

Listen to the Cheshire Cat

How well do you remember Charles Lutwidge Dodgson's (pseud. Lewis Carroll) 1865 novel, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland?

Most readers are now wondering what this has to do with career advice, but wait. Don't stop reading. This aim of this hugely popular fictional tale was to deliver subtle educational messages to English school children, but amazingly it gained in popularity with adults as well. In fact, the work is considered to be one of the most characteristic examples of using logic in the form of literary nonsense, and it has been enormously influential in some of life's basic lessons and decisions.

Back to your skepticism, one part in particular of Alice's conversation with the Cheshire Cat is quoted quite often in publications and presentations on career decisions:

"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" asked Alice.

"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.

No one other than you will be able to make your career decisions, unless of course you don't really care much what you do for a living.

"I don't much care where -" said Alice.

"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.



Now if you are still reading this article, you do care about your career choice, so let's look at how a combination of your interests, skills, personality and values will help you decide which path to take. Listen to the Cat and know yourself.

Know Your Interests

Think of your career interests as well as your hobbies and note particularly how you spend your leisure time. Things we do in our free time are done voluntarily and enthusiastically, so unless you joined a society to please your partner or spouse you presumably find your spare time activities very rewarding. Do you volunteer for charity? Are you actively involved in youth activities? Community? Religious? Educational? Political? Sports?

Know Your Abilities

Record your most significant accomplishments from work, school and personal activities, and then identify the special skills that you possess that enabled you to achieve those results.

Know Your Personality

Do you work best alone or in a team? Are you a morning or a night person? Do you thrive on stressful or calming situations? Are you an urban or a rural individual? Do you like wearing suits and ties or jeans and sneakers? Can you jump on any plane at a moment's notice or do you suffer fear of flying?

Know Your Values

Make a list your values and know what is important to you? Especially identify circumstances under which you would not be able to work at all. For example, there may be social, environmental or religiously related issues that have an influence on your work.



The next step is to integrate all four lists, then combine complementary themes and eliminate contradictions. In the first example below, interests and abilities complement one another, while in the second example personality is sure to limit success in the targeted career.

[Interests = Abilities] Desire to be a financial analyst and is exceptionally talented at math.

[Personality ≠ Interests] Desire to be a stock broker, but is quiet and reserved.

*"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" asked Alice.
"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.*

The same pattern can also be applied when matching employees with employers. For example, individuals with strong socially-responsible values might not perform to capacity at tobacco companies, or at cosmetic companies that perform testing on animals.

So listen to the Cheshire Cat; knowing yourself will allow you to know "...where you want to get to."

Interests	Abilities	Personality	Values
1.	1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.	4.
5.	5.	5.	5.

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