

marie claire @work

YOUR GET-REAL GUIDE TO CAREER & FINANCIAL SUCCESS

Help!

I HAVEN'T
FOUND MY
DREAM JOB

Floating around in a career that doesn't make
your heart sing? Here's how to get a job you love



I

t's a question most of us are asked as soon as we first put on a school uniform. "So, what do you want to be when you grow up?" Although your five-year-old self might have been convinced you were going to be a doctor/artist/chocolate taster, it's highly likely that by the time you were ready to enter the workforce your ideas would have changed.

While some people remain unwavering about their career goals (if you still want to be a chocolate taster, who could blame you?!), for many, the dream jobs they imagined as children have evaporated into confusion and uncertainty. Research from the Department of Education states that one in three Australian students drop out of their university course, and according to the Future Leaders Index, just 29 per cent of young people aged 18-29 are sure of their career path.

However, not having your dream job shouldn't be a source of stress. Uncertainty can lead to positive experiences and actually make your career path more interesting, says Alison Hill, a psychologist at motivation strategy company Pragmatic Thinking.

"Feeling stuck or uncertain about what's next is hard," she acknowledges. "But it also allows you the opportunity to explore possibilities you may have not previously considered. Whether it's making the shift from studying to a work environment, or finding a job that's a better fit for you, being unsure of what you want to do career-wise means it's time to dial up your curiosity – not only about what roles might be available, but about what you're looking for in a workplace culture and environment.

"Jobs are more than just the tasks that you do; identifying the environment you thrive in is just as important."

Amy James, 37, can attest to the fact that spending time in career limbo can bring long-term benefits. "After school I [started] a Bachelor of Education at uni," she says. "But I didn't enjoy it at all. I struggled through a year, finishing in the middle to bottom of all my classes, and became so

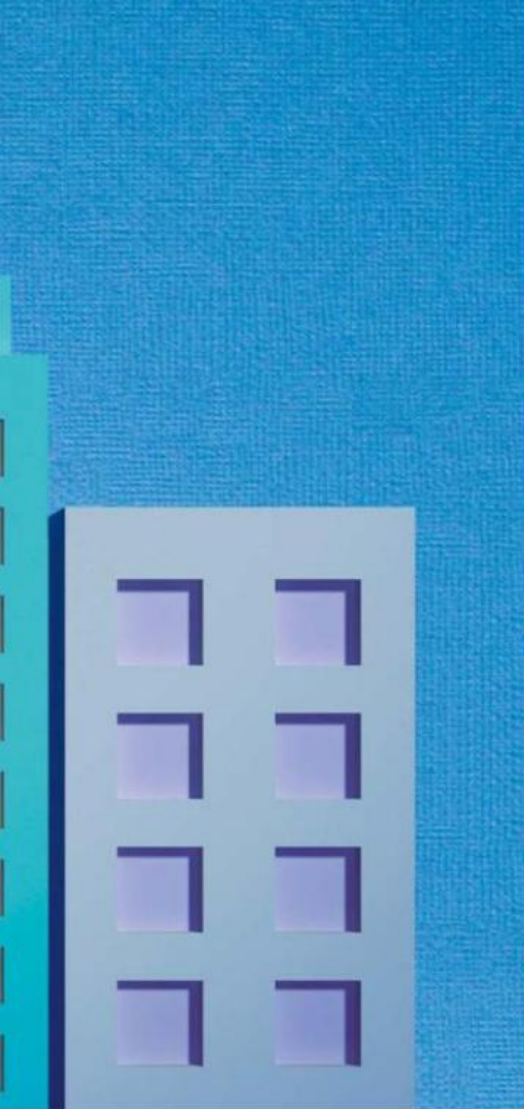
disheartened I just stopped going. I was a bit cagey when people asked why I'd dropped out; I told people I'd deferred but in reality I'd just given up. To earn some money I started working for a legal firm, filing court documents and serving legal notices.

"Then I worked for my dad's business, which was really getting paid to do not much at all. I was heading towards 30 without any qualifications. So I decided to do something totally different, and chose to study nursing. I loved it.

"I'm so glad I didn't do it straight out of school – if I had, I guarantee I would not be in

nursing now. It's too confronting for a first job. You need some common sense. Nursing is about people first and medical knowledge second. Because I had some life and work experience, I was successful in applying for my student placements and my first nursing job. I'm so happy now. I love my job, I love my patients and I have job satisfaction."

Not having
your dream job
shouldn't be a
source of stress.
It's your licence
to explore your
passions and
possibilities



Amy is proof that not initially finding your dream job can help you learn more about yourself while you're searching. Through her experiences she learnt that working with people, being surrounded by a good team and feeling like she's making a difference to people's lives is what drives her. After discovering this, she was able to choose a job that matched these traits.

"Every experience contributes to our career, even if these experiences primarily help you get [clarity] on what you really *don't* like doing," says Hill. "Taking a winding path to ultimately find your dream job can be a smart move, not only because of what you learn from the jobs themselves, but also because of the people you meet and connect with along the way. Being open, having a curious mind, saying 'yes' to opportunities and backing yourself with new projects can all help you find the path that's right for you."

But the discovery of your dream role probably won't happen overnight – Michelle Gibbings, career expert and

FACT

1 in 3

AUSTRALIAN
STUDENTS DROP
OUT OF UNIVERSITY*

founder of change management company Change Meridian, suggests putting pen to paper to ascertain what really matters to you. "Ask yourself what your ideal role might comprise of," she says. "Things to consider: Where will I be based? Will it be full- or part-time? Will I be a permanent staff member or contractor? What would I like to get paid? Do I need to work flexibly? Do I want to travel with my work? Do I need to love what I do? Would this role add to my CV?"

"Put your answers in order of priority. Remember there's often a trade-off involved. Would you rather work part-time so you have flexibility? Sometimes you might be willing to accept less pay in the short-term because you know the role will look good on your CV, and accelerate your career in the long-term."

Think about the skills you have and how you can put them to use. The good news? Chances are you're way more skilled than you realise.

"Give yourself some credit," says Janine Garner, CEO of networking community LBDGroup. "You probably have lots of transferable skills from part-time jobs, voluntary work or your academic achievements that you can apply to different jobs. Think about your interpersonal skills – do you relate well to others? Are you a team player, are you good at assisting others? What about your organisational skills? Are you good at meeting deadlines, planning projects and time management? Have you ever managed or supervised others, solved problems or delegated tasks? Well, you have leadership skills."

Once you've written down your skills and what's important for you in a career, hone in on certain roles. ▷

FIVE TIPS TO HELP YOU DISCOVER YOUR DREAM JOB

FIND A MENTOR

"Mentors provide advice and guidance; they are empowering and enabling," says Garner. "A good mentor will help you identify and focus on your strengths and set goals, and will support you as you navigate the complexities of your career choice."

TRAVEL

"Life is all about experience, and so is your career," explains Gibbings. "The more you travel, network with different people and try new things, the greater your ability to see the world and the

opportunities it has to offer."

BE OPEN

"Understand that your career aspirations may well change," says Gibbings. "Not only is that natural, but it's necessary. If you take a very fixed view on where you are going, you may close yourself off to some amazing career opportunities."

FIND A CAREER COACH

"A career coach can help you identify possible career paths that fit your skills and interests," advises Gibbings. "A good

one will also challenge you to think about how that career path fits with your life goals.

That's important, as your career choices are crucial in determining how happy you are with your life choices."

TAKE TIME OUT

Giving yourself some TLC can help you figure out your career goals. "I developed the concept for my business at a meditation retreat," says Gibbings. "It was in a space where I was away from the busy-ness of day-to-day work that I figured out what my next career step needed to be."



REBECCA JAMES,
SENIOR EXECUTIVE
AT INDUSTRY SUPER
FUND-OWNED BANK, ME

LOTS TO LOVE ABOUT SHOPPING AROUND

We all love saving money a great deal, but when it comes to supersized savings you could be looking in all the wrong places.

One in two of us shop around for hot deals on fashion and shoes. However we don't always put our best foot forward when it comes to shopping around for big-ticket financial products such as a home loan. And that's despite the potential savings far outweighing even the best bargains on designer labels.

Happily, enjoying great value on a home loan doesn't have to involve wearing out shoe leather. To weigh up a variety of home loans, simply head to comparison websites such as Mozo, Finder or InfoChoice, or speak with a mortgage broker to identify what features work for you. And be sure to check out ME's new online calculator, Scroogify™, for a clear picture of how much you could save each month by switching to a better home loan deal. Spend a little time comparing and you'll see how the savings really stack up.



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"Imagine you could do any job you liked," says Gibbings. "Don't limit your thoughts or ideas. Consider what new skills you would need to land this job, and talk to people to confirm your understanding. Then look at the gap between the skills you have and the skills you would need to do this role. For each skill, rate yourself on a scale of one to four, with one being no current skill, two being some skill or knowledge but not proficient, three being competent at the skill, and four being an expert with a high degree of skill.

"Think about what activities and courses you could undertake to close the gap, what activities you would prioritise, and who you need in your network to help you do this. Then create your personal development plan that maps out what you will do and by when." And the final step? "Put your plan into action."



FACT

JUST **29%**
OF AUSTRALIANS
ARE SURE OF THEIR
CAREER PATH*

BEWARE THE DREAM JOB FANTASY

The pursuit of the dream job – or even finding out what passion you should be pursuing – can become an obsession and stop people from being happy in the here and now. Is it time for a reality check?

1 Get real about your expectations
NASA's recent recruitment for 14 positions attracted 18,000 applicants. If your goal is to be an astronaut, yes, you *could* be one of the lucky few who lands one of these coveted jobs. But be realistic about your chances of getting a job in your chosen field.

2 You have to do the work
All the research, questionnaires and quizzing of people in your dream industry mean nothing without experiencing the work. Your fantasy of being a professional surfer may not be quite as appealing when you're out in the water in the middle of winter with a head cold.

3 No job is perfect
You may have a dream to start your own business in floristry, but beyond the creative aspect of flower arranging, there are a whole lot of tasks that also need to be

fulfilled – from marketing and sales to customer relations, invoicing, accounting and staff retention. Eventually these tasks could be outsourced, but how much are you *really* prepared to do to get the dream?

4 Maybe your career just isn't your passion
Perhaps your passion is your family, coaching a school soccer team or travelling. Many career experts say the path to happiness is to find a career doing what you love, but maybe what you need is a job with great flexibility, which lets you pursue your real passion outside the office. □