



# **JOB SEARCHING: AN ENTREPRENEURIAL APPROACH**

## ***Undergraduate Resource Series***

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## **The Start-Up of You\***

A successful job search is similar to launching a successful new business or venture. Both require taking initiative and being proactive, finding ways to stand out and differentiate yourself, being resilient and adaptable if your first plan doesn't work, and making professional connections that will help you through each step of the process. It's not enough to just send applications and then passively wait—the job search is an active process that involves meeting and interacting with many professionals, which is why we often refer to the job search as a “contact sport.”

### **Do you know the new career rules?**

- Gone is the “escalator” model where you start at the entry level and ride to the top.
- The amount of time you spend at one job is shrinking.
- Globalization and technology continue to change the world of work.
- Competition, markets, and the problems that need to be solved are changing.
- You need an entrepreneurial mindset to work in any organizational setting, whether a start-up, multinational corporation, nonprofit, or government agency.

### **Are you prepared for the future?**

Many of the possible jobs in your future haven't been invented yet—your ability to learn, adapt, and develop additional skills will quickly become more important than your current “technical” skills.

- Are you able to adapt, be flexible, pivot and iterate, and view failure as a learning opportunity?
- Can you operate in “permanent beta” mode—not finished and ready for improvement?
- Are you prepared to learn more, do more, grow more, and know that you have the power to improve yourself and the world around you?

### **What is your competitive advantage?**

### **Knowing this can help you answer...**

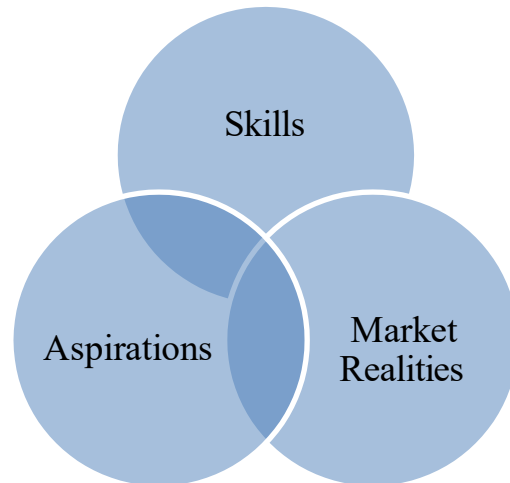
- What should I do with my life?
- Which opportunities should I pursue?
- How should I invest in myself?

### **The best way to answer these questions is by doing.**

- Your identity isn't found—it emerges.
- You remake yourself as you grow and change.
- Your skills and experiences are constantly developing.
- Accept the uncertainty of where you are headed when starting out, and your career will unfold over time.

\*This handout is summarized from the book The Start-up of You authored by Reid Hoffman, the co-founder and Chairman of LinkedIn, and venture capitalist Ben Casnocha. To learn more see [www.startupofyou.com](http://www.startupofyou.com).

**Three forces affect the future: your SKILLS, ASPIRATIONS, and MARKET REALITIES.**



- **Skills and Assets**

Take stock of your skills and assets since success often builds on these:

- Knowledge and information
- Your strengths (things that come easily to you)
- Professional connections and people with whom you have a track record of success
- Your reputation and brand—what would people say about your work? Your role on a team? Your ability to meet deadlines?
- Financial resources, savings, and housing options
- Equipment (i.e. laptop, smartphone, furniture, car)
- How might you strengthen your assets by investing in yourself?
  - What might you add to your knowledge and skills?
  - What are you willing to expend energy on, show enthusiasm for, and work and hustle to learn?

- **Aspirations and Values**

- Ideas, goals, and vision for the future—dream big! Where do you see yourself in 5-10 years and what are your goals?
- Core values—What is important to you in life (i.e. knowledge, autonomy, money, integrity, professional growth, flexibility, power, family)? What drives you forward?

- **Market Realities**

- Where is there growth or hiring in areas you are interested in? Who might be willing to pay you for what you want to do? What is available and possible right now with your skills and experience? Are there any waves to catch? (MCS career [advisors](#) and [Harvard alumni](#) can help you identify these market realities.) The Job Market Insights tab on the top of the MCS Career Pathways Page also has helpful data you can reference.

### **Putting the Three Forces Together**

Your career plans should leverage your skills, set you in the direction of your goals, and account for market realities. Building a successful career involves reflecting on these three forces each time you make a decision or turn in a new direction. Since the world is changing, the best you can do is have a hypothesis and test this theory in the workplace through trial and error. Practical knowledge is best developed by doing, not just thinking or planning, and you won't know what the best plan is until you have experimented with different options. It's going to take years to develop a "career": think of it as a journey rather than a destination. Your first job out of college is your next step along

that journey.

## **Follow These Steps Forward**

- Strengthen and diversify your skill set by learning new things.
- Prioritize options that offer the best chance to learn about yourself and the world.
- Find an environment where you can shine.
- Differentiate yourself by building expertise.
- Build a portfolio of accomplishments and relationships with others.

## **THE START-UP OF YOU: A, B, Z PLAN**

- **Plan A**
  - Start with an opportunity that allows you to meet interesting people and acquire new knowledge and skills. As you learn, pivot and iterate regularly.
- **Plan B**
  - Need to change your goal or the route to get there? Plan B is what you pivot to. It may involve a new job or graduate school.
  - Plan B often is in the same ballpark as Plan A. You might pivot because you have discovered a new opportunity, because in Plan A you are not learning and growing as much as you would like, or because you feel you need education to advance.
  - You want to give thought to Plan B but you can't predict what it will be since Plan B will be based on what you learn in Plan A.
  - Once you pivot to Plan B, stick with it; it becomes your new Plan A.
- **Plan Z**
  - You should also have a Plan C, D, etc., but Plan Z is your lifeboat: a reliable alternative if career plans fall apart, or you want a major life change. Plan Z allows you to take on uncertainty and risk.
  - Occasional missteps are to be expected, but errors are not permanent. Plans can be stopped, reversed, or morphed. Iterate bit by bit. Start with a trial period. Keep your day job if you want to experiment with something completely new.
  - Think and plan two steps ahead and don't focus on immediate gratification. A goal that can be achieved in a single step is probably not very meaningful or ambitious.
  - If you are unsure, pick a first step that might lead to a broad range of possible next options.
  - Establish an identity independent of your employer, city, and industry so that you have a professional identity you can take with you when you move or change jobs.

## **It Takes a Network**

Professionals build networks to help them navigate the world. Invest in your professional network to grow your career. People you connect with are a source of opportunities and institutional knowledge. They are also gatekeepers who can exert gravitational pull from within an organization to help you get that meeting or interview that might land you the job.

Relationships matter because they shape who you are and who you will become. Are you taking full advantage of your Harvard network? Mignone Center for Career Success advisors can help you learn how to [expand your network](#).

## **Finding Opportunities**

Use your network to find and develop professional opportunities that will extend your competitive advantage and grow your Plan A or Plan B. Look for breakout projects, connections, experiences, and luck that lead to career growth. Develop behavioral habits that increase your likelihood of being in the right place at the right time. Being curious about industries, people, and jobs will alert you to professional opportunities. Hanging out with curious people can lead to new discoveries. For example, hanging in the Harvard Innovation Labs space might allow you to easily connect with new founders working on cutting-edge projects.

Even if you're happily employed, keep up your professional network to build opportunity and muscle memory. When Jack Dorsey, founder of Twitter and Square, spoke at Harvard, he said he walks a different way to work each day to foster new ideas and observations. When you are looking for an opportunity, you are really looking for people. An organization doesn't offer you a job—people do.

## **Final Words of Wisdom**

Build a professional network, invest in skill development, keep learning, be curious, take intelligent risks, pursue breakout opportunities, and begin forging your own career path. Evolve and adapt, and as the world changes, enjoy knowing how to function in “permanent beta mode” to make a continuing impact in your field of interest. Utilize your resources and meet with Mignone Center for Career Success [advisors](#) as you explore your next steps.