It’s time to love your work. How to design the PERFECT CAREER for a life of SATISFACTION and SUCCESS!
Hi. I am Nicholas Lore, the founder of Rockport Institute. I’ve spent my life asking and answering one question “what does it take to have a career fit perfectly”? There turns out to be a lot more to this than meets the eye. And I can say with absolute certainty that the vast majority of intelligent people make their career choices in an over-simplistic way that is not likely to lead them to the most satisfying and successful career they could have. No wonder 70% of educated adults feel they are in the wrong job.

Career experts all have their own answers to the career fit question. Some say your work has to fit your personality type, or your talents, or your goals, or your purpose. Some say it’s a matter of practicing for 10,000 hours. Others say you should just keep everything open and experiment. That’s just a few of the endless answers to this question. I think all of those answers are correct – if you combined them all together.

I know that from having worked with thousands of clients who have most of the pieces correct, and may just have one important part wrong. And that wrong piece is like a stone in their shoe, constantly causing discomfort. Most people have more than one piece out of whack. In fact, most people never really designed their career, it just sort of happened, or it seemed like a good idea at the time.
I assert that what makes a career fit is EVERYTHING.

That includes your:

- innate talents and gifts
- temperament, personality traits
- roles you play on the stage of life
- best workplace functions
- what matters to you
- sense of mission or purpose
- values, rewards, and goals
- the workplace environment
- and more

All of this needs to fit together in a realistic way. If this seems idealistic, perhaps it is. But it is practical idealism. To me, choosing the perfect career means getting as close as you can to fitting all the important pieces together while placing great value on what is doable and realistic.

NOTE: Sorting out your future depends entirely on your full-tilt participation. This guide is a beginning. This will show you how to do it. You will never learn to fly or ski by reading. You’ve got to do it. The same applies here!
WHAT YOU WANT

First of all, let's take a look at what is important to you. What do you want to be able to say about your job:

- I enjoy going to work.
- I don’t have trouble getting up in the morning because what I do is interesting and challenging.
- My work is a natural expression of my talents and personality.
- Success comes easily to me because I am extremely good at what I do.
- I am proud of what I do and enjoy telling other people about it.
- I am highly respected at work because I’m so good at what I do.
- Work is often so enjoyable it often feels like play.
- My job provides a flow of interesting problems to solve, ones I find exciting and challenging.
- I don’t have to pretend to be someone else at work because my personality suits my work.
- I’m paid to make use of my own best and most natural forms of creative expression.
- My work environment brings out my best efforts.
- My job fits my most important values and allows me to fulfill my goals in terms of personal growth and achievement goals, income, stability, and so on.
- I’m personally interested in what I do.
- The result of my efforts makes a contribution that personally matters to me. I feel I am doing something that makes a difference.
- My job does not take over my entire life. I have time for friends, family, and fun outside of work.
- I like the people I work with.
- I am on a winning team that is having a great time getting the job done.
- A day on the job leaves me feeling energized, not burned out.

Some of the above may already describe your job. But I assume some or all may be missing or you wouldn’t be reading this. Which of these are vitally important to have in your future work?

DESIGNING THE PERFECT, REALISTIC CAREER IS A PROJECT

Projects have a natural built-in structure. You wouldn’t invite people for dinner, seat them and then go to the grocery store.

One of the reasons people have difficulty designing a great career is that they go about it backwards, starting by considering and comparing various careers. That doesn’t work because you haven’t designed the career from the ground up.
Instead, you have to get completely clear and certain about the definite components and specifications of your future work. And then figure out what fits them. And that includes thinking about some things you probably have never considered. I don’t know how to fly an airplane, and I’m sure there are many things I’ve never thought about that would be important to know, if I wanted to fly. You need to have a similar attitude to make a good career choice. If you think you know what you’re doing, you definitely don’t.

The first step is to think of yourself as a “career detective” looking for the best clues about the fit between you and the working world. Concentrate initially on finding clues about yourself. After all, you want work that fits you, instead of squeezing yourself into the wrong job. Consider everything important: your talents, personality, goals, values, passions and interests, what sort of environment would work best for you, potential limitations, etc.

**LINE UP YOUR TOOLS**

The Rockport Career Design Method employs three main tools. As a carpenter uses a hammer and saw in building a house, so you will use various career design tools many times during your career design project. First of all, remember that you’re now a career detective. Don’t trust your memory. Write things down.

Some of the most vital tools in career design are documents you create and then use as you discover more about yourself and careers, adding to the document, deleting, refining and researching as appropriate.

**Clues** – A list of anything you consider potentially useful in choosing career design components.

**Definite Career Design Components** – A list of the elements you have decided are the specifications your future work must match phrased so your components are specific and as focused as a laser beam.

**Career Ideas** – This is the place to write down every career that might fit you.
The one big question to keep asking is “What am I sure will be some of the definite components of my future career?” This is the heart of the Rockport method. It is different from questions like: “What do I like?” or “What are some good careers out there?” Every time you answer this “What am I sure of” question, you add a new component to your Definite Career Design Components list, building the design of your future work step-by-step, based on certainty, not wishes, hopes or maybes. Adding new components to your design often suggests new clues and career ideas as well.

**HOW TO BEGIN**

You start the career choice process by putting on your invisible detective hat. As an investigator, you search for and gather clues, then work those clues by observing, considering and researching them from various viewpoints. The goal is to see if any clue or combination of clues suggests a definite component that you would like to claim as part of your future career.

EXAMPLE: a friend tells you that you never seem to get enough of talking and doing things with people, face-to-face. This one hits you right between the ears as an accurate observation. Now you have a good clue. You do some investigating, paying more attention to what you do naturally in your day-to-day life. You notice that what your friend said is completely accurate.

You become more convinced that spending most of your time working with people may turn out to be an important career design component. You also look back at your past and realize that you are always happy dealing directly with people. This is so clear to you that you can now move to decision mode and add one item to your Definite Career Design Components document: “In my future career, I will definitely spend most of my time working directly with people, face to face.”

Once you have investigated and decided on enough pieces of the puzzle (definite career design components), you move into putting your components together into a realistic design. In design mode, you combine the components you have decided are essential to you and speculate on careers that might fit that combination. As you research specific careers on your Career Ideas list, learning more about them, you toss out careers that don’t fit, and perhaps add more careers to explore that you hadn’t thought of before, coming ever closer to being able to choose your final and definite career.

Let's say you come up with the following definite career-design components (in real life you will come up with a lot more than two):

- I will spend most of my time at working directly with people, face to face.
- My work will combine teaching and problem solving as major daily elements.
After some head scratching, research and talking with other people, you come up with the following list of careers to explore: college professor, teacher of AP courses in high school, corporate trainer, golf pro at a country club, organizational development consultant/trainer, developer of online educational presentations, seminar leader, and public speaker. They all fit the specifications. After doing a lot of research, you choose to become a corporate trainer.

When you are in the midst of the Rockport Career Design Process, you work in all three modes at once - clues, choosing definite components, and then designing a career that fits these specifications. For example, once you start exploring specific careers and seeing why some don’t fit you, that provides more clues, which puts you back in investigator mode. Once this project gets rolling you do detective work, make decisions and, after a while, explore specific careers all at once. Let’s look at how you do it.
“Early in your career design project, the best clues will be about you.”

INVESTIGATE

Like any detective, you come up with and “work” clues that will help you find the best fit between you and the working world.

You take multiple steps in solving your career questions, just as a good detective does in solving a crime. As a first step, you collect as many clues as you can. At this stage you don’t know what will ultimately be useful and what won’t. Some clues, may be as obvious as a fingerprint-covered dagger sticking out of the victim’s back. Some will be more subtle. These might prove to be strong clues or they might not. Still, you make note of them. Any of them might turn out to be important. Some clues may take a lot of work to uncover, mull over or research. You need to be open-minded and thorough, leaving no stone unturned. You need to poke around anywhere you might find a good, strong, juicy clue.

CLUES

A clue is anything you consider potentially useful in choosing career design components. You may be able to explain why you think it is useful, or you may just have a hunch. Don’t dismiss any clue too quickly in the early stages. It could be an observation, an insight, or a piece of information. In the personal realm, a clue can be about who you are, what you do well, how you behave, what matters to you, and so on. Clues can be information, observations, hunches, or insights.
EXAMPLE: A friend said that at age 20 he didn’t know how to reconcile his great loves: women, drawing, and tying trout flies. He ultimately became a well-known plastic surgeon, a perfect fit. If you’re not sure about a clue, you can do some work on it with questions and research to see if it has lasting value. Early in your career design project, the best clues will be about you.

- How you think
- How you behave in various situations
- What you do well or not so well
- What you learn about yourself from exercises in this book
- Subjects you enjoy or master easily
- Passions and interests
- Your positive or negative reaction to something you learn about a particular career
- Wants
- Goals
- Insights
- Dreams
- Fantasies
- The things you care about
- Your outlook on life
- What attracts or repels you
- Your quirks and idiosyncrasies
- What other people say about you
- Your natural talents
- Tasks you enjoy
- Limitations

Notice that you are not yet looking for clues about careers themselves. In the early stages of the career design process, looking for clues means paying attention to you and how you function. Until you have fully taken your own measure, it’s premature to try to squeeze yourself into ideas about careers. Your investigation ultimately will focus on clues related to externals such as the workplace, the economy and other practical pieces of the puzzle. But first you need to investiage the you that you want a career to fit.

Some clues include the external world: “I love the idea of building Conestoga wagons, but there are only two small shops that make them now, and employment opportunities look dim.” A clue can also be an idea that pops up: “Maybe I could make all sorts of wagons and carriages for the movie industry.”
“... learn to play the hand you have been dealt brilliantly and to your best advantage.

SOME OF THE MAIN AREAS OF LIFE TO INVESTIGATE

- **Natural talents and innate abilities**  Everyone is born with a unique group of talents that are as individual as a fingerprint or snowflake. These talents give each person a special ability to do certain kinds of tasks easily and happily, yet also make other tasks seem like pure torture. Can you imagine your favorite improvisational comedian as an accountant? Talents are completely different from acquired knowledge, skills, and interests. Your interests can change. You can gain new skills and knowledge. Your natural, inherited talents remain with you for your entire life. They are the hand you have been dealt by Mother Nature. You can’t change them. You can, however, learn to play the hand you have been dealt brilliantly and to your best advantage.

- **Personality traits and temperament**  Many people are engaged in careers that make it necessary to suppress themselves at the job. An elegant fit between you and your work includes and supports the full self-expression of your personality. Telltale signs of a career that doesn’t fit your personality include: the necessity to assume a different personality at work, restricted self-expression, activities that conflict with your values.

- **Passions, meaning, mission, purpose**  People who are enthusiastic about their work are usually engaged in something they care about and are proud of what they do. They feel they are making a contribution. They may need to go to work to pay the bills, but that is not what gets them out of bed in the morning.
**Willingness to stretch**  One of our clients was a forty-year-old woman who decided to pursue a career in medicine. Her previous college record was insufficient for entry into medical school. She had no money to finance a medical education. Her willingness to stretch beyond what seemed possible was so strong that she went back to college and completed prerequisite courses. She gained admission to a fine medical school and managed to creatively finance her education. Other clients are unwilling or unable to make more than a modest stretch in a new direction. I encourage you to stretch as far as possible toward a career choice that will not be a compromise. At the same time, be completely realistic. It makes no sense to make plans you are unwilling or unable to achieve.

**Fulfills your goals**  To have something to shoot for is an important part of the joy of working. A custom-designed career supports you to fulfill your personal and family goals and gives you a sense of challenge on the job.

**Rewards fits your values**  Like a biscuit you give a dog, rewards are the motivators that help keep you happily performing your tricks at work. Some rewards mean more to you than others. That is because they are linked with your values. If recognition for doing something well is a value important to you, then it may also be a necessary reward to motivate you to keep performing well. Doing without adequate recognition will slowly erode your well-being on the job.

**Compatible work environments**  Each person flourishes in some work environments and finds others stressful or otherwise inappropriate. Several different aspects of the environment that surrounds you play a vital role in the quality of your work life. You live in a certain geographical environment. The company you work for has a particular organizational environment, style, and corporate personality that affects you every minute you are there. On a smaller scale, your immediate work environment includes the physical work setting, the tone or mood of your office, and your relationships with others, including your supervisor, fellow employees, and clients or customers.

**Realistic**  Are the careers you are considering really suitable, doable, and available? Do they really fit you? The decisions you make about your career direction are no more than pipe dreams unless they are achievable and actually turn out as you hope they will. Research is the key to understanding the reality of potential future careers.
Start paying attention to your everyday life. What do you enjoy so much that you lose track of time? What do you enjoy that others think is difficult or a chore? What do you read? What do you talk about with your friends? What are you passionate about? Make your everyday life an important part of your investigation. Keep a sharp eye peeled. Because we do not always see ourselves with perfect clarity, you can use some outside sources, friends, family, co-workers, teachers, bosses, and others who may be able to supply some useful observations. Some clues will turn out to be central and important; others may not turn out to be important at all.

EXAMPLE: When I was designing my career many years ago, I noticed that what I liked about the Super Bowl wasn’t so much the football game. It was the ads—not just watching them for enjoyment, but critiquing them, noticing which were effective. For some reason I found this compelling, even though I had no interest in marketing or advertising. This provided a very strong clue. When I began to investigate this clue, paying more attention to my daily life, I discovered that I walked around all day critiquing everything. In restaurants, I critiqued the food and the service; in movies, I noticed every flaw; in talking with people, I always listened for what was going on below the surface. This talent got me into trouble when I offered unsolicited advice or coaching, or tried to improve things nobody else wanted changed.

I designed my career so I could enjoy using my “positive critic” talent every day—coaching people, training professionals in my field, inventing new methods, even writing the words you are reading now. What started as something I noticed watching the Super Bowl became a powerful clue that turned into a huge design element of my career, and became one of the big reasons I still love my work thirty-some years later.
HOW TO WORK A CLUE

Pick the strongest clues and then work them. For a detective, this means choosing the clues that narrow the field of suspects. “Woman” cuts the list of possible suspects in half, but “six-foot tall woman” is a better clue. The detective asks questions the clue suggests and investigates where that leads, what it signifies, how it fits together with other clues, and finally figures out what conclusions it supports. That’s exactly what you do as a career detective. When you’re in investigative mode, you have a particular relationship with everything in your life: instead of just living life, you are, at the same time, observing yourself and what’s going on with you as if you’re a detective working on the biggest case of your life.

Out of all the clues you have collected, pick the most important and useful ones, and do what any detective would do: ask questions about those clues. These questions are all subsets of the big question you are working on answering: What am I sure will definitely be some of the components of my future career? The strategy is to move each clue in the direction of making a choice about whether or not it becomes a definite design element of your future career.

I thought my Super Bowl clue was worth investigating so I started observing and asking questions such as:

- What exactly is going on when I’m critiquing ads during the Super Bowl?
- What natural talents am I using?
- Where else do I do the same thing?
- How often do I do it?
- Is it fun whenever I do it?
- Where is it useful? Where does it get me in trouble?
- How can I find out more?

When you have some good questions about a particular clue, you go on to the next step, asking:

- How, specifically can I answer this question?
- What do I need to do, learn, investigate?
- How can I move this clue forward so I can decide if it will be a definite career-design element?

Once you have worked the clue sufficiently and have some definite answers and findings, you can then switch from investigating to deciding—making a choice about the clue you have been working on. Will it be a definite career design element or not?
“Your most useful investigative tool is asking and answering questions.”

HOW DO I KNOW WHICH ARE THE BEST CLUES?

There are two ways of looking at which clues are the best. One way is personal: Which clues do you care about most? Which are you most sure you want as a definite component of your future work? The other way of assessing clues is even more useful: Which clues will help in pointing toward specific jobs? The best clues lead to the most useful definite components. Gather clues with an eye to what matters most to you, and give extra weight to clues that point toward specific types of careers.

ASKING RAZOR-SHARP QUESTIONS

Your most useful investigative tool is asking and answering questions. People whose job is to get high quality answers—such as scientists, real-life detectives and journalists—know that half the battle in getting the best answers is asking good questions. Usually we just ask whatever questions pop into our minds. Nevertheless, the quality of the answers we get is directly related to the quality of the questions we ask. Spend some time honing your questions to a sharp point. You want them as clear as a laser beam to help you move the clue toward making a definite decision about it.

DECISIONS

Once you have investigated a clue, asked good questions, and answered them, you may reach the point where you know enough about a specific clue to be able to ask the big career design question: “What am I sure will definitely be some of the components of my future career?” When you make a definite decision about a clue, think of it as a specification, a design element of your future career. When you decide a certain element will not be a part of your career, you are also adding to your design. For example: “I won’t work behind a desk more than a couple of hours a day.” You may not be sure what you will do, but you know that most of the time it won’t be done behind a desk.
Let’s say you are passionate about talking in front of groups of people and writing. Fine. You also like ice cream, dark eyes, salsa dancing, and Jamaica. So what? Your passions and other clues don’t get really juicy until you claim them as definite career design components. You can’t design with maybes.

If you decide that writing and making presentations to groups will definitely be major components of your work, you have some major specifications to add to your Career Design Components. Stepping into the decision mode is one of the most powerful parts of creating a new future. You are not just the engineer driving the train. You are also the guy out in front laying new track. Not only do you get to drive, but you also decide where the train is going. Don’t let anyone (spouse, parents, friends, fellow tribe members) tell you where the train is going. No one cares as much about your life as you do. No one else will walk to work in your shoes.

Deciding isn’t mysterious. We all work in decision mode all the time: "I’m going to see this movie, not that one." “I will work out today.” Most of us don’t notice when we’re deciding. We tend to give credit to our desires or circumstances. If someone asks why we are working out today, we say things like: “I want to have giant biceps” or “I need to lose ten pounds.” But lots of people want the biceps or weight loss and don’t do anything about it. The real reason you are working out today is that you decided to—and then did it. You created a future that wasn’t going to happen automatically, by making a choice and then taking action to fulfill on that commitment.

All around you, in the wider culture we live in, are many who live this way. If you listen closely to interviews with some of the people you most admire and respect, you will find that they are out in front of their own train, laying new track. They may describe it differently, but that is what they are doing. They are declaring how it will be and then doing what is necessary to make it happen. And that is what you can do to create your future career.

It doesn’t take an extraordinary person to live this way. But it does take willingness, commitment, and persistence: the willingness to stand out and be a little different from the crowd, a commitment to a fully lived life, and the persistence to keep working on your design until it is fully shaped and becomes the life you are living every day.

“ No one cares as much about your life as you do. No one else will walk to work in your shoes.”
BUILDING YOUR DEFINITE COMPONENTS

Your answers to the question “What am I sure will definitely be components of my future career?” are the building blocks, the specifications of your future career. Make them clear and strong and what you really mean. Here are some examples. If you find something that rings your bell, steal it.

- I will move around on a typical day, not be chained to a desk or computer.
- I will do work that changes the way people think about themselves.
- I will do work that focuses on physical objects in the real world.
- I will be on the leading edge of innovation.
- I will do work that involves finding and using ideas and information from different fields and sources.
- My work will have some structure within which I have plenty of room for invention, imagination, and innovation.
- I will not work for a dysfunctional company that cares only for the bottom line and not for the quality of life of its employees.
- I will do work that involves explaining complex things in simple ways.
- I will manage a group of people.
- I will be an artist, sensualist, a creator of beauty.
- My work will let me live in a rural area somewhere in the Rocky Mountains.
- I will diagnose and fix organizational problems.
- I will do work that involves successfully solving problems every day.
- I will primarily design solutions rather implement solutions.
- My career will fit in with my goal to have children.
- My career will make a big, positive difference in many people’s lives.
- I will use my diagnostic problem-solving talent at least several times a day.
- I will build or repair physical systems, buildings, machines or something similar.
- I will gather, compile, and analyze data 20 to 30 percent of the time.
- I will apply my favorite processes (researching problems by reading, finding underlying patterns, brainstorming solutions, discovering, designing, teaching, organizing, counseling) to a variety of content (whether it be different people, companies or subject matter).
- My work will mainly involve short-term projects.
- Communicating with other people will be my central job function.
- My work will not involve drumming up business.
- I will work alone 50 percent of the time. Unless I work with a partner I really like—then it could drop down to about 25 percent of the time.
- I will study for no more degrees. But I would take a few courses if necessary.
- I will do work that I am proud of and enjoy telling other people about.
- I will do work that I have a large degree of control over.
“You may consider some career ideas as serious contenders; others may be less realistic but still worth writing down because they contain a germ of an idea that might turn into a good clue.

:: I will do work that is good for the world.
:: I will earn $250,000 a year or more.
:: I will do work that does not require formal clothing more than one day a week. I will wear casual yet hip/fun clothes.
:: My work environment will be casual, relaxed, friendly, fun.

CAREER IDEAS

A career ideas list is one of the three tools you continue to work with throughout designing your future work. It starts out as a place to jot down careers that might be a good fit or that appeal to you in some way. You may consider some career ideas as serious contenders; others may be less realistic but still worth writing down because they contain a germ of an idea that might turn into a good clue. As your career design process moves forward, you add to this list and delete careers that you’ve decided are not a good fit. Both adding and deleting provides a powerful opportunity to generate clues – why do I think this career fits? Why is it appealing? What doesn’t fit about this one?

DESIGN

In designing your future career, you take the elements you declared as definite pieces of the puzzle and fit them together, looking for multiple careers that fit your specifications.

BUT MY PROBLEM IS THAT I DON’T KNOW WHAT IS OUT THERE

We have heard this from thousands of new clients. The reason they don’t know what’s out there is because they do not have sufficient definite components that point to specific careers. If you have done the work and built a group of definite components that are specific enough, they will point to careers that
fit, including those you have not thought of previously. It takes those definite components to point at what fits, and to suggest possibilities that you have not thought of previously. That is why definite components are such an important part of the Rockport career design process. Without those definite components, you are never going to be able to point to specific careers. If you tried to buy an airline ticket to Europe, you would find that this is impossible. You need to specify more information, at the very minimum, the city you intend to go to.

Once you have a list of careers that seem to fit your specifications, you go back into detective mode, investigating and researching each of these careers. Most of the work you have done previously has been speculative and centered on you, the way a custom tailor takes measurements as the first step in producing custom-made clothing. Now you look outside yourself at real careers in the real world.

As you learn more about possible careers that fit your specifications, you will probably find useful new clues you had not considered before. These may lead to new commitments and new definite career design components. Nothing is more useful than the real world to help separate reality from fantasy. The first steps you took, to understand the “you” your career is supposed to fit, are essential. Because that part of the process is internally focused, however, it is almost impossible to avoid making naive and false assumptions about the real world. Now you have a chance to compare and align the internal and external worlds. Researching actual careers provides practical data that may require you to change some of your career design specifications or recognize that to fulfill your commitments will ask more of you than you previously thought.

Some careers will sink to the bottom and get crossed off your list. Others will rise to the top. As you learn more about a particular career, you will learn more about yourself and what you need and want. As you narrow the list, you get closer and closer to making a final choice. If you continue with this career design method -- finding good clues, asking and answering questions, choosing definite components, researching careers that fit your components -- you should be able to reach a final choice and say, “I know exactly what I am going to do. It is a great fit for me, and I know I can make it happen. I’m certain of my goal.”
WHAT I RECOMMEND

In my experience, the best way to design work that is both a great fit and attainable is to work with an expert guide-coach-consultant. Choosing the best possible career is a project, a process. The Rockport Institute Career Choice Program, works much better than going it alone. This guide outlines the basic methodology we have used successfully with thousands of clients.

If you can’t afford to work with an expert guide, buy our book or just get started with this guide. But first, ask yourself, how important to you is the quality of your life? How sure are you that designing your future work on your own or with a book, is the best way forward?