

Five Steps to Discovering Your Personal Place

A 35-year old engineer named “Krista” successfully planned and designed various products for her company over the course of a 13-year career with her company. When the company decided to downsize Krista and over fifty other employees due to economic downturns, she finally allowed herself to look in the areas that most mattered: helping people. To be honest, she never really liked her career choice as an engineer: “Why did you go this route to begin with?” I asked her. Krista responded rather matter of factly—“I was good at math and my father said ‘you’re going to school for engineering’,” was the gist. She moved from feelings of frustrated obligation to enthusiasm and hope.

Her father’s life history and decisions became Krista’s. She was blind to her own place. It took timing and awareness to occur before the engineer was able to realize her place.

Do you know you have choices if you have options? Some people blindly and passively live their lives according to daily stumblings, the path someone else has set for them, or some mythical ideal that got stuck in their head. Have you sought out options in your life? Have you had a say in stating who you are?

“Place” is about learning your potentiality, configuring boundaries, and nurturing relationships that allow us to find our true selves and our callings.

The truth is that you need to be some place first in order to get to another place, but if you never commit, you’ll never get there! Our tasks are to find our places when we are ready and to realize that we all have different schedules of readiness. That is why we must all have critical words of wisdom repeated to us from time to time. We are all in different places, waiting for our turn for the switch to be turned on, our minds connected to a place of commitment. Without a place, we are left isolated.

My role as a career counselor is to make people aware of the factors which promote isolation, provide tools and processes which allow for growth, and lead people through the open door of connection. Finding your place involves a process of steps that activate you to “do”, not just challenge your intellect. The key steps to identify your place are as follows:

Start with Assessment: Assessment involves an objective source of information. Often when I work with clients, I provide them with various tests and exercises. Testing allows us to find out potentiality and affinity in the areas of personality, interests, values, style, motivation, and even abilities. Exercises involve a focused attention on you and allow for a diet of awareness to occur.

Form a Success Team: “Success Team” is a term borrowed from Barbara Sher and her concept of forming groups of peers who are willing to challenge our beliefs and broaden our concepts. Peers, friends, and mentors can provide a forum for your development. Find 3-5 participants who keep you on task, provide you with ideas and feedback, and

build a network into the area or areas you are considering. The teams are devoted to your success.

Create a Change of Venue: Escaping your routine and space allows you to get unstuck by planting you into a new environment. I experienced this first hand when I decided to take an 8-week course in Berlin while my wife was 5 months pregnant. The experience allowed me to test hunches, experiment with new ideas and actions, and evaluate what internal ingredients seemed most salient. Herminia Ibarra, author of *Working Identities: Unconventional Strategies for Reinventing Your Career*, describes a similar process of “crafting” experiments. That is, the only real change from one place to another is to actually jump into a short-term sample of what you are considering to do in your life.

Evaluate Your Callings: This involves tuning into the boomerangs of life. Gregg Levoy, author of *Callings*, provides ideas and awareness for understanding what a real calling is for people. He also discusses how we often have more than one calling in life, but we often ignore them in order to remain in our comfort zones. A career client of mine was miserably employed in sales management for approximately 20 years. In order to relieve the stress of selling, he played golf every place where he conducted business. After dealing with the pain for several years, even his handsome salary/bonus plan was not enough to keep him in the sales game. His process allowed him to become a golf professional and find satisfaction as a general manager of a country club.

Get Real!: “Reality Teams” provide a critical checkpoint for understanding if you are accomplishing what you wish to be accomplishing. Some folks refer to these people as your “Board of Directors”, a network of professionals, advisors, and candid voices who provide process and evaluative feedback. When a colleague decided to leave a cozy position with a university and go into a consulting practice, I was part of her reality team. Having been in the field of practice, I knew what factors would contribute to her success. We met before the decision as well as after it was made. My role was to provide support and suggestions for continued development.

Following these five steps should allow you to not only identify your current place, but to catapult you into a more satisfying next place in life! For some, this will be a sequence that will lead the reader from one place to another. Others, however, may benefit by jumping to which ever step is most fitting for their needs. Look carefully at your needs and you will decide on the best formula for finding your place.

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