

My Career Coach



Bruce Wade

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by Bruce Wade

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Introduction

Selecting a career while still at school or even at Technicon or a university is not as easy as it may seem. You may have been steered in a direction by a family or friend, but the right choice of career is key to living a happy life.

I want to pause here and unpack that word 'happy'. For many, this may appear to be the best career that makes the most money. Somehow, today, we have linked money and wealth to happiness. This is not true. Sure, money does help to buy stuff, but I know many, many wealthy people, and few of them are happy. You may find it hard to believe, but it is true. But on the other hand, I know many people who have found their true happiness in selecting the right career that fits their personality and skill set, and they wake up each Monday morning looking forward to getting to work, because it is what they love doing. That is far more important than money.

It is also important to note that a career choice before the age of 25 is also an unfair activity that we place on the youth in this fast-changing world. Many people who leave school with a career in mind go through many different changes during their working years. It is also important to note that even a degree from a university will not always dictate where you end up as a working professional. I know many qualified professionals who have gone on to do a wide variety of different jobs, some not even remotely linked to what they studied to do.

So, career choice is not something you need to do and then set it in stone for life, but it is important to make at least a choice, a choice to set the course for the next stage of your life. Where that will lead you, only time will tell.

This short book will help you to begin to find that sweet spot based on your self-assessment. I trust that the direction you gain from this will steer you in the right direction of happiness.

Career Categories

To make things a little easier for you, we have grouped a wide variety of careers into 12 categories. Each category lists up to 6 different careers. Within each of these careers, there are countless types of job functions and positions.

1. Technology & Digital
2. Creative & Media
3. Business & Entrepreneurship
4. Healthcare & Wellness
5. Education & Training
6. Engineering & Manufacturing
7. Finance & Professional Services
8. Social Impact & Public Service
9. Hospitality & Tourism
10. Trades & Skilled Services
11. Science & Research
12. Transport & Logistics

The process of selecting your top 3 categories will help you remove the unwanted ones and give you a more focused approach to what is needed when selecting what best feels right for you at this time.

Please start with the flow chart in the next chapter. Use the simple Yes / No answers to find a path that suits you that will lead to a certain career category. Make a note of that and then proceed to the self-assessment. This is available as both a paper-based and a digital assessment. This will give you your top 3 categories based on your answers.

Then using this information to read through the related chapters that list the different careers, characteristic and interests as well as a case study related to the category. If you find your personal niche that seems to fit, well done. If not, start again and try a different approach, maybe by using another person who knows you well, to confirm your answers for each question.

This is not a science, but more of a guide to help steer you in the right direction. I trust that this process will be of benefit to you and your future.

There is an additional category not covered in this process that some of you may choose as your future:

13. Unemployment

- Stay at home
- Join a gang
- Get addicted to drugs
- Become a criminal
- Spend time in prison

Statistically, this is the most common category selected by youth in Southern Africa. The results are devastating to the person, immediate family and the general economy.

If you are leaning towards this category, please work through this book and find what you are born to be; it is not to be a criminal.

Career Selection Decision Tree Framework

This is a simple decision tree selection assessment that will give you an initial indication of where your interests lie.

You can do the assessment online from the link:

<https://bit.ly/3LkLS5b>



Or follow the question logic below

START HERE

Q1: Do you prefer working primarily with IDEAS and INFORMATION rather than directly with PEOPLE or PHYSICAL THINGS?

- Ideas and Information → Go to Q3
- People and Physical Things → Go to Q2

Q2: Do you prefer working directly with PEOPLE and their needs rather than with PHYSICAL THINGS and materials?

- People → Go to Q9
- Physical Things → Q15

Q3: Do you prefer CREATIVE and ORIGINAL work over STRUCTURED and SYSTEMATIC work?

- Creative and Original → Q4
- Structured and Systematic → Q6

Q4: Does your creativity express itself primarily through VISUAL or STORYTELLING?

- YES → **CREATIVE & MEDIA** (Category 2)
- NO → Go to Q5

Q5: Do you enjoy BUILDING or DESIGNING digital products, apps, or systems?

- YES → **TECHNOLOGY & DIGITAL** (Category 1)
- NO → **SCIENCE & RESEARCH** (Category 11)

Q6: Do you prefer working with NUMBERS and FINANCIAL data over SCIENTIFIC or TECHNICAL data?

- Numbers & Financial → **FINANCE & PROFESSIONAL SERVICES** (Category 7)
- Scientific or Technical → Go to Q7

Q7: Does your work need to result in TANGIBLE PHYSICAL SOLUTIONS (buildings, products, systems)?

- YES → **ENGINEERING & MANUFACTURING** (Category 6)
- NO → Go to Q8

Q8: Are you primarily interested in TECHNOLOGY and DIGITAL systems?

- YES → **TECHNOLOGY & DIGITAL** (Category 1)
- NO → **SCIENCE & RESEARCH** (Category 11)

Q9: Is your primary motivation to HELP, HEAL, or SUPPORT people's wellbeing?

- YES → Go to Q10
- NO → Go to Q12

Q10: Do you want to work primarily with PHYSICAL or MENTAL health?

- YES → **HEALTHCARE & WELLNESS** (Category 4)
- NO → Go to Q11

Q11: Is your focus on TEACHING and developing people's knowledge and skills?

- YES → **EDUCATION & TRAINING** (Category 5)
- NO → **SOCIAL IMPACT & PUBLIC SERVICE** (Category 8)

Q12: Are you primarily motivated by COMMERCIAL success and business results?

- YES → **BUSINESS & ENTREPRENEURSHIP** (Category 3)
- NO → Go to Q13

Q13: Do you want to create MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES for guests and customers?

- YES → **HOSPITALITY & TOURISM** (Category 9)
- NO → Go to Q14

Q14: Do you prefer TEACHING and developing others over selling or managing?

- Teaching → **EDUCATION & TRAINING** (Category 5)
- Selling or Managing → **BUSINESS & ENTREPRENEURSHIP** (Category 3)

Q15: Do you prefer working with COMPLEX SYSTEMS and INFRASTRUCTURE over individual products or services?

- Complex systems → Go Q16
- Products or Services → Go to Q17

Q16: Is your primary interest in MOVING things and people efficiently?

- YES → **TRANSPORT & LOGISTICS** (Category 12)
- NO → **ENGINEERING & MANUFACTURING** (Category 6)

Q17: Do you want to develop SPECIALIZED CRAFT SKILLS with tools and materials?

- YES → **TRADES & SKILLED SERVICES** (Category 10)
- NO → Go to Q18

Q18: Does your work centre on creating EXPERIENCES for people?

- YES → **HOSPITALITY & TOURISM** (Category 9)
- NO → **TRADES & SKILLED SERVICES** (Category 10)

Career Alignment Assessment

Instructions

This assessment will help you identify which career categories align best with your natural strengths, interests, and preferences.

How to Complete Digitally:

Use the link or QR code below to access the online assessment. Follow the instructions and find your results once you have answered all 48 questions and select the Calculate Results button.

<https://bit.ly/4sd5WHe>



How to Complete Manually:

1. Read each statement carefully
 2. Rate how much you agree with each statement using this scale:
 - **1** = Strongly Disagree
 - **2** = Disagree
 - **3** = Neutral
 - **4** = Agree
 - **5** = Strongly Agree
 3. Be honest, there are no right or wrong answers
 4. Circle or write your score (1-5) in the box next to each statement
 5. After completing all statements, use the scoring guide to calculate your results
-

SECTION A: Work Style & Preferences

No.	Statement	Score (1-5)
1	I enjoy solving complex problems using logic and analysis	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	I prefer creating original content over following established procedures.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	I get energy from helping people overcome challenges.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	I'm fascinated by how systems and organisations operate.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	I enjoy working with my hands to build or repair things.	<input type="checkbox"/>

No.	Statement	Score (1-5)
6	I'm naturally curious about how technology and digital tools work.	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	I find satisfaction in teaching others new skills or concepts.	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	I'm drawn to understanding human health and wellbeing.	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	I enjoy analysing financial information and making data-driven decisions.	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	I'm interested in social issues and making communities better.	<input type="checkbox"/>
11	I love creating memorable experiences for other people.	<input type="checkbox"/>
12	I'm interested in how things move efficiently from one place to another.	<input type="checkbox"/>

SECTION B: Natural Strengths

No.	Statement	Score (1-5)
13	I'm good at spotting patterns and trends in information	<input type="checkbox"/>
14	I have a strong visual sense and eye for design.	<input type="checkbox"/>
15	People often come to me when they need emotional support.	<input type="checkbox"/>
16	I'm comfortable taking calculated risks to achieve goals.	<input type="checkbox"/>

No.	Statement	Score (1-5)
17	I'm skilled at working with tools, equipment, or machinery.	<input type="checkbox"/>
18	I can troubleshoot technical problems methodically.	<input type="checkbox"/>
19	I'm patient and good at explaining things clearly.	<input type="checkbox"/>
20	I remain calm and focused in high-pressure medical situations.	<input type="checkbox"/>
21	I'm detail-oriented when working with numbers and finances.	<input type="checkbox"/>
22	I'm good at bringing people together for a common cause.	<input type="checkbox"/>
23	I'm naturally hospitable and make people feel welcome.	<input type="checkbox"/>
24	I'm organised and good at coordinating multiple moving parts.	<input type="checkbox"/>

SECTION C: Subject & Activity Preferences

No.	Statement	Score (1-5)
25	At school, I enjoyed Maths, Computer Science, and IT most	<input type="checkbox"/>
26	I loved Art, Design, Drama, and English at school	<input type="checkbox"/>
27	I was drawn to Life Sciences, Biology, or subjects about people.	<input type="checkbox"/>

No.	Statement	Score (1-5)
28	I enjoyed Business Studies, Economics, or Accounting	<input type="checkbox"/>
29	I preferred practical, hands-on subjects over theory.	<input type="checkbox"/>
30	I found Physical Science and Maths most interesting	<input type="checkbox"/>
31	I enjoyed being a peer tutor and helping classmates understand concepts.	<input type="checkbox"/>
32	I was interested in how the human body functions.	<input type="checkbox"/>
33	I enjoyed working with spreadsheets, budgets, and financial data.	<input type="checkbox"/>
34	I was involved in community service or social awareness activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>
35	I enjoyed organising events or activities for others.	<input type="checkbox"/>
36	I was interested in Geography, especially logistics and trade.	<input type="checkbox"/>

SECTION D: Work Environment & Values

No.	Statement	Score (1-5)
37	I'd prefer working with data and systems over direct customer contact.	<input type="checkbox"/>
38	I want a career where I can express creativity daily.	<input type="checkbox"/>

No.	Statement	Score (1-5)
39	Making a difference in people's lives is my top priority.	<input type="checkbox"/>
40	I'm motivated by commercial success and business growth.	<input type="checkbox"/>
41	I want to see tangible results from my physical work.	<input type="checkbox"/>
42	I'm excited by innovation and cutting-edge technology.	<input type="checkbox"/>
43	I'd be fulfilled watching others grow and develop.	<input type="checkbox"/>
44	I want to work in healthcare, helping people heal.	<input type="checkbox"/>
45	I value professional environments with clear regulations.	<input type="checkbox"/>
46	I'm driven by purpose and social impact over profit.	<input type="checkbox"/>
47	I'd love to work in dynamic, guest-facing roles.	<input type="checkbox"/>
48	I'm interested in global trade and supply chains.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Scoring Guide

Step 1: Transfer Your Scores

Add up your scores for each group of questions and write the total in the "Total Score" column:

Career Category	Question Numbers	Total Score
Technology & Digital	1, 6, 13, 18, 25, 37, 42	____ / 35
Creative & Media	2, 14, 26, 38	____ / 20
Business & Entrepreneurship	4, 16, 28, 40	____ / 20
Healthcare & Wellness	8, 20, 27, 32, 39, 44	____ / 30
Education & Training	7, 19, 31, 43	____ / 20
Engineering & Manufacturing	5, 17, 30, 41	____ / 20
Finance & Professional Services	9, 21, 33, 45	____ / 20
Social Impact & Public Service	10, 22, 34, 46	____ / 20
Hospitality & Tourism	11, 23, 35, 47	____ / 20
Trades & Skilled Services	5, 17, 29, 41	____ / 20

Career Category	Question Numbers	Total Score
Science & Research	1, 13, 25, 30	$\frac{\quad}{20}$ /
Transport & Logistics	12, 24, 36, 48	$\frac{\quad}{20}$ /

Note: Some questions count towards multiple categories, this is intentional as skills overlap between fields.

Step 2: Convert to Percentages (Optional)

To make comparison easier, you can convert your raw scores to percentages:

Formula: (Your Total Score \div Maximum Possible Score) \times 100 = Percentage

Example: Technology & Digital score of 28 \div 35 \times 100 = 80%

Step 3: Identify Your Top 3 Categories

Rank all categories from highest to lowest score and identify your top 3:

My Top 3 Career Categories:

1. _____
Score: _____ %
2. _____
Score: _____ %
3. _____
Score: _____ %

Interpreting Your Results

High Alignment (70-100%)

This category is an excellent match for your strengths, interests, and values. Explore career options within this field thoroughly.

Moderate Alignment (50-69%)

You have some alignment with this category. Consider it as a secondary option or look for hybrid roles that combine elements from your top categories.

Lower Alignment (Below 50%)

This category may not align well with your current preferences, though interests can develop over time.

What to do Next

- 1. Read the detailed descriptions** of your top 3 categories in Chapter [X]
- 2. Research specific careers** within these categories that interest you
- 3. Conduct informational interviews** with people working in these fields
- 4. Seek work experience** or volunteer opportunities in your top categories
- 5. Consider combination careers** - many modern roles blend elements from multiple categories

Important Reminders

- **Your results are a guide, not a limitation** - you can develop new interests and skills.
- **Hybrid careers exist** - many roles combine elements from multiple categories (e.g., Medical Technology combines Healthcare + Technology)
- **Re-take the assessment** after gaining work experience or as your interests evolve.
- **Don't ignore low scores** - sometimes what you think you "should" like differs from what truly energises you.
- **Context matters** - South African opportunities may vary by region and economic sector.

Reflection Questions

After completing the assessment, consider:

1. Were you surprised by any of your top categories?
Why?
2. Do your results align with subjects you enjoyed at school?
3. Which category intrigues you most, even if it didn't score highest?
4. What concerns do you have about pursuing your top-rated categories?
5. Who can you speak with to learn more about careers in your top categories?

12 Career Categories

The following chapters contain a more detailed description of each of the 12 career categories. It lists possible careers for each category as well as a brief description of the skills and subjects required for entry into this category.

This is only a guide and a deeper research is highly recommended if you find a category that you are interested in pursuing as a career.

Please contact you local University, Technicon or skills centre for more details on entry requirements and possible qualifications.

Foe each category there is a fictional case study story to help you to identify the type of career that the category could offer you.

1. Technology & Digital

- Software Development & Engineering
- Data Science & Analytics
- Cybersecurity
- Digital Marketing & Social Media
- UI/UX Design
- AI/Machine Learning Specialists
- Cloud Computing & DevOps

If you're the person who naturally gravitates toward solving puzzles, thinking logically, and figuring out how things work, this category might be calling you. Technology careers suit those who enjoyed Mathematics, Computer Science, and Information Technology at school, and who find satisfaction in building systems, analysing patterns, and creating digital solutions. You likely have strong problem-solving abilities, attention to detail, and the patience to debug code or troubleshoot technical issues. Your interests probably include gaming, staying current with tech trends, experimenting with apps and software, or tinkering with computers and devices. The key strength here is logical thinking combined with creativity; you can envision what's possible and have the analytical mind to make it real.

Thabo's Journey: From Township Internet Café to Software Developer

Thabo Mokoena grew up in Soweto, where his first encounter with computers was at the local internet café, where his cousin worked. At 15, he was meant to be browsing for school projects, but instead found

himself fascinated by how websites worked. He started teaching himself HTML using free online tutorials during his matric year.

Despite achieving good marks in Maths and Physical Science, Thabo's family couldn't afford university fees. He took a job at a call centre in Johannesburg whilst attending free coding bootcamps on weekends. "Everyone thought I was wasting my time," Thabo recalls. "But I knew technology was the future."

His breakthrough came when he built a simple app to help his grandmother's spaza shop track inventory. He posted about it on LinkedIn, and a recruiter from a fintech startup in Sandton noticed. They offered him a junior developer position, recognising his self-taught skills and problem-solving ability.

Three years later, Thabo leads a team of five developers, earning more than he ever imagined possible. He now runs free coding workshops in Soweto on Saturday mornings, paying forward the knowledge that changed his life.

"I never saw myself as the 'tech type' because I didn't have a laptop or fast internet growing up," Thabo reflects. "But what mattered was my curiosity and willingness to learn. Technology doesn't care where you come from—it cares about what you can build."

Key Insight: Thabo's story demonstrates that technology careers are accessible through self-

learning, determination, and practical application. You don't always need a formal degree to break into tech—you need problem-solving skills, persistence, and the ability to demonstrate what you can create.

2. Creative & Media

- Graphic Design & Visual Arts
- Content Creation & Copywriting
- Video Production & Photography
- Animation & Game Design
- Music & Audio Production
- Fashion & Styling

This is your space if you think in images, stories, and experiences rather than purely in words or numbers. Creative careers attract those who excelled in Art, Design, Drama, or English at school, and who have always had a strong need to express themselves visually or through storytelling. You possess natural aesthetic judgment, can envision how things should look or sound, and have the ability to communicate ideas through creative mediums. Your interests likely include drawing, photography, making videos, writing, music, or following design trends. You're observant about visual details, colour, composition, and emotional impact. The essential skills here are creativity, originality, visual or verbal communication, and the courage to put your work out into the world for others to experience.

Zara's Story: From Graphic Design Student to Creative Director

Zara Patel always had a sketchbook in her hand during school in Durban. Whilst her parents hoped she'd become a doctor or lawyer, Zara's heart was in visual storytelling. After matric, she enrolled in graphic design at Durban University of Technology,

working part-time at her father's printing shop to pay her fees.

Her career didn't follow the traditional path. Straight after graduating, Zara struggled to find work as agencies wanted "three years' experience" for entry-level positions. Frustrated, she started creating social media content for small businesses in her community—a halaal butchery, a sari shop, a local gym. She charged minimal fees but built an impressive portfolio.

One of her clients was so impressed that they recommended Zara to a friend who owned a growing marketing agency in Umhlanga. The owner took a chance on her energy and fresh perspective. Within two years, Zara was promoted to senior designer, leading campaigns for national brands.

Now 28, Zara is Creative Director at the same agency, managing a team of six creatives. She's worked on campaigns for major South African brands and recently won a Loerie Award.

"Creative careers aren't always linear," Zara advises. "I took every opportunity to create, even unpaid projects, because each one taught me something and added to my portfolio. The work speaks louder than any CV."

Key Insight: Success in creative fields often comes through building a strong portfolio, taking initiative on smaller projects, and demonstrating your unique

creative voice rather than waiting for the perfect opportunity.

3. Business & Entrepreneurship

- Management & Administration
- Sales & Business Development
- Marketing & Brand Strategy
- Entrepreneurship & Startups
- Project Management
- E-commerce & Online Business

If you're energised by opportunities, competitive challenges, and the idea of building something from scratch, business might be your calling. This category suits those who enjoyed Business Studies, Economics, and Accounting at school, and who have a natural curiosity about how companies operate and markets function. You likely possess strong communication skills, confidence in dealing with people, and the ability to see commercial possibilities where others see obstacles. Your interests might include following business news, understanding what makes brands successful, spotting trends, or having ideas for new products or services. You're probably persuasive, driven by results, and comfortable with calculated risks. The core strengths here are strategic thinking, resilience, people skills, and the ability to turn ideas into viable commercial ventures.

Mandla's Path: From Street Vendor to Business Owner

Mandla Dlamini left school after Grade 11 when his father passed away, forcing him to support his family in KwaMashu. He started selling airtime and sweets outside a taxi rank in Durban. Most people saw a struggling vendor; Mandla saw a business education.

He noticed patterns—which products sold when, which customers bought what, and how location affected sales. He saved every rand he could, reinvesting in stock and gradually expanding his product range. By 20, he'd saved enough to rent a small container shop near the taxi rank.

Mandla taught himself basic accounting using YouTube videos and attended free business workshops offered by the Small Enterprise Development Agency. He applied for and received a small business loan, which he used to open a second location. His attention to customer service and competitive pricing built a loyal customer base.

Today, at 32, Mandla owns five container shops across Durban, employs 12 people (many from his old neighbourhood), and recently launched an online delivery service. He's currently studying for a business management diploma through correspondence.

"University teaches you theory; the street teaches you survival," Mandla says. "I learned about profit margins because I had to eat. I learned about cash flow because rent was due. Not everyone's path is textbooks—mine was customers, competition, and consequences."

Key Insight: Entrepreneurship can start from anywhere. Mandla's story shows that business acumen comes from observation, reinvestment,

continuous learning, and the courage to grow beyond your starting point.

4. Healthcare & Wellness

- Nursing & Allied Health
- Medical Practice (Doctors, Specialists)
- Mental Health & Counselling
- Physiotherapy & Occupational Therapy
- Nutrition & Dietetics
- Fitness & Personal Training

This category calls to those who are genuinely moved by the desire to help others heal, improve, or maintain their well-being. Healthcare careers suit people who excelled in Life Sciences, Biology, Physical Science, or Mathematics, and who combine scientific understanding with empathy and compassion. You likely have strong interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, the ability to remain calm under pressure, and genuine care for people's physical and mental health. Your interests probably include understanding how the human body works, staying informed about health topics, helping others through difficult times, or activities related to fitness and wellness. You're detail-oriented, responsible, and can handle the emotional demands of working closely with people in vulnerable situations. The essential combination here is scientific knowledge paired with a caring, service-oriented mindset.

Lindiwe's Journey: From Care Worker to Registered Nurse

Lindiwe Ngubane never planned to work in healthcare. After matric in Pietermaritzburg, she took a job as a care worker at an old age home, simply because it was available. But something shifted when

she helped an elderly patient through a difficult recovery. "I felt like I was making a real difference," she remembers.

The nursing staff noticed Lindiwe's compassion and encouraged her to pursue nursing. At 23, she enrolled in a three-year nursing diploma at Grey's Hospital School of Nursing whilst continuing to work part-time. The workload was gruelling, studying late into the night after long shifts, but Lindiwe was driven by purpose.

Her practical experience as a care worker gave her an advantage during clinical placements. She understood patient care beyond textbooks; she knew how to communicate with dignity, handle emotional situations, and work efficiently under pressure.

After qualifying, Lindiwe worked in a public hospital's emergency department, an intense environment that tested every skill she possessed. Five years later, she's now a unit manager in a private hospital in Pietermaritzburg, supervising a team of nurses and mentoring new graduates.

"Healthcare isn't just about medical knowledge," Lindiwe explains. "It's about empathy, resilience, and genuinely caring about people's wellbeing. If you can't handle seeing people in pain or don't have patience during difficult moments, this isn't the path for you. But if helping others heal gives you purpose, it's the most rewarding career imaginable."

Key Insight: Healthcare careers require both technical competence and emotional intelligence. Lindiwe's pathway shows that starting in a related role can clarify your calling and provide valuable experience.

5. Education & Training

- Teaching (Primary, Secondary, Tertiary)
- Corporate Training & Development
- Educational Technology
- Tutoring & Academic Coaching
- Special Needs Education

If you light up when helping others understand something new, when breaking down complex ideas into simple explanations, or when you see someone's confidence grow through learning, education is likely your path. This category attracts those who enjoyed a variety of subjects at school—whatever your passion subject was—and who have natural patience, clarity of communication, and enthusiasm for knowledge sharing. You possess the ability to adapt explanations to different learning styles, create engaging experiences, and inspire curiosity in others. Your interests likely include reading widely, staying curious about your chosen subjects, mentoring peers, or organising group activities. You're probably patient, encouraging, organised, and find deep satisfaction in others' growth and achievement. The key strengths are subject knowledge, communication skills, empathy, and the ability to create environments where learning happens naturally.

Ryan's Story: From Struggling Student to Passionate Teacher

Ryan Petersen hated school. Growing up in Mitchells Plain, Cape Town, he barely scraped through matric with a bachelor's pass. His teachers wrote him off as unmotivated. What they didn't see was Ryan's

struggles with undiagnosed dyslexia and a chaotic home environment.

A gap year working at a surf shop gave Ryan space to discover what he actually enjoyed: teaching youngsters to surf. He was patient, broke down complex movements into simple steps, and celebrated small victories. One of the parents suggested he'd make a great teacher.

Ryan enrolled in a teaching diploma at Cape Peninsula University of Technology, specialising in Physical Education and Life Orientation. University was challenging, but this time Ryan had support services and understood his learning needs. He graduated with distinction.

Now 29, Ryan teaches at a high school in Hout Bay. He coaches the rugby team, runs surf therapy sessions for at-risk youth, and specialises in supporting students with learning difficulties. "I remember what it felt like to be the kid everyone gave up on," Ryan says.

His unconventional background makes him relatable to struggling students. He teaches them that there are multiple paths to success and that understanding how you learn is as important as what you learn.

"Teaching isn't about knowing everything—it's about inspiring curiosity and meeting students where they are," Ryan reflects. "My struggles made me a better

teacher because I understand that every learner's journey is different."

Key Insight: Effective educators often draw from personal experience. Ryan's story demonstrates that facing educational challenges yourself can become your greatest asset in helping others learn.

6. Engineering & Manufacturing

- Civil & Construction Engineering
- Mechanical & Electrical Engineering
- Industrial & Production Engineering
- Quality Control & Process Management
- Renewable Energy & Sustainability

This is your domain if you're fascinated by how things are built, how systems work, and how to make physical things better, stronger, or more efficient. Engineering careers suit those who excelled in Mathematics, Physical Science, and Technical subjects, and who combine theoretical understanding with practical application. You likely have strong spatial reasoning, problem-solving abilities, attention to precision, and enjoy working with both calculations and tangible materials. Your interests probably include building or fixing things, understanding how machines work, following infrastructure developments, or working on hands-on projects. You're methodical, detail-focused, and get satisfaction from seeing theoretical designs become real-world solutions. The core combination here is mathematical aptitude, scientific knowledge, practical skills, and the persistence to refine solutions until they work perfectly.

Naledi's Path: From Factory Floor to Production Engineer

Naledi Motsoane grew up watching her uncle repair machinery at a manufacturing plant in Germiston. Whilst other girls played with dolls, Naledi was fascinated by how things worked. Her uncle let her

help with basic repairs, teaching her to respect machinery and understand mechanical systems.

After matric, Naledi enrolled for Mechanical Engineering at the University of Johannesburg. She was one of only three women in her class. "The first year was tough," Naledi admits. "Some lecturers doubted I belonged there. But I'd grown up around machinery—I understood it instinctively."

During her in-service training at an automotive parts manufacturer in Rosslyn, Naledi identified a bottleneck in the production line that was costing the company thousands in delays. She proposed a solution that improved efficiency by 23%. The company offered her a permanent position after graduation.

Six years later, Naledi is a Production Engineer, leading a team that optimises manufacturing processes. She's implemented several automation improvements and mentors young women interested in engineering through the Women in Engineering Programme.

"Engineering is about solving real problems that affect real people," Naledi explains. "Every time I improve a production process, it means products reach customers faster, costs decrease, and jobs become more secure. It's creative problem-solving with tangible impact."

Key Insight: Engineering combines technical knowledge with practical problem-solving. Naledi's story shows that hands-on experience and understanding how systems work in practice are as valuable as theoretical knowledge.

7. Finance & Professional Services

- Accounting & Auditing
- Financial Planning & Investment
- Banking & Insurance
- Legal Services & Law
- Consulting & Advisory

If you're drawn to working with numbers, analysing financial information, understanding regulations and compliance, or providing expert advice that impacts important decisions, this category offers your pathway. These careers suit those who enjoy Mathematics, Accounting, Economics, and Business Studies, and who value precision, integrity, and professional excellence. You likely possess strong analytical abilities, attention to detail, ethical standards, and the ability to interpret complex information and communicate it clearly. Your interests might include understanding financial markets, following economic news, problem-solving through analysis, or helping people make informed financial or legal decisions. You're probably organised, trustworthy, comfortable with responsibility, and appreciate structured, professional environments. The essential strengths are numerical literacy, analytical thinking, professional judgment, and the ability to earn and maintain trust.

Ayanda's Journey: From Bank Teller to Financial Advisor

Ayanda Mthembu took a job as a bank teller in Bloemfontein straight after matric because her family needed income immediately. She found the

work monotonous at first—processing transactions, helping customers with basic queries. But Ayanda noticed something: customers often asked her financial questions she couldn't answer.

Intrigued, she started studying towards an accounting certificate through correspondence whilst working full-time. The bank noticed her initiative and sponsored her further studies in financial planning. Ayanda worked during the day and studied at night, a gruelling schedule that tested her commitment.

Her breakthrough came when she helped an elderly customer understand their retirement options, spending her lunch break explaining different investment products. The customer later returned with their entire family, requesting Ayanda's advice. Her branch manager recognised her talent for making complex financial concepts understandable.

Today, at 31, Ayanda is a certified financial advisor with her own client portfolio at a wealth management firm in Johannesburg. She specialises in helping first-generation wealth creators—people like herself—navigate investments, tax planning, and retirement strategies.

"Many financial advisors come from privileged backgrounds and don't understand what it's like to start from nothing," Ayanda observes. "I understand my clients' fears and dreams because I've lived them. Finance isn't just about numbers—it's about helping people build security and achieve their goals."

Key Insight: Finance careers can start from entry-level positions. Ayanda's progression shows that continuous learning, professional certification, and genuine care for clients' financial well-being create advancement opportunities.

8. Social Impact & Public Service

- Non-Profit Management
- Social Work & Community Development
- Government & Public Administration
- Environmental Conservation
- International Development & NGOs

This category speaks to those driven by a desire to address social issues, advocate for communities, and create positive change in society. Social impact careers attract people who excelled in subjects like History, Geography, Life Orientation, or Social Sciences, and who have strong values around justice, equality, and community wellbeing. You likely possess empathy, cultural sensitivity, communication skills, and the resilience to work on complex social challenges that don't have quick fixes. Your interests probably include current affairs, social justice issues, community activities, volunteering, or understanding different cultures and perspectives. You're passionate about causes, good at bringing people together, and motivated by purpose rather than purely by profit. The key strengths here are compassion combined with practical action, communication abilities, cultural awareness, and the determination to create meaningful change despite obstacles.

Sipho's Story: From Community Organiser to NPO Director

Sipho Ndlovu grew up in Alexandria township, where he witnessed the impact of unemployment and inadequate social services. After completing a BA in

Social Development at Fort Hare University, most of his classmates pursued corporate jobs. Siphso chose differently—he returned to Alexandra to make a difference.

He started as a volunteer at a community organisation running after-school programmes for youth. The work was unpaid initially, but Siphso was driven by purpose rather than profit. He wrote funding proposals, organised community meetings, and built relationships with local businesses and donors.

His dedication caught the attention of a national NPO focused on youth development, which hired him as a project coordinator. Siphso's understanding of grassroots challenges and his ability to mobilise communities proved invaluable. He developed programmes that actually addressed real needs because he'd lived the reality.

Eight years later, Siphso directs a regional office managing youth development programmes across Gauteng. His organisation has helped over 3,000 young people access skills training and employment opportunities. The salary isn't corporate-level, but Siphso measures success differently.

"I could probably earn double in the private sector," Siphso acknowledges. "But every time a young person from the township gets their first job through our programme, that's worth more than any bonus. Social impact work isn't for everyone—you need to

be genuinely driven by purpose and comfortable with challenges. But if changing communities matters to you, it's the most meaningful career possible."

Key Insight: Social impact careers require passion, resilience, and genuine commitment to communities. Sipho's path demonstrates that starting as a volunteer, understanding grassroots realities, and building relationships creates opportunities in the sector.

9. Hospitality & Tourism

- Hotel & Resort Management
- Event Planning & Management
- Travel & Tourism Services
- Food & Beverage (Chef, Restaurant Management)
- Experience Design

If you're energised by creating memorable experiences for others, thrive in dynamic environments, and love the idea of working with diverse people and cultures, hospitality is calling you. This category suits those who enjoyed subjects like Consumer Studies, Tourism, Business Studies, or Languages, and who have natural warmth, service orientation, and adaptability. You likely possess excellent people skills, attention to detail in creating experiences, the ability to think on your feet, and a genuine enjoyment of making others happy. Your interests probably include travel, food, cultures, event planning, or creating special occasions. You're personable, energetic, detail-conscious about guest experiences, and can remain positive even when dealing with demanding situations. The essential combination is a hospitality mindset, organisational skills, cultural awareness, and the stamina to work in fast-paced, people-intensive environments.

Charlene's Path: From Waitress to Hotel Manager

Charlene Jacobs started working as a part-time waitress at a guesthouse in Stellenbosch during university holidays. She was studying law but found herself more excited about shifts at the guesthouse

than her coursework. She loved creating experiences for guests, solving problems on the spot, and the dynamic energy of hospitality.

After her second year, Charlene made a brave decision—she left law school and enrolled in Hospitality Management at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. Her parents were horrified, but Charlene knew she'd found her calling.

She worked her way up through various positions—front desk receptionist, reservations coordinator, assistant manager—at different establishments across the Western Cape. Each role taught her different aspects of hospitality operations. The hours were long and the work demanding, but Charlene thrived in the fast-paced environment.

A breakthrough came when she managed a challenging situation with a difficult guest complaint at a boutique hotel in Franschoek. Her professionalism and creative problem-solving impressed the general manager, who mentored her and recommended her for a management position at a new hotel opening in Hermanus.

At 32, Charlene now manages a 45-room boutique hotel on the Garden Route. She oversees all operations, from housekeeping to guest services to financial management. She's created a work culture where staff feel valued, resulting in exceptional guest reviews.

"Hospitality is about reading people, anticipating needs, and creating moments that matter," Charlene explains. "It's not just serving—it's crafting experiences. If you love variety, people, and problem-solving, and you don't mind working when others are relaxing, hospitality offers incredible opportunities."

Key Insight: Hospitality rewards those who genuinely enjoy service, can handle pressure with grace, and are willing to work their way up through various roles to understand all aspects of operations.

10. Trades & Skilled Services

- Plumbing, Electrical, Carpentry
- Automotive & Mechanics
- Beauty & Cosmetology
- Construction & Building
- Technical Maintenance

This is your path if you're practical, hands-on, and find deep satisfaction in mastering craft skills and creating tangible results through skilled work. Trades careers suit those who enjoy technical subjects, Design, or practical applications more than abstract theory, and who have good hand-eye coordination, spatial awareness, and mechanical aptitude. You likely possess problem-solving abilities in physical contexts, attention to quality and detail, and pride in workmanship. Your interests probably include fixing or building things, working with tools and equipment, understanding how mechanical or electrical systems function, or creating with your hands. You're practical, independent, reliable, and appreciate seeing the direct results of your work. The core strengths are manual dexterity, technical knowledge, problem-solving in practical contexts, and the commitment to continuous skill development in your chosen trade.

Kagiso's Journey: From School Dropout to Master Electrician

Kagiso Molefe dropped out of school in Grade 10, not because he lacked intelligence, but because classroom learning didn't suit him. He needed to work with his hands, to see practical results. His

father was furious, but Kagiso was determined to prove himself differently.

He found an apprenticeship with an electrician in Rustenburg through a family connection. The first year was tough—fetching tools, cleaning up, doing basic tasks. But Kagiso was learning every day, watching how experienced electricians diagnosed problems and implemented solutions. He studied electrical theory at night through a technical college.

His turning point came during a complex industrial installation where his creative problem-solving saved the project significant time and money. His boss recognised his talent and encouraged him to complete his trade test.

At 24, Kagiso qualified as a master electrician. He worked for a large electrical contractor for three years, gaining experience on major projects, shopping centres, office blocks, and residential estates. Then he leapt and started his own electrical contracting business.

Today, Kagiso employs six people, including two apprentices he's training the way he was trained. His business handles everything from residential installations to industrial maintenance contracts across North West Province.

"Trades aren't second-choice careers—they're skilled professions that the country desperately needs," Kagiso insists. "I earn more than many of my friends

who went to university, I have job security because skilled electricians are always needed, and I have the satisfaction of tangible work. When I wire a house, that family has safe electricity for decades."

Key Insight: Skilled trades offer excellent career prospects for those who prefer practical, hands-on work. Kagiso's story shows that apprenticeship, dedication to mastering your craft, and eventual business ownership create sustainable success.

11. Science & Research

- Laboratory & Research Science
- Environmental Science
- Agricultural & Food Science
- Biotechnology
- Academic Research

If you're driven by curiosity, love investigating questions methodically, and find excitement in discovering new knowledge or solving scientific puzzles, research is your calling. Science careers attract those who excelled in Life Sciences, Physical Science, Mathematics, or Geography, and who have a naturally inquisitive, analytical mind combined with patience for detailed work. You likely possess strong critical thinking, the ability to design and conduct experiments, attention to accuracy, and comfort with uncertainty and repeated testing. Your interests probably include reading about scientific discoveries, conducting experiments, understanding natural phenomena, or exploring how things work at fundamental levels. You're methodical, objective, detail-oriented, and motivated by understanding rather than immediate practical application. The essential combination is scientific knowledge, research methodology, analytical thinking, and the persistence to pursue answers even when progress is slow.

Dr Priya's Story: From Curious Student to Marine Biologist

Priya Chetty grew up in Chatsworth, Durban, far from the ocean, but became obsessed with marine life after a school trip to uShaka Marine World. Whilst

other students were excited by the dolphins, Priya was fascinated by the coral reef ecosystem and asked the guide endless questions about symbiotic relationships.

Her teachers noticed her scientific curiosity and encouraged her to pursue science at university. Priya enrolled for a BSc in Marine Biology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The coursework was demanding, particularly the advanced chemistry and statistics modules, but Priya's genuine passion carried her through.

During her honours year, Priya secured a research assistant position studying the impact of pollution on Durban's marine ecosystems. She spent days collecting water samples, analysing data, and documenting findings. The work was often tedious and unglamorous, but Priya found it fascinating.

Her research contributed to an important paper on microplastic pollution in the Durban harbour, which influenced local environmental policy. This success helped her secure funding for a PhD investigating coral resilience in warming oceans.

Now, Dr Priya Chetty lectures at UKZN whilst continuing her research. She supervises postgraduate students, applies for research grants, and collaborates with international scientists. The career isn't high-paying compared to private sector science roles, but Priya measures success in discoveries and conservation impact.

"Research requires patience, precision, and comfort with uncertainty," Priya reflects. "You might spend months on experiments that fail. But when you discover something new about how nature works, when your research helps protect ecosystems, that's incredibly rewarding."

Key Insight: Science research careers suit those driven by curiosity, comfortable with rigorous methodology, and motivated by discovery rather than immediate results. Persistence and passion are essential.

12. Transport & Logistics

- Supply Chain Management
- Aviation (Pilot, Air Traffic Control)
- Maritime (your background!)
- Freight & Distribution
- Urban Planning & Transport Systems

This category calls to those fascinated by movement, systems, supply chains, and the complex coordination required to get things and people where they need to be efficiently. Transport and logistics careers suit those who enjoy Geography, Mathematics, Business Studies, or Technical subjects, and who think systematically about networks, routes, and optimisation. You likely possess strong organisational skills, spatial awareness, attention to timing and coordination, and the ability to manage multiple moving parts simultaneously. Your interests might include travel, understanding global trade, following transportation technologies, mapping and navigation, or solving complex scheduling puzzles. You're practical, detail-focused about systems and processes, comfortable with responsibility, and find satisfaction in smooth operations and efficient solutions. The key strengths are systems thinking, planning and coordination abilities, problem-solving under constraints, and the capacity to manage complexity while maintaining safety and efficiency standards.

Bongani's Path: From Warehouse Assistant to Logistics Manager

Bongani Khumalo started as a temporary warehouse assistant at a distribution centre in Johannesburg after matric. The job was physically demanding—loading trucks, managing stock, working long shifts. Most people saw it as low-skilled work. Bongani saw it as a system.

He noticed inefficiencies—how poor organisation slowed down dispatch times, how certain routes were always delayed, how stock placement affected retrieval speed. During breaks, he asked the logistics coordinator questions about supply chain management and route optimisation.

The coordinator, impressed by Bongani's interest, lent him a textbook on logistics management. Bongani studied it thoroughly and started making suggestions for improving warehouse flow. Management implemented several of his ideas, reducing dispatch times by 15%.

The company sponsored Bongani to complete a diploma in Logistics Management through correspondence. He progressed from warehouse assistant to dispatch coordinator, then supply chain analyst, learning each aspect of the operation. He understood the importance of timing, efficiency, and coordination in moving goods from supplier to customer.

At 33, Bongani now manages logistics for a major retail distributor, overseeing the movement of millions of rands worth of goods daily. He

coordinates with suppliers, manages a fleet of 40 vehicles, optimises routes using software systems, and ensures on-time delivery to hundreds of stores across Gauteng.

"Logistics is the invisible career that keeps the economy moving," Bongani explains. "Every product in every shop got there through logistics. It's problem-solving, coordination, and efficiency. If you enjoy puzzles, systems, and seeing measurable results, logistics offers tremendous opportunities."

Key Insight: Logistics careers often start from entry-level positions but offer significant advancement for those who understand systems thinking, continuously improve processes, and pursue relevant qualifications.

Wrap Up

I hope that this process has helped make your initial career decisions. Remember that nothing is set in stone, and life will happen no matter what career you change into.

Over your 40 to 50 years of working, you will be faced with many challenges and decisions that will define who you become and what you will achieve.

But always pause a bit before making any career change and consider if you are chasing the correct prize.

I have had many different careers over the years; none of them were wrong, but only much later did I begin to understand the right choice for me as I moved into a more suitable and fulfilling choice. For me, it is now evident that I am within my selected niche for this season of my life, and I love what I do with all of my heart.

Monday mornings can and should be a time of joy, as we get up and prepare to go to work that will fulfil our dreams and complete who we are.

May you find your sweet spot one day, too.

Bruce wade