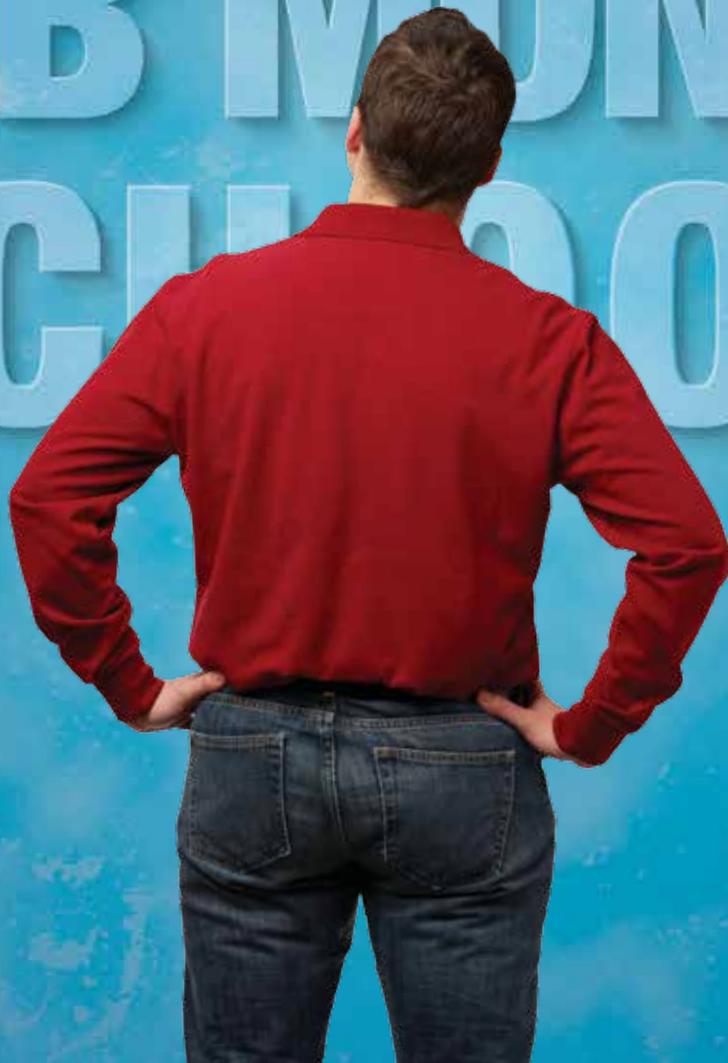


My Choices,
My Work, My Life

FAMILY
JOB MONEY
SCHOOL



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» Make the most of your future

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Career practitioners and educators

My Choices, My Work, My Life will help your clients or students to

- assess if they want to change their current situation
- identify their choices and options for the future
- review their values, interests, strengths, assets and challenges
- establish or reflect on their life vision
- explore options before making a decision or setting a goal
- try different decision-making methods
- prepare and follow through with an action plan
- stay motivated while working on an action plan
- connect with further information and resources

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The Province of Alberta is working in partnership with the Government of Canada to provide employment support programs and services.



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About This Book

Stairs or escalator? Strawberry or vanilla?

You make choices every day. The little ones are fairly easy to make, but you can get stuck when it comes to the bigger decisions that may affect your life.

This book is designed to help. By guiding you through some decision-making steps, *My Choices, My Work, My Life* will make it easier for you to see your options more clearly, make decisions that fit your needs and take action to achieve your goals.

You may have picked up this book because you're

- finishing school
- going through changes in your work situation
- considering a move to another position in your company, or to a different company altogether
- wondering how to incorporate your passions or hobbies into your work life
- considering a promotion
- thinking about changing occupations
- considering more learning opportunities
- thinking about a life change, such as retirement
- looking at other ways of working, such as job-sharing, part-time work or self-employment
- trying to balance your work life with the needs of children or older parents

Whether you're considering a relatively small decision, such as taking a course to try out a hobby, or a large one, such as choosing an occupation or starting a whole new line of work, *My Choices, My Work, My Life* can help you head in the direction you want to go. While the focus of this book is on career decisions, you can use the decision-making process outlined here to make other life decisions.

The following chapters will guide you through a personal exploration so that you can make a decision that suits you, your needs and your goals. You'll explore what you feel needs to change, what made you decide you needed a change, where you hope this change will lead you, and what values, skills and information you'll need to make this change happen. You'll also learn about four decision-making steps that can help you make the right choices.

If you think you already know the answers to some of the questions you're asked to reflect on, or if any questions don't apply to you, just go on to the next section. This is *your* time to explore. But be open to the possibility of learning something new about yourself and your situation. By the end of this book, you'll know whether that decision will take you closer to the life you want to lead and whether it will be true to your values.



My Choices, My Work, My Life

is aimed at helping you make effective decisions about issues affecting your life as a whole. For specific matters, such as job loss, education planning or work search help, please visit the Alberta Learning Information Service website at alis.alberta.ca.

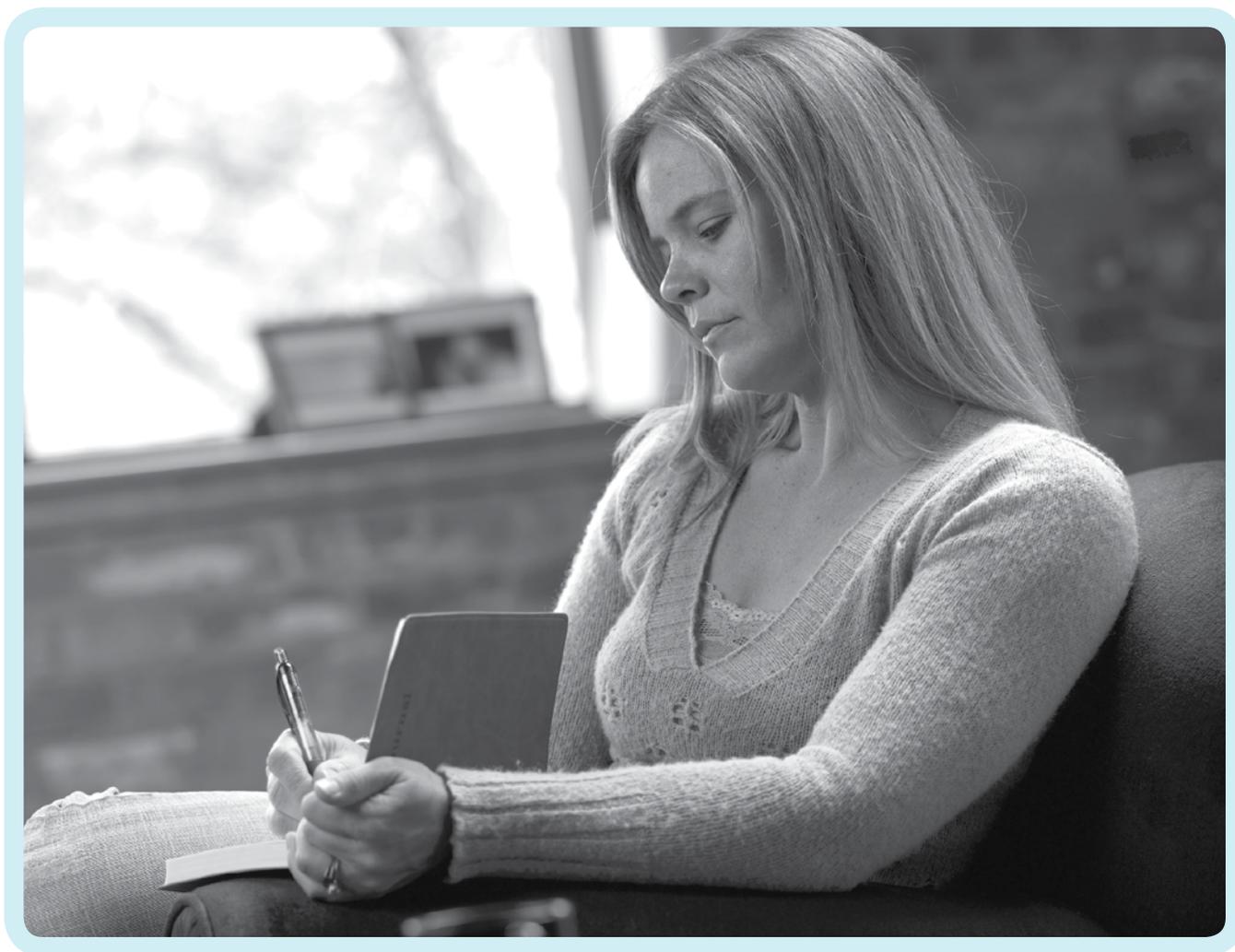
There you can find publications, such as *Creating a New Future: The Job-Loss Workbook*, or web pages, such as OCCinfo, that may provide specific information related to your needs.

In **Chapter 1**, you'll consider what you feel needs to change, and why you think it should change. You'll learn how to reconnect with your old dreams or discover new ones in **Chapter 2**. They will become your life's vision, the one that will help guide your choices and decisions. In **Chapter 3**, you'll examine the values, interests, strengths and assets you've developed so far. You'll also look at what might be holding you back from your dream life.

You'll identify the trends in work and life that are changing your world in **Chapter 4**, and you'll see how those trends may create options for you. In **Chapter 5**, you'll explore those options to come up with goals for the short and medium term that will help you fulfil your vision.

Once you've gathered all this information, we'll show you different ways to make a decision in **Chapter 6**. You may discover that with the information you now have, your vision or dreams may change, and there's nothing wrong with that. That's what making a well-informed decision is all about: gathering lots of information, weighing it and comparing it, and then coming to the best conclusion for you.

In **Chapter 7**, we'll show you how to create an action plan for your short-term goals, how to proceed from there to your medium-term goals and, finally, to the future you've imagined. It is possible. Turn the page and begin to dream.



Susan:



Why make a decision at all?

Sometimes people refuse to make a decision, although they don't realize that their refusal is a decision in itself. Staying the course and not changing things may be the best choice for the moment, but they won't know that until they have considered all the options.

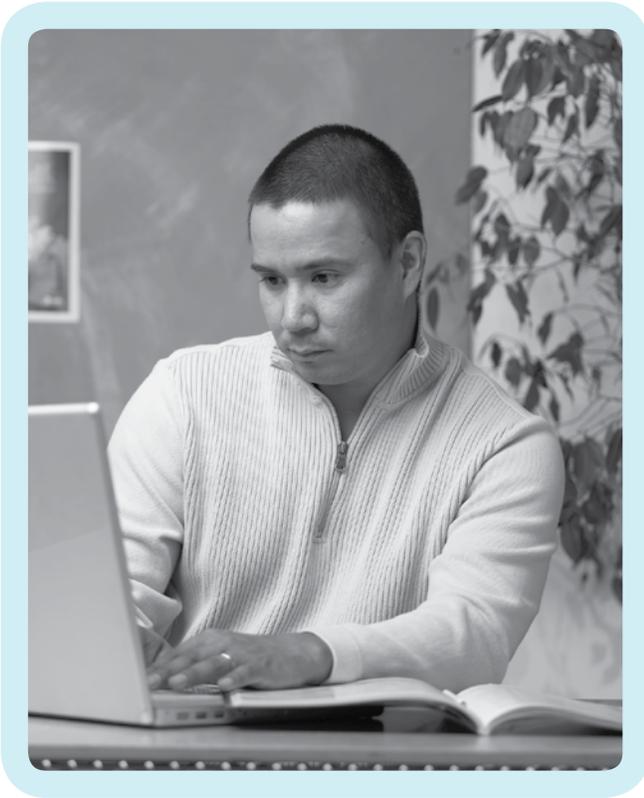
But some people seem unable to make a decision or change directions. Many things can prevent them from making a decision or changing directions, including the following feelings:

- They're helpless. They think they have no power in their situation, which means they can't do anything to change it.
- It's not their fault. They are simply the victims, which means they don't need to change. It's somebody else's responsibility.
- Things somehow have changed, at least in their minds. They *pretend* things have changed, instead of putting the effort into a real change. And when the same problem crops up (as it will, because nothing has changed), they're likely to say, "I can't believe this happened again."

They're afraid of making the wrong choice, so they make no choice at all.

I always wanted to travel

Susan hangs up the phone and sighs. Her younger sister Lauren is off on another two-month trip—to Australia this time—and Susan realizes she's jealous, even though Lauren has invited her along. Susan has never travelled. She started work right after graduation, and her job offers her no flexibility. The only way she can ever join her sister's backpacking expeditions is to quit...or is it?



My decision—big or small?

Often people believe that the only way they can feel happier or more satisfied is by making a *big* decision—to quit their job, dump their partner or walk away from a responsibility or commitment. And because they would rather not make such a drastic change, these people often make no decision at all and become less and less satisfied with their lives.

Change doesn't have to be an all-or-nothing proposition—often only little tweaks are needed. In Susan's case (*I always wanted to travel*), handing in her notice to join her sister's backpacking trip is not the only choice. Many employers value their long-term employees and may offer unpaid leaves of absence or opportunities to bank overtime hours. If Susan wants to go around the world, she can learn how to negotiate an extended leave of absence from her company instead of choosing to resign.

Four steps to a better decision

People often decide to make changes because something doesn't fit. Darryl is bored, Jenny feels something's missing and Susan longs to travel. They know life can be better, but they're just not sure how to go about improving it.

To make a good choice, it helps to have some guideposts. The next few chapters will show you how to make effective decisions and what to consider.

There are four basic steps:

1. Know who you are
2. Investigate your options
3. Make your decision
4. Plan and take action

If you think you already know who you are, you might want to skip the next two chapters. But keep an open mind; you may be surprised at what you learn about yourself! To begin, let's explore what you think your ideal life would be like in the next chapter.

Chapter 2

Looking at My Vision

In Chapter 1 you established what you feel needs to change. But deciding to change something without looking at where you want that change to take you can be tricky.

It's a little like a sloppy renovation: if you knock down a room's wall without thinking about what that will do to the entire house, the whole thing can come crashing down. In this chapter, you'll explore how the change you want will fit into the vision you have for your life. You'll look at what you dream of being and how those dreams can guide you—whether you're 17 or 70.

Now, if you think that dreaming is just for dreamers, think again. Most successful organizations spend a great deal of time creating a corporate vision. Why? Because creating a vision helps define the future the company really wants. It works the same way for people.

Your dream or vision is your big, bright, high-definition picture of the way you want your life to look. Even if you're having setbacks or problems right now, you can look at them in the light of your vision and put them in perspective. For instance, Jesse (*The pink slip that helped*) had to be laid off before he really looked at where he wanted to go with his life. It occurred to him that dealing with car parts wasn't really his life's dream. His true love, he realized, was being around vehicles that were assembled and ready to go—especially the expensive kind!

Your dreams can give you clues about what excites you, motivates you and makes you want to get going in the morning. If it's been a while since you've felt like leaping out of bed, then maybe it's time to figure out why. Often it's because we've been told we can't have dreams. Sometimes we've let other people define our dreams, and at other times it's because we've forgotten what our dreams are. If we limit our dreams, we limit our actions, and our lives are less lived.

Jesse:

The pink slip that helped

When Jesse was handed his layoff notice last year, he thought his world had ended. Even though he'd been delivering auto parts since high school and had never been promoted, he liked being around his first love—cars.

But Jesse traded in the old delivery van for high-end sports cars. He's joined a dealership that values his knowledge and passion for cars. "I've always dreamed of being around great rides, and this sales job is perfect. I just love coming in each day."



What do I really want?

It's your turn to dream. Settle back and take the time to really think about your dreams and your vision. The following questions will help you imagine your ideal life. They're designed to help you explore how you want to live. Not every question may appear to apply to you or to the decision you want to make, but may spark something you haven't thought about before. Once you're aware of your vision, you can check your decisions against this vision to see if the option you're considering will take you closer to the life you want to lead. This decision could be as small as buying a new computer or as large as going back to school. Once you know how you want to live, your options will be clearer. If a question doesn't apply to you or you feel your vision is solid, move on to the next section.



My ideal tomorrow

Let's look at what you want your ideal tomorrow to look like—the one where you can't wait to jump out of bed. But first, give yourself permission to banish “I can't” or “I could never” from your thoughts. Instead, think about what your life would be like if you could do anything. Really. Anything.

Jot down your answer(s) here:

Let's fill in some details about this day in your dream life.

Where will you wake up?

In your house in the country? In a condo in the city?

In an apartment in another country?

On a street in a close-knit community?

Something else?

What does it look like?

Do family, friends or pets live with you, or are you happily alone?

What gives you energy to complete what you want or need to do for that day?

Is it interacting with people?

Quiet time to think? Something else?

What inspires you to strive, create or complete something? Music? Art on the wall? Inspirational quotes? Something else?





What are you spending your money on?

A fancy car? A school in Africa?

A present for a family member?

A trip around the world?

A shelter for injured wildlife?

Something else?

How would you describe what you would do on a typical day?

If you're working, how do you get there? By truck?

By foot? By heading downstairs to your home office?

Or by walking to the shed out back?

Something else? What does your workplace look like?

What are you doing in your ideal work world?

Are you working alone or with other people?

Are you operating machines, handling animals

or selling things? Are you designing software,

menus or fashion? Something else?

What type of people work with you?

Are they creative, serious, talkative or businesslike?

Are you part of a team or its leader?

Or do you work alone?





What else are you doing?

What are your hobbies?

What are your social activities?

Meeting with friends?

Spending more time with your family?

Riding one of your horses?

Training for a marathon?

Writing that children's book?

Something else?

If you're having trouble envisioning your ideal day, let's start at the beginning and explore your childhood dreams and passions.

When you were little, what did you answer when people asked you **what you wanted to do when you grew up?**

What games and toys did you particularly love as a child? Using building blocks, making crafts, organizing shinny hockey, playing teacher or running a lemonade stand?
Something else?

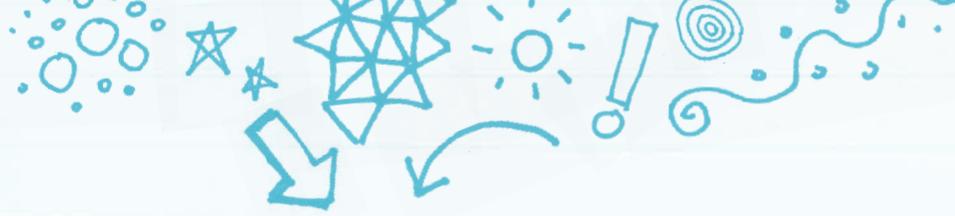
What books, TV programs or video games did you like the most when you were young?

Did you like the travel programs or the science shows?

Did you always choose books about real people instead of fiction?

Think a little about why you chose the things you did as a child.





My bucket list

Finally, create your own bucket list of the 10 things you want to do before you die. The possibilities are enormous. They could include flying a plane, being a parent, running your own business or asking for someone's forgiveness. Think about what *you* want to do. Not what your parents or your spouse or your children want you to do. And it's about what you *want* to do, not what you *need* to do.

Dive inside yourself and listen to what you really want to do.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.



Chapter 3

Assessing Myself

Why do some people dream of finding a cure for cancer or writing a smash Broadway musical, while others are determined to save their corner of the river valley or make a great deal of money?

In the last chapter, you explored your own particular vision. This vision is undoubtedly different from the dreams of your classmates, colleagues, friends or family members, and that makes sense. People create their dreams from the values and interests they develop as they interact with the world, and those interactions are all different. If you love the clean, careful world of a cancer laboratory and want to help people, for instance, you're more likely to imagine becoming a scientist than a writer of musicals. Your values and interests are the heart of what drives the vision of your future life. In this chapter you'll explore why you want the future you've imagined by examining your values and interests—the heart that shapes your dream.

But a dream with heart can only go so far. You'll also need the right strengths and assets. For instance, working to find a cure for cancer is easier if you like writing up lab reports (a strength) and have taken an undergraduate degree in science (an asset). In this chapter, you'll have a chance to take stock of your strengths and assets as well as any challenges that may be preventing you from achieving your vision. You can choose to answer only the areas where you want to be clearer about yourself.

What are my values and interests?

Your values guide you in the way you relate to the world. Together with your interests, they tell you why you do things. Equally importantly, they also tell you why you feel uncomfortable if you don't do things. Estelle (*This great job...makes me squirm*) is unhappy at her job because she feels Adam is in danger, which clashes with her values.

Estelle:



This great job... makes me squirm

The sight of Adam leaping over the open gaps on the second floor makes Estelle squirm. It's the fourth time this month she's seen the 17-year-old working upstairs on this construction site without a safety harness on. She's said something to Adam and to the supervisor, but there's a good-old-boy attitude here, and as the only woman carpenter, she doesn't want to make too many waves. She's already been teased for insisting on a harness for herself, because few of the others wear them. Estelle feels lucky that she's found work in this field, but she's really worried about Adam. Should she call Occupational Health and Safety secretly? Estelle has started checking the wanted ads for a different job.

My values

Fill out this table if you'd like to explore your values. Decide how important the listed values are to you and check off whether they are ones that you always value, sometimes value or never value.

Values	Always	Sometimes	Never
Artistic imagination —creating your own art	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Beauty —finding meaning in the beauty of art, nature or design	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being alone —having little contact with others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Belonging —being a member of a group or community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Change —doing different or new things	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Competition —pitting yourself against others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Creativity —thinking of new ideas or ways to do things	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Excitement —doing new, adventurous or risky things	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Expertise —being an expert at something	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fairness —upholding equality or justice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Family —being meaningfully involved with family members	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Friendships —having friends around, even at work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fun —finding pleasure in the things you do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Helping others —giving support to individuals or groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Helping society —doing something to make the world better	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Honesty —being fair and truthful in your dealings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Independence —being your own boss	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Influence —changing people's attitudes or opinions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Intuition —using insights and feelings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Knowledge —learning and understanding things	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leadership —guiding groups of people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Life balance —having enough time for important activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Money —earning a large amount of it	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Moral satisfaction —doing what you strongly believe in	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Continues →

Values	Always	Sometimes	Never
Order/cleanliness —having rules and things in their place	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Peacefulness —living/working without stress	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
People contact —interacting daily with family, co-workers and/or the public	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Physical challenges —using your body’s abilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Precision —doing things precisely and exactly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recognition —receiving special or public attention	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Routine —having things stay the same; doing things the same way	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Security —feeling safe; having stable finances and work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Solving problems —knowing how to fix issues and situations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spirituality —relating to the human spirit or soul	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Status —being respected or looked up to	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Time freedom —not having to live/work by the clock	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Add your own:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Give your vision a quick scan. If you can identify values in your vision that aren't on the list, add them in.

What are five of your favourite or most important values? List them here:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Think back to why you picked up this book. Now that you've identified the values that are important to you, which of your values are not being met in your life? Write them here:

What can you do to meet your values better? Write your answer(s) here:

My interests

Now let's explore your interests. These are issues and activities that you enjoy learning about or doing. The following table isn't a full list, but it should get you started identifying what catches your attention and makes you think, "Yes, I like to do that or learn about that."

Again, check off the items that really interest you, somewhat interest you or never interest you.

Interests	Really	Somewhat	Never
Arts and crafts —creating something visual with your hands	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Astronomy —learning about stars	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Books —reading anything from biographies to science fiction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Design —planning something new with skill or artistry	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Family history —learning about your own past	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Film —watching or learning about new or classic movies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Food —cooking for fun or learning about what we eat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Games —playing or designing computer, video or board games	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gardening —growing plants, indoors or out	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
History —learning about the past	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Languages —learning a new way to communicate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Music —listening to or making it	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nature —exploring its different aspects, from birds and plants to forests and oceans	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public speaking —talking or explaining in front of groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Research —discovering facts in different ways	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sports —taking part in or following a physical activity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teaching —showing someone how to do something	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Technology —keeping up with the latest in the mechanical or applied arts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Travelling —seeing new parts of the world	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Volunteering —giving your time to a person or group	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Writing —creating stories, songs, scripts, etc., with words	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Add your own:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Continues →

This list of interests isn't complete. Are there other interests that you feel should be added? Write them down at the bottom of the Interests table.

Review the entire table again to choose and list your five top interests:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

In **Chapter 1**, you wrote down the reason(s) that made you pick up this book. Now that you've identified the interests that are important to you, which of your interests are not being met in your life? Jot down your answer here:

What can you do to meet your interests better? Write your answer(s) here:

You may be thinking, "What's it matter that I really like gardening when all I want to decide is whether to take this promotion." But if you also value beauty, and you find pleasure in stepping outside your home each day to see what new bud has blossomed, you may come to resent a promotion that robs you of the time needed to create this beautiful oasis. You may, instead, choose to stay in your current position or negotiate a different role that takes into account your values and interests.

So far you've defined the life you want to live, and you know and are clear about your values and interests. But that's not all you need to make a decision. You also need a sense of what's realistic in terms of your strengths and assets. It's a little like wanting to drive deep into the Rockies but not knowing whether your car can get you to the top of the first mountain. Is the gas tank full? Are the tires bald? Before you set out, let's check to make sure you have the strengths and assets you need.

What are my strengths and assets?

We are born with many gifts, and as we grow up we develop a number of talents or skills. These gifts, talents and skills are our strengths; we can rely on them even when we approach new situations that are unfamiliar to us. These strengths help us achieve our vision and fulfil our values and interests.

You may already know what some of your strengths are. They are the things you can do well. You may be good at numbers, organizing, leading others, being persistent or being funny. Most people have a fairly good idea of what their abilities are, but if you want help identifying your strengths, visit the Alberta Learning Information

Service website at alis.alberta.ca and sign in to the CAREERinsite section. Go to the Know Yourself page, and try out the different quizzes and exercises.

If strengths are things you can do, then assets are things you have. Assets can be divided into two groups:

- 1. Material assets** can include anything from a diploma or a degree to a special piece of equipment or money in the bank.
- 2. Relationship assets** are the connections you've built up with people. They can be your family, friends, clients, sports buddies or neighbours—anyone who can give you support or advice when you need it.

Examples

The strengths and assets you will need depend on what you want to do.

A construction contractor, for instance, will need different strengths and assets than a person heading into retirement.

A construction contractor

Strengths	Material assets	Relationship assets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logical thinking Skills in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • construction • measuring • operating equipment • making decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Truck • Building tools • Computer • Cellphone • Fax • Work clothes • SAIT diploma 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A good reputation • Referrals from satisfied customers • Reliable subcontractors • A life partner willing to put up with long hours

Continues →

A person considering retirement

Strengths	Material assets	Relationship assets
Skills in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • time management • making decisions • learning • managing money • questioning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • House • Money in the bank • Recreational vehicle • Pension 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer links • Membership in a professional organization • A good doctor • A supportive life partner

While a cellphone may not be important for someone who is retiring, contractors will find life much easier if they can call the lumber supply store from the work site. Similarly, contractors may not care about the contacts

they've made through volunteering, but soon-to-be retirees may find that their volunteer activities provide a link between their pre- and post-work lives.

My strengths and assets

Consider your own vision. Which of your strengths and assets will help you reach your vision? If you'd like, list them in this table.

Strengths	Material assets	Relationship assets

What are my challenges?

Now that you've identified your strengths and assets, it's time to think about what is slowing you down or getting in your way. These are the challenges, and everyone has to face them. They can be as small as the babysitter's cold or as large as a stock market crash that means layoffs in your field. But identifying challenges—naming them—is the first step in dealing with them.

Often these challenges are gaps in your strengths and assets. If the babysitter's cold is throwing you in a tizzy, for instance, it may be because you have a gap in your relationship assets. Those assets are the ones that offer you support, such as a stay-at-home friend or relative. If the prospect of layoffs is terrifying you, you may have gaps in both your strengths (skills that need upgrading) and material assets (emergency financial cushion).

It's important to keep a running tab on our strengths, assets and challenges. Let's look at Tom's situation (*I'm living someone else's dream*).

Strengths and assets:

- a law degree
- a law practice
- a close family
- a relationship with a person in a field that really interests him

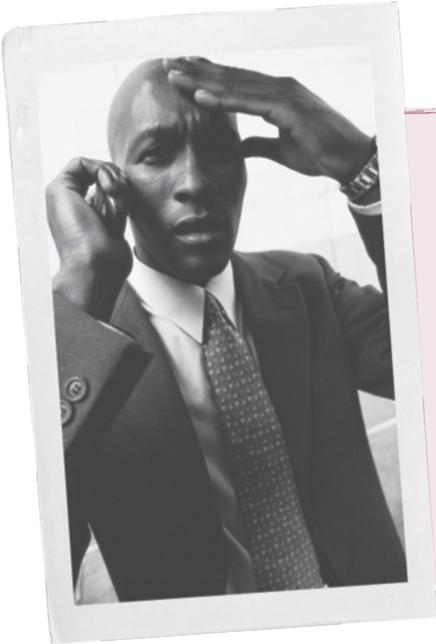
Challenges:

- a gap in his organizational skills (lost files)
- a constant stress headache
- no time to do the things he really wants
- feelings of guilt for following the dreams of his parents, instead of his own

Tom:

I'm living someone else's dream

Tom leaves the courthouse, furious. His client isn't co-operating, files are misplaced and the case is delayed, again. This is why he went to law school? But his parents have always pushed him, saying they had come to this country so that he and his sister could have a better life. Trying to ignore his constant headache, Tom looks for his buddy, the courthouse gardener. They chat about the weather, the choice of plants and this year's outbreak of caterpillars. Tom's fingers itch to pick up a trowel, but he'd look silly digging in the dirt in his expensive suit. And he has no time. He turns away, feeling stressed and tired.





Magda:

Rediscovering the passion

Magda shoves the last chart into its slot and checks the computer screen and then her watch. Some of the other nurses want to toast her 50th birthday at a nearby restaurant tonight, but Magda can barely find the energy to go. In fact, Magda can barely find the energy for anything to do with work. She used to enter the hospital each day eager to see how her patients were doing. But now she drags herself in, knowing that she faces piles of charting, orders, patient classification sheets and early discharge planning forms. The paperwork is drowning out her passion for looking after other people. That's why she entered nursing. But the paperwork is making her want to quit.

"Magda?" A student nurse taps her on the shoulder. "I'm worried about Mrs. Kent in 4B."

Magda looks at Kim, full of the passion she herself once had for the patients under her care, but needing the guidance of someone with more experience. Magda pauses for a moment. "Me too. Let's look at her chart together. And when we're done, will you join some of us nurses down at the restaurant tonight?"

Let's look at Magda (*Rediscovering the passion*). She really values helping other people. That's why nursing was such a good fit for her. But as she became more experienced and more patients came under her care, the volume of paperwork increased, and now Magda feels she's ignoring her values.

Yet student nurses need the experience Magda has to offer. Magda comes to realize that she's there to help not just patients, but also student nurses, such as Kim. Instead of quitting her job, Magda discovers she has another choice that will fulfil her values: she can mentor young nurses and show them how the paperwork will help them help their patients.

As you think about your reason for change, it helps to keep an open mind about your options. The change may not have to be as drastic as you first believe.

In the next two chapters, you'll learn how to explore your options and look at forces and factors that may affect your choices in the short and medium term.

Chapter 4

Identifying My Options

When you were little, did you ever stack building blocks or empty containers into a tower, only to have the dog or your bratty brother knock them down? Some kids just cry when that happens; others learn to interlock their bricks or set their tower on a broader base.

Making decisions is like choosing the bricks to build your tower. In the previous chapters you identified what your bricks are: what strengths, skills and assets you have to create your goal. But if you're only grabbing the first thing at hand and plopping it down on what's there, you're likely to end up with bricks that won't fit and an unstable structure that will fall apart with the first wag of the dog's tail.



Rani:

There goes my promotion

After her boss leaves, Rani slides back into her cubicle, depressed.

The economic changes mean she'll be stuck in her clerical job at this import/export business for at least another year. She'd hoped she'd be in line for a promotion despite her lack of Japanese, but now that's not going to happen. And she doesn't feel like going back to school for Japanese lessons. Rani knows she should feel lucky that she still has her job, but is she really? She's young. Will she be trapped in this cubicle for the rest of her life?

Winds of change

Choosing your building materials—or making decisions—works better if you're looking at the bigger picture and taking outside forces into account. Even though it's your tower, or your life, these forces can affect its stability. We call these forces the winds of change. They are the trends that affect not only you, but the company you work for, the age group you're in, the community you belong to and so on. When you take these larger trends into account, you'll make decisions that will help you realize your vision sooner.

Trends aren't fads. Your life won't change because lots of people think bacon-scented candles are something they need to buy. (Unless you were the person who invented them!) But it may be affected by the fact that people are living longer or are more concerned about the environment. In this chapter, we'll look at trends in

- **the economy**—factors around the province, the country and the world that can affect the way you earn money or how much you pay for things
- **technology**—new tools (machinery, computer programs, etc.), social media, e-commerce
- **society**—changes in the way we live together and attitudes about them
- **education**—new research, as well as opportunities to expand your knowledge
- **a company or business organization**—new ways to manage work (outsourcing, taking on more contract workers, etc.)



Peter:

I can't work this way anymore

Peter can barely reach his wrench from where he's standing, bent over the car motor. He puts both hands on the car's frame to take the pressure off his back and tries to stand up straight. The pain shoots through him. "This can't go on anymore," he thinks. Even though he has good days, the bad ones are getting worse. He can't keep making a living this way, but he still has bills to pay.

Let's look at some examples. In Rani's case (*There goes my promotion*), the cutbacks in her department show that the economy is getting worse. Rani may be hoping for a promotion, but in this economic climate, her lack of Japanese will definitely hold her back. Organizations only hire or promote people with fewer qualifications when there are too many jobs and not enough workers.

Rani is restless with her work and looking for something new, but she doesn't want to return to school to learn the language of Japan, the country where her company does most of its business. But if she did some research, she'd discover that she could combine adventure and learning while she travels, by living in Japan. And because of the recent changes in the economy, her employer might be more willing to give her a leave of absence—it's one less cheque to pay during these cutbacks. Rani will return with enhanced skills, probably just when the economy improves.

Rani's options:

- ➔ stay in her current job
- ➔ stay in her current job and take upgrading
- ➔ quit her job during a slow economy and try to find something new with her current skill set
- ➔ upgrade her skills overseas

Peter's ailment (*I can't work this way anymore*) is interfering with his work and his quality of life. He doesn't want to stop working; he just can't imagine what else he can do with his training in small motor and engine repair.

Peter needs to look at social trends. Baby boomers are growing older, and people are living longer. The sale of motorized wheelchairs and scooters is booming, and with that change come opportunities to repair them when they break down. Because these devices are smaller than a regular car, Peter may be able to work on them in a more comfortable position. He could even consider starting his own business and making on-site calls.

Peter's options:

- ➔ stay in his current job
- ➔ quit his job and go into debt
- ➔ find work that can accommodate his ailment



Emily:

My time at home is ending

Emily signs the school registration form with mixed feelings. Her youngest will be off to Grade 1 in the fall, and her time as a stay-at-home mom is ending. She's not sure if she should go back to her old job in wildlife biology—the department's been reorganized while she's been away. She'd like flexible hours; both her children are still young. Should she go back to school and retrain for a different field?

Emily (*My time at home is ending*) has a great skill set with her degree in wildlife biology, but her department has changed during the time she's been at home raising her children, and the company now relies on mainly temporary or contract workers. A revision from her former full-time position to only part-time may not work there. Although Emily wants flexibility, she also wants the security of a steady job.

But Emily has noticed a new trend: many companies are now paying more attention to the environmental impact of their activities. The idea of acting as an environmental consultant appeals to her; although such a position may not result in a permanent job with a single company, she might be able to find several businesses and develop a steady client base. In the beginning, having only a few clients would allow her to work from home and give her the flexibility to be around when her children come home from school.

Emily's options:

- ➔ try to find temporary work at her previous department
- ➔ change her line of work
- ➔ create a consulting job with her current skill set

What trends can I use?

Yes, it's true—trends can sneak up on you and really change your life. At the same time, you can take advantage of these winds of change and harness them to your own purposes. For instance, although Emily's office restructured, she looked at an emerging trend—the concern for the environment—and used it to craft a future career that fit her needs.

What trends can you use to create your future life? Ask your family or friends what they think will make a difference down the road. We've started a list—feel free to add ideas that relate to you.

Some specific future trends:

- aging baby boomers
- alternative energy sources
- concerns about food safety
- concerns about climate change
- concerns about the environment
- concerns about health care
- technology for clean energy
- nanotechnology
- social media

Add your own:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



George:

Weekends with wood

It's Friday at 5 p.m., and George's office workmates are all heading home or out for fun. But George is off to the custom lumber store where he now works Friday nights and Saturdays. When he saw their "Help Wanted" ad last winter, the 58-year-old knew he had to apply. As an amateur carver, George knew he could learn more about woodworking and perhaps develop contacts to sell the growing number of items he was creating. People think he's crazy, working a part-time job on top of his full-time one, but George figures he's sliding into retirement with a splinter-free plan.

How do I want to spend my time?

When people talk about needing a change, they're often looking for a better work-life balance—the way they divide their time between their job and their life outside their job. For some people, spending 12 hours at the office fits nicely into their values: they're competitive and want that corner office with all the status it brings. But others come to realize that their life would have more meaning if they extended their parental leave or worked part time to look after an ill life partner because they value family. On the other hand, some people might choose to pick up extra work in a different area (see George's story: *Weekends with wood*) because their interests aren't really being addressed otherwise. Shaking up the nine-to-five routine is a choice more and more people are considering.

The following alternatives to full-time work may help you develop some options. As you review them, consider how they will affect your life in other areas.

Part-time work: The obvious trade-offs for working fewer hours at paid employment are less income and a career path that zigzags, but it gives you more time for what you value most. Part-time workers have fewer or no benefits.

Job sharing: This involves two or more people sharing the responsibilities of one job description. The advantages and disadvantages are similar to part-time work.

Multi-tracking: If you work more than one job, you're multi-tracking. This approach can include having several part-time positions or full-time work as well as a part-time job in an area that really fits your values or interests. George (*Weekends with wood*) is multi-tracking by exploring his woodworking interests through a part-time job.

Telecommuting: Working from home with a computer, a phone and the Internet is a great way to avoid fighting traffic. Not only can you avoid the office cooler small talk and decisions about what to wear in the morning, but you're also there when the kids come home from school or when Dad needs help taking his pills. On the other hand, you really are taking your work home from the office—when does your day end? Some full-time employees work in the office part of the week and from home for the rest of the week.

Self-employment: Being your own boss has definite advantages—who's going to fire you? But you have to weigh the advantages of structuring your own hours and calling the shots against an unpredictable income, the constant search for work and a great deal of paperwork.

Contracting/consulting: These are two different types of self-employment. Contractors often sign contracts to work for a specified length of time or for a particular project. Consultants often work on a number of different large and small projects at the same time. This type of work can be feast or famine—you may be flooded with work in a busy year and have almost nothing to do at other times. As with any type of self-employment, income levels fluctuate and there are no benefits, such as employment insurance or dental plans.

How do my values and interests fit in?

In **Chapter 3** we talked about how your values guide you in the way you relate to the world. Together with your interests, your values determine why you do or don't do things. If your values or interests aren't being met, you may feel as if something's missing. Because we all have a number of different values and interests, we can't usually fulfil them all in one role.

Fortunately, our lives are made up of a number of roles—we can be parents, students, friends, artists or community league members, just to name a few. For instance, your assembly line job may give you the routine and security you value, but you may coach your daughter's soccer team because you also value influence



and contact with people. Or you may love the knowledge you acquire as a librarian, but need to explore your interest in physical activity in another role. George (*Weekends with wood*) addressed his interest in carving by taking a part-time job at a custom lumber store.

As you explore your options, look at which of your values and interests aren't being addressed. Can you create options that include these missing elements?

What options do I see for myself?

Now that you've defined some trends that may affect your future, explored different ways to use your time and re-examined your values and interests, can you list at least three options for yourself? Be creative and keep an open mind. Remember that trends may create change in your life, but also that you can use them to create and direct change. Don't forget to include your strengths, assets and challenges. An English teacher tired of teaching junior high students may realize that more and more seniors are signing up for creative writing workshops. A technology buff who needs to become more physically active may form a treasure hunt club that uses global satellite systems. The possibilities may be endless.

My options

Consider your options and write down three of them here:

1.

2.

3.

In the following chapter, you'll learn how to explore these options and figure out which one is best for you.

Chapter 5

Exploring My Options

In the last chapter you defined some options to help you reach your vision; in this chapter, you'll learn how to dig into these options and find out whether they're really what you want.

And since you've also defined some long-term trends that may affect your options, you can start looking at what information you need right now, and in the short term, to make an informed decision.

Keep in mind that your research may open up doors you may not even have considered knocking on. That's the beauty of uncovering information—it creates possibilities

you may never have dreamed of. Let's look at Helena's case (*Finding something for my mom*). She looked at her mom as a senior who only needed some activities to fill her days and keep her mind off her loss. But the conversation with her neighbour allowed Helena to think of her mom as a person who still had skills to offer and who would feel useful doing so.

Helena:

Finding something for my mom

Since the death of Helena's dad, Helena has worried about her mom, Kay, who seems to be withdrawing from the world. Helena has been looking at seniors' programs, hoping that the company might cheer her mom up, but Kay is having none of it. "I'm not crocheting pot holders," Kay says. Helena's so worried about Kay's well-being that she considers cutting back on work to spend more time with her. But when Helena's neighbour mentions a nearby centre's need for volunteers to chat with English-language learners, Helena tries again. Kay loves the idea. It makes her feel useful, and she's surrounded by people of different ages and cultures. "Can't talk—we're off to explore Lebanese restaurants," she says when Helena calls a few weeks later.



Information I need

The following questions will help you identify what information you'll need right now. You'll be surprised at how much you already know. These questions will also help you find the facts you'll need to fulfil your short-term goals.

In my social network, whom can I talk to about my research?

Friends, family members, neighbours, co-workers, fellow volunteers and your spiritual community may all have insights and information.

Are there any groups or organizations that can help me with my research?

Helena tried a seniors' group; others may wish to contact professional associations, non-profit groups or health organizations.

Can I ask my question in a different way to get a different answer?

Helena asked what programs would help her mom. She could also have asked what programs her mom could help.

How can I best use Internet search engines, such as Google or Yahoo to conduct research?

Try using different words or phrases to get different results.

What newspapers, books, magazines and other print sources can I use for my research?

*Newspapers and bookstores carry the latest information on a particular issue.
Magazines often specialize in certain topics. Finding the right one can offer lots of details for your research.*

What information can I find at the library or ask the librarian about?

Your library card makes available lots of information that you might otherwise have to pay for, especially online (such as access to newspaper databases). And librarians may show you new or different ways to search for information.

What type of counsellor can I talk to?

Counsellors often specialize in different areas, such as careers, marriage, family and so on.

What department at a nearby college or university can point me in the right direction?

Experts there can tell you about trends, issues and courses you might take to help achieve your dream.

What government department can help?

The Government of Alberta, for instance, maintains service centres that offer counselling and libraries for research. Go to programs.alberta.ca. Under the menu on the right, choose Life Events. You'll find details on everything from getting married and raising children to dealing with a crisis, needing social supports or retiring.

To explore work-related issues, visit Alberta Learning Information Service at alis.alberta.ca. That website has lots of information about occupations, learning, wages and work search. Type a keyword in the ALIS Tip Sheets section, for instance, to find current advice and suggestions. The CAREERinsite section can guide you through the key steps of career planning.

What business can I approach for information?

While most businesses aren't in the habit of offering guidance to members of the public, they will take the time to answer some questions about their services or products.

Setting some short-term goals

Now that you've identified some places where you can find information, it's good to establish some short-term goals to actually get that information. The SMARTS method of goal-setting will keep you moving in the direction of your vision. Otherwise, life may bog you down with everyday duties and rob you of your momentum. By setting short-term goals, you are saying, "My future vision is important enough to commit to these small actions."

According to the SMARTS method, each short-term goal should be

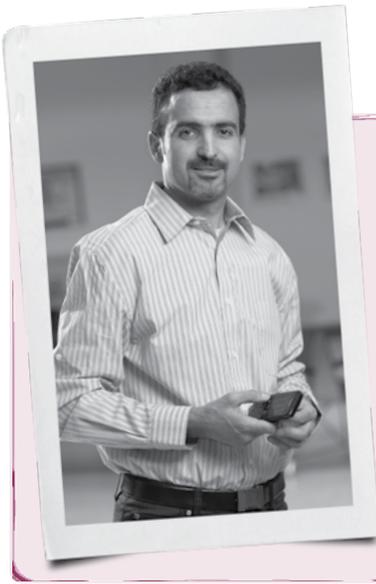
- S** **Specific.** State in your own words exactly what you're going to do.
- M** **Measurable.** Define a beginning and an end result so you know you've achieved the goal.
- A** **Achievable.** Decide what you can realistically accomplish, keeping in mind the resources you have available.
- R** **Relevant.** Make sure your goal is meaningful to you and supports the direction you've chosen.
- T** **Time certain.** Set a deadline or finishing date.
- S** **Supported by your allies.** Get buy-in from those who can help you, and especially from members of your immediate family who will be affected by your decisions.

My short-term goals

Look at the sources of information you've identified in the previous section. Can you set at least three realistic, short-term goals with definite deadlines? For example, can you make it to your local library by the end of the week? Can you do an Internet search by next Tuesday? Write down your short-term goals and deadlines here:

Short-term goal	Deadline

Omar:



Will this option work for me?

Omar is tired of running a restaurant and dealing with long hours, unreliable staff and fickle suppliers. He wants a steady, nine-to-five job so he can spend more time with his young family. When a food safety inspector gives Omar's kitchen high marks, again, Omar quizzes him about his work, his regular hours and his benefits as a city worker. "Imagine taking a paid vacation!" he tells his wife excitedly that night. Omar knows all about food preparation and the restaurant industry. Switching over should be simple. But further research shows that inspectors need courses in microbiology and chemistry. Omar hated science in high school. Is this the right option for him?

How much do I need to find out?

Researching your options can be as simple as talking to someone who seems to be living the dream, just as Omar does (*Will this option work for me?*). But as he digs a little deeper and looks at websites where such positions are advertised, Omar discovers he needs some post-secondary courses in an area that he's never liked: science. For Omar, it makes sense to look at other options.

Remember, too, that the amount of research you do should be guided by the amount of change you want to make in your life. If you're trying to decide whether you can afford the entertainment system for the family room, a quick check of how much debt you have, the amount of interest you're paying and the amount of future income you can afford to set aside is probably all the research you need.

A change in occupation is much more serious. Pause and really listen to advice or read information from various sources. Consider the time you're using for your research as an investment in your dream. And while you don't want to waste your time, give yourself permission to follow interesting facts or ideas down other roads. Let yourself be diverted by sidebars in a magazine article or interesting links on a website. You may discover something you'd never realized existed, such as a job or a program you'd never heard of before. For example, while Omar was researching careers in his field, he realized that with the skills in organization and food and beverage management that he'd learned running a restaurant, he could also manage events, supply wholesale equipment to restaurants and hotels, or teach food and beverage management at the local college.

Keeping track of new information

All your work gathering details about a great program or a fantastic job lead won't help if the details you collect aren't easy to find. Create a paper or computer folder, or designate a special drawer in which to store the details. Here are a few tips:

You may have an amazing memory, but it pays to **write things down**. Take notes as you research. Don't just follow an Internet link and then shut off the computer—you may never find your way back to that site. Bookmark it, write it down or copy and paste it into a computer document.

Ask for business cards. Write down the dates on which you spoke to people and a few points on what you spoke to them about.

Keep brochures, magazine and newspaper clippings, and other documents in the same area.

Jot down any impressions or feelings you have as you learn new information. For example, if you're chatting with a prospective instructor about an exercise program you want to take and you feel she's not interested in your past experience or injuries, write that down. You'll be able to compare it to your impressions of other instructors.

Remember, you're exploring your options by collecting information. Having all this information on hand will help you as you move to the next stage in **Chapter 6**.

Chapter 6

Making My Decision

*Changing something in your life and moving toward a dream future isn't always easy. But this is **your** life and these are **your** dreams, so it's well worth the effort you're making..*

And in terms of the decision-making steps we outlined in **Chapter 1**, you're halfway there. You know yourself better, and you've investigated your options. Now you'll move on to step 3: making your decision.

This chapter will show two methods you can use to decide which option is best for you. It will help you define your options and predict as best you can what will happen if you choose a particular option.

How do I choose?

Deciding something can be scary. You're taking control of a situation, and it may go wrong. But feeling a bit anxious about making a decision is a normal part of the process when you're faced with difficult choices. This nervousness should help spur you on to action. Too little anxiety may make people not even bother with a decision, while too much may mean they will put off making a choice or let others do it for them. Overly anxious people may need strategies to reduce their anxiety before they make a decision.

Know, too, that even the best decision you make can come with feelings of regret or the realization that there are problems attached to it. After all, that's why you're working so hard to choose the right option—because you know that each one comes with its own challenges. Also keep in mind that few decisions are set in stone. If you need to or want to, you can probably try another direction. And finally, it's important to remember that there are few perfect choices in a world that is less than perfect. You can only make the best choices you can with the information you have at the time. And learn from what you've chosen. This is part of a life well lived.

Typically, a good choice

- is made after a person has considered the most promising options and the possible results (outcomes) of acting on those options
- fits a person's values and self-image
- is one that a person will act on
- is one where a person's head and heart agree on the way to act

On the following pages, you'll walk through two different methods for making a decision: the **rational, linear** method and the **intuitive, it-feels-right** method. The first method involves reviewing an option systematically and exploring possible outcomes. The second method involves looking inward to discover your true feelings about an option.

While people tend to prefer one way over the other, these processes often link together or borrow from each other. In either case, the methods described here will help you create midterm goals that will move you toward your vision.



Cody:

A cycling solution

Cody can feel the button on his police uniform straining. He's got to get in better shape, but he's always so worn out when he gets off work, and Akina's waiting at home with the baby. They used to go for bike rides together, but now that's impossible. He sighs and looks at the memo about recycling that's just come across his desk. "If they really cared about the environment, they wouldn't use the paper this is on," he thinks. Cody stops. If they're really interested in the environment, would they go for a bicycle patrol? It would mean fewer cars on the road and a lower gas budget. Plus, Cody would be able to pedal off some of these post-baby pounds.

Method 1:

The rational, linear method

Using this approach means systematically reviewing your values, interests, strengths, assets and challenges and evaluating the possible outcomes of each option. Once you've done that, you can compare your options.

It often helps to set your thoughts down on paper, so you can see the differences and make comparisons. Let's look at the example of Cody (*A cycling solution*).

He values both his job and his family, and sees himself travelling the world with his wife when he retires. Right now, though, the new baby means Cody has had less time to exercise, and he's feeling the inches creep up. But by considering a trend—concern for the environment—Cody comes up with an option that may help him get in shape. He takes a separate piece of paper and rationally considers whether this might work for him. On the following pages, you'll do the same. Let's see how Cody does:

Evaluating Cody's option using the rational, linear method

My option: Offer to create a bicycle patrol

Fulfils these values

- protects family time
- helps environment
- promotes healthy attitude at work

Fulfils these interests

- cycling

Allows me to use these strengths

- organizing

Allows me to use these assets

- respect of my superiors for a new idea
- bicycle maintenance knowledge
- argument that gas and vehicle maintenance budgets will go down

Has these challenges

- convincing older officers that bicycles are a good idea
- concerns about officer safety on bicycles
- cost of new bicycles

Outcomes of this option:

1. better physical shape
2. better environmental image for the police force
3. more community visibility for the police force
4. go-getter image on the job
5. possible resentment from other officers for making this kind of suggestion

With this option, will Cody move toward his vision or preferred future? Yes No

Evaluating my option(s) using the rational, linear method

Now it's your turn. Think about how an option you're considering relates to your values, interests, strengths and assets. Also consider the challenges you might have if you choose this option—that is, what gaps you have in your strengths and assets. Finally, consider what will happen if you choose this option—what will be the results?

If you have more than one option, just photocopy this page or make your own.

My option: _____

Fulfils these values

Fulfils these interests

Allows me to use these strengths

Allows me to use these assets

Has these challenges

Outcomes of this option:

Will this option move me toward my vision/preferred future? Yes No

Continues 

If you have more than one option, after you evaluate them individually you can compare them by answering the following questions:

Which option satisfies your values the most?

Which option satisfies your interests the most?

Which option uses your strengths and assets the most?

Which option has the most challenges?

Which option has the best outcome?

Which option moves you toward your preferred future?

As you compare your options, remember to look at all the different elements on your chart. One option may have more challenges, for instance, but it may also fulfil your values better. And challenges aren't necessarily a bad thing. In fact, they may help you define your midterm goals. Just because you're missing a certificate in first aid, for instance, doesn't mean you can't consider becoming a day home provider. It just means you have to spend a weekend getting the certificate.

Have you made your decision? Write it down here:

The beginning of the chapter pointed out that the linear and intuitive decision-making methods are linked. To double-check your decision on an option, borrow from the intuitive method, which is described in the following pages. Close your eyes for a moment and imagine you have chosen that option. How does it *feel* having made this decision?

Write your answer(s) here:

If you've refined your decision as a result of borrowing from the intuitive approach, rewrite it here:



Joanne:

Following the beat of my heart

Joanne is torn. Should she take that watercolour class to bring her to the next level of her art or the occupational therapy course to upgrade her career? They're both good options in her quest to learn something new. But as she closes her eyes and imagines her autumn evenings, first with her watercolours, and then with her textbooks, she realizes that her heart skips a beat in excitement when she thinks of painting and does nothing when she imagines writing papers. Joanne takes in the silence for a few moments and then opens her eyes. She's made her decision.

Method 2:

The intuitive, it-feels-right method

The second method for making a decision allows you to hear your inner voice and encourages its wisdom to emerge. Even if you have not consciously identified, researched or analyzed your options, your subconscious is always working to explore, gather and store information. With the intuitive method, you tap into this subconscious well of information and bring it to the surface.

This method differs from the rational, linear approach because it focuses on what you **really** feel, instead of what you're **supposed** to feel.

Here are a few simple techniques that may help you get in touch with your true feelings about an option you're considering:

- meditating
- “sleeping on it”
- going on a vision quest
- sitting peacefully
- taking a quiet, solitary walk
- writing in a journal
- visiting an important site, such as the place you were born or a loved one's grave

The beginning of the chapter pointed out that the rational and intuitive decision-making methods are linked. To double-check your decision, borrow from the rational method and write your answers to the following questions here:

What are the outcomes of this option?

1.

2.

3.

4.

Will this option move you toward your vision or preferred future? Yes No

If you've refined your decision as a result of borrowing from the linear, rational approach, rewrite it here:

What if I can't come to a decision?

Sometimes you just can't make a decision, for a number of reasons. But before you throw up your hands and walk away, try asking yourself these questions:

1. Is my self-assessment in **Chapter 3** up to date?
Are the values I've listed really my values, or are they someone else's? What about the interests, strengths and assets I've listed?
2. Is the vision I've identified in **Chapter 2** really the one I want? Is it really the future I want to have?
If your vision and self-assessment are still the same, then it may simply not be the right time to make this decision. Give yourself some time and come back to the process with fresh eyes later on.

Chapter 7

Moving My Decision to Action

Making your decision is a huge step and you've done it well—by taking into account all the things discussed in the previous chapters.

But stopping now is like deciding between studying business or English at university and then not bothering to apply. If you really want that degree, you have to set some goals, such as filling out the application form, arranging for tuition and signing up for courses in your particular specialty. It's the same for most decisions.

Setting goals

Now that you know what you're going to do, set some goals to get you there. Manuela (*I'm changing my job's description*) loves spending her day around soon-to-be brides, probably because they remind her of her own wedding. But working the cash register while others do the real consulting work frustrates her. With her husband's support, she talks to her boss and sets a midterm goal: to be a full consultant in 12 months. This moves Manuela nicely toward her vision of running her own wedding shop five years down the road.

Manuela:

I'm changing my job's description

Manuela locks the door of the wedding shop with a smile. Today's conversation with her boss had gone well. Usually Manuela works the cash register, selling bridal shower favours and chair rentals. But after two years, the work was so boring that she'd considered quitting. "I love being around the brides," she confided to her husband last night, "but taking their money is the least interesting part. I want to help them plan their most important day." "So do it," he said. She started by talking with her boss. Although Manuela is still responsible for the cash register, she is now a junior bridal consultant. "By next year, I'll be a full consultant. And in five years, I plan to have my own shop."



My midterm goals

Now that you've made your decision, what midterm goals can you set?

What can you work toward in the next one to five years that will bring you closer to your dream future?

Write down your goal(s) here:

1.

2.

3.

4.

Setting midterm goals will prepare you for the final step, creating an action plan. You will want to now set your decision in motion by planning and taking action.

It makes sense to plan first. To plan *well*, it helps to think about the different situations that can occur once you start following through on your decision. These situations, or scenarios, can be divided into three types: **typical**, **positive** and **negative**.

Looking at scenarios

Successful decision-makers imagine different situations or scenarios that may affect the action they take. In the business world, this is called strategic planning.

Let's say a company wants to invest in a product we'll call Widjits. The company imagines three different scenarios:

1. **Typical:** Customers who like Widjits continue to use it, and demand stays the same.
2. **Positive:** Celebrities start using Widjits, and the product becomes a global sensation.
3. **Negative:** Someone invents Whizmos, and no one wants to buy Widjits anymore.

A good company will plan for each of these scenarios. It wants to be ready and able to manage the possibilities that the future throws at it, instead of being caught unprepared. If you're caught unprepared, you're not in control, and that means someone else is calling the shots. By having a strategic plan, you can control what happens to you.

For the company looking at investing in Widjits, the first scenario outlines a typical, expected future. Everything goes pretty much the way they expect, and based on what's happened up until now, the company knows how many people to hire and where to find the supplies.

In the second, or positive, scenario, those winds of change that we talked about in **Chapter 4** have whooshed past the company. A well-prepared company will have planned how to hire more people, where to find more supplies and how to ensure that more people can buy Widjits easily. A less organized company would panic as its product supply ran out and customers turned away, frustrated.

The third scenario is the negative one. It looks at what happens when the winds of change have slammed into the company. If someone develops a similar, but better, product with more gadgets or features, the Widjits company will lose customers and possibly fold up. But if it does its job of planning well, it will keep an eye on the trends and develop ways to evolve Widjits so that Whizmos aren't a threat. Individuals can do the same thing.



Donald, Denise & Alex:

Balancing work and family

Donald gets out of his car, stiff from his hour-long commute. He wishes he didn't have to teach so far away, but only Denise found a job in the city. He hates the long drive; it means Denise has to cope with dropping off Alex at the daycare every day. This is the third daycare they've tried, and he still hasn't settled in. But they really need the second income. They both want a big family, and their house comes with an equally big mortgage. Donald skirts past his abandoned workbench as he leaves the garage. Denise greets him.

"I've got some good news and some bad news," she says.

"Bad news first," he replies.

"I had to pick Alex up early from daycare. He just doesn't want to be there."

"And the good news?"

"We're going to have another baby!"

Let's look at Donald and Denise's case (*Balancing work and family*). The couple's vision or dream future is one of an expanded, relaxed family. But their current situation isn't allowing for that.

Alex is a demanding toddler, and Denise can't bear to leave him at daycare. Something needs to change. Donald and Denise reviewed their strengths and assets, which include their teaching degrees, their steady jobs and Donald's skill with his hands. When they look at their challenges, these include their high mortgage and Alex's need for Mom's attention.

The couple has recognized a trend in the small town that Donald commutes to for his teaching job. Several companies have set up shop there, including a new manufacturing plant. Donald and Denise brainstorm for several evenings and identify several options:

- Denise stays home with the children.
- Donald stays home with the children.
- Denise and Donald job-share so one parent is always around.
- Denise and Donald move to the small town where Donald works and where house prices are lower, and Denise stays home with the children.
- Denise and Donald move to the small town, and Denise opens a day home.

After lots of discussion and research, Donald and Denise decide on the final option. (Living on one income is impossible in the city, and Denise still wants to earn an income.) Their decision is made easier by the fact that Donald has the carpentry skills to do much of the work needed to meet the regulations for day home providers.

Selecting key tasks

Remember those Widjits investors? They created different scenarios to figure out what they needed to do

to stay on top of things. The things they need to do are their key tasks.

Donald and Denise's scenarios and key tasks

Donald and Denise imagine scenarios where the economy either stays the same or fluctuates, and come up with key tasks for each scenario. (Remember that in your case other issues or events, such as doing well or badly on an exam, or finding or not finding a new job, could cause the different scenarios.)

Scenario

Typical: We buy a large home in the small town and renovate it to accommodate Denise's day home, while Donald continues to teach.

Positive: More companies move into the small town, creating a need for more child care.

Negative: Companies downsize or close up, lowering employment and thereby reducing the need for child care.

Key tasks

- Denise explores what a day home provider requires.
- We find a new house.
- We sell our house in the city.
- Denise quits her job.
- We move to our new home.
- Donald begins renovations.

Either:

- We choose a large property that will allow us to add or renovate to build the separate day home space on it.
- or
- We custom-build with day home specifications in mind.

- We choose a smaller property requiring minor renovations to accommodate a small day home.

Donald and Denise choose to create an action plan for the first scenario, but they also decide to include the first task from the positive scenario. While a larger property may be more expensive, it's still less than the cost of a house in the city. A bigger property will also mean more room for their growing family. The couple's action plan includes these key tasks (note how the second task has changed from the typical scenario in the chart above):

- A. Denise explores what a day home provider requires.
- B. They find a home on a large property.
- C. They sell their house in the city.
- D. Denise quits her job.
- E. They move to their new home.
- F. Donald begins renovations.

My scenarios and key tasks

Let's apply this process to you. How does the decision you've made look when you apply the different scenarios to it? Take a minute (or 10) to imagine typical, positive and negative scenarios for your decision. Once you've done that, try to come up with key tasks for each scenario.

Scenario	Key Tasks
Typical:	
Positive:	
Negative:	

Is there anything from the positive or negative scenario that you should include in your broad action plan for your typical scenario?

Write out the key tasks of your action plan here:

Scenario	Action Plan
Typical:	
Positive:	
Negative:	

Identifying supporting tasks and mini-tasks

Now that you've pinpointed your key tasks, it's time to break them down further to create supporting tasks for each key task. Breaking your key tasks down into smaller steps helps you

- see what needs to be done first
- see what it will take to achieve your key tasks
- make it more likely that you'll achieve your key tasks

Let's look at the tasks Donald and Denise identified:

- Denise explores what a day home provider requires.
- They find a home on a large property.
- They sell the house in the city.
- Denise quits her job.
- They move to their new home.
- Donald begins renovations.

For the first key task (exploring what a day home provider requires), Denise does a little research and breaks it down into several supporting tasks:

- read government websites about day home regulations and requirements
- write a letter of intent to day home government authorities
- fill out a day home provider application
- create a service plan



Donald, Denise & Alex — look at mini-tasks

Denise's supporting tasks are not simple, easy jobs that she can complete in an afternoon. The supporting tasks are large and maybe even a little overwhelming. Someone less determined might feel the whole thing is too much and walk away. That's it for the dream.

But if you break down each supporting task into mini-tasks, the whole thing becomes more manageable. And once you've done that for each task and each supporting task, you've created your action plan.

Part A of Donald and Denise's action plan is outlined in the table that follows. After they complete **part B** (action plan for finding a home on a bigger property), **part C** (action plan for selling the house in the city), **part D** (action plan for Denise to quit her job), **part E** (action plan for moving into their new home) and **part F** (action plan for beginning renovations), they'll know exactly what to do.

Donald and Denise's supporting and mini-tasks

A. Explore what a day home provider requires.

Supporting tasks	Mini-tasks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> look up information on the government website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> download the family day home program manual
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> locate the correct family day home agency for their area
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> make a list of other requirements (letter of intent, application form, etc.)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> write a letter of intent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> learn what is required
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> write the letter
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> mail it to the proper department
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> fill out an application 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> find three references
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> complete a criminal record check
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> create a Child Youth Information Module
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> create a service plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> learn what is required
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> fill out the form carefully and fully
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> mail or bring it to the proper office

Once Denise breaks down her supporting tasks into even smaller mini-tasks, she not only knows what she needs to do, but also what she needs to do first. Denise can't send in her application, for instance, until the regional licensing officer has received her letter of intent and advised her to apply. And Denise can't apply until she's completed her criminal record check and contacted and provided her three references.

It quickly becomes clear to Denise that she'll need to write the letter of intent first. While she's waiting for a response, she stops by the police station for the criminal record check form and fills it out. She also sets aside one evening to contact several people she knows so she can confirm them as references. By the time she gets the go-ahead to apply, Denise has completed two out of three mini-tasks she needs in order to fill out her application.

Staying motivated

It's a good idea to build a few motivators into your task, because even the best of us can't always stay focused and single-minded about completing a goal we've set. That's where motivators come in. What are motivators? Anything that keeps you on track. Here are some things that may encourage you when you feel your confidence or determination has gone into hiding:

Rewards: A movie, new running shoes or even an extra hour of guilt-free gaming. Find a way to pat yourself on the back for completing a task.

Mentors: These are people who've probably been in your shoes and know what you're facing. You can rely on them to help you through the rough spots.

Support system: Family and friends who encourage you are great motivators—and that's why they're there.

Visualization: Keep your eye on the prize—imagine yourself living your vision whenever you're feeling a little down.

Anchoring: If you're feeling discouraged because you haven't completed a goal, think about tasks you have achieved and give yourself credit for doing them.

Bumps along the way

Despite all your planning and hard work, a course of action can sometimes create problems you haven't considered. Relationships, situations and finances are just some of the things that may change after you put your action plan into play. For example, the travel requirements of your job cause your fiancée to have second thoughts; the grant for your studies is less than you expected; the new position doesn't match its advertised job description. The key? Recognize problems when they come up and deal with them.

Take Donald and Denise's example. Denise may think that caring for other children as well as her own while earning an income is ideal, but Alex may be jealous of his mother's attention. He may cry and be cranky, causing stress in the day home and in the family. Because Donald and Denise value a happy family, this could be a stumbling block for them. They will need to recognize this and try to set other midterm goals. These could include a special, separate time for Alex with his mother after the other children go home. Or maybe Donald could step in to take on more of the parental care now that he no longer has an hour-long commute.

My motivators

Can you think of motivators that will help you when you're feeling discouraged? Write them down here, and remember to review and use them from time to time to help you follow through with what you have decided:



Either of these possibilities will allow the family to interact more, creating what they value most: a relaxed, contented family. Again, the key is to recognize the new problem and find helpful ways to deal with it. Sometimes this may mean revisiting your vision, or even going back to **Chapter 1** of this book to think more about what needs to change.

This Is Not the End

Someone once said that change is the only constant. The wind shifts; children are born and grow up; the world turns. To take advantage of what this world has to offer means seeing the possibilities and grabbing them. The ride may not be all smooth and straight, but it will be packed with interesting experiences.

You picked up this book because you needed to make a decision about your life. It may have been about your education, your family, your home or your work life. Whatever the decision, know that you're not done. One decision seems to lead to another: if you've made a choice about your education, for instance, you'll probably have to make one about how you'll pay for it or what you'll do after you've finished. This is not a bad thing. It shows that you have choices in the way you want to live.

My Choices, My Work, My Life is designed to help you not only make a decision, but also visualize your dream future—your vision. As you face more decisions—large and small—you can use the steps and processes outlined on these pages whenever you're struggling. And even when things are going smoothly, take a moment every so often to make sure you're living up to your values and have time for your interests. Keep a copy handy so you'll know how to reach your vision and which choices will help you get there.

Ultimately, that's the privilege and the responsibility of being an adult: choosing the way you want to work and live.



Resources

There are people, publications and websites that can help you with your decision and next steps. The following pages list resources, services and programs available alphabetically by topic.

Government of Alberta

You can access career, workplace and labour market information in one of three easy ways: click, call or come in.

Click

Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS) alis.alberta.ca

ALIS is Alberta's online source for career, education and jobs information, including

- **Career planning**—The CAREERinsite planning tool allows you to explore career options and develop an action plan that's right for you. Go to alis.alberta.ca/careerinsite. Then use **OCCinfo** to find job descriptions, educational requirements, salary information, employment and advancement opportunities and information on more than 500 occupations. Sign up for a free account and save your searches. Go to alis.alberta.ca/occinfo.
- **Education**—Get information about planning and funding your post-secondary education and training programs. Also learn about certification requirements and programs for regulated occupations in Alberta. Search by program, school, region and type of institution.
- **Jobs**—Find links to a large collection of Alberta and regional job banks and postings at alis.alberta.ca/jobpostings. Also explore information, examples and exercises for every step of your job search. Go to alis.alberta.ca/worksearch.
- **Resources**—Go to alis.alberta.ca/publications to find more than 60 career, learning and employment publications. All are free to Albertans. There are also over 150 short online articles on career planning, education and jobs at alis.alberta.ca/tips. Many videos are also available, including work search topics at alis.alberta.ca/worksearchvideos, and occupational profiles at alis.alberta.ca/occvideo.

Call

Alberta Career Information Hotline

A career counselling and referral service. Hotline staff can answer your questions about

- career planning
- educational options and funding
- occupations
- labour market information
- work search skills
- the workplace

1-800-661-3753 (toll-free)
780-422-4266 (Edmonton)

Come in

Alberta Work Centres

Across the province Alberta Works Centres provide information and advice on occupations, career options, finding work, education programs and funding. To locate a centre near you, call the Alberta Career Information Hotline or visit alis.alberta.ca/awc

Contact Government of Alberta from your mobile phone.

Certain mobile service providers have a shortcut for contacting the Government of Alberta phone directory from your mobile phone with no long-distance or airtime charges. Dial *310 (Rogers) or #310 (Bell or Telus), followed by the 10-digit number for the office you want.

Resources by topic

To view, order or download the following publications, visit alis.alberta.ca/publications.

Budgeting

Stretch Your Dollars: Budgeting Basics

Career planning

Assessing You: The First Step in Career Planning

Career Planner: Choosing an Occupation

A Guide for Midlife Career Moves

Going Somewhere? Live/Learn/Work

Women in Non-Traditional Occupations:

Stories to Inspire (online only)

Working in Alberta: A Guide for Internationally Trained and Educated Immigrants

Education and training

Adult Back to School Planner

Education and Training Planner

Time to Choose...a Post-Secondary

Education Program

Training For Work (online only)

Entrepreneurship

To order or download the following publications, visit alis.alberta.ca/publications.

Self-Employment: Is It for Me? (online only)

Employee or Contractor? Know the Difference (online only)

Alberta Women Entrepreneurs

Offers advice, business skills development, finance and networking opportunities for women in business.

awebusiness.com

1-800-713-3558 (toll-free)

Apeetogosan Métis Development Inc.

Provides advice and small business grants to Métis entrepreneurs.

apeetogosan.com

1-800-252-7963 (toll-free)

The Business Link

Offers information and services for Alberta entrepreneurs and small businesses.

businesslink.ca

1-800-272-9675 (toll-free)

780-422-7722 (Edmonton)

403-475-7466 (Calgary)

Family supports

Becoming a Parent in Alberta

Provides answers on maternity, parental leave and employment insurance benefits.

work.alberta.ca/es

(in the left-hand menu, choose *Resources*)

Alberta Adult and Child Health Benefit

This program helps with basic health-care coverage for families with limited incomes.

humanservices.alberta.ca/hb

1-877-469-5437 (toll-free)

780-427-6848 (Edmonton)

Alberta Child Support Services

Helps arrange court orders and family maintenance for Alberta parents with low incomes.

humanservices.alberta.ca/css

310-0000 (toll-free), and ask for the Child Support Services office in your area

Alberta Child Care Subsidy Program

Provides financial assistance for child care to families with preschool children.

humanservices.alberta.ca/childcare

1-877-644-9992 (toll-free)

780-644-9992 (Edmonton)

Alberta Supports

Provides information on social-based services and programs, as well as guidance on which ones to access for personalized situations.

albertasupports.ca

1-877-644-9992 (toll-free)

780-644-9992 (Edmonton)

Parent Link Centres

Provides parents and caregivers information on health and safety, discipline, communication and choosing child care.

parentlinkalberta.ca

310-0000 (toll-free), and ask for the centre in your area

Funding for education and training

To view, order or download the following publications, visit **alis.alberta.ca/publications**.

Money 101: Budgeting Basics for Further Education

To help plan and obtain financing specifically for post-secondary education, visit **alis.alberta.ca/studentsfinance**

Alberta Works Income Support Program

Provides income support to help people meet basic food, clothing and shelter needs for an interim period. Those eligible for the program may also receive health benefits, help to obtain child support payments, and information and training to find employment.

humanservices.alberta.ca/is

1-866-644-5135 (toll-free)

780-644-5135 (Edmonton)

Alberta scholarship and bursaries

Provides information on post-secondary scholarships and bursaries and how to apply for them.

studentaid.alberta.ca/scholarships

1-855-606-2096 (Edmonton)

Lifelong Learning Plan

Allows withdrawing from RRSPs to finance education for you or your spouse.

Canada Revenue Agency

cra-arc.gc.ca

(type “lifelong learning plan” in the search box)

1-800-959-8281 (toll-free)

1-800-665-0354 (TTY only)

Student Aid Alberta

Provides information on types of education funding available, and guides to the application process.

studentaid.alberta.ca

Job search

Visit alis.alberta.ca/jobseekers to access job postings and resources.

To view, order or download the following publications, visit alis.alberta.ca/publications.

Advanced Techniques for Work Search

Workability: What You Need to Get & Keep a Job

Work Search Basics

Labour market information

To view, order or download the following publication, visit alis.alberta.ca/publications.

Making Sense of Labour Market Information

Life transitions

To view, order or download the following publications, visit alis.alberta.ca/publications.

A Guide for Midlife Career Moves

Adult Back to School Planner

Change and Transitions: The Path From A to B

Trades and apprenticeship

Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training

Provides a guide to trades, apprenticeship and industry training in Alberta.

tradesecrets.alberta.ca

310-0000 (toll-free), and ask for your local Apprenticeship and Industry Training office

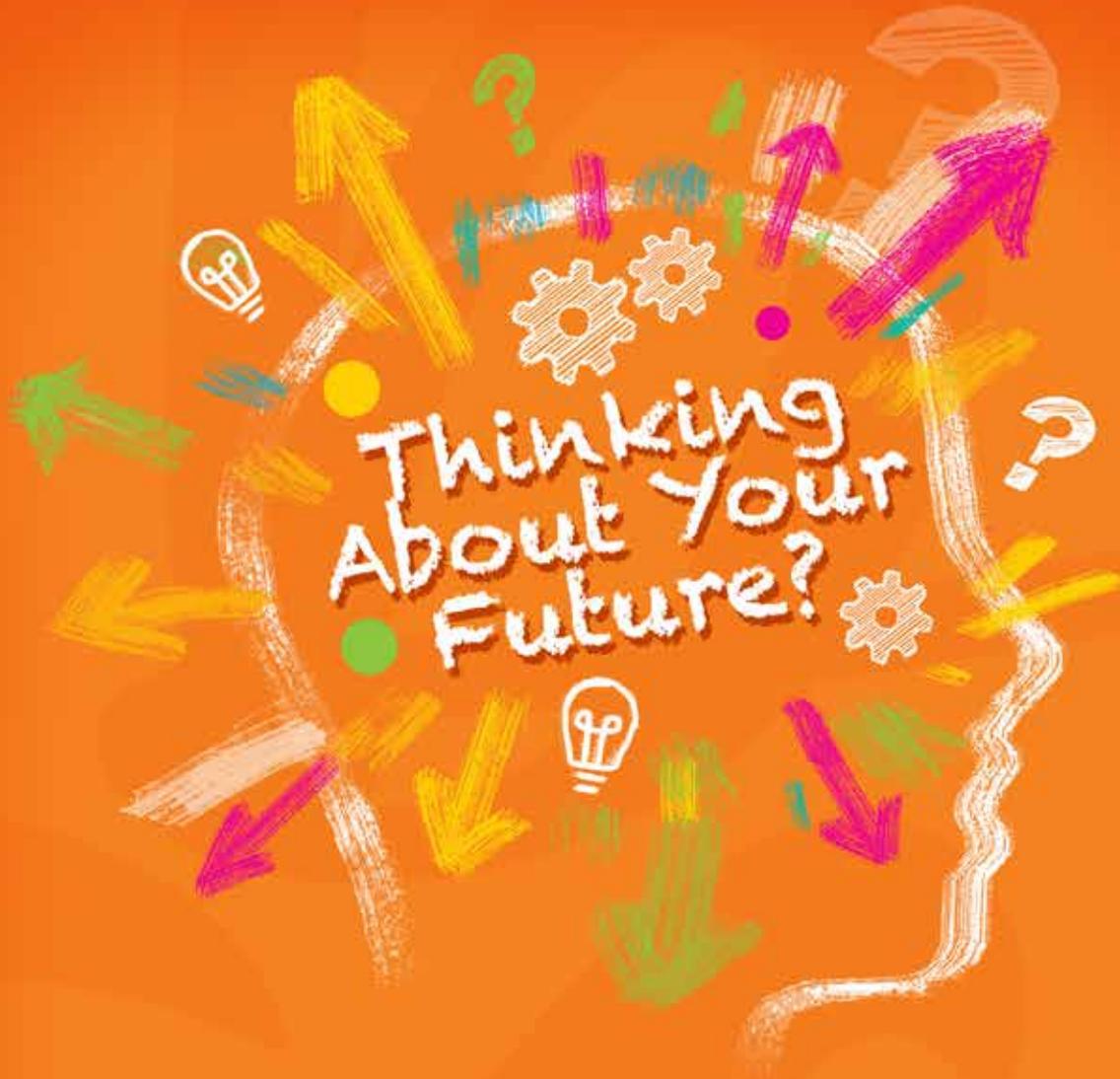
Workplace

To view, order or download the following publications, visit alis.alberta.ca/publications.

Let's Talk: A Guide to Resolving Workplace Conflicts (online only)

Workability: What You Need to Get & Keep a Job

Your Rights and Responsibilities at Work



alis.alberta.ca

CAREER PLANNING • EDUCATION • JOBS

Wondering where to take your career? How to find a job?

Is continuing your education the next step?

Find the answers on ALIS.

Make the Most of Your Future

Alberta 
Government

My Choices, My Work, My Life

Have you come to a crossroads in your work or career journey?

This book can guide you through a personal exploration that will take you closer to the life you want. Discover what you feel needs to change and why you want a change. Explore your options and make a decision that suits you, your needs and your goals.

