

Parameige

You've done the test and now you know you're in the wrong job. So, where do you go next? **Karen Kissane** asks the experts in the final part of our series on personality tests.

IT IS the season to be thoughtful. New Year is a time not just for resolutions but also for reflection about life generally. In other words, the perfect moment for the seeds of that midlife crisis to begin their painful sprouting. If change is on the agenda, the form it takes is up to you. You can buy that Captain Midlife sports car you can run off with that blonde; or you can throw in that soul-deadening job of yours for something entirely different.

"Work is who we are, not only what we do," says vocational psychologist Meredith Fuller. "Is your work a good fit? Are you kicking goals or limping from injuries? If every work day gags you out and nullifies your capacity for pleasure, your body is telling you something is not right."

If that sounds like you, if you are starting to realise you're no longer the person who fit the career path you have chosen till now—then who else can you be? And how do you figure out where to go next?

You could start with a vocational psychologist. Such a professional is likely to use personality tests of the kind already discussed in this series. Interview you extensively and ask you to complete a series of assessments of your occupational interests and abilities to help pinpoint the best kind of work for you.

"It's a common pattern at midlife for people to want a career 'U-turn direction,'" says Fuller. "Data people might want to be more people-oriented, or therapists might want to become artists or gardeners; they want to make or create."

According to organisational psychologist Michael Borge, for some people this kind of crisis is happening earlier than midlife. "In recent years people have started talking about the 'quarter-life crisis.' This wasn't just the prerogative of the general population, but there are people who hit their late 20s and early 30s or 15-hour days trying to keep on the corporate fast track and, by 30, they are burnt out."

There are those who have never in the right job in the first place. "People can do things and be good at them—managing, accounting, engineering," Borge says. "But the fact that they are stressed at it doesn't mean they enjoy it."

Personality assessments all will not be enough to sort this

out, Fuller says. Although, the more you know about yourself, the better. The trickiest part is translating who you are into roles or tasks that are available to you—and that people will pay you for and that will retain your integrity."

She says a full vocational assessment should examine your natural behaviours and style (are you oriented towards inventing, problem-solving, caring?); your hopes and dreams since childhood; your strong interests or passions; your values and ethics (for example, ecological respect or interstate travel no more than once a month); any anxiety that might be preventing you from taking action; and your talents, aptitudes and skills.

John Holland's Self-Directed Search questionnaire is commonly used with young people leaving school, says Fuller, and for more senior professionals there are more sophisticated tools, such as SHL's Occupational Interest Inventory. Many assessments use the kinds of personality groupings developed in the Holland or the Strong inventories.

Marian Power, consulting psychologist with the Australian Council for Educational Research, describes Holland's broad categories thus:

"Realistic" people are confident, hands-on and practical, dislike human relations and enjoy hands-on jobs such as mechanic, gardener or carpenter. "Investigative" types are mathematical and scientific, and enjoy tasks that require logical and scientific ability but often lack leadership ability. He or she enjoys reading and thinking about solutions to problems and is attracted to careers such as biologist, engineer, surgeon or mathematician.

"The Artistic" type is imaginative, creative, non-conforming and disordered, dislikes routine and likes jobs such as musician, journalist, interior designer, writer and actor.

"The Social" type has good people skills and is extrovert, helpful, tactful and idealistic, but often lacks mechanical and scientific ability. He or she is interested in teaching, counselling, nursing and welfare work.

"Enterprising" person has leadership and speaking abilities, and is acquisitive, forceful, ambitious and goal-oriented. He or she probably dislikes scientific or theoretical positions and enjoys holding a position

of power, often ending up as a salesperson, manager, lawyer or parliamentarian.

"Conventional" people are thorough, methodical, efficient and unimaginative. They dislike artistic activities but enjoy keeping records and doing computations so are suited to structured jobs such as accountant, bank worker, postal officer or checkout operator.

Power says the SDS questionnaire results in three-letter codes that express a person's top preferences. For example lawyers tend to be EIS (Enterprising, Investigative, Social). CPs are ISC (Investigative, Social and Conventional), architects are AIE (Artistic, Investigative, Enterprising).

"The inventory also tells you the level of training you need for each job, because your final choice will also be affected by practical logistics," Power says. "You might desperately want to be a doctor, but can your family afford you to have six years of tertiary training when they are struggling on a farm in the drought?"

Power says other tools can be

used to assess occupational questions, such as a person's competencies in literacy and numeracy or their untagged talents—"for example, their innate visual-spatial abilities."

The results themselves need to be integrated into the bigger picture. "When making career life decisions, we confront a changing world labour market and socio-economic realities, as well as our

might shadow a person who does that role, to work in the role as a volunteer, to try it out, or investigate the risks and figures about it through employment projections, training courses, or by interviewing people in that career."

Fuller was once approached by a senior IT specialist who was bored.

"He had to drag himself to work every day and he felt like he was

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MICHAEL BERGE, organisational psychologist

going through the motions. He was earning a lot of money, but he didn't feel challenged."

A battery of assessments and a couple of long talks later, they worked out "he would be stunning as a paramedic or ambulanceman or firefighter". He did his homework and then his training, and changed careers.

Fuller says, "Living on the edge

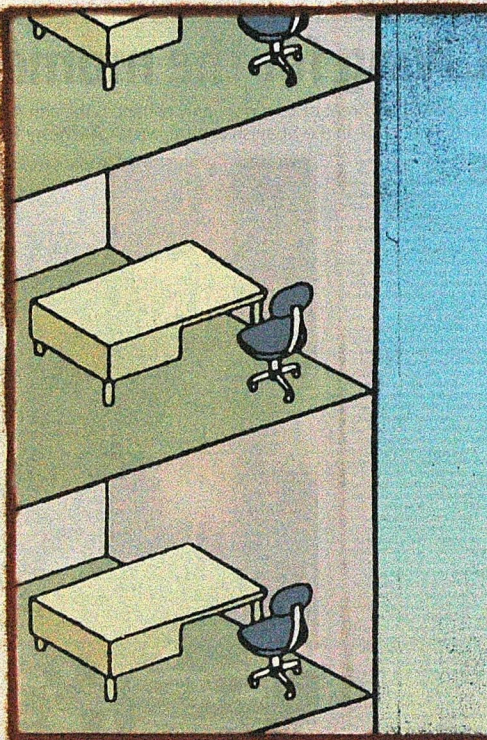


ILLUSTRATION: JIM FOSTER

THE GOOD-ODD CAREER

- I can do it.
- It is based around my interests.
- It respects my values and ethics.
- My personality is tolerated, even welcomed.
- It excites what drains my energy so I can still have a personal life after work and do not have to sacrifice my relationships with family, friends and other people.
- My work has a unifying theme that recognises, for example, "I clearly care about," or "I help people," or "I fix things."
- Work does not prevent me from growing.

Source: Meredith Fuller, vocational psychologist

BOOKS

The chapter "Doing Below Work" by Meredith Fuller, in *Love@Work*, published by Wiley for the Australian Institute of Management. What Colour is Your Parachute? by Richard N. Bolles. Leaving the Rat Race to Get a Life by Philomena Tan. The Quarter-Life Crisis, by Alexandra Robbins and Abby Wilner.

Passages: Practicable Crises About Adult Life, by Beth Sheehy.

INTERNET

Jobinterable.com has an article on "The Seven Rules about Taking Career Tests", and it has links to online tests including the John Holland Self-Directed Search, and self-directed-search.com (for \$15.95). At www.priceworkers.com.au/ctd02/default.asp there is a free suitable test of your work interests and style.

CONTACTS

To seek professional assessment, contact the Australian Association of Career Counsellors (02 9622 3900; aac.org.au) or the Australian Psychological Society (03 8222 3300; www.psychology.org.au).

nursing while studying fashion part-time and now runs a fashion shop.

"Sometimes there are ethnic aspects (to the person's perception that they are stuck)," he says.

People who migrate and work very hard for years to make a life for themselves and their families can become dedicated to making work the focus of their lives. Do they know when to turn off the work? "People who migrate need to be done hand-in-hand with personal interviews."

perfect. Fuller warns: "You might not become specifically what you want to do, especially if that job hasn't been invented yet. But, meantime, a seasonal career fit offers you satisfaction for at least 50 per cent of the time. In my experience, a lot of people think they should be entertained 95 per cent of the day and get really angry if asked to do something they don't want to do. But, in practical terms, if you are slightly above halfway, you are doing well, and anything after that is a bonus."

But, if more than half your work is not satisfying, and you cannot modify the way you see your role in the organisation, it might be better to take the plunge. "It can make a massive difference. Vocational testing can be useful to help you find a place where you can be closer to what you want."

Burge agrees. "The bottom line is, if someone is feeling depressed and demoralised and dead inside, it's important to look at what has gone on in their own personal history as well as in their present life. They may have in a certain type of job, no matter what, because they learned that message from their parents, who were of the post-depression generation."

Burge says he once counselled a client who became a nurse only because her parents told her it would be a secure job. Her tests showed her to have a creative and entrepreneurial flair. She courted