



# The BIG Questions

A self-help tool

## Introduction

Finding the right career is more than simply getting a job that uses your skills. Ideally, you also want something which also aligns with your values.

The leaders of the popular 'Life Design' career planning course at Stanford University (Burnett and Evans, 2016, p. 31), argue that to have a life that makes sense, you should integrate three things:



For Burnett and Evans, in the context of employability, what you believe is about having a 'philosophy of work'. That is, understanding what 'work' means to you and how it relates to your other beliefs. These personal beliefs will vary from person to person but may include political and religious ideas, as well as a what we may call 'life beliefs' about what is the 'right' way to live.

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## **This tool is designed to...**

- Help you write your own philosophy of work.
- Help you think about the values that matter to you.
- Consider what sorts of careers fit with your outlook on life so you can choose a path that is right for you.

## **Consider using this tool if you...**

- Want to carefully consider how your choice of career fits with your wider life and values.
- Enjoy thinking about ethical issues.
- Want to work out how your career and your mission in life relate to each other.

# How to use this tool

**First, spend 15-20 minutes writing responses to the prompt questions (on the next page)**

Use these prompt questions (which we've adapted from Burnett and Evans) to unpack your work philosophy. Because your ideas about work will be part of your wider beliefs about life these are 'big' life questions. Use these as prompts. Ignore any that don't work for you and feel free to add any extra questions that you think are helpful.

Importantly, for this exercise you decide what counts as 'work', It can include:

- Paid jobs (full time / part time).
- Graduate and non graduate jobs.
- Entrepreneurship, self-employment and portfolio working.
- Studying.
- Volunteering.
- Other tasks and responsibilities which might be unpaid (e.g caring).



Write quickly and don't get hung up on grammar or how you express things.

**Earning**

**Loving**

**Living**

What sorts of work do you value and prize?

What does family mean to you?

What constitutes a 'good' life, well-led for you?

What place does (or should) work have in a just and fair society?

What does friendship mean to you?

What values do you try to live by?

How might you define or describe 'good' work?

What responsibility do you have to the wider world?

What beliefs do you have about the meaning of life and a 'higher purpose'?

How much does money matter to you?

How might work help or hinder you to be a good family member and citizen?

How might your career help or hinder you from living in accordance with your values?

What career would you do if money were no object? And what does that tell you about your values?

**Second, do this again another 2 or 3 times.**

You can add to, expand or change what you have written. Try to write as much as you can so you really unpack your beliefs.

**Third, write what work means to you in the form of a short work summary statement.**

Here are some suggestions for how you might start your sentences:

- I believe that work should....
- I think that the purpose(s) of work is ...
- I believe this because....



# Pause, Reflect, Act

When you've finished, take some time to read and reflect.

- What are the key insights you've taken from this self-help guide?
- How can you use your 'work philosophy' to guide your life mission?
- Does this change the careers you are considering?
- What actions do you need to take now to build on this exercise?
- 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, no one solution is a magic bullet, so please also look at our other self-help tools and use the ones that work best for you. Some tools which may be especially relevant include:

- **Values under the Microscope** (how far does your career choice express your values?).
- **Best Possible Future Selves** (imagining your life in the future).
- **Past, Present and Future** (how does your career choice fit into your evolving life story? Does it lead to a positive new chapter?)
- **Leaving Speech** (how you want to be remembered at the end of your career).

If this exercise has been uncomfortable to complete, or has simply raised issues you wish to consider further, you are welcome to talk through your feelings with a member of the [Careers and Employability Service](#) in a confidential setting by booking a careers appointment via the CES website, or by using the [Wellbeing Services](#).

## References and Resources

- Burnett, B., & Evans, D. (2016). *Designing Your Life*. Chatto and Windus.



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.