search on employer web sites instead of generic catch-all web sites if possible. Specify by location as well to further focus your efforts. If your key word and focus efforts produce the desired results then move forward. If you are not seeing enough opportunities, widen the search. There is a “give and take” with this search strategy as you may have to modify your interests in order to position yourself for success.

If you are interested in working for a small firm, and can’t find an open position with a specific employer you will need to modify your search. I would recommend all things being equal that you target a larger more established employer instead of a smaller one. Some might say you should target the smaller firms because you will get a chance to “wear more hats,” but while that may be true it is also very likely the employer will have a less sophisticated training and development program, less prestige in the industry, and less interest to a potential employer should you decide to move on to another opportunity. More importantly, securing a position with a large, recognized employer will give you and your resume a “stamp of approval” in the eyes of future employers. If you were looking for new talent to add to your company and all other skills being equal, would you select the person who had 5 years with IBM or 5 years with Bob and Jane’s Tech Services? Names, industry reputations, product brands, professional images, performance, and personal experience are all analyzed when you are being evaluated for promotion or hiring.

Your search strategy should take into account positions posted on your university’s web site or career database as well
as positions with employers that frequent campus as they often have a vested interest in seeking talent on your campus. Target not only positions that are a strong fit but also companies that employ friends and family members. Keep a spreadsheet of your applications by company, job, or internship title. Include the contact you sent your information to, date of activity, response from the company, required follow-up, interview status, and general comments so you can keep track of and manage your career development actions.

5) Preparation.

Let’s assume you have made excellent progress in your career development. You now understand your career interests. You know in general terms what you want to do or the functional role you want to play and that you are qualified for (do not forget this very important requirement) in your career and the location or locations that appeal to you. You have an impressive resume that shows a solid fit to the role you desire and you targeted your search so that you represent yourself as clearly a qualified candidate. You also reached out to individuals who know you, or know of you, and can help connect you to the employer you targeted. You did this so that your resume has the greatest chance of being reviewed by a human with decision-making capability. Congratulations. You just received a call from the employer and they want to schedule you for an interview. Preparation becomes critical. Hopefully you have done some research on the company in order to know that this opportunity is a fit for you so that when you begin the interview preparation you are not starting from the beginning.

As a minimum, you need to know the answers to the following critical questions:

- Why do you think this job is a great fit for you?
- Can you articulate why you are the best candidate for the role?
Chapter One
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- Why are you attracted to work for this company?
- What is it about this industry that interests you?

There are many other questions you should prepare for, but your mission during the interview is to show that you are energetically interested in and qualified for the position. Another segment of the interview preparation is how you conduct yourself during the interview and how you follow-up after the interview. We will go into greater detail on this later in the book.

6) Negotiating and conduct during the offer.

You should be aware of the market value of your degree. I hope before you select your major and establish your degree plan that you research this. Once again, not that money is everything, but understanding this component of your career development is critical to your career satisfaction and your financial budget. You should also be aware of the basic salary and compensation levels for the role you are applying for. You will probably not find the exact amount, but you will gain a good understanding in the salary range by researching salary Web sites like www.glassdoor.com.

You can search salaries by company, location, and by position. There are other salary sites, but this has been a good resource for the students I work with. Another bonus feature of this Web site is that you can also research the company and even the interview process. This is covered in more detail with respect to doing your preparation as discussed in segment five.

7) What happens after you have accepted the great offer the company makes?

You have accepted and have an official start date. Chapter seven addresses what you need to do to separate yourself as a performer in the first six months of your job or the first 30 days of your internship. You worked so hard to get to this position; you want to make the best of it, correct? Well, you would be
surprised how many recent graduates get the opportunity of their dreams, but within six months to a year they are frustrated and disillusioned with their situation and their new employer is feeling the same way. We will cover these points later.

These seven points are major items in your career development and while I cannot guarantee you a job or internship when you understand and implement them, I can tell you that you are positioning yourself for success to accomplish your career dreams.
Chapter 1 Review Questions

1. What choice below best describes where you are with respect to your career development?
   a) I don’t know what I want to do when I graduate.
   b) I don’t know what my options are.
   c) I don’t know what career field I would have the most success with.
   d) No need to worry, I still have 4 years to figure it out.
   e) I know what I want to do and I understand what it takes to succeed in that career field.
   f) Other (fill in the blank) ____________________________

2. The book describes seven major areas in your career management process and progress. List them and then circle the one that you are currently struggling with.
   1.
   2.
   3.
   4.
   5.
   6.
   7.

3. If you won the lottery and suddenly had $50 million to use as you wish, what would you do?

   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
4. Why did you make that choice?

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

5. When people describe you, which characteristics do they talk about the most?
   a) 
   b) 
   c) 

6. Research career fields that might lead to at least, an entry level role for a college graduate. List three job titles in this career field. These would be for entry level roles for college students.
   a) 
   b) 
   c) 

7. Describe YOUR personal “Brand” as if you were talking to a recruiter?

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________