

The Career Discernment PROCESS: A Path to Purpose and Fulfillment



Calling & Career

John Scroggins, May 2025

Choosing a career is one of the most consequential decisions a person can make. It not only influences daily routines and income but also impacts one's sense of identity, purpose, and overall well-being. For many, this decision is not straightforward. Instead, it involves a complex, often nonlinear process known as **career discernment**—a reflective and strategic journey of exploring, evaluating, and ultimately deciding on a vocational path that aligns with one's values, skills, and aspirations.

Understanding Career Discernment

Career discernment differs from mere job selection. While job searching tends to be a tactical pursuit—finding a role that fits one's current skill set and meets immediate financial needs—discernment is more holistic. It involves asking deep, sometimes uncomfortable questions about who you are, what you want from life, and how you can contribute meaningfully to the world.

The process of discernment requires time, patience, and intentionality. It can be particularly useful for students nearing graduation, professionals considering a career change, or anyone seeking greater alignment between their work and their personal calling.

Stages of the Career Discernment Process



The career discernment process can be broken down into five key stages: self-assessment, exploration, experimentation, decision-making, and commitment.

1. Self-Assessment

The journey begins with introspection. Understanding yourself is the foundation of good decision-making. Self-assessment involves reflecting on your:

- **Childhood reflection:** What did you enjoy doing as a child?
- **Values:** What principles guide your decisions? Do you value creativity, stability, service, autonomy, or achievement?
- **Interests:** What topics, activities, or causes naturally excite you?
- **Skills:** What are you good at? These can include both hard skills (e.g., data analysis, coding, writing) and soft skills (e.g., empathy, leadership, communication).
- **Personality:** Are you energized by social interaction, or do you thrive in solitude? Are you structured or spontaneous? Tools like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, StrengthsFinder, or Holland Code (RIASEC) can provide helpful insights.

- **Life circumstances:** Your financial responsibilities, family obligations, and health can all influence what is realistically possible at different times in your life.

Journaling, speaking with a mentor, or working with a career coach can all aid in this stage of self-discovery.

2. Exploration

Once you have a clearer picture of who you are, the next step is to investigate the vast landscape of career possibilities. This stage involves researching industries, roles, and work environments that might fit your profile.

Key strategies include:

- **Informational interviews:** Talk to professionals in fields of interest to learn about their day-to-day work, how they got there, and what they enjoy or find challenging.
- **Job shadowing:** Spend a day or more observing someone in a role you're curious about.
- **Online research:** Use platforms like LinkedIn, Glassdoor, or O*NET to explore job descriptions, salaries, required qualifications, and career trajectories.

It's important to keep an open mind during this stage. Many people discover careers they hadn't previously considered once they begin exploring more broadly.

3. Experimentation

Theory must be tested in practice. Experimentation allows you to experience potential career paths on a small scale before committing fully. It's about trying things out, gathering feedback, and seeing what feels right.

Ways to experiment include:

- **Internships and part-time jobs:** Short-term roles can give you a sense of the work culture and responsibilities without long-term commitment.
- **Volunteering:** Especially valuable if you're considering mission-driven work or nonprofit roles.
- **Freelancing or side projects:** Taking on short-term gigs or personal projects can help you test your skills and interests in a low-risk setting.
- **Courses and certifications:** These not only enhance your skills but also allow you to gauge your interest in a particular subject area.
- **Stepping-stone positions:** think of positions you may not want to end at as stepping stones to where you eventually want to go.

Through these experiences, you begin to identify what energizes you, what drains you, and what aligns with your long-term goals.

4. Decision-Making

After assessing yourself, exploring options, and experimenting, it's time to make a decision. This is often the most difficult part, as it involves committing to a path while accepting the uncertainty that comes with any major life choice.

To make a sound decision:

- **Weigh the pros and cons:** List out the benefits and challenges of each path you're considering.

- **Consider alignment:** Does the path reflect your core values, play to your strengths, and support your lifestyle goals?
- **Imagine your future self:** Picture yourself in the role 5 or 10 years down the line. Are you fulfilled? Do you feel a sense of purpose?
- **Consult trusted advisors:** Share your thoughts with mentors, friends, or family members who know you well and can offer honest, supportive feedback.

Sometimes, despite thorough analysis, you still won't feel 100% certain. That's normal. Many successful careers are built through a series of informed decisions and course corrections over time.

5. Commitment and Growth

Once a decision is made, the work of commitment begins. This means setting goals, acquiring necessary qualifications, and actively building a career in your chosen field. However, commitment does not mean rigidity. The modern career landscape is dynamic. Adaptability and lifelong learning are essential to growth and satisfaction.

Staying reflective and open to change is key. Check in with yourself regularly to assess how well your work aligns with your evolving goals and values. Career discernment is not a one-time event but a lifelong process. People grow, industries change, and what once felt right may no longer serve you years later.

Prayer: The Role of Spiritual or Philosophical Reflection

For some, especially those from faith traditions or those who value contemplative practice, career discernment includes a spiritual dimension. Questions like "What am I called to do?" or "What does the world need from me?" elevate the decision from a practical concern to a matter of purpose and contribution.

Practices such as prayer, retreats, or conversations with spiritual mentors can offer clarity and peace during the discernment process. This is the last stage, but *something you need to be doing throughout the process*.

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

1. **Rushing the process:** Career decisions made in haste often lead to dissatisfaction. Take the time needed to move through each stage.
2. **Over-relying on external expectations:** Family, cultural norms, or societal pressures can skew decision-making. Listen to others while reflecting on how God has wired you.
3. **Perfectionism:** There's no perfect job. Every role comes with trade-offs. Look for a "good enough" fit and be willing to adjust over time.
4. **Fear of failure:** Mistakes and missteps are part of the journey. Each experience offers valuable lessons that inform future choices.

Conclusion

Career discernment is an intentional, reflective process that invites you to align your professional life with your deeper self. It's not simply about finding a job but about pursuing a vocation—a way of contributing to the world that feels authentic and fulfilling.

Though the process can be complex and at times overwhelming, it is also an opportunity for profound personal growth. By approaching career discernment with curiosity, courage, and commitment, you set the stage for a life of purpose, satisfaction, and meaningful work.

ASK YOUR MENTOR

1. How have you discerned career direction or career changes? Would you tell me about that journey?
2. What resources have been helpful? Not helpful?
3. Is there anything missing from the above?

Reflect & Respond/Self-Rate (Mentee)

Check the degree to which you have already worked in the above stages of the career discernment process. 5= A lot of work completed.

	1	2	3	4	5
Self-Assessment					
Exploration					
Experimentation					
Decision-Making					
Commitment and Growth					
Prayer: The Role of Spiritual or Philosophical Reflection					

Go Do

1. Ask God, "What should I focus on?" Write down what comes to mind. How will you follow through? What will you do? By when?
2. Practice. How I will practice or what will I do with what I learned over the next month:

Sources & Resources

Website: www.thegiftednesscenter.com

Website: www.careerdirect.org

Book: The Person Called You, Why You're Here, Why You Matter & What You Should Do With Your Life, By Bill Hendricks, <http://www.thegiftednesscenter.com/the-person-called-you>

Ask your mentor what resources I should consider that aren't mentioned above.