



## THE CAREER PLANNING PROCESS

The career planning (or career management) process consists of three steps.

**Step one is self-knowledge.** The more an individual is aware of their interests, skills values and personality preferences, the better able they will be to choose a career that provides them with satisfaction. Career planners sometimes talk about finding work that you are “passionate” about. That might be hard for many of us, but a careful consideration of our interests, skills, values and preferences should, at a minimum, result in our being able to find a job that does not bring us down.

**Step two is market knowledge** (job market, that is). An individual needs to be aware of all the opportunities that are available. Sometimes (especially in the private sector) this is not an easy task. Market knowledge is very important for an individual who is considering changing fields of work. Market knowledge specific to the federal government is crucial for those seeking federal employment.

**Step three is effective self-presentation.** This is what most people think of when they look for a job. Résumés and interviews are the two most common ways of self-presentation during a job search. There are vast differences between the federal sector and the private sector in both résumés and interviewing.

Let’s take a deeper look at the first step — self-knowledge. Job satisfaction is often a result of having work that interests you and that you are good at. That speaks to two of the most important areas of self-knowledge – interests and skills. It is possible to have an interest in a certain area, yet have little or no skill in that area, and vice-versa.

Many people tend not to be introspective and don’t give much thought to what interests them. That’s where interest assessments come in; they can help individuals identify areas of interest that they may want to explore as a profession. Even something as basic as reading Richard Nelson Bolles’ book *What Color is Your Parachute?* will give a job seeker insights.

When we think of our skills, we often end up focusing simply on our job-specific skills (e.g., ability to repair an internal combustion engine, knowledge of generally accepted accounting principles, skill in operating a forklift, etc.). It is important to focus on transferable skills, that can be used in a multitude of jobs (e.g., detail orientation, dealing with difficult people, dependability, etc.).

Values and preferences can also affect our choice of occupations. For example, if you are an extrovert, you might not want to be a forest ranger; if you value your family life, you would want to avoid jobs that required lots of travel, etc.

All of these areas of self-knowledge can be assessed, either by doing some serious introspection, or by taking career assessments. Federal Career Experts offers several different types of assessment.

In the second step, market knowledge, if we don't know what is available, how will we know if we would enjoy the job or not? In agencies with significantly different components individuals who work in one area, might not be aware of the opportunities in other areas. For example, the IRS both assesses and collects taxes; and the duties and the type of employee attracted to them differ greatly. A person who may be a round peg in a square hole, might very well find round holes right there within their own agency if they looked hard enough. Once we get a fair amount of market knowledge we might be able to:

- Find information about careers and government agencies that appeal to us; and/or:
- Locate specific career opportunities in those career areas or government agencies.

Engaging in research and networking activities helps individuals gather more information about available opportunities.

In the third step, self-presentation, you focus on competing for a particular job. Résumés are the most common method of written self-presentation. For an idea of what not to do in a résumé, click [here](#). Federal résumés are quite different from those used in the private sector. In addition, more and more federal jobs are requiring on-line applications.

Beware of having someone write your résumé for you. You are the best person to put your résumé together. Once you have the information necessary to create a basic résumé, take a shot at writing it yourself. Then you can have a professional review it. At that time, a new viewpoint and assistance in “wordsmithing” your document would be a good investment of time and money.

Interviewing is the most common oral self-presentation. Basically, the purpose of an interview is to answer two primary employer concerns. They are:

- Can you do the job? Do you have the job specific skills needed to succeed? Do you qualify?
- Will you do the job? Do you have the soft skills and abilities necessary for success? In his book *Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman identifies many of these skills.

Once a person gets a handle on the three major parts of career development, they are on the road to finding a more satisfying, more successful career.

**Federal Career Experts**  
129 Crissey Avenue • Geneva, IL 60134  
Phone: (630) 208-7233 • Fax: (630) 208-7244  
Email: [info@federalcareerexperts.com](mailto:info@federalcareerexperts.com)