

## 4: What Don't You Like?

Allison graduated from college four years ago and already wanted to change her career.

She had attended a prestigious university. When forced to pick a major, she chose marketing; it seemed as good as any of her other interests. After all, she thought, it would lead to a job, which she needed after graduation for rent, health insurance, and to pay off student loans.

In four years, Allison had had four jobs. Each time she left a job, she thought the next would prove that marketing really was for her. So far, that hadn't happened. She worried how future employers would judge her resume, but worried more about being miserable for eight hours a day.

"I still don't know what I want to do," she said. "My interests are varied—music and photography are only two. It's not like there's something that I can't wait to jump into. I have no clue how I could make money with what I like to do."

Allison wondered if she ever would.

### ***Hating Your Job is a Gift***

I told Allison, first of all, that hating her job was a gift. "Because you are clear on what you don't like," I said, "it will be easier for you to

discover what you do like.”

I then asked Allison to spell out, in detail, what she didn't like about her job. As much as her job loathing was a gift, it was a gift she needed to leave behind; being miserable for eight-plus hours feels as bad as working all day in rain-soaked clothes. The sooner Allison could transform the energy of “I hate it” to the energy of “But there is something else I do like,” the better she would feel.

To help Allison, I asked her what she didn't like about her job in these categories:

- Physical environment where she works
- Work hours
- Commute
- Business travel (this may or may not apply to you)
- Office politics
- Corporate style (such as flexible vs. structured)
- Boss
- Pay
- Co-Workers and/or customers
- The day-to-day tasks performed; the work itself
- End product or service created by the company

As we went through the list, Allison had few complaints. It was

not until I asked her about her boss that she winced, and said, “Nothing that I do is good enough for her. Even when I do something almost perfectly, she will find the smallest mistake to criticize. On top of that, she asks me to stay late and work, always at the last minute. And she assumes that I will say yes.”

Babysitting Lesson #4: Bosses can sometimes be unfair.

I listened, thinking that Allison might be more in need of mentoring on how to manage up than a career change. But then I asked her about her co-workers.

She said, “In all my marketing jobs, I have never found anyone that I felt comfortable with. This one is no different. I feel like a fish out of water.”

Allison’s words were a red flag. In careers that are a fit, we generally find people with whom we feel a bond. They don’t have to turn into our best friends outside of work, but they should not seem like another breed.

When I asked her about the work itself, she was even more revealing. “Marina, what I do leaves me with a ‘so what?’ feeling. Even when I accomplish something, what does it matter that another sales

campaign kicks off? Who cares? I guess, ultimately, the consumer benefits by buying a superior product. That's the theory anyway. But even if it's true, it's too thin a satisfaction to motivate and interest me. Way too thin."

### ***The Opposite of What You Don't Like***

Once Allison said what she didn't like, I asked her for the opposite. If her next career were the opposite of her current career, what would it look like?

But this time I asked Allison to take a few days and write down the opposite. Even if she talked it over with a friend first and then wrote, I wanted her to see *what she wanted* in print. There is power in the written word.

When Allison returned, she had written that her next career would be:

- A career that I enjoy and that contributes to something that I believe in
- Co-workers who could possibly be my friends

You can see that Allison was still vague; she didn't know *the* career that would make her forever, every-moment happy (which, by the way, doesn't exist). But she did know that:

- She didn't hate *everything* about her job. From this, she realized that she hadn't flunked the select-a-job exam after all.
- The things that she did *not* like were important to a healthy career. This compelled her to continue discovering a new career.

### ***Alternatives to a Career Change***

Like Rachel in the Introduction, you may not dislike your current career or job—but there is some change you would like to see happen or you would not continue with this book. It is important to recognize, specifically, what you want to be different so that the size of your solution fits the problem. Why vacuum the whole house when a spot-clean will do?

When you pinpoint what you would like to be different, you could find that less drastic changes are required. Instead of a wholesale career change you might:

- **Change work hours or locations**—Working from home might be what you are really after. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics<sup>1</sup>, about fifteen percent of women work from

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Work at Home Summary, 2005

home. Other surveys show that roughly double that percentage would like to.

- **Change bosses**—According to Gallup research<sup>2</sup>, a person’s relationship with her immediate manager is the most important determinant of how long she stays and how productive she is at a job. Do you need a change of manager rather than a career change?
- **Change companies**—Not all employers are alike. Corporate cultures vary dramatically, which is why lists of the “Best Companies to Work For” stay popular.
- **Change industries**—Do you abhor working for a manufacturing company but would love the same position for a green company? Are you a teacher tired of squirmy kids who instead would like to train squirmy adults?
- **Change what you do after work**—and focus on your passion. There are attorneys who sing in polka bands on the weekends, engineers who are models, and hair stylists who are authors. Why not you?

If you suspect you might want less than a wholesale career

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<sup>2</sup> *First, Break All the Rules: What the World’s Greatest Managers Do Differently* by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman

change, the system described in this book works for you, too. While you might need to customize the language slightly to accommodate your change, the principles are the same.

### ***When the Mind is Foggy***

The answer to the question, “Why do I want to change my career?” can be profound. Maybe you are gradually shifting your inner priorities or moving from one major phase of life to another. When change occurs, we often resist it more than welcome it—especially if the change seems imposed from the outside, like being laid off or fired.

These days, if deciding what to wear is hard for you, making career choices may be even harder. Don’t worry. As you continue reading, your clarity will increase.

Besides, there was once someone else who was very, very unclear—me.

### ***Stepping Stones to Clarity***

As I mentioned in the Introduction, my first career was social work. My first job in that field, which began two weeks after I graduated from college and one week after getting married, was as a caseworker for families receiving public assistance.

In the beginning I loved what I did. But after a year, putting my finger in the dam of poverty began to hurt. In retrospect, I realize that casework met one of my core values, which was making a contribution. But working in a highly regulated bureaucracy stifled other values, such as achieving results and having flexibility.

In contrast, my then-husband, who was in medical school, must have had all of his values met, and more. He practically skipped to the hospital! He loved his work! And most impressive to both of our families, he was going to be a public health doctor and help tons of people!

I grew more and more discontented with social work. I didn't ask why I was so dissatisfied; I did not dissect my aversion. Instead, I decided to upgrade. In order to more efficiently solve societal problems (I talked like that at the time), I would become a lawyer, a class action attorney. As an attorney, I reasoned, I could also enjoy more flexibility and recognition.

The decision to become a lawyer came from my head. It was logical; it made sense.

When friends asked me why I was switching, I talked about lawyers who made a difference, like my heroes at the Southern Poverty Law Center. But the words were hollow; a part of me knew that my

heart hadn't initiated this plan.

The application process began. I barely studied for the Law School Admission Test (LSAT), yet applied only to prestigious schools that required high LSAT scores. Now I see that my lack of preparation reflected my lack of even a spark of passion. At the time, I was oblivious. "Of course I want to be a lawyer," I told my husband when he compared my scant study time to the hours he had spent prepping for medical school admission tests.

Obliviousness ended after receiving the third and final rejection letter. My ego sobbed her eyes out while a more knowing part of me was relieved. Whew—one less thing that I didn't want to do. The rejection hurt too much for me to call it fortunate, but that is the word I use today.

After the rejection, I went to graduate school in another branch of social work, community organizing, and eventually worked in West Oakland organizing the first farmers' market in a California inner city. The job was the package I had been looking for years before: contribution, action, flexibility, and, yes, even recognition. Until one of my values shifted, it was perfect.

## **Chapter 4 Exercises**

### **The Opposite Of**

1. Answer the same questions about your career as Allison, the Marketing major, did. Why do you want to leave? What don't you like about your job or career? (If you're not currently working or working in your field, use the last job you held.) You can either write your answers or tell a friend.
2. Now, write or tell a friend the *opposite* of each item you do not like.
3. Notice your energy level as you write or talk. What depresses you or makes you the angriest about your dislike list? What inspires you the most about the opposite list?

### **Tell a Friend**

1. Picture the face of your best friend, someone who has supported you time and time again.
2. Now, tell this person why you want to make a career move. They will listen to you without saying anything in reply. This is

especially easy since they are not really there! Don't let your mind inhibit what you say; it will try.

3. Imagine that they ask you to repeat your reasons for changing your career. Reach deeper inside of yourself. Tell them again why you are changing careers. See what you tell them the second time.
4. How do you feel about your motivation for career change? Does it resonate with you?
5. Don't worry if you don't feel solid with your reasons. It's still early on.

### **Chapter 4 Summary**

Congratulations! You have faced what you don't like about your current career. You have also looked at the opposite of your dislikes, that is, what you want in your next career. If a career shift seems too drastic, there are alternatives.

Most importantly, you have begun asking yourself, "Why do I want to make a career change?" The answer may not be clear yet, but

it will be.

In the next chapter you'll meet Carmen, who knew why she switched careers—only her move did not turn out as expected.