UNDERSTANDING THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROCESS
Note: This is the third of a four-part article.

The following four steps are the basic foundation for the career development process:
1. Understand yourself
2. Explore options
3. Make decisions
4. Take action

Previous articles addressed the first two steps, and this article will discuss the third step: Make decisions.

Numerous decision-making models exist, and this article describes two of those models: the 7-Step Decision-Making Model and the Zig-Zag Analysis. It also discusses barriers that some of us face when trying to decide on a career direction.

7-STEP DECISION-MAKING MODEL
While flipping a coin or playing rock-paper-scissors may be fun ways to make a decision, they are not realistic for serious decisions such as career choices. The 7-Step Decision-Making Model is a much more realistic strategy. This process consists of the following seven steps:
1. Identify the decision you need to make.
2. Gather the information.
3. Identify the alternatives.
4. Determine the pros and cons.
5. Choose among the alternatives.
6. Take action.
7. Review and evaluate the decision.

ZIG-ZAG ANALYSIS
Another decision-making model is called the Zig-Zag Analysis. This model, from Gordon Lawrence’s book, *People Types & Tiger Stripes*, uses the four mental processes from the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI): sensing, intuition, thinking, and feeling. The following steps share similarities with the seven steps listed above.

1. Gather information using the sensing preference: **Objectively** identify the facts and gather data and details. For deciding on a career direction, these facts and data may pertain to you (your interests, personality, values, and skills), occupations, industries, and employment projections.
2. Gather information using intuition: Taking the facts, data, and detail from the previous step, look for patterns and connections. Brainstorm ideas and explore possibilities. Notice any themes emerging. If you find yourself repeatedly drawn to a career direction, explore it. Make a list of options, and avoid eliminating any ideas at this point.

3. Make a judgment using thinking: After you have gathered all the necessary information and listed all the possibilities, analyze the options. Using the objective facts and data, list the pros and cons of each alternative. Determine criteria for judging each option (for example, how much education is required for the career? Will you need to relocate?)

4. Make a judgment using feeling: Examine how you feel about the various alternatives. How does each option fit with your values? What effect—either positive or negative—might each alternative have on your life? What impact might each alternative have on your relationships?

**Barriers to Decision Making**

Many careers come with inherent barriers because they require certain skill sets, interests, or personality traits. For example, to be a musician, one must have musical aptitude. Additionally, when it comes to making a career decision, we may also face barriers. Following are two examples of common barriers that may keep us from making a decision.

**Problem:** You feel so overwhelmed or confused by having to make a decision that you avoid it or rely on someone else to make the decision for you.

**Solution:** Realize that career decision making is a process and needs to be taken in steps. Using one of the methods outlined above, set goals for each step—and write them down. For example, when gathering information—

- Be specific: What facts, data, and details should you collect?
- Make it measurable: How many information interviews are you going to do? How many sources are you going to consult?
- Make it achievable: While interviewing professionals about their careers is a wise strategy, conducting too many information interviews in one week may not be achievable.
- Make it realistic: Make sure the resources you use for gathering information are realistic. For example, while interviewing Bill Gates would be incredible, for most of us, it probably is not realistic.
- Set a time frame: Establish a deadline for yourself—and stick to it. Mark off time on your calendar to research occupations, explore options, do information interviews, and conduct other information-gathering activities.

**Problem:** You cannot quite commit to a career direction, and you feel anxious that you’re not making the best decision.

**Solution:** The saying “knowledge is power” definitely applies in this situation. Make a list of all your alternatives and then, using all of the facts and data that you have collected, write down the pros and cons for each alternative.
While many decision-making models involve steps, at any time any of these steps may be repeated. Even after finding career satisfaction, many people choose to leave their careers and explore other options. And the decision-making process continues.

The next article in this four-part series will discuss the last step of the career development process: taking action.