

# **CONTENTS**

Introduction .....	13
1. Facing Career and Workplace Issues .....	15
2. Gaining a Biblical View of Work.....	21
3. Understanding Your Personality Strengths.....	29
4. Understanding Your Skills .....	39
5. Understanding Your Work Priorities .....	43
6. Understanding Your Vocational Interests .....	49
7. Putting Your Pattern Together .....	51
8. Making Career Decisions.....	59
9. Developing Your Résumé .....	67
10. Organizing for the Job Search .....	85
11. Managing Your Finances .....	95
12. Starting a Business .....	109
Resources .....	118

CHAPTER  
1

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# FACING CAREER AND WORKPLACE ISSUES

**S**ince you are reading this workbook, it's likely that either you or someone close to you is facing a career problem or decision. You're not alone. Career and work issues are having a major impact on the lives of millions of Americans today.

Through our experience in administering a career assessment to over 50,000 individuals, we see that the vast majority of career problems fall into one of four categories: job mismatch, no job, returning to the workforce, or young people with no direction. You probably will be able to identify with at least one of these groups. No matter which group you're in, this workbook can help you work through your career issues.

# WHICH CAREER PROBLEM FITS YOUR SITUATION

## 1. Job mismatch—unenthusiastic, bored, stressed out

A major issue with adults continues to be job and career dissatisfaction. There are millions of people who don't like what they are doing at work. In fact, according to a recent poll, 50 percent of those surveyed said that if they were starting over they would choose a different career.<sup>1</sup>

When experiencing a lack of fulfillment and corresponding low motivation toward work, many people realize they did not make a good career choice. They chose a field of work that was not a good match. Many are looking for a way to find out what their talents are and what occupations might fit.

We've seen some who are stressed, even to the point of not wanting to go to work in the morning. For some, the problem of job stress is so severe they are having health problems.

One person put it this way: "I make a living at my job, but I don't look forward to going to work everyday. In fact I usually dread it, and when I'm there I look forward to five o'clock so I can go home. I wish I could make a career transition."

A person in sales said: "I can make a big sale on Friday, but I hate my job so much that I don't look forward to going to work on Monday."

## 2. Don't have a job—have been laid off or downsized

Mergers and cutbacks have added millions to the ranks of the unemployed—some for the first time.

"I had been with this company for 15 years and was the marketing manager for the Northeast region. Our company was bought out in a merger, and I was replaced by the guy who had a similar position with the parent company. I've been unemployed for 10 months and have no hope of a good job."

Another person said, "I worked for 'XYZ' Corporation for 12 years and thought my future was quite secure. Our company restructured, and they cut 10 percent of the management staff. I haven't been able to find employment and probably never will get back into my old field."

These cutbacks have had a tremendous impact on families. For those who have experienced downsizing, it's much like a death in the family or a divorce. As a wife whose husband is in the throes of a job search put it, "My husband's unemployment has caused tremendous stress in our family—financially, emotionally, and spiritually."

## 3. Entering/reentering the workforce—lacking confidence, experience, skills, and direction

This group has expanded rapidly in recent years. Some are homemakers who have decided to pursue a career now that their children are older or have left home. Others have felt the pain and hardship of divorce and now, as single parents, must go to work to provide for their families.

Entering the workforce as an adult can be a scary thought. Many who are in this position don't have any idea which direction to pursue. Others may know what they would like to do, yet they haven't kept up with the changes in their fields. Should they go to school, or should they just take entry jobs and try to get established in the workplace?

How do you gain the confidence needed to succeed at what seems like a monumental task? It comes from knowing your talents, making a commitment to develop and use them, and following a plan of action. For many in this group, just getting started at some level can give these individuals the experience and confirmation of their abilities they need to really bloom.

A lady who just received her "first full-time paycheck in sixteen years" put it this way: "When our boys reached teen age and I was ready to do something else. . . a career assessment seemed a logical place to start. I believed the Lord was directing me to. . . get back my office skills and develop my computer skills. I began to work part-time. . . at the same time going through the career assessment and counseling. I gained many skills working for the past two years, but the most important thing I gained was my self-confidence. . . to stretch myself and not to be afraid of what I don't know."

#### **4. Young people facing the future with no career direction**

The problems facing young people and their career decisions are multifaceted. First, they have had little exposure to the world of work, so they don't know much about what is available. Second, in general there is no good system in place at home, school, or church to help them make good decisions. Consequently, youth often choose an occupation out of ignorance or choose based on the current trends and values of society.

Additionally, the lack of academic motivation in students is at least partly related to their lack of a career goal. Dr. Cliff Schimmels, Christian author and educator, says that "motivation is the ability of the learner to see the applied value of the lesson to be learned."<sup>2</sup> If young people have no career goals and know little about work, they see no purpose for their learning. Hence, when high school students are asked the question "How was school today?", too often we hear another verse of "Boring."

Young people who go to college also suffer from a lack of career direction. Low motivation, no direction, and poorly defined career goals, such as "I want to make a lot of money," have costly consequences. Unfocused students flunk out, change majors, or flounder around, expecting one day to graduate and get a good job. Unfortunately, many who do graduate still have no idea what their talents are or what they want to do.

The waste in classroom time, lives, talent, and productivity is discouraging; and, with the rapid inflation in college costs, the expense of misdirected education and training is becoming significant.

One parent put it this way. "We educated our son through four

years of college and three years of law school. He's practiced law for two years and, now, he hates it. In fact, he has quit. He says he wants to go back to school to prepare for a new career field, but we can't afford to help him anymore. When I think of all his effort and the money we invested, I could just cry."

The categories above are representative, and we know that there are others. For example, we didn't mention it, but retirement career decisions have become an important issue for many.

However, we believe that the previous illustrations are adequate to point out that career problems are widespread, and they cut across all lines of age and gender.

## **WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE WORKPLACE?**

We've given you some insights into the career issues people are facing. Now let's take a quick overview of the change factors that are affecting the world of work.

**RAPID TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE.** New technology continues to expand at an ever increasing rate, highly affecting the way work is done. Robotic tools have replaced many assembly line jobs. We live in the Information Age, and the Internet has provided worldwide access to almost any information we need.

Low-cost technology has made it possible for small companies to compete with the giants. Often, speed to market determines success; and this can be to the advantage of the smaller, newer, and more flexible companies. In some cases, the new technologies enable overseas companies, where labor and raw materials may be cheaper, to operate at a better profit margin.

**WORLDWIDE ECONOMIC COMPETITION.** The expansion of technology has brought incredible market competition on a worldwide scale. This competition erodes profit margins, which causes companies to continually seek ways of cutting costs—of doing business more efficiently. This relentless drive to cut costs often brings drastic changes to the workplace.

**REVOLUTIONARY CHANGES IN WORK STRUCTURE.** Since personnel costs are usually the biggest percentage of the budget, downsizing, rightsizing, and layoffs have become a way of life. Layoffs are probably necessary to maintain a healthy economy. Through the use of technology, many industries now operate more efficiently with fewer people. The push for corporate mergers often is related to the anticipated efficiencies from personnel reductions.

At the same time, organizational structures are being flattened so that more work is done by teams that have been empowered to carry out major projects. Projects come and go as contracts come and go; so finding a job may mean finding a new project that can utilize your talents.

The downsizing movement has given impetus for many people to leave the corporate world to start their own businesses. Entrepreneurism is growing at a rapid pace, so we can expect more small companies to spring up to provide work. But, usually, new companies also are more unstable, which adds to the insecurity in the workplace.

## **WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN TO YOU?**

**YOU MUST BE ABLE TO MARKET YOUR TALENTS.** As you can see, the one constant is going to be change; and, if the past is an indicator, change will continue at an increasing rate. This means that you need to be flexible; you need to know your talents, interests, and passions; and you need to be able to market yourself into a job that fits you.

The word "market" may sound scary, but it just means that you have to be able to describe to someone exactly what you do very well. Even more important may be the need for you to find organizations that match your values and that have a need for someone with a passion to do what you want to do. More and more, companies are realizing how important it is to match the right person to the needs of the job. By knowing the career that fits you and by marketing yourself accordingly, you are helping employers in that talent search.

### **Where Is Your Job Security?**

All this leads us to believe that jobs will be more transient in the future than they have been in the past. As many have found out, over the long haul you cannot look to your company for job security. We don't think there is such a thing as job security. (There is only one Source you can look to for any security in this world.) But we can assure you that the best way to increase your odds of being employed is to know your talents, develop them, and be truly excellent in your work.

Since jobs are insecure, you will have to be flexible; and that's why it's so important for you to know how to find a career that fits you. We don't like to tell people just one specific occupation in which they can excel. That will help them only until the next layoff occurs. Rather, our approach has always been to show them their pattern of talents and help them to see that their talents can be applied in a variety of settings.

As we said in the Introduction, this workbook is designed to lead you through a process that will equip you to know your God-given talents and understand how to find your calling. Our prayer is that you will place your confidence in the One who gave you your talents and be a good steward of them by being faithful to your calling.

Begin now by faithfully working your way through each chapter. We think you'll enjoy seeing how God has wonderfully equipped you for the journey on your career pathway. And in time, we trust you'll have a clear view of your calling and life purpose.

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## CHAPTER NOTES

1. *Wall Street Journal*/NBC poll, 1997.
2. Dr. Cliff Schimmels, *Parents' Most-Asked Questions About Kids and Schools*, Victor Books, Wheaton IL, 1989.