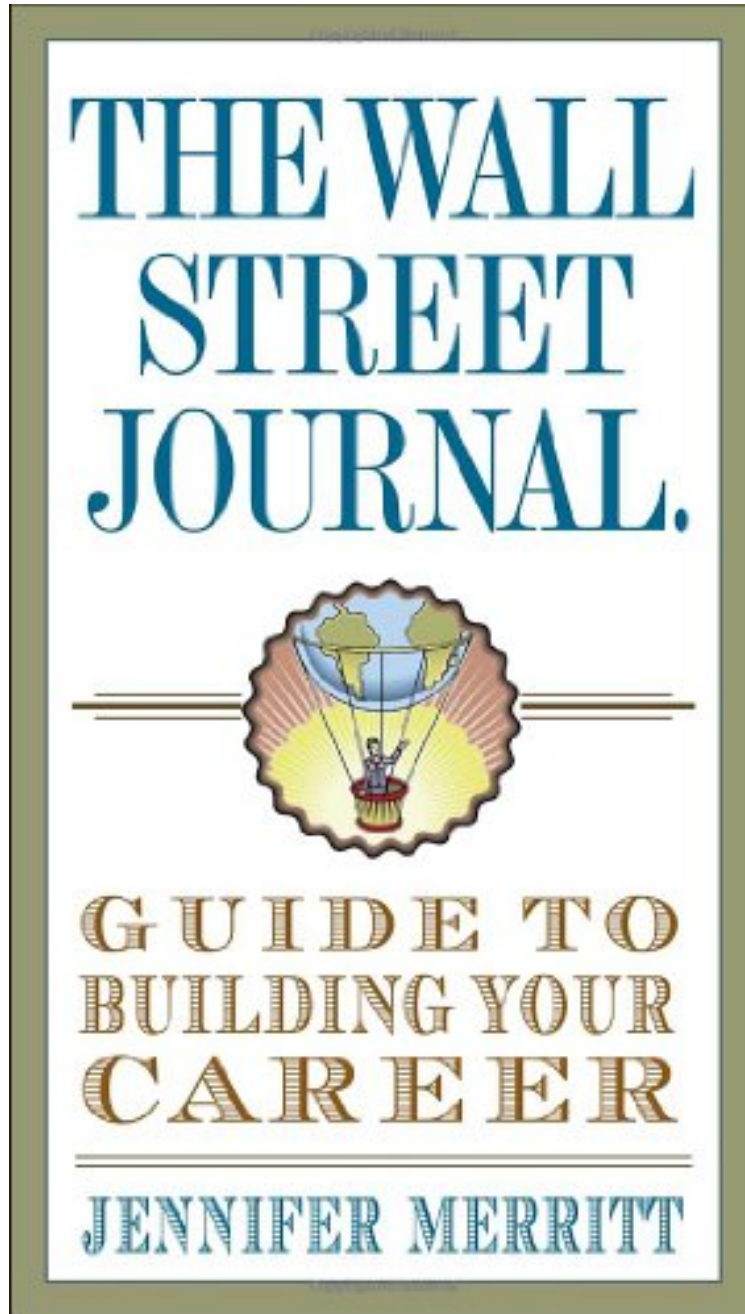


(Download) The Wall Street Journal Guide to Building Your Career

The Wall Street Journal Guide to Building Your Career

Jennifer Merritt

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Jennifer Merritt : The Wall Street Journal Guide to Building Your Career before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Wall Street Journal Guide to Building Your Career:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Quality advice, if rather basic. By Tom McMorrow This book is squarely targeted at the 22 year old fresh out of a 4 year school, wanting to make it in the world. While the information contained within is genuinely helpful, it is also rather basic. Things that seem to be common sense (arriving early to an interview) are the main focus. A more adequate title would be "Guide to Starting Your Career". A good book to give a recent college grad, but won't provide the deep insights someone in mid-career would need to climb the ladder.

Are you looking for a mere job the kind where you do virtually the same thing day after day, year after year, and spend the hours counting down the minutes until the clock hits five p.m.? Or are you looking for a career the kind that engages your interests and passions, constantly presents new and exciting opportunities and challenges, and allows you to grow personally and professionally? If you chose the latter, this is the book for you. In *The Wall Street Journal Guide to Building Your Career*, former Wall Street Journal careers editor Jennifer Merritt shows you how to build the foundation for the fulfilling professional career that leads to that corner office. She'll walk you through how to: Select and nab that important career-launching college internship Ace your first interview and blow them away in the second round Navigate the unwritten rules of any office culture Negotiate tastefully and successfully for the salary your skills are worth Get that critical promotion when you're at the peak of your learning curve Choose the mentor (or mentors) who can best help you achieve your goals Leap ahead of other high achievers racing you to the top Drawing on advice from industry experts, career coaches, and ordinary people who've made the climb themselves, Merritt offers insider tips for landing and moving up in the kind of job that's not just about earning a paycheck but about realizing your ambitions and achieving the kind of success you've always dreamed of.

About the Author The former careers editor for *The Wall Street Journal* and previously a management education editor at *BusinessWeek*, JENNIFER MERRITT has written and edited career stories for the past decade. In 2008, Jennifer developed the Journal's *Second Acts* column as well as *90 Days*, a regular column about tackling the first 90 days of any career change. She is currently an editor at Thompson Reuters. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

CHAPTER 1 What Is a Professional Career? This isn't just another book about how to get a job. Even in a tough economy, pretty much anyone can get some sort of job or another. No, this is a book about building a career. So, what is the difference between a job and a career? Simply put, a career is a lifelong endeavor, the pursuit of a professional track that consists of multiple jobs you'll stack one on top of the other (experts call it a career ladder for a reason), each tapping into skills and experiences you've already had and each adding a new set of skills, increased responsibilities and challenges, and fresh experiences. For someone focused on a professional career track, each job you choose matters, so it's critical to consider not just what you can do in the next job, but also the tangible skills and experiences you can take away from each position and use for selling yourself in the future, says career coach J.T. O'Donnell of *CareerRealism.com*. Figuring out what those skills are before you take a job is an art, of sorts, one that takes a few hits and even some misses to refine. But building a professional career is about landing the next job on the ladder and you can do that only if you've built new skills each step of the way. For the purposes of this guide, consider a professional career as one where you start in that ubiquitous entry-level position and climb the ladder toward a management or leadership position. How you get to that leadership role can vary from a straight-line ladder leading up, to a zigzag climb that will find you moving among different functions or departments, sometimes moving laterally, then up, sometimes moving up a few rungs at a time. For many people, the path will be a bit of both. Along the way, each job you choose should build the skills and experiences you need in order to reach your short-term and longer-term goals starting as early as a strong internship in college (better yet, two) to help you land that first job after college. I know it sounds daunting, but it doesn't have to be. This book will guide you through the steps you need to take, from deciding on a career path, to scoring that first internship, to making the most of it to pave the way to your first real job (don't worry, if you've already missed the internship boat, you can still get where you want to go with a little extra maneuvering you'll learn about in the following chapters). Then we'll look at how to land that first job, negotiate your first salary (which is crucial, as it's the starting place for all future salaries), and earn that critical early promotion that will put you on the path you desire. Then you'll learn some tricks for how to move up that ladder faster, including networking, smart early job moves that will set the foundation for your future success, career boosters that can set you apart from the crowd, and more.

WHERE TO START: DECIDING WHAT CAREER IS RIGHT FOR YOU Many ambitious college students walk into their first class with a good idea about what they'd like to do when they grow up, or at least a sense of the field they'd like to work in once they graduate. But that's just a start. Many industries and professions have become so diversified and segmented that simply saying you want to work in such-and-such field doesn't paint a full picture of what you really want to do. Let's take engineering, for example. There are some two dozen specialties in engineering, from the more common civil, mechanical, chemical, and electrical, to the more specialized subsets such as aerospace, geotechnical, biomedical, environmental, petroleum, and nuclear. But even careers with fewer head-spinning options still present forks in the road. Take marketing: market research, promotions, account management, and even public relations and advertising can fall under the marketing moniker at many companies. The point is that before you decide which first job or internship to go after, you need to narrow down (as

best you can) what exactly you ultimately want to do. Of course, that's easier said than done. With all the different options out there, how are you supposed to figure out what field or industry most interests you? Well, it isn't easy, but the good news is, there's no wrong answer (although choosing a professional track that's not likely to be around in a decade might not be so wise). The key is to figure out the intersection between your interests and your aptitude. It helps to first rule out areas where what fascinates you does not match your abilities. For example, you might find biomedical engineering fascinating but struggle in biology classes. Or you might be drawn to market research but lack an aptitude for the database mining and analysis it actually requires. While there may be a sign that a particular job isn't right for you, a fascination with marketing might yield a more creative career in the field, or struggling in biology but not other earth sciences could make environmental engineering right for you. At the end of the day, you aren't going to shine in a career if it's not something you've got both an aptitude and a passion for. Trust me, if you've got an aptitude for math and statistical analysis but can't stand the idea of running numbers behind the scenes and without a lot of people, being a financial analyst may not be for you. But you could put that aptitude to use elsewhere. The key to building a professional career starts with finding the proverbial sweet spot between what you do well and what you love to do. Here are four questions and strategies to help you find the answer that will help you figure out the career that is right for you.

1. What am I both good at and fascinated by? If you've found yourself scoring As in every history class you take, it could be because you're enthralled by the subject or that you're just really good at understanding historical context and writing papers that convey clear, concise, and persuasive arguments. Both of those characteristics are critical for a career, be it history-related or not. Understanding the context of the projects you work on and being able to persuade with strong communication can go well beyond, say, becoming an historian at a local museum or a history teacher at a local college. So, think about the classes you've taken where you've both received strong grades and felt excited to attend (even if it was at the dreaded hour of 8:30 a.m.). They don't need to be classes only in your major, and you should consider extracurricular activities you love, too (after all, intramural soccer requires skills like teamwork, stamina, and mental agility; volunteering at a local senior center requires patience and empathy). Once you've got a list of things that both hit the success button and have a strong happy factor, think about the skills you use when you're in those classes or participating in those activities. Consider both the tangible stuff like strong writing or the know-how required to work through formulas and the harder to quantify, such as deductive reasoning, connecting the dots to solve a problem, persuasion, team-building, or creating new formulas or ideas. Write down these skills you employ and then weight them. No, it's not a grading curve—just another critical-thinking exercise that will force you to really think about what you're good at. Number the five skills you feel you most excel in, with the standout skill as No. 1. If you aren't sure about which skills you're using or what you're best at, quiz professors or classmates who know you well to help round out your own thinking. You can also see if your university offers workshops directly linked to or based on the Dependable Strengths Articulation Process program. You'll sit with a small group of students and go through a series of exercises that help discern your strengths. From conversations about your best experiences and your not-so-great experiences, the people in your group record the strengths they think you're describing and you'll do the same for them. There'll be a gut-check about how valid those strengths are, and in the end, you'll be able to match those strengths with various career paths.
- 1 Sounds a little kumbaya, for sure, but the process has been around for more than fifty years and can be wildly helpful for driven but uncertain professionals and early careerists. At many colleges and universities, you can also tap peer advisors—often through the career services office—who've been there, done that and who get a little extra training to help other students wade through the process of the right fit for their skills and interests. Some even maintain regular blogs or daily newsletters to offer advice, give feedback, and share their own experiences selecting a career or landing an internship. You can often read these even if you aren't a student. One particularly helpful one: the University of California Berkeley's Peer Corner blog, which offers advice and insights from students from a variety of majors.
22. How can I translate that into a job in my chosen field? You've got your list. And you're pretty sure it serves to confirm your desire to build a career in banking. Or maybe you've realized you'd really be excited by a career managing a brand or developing new consumer product launches. Or your list is so problem-solver heavy that it's clear that consulting is right for you. Now it's gut-check time. Make an appointment with the career services office or peer advisor group at your college and go over your list of skills and your career attractions. These professionals might suggest a series of quizzes or questionnaires to help refine your list. They will also have a strong sense of where in your chosen field those skills will get you in the door and off to a strong start. As you shape the list of possibilities, consider what other classes you might need to take in order to round out the required skill set. If, say, it turns out that your penchant for visual thinking and your winning potato-chip campaign in the last marketing class you took make you a perfect candidate to move into branding or marketing for a big consumer goods company, that track will also involve some quantitative knowledge to help you understand concepts like budgeting and market statistics. (You'll want to look for courses to round out those skills, if you don't already have them.)
3. What's it really like to do those jobs? Don't leave the career office just yet. Ask if yours keeps a database of recent graduates and more-experienced alumni who are willing to connect with students interested in similar career paths; most schools do and they've been aggressive in the last few years about updating those lists and making inroads with alums on behalf of job-seeking students. Ask for a list of alumni you can reach out to. Check with

your parents, professors, and family friends for a similar list. Make the connection with a simple phone call or an e-mail. Introduce yourself and the person who referred you and quickly acknowledge that you know this person's time is valuable, but that you hope he could spend fifteen minutes in the next week or two telling you about his job. When you chat, ask about a typical day, the next-step jobs your new contact is pursuing, and what those are like (after all, you might want to follow his path), and ask what skills are most critical to get started on the same path. Be sure to ask about the personality types that fit best in the career and the positions your contact has had. You might love the idea of being a junior trader on a stock or commodity exchange, but if you're the cooperative, teamwork type, you'll find you don't have the sharp elbows and a tough-as-nails personality the job might require. Take careful notes. If you find yourself even more interested and your contact is nearby and seems enthusiastic about taking you under his wing, ask if you might shadow him for a day. And don't be lackadaisical with your efforts; even if the first person you reach gives you plenty of time and insight, it's important to speak with at least three or four people already pursuing each path you're interested in. Each person will add a little something to your thinking process.⁴ Can I try this out for a day? Now you've got a pretty good idea of what you want to do. Next up: Ask career services about externship/experiential learning opportunities, similar to internships, but usually lasting a day to a few days, that are designed to give students a flavor of a career in the path that interests them. Unlike an internship, the goal here is to further explore a career, not to get actual experience. A number of universities have set up extensive programs to make externships possible. (Cornell University, for example, has a broad-based extern program that gives students a chance to apply to shadow experienced Cornell alumni over winter break as early as sophomore year and another spring-break job shadowing program for freshmen. Many schools, from the elite to public state institutions, offer something similar.) Take advantage of these recent opportunities. Individual company career portals often have information about such opportunities; of course you can also ask the alumni contacts you've spoken to. Most externships will involve a day or two of shadowing a midlevel professional in the careers you're interested in. In some cases, you can extern for a day or two with several different people in different companies and fields. Often, consulting, accounting, and finance firms and sometimes engineering concerns will host their own externships. You'll need to search the career websites of individual companies for instructions on applying or look for a list at your career services office. Another option: be bold, contact a local company, and ask about shadowing an employee or group. Before making that call, research the firm and be ready to offer suggestions about the group, team, or person you'd be most interested in shadowing. You can also contact professional associations most related to the career field you're considering. They'll often offer workshops, seminars, or handouts on what the field is really like and might be able to point you to shadowing opportunities that you might not find elsewhere. Whatever you do, don't miss out on the opportunity to ask questions of the person you follow for the day. You're making an educated decision about your future and you can't do it without arming yourself with firsthand information, insight, and advice. Thank the person you've shadowed or externed with in person and with a follow-up e-mail or note. While a day or two of shadowing won't tell you all you need to know about working in a specific job or career field, you will get a good feel for the type of tasks you'd be handling and the sort of environment you'd be working in every day. What's more, the contacts you make are sure to be valuable down the road.