

# CHALLENGING CAREER CHOICES MADE SIMPLE

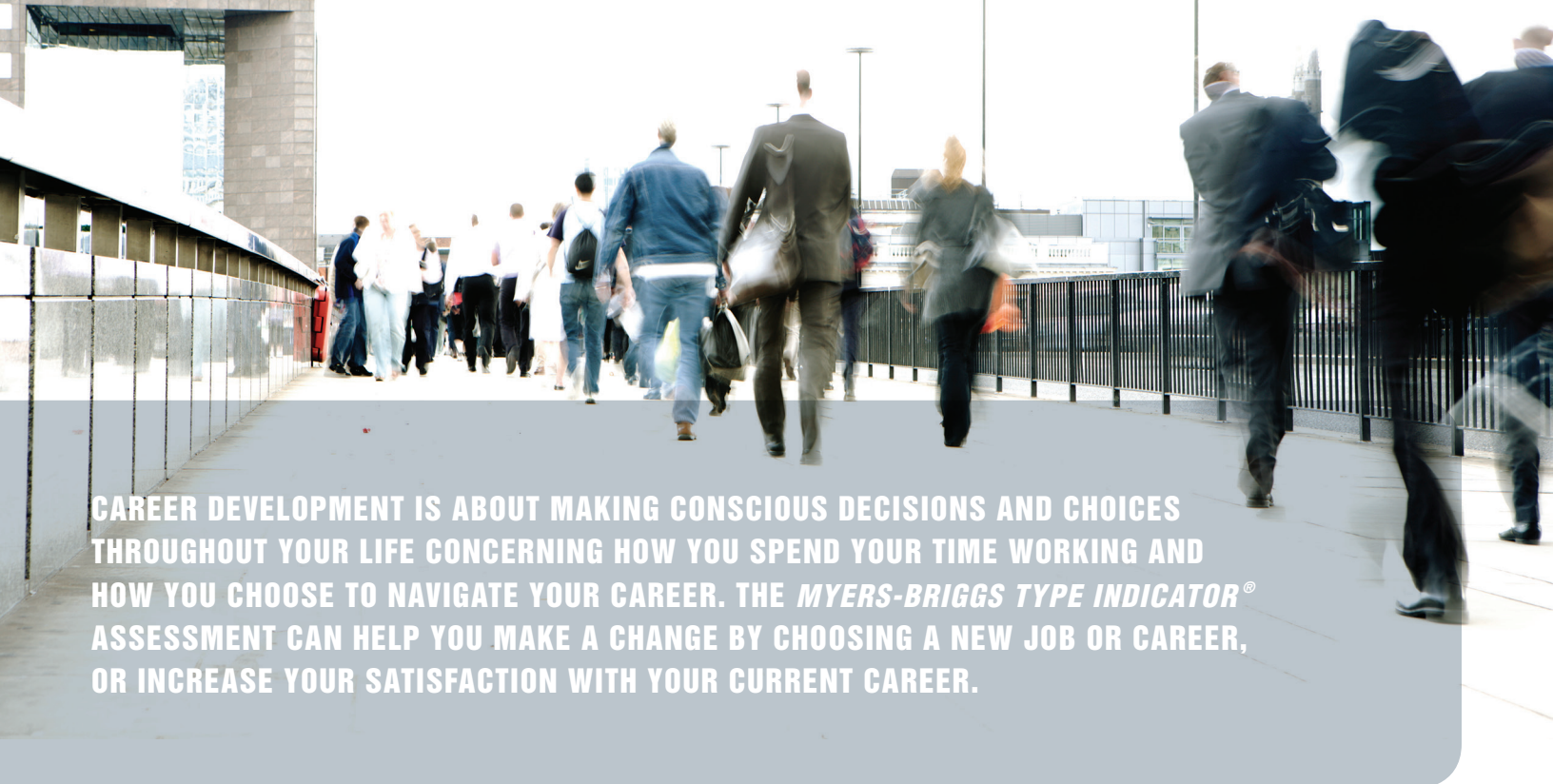


Career choices don't become easier throughout your life. They become more challenging. **SAUNDRA STROOPE**, human resources manager at Intermountain Healthcare, shares how you can achieve a rich, fulfilling career by understanding and applying Myers-Briggs® personality type insights to your career development.



*The people development people.*

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**CAREER DEVELOPMENT IS ABOUT MAKING CONSCIOUS DECISIONS AND CHOICES THROUGHOUT YOUR LIFE CONCERNING HOW YOU SPEND YOUR TIME WORKING AND HOW YOU CHOOSE TO NAVIGATE YOUR CAREER. THE *MYERS-BRIGGS TYPE INDICATOR*® ASSESSMENT CAN HELP YOU MAKE A CHANGE BY CHOOSING A NEW JOB OR CAREER, OR INCREASE YOUR SATISFACTION WITH YOUR CURRENT CAREER.**

Typical decisions to be made along the way include whether you will

- Stay at a specific company or find a new one
- Stay within the corporate environment or shift to self-employment
- Work independently as a consultant or remain an employee
- Move into a new role within the same field or move to a new functional area
- Relocate or stay in the same locale
- Remain a technical specialist or become a people manager

Ultimately, you are responsible for your personal success and the satisfaction you gain from it. This requires taking responsibility for your development and being open to self-discovery, as well as to input and feedback from others (managers, mentors, coaches, peers, friends, and/or family). It also requires that you define your goals and adjust them regularly, giving consideration to overall economic conditions and business trends.

Research shows that working in a role that is well matched to your personal interests has a high correlation with job satisfaction. Early on, when I was in college, I attended an evening dinner career discussion with a well-respected university professor. His advice to me was this: “Don’t choose a career field for the money; find something you love to do, and the money will follow.” This advice is relatively easy to follow when you are a student and are discovering those things you love, passing your required courses as quickly as possible, and choosing elective classes for fun.

Later, after you have invested 10 to 20 years working in your chosen career field—somewhere between the ages of 30 and 55—the

choice to simply do “something your love” becomes harder. It’s tough to imagine stepping out of a seemingly secure corporate environment with a steady paycheck to risk generating a business and income on your own. It’s difficult to imagine moving to a new field and starting at the bottom of the career ladder again, risking being seen as having taken a step backward or having become a “job hopper” (not to mention giving up your seniority and taking the risk that the new endeavor won’t work out). It is also often difficult to relocate a family—changing your employer, your children’s schools, and your residence all at the same time. And it can be challenging to step into a management role, trading the excitement of performing the work yourself for the opportunity to lead and coach others.

Career choices don’t become easier, they become more challenging—typically requiring you to leave your comfort zone and accept substantial change.

Knowledge of type can help put career decisions into perspective by helping you understand your basic behavior, your interactions with others, the work environment, and the roles and tasks that best fit your preferences. Some of the key considerations, based on type, include

- Which MBTI® four-letter type best describes me?
- What are my natural strengths?
- What kind of work really energizes me?
- Where do my greatest developmental opportunities lie?
- What do I most want to learn?
- What work environment most appeals to me?



## Here are a few simple actions you can take when considering a career change:

**1. TAKE THE MBTI ASSESSMENT AND REFLECT ON YOUR PERSONAL STRENGTHS.** By taking the MBTI assessment, you get to know yourself better. When you understand more about your unique strengths, you are better equipped to decide what kind of career change would make sense for you. The MBTI tool helps you learn more about the work you might enjoy, how you might prefer to do it, and the work environment that might be most satisfying to you.

While the nature of a job might attract certain types, a complete career change is usually not a quick decision—it requires much thought, exploration, and research. Knowing your type and using the MBTI® Career Report can help you discover career paths you would truly enjoy and whether some jobs are suitable before taking the significant risk of leaving your current job.

**2. MAKE AN INVENTORY LIST OF YOUR SKILLS, EXPERIENCE, AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS.** When considering a career change, it's important to think about your transferable skills. Identify the work activities that appeal to you and the skills, experience, and accomplishments you have that will transfer to the new career path. Update your resume with a career summary section and focus on your accomplishments that relate directly to the role you want. Then identify skills and experience you would like to gain. It's helpful to think about how your profession will change in the next one to three years and the skills critical to future opportunities you would like to have.

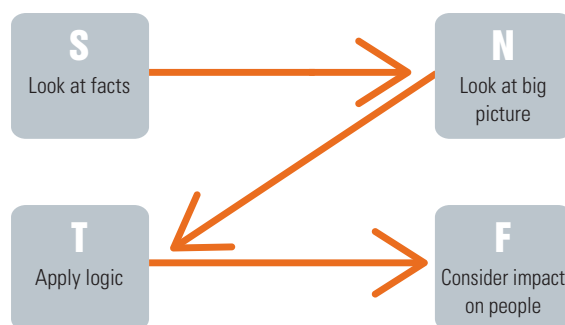
**3. CREATE A VISION OF YOUR IDEAL JOB AND WORK ENVIRONMENT AND A PLAN FOR OBTAINING THEM.** Once you have identified your strengths and current skills—and those you want to obtain—write down a description of your ideal job and work environment. Then create a specific action plan for obtaining the skills, knowledge, and experience you want to gain. Identify learning opportunities, either on the job by volunteering for new projects, or outside work by volunteering with an external organization, or by completing a formal learning event, such as a certification or degree program. New experiences might include building your network in the new career environment, taking on special assignments or projects related to the work, reading about the occupation, getting feedback through a formal mentor, or attending a formal learning program. As part of the plan, identify people in your network with whom to communicate about your newly acquired skills, knowledge, and experience.

**4. DISCUSS YOUR CAREER PLAN WITH OTHERS WHO CAN OFFER FEEDBACK AND SUPPORT.** Discussing your career plan is a vital step in the pursuit of your career aspirations. It is your

responsibility to identify people who can help support your goals and to communicate your interests to them. It is very important to keep an open mind and remain flexible throughout any career plan discussion; be sure to listen closely to all constructive feedback and address areas for growth with a positive attitude. The purpose of a career discussion is to gain perspective on various career options and obtain support for your implementation plan. Progress begins the moment you move from your career plan to the discussion with individuals who are in a position to support you.

**5. USE A DECISION-MAKING PROCESS WHEN EVALUATING CAREER CHANGE.** For any decision you make, you can be most effective when you effectively gather all the information and evaluate the possible change using a sound decision-making process, such as the “Z model” for using your MBTI preferences. The Z model provides an approach to solving a problem using the four type functions deliberately and in a specific order: Sensing, Intuition, Thinking, and Feeling.

The arrows in the diagram below show this Z-model process.



When considering a career change, apply the Z-model approach to the decision by gathering all the available information and details about the new role, employer, or employment situation you are contemplating.

- Make a list of all your transferable skills and experiences (S).
- Think about your vision—where you would like to be in three to five years—your interests, and your strengths and brainstorm all the creative ways to use them at work (N). Brainstorming and thinking creatively about work and career are sometimes overlooked. I worked with a client who realized he really liked working outdoors, yet his current job, which he did enjoy, was in an office environment. After a few minutes of brainstorming we were able to generate a list of volunteer activities that he could participate in after work to achieve greater work–life balance and satisfaction.
- Use your Thinking (T) preference to help identify the rationale and logic behind the change.
- Identify the values that are important to you at work (F).

By using all four preferences for taking in information and making decisions, you can make the most well-rounded and informed decision. Becoming mired in facts, data, and research (S) without a vision or goal (N) may lead to analysis paralysis and staying in a role that is never truly satisfying. If you jump too soon on a creative idea (N) for a new business without all the facts and data (S), you run the risk of experiencing a short-lived adventure and having to start over again. While many people have logical reasons for entering a career path or choosing a degree (T), such as potential earnings and the projected growth opportunity of the field, people rarely stay in a job for the pay if other key factors, such as values, are out of alignment. It's important to consider values, the people you will work with, and the work environment (F). For example, a person with a core value of spending time with friends and family may be dissatisfied in a career role with great pay that requires extensive travel. Consider your MBTI preferences, transferable skills, and experience; apply the Z-model decision-making method; research job options; network; and build a specific action plan for achieving your vision. Before you accept a new position, ask for a description of the role and key goals, meet with the people you will work with, and ask about the way that work is typically done. Then assess to what extent the role and work environment might be a good fit for you.

The more you know about yourself, the easier it is to put your career choices into perspective. With this information you can make better decisions about whether it's the right time to make a big change, to take on more responsibility, or to grow in place. It's not always easy, but it is possible to make a change at any time. Consider Harrison Ford's late start in his acting career and the fact that Julia Child didn't enter cooking school until she was in her mid-thirties.

The ideal career is one that makes the most of who you are and aligns with your long-term goals, unique skills, experience, background, and accomplishments. Confucius said, "Choose a job you love and you will never have to work a day in your life."

—by Sandra Stroope



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development. Sandra has experience creating HR and development solutions that align with business strategy and achieving results in a variety of industries at global and Fortune 500 companies. She is the author of more than a dozen works, including a chapter in *Integrated Talent Management Scorecards*, to be released in September 2013 by ASTD Press.

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