

12.5 Career Development Starts Now

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand that career development is not a process that occurs only when you are searching for a job.
2. Know how to get organized for career development.
3. Use resources for career development.

Think of developing your career as if you were working in a start-up venture, because in a sense, you are. The product you are developing is yourself as a professional. While you are focused primarily on product development during your college years, you need to “seed” the market during this period as well so that when the product is ready (when you get your degree), the market will be ready to accept you. If launching a career means getting your first postcollege job, the time to start preparing is now, not six months (or six weeks) before you graduate.

Start by organizing yourself. Set aside some physical space dedicated exclusively to career development and job hunt work. It can be as small as a corner on your desk or an accordion file, but it should be a place where you can keep and access your records whenever you need them. Organize some digital space as well. Create a file for all your career-related documents on your computer. Make sure you have a backup using an online service or at least a thumb drive or other external storage device.

Get and keep two notebooks to use during your career exploration. One is for recording and tracking phone calls, and the other is for general notes. Similarly, on your computer, create a folder in your browser’s bookmark menu to use exclusively for keeping track of Web sites of good resources, interesting companies, and leading ideas from your targeted occupation. In your contact management system or personal directory, flag those individuals who may be of use to you in your exploration and search. Create group folders for them in your social networking sites. There may not be many people in those groups and directories now, but as you go through the processes described in the rest of the chapter, those numbers will multiply, so it will pay to have a system in place to identify your key professional contacts starting now.

A second step in getting organized is understanding your financial picture. If you think of yourself as a business, you are investing both time and money in your college degree, and you should have a clear picture of how and when your investment will begin to pay off. Project your cash flow and prepare a personal budget and live within it (see [Chapter 11 "Taking Control of Your Finances"](#)). Paying off student loans on an entry-level salary can be a challenge without the discipline of following a budget.

Start identifying resources that you can use to explore and select an occupation and to help land that first (or next) job in your career. Every student will have his or her own list of favored resources. For some it may be a Web site like the Department of Labor’s site or SuccessHawk (<http://www.successhawk.com>). Others may want to include a counselor at the college career guidance or placement office or their faculty advisor. You may want to add an alumnus who has been helpful or a relative who already practices in your

target occupation. Most important, identify these resources and record them in your “notes” notebook, creating your own personalized reference guide.

Set goals for yourself to guide you in your process. Especially since career planning is an ongoing, long-term process, it is important to set short-term, attainable goals to keep making progress toward a fulfilling occupation. The goals should be simple, everyday steps that keep you moving in the right direction, such as “investigate metallic arts sculpture as a business by Friday” or “make an appointment to see a counselor at the guidance office by Tuesday.” As you proceed through the process of investigation, decision making, networking, selection, and application, these goals will become even more important.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Career exploration and job hunting are not short-term projects but processes that continue over time.
- Organization is key to an effective process and sets you up for success.
- Setting goals will keep your actions organized and keep you moving forward in a long-term process.

CHECKPOINT EXERCISES

1. What are three things you should do to get organized for the process of career development?

2. Why is it valuable to have two notebooks to work with instead of just one?

3. Why is setting a goal important in this process?
