



Do What You Do Best

for Adults

Time To Re-Evaluate

What happens when you reach a turning point in your career? What if you have been in a field for ten years and feel an urge to change? Tom Abernathy reached that stage at the tender age of 25. He started as a child actor, received a degree in drama and worked in the theater as an adult. Then he realized he needed a change. Tom wanted to use his creativity, but he also wanted to move into a field that had more practical promise.



“I had run out of options. I wasn’t doing anything wrong; I just felt it was time to re-evaluate. I needed to find out what was true about me. I almost hoped someone would tell me that I should be an accountant.”

Tom took The Highlands Ability Battery and he wasn’t advised to be an accountant. Instead, he found out that he was in the right arena, but that he wasn’t using all of his abilities to best advantage. He discovered that he had the ability to solve problems in a well thought-out, logical manner and that he had an innate sense of how relationships work in the real world. These abilities, along with musical abilities, an eye for detail and a high vocabulary, all pointed to the role of a person who wants to write and direct productions rather than act in them.

Tom was delighted. “This quantified things that I had always intuited, and reinforced the general direction in which I had already been moving. I learned that I had been in the right ballpark but I needed to move toward something more sensitive to my abilities. All of my experience had been in theater; I didn’t know much about film. But I saw that by using my talents as a director or writer in film, I could apply what I really knew to a field that had more commercial promise.”

Determined to put this knowledge to use, Tom applied to several film schools, was accepted by the University of Southern California, and has received a Master of Fine Arts degree in film production. He has started using the surveying techniques he learned from the Highlands book *Don’t Waste Your Talent* to implement his plan for the future. Tom has found an agent and written a screenplay which is being considered by a major film company.

What helped Tom the most was the realization that he could listen to his own feelings and ideas as well as the ideas of his Highlands Affiliate. He came up with several options and then used surveying techniques to determine which options offered the most promise. He found out that he “shouldn’t close the door on change when new options arise.”

Constructing a Personal Vision

Eight Critical Success Factors

Tom made his decision about the direction he wanted to follow in his career by creating a Personal Vision based on the eight career decision factors. These factors—abilities, skills, interests, personal style, family, values, vision and goals, and stage of personal development—all interact and should be considered when making major changes in one’s life.

In Tom’s case, his ability pattern indicated that he would do well in any role that allowed him to direct the production of a tangible object. That description could apply equally to the roles of architect, music composer, manufacturer or, for Tom, film writer and director. In Tom’s case, it was his interests and acquired skills that led him to decide that he wanted to remain in the area of performing arts and to use his writing talents.

Assessing his personal work style, values and goals, Tom realized that it was important to him to achieve financial independence but not to abandon his creative autonomy. Tom works best when he can make decisions based on his own philosophies and artistic visions. He values independence and lack of regimentation more than he values corporate power or a great deal of wealth. His vision was to be able to write in a commercially rewarding way and, when possible, to direct his own works with complete creative independence.

Tom also took into account his stage in the career development cycle and the influences of his family background – one which had always supported the arts as a socially valuable career. Tom found a Highlands Affiliate after college with three years of theater experience. He realized at that point that he needed to make the transition into an adult career path that would provide financial stability and still incorporate the other things that were important to him. Tom’s career path started with additional education, but many people incorporate changes into their lives by making more subtle shifts in their work or by bringing outside interests to their daily routine.

Each person should make decisions based on the unique factors that influence his or her life. It is important to learn to pull out and articulate each aspect of your life in order to make those choices that integrate all aspects of your life. Leaving out even one can result in frustration and dissatisfaction.

Find Out What Fascinates You and Use That Passion At Work

Several years ago, there was a story on television about the 'Living Treasures of Japan.' One of the people honored was a weaver in one of the far Northern provinces. "Sometimes I lie awake in the early morning hours waiting for the sun to come up, so that I can start my weaving again."

This woman was engaged in a simple, repetitive task, but was utterly fascinated by every part of it - the yarn, the colors, the dying, the act of weaving itself. The end product, the woven cloth, was almost an afterthought for her. And yet her cloth is considered so unusually beautiful, rich, and finely made that much of it is displayed in museums as examples of the art.

We are often asked if people can really love what they are doing in this day and age. Executives, managers, professionals, people who would seem to have it all together - are asking if they can actually be passionate about what they do.

Of course they can. You can get up in the morning looking forward to work. You can find out what fascinates you about what you do. In fact, finding out that key part of you can absolutely mean the difference between just going to work and being enthusiastic about it.

Bringing more of yourself into your work makes sense: the more involved, interested and fascinated you are by what you are doing, the more you will enjoy it, and the more productive and creative you will be. How do you do that? You have to work at it. You can't just assume that your interests and enthusiasms are easily captured

Many people say that there is nothing really interesting about what they do all day. They probably aren't looking beyond the trees. Consider one cashier at a large, all night drug store. He got interested in the kinds of customers that came in, and what they bought. He found that the buying habits of some customers were so regular that he could predict fairly accurately what ended up in their shopping bags. He developed an idea about how to arrange the merchandise to take advantage of these observations, and he wrote a report to management. You can guess the result: management wanted him on the fast promotion track immediately.

The weaver and the cashier found things that fascinated them and brought them to their work. You can do this too.

Where Are You In The Six Turning Points?

Make Discovery A Priority: Finding your fascinations takes surprisingly little time and energy - but you have to take action to get there. You can't just assume you know.

Be Aware Of What Grabs Your Attention: If a news story gets your interest, ask yourself, "why"? If a picture in a magazine is interesting, cut it out. Don't be concerned if it doesn't have anything to do with work.

Start an Interest File: Get a file folder or just a box and put it someplace easily visible. Collect your notes - things that get your attention, articles and pictures you cut out, even your random thoughts about things that interest you. Anything. What things excite your interest? What would you like to know more about?

Keep Your Files for at Least Two Weeks: Longer is better. Just keep throwing stuff in.

Don't Try To Make Sense Of It Right Away: Give yourself time. This is one of the most important secrets of creativity. You don't have to make sense of everything for now. You are looking for as wide a sampling as possible of all of the things that get your attention all day long - not just those things that you have to do.

After A Few Weeks, Open Up Your Interest File: Pull everything out that you have been collecting and spread it all out on the floor. Start to sort it out. What interested you about that story? What was fascinating about this picture? How are they related? If you don't get any real groupings, put it all back and keep collecting for a few more weeks. Try again.

Name Your Groupings: Develop some categories for your interests. You need a name for them, because you have to start focusing on what you are interested in. Make a list. Put them in order of things that interest you most.

Take It To Work: Now that you have a clearer sense and picture of the things that fascinate you and turn you on in life, it's time to start looking for these things at work. What can you become involved in that would light you up every day? What can you start at your company that would make you want to get back to it every morning? Take the time; make it a priority; and do it.

