

Finding Square Holes

Discover who you really are
and find the perfect career

"...find your own place in the world of work and
chart your own path to career success."

Laurence G. Boldt, author of *Zen and the Art of Making a Living*

Anita Houghton

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Introduction

If you are a connoisseur of self-help books you'll be familiar with the writers who started from nothing, battled with the odds, and finally came through as international stars. Photographed with tanned faces in the grounds of substantial properties, surrounded with ex-spouses mingling good-naturedly with happy, well-adjusted children, they smilingly let us into the secrets of their success.

I'd like to reassure you that I am not one of these. My qualifications for writing a book on work are two-fold, and nothing to do with having a perfect life. The first qualification is that I have had the odd problem with work myself, and have learned a great deal through dealing with those problems; the second is that I have used that learning to help a large number of people through theirs.

Work can be both your making and your undoing. A productive, successful and happy working life is a wonderful thing: inspiring, fulfilling and fun. An unhappy working life can not only ruin your working days, but has the ability to infect your whole life with misery. Investing some time and effort in getting it right will therefore not only pay dividends in terms of short-term success and happiness at work, it will provide a framework for planning your entire working life, and will have immeasurable positive effects on the rest of your life.

Many books on work and careers are centred around success, and the Western concept of success is high status and much money. This book is different in that it is centred on happiness and fulfilment at work, for two simple reasons:

1. Few of us want status and money at any price, and
2. Success follows happiness as night follows day.

Basic principles

The mistake that many people make in choosing their careers is starting off with a long list of possible careers and wondering which ones they might be able to shoe-horn themselves into. The idea behind this book is that instead you might discover what shape *you* are, and then create a career around that shape.

The underlying principles are:

Knowing and understanding yourself is an essential first step towards a successful and happy career.

When you know who you are, how you excel, and what inspires, fascinates and drives you, you can review and plan your career with confidence.

Once you realise that success and happiness are within your control in one area of your life, you open up the possibility that this could be applied to other parts of your life. The results are life-changing.

If you work through this book I can guarantee that by the end of it two things will have happened: you will be in a much better position to plan and execute your future career, and you will feel a lot better than you do now. There will be times when you will wonder what some chapter or exercise has to do with your career, but if you want to get your career right, you need to do some groundwork, and that groundwork needs to be broad-based.

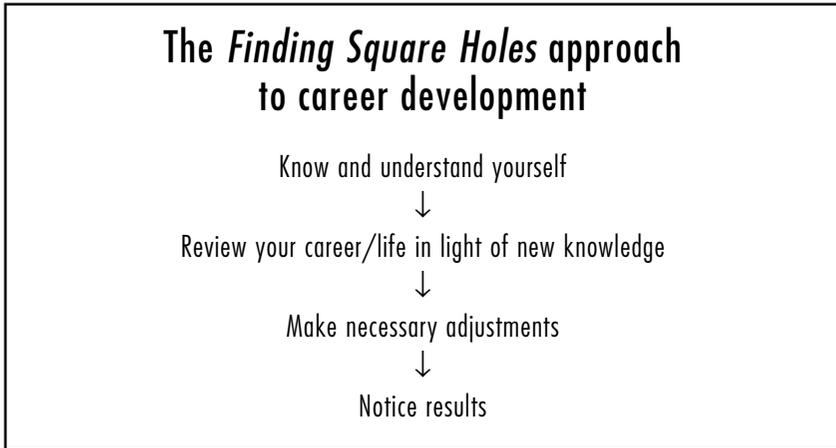


Figure 0.1

Part 1 of this book is aimed at setting the scene, providing some background on typical career problems and their causes, and some strategies for getting in the right frame of mind for exploring yourself and your career.

Part 2 covers the work each person needs to do in laying a strong foundation for career development. It asks what sort of person you are, why you work, what's important to you, and what's important about you? It takes a close look at what you have to offer in the workplace, and at what holds you back from offering it. In doing so it leads you to a greater understanding of the problems and dilemmas you are facing, or have faced in the past, and provides a framework for planning the future.

Armed with this new knowledge, Part 3 takes you through a practical career development process which will ultimately lead to an action plan.

What is *your* purpose in reading this book?

If you're an independent-minded sort of person you'll probably only have a passing interest in my purpose for you, and will be tempted to skip entirely any section in a book entitled 'How to use this book'. You may want to work through the pages that follow methodically, or you may want to cut straight to one or two of the chapters that interest you. You may prefer to do it alone, or with a friend, or even a group of people. Whatever method you choose, I urge you to do one thing in preparation, and that is to clarify what you want from reading the book.

clarify what you want from reading the book

Take a few minutes to ask yourself: what would I like to have for myself at the end of this book? What am I hoping to achieve?

It might be to:

- Make a particular decision about a job or career move
- Understand your current problems or dilemmas
- Gain knowledge about your strengths
- Generate a list of career options
- Learn about career development in order to help someone else
- Make a plan to improve your work-life balance
- Increase your self-awareness
- Something completely different from any of these

When you have your desired outcome or outcomes, ask yourself: if I had this by the end of the book, would I be pleased? If you have any doubts, try adjusting your outcome until you're happy with it.

Chapter Five

What sort of person are you?

This chapter looks at how the kind of person you are affects your working life.

By the end you should have an understanding of:

- Personality type, and the meaning of 'preferences'
- Your own preferences and personal style
- How knowledge of type can help in explaining past work experiences, and in planning for the future
- What to do if you are in the 'wrong' job

Mention personality types and some people get nervous. They fear that if they start answering questionnaires on what they are like, all that careful work they have put into their outward appearances will be uncovered, and they will be left naked in all their awfulness. And if it's not a fear of exposure that besets people, it's a fear of being boxed in. 'I'm an individual, how can I be put into a box with a whole load of other people?' Yet of all the techniques I use to help people understand where they are in their working lives and where they need to go, one of the most powerful is to increase people's awareness of their personal style and preferences. Not only does it help them understand *why* they enjoy what they enjoy at work, and *why* they do not enjoy what they do not enjoy, it also shines a light on their relationships, working patterns, behaviour in groups, stress, strengths, what they find difficult, how they like to learn ... in fact just about everything in life.

The reason that a knowledge of your own and others' psychological type is useful rather than threatening, is that fundamentally we're all

fine. You are only less than fine if you conceal the best parts of yourself, if you substitute your gifts with the qualities you think other people want, if you put yourself not so much in a box, but in the wrong box. If you have ever observed people and wondered why certain things come naturally to some but not to others; why it is easy to communicate with some people while with others you may as well be speaking a different language; or why certain types of people seem to congregate in, say, the caring professions, while you find a rather different type in business, then you will find much to interest you in this chapter. If you have ever been in a job where you felt incompetent, under-valued, misunderstood, unaccountably weary, or as if you were in a foreign land, this chapter will help to increase your understanding. Even if you have never been in those situations, or are antipathetical to the notion of type, I suggest you approach this chapter with a sense of openness, with a sense of curiosity, to discover if the concept of type would be useful to you in developing your career and your life.

An introduction to Jungian typology

Over many years of observing his patients, the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung noticed that while everyone was unique, there were patterns and groups of characteristics that seemed to recur and cluster. He found that once he had some information about someone's behaviour and preferences in one part of their lives, he could predict their behaviour in other areas. He developed these ideas into a theory of *Psychological Types* which was published in 1921.

At around that time, the American psychologist, Katherine Briggs, was pondering with fascination the differences she found between herself and her husband. She thought there must be something really fundamental in people, to produce such different patterns of thinking and behaviour. When she read Jung's book she realized with great excite-

In search of purpose

Examining the roles you play and the qualities you bring to those roles is a good first step on the road to purpose. Purpose is one of those private things that very few speak of. You may only surmise its presence when you see someone pursuing a goal with great determination and drive. Like the fellow diner watching the eponymous couple in the film *When Harry Met Sally* when faced with these individuals one is tempted to tell the waiter, 'I'll have what she's having'. For purpose is a wonderful thing. It produces energy and focus like nothing else. If you think of the roles you play and find one or more that you play with commitment, concentration and passion, the chances are that there is a sense of purpose driving you. There are few things as exciting as the single-minded determination to do something, and do it well.

You may believe in such a thing as life purpose or you may not, but whether you are religious or secular in your outlook, spiritual or pragmatic in your philosophy of life, thoughtful or active in your lifestyle, is there anyone who doesn't have moments in their lives when they wonder what it is all about, when they long for some explanation, some meaning, some purpose for life? Those moments are more likely to occur when things go wrong, as they assuredly will from time to time: when you fall ill, lose loved ones, relationships break down, jobs are taken away from you, when you grow old. In between times maybe you say 'Ha! What a load of nonsense! We're here, we live, then we die. What more do we need to know?'

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This chapter is not aimed at persuading anyone to a particular way of thinking or living or believing. It simply explores the idea of purpose, and asks the question not ‘is there such a thing as purpose?’ but ‘would it be useful?’ In particular, would it be useful for planning your career?

I recently had a revelatory experience. I was watching one of a series of television programmes about the history of the British Empire. It had reached the 1950s and was describing the political climate and events in the Mediterranean. I had always felt a sense of connection to those times because I was born in 1956, the year of the Suez crisis, and I was watching with great interest. The narrator was talking about 1955, and the archive film, incongruous as it often is, was of the bows of a large liner ploughing through the waves. This was the year *before* I was born, I realised, and I drifted off for a few moments, vaguely wondering to myself if I had been thought of at that particular point, had I been conceived? As I ruminated peacefully to myself I was suddenly overcome with the thought that there was a time I had not existed, a time when I had not even been thought of. And that led quickly to the thought that again, there would be time when I did not exist. And in between here I was. THIS IS MY TIME.

As that dramatic thought took hold, there grew in me an overwhelming sense of excitement, as if I had a small but crucial part in a very long play, and had only just realised that it is now that I am on stage. Not before 1956, not in a hundred years time, but *now* that I have to play the part, *now* that the spotlights are on me, *now* that everyone is watching.

We know at an intellectual level that this is true for everyone. Of course. Yet to experience it is palpably different. It’s as if you are ambling around in a trance, not knowing quite what you are doing or what you are doing it for, then suddenly someone or something gives you a shake and you realise you are not dreaming, not sleep-walking, this is the *real thing*. You are on stage right now. Your time is short and you have choices about how to spend your time. Will you skulk in the shadows,

mumble your lines, and just bide your time until you can slip unseen into the wings? Or will you exalt in the wonder of it, the bright lights, the beautiful sets, the story, the rest of the cast, the possibilities, the preciousness of it all ... because you know it is not for ever?

It would be great, wouldn't it, if you knew exactly what you were meant to be doing with this time, why you are here, what it is all about? Wouldn't it be easy to plan your working life? Some people seem to know from an early age what they want to do and devote their lives to doing it. Listen to any interview with someone famous and the vast majority will say that they always wanted to sing, dance, act, write, be prime minister, and that the signs were clear at the age of three. One feels sure that Mother Theresa was tending poverty-stricken dolls in infancy, that Shakespeare was writing sonnets before he could walk, and that Bill Gates was registering patents in kindergarten. If you are someone who has slid from dilemma to dilemma with no deep conviction about what you want to do, it can be very dispiriting to hear these people. It's hard not to feel envious, and it's hard not to feel that your own piffling abilities and what you might do with them are as poorly set jelly compared with these pillars of certainty.

Talent does what it can, genius what it must.

George Bernard Shaw

With feelings like this, looking for a Life Purpose – capital 'L' capital 'P' – can be a very daunting way to start exploring what you are meant to be doing on Earth, like contemplating the summit of Mount Everest from the lowest of foothills. Suppose you start from the less alarming premise that your purpose in life is simply to use your special combination of gifts as fully and as often as you can?

Chapter Thirteen

Action!

This chapter is designed to turn your knowledge, your options and your motivation into planned action.

By the end you should

- Understand the principles of goal-setting, and how type affects your approach
- Have a set of written, validated, goals
- Know how to deal with common pitfalls
- Have a system for ensuring that your goals are achieved

You are probably familiar with the notion of To Do lists. On scraps of paper or the backs of envelopes, you scribble down those tasks you need to do, and they sit there winking at you every time you sit at your desk, check your emails or look at the notice board. You have bursts of energy when you rush through a few urgent items, acting on those that have become crucial, indulging in the satisfaction of crossing them off, and every now and then taking the plunge with one of the less appealing items. Once a list has been around for a while, a few jobs have been ticked off, and the piece of paper has become rather dog-eared, you may then read through the list and transfer the outstanding tasks to a new piece of paper. Often those tasks are the same ones, week after week, and some jobs may stay on your list not only for months, but for years. You may even look at those items sometimes and ask yourself, How long will it take before I know I'm not going to do this thing?

This chapter is about how to turn a To Do list into an action plan, how to ensure that what goes on the list is realistic, and is ticked off within

a planned interval. It helps you to prioritise the demands on your time so that the important tasks get done, and that you are no longer reacting to crises or distracting yourself with trivia.

The magic of goal-setting

Many years ago I was working in a job I found thoroughly unsatisfying. The work itself was fine, but the climate of the organisation was controlling and petty, and while criticism flowed freely, appreciation was thin on the ground. I was dispirited. I had a colleague in the same department who was similarly disenchanted, and the two of us developed a habit of going straight from work to her flat, where we achieved a certain catharsis in bemoaning our lot. There was a self-indulgent pleasure to be derived from moaning, and we certainly indulged.

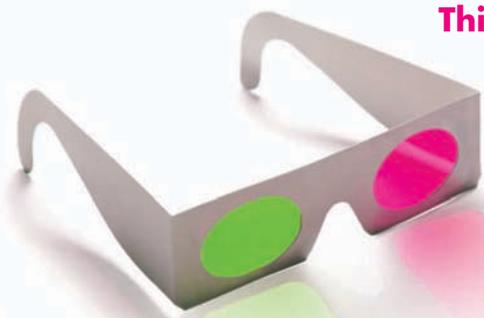
As time went on, though, the pleasure faded, and I began to feel not only disenchanted with work, but disenchanted with myself. I noticed that while my family and friends had been supportive and sympathetic for many months, of late their willingness to listen had ebbed somewhat. The still friendly but somewhat resigned looks on their faces were sufficient mirror for me to have a good view of myself. It was not an encouraging sight.

I decided to seek some professional help, and my first course of action was to send off for a career review pack. I waited for it to arrive with some excitement – there are few things more pleasurable than the feeling of taking charge after an extended period in ‘victim’ mode. When the parcel finally tumbled through my letterbox I was intrigued to find that included in the pack was an audio cassette, labelled ‘An excerpt from *The Psychology of Achievement*, by Brian Tracy’ (2002). With no idea of what to expect, I listened to it in my car as I travelled to work and back each day. It was interesting, very interesting. It covered all

Are you in a fix in your career, either trying to decide what to do or disgruntled with your current job?

Filled with anecdotes, insights and exercises, *Finding Square Holes* lays the foundations needed to take control of your career.

Combining techniques from personal development, Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) and the Myers-Briggs model of personality, this book's unique approach to career development is based on raising your self-awareness. This new self-knowledge is used to guide you through a highly practical and self-motivating process of research, networking and goal-setting.



This book works on the premise that you, and only you, are the best judge of what is good for you.

Anita Houghton is a trained doctor, careers counsellor and personal development coach.

"Practical and inspiring: a clearly written manual which is essential reading for careers advisers and coaches."

Alison Lang, Careers Adviser and Coach

"... a practical, thought-provoking, advice-filled guide to creating a career that fits you both as you are and as you'd like to be."

Michael Neill, author of *You Can Have What You Want*, www.geniuscatalyst.com

"... shows you how to find your own place in the world of work. In this easy-to-read and well-organized book, you will find the tools and advice you need to chart your own path to career success."

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