

*You Majored in What?*

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Now you're ready to move on to the next chapter, in which you'll use experimental wanderings to test your plans and develop more clarity. Your goal is to explore and learn.

## CHAPTER 5

# SHARPENING YOUR VISION

## TESTING THE WATERS BEFORE YOU TAKE THE PLUNGE

Do not be too timid and squeamish about your actions. All life is an experiment. The more experiments you make, the better.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Congratulations! Whether you know it or not, you have made incredible progress on your path to your future. You have mapped out your strengths, identified the skills you possess that employers are seeking, and created a vision of your future.

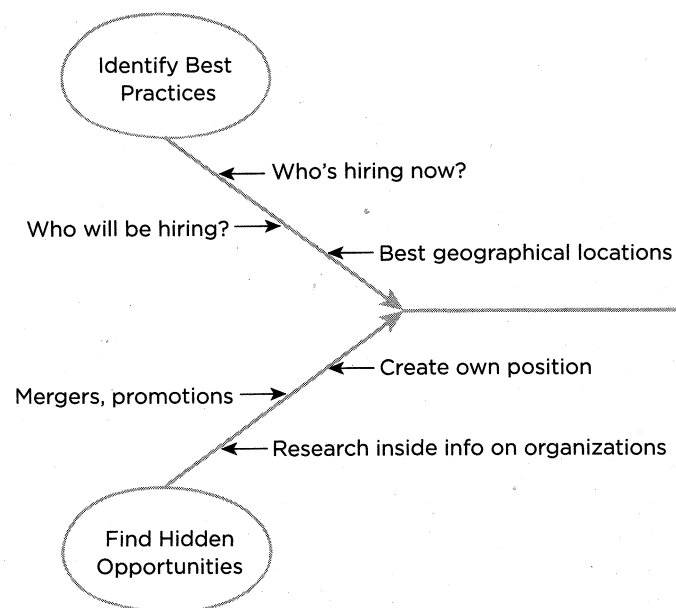
You are almost ready to move into the third phase of the process: designing your path. But in order to design the best path, you need to test and clarify your vision, particularly if it's a relatively new vision and you don't have a lot of knowledge about it. Conducting some "experimental wanderings" will help you do just that. Experimental wanderings are some of the most fun you can have in the job search. Some of them will be obvious and directly career related, such as an internship in your chosen field. But others will be just about you having fun doing what you like to do and encountering a chance connection or lead that will move you closer to your dream.

Chaos theory stresses that greater knowledge leads to better predictions, so the information you gather through your research and experiments will help you make better decisions about your future.

And as a student or recent grad, you get an added bonus most other job seekers lack: your youth opens doors to opportunities and helpful mentors because most people enjoy helping or mentoring young people who are enthusiastic and interested in learning.

By creating experimental wanderings you will:

- Quickly learn the skills and competencies you will need to succeed.
- Discover the best ways to enter your chosen field.
- Find hidden opportunities.
- Develop your network.
- Efficiently prepare for the job search process.
- Strengthen your vision of the future.

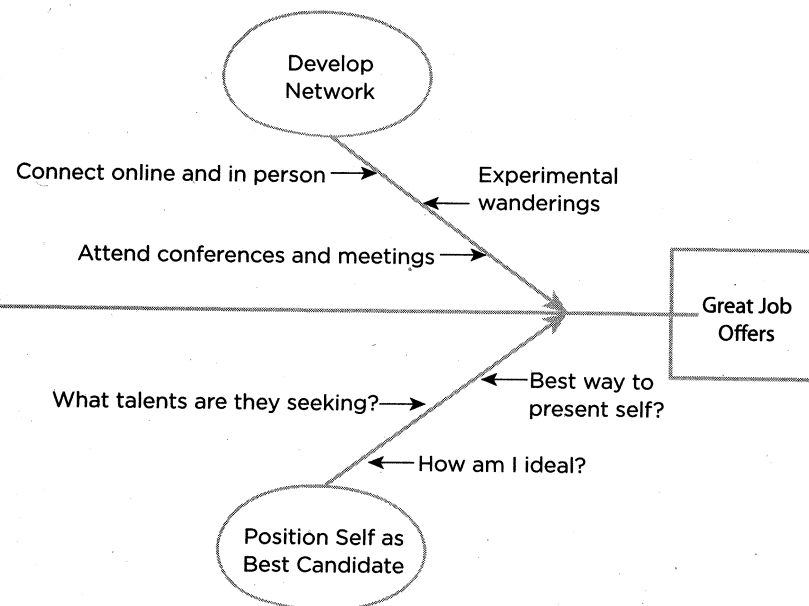


- Confirm that you have, in fact, chosen a path you truly enjoy and look forward to pursuing.
- Position yourself as the best candidate by building knowledge and skills related to your career field.
- Set up more opportunities to encounter the butterfly.

And what's fun about experimental wanderings is that there are so many different ways to do them. Some are well planned and carefully crafted while others will just happen because you're in the right place at the right time and you can't plan for them at all.

Through your wanderings you will encounter all sorts of environments and people, which will help you make wise choices based on what you learn. So let's start adding to your Network of Possible Wanderings by creating new knowledge, skills, and experiences.

The chart below demonstrates the key results of experimental wanderings.



So how do you conduct experimental wanderings and achieve these results? By wandering two ways:

- using classic research with books and websites, and
- placing yourself in situations where you can acquire needed skills and knowledge or meet people who can help you.

The tougher the job market or the more competitive the position, the more important it is to do both types of experimental wandering. Start by using some of those mindsets we discussed in chapter 3: analyzing, thinking creatively and strategically, and being flexible. You're going to research your vision, take action, learn, meet people, and maybe even get some internship and job leads—and have fun while you're doing it.

## WISDOM BUILDER #16

### FIND THE REALITY BEHIND THE IMAGE

As entertainment, TV shows are great. As reality, they fall a little short. The characters go to work occasionally, never seem to work long hours, hang out in coffee, bars, or restaurants, and magically have nice apartments. The media is actually the worst place to get an idea of the working world. Remember, there's a reason they call television and movies entertainment. People would quickly turn off a show that presented a realistic picture of many workplaces. Only insomniacs would watch a lawyer show that placed a camera in front of an attorney researching and writing a brief at his desk for fourteen hours. So enjoy your TV and movies, but don't make career decisions based on them. Do your research to uncover the reality. Kathy, a biology major working in a CSI-type setting, is quick to point out that they *don't have the attractive blue lighting, no one wears leather pants, and absolutely no one looks like Marg Helgenberger.*

## RESEARCH-BASED EXPERIMENTAL WANDERINGS

The art of research is the ability to look at the details and see the passion.

—BILL PULLMAN AS DARYL ZERO, *THE ZERO EFFECT*

As a college student or recent graduate you are already skilled at researching information through books and on the Internet. Career research isn't all that different. You can complete the bulk of your research in a short time, particularly if you stay focused. For instance, if you're conducting Internet research, set a time limit and say to yourself, "For the next hour I'm going to find anything I can about \_\_\_\_." You can insert the name of a particular company, job field, city, or whatever topic you're trying to find information on. Don't have a job or city in mind yet? Focus on a personal attribute or interest, such as "careers working with animals." Setting a time limit and having a specific reason for searching the Internet will keep you from wandering off, so to speak, to find that really good game site or interesting blog you can't resist. Be sure to bookmark the best sites, write them in your notebook, or e-mail them to yourself so you can refer to them later.

Usually the best resource for more in-depth research is a college or university library. If you're still in school, use your library to locate databases, journal articles, books, e-books, and other resources. Check with your career center: they likely subscribe to many of the job search databases, which would be expensive for you to get on your own. Many university libraries (particularly business school libraries) have already organized a section of resources for job seekers that will make your search even easier. If you're not in school, talk to the librarian at the nearest college or university. Often, local residents are granted special permission to use the library resources. Public libraries may also have access to job-hunting materials; ask the librarian for assistance with your research.

As you research, fill in as much information as you can on the following fact sheets, which identify the key information you need to discover. (Probable and Possible Planners will fill out the same fact sheet; Possible Planners will fill out one fact sheet for each Possible Life.)

### Probable/Possible Life Planner's Fact Sheet

What career field I'm researching: \_\_\_\_\_

Most interesting job titles: \_\_\_\_\_

Typical entry-level position: \_\_\_\_\_

Potential for job growth: \_\_\_\_\_

Typical salaries in the field: \_\_\_\_\_

Stress level of this career field: \_\_\_\_\_

Job satisfaction rates reported by those in the field: \_\_\_\_\_

General culture of the setting: \_\_\_\_\_

Personality traits needed to succeed: \_\_\_\_\_

Education/training needed: \_\_\_\_\_

Experience needed: \_\_\_\_\_

Skills needed: \_\_\_\_\_

Skills/knowledge I need to develop or improve to be competitive: \_\_\_\_\_

Typical terms used in the field: \_\_\_\_\_

Geographic locations with most opportunities (and cost-of-living information): \_\_\_\_\_

Sample job description/duties: \_\_\_\_\_

How to move up: \_\_\_\_\_

What's needed to get started: \_\_\_\_\_

Best resources to learn more about this field: \_\_\_\_\_

Books: \_\_\_\_\_

Companies: \_\_\_\_\_

Websites: \_\_\_\_\_

Internships: \_\_\_\_\_



People to contact: \_\_\_\_\_

How do I match up to what I've learned? Key information about myself and specific language to use in interview, cover letter, or résumé: \_\_\_\_\_

### Intention Seeker's Fact Sheet

Key topics I have researched: \_\_\_\_\_

Topics I'm eliminating due to lack of interest or energy: \_\_\_\_\_

Topics to keep focusing on: \_\_\_\_\_

Geographic interests: \_\_\_\_\_

Interesting job titles: \_\_\_\_\_

Personality traits I want to focus on and develop: \_\_\_\_\_

Education/training that interests me: \_\_\_\_\_

Experience I would like to acquire: \_\_\_\_\_

Skills that would be interesting to acquire: \_\_\_\_\_

Skills/knowledge I need to develop or improve to be competitive: \_\_\_\_\_

More research I'd like to do: \_\_\_\_\_

Books: \_\_\_\_\_

Organizations: \_\_\_\_\_

Websites: \_\_\_\_\_

Interesting Internships to look in to: \_\_\_\_\_

People to contact: \_\_\_\_\_

How do I match up with what I'm learning? Key information about myself and specific language I'll need to use in interviews or on my cover letter or résumé: \_\_\_\_\_

## ANOTHER QUICK CHECK-IN: WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

We're checking in again because as you learn, your plans will change, and you need to keep up with those changes.

### *Probability Planners*

- ➔ Are you starting to see a clearer path developing?
- ➔ Do you have clearer ideas around what you need to do?
- ➔ Have you honed your vision of your future?
- ➔ Do you need to acquire new skills?
- ➔ Have you identified some specific steps you will need to take?
- ➔ Have you gleaned what you can from research?
- ➔ Are you ready to start networking and meeting people who can help you?

### *Possibility Planners*

- ➔ What have you learned about your different options?
- ➔ Are they all still equally interesting or are you starting to lean toward one or two in particular?
- ➔ Have you thoroughly researched all your options so you know what you need to know?
- ➔ Are you ready to start networking and meeting people who can help you?

### *Intention Seekers*

- ➔ Has anything started to capture your attention?
- ➔ Where did you find yourself most interested and energetic when researching? Explore that further.
  - Hint: don't worry if it was something odd like finding recipes on Pinterest.
  - What's behind that interest?

- Would you like to work in the food industry?
- Would you like to create websites for people in that industry?
- Work for a magazine devoted to food?
- Keep digging into yourself.

Are you ready to move onto a probable path based on a career you have identified?

Or would you like to continue intention seeking?

*Now* that you have done enough book and Internet research, it's time to meet people. This part can be a lot of fun because you never know who you might meet, what you will learn, and who may end up helping you.

## PEOPLE-BASED EXPERIMENTAL WANDERINGS

What do you first do when you learn to swim? You make mistakes, do you not? And what happens? You make other mistakes, and when you have made all the mistakes you possibly can without drowning—and some of them many times over—what do you find? That you can swim? Well, life is just the same as learning to swim! Do not be afraid of making mistakes, for there is no other way of learning how to live!

—ALFRED ADLER, *ALFRED ADLER: A PORTRAIT  
FROM LIFE* BY PHYLLIS BOTTOME

If you've gleaned as much information as possible from websites and books, it's time to start the other kind of experimental wandering: meeting people in interesting places. Meeting and connecting with people is even more important than ever. Statistics vary but some studies say as many as 75 percent of all jobs are obtained through networking, and recent studies have shown that your connection to your eventual workplace is likely someone who's a stranger to you right now. Parents, neighbors, professors, friends, and other typical connections can be helpful, but you may get even better results by reaching out to new people and new places, and using social media.

Many new opportunities aren't opening up in traditional large companies but rather in small start-ups and entrepreneurial ventures. Individuals running those ventures aren't as concerned with your résumé or your education: they are more interested in your ability to do the job they need you to do, and your willingness to show up and work hard. Crafting experimental wanderings into start-ups and new venture opportunities may be one of your best ways to find your future!

You're already familiar with the basics of networking through Facebook or Instagram, where you meet people and develop new friends through common interests. Now you're going to apply that to your job search. Whether you network online or in person, your goal is to become comfortable meeting people and letting them know what you're seeking. So, armed with lots of knowledge about your strengths, and the thorough research you just completed, it's time to try a new type of experimentation.

People-based experimental wandering is a little like doing improvisational comedy. You never know where it's going to lead, so just say "yes" and keep moving forward. It may seem hard to add one more commitment to an already overcommitted schedule, so design your experiments to fit with your schedule. You're less likely to experiment if the cost seems too great for the benefit. Don't set yourself up for ten hours a week of volunteering if you don't have the time. Find a project that you can do in an afternoon. You'll get a taste of whether you like it and can add more time as you go along. The trick is to take some sort of action.

There are very few rules, but some guidelines are:

- Wander anywhere and anytime.
- Be curious.
- Be flexible.
- Forget perfect. No experiment is a failure if you've learned something.
- Assume there will be messiness, detours, blind alleys, and new adventures.
- Be sure to actively engage with your surroundings:
  - Acquire knowledge.
  - Learn new skills.

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- Provide a solution.
  - Focus on and state what you want.
  - Ask how you can help.
  - Ask good questions.
- Find the stories you can tell later on.
- Seek part of your dream if the whole dream isn't available.

Think of yourself as auditioning for a future life. You define the level of commitment—one hour, one day, one semester, or one year. As you experiment, pay attention and look for potential stories and possible career connections with potential employers. Don't ask for a job—talk about what you're seeking and see what happens. Let's take a look at Hannah's experimental wandering.

*Just prior to leaving school for the holidays, Hannah's handbell choir performed a concert at a local church. At the end of the concert, the minister asked the choir to introduce themselves to the congregation. Most people just said their names, but on a whim Hannah said, "I'm Hannah, and I'm a Russian studies major, and I just returned from a year in Moscow and would love to go back again." The audience smiled and clapped. Hannah thought nothing more about it until a woman stopped her as she was leaving the church and said, "My husband is an executive with a local company that is just starting to do business in Russia. Would you like to meet him?" Hannah, of course, said yes, and the woman gave her the executive's home phone number. Hannah called him that evening, and a few weeks later she was on a plane to Moscow, escorting several company executives on a two-week fact-finding trip. She translated for them, showed them around the city, explained how many services worked, and even sat in on confidential meetings. When she returned for spring semester, she interned with the company and received a job offer at graduation.*

Let's take a moment to analyze what Hannah did right:

1. She was doing something she loved: playing in a handbell choir. (She didn't even realize she was experimental wandering!)

2. She seized the opportunity to let a group of people know what she was seeking.
3. *She didn't ask for a job.* This is an important point to remember because timing is everything. Obviously, she was ultimately seeking a job, but if she had said, "I need a job," the executive's wife might not have even approached her because she wouldn't have known if her husband had any jobs. Hannah simply phrased her desire as an intention, "I'm looking for a way back to Russia," which opened the gate to the job path.

Hannah's situation worked out beautifully. But some experimental wanderings are more challenging, as in the case of Andrew, who wanted to work in South America.

*While riding on an elevator, Andrew met a gentleman who had some connections in Argentina and told him about an opportunity in market research for a dental organization. Andrew applied for the job and was told to report in about a month. He took off for Buenos Aires, excited about the prospect of working in his dream country. He vacationed and traveled for a few weeks first and then reported to his new job. Unfortunately, his dream quickly disintegrated when on his third day at the job (which turned out to be in a dentist's office), he was handed a book of dental procedures and told to read it and be ready to work as a dental assistant in one week. He protested his lack of knowledge and skill in this area and shuddered at the thought of cleaning people's teeth, but no one cared. He realized that because they were paying him in cash and he technically didn't have the proper working papers, he had no power to do anything. In two days he would have to sign a contract that would keep him there for six months, so he quickly packed and took a flight back to America. It would be easy to call this experiment a failure, and Andrew did feel frustrated and angry when he returned home, but within a few days he had decided he could turn his experience into something good. First, he had traveled all over Argentina, which he had always wanted to do, and second, he had strengthened his language skills. Moreover, he had a great story to tell a future*

*employer. He even wrote a short essay for the career center at his college to help students prepare for an international job. He decided to pursue another of his possible lives: becoming a Spanish professor. He has enrolled in a master's program in Spanish (he used his Argentina story as his essay) and will remain to get a PhD. And now that he can laugh about the experience, he has a great educational story for his students.*

What did Andrew do right?

1. He engaged with someone who helped him find an opportunity in a country he had always wanted to see.
2. He took a chance and reached for his goal.
3. Once he discovered unforeseen problems, he made quick decisions and cut his losses.
4. He used his negative experience to catapult himself forward into a new and better experience.

Andrew and Hannah's experiences confirm the value in approaching all your experimental wanderings with two questions: "What can I learn?" and "What stories could I tell about this experience?" By constantly considering what you're learning and the story you will tell, you mine the experience for its learning value regardless of whether it is positive or not.

This is a good time to get curious and ask yourself what would happen if . . .

I went to that program tonight at my college and asked the guest speaker how she or he first started?

I started writing a blog about my interest in foreign policy?

I took a semester off to test out my dream?

I called a graduate who's a social worker to find out whether or not I really need to get that MSW degree?

Or ask yourself these questions:

Just what do I need to do to be able to \_\_\_\_\_?

How could I make a better learning experience out of this \_\_\_\_\_?

What are the salaries of \_\_\_\_\_?

Would I really like working with \_\_\_\_\_?

Where is the best place to work if I'm interested in \_\_\_\_\_?

## TRADITIONAL EXPERIMENTAL WANDERINGS EVERYONE CAN TRY

Are you not sure what kind of experimental wanderings would work best for you? These well-known traditional sources for experimental wandering have helped many students find their paths. One reason they are successful is that they tend to be longer-term experiences that give you time to really gain new knowledge and develop your skills in a particular field. You can also list them on your résumé under the experience category (see chapter 8), regardless of whether you were paid or not. Employers like seeing these experiences because they demonstrate commitment; they show that you successfully complete an experience and that you are hardworking and focused. The chart below illustrates the top seven experiences you can acquire and their value to both you and the employer:

TRADITIONAL EXPERIMENTAL WANDERINGS	SOME OF THE VALUE TO YOU	SOME OF THE VALUE TO EMPLOYER OR GRAD SCHOOL
STUDY ABROAD	Intellectual challenge. New perspectives. Build language skills. See new places. Get to know a culture. Handle problems.	Comfortable in new environments. Language and culture skills. Active learner. Risk taker. Shows initiative. Global perspective.

TRADITIONAL EXPERIMENTAL WANDERINGS	SOME OF THE VALUE TO YOU	SOME OF THE VALUE TO EMPLOYER OR GRAD SCHOOL
<b>STUDENT EMPLOYMENT (WORK STUDY OR OTHER)</b>	Acquire workplace skills. Learn about college from a different perspective. May be given professional duties depending on position—seek these out. Acquire recommendations.	Demonstrates initiative and is a hard worker. Manages time well if grades are also good. May acquire specific skills related to job depending on position.
<b>LEADERSHIP IN STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS</b>	Practice motivating and leading others. Learn new skills and develop relationships. Be recognized on campus. Connections with administrators and faculty. Acquire recommendations.	Future management potential. Someone who can motivate others. Handles variety of management tasks including budgeting. Takes initiative and demonstrates team-playing ability.
<b>INTERNSHIPS</b>	Pre-professional experience valuable on résumé. Immersion in work environment. Learn whether you want to pursue as career. Acquire recommendations.	Experience in field demonstrates commitment. Shows initiative. Demonstrates skills directly related to job.
<b>SUMMER JOBS</b>	Money. Shows you work hard. May acquire skills related to future, depending on job. Learn what you like and don't like about workplace.	Demonstrates initiative and hard work. Depending on position, may have specific skills needed for workplace.
<b>VOLUNTEERING/ SERVICE LEARNING</b>	Good feeling knowing that you helped another. May acquire work-related skills. Provides understanding of nonprofit organizations.	Demonstrates character. May have acquired relevant knowledge to workplace. Generally valued by all employers.
<b>TEMP WORK</b>	Learn about a variety of workplaces. Acquire valuable office skills. Build customer service skills. Can get promoted or lead to a full-time job. Many sources for recommendations.	Demonstrates flexibility. Able to handle a variety of situations. Quick learner. Will fit in with new workers.

## UNIQUE EXPERIMENTAL WANDERINGS WITH HUGE POTENTIAL PAYOFFS

But what if you don't have the time or resources to do the traditional experiments on the previous chart? Start by thinking about activities you're currently involved with. Who might you be connected to already? Remember, Hannah's big break came from playing in a handbell choir, not from any intended networking plan.

Below is a list of more than fifty experimental wanderings, in no particular order, many of which might not seem job-search related. Remember your overall goal is to collect information and learn, and these activities can help you by either contributing to your understanding or knowledge of a subject, or connecting you to people who can help you. As you read the list, highlight the ones you'd like to try first or jot them down in your notebook as intentions or goals. And add your own as well!

### Join, Interact, and Meet People

- Talk to everyone you know or meet about your plans for the future.
- Join or create an organization and demonstrate your unique gifts and talents.
- Shadow someone: spend a day with a person doing what you want to do.
- Do an externship: spend a week or two with an alumnus in your field of interest.
- Put yourself in places where you'll meet the people you want to meet. When asked why he robbed banks, Willie Sutton said, "Because that's where the money is." If you want to work in \_\_\_\_\_, where are the people who are already working in that field? Find out where they hang out and go there. If you're older than twenty-one, bars can be a great place to connect. There are several bars in Washington, DC, for instance, that are known as hangouts for congressional aides and political types. Police usually have a favorite watering hole, as do newspaper reporters. Doctors and nurses might stop for a quick after-work drink in bars or restaurants near the hospital. Traveling business

executives often stop for a drink in the bar of a five-star hotel. In Austin, Texas, there's a chili parlor frequented by lawyers, judges, legislators, and others who work in the capitol nearby.

- ➔ Join a club, play a sport, sing in a choir, or play in an orchestra.
- ➔ Seek out entrepreneurial groups.
- ➔ Play tennis, golf, or other sports, even if you're awful at it. You'll have a good laugh and meet new people. Take group lessons to meet others.
- ➔ Join one of the thousands of professional organizations, such as the American Marketing Association or the American Philosophical Association. You'll get a bargain student rate, newsletters and journals about the field, and access to private job listings.
- ➔ Never miss an opportunity to make a new friend—people of all ages, in your classes, on your floor in the dorm, or in your apartment complex.
- ➔ Find hidden opportunities at your school.
  - Many presentations, programs, workshops, and other opportunities are poorly attended or receive few applications. Show up. Ask questions. Participate. (Hint: Even if you've graduated, most schools advertise their special programs and lectures and allow the public to attend. Here's your chance to connect with the speakers you didn't have time for when you were in school.)
  - Select an office at your school that interests you. Tell them about your skills (the ones you have and the ones you want to develop), and ask if you could volunteer to work for them.

### Read, Listen, and Respond

- ➔ Find textbooks related to your career field if you didn't major in the subject. Usually your school library will have them, so you can read them for free. Mine them for keywords, industry terms, phrases you should know, and so on.
- ➔ Read bulletin boards and informational kiosks. Look for interesting opportunities.
- ➔ Read the advertisements in a magazine related to your interest area. Are there hidden jobs with any of those companies? For instance, if you're interested in sports and read *Sports Illustrated*, notice the advertisements. Would you be interested

in working for a company that manufactures athletic gear or energy bars?

- ➔ Write a blog or use your social media to develop potential connections or job leads.
- ➔ Find podcasts that will help you learn or keep up your skills in a foreign language.
- ➔ Read your professors' websites. Find out what research activities they are involved in and offer to help. For free. At the very least, you'll get a recommendation letter out of it. Maybe even academic credit or some income.
- ➔ Read books (or listen to downloads) on management or other business ideas. Even if you don't plan a business career, most people benefit from knowing more about management and business thinking.
- ➔ Subscribe to a magazine in a field of interest. If you're interested in working and living on an island, for example, and the nearest one is thousands of miles away, reading *Islands* magazine ([www.islands.com](http://www.islands.com)) might keep you informed and help you identify sites for future employment.
- ➔ Subscribe to (or download the app for) the newspaper from the location where you want to live. Become as knowledgeable as a native before you've even lived there.
- ➔ Check out your school's alumni database. If they don't have one, talk to someone in alumni relations to get some names of alumni who might help you.
- ➔ Join LinkedIn ([www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com)), look for compelling groups to join, and start networking.
- ➔ Look for opportunities for grants, scholarships, and funds. Start reading about them as soon as you can because many have long application periods.

### Be Bold and Daring

- ➔ Move: get a summer job in the city where your best opportunities are.
  - Have you always wanted to live in \_\_\_\_\_? What about moving there now?
  - Set an intention: "I want to find a way to live in Washington, DC, this summer."

- Can you find others interested in spending a summer elsewhere as well? Maybe you can share an apartment? Check colleges for cheap summer dorm rentals.
  - Take a “survival” job that puts you in your desired location. While waitressing or bartending in Washington, DC, you can use your free time to learn all about the city, decide where you might want to live, and so on.
- ➔ Start your own business.
  - ➔ Write a reality show based on your job-search experience. Pitch it to a network.
  - ➔ Go up to a famous guest speaker at your school, tell him or her what you want to do, and seek their advice.
  - ➔ Get lost in a strange city and explore.
  - ➔ Write a screenplay, memoir, poem, or short story, and submit it to a contest.

## PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

So how does all this experimental wandering come together? Obviously, it's going to be different for each of you, but here's one story of how a student found a whole new career plan by experimental wanderings:

*Brandon had been planning to go to law school since his junior year of high school. He started working as a residence hall adviser in his sophomore year of college just to help with college expenses. He discovered he enjoyed living with the first-year students and helping them with typical issues they faced, such as homesickness or getting along with their roommates. After reading about an opportunity posted on a campus kiosk, he found a summer job working as a resident adviser for high school students attending special summer programs at a college. He learned that he truly enjoyed this type of work and now wasn't as sure about going straight to law school. His senior year he was asked to sit on a freshman orientation panel along with the dean of admissions to talk about college life. Even though he was still applying to law*

*schools, Brandon began thinking that he might want to work in a college or university setting for a few years first. He talked to the staff in the residence life program at his college about working in a college setting. Everyone gave him lots of information and advice about the field and recommended he start his job search in February.*

*First, he defined what he wanted: a position in a college or university working directly with students. He identified the likely offices that might hire him: residence life, housing, financial aid, development, and admissions. If he was unsuccessful in his initial search, he figured he would expand his search to boarding schools and junior colleges. He isolated the areas in which he most wanted to work: New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, knowing he could expand this as well if he needed to. To his delight, he learned that just those three states had over six hundred colleges and universities. He created a folder called College Jobs and bookmarked the human resources websites for the colleges he was particularly interested in. He also created his résumé and a cover letter that he modified as needed. Every week he searched the sites and applied for positions for which he was qualified. Ultimately, he uploaded twenty-two résumés and cover letters for positions at a variety of institutions.*

*Within a few weeks, he began to get calls and e-mails, and he started taking phone interviews. His research and knowledge of the field paid off, and he was then invited to several campuses until, ironically, the dean of admissions with whom he had served on the panel called to ask him if would be interested in applying for a job in the admissions office. And that's where he's working.*

You could say Brandon got his job because of the butterfly effect—a random job he took to pay the bills and a coincidental appearance with a college administrator. But it was Brandon's work and his knowledge of the field that ultimately sealed the deal. The butterfly just got him started. And now he knows how to do the search if he wants to again in the future. He's now planning to start taking classes to get his master's degree in higher education with a



specialty in counseling so he can go even further in the higher education field. Key steps included:

1. Applying to law school while seeking a plan B: a residential life position.
2. Targeting his résumé to the settings for which he was applying.
3. Creating a basic cover letter that he modified based on the position and school.
4. Speaking with people already doing the job he wanted so he could be better informed.
5. Targeting a large but manageable range of potential employers.
6. Creating a system for checking on job openings that fit the field.
7. Knowing the right season for applying for the job.
8. Being flexible yet focused in his search—wanting a college setting but willing to work in a variety of areas.

## WISDOM BUILDER #17

### EXPAND THE SCOPE OF YOUR EXPERIMENTAL WANDERINGS

You may have settled on a career field, but particularly in tight job markets or situations in which you face a lot of competition, it's a good idea to think of ways to expand your options. You can expand geographically by changing the location of your search or you can expand within the field by considering related jobs or occupations in the same general area as your target.

The simplest way to expand geographically is to start where you are and connect with family or friends who might know about opportunities in your field. If you're still a student, pay attention to what's going on right at your college or university. Is there an opportunity to learn the skills you need through working in an administrative office or department on campus? No jobs? Ask if you can volunteer a few hours a week or offer to work on a special project using your skills. If you're in school, branch out to see what's happening in the town or city where your school is located. By changing the location of your search, you might change the nature of the work. For instance, if you're in a social work field and living in a small town, you may find you'll provide more direct client service. If you're in a big city, you may work for a large agency where you won't have much client contact but will provide other services that ultimately benefit the client. If you're working at the national headquarters of a nonprofit organization, you might even be involved in lobbying for legislation or setting policies.

Alyssa is considering a career working with homeless individuals. She has already volunteered at a local shelter and is looking to expand her job possibilities. She brainstormed about the different opportunities she might have depending on her geographic focus, and developed the chart on pages 166–167. She's filled in the opportunities for her vision; **there are two blank columns for you to write in your vision** and how it might grow if you choose a different level of involvement. Don't worry if you don't know all the answers: that's what research is for.



	HOMELESSNESS	YOUR AREA OF INTEREST 1	YOUR AREA OF INTEREST 2
At college or university	Fund-raising; take sociology and economics classes.		
Hometown or school location	Volunteer or work at local shelters and services. Check with churches to see what programs they operate.		
County	Speak to the city council about the needs of the homeless; find out what county services are provided. Are there any job openings?		
Nearest large city	What services are available in the nearest large city? Larger service organizations might have more opportunities.		
State	What is going on at the state government level? What state agencies work with homelessness?		
Region	Are there any agencies that provide services across several states or in specific regions like the Northeast or Southwest?		
Country	What national organizations deal with issues related to homelessness? Where are they located? Are they specialized to areas like housing or alcohol or drug abuse?		

	HOMELESSNESS	YOUR AREA OF INTEREST 1	YOUR AREA OF INTEREST 2
International	What relief organizations are helping with housing and homelessness around the world? What types of positions do they offer?		

Not only is Alyssa expanding her geographic opportunities, she's also noticing that the opportunities start to vary in scope. When she volunteered at the local agency, she dealt directly with all the issues of her clients. But if she goes with a state agency, she might find she can specialize in one area. She will want to consider her specific skills and strengths and seek a variety of positions within those larger agencies.

What ideas have you developed about your area of interest?

## WISDOM BUILDER #18

### EXPAND YOUR CAREER OPTIONS

Another way to expand your career possibilities is to consider a variety of jobs within a particular field or to consider related fields. On the worksheet below or in your notebook, try listing up to three industries or fields you might be interested in. Then list several places where you could work within those fields. Finally, indicate possible job titles or functions you would be interested in within those industries. The first one is filled out as an example. If you're having trouble identifying the locations or titles, keep researching!

### EXPANDING YOUR CAREER POSSIBILITIES WORKSHEET

FIELD: Writing

POSSIBLE EMPLOYERS:

- Publishing firms
- Computer or high-tech companies
- Professional trade organizations (newsletters and journals)
- College alumni, admissions, and development offices

POSSIBLE JOB TITLES: Freelance writer, Web writer, technical writer, assistant editor, science writer, training and development specialist, editor, copywriter, proofreader, grant writer

Now you try it

FIELD: \_\_\_\_\_

POSSIBLE EMPLOYERS:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

POSSIBLE JOB TITLES: \_\_\_\_\_

FIELD: \_\_\_\_\_

POSSIBLE EMPLOYERS:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

POSSIBLE JOB TITLES: \_\_\_\_\_

FIELD: \_\_\_\_\_

POSSIBLE EMPLOYERS:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

POSSIBLE JOB TITLES: \_\_\_\_\_

## WISDOM BUILDER #19

### ANALYZE THE CULTURE OF THE WORKPLACE

Company cultures are like country cultures. Never try to change one. Try, instead, to work with what you've got.

—PETER DRUCKER

You're about to enter a foreign land. Most of the people are older than you, and they gather around a water cooler laughing and joking. The only person close to your age is an intern. They dress more formally than you. They're pleasant to one another, but your attempts at making light conversation aren't working. They seem to use certain words or acronyms over and over and you don't know what they mean. You were given a name tag on your first day, but you forgot to wear it and your supervisor noticed and commented on it. Despite some joking or friendly banter, there's a serious atmosphere. Sometimes you even sense fear, but you're not sure why. The rules seem odd and not all of them are written down. Welcome to the workplace.

A culture is defined as a set of shared meanings, values, and assumptions, and in general, it is the responsibility of the individual to adapt to the culture. Just because some rules are unwritten doesn't mean you don't have to know them. It's important for you to quickly size up the culture so you can determine whether you are a good fit or not, and good research can help you uncover the information you need.

In today's workplace, cross-cultural understanding is imperative. An HR executive at a California-based Marriott Hotel once stated that their employees speak over one hundred foreign languages, including dialects. Can you imagine the challenges of communicating with that workforce and how important it is to be aware of your culture and what you bring to the workplace?

It's not unusual for students to experience a certain culture shock at their first professional job. You might be used to

sleeping in, having long breaks over the holidays and in the summer, being surrounded by people your own age, and being immersed in other common characteristics of college life. The first step in analyzing a culture is understanding your own. Take a few minutes to describe your culture. Where are you from and what implications does that have for where you want to live? Noticing your own cultural perspective will make you more cognizant of what you consider "normal." Can you think of a time when you felt you didn't fit in somewhere? Why? Did cultural differences have anything to do with your feelings?

Some books and websites (such as the *Vault* guides) interview employees to give you the inside scoop on an organization. You want to get past any bias you might have from watching *The Office* or reading Dilbert cartoons. You can also gain perspective by reading the organization's website and corporate or annual reports to see what they say about themselves.

How do they present themselves in writing?

Are their publications creative, conservative, visionary, or traditional?

Do they state their organizational values or mission?

Is the leader clearly identified and does she or he dominate the publications?

While all of that information is helpful, the best way to discover the culture is when you visit the organization for an interview and see for yourself. People tend to view things through their own perspective, and websites that rate organizations (just like the websites that rate professors) are often biased with either extremely positive or extremely negative perceptions. Take a look at the environment where you're considering working. You won't be able to assess everything on a single visit, but you might be able to assess culture through some visual cues:

## **BUILDINGS**

- Is it in a freestanding building or a suite within a larger building?
- What is the architectural style? Modern, stylish, conservative, nondescript?
- Location of the office: rural, urban, suburban?
- How safe is the location?

## **AMBIENCE OF OFFICE**

- How do they greet strangers?
- Is the reception area formal, informal, or elegant?
- What kind of furniture and decor? How attractive is the environment?
- Is the general noise level quiet or loud? Is music piped in? Or do a lot of workers have headphones on?
- How neat are the offices?
- Does there appear to be a policy for the appearance of the offices?
- Do people wear name tags?

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WORKERS**

- What is their age range?
- Are they friendly, neutral, or tense?
- How diverse is the workforce? Will you be one among many, or will you stand out for some reason?
- How much are they interacting?
- How do they dress? Is there a dress code? Do they wear uniforms?
- Are most workers in cubicles or offices?

## **FINAL QUESTIONS**

What experimental wanderings are you going to try in the next twenty-four hours? What is your goal in doing this?

Is there a secret experimental wandering you would love to do but are concerned that you might not do well in it? If you knew you couldn't fail, what would you do?