

Guidelines for making the right career choice

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“Your Career, Your Future!”-Guidelines for making the right career choice

“What should I do with my life?” Which career should I choose?” is one of the biggest and most challenging decisions most children/ youths face. Back in the day choosing a career was not so difficult as one was forced to either ‘follow’ their parents dream or recommendation of an ideal career or go for the same old ‘tried and tested’ careers for example accountant, lawyer, doctor, nurse etc. Others choose career based on the possible financial benefits that come with such careers (the idea of earning a lot of money, driving fancy cars, owning luxurious homes, going on extravagant trips etc.) Nowadays career options have become so vast, meaning children now have a number of career options to choose from. Sources have become many, there is now the internet, social pressure, media etc. Too much choice however without the correct guidance can be problematic. The careers people choose are also vital to a healthy economy; better allocation of talent means that people are in jobs they can excel at and reap potentially huge rewards.

Many of us in our quest to find the ideal career have been told to “follow our dreams” or “go with your gut”. This has turned out to be the worst piece of advice which has landed a number of people in dead end careers. Such advice cannot be used alone without considering other sources of information like one’s natural ability. In choosing a career there are two major steps: firstly the exploration and secondly the guidance. The exploration part begins as early as pre-school, where one starts exploring their career options based on their aspirations. Ask a child in pre-school what they want to be and you hear them giving typical answers like: teacher, doctor, pilot etc. The second phase is the guidance part which usually requires a professional for example a psychologist. With professionals they go beyond looking at one’s aspirations, they now take into consideration whether one has the cognitive ability and personality suited for their career choice.

Your mental ability vs your dream job

Before making any career choice it is important to understand yourself. Over and above knowing your interests one needs to assess whether their aptitude and personality are suited for their career choice. A child may be interested in becoming an engineer, but if they’re not technically sound cognitively their chances of succeeding in such a career may be challenging. Assessing one’s mental ability can be done through psychometric assessments. Psychometric assessments are standardised tests that measure characteristics that are relevant to occupational success. These include both ability factors and aspects of personality that help the candidate perform work-related tasks. The tests measure persistent and underlying characteristics; this means that they do not only explain current modes of behaviour but may also highlight unrealised potential. Psychometric tests are scientifically based, objective and valid and are therefore able to predict success in a particular job. Psychometric assessments are administered only by a registered psychologist. According to Schmidt (2016) General Mental Ability is the highest

predictor of job performance (65%).

One might be wondering if academic performance is linked to cognitive ability. You find a student might have all A's at Ordinary level and go on to pursue certain subjects at Advanced Level only to fail. Why? Academic performance comes as a result of learning, memorizing and then passing off that learnt knowledge whilst cognitive ability looks at one's innate knowledge (natural ability). So basing one's career choice based on academic performance may not be effective.

The role of parents in career guidance

Back in the day parents would dictate their children's career paths. Children were expected to either follow in the same career footsteps as their parents or live the parents' failed career dream. But looking at today's parents that should not still be the case. According to Professor Wendy Johnson (an American differential psychologist and professor of Psychology at the University of Edinburgh) parents should let their children make their own career choices. Instead of dictating their children's career path, Professor Wendy Johnson encourages parents to be 'supportive onlookers, cheerers-on, and sources of advice, but the latter only when asked'. Parents should allow their children to be exposed to various environments that can stimulate their decision making, being observant of what their children like and offering advice and support where required. Parents should take time to talk, listen and respond constructively to their children.

Parents are also encouraged to make sure they provide the best social environment, emotional support and nutrition. All these three factors have been seen to contribute to children's cognitive development. According to Memory Nguwi in our latest podcast on career guidance, a high protein diet plays a big role in child cognitive development. Cognitive development is influenced by many factors, including nutrition. There is an increasing body of literature that suggests a connection between improved nutrition and optimal brain function.

Early career guidance-preparing for the future

Career guidance can start as early as pre-school age. The starting point for every parent is to have their children assessed early to enable proper career advice. At IPC our tests are designed to assess children starting from form 3, but you will find in developed countries they have tests modified to assess children as early as pre-school age. According to Memory Nguwi, by age 10 one is fully cognitively developed, hence it is important for parents to invest in their children's cognitive development in the early stages of their life. Exposing them to ways in which they can learn and fully develop. Cognitive ability rarely changes with age, so it is important for parents to understand and know their children's strengths and weaknesses and find ways of working and maximizing on the areas of strength.

Research is key in career mapping

Other people are driven into careers by money. While this is a good idea for some, it can be misleading. What each career pays 10 years from now is not known and it is affected by supply and demand. A lot of people are in careers they hate because they went into those careers hoping to earn a lot of money only

to be disappointed with their current earnings. Children should be advised to choose careers where their skills can give value in any part of the world. Based on this alone one must always take into consideration demographic, technological and socio-political issues that shape how work will be done in the future. Ira Wolfe, president of Success Performance Solutions and expert in workforce trends, estimated that close to 50 percent of jobs will be extinct within the next 20 years. Such information should be taken into consideration when one is thinking of taking up a certain career path. The best way is to advise children to build on their critical thinking skills that will allow them to switch careers based on what society needs to solve problems of that time.

“In supporting the future generations, we are shaping the future, we are shaping our country, and we are shaping the world.” In offering career guidance it is important that parents, professionals and career counsellor remember that in the guidance we are providing we are shaping our countries, our economies and in turn the world. So whatever we invest in now, we are ultimately investing into the future. Yes it’s important to have passion and drive, but without the right guidance, that passion and drive can turn out to be a nightmare.

For more information on career guidance, please feel free to refer to our recently launched career guidance and counselling magazine link: <https://www.bestemployerzim.com/ebooks.php>. Or take a listen to our podcast where we interviewed Mr Nguwi regarding his perspective on career guidance, link: <https://soundcloud.com/ipc-jobs-portal/ipc-careers-magazine-launch>.

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