

Explore



Decide



Plan B

A self-help tool

Introduction

Sometimes your dream job can turn out to be a nightmare. You may discover that the career you'd planned on doing is quite different from what you'd hoped. Or it's much harder to get into than you'd imagined. As result you've realised that you need to change direction – you need a 'plan B'.

The good news is you're not alone. Of course, it can feel hard to abandon something you've set your heart on. You may feel 'all at sea' and unsure what to do next. But if you have been heading in the wrong direction, it's better to realise that sooner rather than later. The expression 'taking one step back to take two forwards' is apt. Initially it feels like you're going backwards, but in the long run you'll make more progress.

It important to remember that changing career plans is perfectly normal. In fact, when it comes to choosing a career it's virtually unavoidable at some point because life is so unpredictable. When you let go of an idea which is no longer suitable it, opens up a creative space for new possibilities. It's a valuable part of the process of improving your ideas. In fact, there are many notable examples of people who've changed career direction for the better (Gillette & Feloni, 2017).

This self-help guide uses an exercise by Bernard Roth, co-founder of the famous Stanford University Design School (Roth, 2015, pp. 64-70).

It's based on a powerful insight. We choose goals to get things we want. For instance, we might want a foreign holiday so we can get a tan, see new places, or meet people from different countries. or we might want to buy a car so it's easy to get the shopping or travel to see friends.

But what if it's actually not possible for you to go on a foreign holiday or buy a car at this point? Does that mean you can't get what you want?

Roth says, in this situation, you should separate the means from the end. Rather than struggling to find ways to go on a holiday, for example, instead ask 'if I went on a holiday, what would that give me?' and then find other ways of getting that thing.



In this example, the thing that going on holiday would give this person is the chance to meet people from different nationalities. As you can see below, there are different ways someone might get that (without going on holiday).



This tool is designed to...

- Help you find a new career direction.
- Think more deeply about what you want from a career.
- Identify the real goals lying behind your career choice.

Consider using this tool if you...

- Need a 'Plan B' because your first career choice hasn't worked out.
- Want to think outside the box and find new solutions.
- Want to do a 'thought experiment' to see what else you might consider.

How to use this tool

First, take your original career idea.

Ask yourself, if I were to become an X, what would that give me?

There may be several answers to this question. Note each down.

You can create your own branching diagram using mind-mapping software or Smart Art Graphics (try the Hierarchy section).



Second, pick the most important thing you would have gained.

Brainstorm all the alternative ways you could get these benefits. You may choose to only include career solutions. However, including ways of getting what you want outside of your career choice may be liberating. You may find that the need you want to satisfy can be achieved separately from your career. Who knows? That could free you up to consider other careers which you might not otherwise have been open to.

Third, rate these alternatives.

Score each alternative out of 10 for immediate appeal, where 10 is high .

Then score each alternative out of 10 for practicality (how easy it would be to do), where 10 is high.

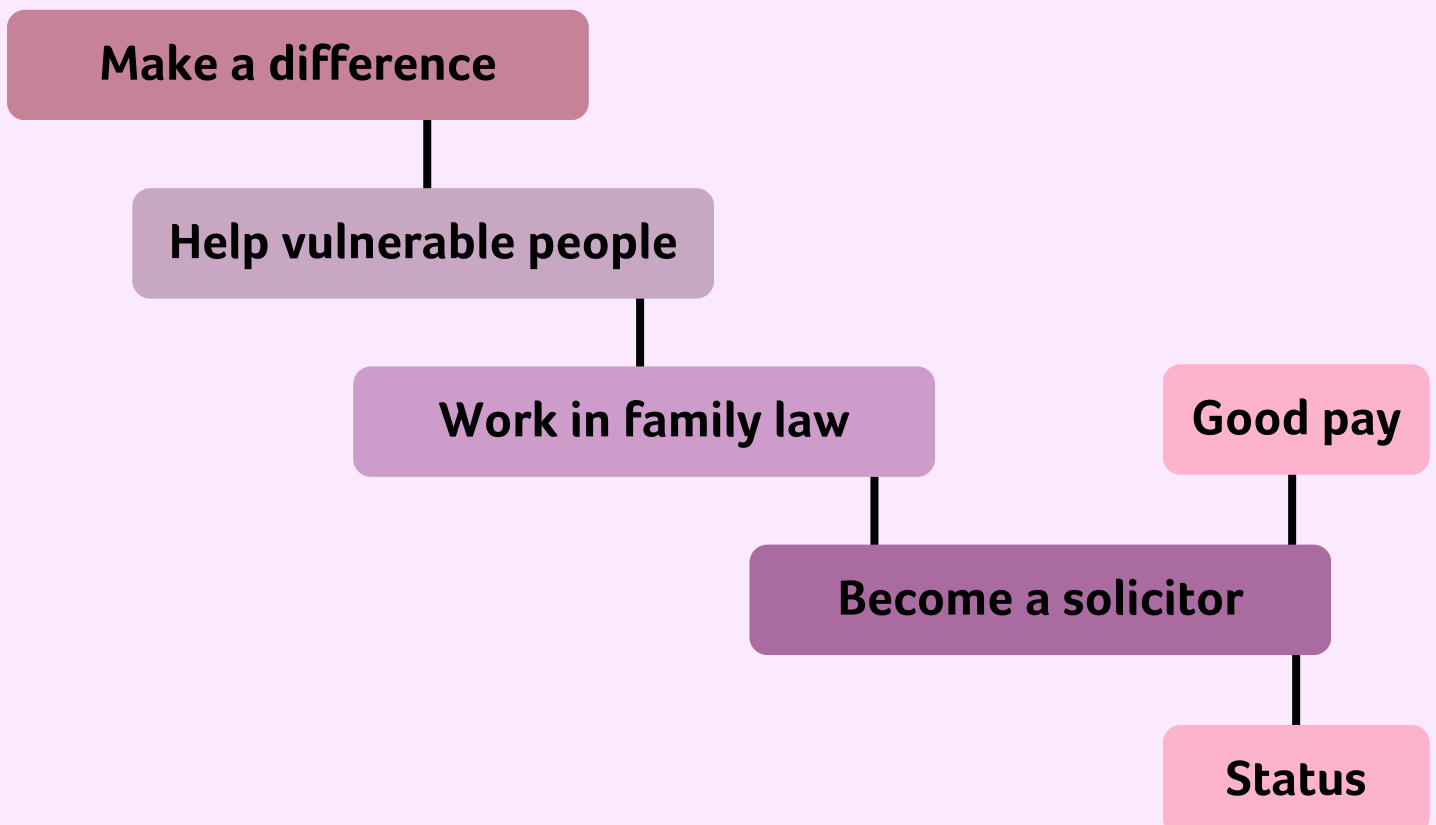
Options that score highly for both are probably worth looking into further.

Here's a worked example:

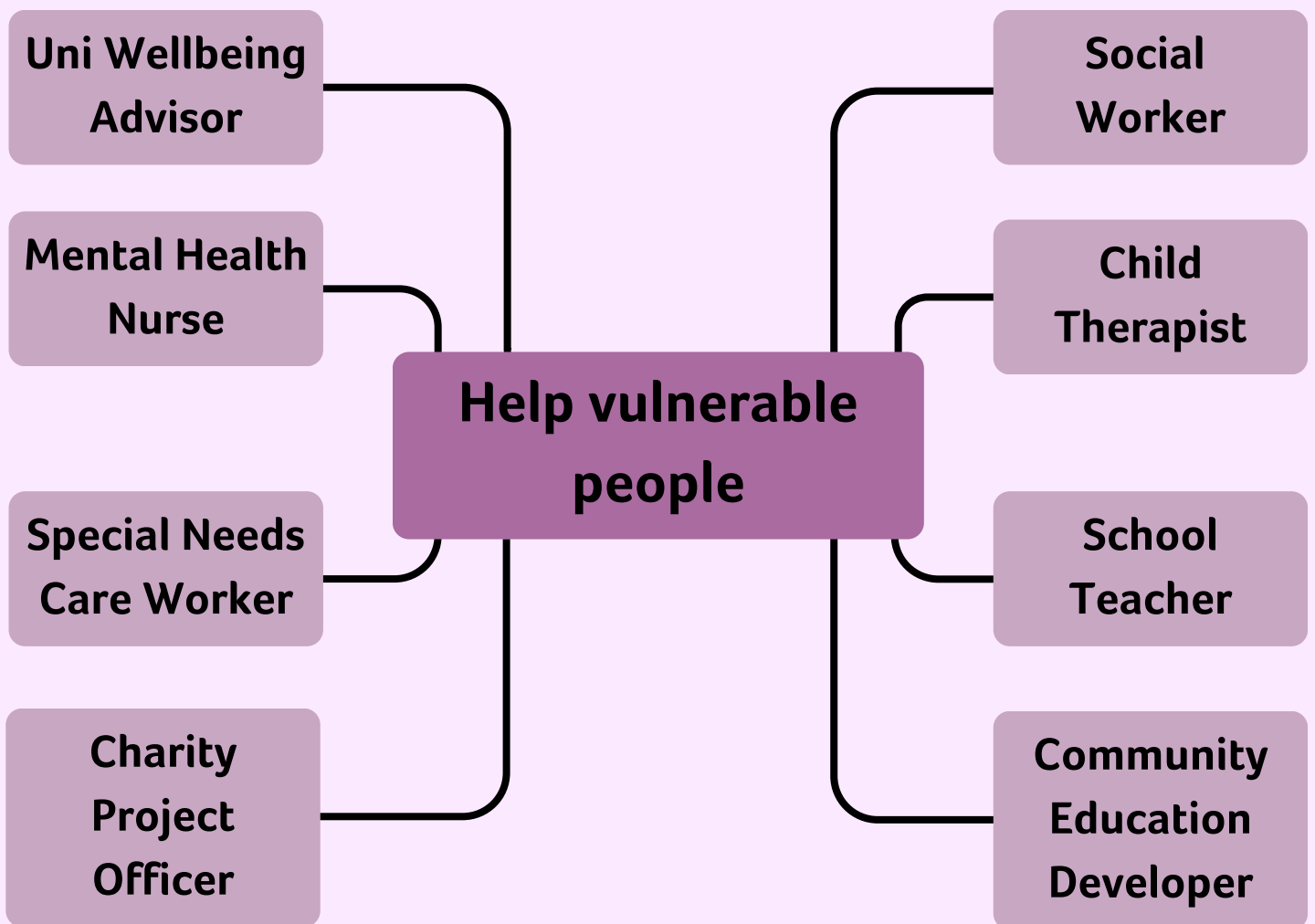
In this example the person wanted to be a solicitor. So, they asked themselves the question 'what would being a solicitor give me?'

The first answer they gave was 'to work in family law'. (They also identified 'pay' and 'status' but these were less important for them). In relation to Family Law there were other 'higher level' motivations lying behind it. This is quite common, so it can be worth taking your first answer and asking yourself 'what would that have given me? You can see that each time the person answers the question, they find another answer at a higher level (a technique sometimes referred to in coaching as 'laddering up').

At the highest level the ultimate payoff for them was 'making a difference'. This was most important thing that being a solicitor would have given them.



As there are lots of different jobs that might make a difference to vulnerable people, this realisation opens up a lot of new occupations to consider (as the following non-exhaustive list shows).



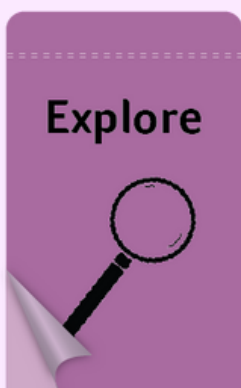
Pause, Reflect, Act

- How easy was it to pick which were the most important things your original career would have given you?
- What came out as your underlying motivation?
- Was it a surprise?
- Which alternatives most appealed?
- Which looked most practical?
- What are the key insights you've taken from this self-help guide?
- What do you need to do to use the insights from this exercise to form a Plan B for your career?
- Who could help you with this?
- Are there other related self-help tools you'd like to use as well?

NB: Because everyone is different and no one solution on its own is necessarily a magic bullet, please look at our other self-help tools as well and use the ones that work best for you.

References and Resources

- Gillett, R., & Feloni, R. (2017, November 29). *19 Extremely Successful People Who Found Success and Changed Careers After 30*. Inc. <https://www.inc.com/business-insider/people-who-found-success-and-changed-careers-after-30-years-old.html>
- Roth, B. (2015). *The Achievement Habit: Stop Wishing, Start Doing and Take Command of your Life*. Harper Collins.
- The Muse Editor (2020, June 19). *9 Career Change Success Stories That Will Seriously Inspire You*. The Muse. <https://www.themuse.com/advice/9-career-change-success-stories-that-will-seriously-inspire-you>



If you are a member of staff from another educational organisation and want to use a limited number of our self-help tools with your students, we'd love to hear from you and share good practice. We'd ask that you retain references to University of Huddersfield as a matter of courtesy and acknowledge the other sources we've used. Thank you.