

YOUR PERSONAL CAREER TRAP

It's easy to step into a "career trap" of your own making. Such a trap has been carefully conceived and set in place by society over a long, long period of time. As such, it can be difficult to spot in your path and thus hard to avoid. You may have innocently set your foot inside it at one time or another and then grimaced as its clamps slammed shut. Clang!

What exactly is a career trap? Just simply that the great work that you have been doing, or that you do now or have been studying towards, doesn't need to be even acknowledged as valuable work. Because after all, someone may have remarked to you, "Anybody could do it or learn to do it. It's really nothing special or unique." Translation: And so neither are you!

But respect is a necessity for each one of us, especially if you're planning to turn yourself inside out and make a major career move. And seeing yourself as a unique and valuable contributor to the overall work world is a requisite for maintaining respect for yourself.

Otherwise, you begin believing that (a) you don't deserve a fabulous career life, and (b) the knowledge and expertise and individualized

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thinking that you've developed over the years aren't all that special. You then start devaluing yourself and disbelieving you can ever make such a fulfilling career move at all. And that buys you a one-way ticket to No-fun Land.

Help Is on the Way

Fortunately, by picking up this book, you've made yourself an important career commitment. You've actually decided to take command of your work life. Whether you've been fantasizing about getting promoted, moving laterally to a new department, changing your career, quitting your present job, moving into your first real professional job after graduation--whatever! Something inside you has begun suggesting to you that you can do it.

So let's now gauge your level of positive thinking and self-confidence. If you've been allowing too many inner barriers to stand in your way, you'll need to start knocking them aside so you can ramp things up. For example, do you tend to yield too much power to external forces? Delay personal career victory by living off excuses? Put yourself continually in the background while others get the spotlight and pull it away from you? In the worksheet below, answer the questions using the scale. Then we'll score your answers for a readout of your "positive self-belief"--that is, your level of self-confidence about your chances for genuine career fulfillment.

1. Dreaming of a better life will get you nowhere. _____
2. You CAN fight City Hall. _____
3. Television is a vast wasteland. _____

4. The chances of finding a job I will enjoy are very unlikely _____
5. There are no decent movies around anymore. _____
6. I'm not really a creative person. _____
7. Lending money to friends usually ends in trouble. _____
8. Cops are never around when you need them. _____
9. People do not understand me. _____
10. The world is my oyster! _____

Total _____

Scoring:

Give yourself two points if you marked an 8 or higher on questions

1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9, one point if you marked a 4, 5, 6, or 7 on these questions and zero points if you marked a 3 or lower.

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Give yourself two points if you marked a 3 or lower on questions 2 and 10, one point if you marked a 4, 5, 6, or 7 on these questions and no points if you marked an 8 or higher.

Now total all your scores.

How did you do? Did you score 20? If so, you scored big! That's a perfect score, and it means you absolutely, no-question-about-it, couldn't be more of a positive thinker if you tried. You're optimistic, you believe in your ability to effect change, and you've got your barriers in check or you're constantly working on them. It's unlikely that you let yourself feel victimized for any great length of time.

NOTE OF CAUTION: Does this mean that you never have to work on your barriers, that everything comes easy to you? Probably not. More likely you have to work on your inner barriers the same as everyone else. But you probably give yourself effective inner signals to make your efforts at eradicating your barriers pay off. You've decided in your head that you can do it.

If you scored 15 to 19, you're on your way to heaven, although you're not quite there yet. You probably know that you've got to keep watch on yourself so you don't stray from the path. I suggest periodically asking yourself such questions as:

Which inner barriers do I most want to get rid of?

Which give me the most trouble?

What solutions can I think of to keep them in check?

A score of 8 to 14 means you have some work to do. There may be a bug in your ear that keeps whispering something to this effect: "No matter what you do, you will probably never make it. Face it: there's too much going against you. It's just not in the cards."

So for you low scorers, it's time to set free that wild, never-say-die, high-flying bird that lives deep inside you.... And is crying to get out! Flick away all the naysaying that keeps getting in your way. Put this book down for a moment and begin flapping those powerful, elegant freedom-loving wings.

Go ahead now, do what I say, I'll wait. Flap, flap, flap.

Now, ahem, didn't that feel just wonderful? Practice such wingflapping each and every day from now on. Practice at work, at your

desk at home, at school. At Starbucks, in your car, at the gym, or waiting at a bus stop, getting cash from an ATM or Googling in the school library. Alone or in front of friends. Or strangers. It will make you stronger.

Did I leave anybody out in the scoring? Oh, you say you scored less than 8? Well, then, ahhh... you've got a lot of work to do! You have a few hills to climb.

But fear not; you won't be going it alone. After all... you did buy this book!

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Trust me when I tell you this, and this goes for everyone: You've got greatness inside of you, and you're about to display it. You're now embarking on a grand adventure that will take you to a new place, a happy and brave new world, at which you will discover your dream career.

Before we go on, let's define our terms. When I use the phrase "discover your dream career," I'm not some dopey-eyed idiot. I have indeed lived and learned, I've been around the block (a few times, actually), I like you graduated from the school of hard knocks. (Enough clichés for ya?)

All of which means that I am not recommending you discover your "fantasy career." Fantasies are just that: far-out yet deep in our minds, separate from reality, something that seems like great fun and excitement but in truth probably would not be so in real life. Fantasies ignore the downside of things and the pitfalls and the tough challenges.

Fantasies represent perfect... which life is not.

So a dream is different, a dream is "a wish your heart makes," or so the theme song to the Wonderful World of Disney used to insist many decades ago. Walt Disney himself, no slouch in his own life when it came to making dreams "come true," once uttered, "If you can dream it, you can do it." And many of us who have jumped over high hurdles to leap up lofty goals would agree with that: The first step is to imagine a seemingly impossible goal, i.e., to dream or wish. Next take a few steps toward making that dream/wish inside your mind more concrete, typically through such actions as writing it down, and/or talking it out with someone, and/or declaring it verbally to the world, and/or doing some research to gauge its practicality, and so forth.

You get the picture, right? It's about taking baby steps at first, sticking your toe in the water, trying this and that. OK there I go with the cliché bit again.

In this book, we'll also meet quite a few folks who followed this very path and not only discovered a dream career but have lived to tell about how they eventually got themselves into it. Your dream career is more than attainable, millions before you have managed to attain their own and with the help of this book and your determination, you will too!

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The Dream Career Files

NANCY HALE: Simply by Chatting

For more than twenty years, Nancy Hale had felt completely secured in her career. A high school history teacher, she'd been appointed head of the department at age 22, an event that would set the tone of her work and life for two decades. She could ignore recessions and job market turmoil and just go to work and do her job. As a divorced single mother, she could raise her son, Tim, and worry about the outside world.

But after she passed age 40, Nancy's life changed. The cutbacks and layoffs and downsizings she'd been dimly hearing about, stories of work and family lives getting torn apart in private industry throughout the 1980s, suddenly came slashing her way. Her town's school board began chopping up its budget and eliminating entire departments. Once sacred cows, these departments had now been rendered obsolete, untenable, a luxury. She got word about her own dismissal from the newspapers: Her safe, secured, comfortable, familiar routine would be over at the end of June.

"I have no connections, I'm too old, I'm not qualified for anything else," she told anyone who would listen. She felt her life beginning to unravel. "I only know teaching. What will I do? What? I'm just terrified!" Nancy worried about other blocks, too, great, lurking internal ones. As she considered moving herself from here to there, she confronted a truth about herself.

"I'm a classic self-saboteur," she confided to us. "Whenever I try to change my life I make sure I don't succeed. I'll do everything I'm supposed to, everything people say you've got to do to make progress, but I keep resisting the process all the way. I refuse to let myself succeed." In the midst of this crisis Nancy surprised herself. With our guidance, she began by "de-whelming" herself, breaking down the scary big picture she faced, downsizing it into small, realizable steps. That got her started. With each step she advanced a little further down the path. And each time she stepped off, she automatically left an old place and arrived somewhere new- new vistas, new resources, and fresh possibilities.

By taking such beginning steps, Nancy got herself into gear, despite her terror. What form did her steps take? She simply began chatting with people. That was all at first, just chatting folks up. Here's my story, sad but true. Everyone she met got earful- grocers, mailmen, gas station attendants, old friends. Astonishingly, the mere act of reporting her personal crisis to others released many of her blocks. People returned positive feedback to her about all her concerns.

"I'm trying to find out what I want to do next, but I'm not sure what that is," she told anyone and everyone who would listen. "I'm looking for a new opportunity." Nancy's openings were short, sweet, and candid. Now lob the ball back.

Nearly all the people Nancy talked to had some kind of idea, suggestion, or tale of their own life turnarounds to offer her. Many truly great conversations ensued, including not a few invaluable ideas from totally unexpected sources. Soon she had so many options to explore there was

no time left for panic, self-denigration, or hopelessness. She could make this change, whatever it was going to be. She really could.

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All these interactions, all this chit-chat with a purpose, propelled Nancy Hale into a new image of herself and of what life could be. She put all the pieces together, including her home life with her son, Tim. She could spend more time with him, help him grow, pay attention. She could feel more creative and confident and personally powerful than she'd ever felt working at the school.

Someone somewhere told her about a man who wanted to sell a profitable home-based newsletter. After speaking with others who ran similar businesses, Nancy quickly came to understand, to her amazement, how eminently qualified she was: Her excellent organizing and editing skills would enable her to set up the business easily in her own home, and she also began noticing a knack for coming up with creative ideas for better marketing the business. The ideas just started flowing through her head and she couldn't stop them. The more she thought of herself in this new role, in fact, the more she felt that she could manage this business even better than its present owner!

So she took out a second mortgage on her home, negotiated a fair price for all, and bought herself a new world.

"I'm independent now, in control of my life," she could later report to all those willing contacts and resources she'd met along the way. "Now no one can fire me- I'm running my own show. That forces me to be more creative, energized and alive than I ever was at the school! It's up to me to keep making things happen now. That's still a scary thought at times, but not so scary as the idea that I couldn't make my life work out the way I want to."

As so often transpires when people break through blocks and start taking command of their lives, Nancy's universe turned around completely as a result of her decisions. In the midst of all this remarkable personal change, in fact, her school reinstated her department and offered her old job back. Immediately she thought, "How dare they! They just got me used to the idea that they don't want me anymore, and I finally came to accept that. Now they want to drag me back. The arrogance!" How the lady had changed!

But Nancy reframed the dilemma as a window of opportunity, a challenge to her new assertiveness. What if she could shape this into something that worked for her? Sure, I'll come back, she decided to tell the school principal, but first I want you to release my accumulated retirement funds to me, then hire me on a part-time basis only, and at hours of my own choosing. The old Nancy would never have even thought of doing this.

So Nancy Hale now works mornings as a teacher, the profession she carefully crafted throughout most of her adult life, and the rest of her day as a successful desktop publisher. She spends much time with her son, takes classes in areas of other interest, and runs her own life.

Do blocks and old doubts still rumble around in her head, taunting

her, pushing at her? Sure, they keep trying to creep back in, she acknowledges, but they're no longer welcome, nor do they visit for very long. Whatever blocks come her way now, whatever terrors spring forward, she faces them down. She's worked out her own definition of balance, and she's made it reality.