

What's the best career for me?

Today's guest for our "Professionals Speak" interview is Lucky Kalsi from the Career Centre at the University of Toronto. Lucky is a Career Counsellor at the Career Centre and prior to joining the University worked as a social worker and a health care professional. Today we are going to briefly address the topic: "What's the Best Career for me?"

So Lucky, in your opinion, do most students know what careers they want to do before they come to university?

Based on my experience of working with many students as well as a recent online poll that we did here at the Career Centre, the majority of students don't know what careers they want to pursue before they come to university. I would say about 80 to 90% of students fall into this category.

So when I see students that are in this situation, I do share that information with them and they are often relieved to hear that they are not alone and that this is a normal experience for them.

So once they hear that it is normal and it is a process, they are much more open to the idea that if it's a process, then there must be steps to navigate that process. So their thinking then does start to change from "I don't know what I want to do" to "What can I do?"

So many students come to university, they don't necessarily have to know what they want to do; it is probably during that time that they can fine tune some of their interests, that is good for them to know. So how then does a student decide if I don't know what I want to do? How then do I go about finding out what is the career that would be right for me?

Well, I find that most students have that knowledge stored somewhere within them and we just have to help them bring it about. So one of the places that I would recommend that, you know, students can start is to really start thinking about what are the best qualities about themselves that they want to use in the work that they might be interested in. So I would encourage them to start thinking about what courses have they really enjoyed most. For example, in high school or currently that they might be thinking of taking. Which ones have they done really well in? What careers, maybe, have they heard about that sound interesting to them and as well, what do they enjoy doing during their spare time and what are their other hobbies? What did they do in high school extracurricular(ly) speaking and do they like it? What did they enjoy doing? So this would help them to start to generate some good interest points, some good perhaps then career options that link to those interests and then once they have that preliminary list then they can go ahead, start talking to people in those fields or people that have those similar interests and really start to then assess well which one might be better for me. So again starting point, there is a process and then hopefully will get to that decision.

OK! But I could be, you know, a graduate student or I could be undergraduate student or in a professional program. I am committed to my engineering program that is a program I want or to my nursing program or my graduate work; but I still don't know what I am going to do with it when I graduate. Say a student is in that situation, are there specific things you could tell them to how to make that decision?

Absolutely, I think one of the key things that for a student to, I think to go through is a process of really good self-assessment, to really, really look at, you know, what do I really want to do with respect to my interest. Where do I want to apply those interests? So we specifically ask students to look at four key things.

The first is interest. So we have been talking about that. What do you really enjoy doing?

So, you know, some people have an interest in the business world but maybe they need to start looking at specific careers in that area. So firstly it is certainly the interest. Then it's the skills. You really have to start thinking about what am I good at? Are there other ones that I have to learn? So you know, an example might be somebody is very, very good at teaching, they have a natural talent for it. They just may need to find out where they can apply that while others just maybe have an interest and want to develop a particular type of skill - like working with numbers and again they need to find out what careers are going to be a good fit with that.

The third thing that they should really be thinking about is their personality. So, you know, everyone has this unique way of looking at the world, behaving in the world, making decisions. It is a very unique perspective but we also want to make sure that your career fits that unique perspective about you. So I really encourage that it should be a key component when they are assessing their career options.

The last one would be something that we refer to as Work Values. It is something that is not really talked about that much but it is the main qualities that people really need to have in their work in order for it to be satisfying.

So an example might be that you know someone may really just need to have a very, very flexible work schedule while others may have a real need to be working on a team or need to be in an environment that really fosters creativity. So when you look at these four elements and start putting those together that can help to start give people a picture of what they really want to do.

**OK, so the first place the student needs to start in terms just beginning to answer these career questions. What are my interests? What are my skills and the skills I want to develop? What are my values and what is my personality?
And you are saying the Career Centre can help them with these kinds of things.**

Absolutely, in fact there are couples of good specific services that I can recommend for students as a starting point.

The first is a workshop that we have here designed specifically to get up those four things that we just talked about.

This workshop is called **Discovering Your Skills & Options** and it looks at those four areas and then you know looking at careers that could fit those areas about yourself and if people want to continue a little bit more, do a little bit more work, there is a second workshop I would recommend is called **Career Choices and Your Personality**. And this one really focuses more on helping you look at your personality, look at those unique characteristics that I mention and then of course what careers would be a good fit with that personality. So those are some good starting points.

I would also encourage people, you know, for whatever reason can't make it in just in the moment, then there is a good career management e-learning module that we have online that they can also go through to help them start that process.

For those students knowing what they want to do, what can the Career Centre do to help them?

Well, students have decided what they want to do, they may need to educate themselves on what they are going to need to prepare themselves for that career, and perhaps just a further check in that this is the right career for me. So this could mean that perhaps they want some hands-on experience of that area; this could come through volunteer work, part-time work, it could be internships. So one of the things that we have here at the Career Centre is a database of job listings that they can access to have a look at volunteer job postings; to look at part-time job postings; internships. So that can really, really be a good starting point for them. I would also encourage them to come in, have their resume critiqued. We have a service here called the Resume Clinic where they can have a one-on-one with a career professional who can go over their resume. So those would be a good starting point for them and the last piece that I encourage people to really stay on top of is looking at the various special events that we have going on here at the Career Centre and a recent one that we had was the "Career Information Days" where students had a great opportunity to meet with lots of different employers from lots of different fields and really learn more about that career, that industry and to make contacts. So those would be some suggestions for those types of students.

Just one quick question before we wrap up. If I am a graduate student, are there specific services that you have to address my needs as a graduate student?

Absolutely, there is a whole array of services that we have for graduate students. We do encourage students to come in particularly if again they are a little bit stuck. We do have similar workshops: self-assessment workshop, **Discovering Your Skills & Options**, **Career Choices and Your Personality**; but it is specifically for graduate students. So I encourage students to come in to attend those.

The other specific services that we have would be to address some of their work search needs. So for those that are, you know, getting ready, for example, an academic job search, we offer C.V. critiques, and statement critiques, coming in to do a practice for the academic interview, so those would be some key services that we have for the graduate students.

Excellent! Excellent!

Thank you very much Lucky for sharing your expertise with us today on this topic. For more information on career planning or career choices why not take some time to attend the Discovering Your Skills & Options workshop or the one called Career Choices and Your Personality. You can also visit the career resource library to see some of the great books available on this topic. Also remember to check our website www.careers.utoronto.ca, that's www.careers.utoronto.ca, there you will find information on upcoming events offered to help you connect your great mind to great career opportunities.