

Making the apt choice

V Pradeep Kumar

The opening up of our economy resulted in a much wider choice of mainstream and offbeat careers. Although some parents allow their children to pursue their interests, others push them into medicine or engineering courses, leading to disappointments, failed careers and in some extreme cases, suicides too.

Consider the following examples from counselling sessions:

Rajesh wanted to do Aerospace Engineering much against the wishes of his parents. Two generations of the family were into healthcare, running a well-known nursing home. In a counselling session, it was found that Rajesh had absolutely no interest or aptitude for a course in medicine. Hence his family was advised to allow Rajesh to take up engineering. Though disappointed, they agreed. Today, Rajesh has a successful career and works for a leading Aerospace organisation.

Right from an early age, John was fascinated about food. Growing up, he was influenced by several cookery shows and developed a passion to become a chef. In counselling, I highlighted the opportunities and challenges of an offbeat career as a chef and advised the parents to allow John to pursue his passion. Although they seemed convinced at that moment, eventually they prevailed upon John to join an engineering course. Disappointed by his inability to convince his parents, John lost focus and after two failed semesters, left the engineering course to join a catering and food technology course.

Since adolescence, Sundar was a rebel and didn't enjoy a cordial relationship with his parents. He was keen on Engineering or Architecture, and managed to get an architecture seat. Sundar's father who was a doctor disagreed and pushed Sundar into medicine. Now, after two years of MBBS course, Sundar has a huge number of backlogs and can't continue the course.

In the 18-20 years of education, no period is as crucial as Class 12 or PUC, when you make a career choice. To make the right choice, use the following approach:

■ **Assess dream career vs skill sets:** You may have a dream to become a doctor or an aeronautical engineer. First assess if you have the required skills like memory for MBBS and mathematics for Aeronautical engineering. If your skills are weak and you are not confident of strengthening them, then reconsider your choice.

■ **Aptitude test:** Take up an aptitude test to assess your skills like academic, artistic, life skills etc. Remember, as you go to higher courses, the scope of subjects

is more and it will be application-based. Thus, you must be really proficient in the subjects. For example, an architect should have creative and imaginative skills, a doctor needs patience, empathy and memory, apart from other professional skills. An aptitude test makes you realise if you have inherent strengths for the chosen career.

■ **SWOT analysis:** Understanding your strengths and weaknesses is important to exploit your strengths and take actions to rectify your weaknesses. For example, if you are choosing marketing and have weak communication skills, bridge the gap by a short-term personality development course. Also, assess the opportunities and threats towards building a rewarding career. For example, currently, artificial intelligence is a very promising career and the trend is expected to continue. However, check for threat of over-supply in the field when you complete the course. Hence, once you evaluate the outcome of the aptitude test, use SWOT analysis to authenticate it before choosing.

■ **Validate career choice:** Although options have multiplied in both mainstream and offbeat careers, they are extremely competitive. In mainstream careers, technology-supported industries are dynamic and the scenario keeps changing rapidly. Offbeat careers (fine arts, performing arts, fashion design, communication and personality development, sports etc.) while being lucrative in the long run, are challenging and tough in the initial years. Hence, you will have to endure the challenges.

■ **Convince your parents:** Assuming you have the skill sets to be an engineer, doctor, a chef or a dancer, convince your parents that you are taking the right decision by elaborating how you will reach the pinnacle of success. Remember, parents only want to ensure you make the right choice and hence, clear their apprehensions.

■ **Approach a mentor:** As seen in the above examples, career-related mistakes can make you lose time as well as direction, causing setbacks. Remember, many jobs that exist today may not be there tomorrow, while many which don't exist today will be created. Therefore, approach a mentor who can assess your overall strengths and advise careers appropriate from a future perspective. A mentor makes you realise if your aptitude and skill set support your career aspirations. Thus, they help you avoid career and course related mistakes.

Therefore, take the right decision which defines your destiny and be the architect of your life.

(The author is a career and management consultant)



LIFE-CHANGING DECISION Ensure that you have the required skills before making a career choice.