

Chapter 11: Decision Making & Action Planning

As you begin to read this chapter, you are officially beginning the third, and final phase of your career counselling journey – decision making and action planning. We understand it's been a long road to get here; you've engaged in self-exploration, completed assessments, clarified the things that you need in a career, engaged in both online and interactive research, attended career counselling sessions with your counsellor, and probably have experienced a number of emotions along the way.

Now, you've put the pieces together and are close to finalizing your career planning! Before you reach a career decision and begin to move forward with your transition, there are a few concepts that will be helpful to be aware of and explore: (1) decision-making styles, (2) planned happenstance, (3) coping with transition, and (4) managing negative emotions

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Decision-Making Styles

Everyone has a unique decision-making style. This is due to both nature (your genes, central nervous system and brain) and nurture (the experiences you've had in your life).

There is no right or wrong style, but it is helpful to identify how you tend to make decisions, as well as the strengths and weaknesses associated with each style. You may also find that depending on the situation, you use different decision-making styles.

Below, we've listed 8 common decision-making styles:

- **Fatalistic** - Lets the circumstances determine the outcome, "what will be will be".
- **Logical** - Weighs the pros and cons in an objective manner.
- **Satisficing** - Makes a decision that is "good enough".
- **Agonizing** - Analyzes all the information possible, sometimes worrying and over-analyzing to the point of indecision or "analysis paralysis".
- **Impulsive** - Gives little thought or reflection to the decision.
- **Procrastinating** - Puts off decision making until forced to make a decision.
- **Dependent/Compliant** - Bases decisions on the needs or decisions of others.
- **Intuitive** - Bases decisions on gut instinct or feeling.

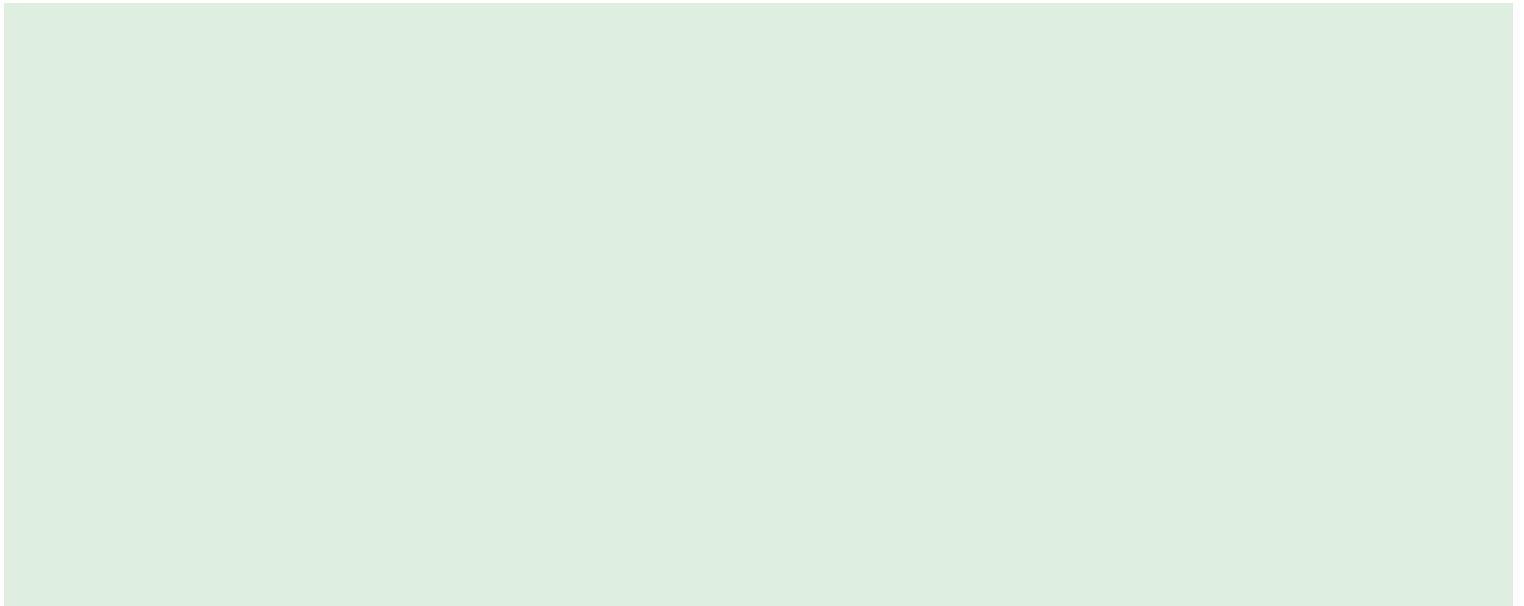
After reviewing these decision-making styles, which one(s) have you used in career-related decisions? Identify some of the decisions you've made using these styles.

What do you think are some of the pros and cons associated with the styles you identified?

What style would you like to develop further, and why?



Which style has helped you make the best decisions for yourself?



Planned Happenstance

When describing career experiences, you've probably heard, or even used, the following expressions:

"I just stumbled upon it"

"I fell into it"

"I was in the right place at the right time"

"I got a lucky break"

"It just worked out"

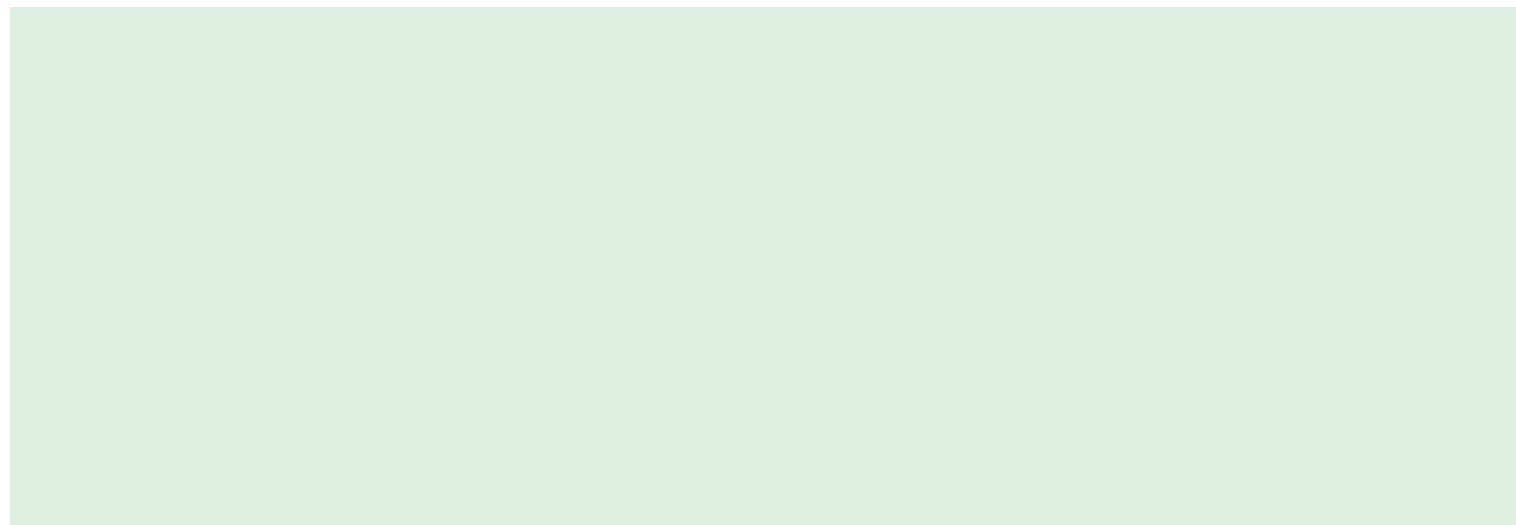
What the above statements acknowledge is that not every aspect of your career can be planned or controlled. Many aspects of your career are subject to chance events. Even the most well thought out plans can be influenced by unplanned occurrences and these occurrences may present opportunities worth considering.

The idea that one can take a chance occurrence and turn it into a career opportunity is called **planned happenstance** (Mitchell, Levin, and Krumboltz, 1999). It's important to familiarize yourself with the notion of planned happenstance because many factors beyond your control will influence your career (e.g., economy, political structures, decisions made by others). In these unplanned situations, the individual recognizes a possible opportunity and takes intentional action to capitalize on the situation.

To help you explore and understand the role of chance in your life, answer the following questions:

Think about an unplanned positive event or outcome you have experienced in your career or life. Briefly describe the situation and the outcome.

Did you take any action that may have contributed to the unplanned event occurring (e.g., conducting an information interview, volunteering, taking on additional responsibilities at work or filling in for someone, attending a networking event or social gathering and bumping into someone)?



Coping with Transition

One common outcome of decision making is the experience of change and transition. William Bridges (2004) suggests that change is what happens to you and transition is the psychological adjustment to this experience. For example, the loss of a job is the change and the experience of grief over losing your job is part of the transition.

As we've shared throughout this process, experiencing a range of emotions is a very common experience for individuals exploring a career transition. It's important to remember that no matter how similar, no two transitions are exactly alike.

Additionally, even exciting and positive changes (e.g. going on a vacation; having a baby) create some level of stress physiologically, and often psychologically.

It's normal to feel anxiety, confusion, fear, excitement, hope, and happiness all in the same day!

Here are some questions that will help you reflect on your upcoming transition:

What are your reasons for making a career change?

How does the timing of potential career change impact other life goals (e.g., travelling, marriage, retirement, starting a family, buying a home...)?

Are there any concurrent stressful situations occurring in your life? List them below and identify how you can manage them or minimize their impact.

What aspects of your career transition *can* you control?

What aspects of your career transition are *beyond* your control?

What strategies can you use to cope with the aspects of your career transition that are beyond your control?

Have you experienced a similar career/life transition? If so, identify the transition and describe what you learned in that situation which you could apply to this situation?

Identify some of the pros and cons of making this career transition.

We can use internal and external resources when coping with transition.

Internal resources come from “within us” and may include an attitude or skill such as optimism or the ability to negotiate. **External** resources are “outside of us” and may include other people and information on career options.

List the **internal** resources and supports you can draw upon to cope with your career transition:

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

List the **external** resources and supports you can draw upon to cope with your career transition:

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

Managing Negative Emotions

For some, deciding to seek career counselling can be preceded by strong negative emotions such as fear, frustration, apathy, anger, anxiety or even depression. These emotions may stem from a long period of feeling unhappy or unclear about your career or they may result from a specific situation you've faced (e.g., conflict with a co-worker, getting laid off or being let go from work, being passed over for a promotion, organizational change, burnout). While other circumstances may co-exist, it's often a strong emotion which propels a person to take action.

If you can relate to the emotions or experiences described above, list the events and negative emotions which may have triggered you to seek out career counselling/ consider a career transition.

Event	Associated Emotions
Example: <i>Being passed over for a promotion</i>	<i>Feeling undervalued, frustrated</i>

When we experience difficult situations, they can impact our emotional and mental health. We may be in a more reactive, or less healthy state than normal. If/when this occurs, we are more prone to making poorer decisions. For example, one may feel rushed to escape a bad work situation and want to decrease the intensity of the associated negative emotions.

If they make a decision based on these factors alone, without thoroughly considering future implications and other relevant factors outside of the situation, the decision they're making is uninformed, and could readily lead to future challenges.

It is important to slow down and reflect thoroughly on the decisions you are making, especially during a challenging time.

Re-framing or **re-labeling** involves looking at a situation from a different point of view, often in a more positive way. It is a cognitive coping strategy and is helpful to apply when you are faced with a difficult situation involving negative emotions.

With the events and associated emotions you listed on the previous page, your next task involves re-writing the events and reframing/re-labeling them.

Event	Reframe
Example: <i>Being passed over for a promotion</i>	<i>Opportunity to explore a new career direction</i>

Below, are some additional coping strategies (some cognitive and some behavioural) to help you cope with change and transition:

- **Positive asset search** - List all of your positive attitudes, skills, traits, etc., especially those that have helped you adapt to changes in your life.
- **Thought stopping** - Keep a rubber band around your wrist and snap it every time you catch yourself thinking negatively about yourself or your career. Force yourself to turn the statement into a positive or optimistic one.

- **Disputation** - Challenge your negative career beliefs. You can refer to the Career Beliefs section in Chapter 3 of this workbook to review some of the career beliefs you identified.
- **Look for alternative explanations** - Think about healthy ways to interpret situations.
- **Learn to say no** - Know your limits and what you are capable of effectively managing.
- **Ask for help** - Don't assume you need to do everything or know everything. Asking for help may allow you to manage situations more efficiently and achieve your career goals faster. You should be proud of yourself for already using this strategy by the very fact that you are at this stage of working with your counsellor through the career planning process!
- **Self-care** - Take time for yourself and engage in activities that you enjoy (e.g., massage, bath, listening to music or a podcast, physical activity, journaling).
- **Diet, exercise and sleep** - Diet, exercise and sleep influence mood and impact motivation. Consult with your health professional, such as your doctor or a registered dietician, to discuss a nutrition and exercise plan that works for you. You can also work with a counsellor to improve your sleep patterns.

Note which of these strategies you are going to apply (or keep applying) during your career transition:

Career Decision-Making

Let's now turn to your career decision-making! Based on self discovery work you completed in Phase 1, and the career research you conducted in Phase 2, you may already have a sense of what occupation you'd like to pursue.

It is not uncommon that some individuals begin to move toward decision-making as they conduct their information interviews. Others prefer to wait to decide until they've completed their research and shared their learnings with their counsellor.

Even if you feel you have reached the ideal decision, we recommend completing this chapter and working with your counsellor on putting together a solid action plan.



REMEMBER:

- There is no perfect career.
- Some level of uncertainty will exist.
- It is normal to experience a range of emotion in the career planning process, including during the decision making process.
- Not everything can be planned or controlled.
- Make decisions based on information, not assumptions.
- Always have a Plan "B".
- Everyone has multi-career potential - that is, there is more than one career you can enjoy and be successful in.
- Don't expect your career to satisfy the "whole you". Hobbies and volunteering can also satisfy some of your needs so you feel fulfilled.
- You can pursue more than one career/job in your life or at the same time.

To move toward clarifying and confirming your choice, complete the following exercise and the accompanying reflection questions.

In doing so, you can feel confident you're making an informed decision!

In this exercise you will weigh your **top 3** career options.

Record the relevant information in the left-hand column under “My Career Criteria”.

For this we will use the following:

- Top 5 Skills
- Top 5 Interests
- What I Need In A Career For It To Be Satisfying

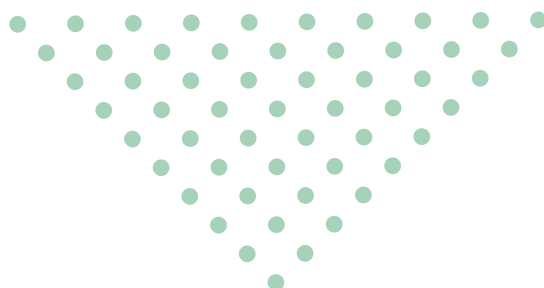
- Top 5 Career Values
- Top 5 Life Values
- Reality Factors

Next, rate how well each option matches your criteria using the following rating scale:

0 - Not a Fit 1 - Slight Fit 2 - Good Fit 3 - Great Fit

Based on your research, you should be able to identify how well each option matches each of your criteria. If you are uncertain about the fit of any of your criteria with any of your top career options, you may consider conducting further research.

If your research has identified that a given criteria would fit a career option, depending on the specific job/workplace, we recommend selecting “2 – Good Fit”. If your research has identified that a given criteria would fit a career option and it has been validated in multiple information interviews, we recommend selecting “3 – Great Fit.”



0 - Not a Fit 1 - Slight Fit 2 - Good Fit 3 - Great Fit

MY CAREER CRITERIA

Option 1:

Option 2:

Option 3:

My Top 5 Skills

0

1

2

3

0

1

2

3

0

1

2

3

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

My Top 5 Interests

0

1

2

3

0

1

2

3

0

1

2

3

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

MY CAREER CRITERIA	Option 1:	Option 2:	Option 3:
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What I Need In A Career For It To Be Satisfying		0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3
1.													
2.													
3.													
4.													
5.													

[illegible]

0 - Not a Fit 1 - Slight Fit 2 - Good Fit 3 - Great Fit

MY CAREER CRITERIA	Option 1:	Option 2:	Option 3:
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My Top 5 Life Values		0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3
1.													
2.													
3.													
4.													
5.													

My Reality Factors		0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3
1.													
2.													
3.													
4.													
5.													

TOTALS													
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It may be tempting to choose the career with the highest total score, however, it is helpful to understand that different criteria may be more or less important for you.

When you look at your career criteria, are there any items that are non-negotiable, which would cause you to reject an occupation if those criteria weren't met? List any non-negotiables:

If you listed any items above, could they be met in other areas of your life? If so, how?

Is the occupation that has the highest rating truly the best fit for you at this time in your life? Remember that some priorities might be more important for you than others, which may not be reflected in your score.

As mentioned previously, it's important to have a Plan "B" for the reason that you can't predict or control all aspects of your career and life.

My Plan "A" option is:

My Plan "B" option is:

Action Planning

Now that you've made a decision about the career you'd like to pursue, it's time to plan for your transition. While you've likely considered some of the steps you'll need to take, this final section of Chapter 11 will help you create a clear, actionable plan, so you can feel confident about successfully making your career change.

To help you identify some of the steps you may need to take, use the checklist below to begin brainstorming steps in your action plan. The list below is not exhaustive, so you will likely need to include additional items for your personalized action plan.

- Make a business plan

Apply to program(s)/school(s)

Make a financial plan

Build my network

Develop a portfolio

Update my resume and cover letter

Begin volunteering

Build a company website

Apply for student loans/scholarships
- Determine program pre-requisites

Take courses or training

Research companies you want to work for

Create a LinkedIn profile and connect

Find a mentor

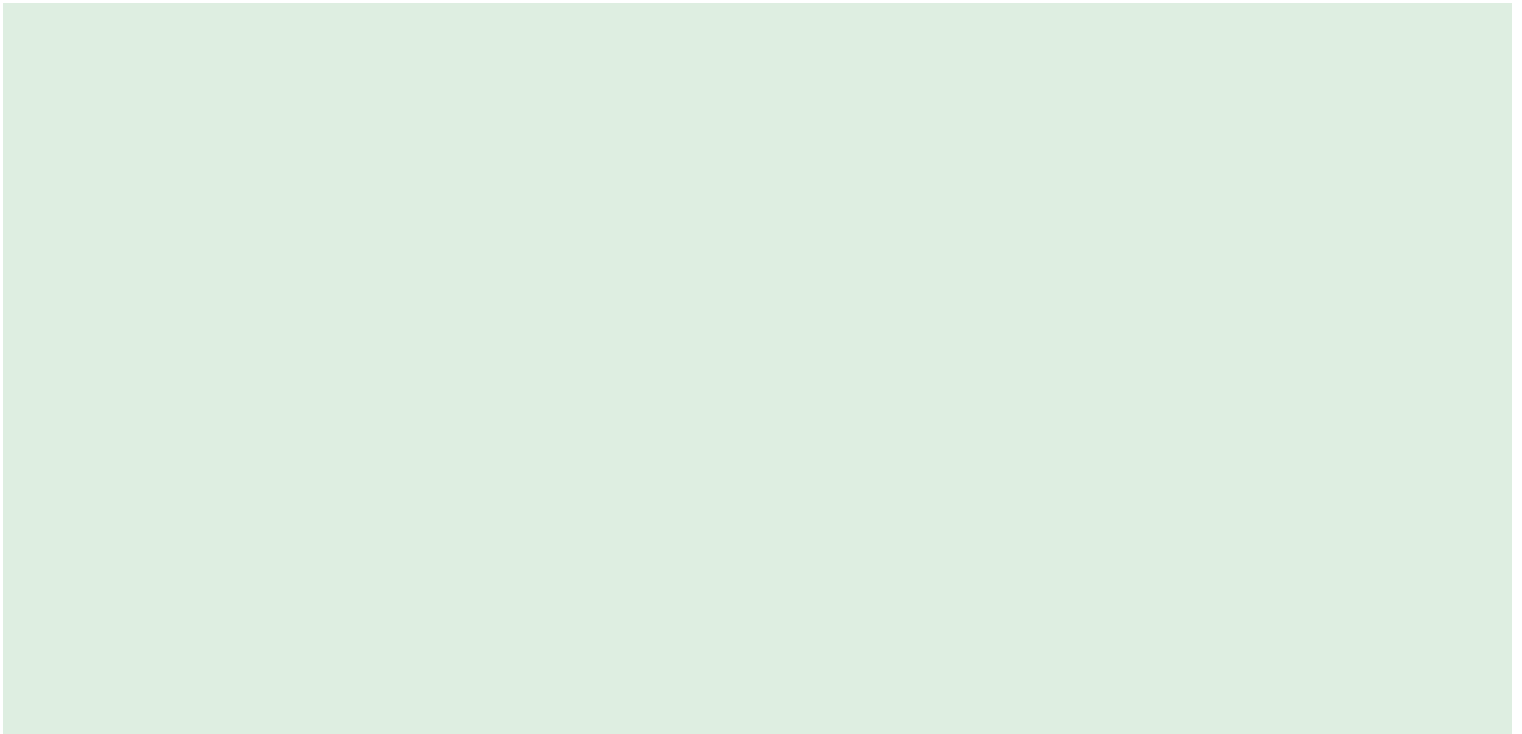
Discuss my action plan with family and/or friends

Find child care options

Get business cards

Relocate

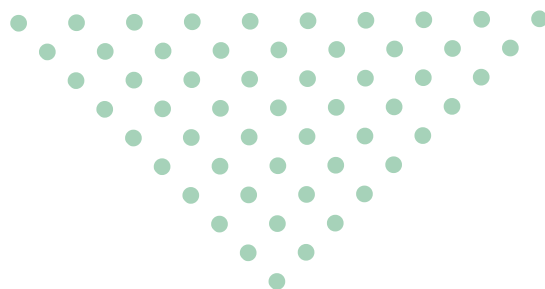
Any other steps:



Based on the steps you've identified, complete your personalized career action plans on the following pages.

Start by listing your action steps, the target dates to complete each step, and the anticipated outcome. The outcome will be how you know the action step has been successfully completed.

We have additional resources to support you with accomplishing your action steps and meeting your target dates. Our job search advisors can help you with implementing the action steps you have identified, including support with preparing job applications, how to build a network, identifying volunteer and work opportunities, researching companies, creating a LinkedIn profile and more. Reach out to your counsellor if you'd like more information about our job search advising services.



MY PLAN “ A ” CAREER ACTION PLAN

Action Step	Target Date	Outcome
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

Sometimes there are things that prevent us from achieving our outcomes.
To prevent this from happening, try to identify possible roadblocks and solutions linked to your action steps.

Potential Roadblocks	Possible Solutions
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

It's good to build in appropriate rewards for your hard work! Identify some rewards for achieving the listed action steps (e.g., a spa treatment, a dinner out, a new outfit, etc.).

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MY PLAN “ B ” CAREER ACTION PLAN

Action Step	Target Date	Outcome
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

Sometimes there are things that prevent us from achieving our outcomes.
To prevent this from happening, try to identify possible roadblocks and solutions linked to your action steps.

Potential Roadblocks	Possible Solutions
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

It's good to build in appropriate rewards for your hard work! Identify some rewards for achieving the listed action steps (e.g., a spa treatment, a dinner out, a new outfit, etc.).

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To Conclude...

Please refer back to the goals you noted in Chapter 1. Looking at your measure(s) of success for this career planning process:

- Did you achieve what you wanted to from this process?
- Do you feel that you are well on your way to achieving a fulfilling career direction or transition?

Keep in mind that a good action plan remains flexible and changes when your circumstances change. Don't adhere to a rigid plan when it is clearly no longer working for you. Modifying your action plan is not indicative of failure, but is an adaptive approach to career management, which is necessary to achieve your identified goals. Consider your action plan a living document, one that should be evaluated and revised periodically, and at minimum, every time you accomplish an important step.

Given that career development is a lifelong process, it is important to periodically consider future career steps and options. We recommend taking some intentional time to reflect every year to two years, even if you are feeling happy in your current role. Doing so will allow you to strategically set goals, and develop the knowledge and competencies required to move forward in achieving them.

As you journey forward, remember to consider your career criteria in any future job decision you make. This information is priceless – it's all the pieces you need for a satisfying and fulfilling career!

As time passes and different experiences potentially alter the course of your life, you may need to re-evaluate your career criteria to ensure it's still accurate. If you need any support, know that your counsellor and Canada Career Counselling would be happy to reconnect with you and to support you again in the future.

We hope you've enjoyed the process. You have certainly put in a great deal of effort to make it to this point. We wish you much success in your future career endeavours!