

10 Tips for Career Success

The Big Career Picture

1. The 2 S's of Career Success –Self-Awareness and Self-Esteem

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When you are doing the Leaving Cert, the focus is on points, points, points. Such is the intensity of focus on this area that people can lose the sight of what really drives career success and satisfaction. So what matters most in the long-term? Self-awareness and self-esteem.

Self-awareness is about knowing what your talents and preferences are. Are you out-going, competitive, flexible? Do you enjoy meeting people and telling stories? If so, a career in sales could be a good fit for you. Think about what you have learned about your talents from school projects, work experience, sport, transition year, hobbies and other pursuits?

Self-esteem is a key driver of career success and satisfaction and enables people to get the most from their talents. It is important to focus on activities that build self-esteem and be able to draw on a circle that contributes to that. Success in pastimes such as sport, the arts or drama have a role to play. Building your self-esteem and self-awareness is more important in the long term than the number of points you get.

2. Some people need to build up to big learning

When it comes to going to college, the expected path for many people is to do a 3 to 4 year degree straight after school. However, this is not the ideal path for everyone and not for reasons of ability but more about their motivation and learning style. Undertaking a degree too early can ruin a good learning experience and increases the chance of dropping out. Reflect on whether or not you would be better suited to doing a shorter more practical course and getting some work experience, and perhaps a degree later on in your career?

There are a few stellar examples of successful college dropouts such as Steve Jobs, Larry Ellison, or Bill Gates but dropping out for most is a setback for their confidence not to mention family finances. Completing a short course successfully is a better foundation than misfiring at degree course.

3. Would you cast yourself in the role?

Many people enter a career without having a clear picture of what it involves on a day-to-day basis. We often ask our student clients; do you see yourself working in an office 8 hours a day? Or do you see yourself out and about a lot meeting customers? Do you see yourself working in the outdoors or on your feet in a shop? Do you see yourself in a uniform?

Don't just think about the activities of the job, think about the setting and ask yourself would you cast yourself in such a role?

Avoid the college 'Bermuda Triangle'

4. Don't be led by a subject unless you really love it.

A subject at 3rd level is a very different proposition than it is at 2nd level. Take Maths as an example. You don't know what you want to do at college but you are good at Maths, so you plump for a degree in Maths. Most pure maths courses include the study of physics, logic and theoretical computing and maybe you just wanted to focus on Maths. The key question is do you really love the subject enough to engage with all the aspects of it?

And look before leap. Review what subjects the course involves. If you really want to study History, French, English or Greek Civilisation at 3rd level with no particular career in mind, we say go for it. But do it with your eyes open. You are more likely to excel at something you love and any degree will enable you to specialise in something else at postgraduate level.

5. Don't just follow the market for jobs because the jobs market will change.

Some people choose courses because the demand for particular skills is strong when they leave school. A classic example is when the DOTCOM bubble grew, the demand for IT skills raged and the salaries in those areas were highly attractive. Many people bailed into the IT because it was a secure option. This worked for a while but when the bubble burst, many people found themselves qualified and experienced in a career that did not suit them. The new circumstances forced them to

change as they found themselves competing for fewer jobs with people who were much more passionate about the area.

Don't make career choices based on the current market demand because the demand may not be there when you finish course.

6. Don't make security led career choices

A natural follow on from the above tip.... After the DOTCOM bubble burst, school leavers turned away from the IT area due to the negative press surrounding employment prospects. A short few years later when things returned to normal, there was a shortage of people with strong IT qualifications.

Following the credit crisis and resulting recession, a significant proportion of people will naturally move away from careers in architecture, finance, property, and related areas such as commercial law. However, things move in cycles. Engineering and construction are currently in a lull but if this is what you really want to do, there will be opportunities in the future. There is always room for talent in any marketplace.

Don't choose an area because of job security as you may up end secure but miserable. Don't let the present lack of opportunity be the sole driver of your choices about your future career.

7. Avoid college choice snobbery

Many students limit their CAO choice to the major universities and disregard other educational establishments that offer excellent courses and qualifications. Obviously, the environment, the size of the college, the location, and whether friends or relatives are attending all have an influence on your choice of college. Is snobbishness the main reason for disregarding a college, which may have built a strong reputation in your preferred subject area?

8. Investigate alternative routes

Ok, you didn't get your first choice. But before you commit to repeating or take a different option, look at alternative routes into your chosen field. Medicine is a high points course as an undergraduate but that is not the only route. A foundation course in science followed by a graduate course in medicine takes slightly longer but may be more productive. Most career options have these stepping stones. Better to get to the right destination a little slower than into the wrong career in a hurry.

Look before you leap into further study

9. Step back, don't just go with the crowd.

Certain types of 3rd level courses have momentum towards a specific career. For example, you did law and now 80% of your class are off to become either a solicitor or a barrister. You on the other hand, enjoyed elements of the course but you are not sure about a legal career. You decide to go with the flow. This is a classic example of being carried along by a career current when you need to step back and carefully consider your next move. If you have reservations, listen to them. This applies to any degree that is driving towards an obvious goal such as engineering, accountancy, law, IT, medicine, architecture, or graphic design. You don't have to follow the crowd.

10. Get experience before you do a post graduate course

A postgraduate course is a really good way to develop specialist or higher level skills. However, many people rush into these courses signing up straight after they complete their undergraduate course. Some people choose a general postgraduate course such as an MBA hoping that it will provide inspiration about the right career path from them. It rarely does unless you have a burning passion for an area or a strong master plan for your career. Don't do a postgraduate course for the sake of it. You will get much more value by gaining some work experience and undertaking a post graduate course later on in your career.

Where these tips come from

Together we have over 25 years experience of working with people to help them find satisfaction and success in their career. These tips are based on key research into career success, and learning from our clients' experience of forging successful and satisfying careers.

Call us now for a chat: (01) 6425721

Send us an email

Sophie (Sophie.Rowan@pinpoint.ie)
John (John.Deely@pinpoint.ie)