



# Inspiring Career Development

How counselors can increase students' self-awareness, identify interests, and support directional decisions

*Includes 2 career development activities to use with students*

**“We get students who walk in and say, ‘Tell me what classes I need to take.’”**

This quote came from a community college counselor we spoke to last year. Do you ever hear anything like this from your students?

If not, great. But maybe you have some students who are less direct and less blatant about their lack of direction. Maybe you have students who are ‘keeping their options open’ or just haven’t really decided what they want to focus on yet.

It’s understandable. These are big decisions. But if students are avoiding them unnecessarily, it could lead them down the wrong path or delay their arrival on the right path.

## Helping students make a decision about their career

If we can help students understand themselves and make decisions, without them feeling boxed in, there’s a good chance they’ll improve their career prospects.

In this e-book, we’ll share ideas on how to help students do two things with their education and career:

- 1. Understand the need for making decisions instead of delaying them.**
- 2. Make better quality decisions—which comes from having the right information.**

We’ll explore why and how you can help students make decisions based on their authentic selves: the real ‘them’.

Instead of what they think they should do or drifting into something that might be OK, they can get clear direction on what they want to do.

And when they have a direction, they have the beginnings of a plan. Which makes it easier for them to take more meaningful steps.

## Taking practical steps to get started

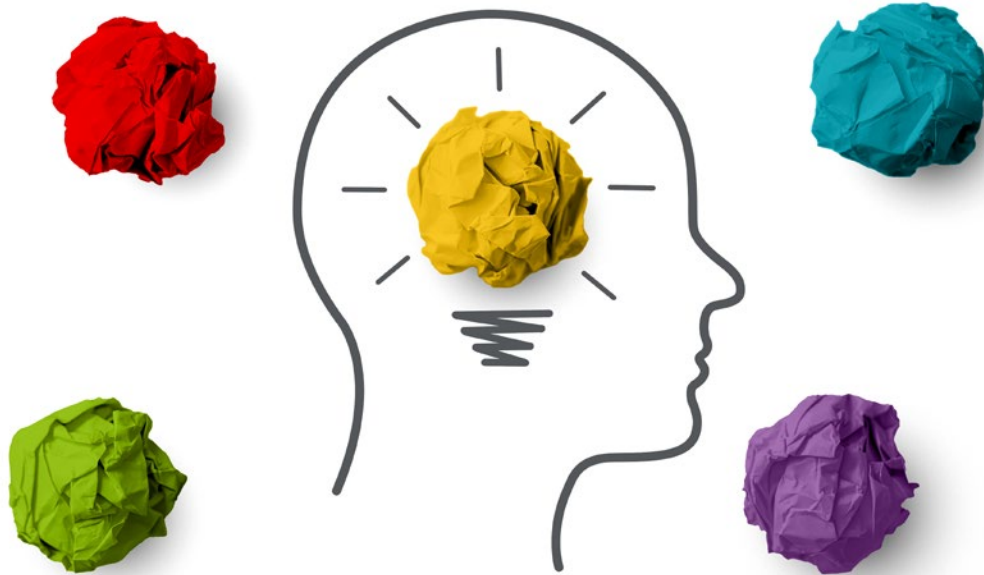
At the end of this e-book, you’ll find two activities that you can use with your students to help them focus on choosing a career.

The activities are:

- How to get career ideas.
- How to write a career mission statement.

Talk them through with your students, share them (they’re easy to print or email), and encourage students to complete the tasks.

It makes for a useful discussion point for your next meeting.



## What is career development?

Career development can be defined as:

'...the process of self-knowledge, exploration, and decision-making that shapes your career. It requires successfully navigating your occupational options to choose and train for jobs that suit your personality, skills, and interests.'<sup>1</sup>

Which means the first step in finding a career that suits a person's personality, skills, and interests must be this:

**Figuring out and understanding a person's personality, skills, and personal interests.**

It sounds obvious. But by focusing on these three areas, students gain the confidence to move forward in finding a more fulfilling and rewarding career path.

All three things are crucial. However, if you only focus on one, **interests** are a great starting point because they're engaging—and the effectiveness of interests is supported by plenty of research.

When a person understands their interests properly, and what those interests mean in terms of mapping them to a future career or job, they can start to build a plan. This leads to an increase in their probability of finding long-term career satisfaction.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/>

## The role of self-awareness

People are carrying a lot of invaluable information without even knowing it. What we want to do is help them access it and understand it by being self-aware.

## What are the advantages of self-awareness?

The top advantage from our research into self-awareness was understanding your own reactions and motivations.

The next three areas that people reported as advantages to being self-aware were:

- Better management of self/others/choices.
- Adapting behaviors.
- Improving relationships.

All of these relate to what we do every day in the workplace and in our careers. So, students who gain self-awareness earlier in their lives have an advantage when entering the workforce.

Our research findings showed that after gaining self-awareness, respondents:

- Made better decisions (61% of respondents said this).
- Were more confident leaders (64%).
- Felt more confident in their contributions at work (67%).
- Capitalized on their strengths more (85%).

They also said that self-awareness had been most helpful in the following areas:

- Dealing with change (47%).
- Managing/leading others (54%).
- Coping with stress (54%).
- Working with others in a team (56%).





## Closing the skills gaps

A 2021 report by Deloitte and The Manufacturing Institute found that the 'US manufacturing skills gap could leave as many as 2.1 million jobs unfilled by 2030, which could cost the US economy \$1 trillion.'<sup>2</sup>

The report says:

- **Entry-level production roles aren't being filled.** High school graduates and workers displaced from other industries are prime candidates, but applications are low, despite manufacturing's relatively high starting wage.
- **Middle-skill roles aren't being filled either.** The top five highest projected job openings in manufacturing are:
  - Assemblers and fabricators.
  - First-line supervisors.
  - Inspectors, testers, sorters, samplers, and weighers.
  - Helpers—production workers.
  - Welders, cutter, solderers, and brazers.
- **Digital skills will be crucial to the future of manufacturing**—but much of the current workforce doesn't have those skills.

Another report—*Closing the Skills Gap in 2022: How is America Doing?*—notes that cybersecurity, aerospace, and the skilled trades have seen huge growth recently.<sup>3</sup> Those areas have opportunities for talent that's workforce ready.

Headlines and data like these can make for alarming reading. Skills shortage is a real issue, and we need to help students gain the skills to fill those roles. Whether it's a four-year degree or a credential, we can help people find the fields and pathways that are right for them.

Technical skills are beyond the scope of this e-book.

But employability skills? They're crucial for everyone entering the workforce, regardless of sector, job type, and educational attainment.

Let's look at **the employability skills gap**.

<sup>2</sup> US manufacturing skills gap could leave as many as 2.1 million jobs unfilled by 2030 - Modern Materials Handling (mmh.com)  
<sup>3</sup> skillsgapp.com

## Employability skills

In *Closing the employability skills gap*, Deloitte writes, 'Advances in AI, cognitive computing, and automation mean employers should equip workers with more than technical skills. Skills such as creativity, leadership, and critical thinking might be more important than ever.'<sup>4</sup>

Their article cites a Chronicle of Higher Education 2013 survey and says:

'Half of those [employers] surveyed said they had trouble filling vacancies in their companies, noting that **even though most applicants had the technical skills to do the job, many lacked the communication, adaptability, decision-making, and problem-solving capabilities needed to be successful.**'

In his 2015 study, *The Growing Importance of Social Skills in the Labor Market*, David J. Deming of the National Bureau of Economic Research, wrote:

'In this paper, I show that high-paying jobs increasingly require social skills. Technological change provides one possible explanation. The skills and tasks that cannot be substituted away by automation are generally complemented by it, and social interaction has - at least so far - proven difficult to automate (Autor 2015)... human interaction requires a capacity that psychologists call theory of mind - the ability to attribute mental states to others based on their behavior, or more colloquially to "put oneself into another's shoes" (Premack & Woodruff 1978; Baron-Cohen 2000; Camerer et al. 2005).'

And in **The Lost Workforce** from 2019, PwC and the World Government Summit wrote:

'...technical competencies, creative problem-solving, innovation and collaborative skills are important to success. PwC's Future of Work: A Journey to 2022, McKinsey's Future of Organisations and Work, and Bain's Workforce of the Future, are just a few studies that link adaptable technology-based capability, soft-skills development (such as innovation and creativity) and complex problem-solving, with employability.'

The message is clear:

### Employers want people with essential skills.

This is especially true in our digital-automation-AI era. Essential skills, like decision-making, inclusive behavior, and effective leadership, cannot be replicated by non-humans.

Employers want those skills. But can they be learned?

Yes.

Essential skills like these come from personal development, which starts with self-awareness. Along with interests, they're integral to students' career development plans.

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<sup>4</sup> Closing the employability skills gap | Deloitte Insights)

# The case for interests

We said that interests are vital to any career development plan. Why?

It's because of their link to motivation.

We define interests as an inclination toward subjects that students easily connect with.

Professor Paul J. Silvia explores the role of interest in human motivation and emotion in his research paper *Interest—The Curious Emotion*, and his book, *Exploring the Psychology of Interest*.

Professor Silvia says, “A good case can be made for viewing interest as an emotion... Interest appears to have...a stable pattern of cognitive appraisals...a subjective quality...and adaptive functions.”

Essentially, interests relate to characteristics, environments, and goals.

In conjunction with Silvia's definition of interests, it's the emotional characteristics that lead individuals to prefer certain activities, contexts, and outcomes.

Researchers and authors Rounds and Su explain, “interests [are] more stable across all age periods before middle adulthood” and “the peak of interest stability also occurs much earlier in life than the peak reported for personality traits...Interests describe a person in relation to the environment, which...appears to enhance their predictive utility.”<sup>5</sup>

While personality traits are worth exploring and studying from a self-awareness lens, interests are the guiding light. Interests are the optimal factor to consider in career exploration.

This is the case for interests playing a significant role in career success.

However, interests aren't simply what a person likes. There's more to it than that.



<sup>5</sup> Rounds, James, and Rong Su. “The Nature and Power of Interests.” *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 2014

# How to identify interests

Basketball, cooking, and contemporary jazz are all interests. But they're not enough to define a career direction (although they could inform some exploratory ideas).

Interest, in a career sense, is more about what lies behind 'what people like'. It covers:

- The kind of things people find satisfaction in doing.
- What they value.
- The environment they like to be in.
- The sort of people they prefer to be with (at work).
- Whether or not someone is process or results oriented.

It's about finding an occupational context for the interests a person has.

But because students and graduates often lack real-world experience in their desired work and careers, they don't know which roles and fields could satisfy their intrinsic interests.

They don't know how a person like them will fare in different roles. So, they need a connector.

They need to see how someone with their interests and attributes is likely to succeed in different occupations. Something that says, 'This career is likely to be a good match for you, based on your interests and your work-style preferences, because other people with similar preferences have said that they're satisfied in this career.'

This is the essence of the **Strong Interest Inventory**<sup>®</sup> assessment, developed by Professor E.K. Strong.

## Turn interests into career development

The *Strong Interest Inventory* assessment helps individuals identify their work personality by exploring their interests in six broad areas:



These areas are often referred to by the acronym RIASEC.



The *Strong* assessment then breaks the RIASEC areas into 30 specific areas of interest that can be directly related to fields of study, careers, and leisure activities.

In addition, it helps describe an individual's personal style preferences in five areas:

- Work style
- Learning environment
- Team orientation
- Leadership style
- Risk taking

The *Strong* assessment supports people with:

- **Choosing a college major**—Students can uncover their career interests and identify which areas of study are appropriate or required for a particular field. Students become more engaged because they are focused on classes relevant to their goals.
- **Career exploration**—By identifying personal interests and how these relate to different occupations, it helps to open up the world of work to first-time career seekers and people considering a career transition.
- **Career development**—People's self-awareness is heightened and through their results, they have a deeper understanding of individual strengths and blind spots, including work preferences and orientation to risk-taking.

## Summary: Making it personal

Hopefully, interests and self-awareness are areas you'll choose to focus on with students so they can:

- Find the pathways most likely to fulfill them in the long run.
- Identify the essential skills they have—and the ones they need to develop—to help them secure employment.

To finish, here are a couple more findings on the significance of interests in education and career success.

## The role of interests in attainment, persistence, and grades

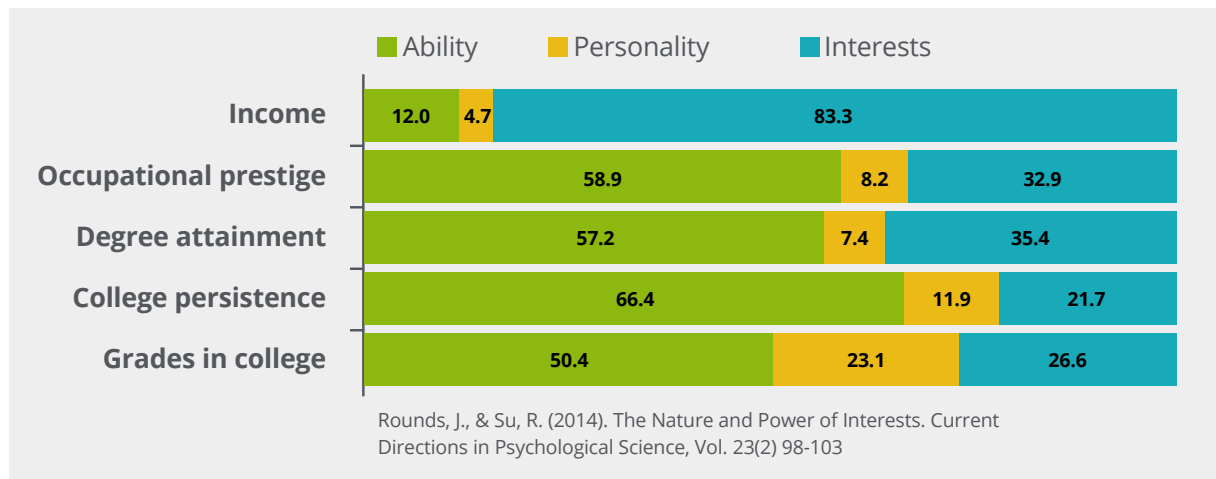
In their research, Rounds and Su found that, when compared with personality and ability, students' interests are:

- 35.4% predictive of degree attainment.
- 21.7% predictive of college persistence.
- 26.6 percent predictive of grades in college.

Rounds and Su add that because interests are stable and powerful, they are “suitable for use in academic and career guidance and prediction.”

## The role of interests in income, degree attainment, and grades

In the same research, the table shows that interests are much more predictive of future income than either ability or personality.



When it comes to degree attainment and college grades, ability is the most predictive factor. But interests aren't insignificant—not by a long way.

## Try these with your students

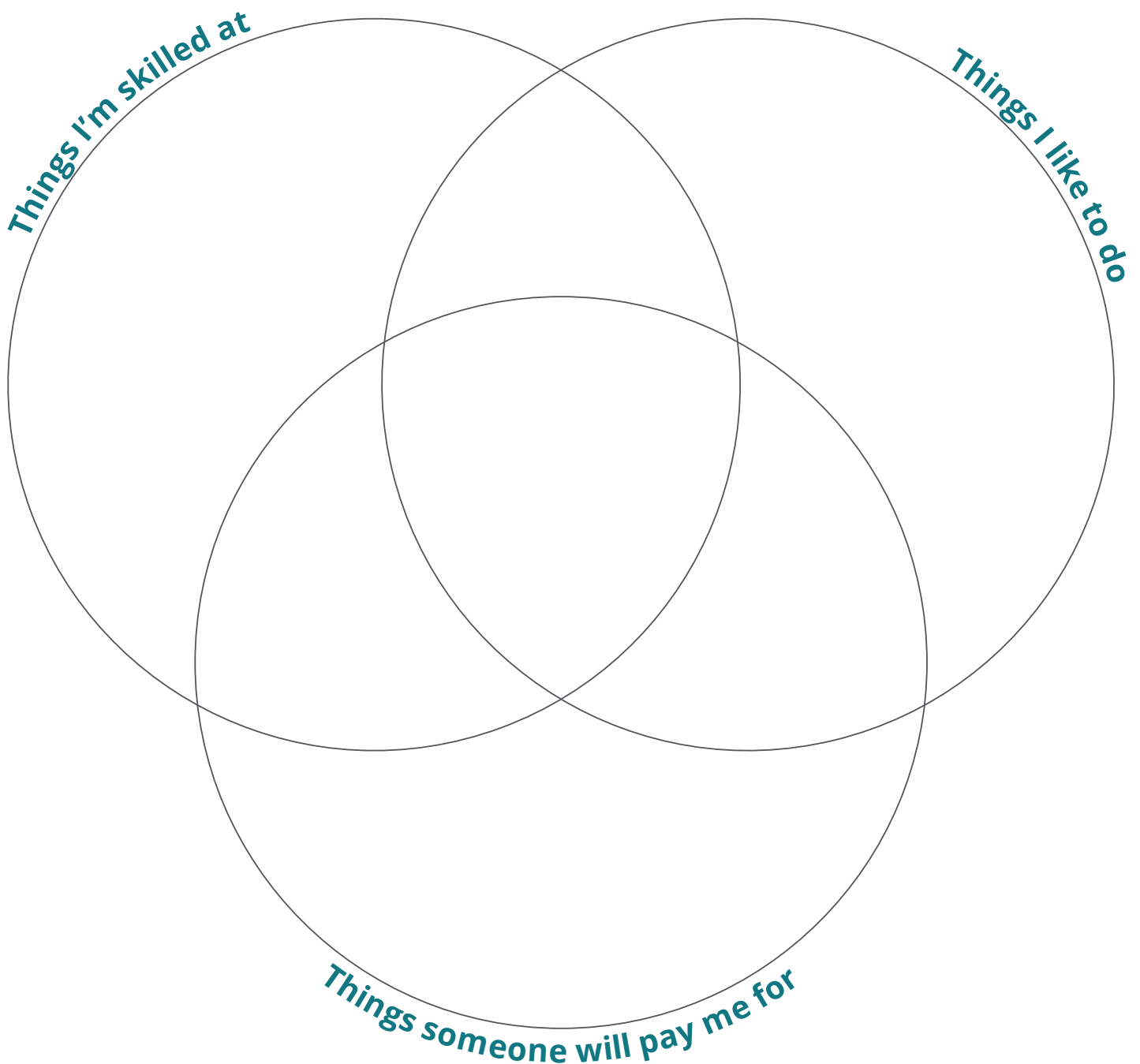
Check the activities on the following pages to help students start thinking about careers that suit them best and how to write a career mission statement.

## ACTIVITY 1

# How to get ideas for your ideal career

A 3-way occupational Venn diagram is a great way to get some ideas and find career options that suit you best.

Use the diagram below (or draw another one where you have more space) and follow the three steps on the next page to see where your skills, interests, and payment opportunities intersect.



## STEP 1

### In circle 1

Add the **talents or skills** you think you have. If you need help, reach out to parents, friends, co-workers, or others who know you well. Often, they'll come up with things that you're good at that you might not think of yourself.

### In circle 2

Add anything you **enjoy doing**—whether it's work related or not. Basically, it's things that you're interested in doing, or would like to do if money and time weren't holding you back.

### In circle 3

Add the times where someone has **used your help**. Think about jobs you've had or volunteering you've done. It could be small, like mowing the grass, or something bigger like helping a friend code an app.

## STEP 2

Now look at each of the intersections of two of each of the circles:

- Things I like to do + things I'm skilled at
- Things I like to do + things someone will pay me for
- Things I'm skilled at + things someone will pay me for

Write down any **careers or jobs that come to mind** for these intersections.

For example, if you're skilled at cooking and enjoy planning parties, how about a job working for a catering company? Or if you enjoy video games and you're skilled at finding mistakes, how about testing software?

Be creative, have fun with this. The idea here is ... ideas.

## STEP 3

Finally, look at the intersection of all three circles.

Are there jobs or careers that would fit into all three of these circles?

If you get stuck at the intersections or at the intersection of all three, share what you've written in each circle with someone who knows you well (preferably someone who's been in the workforce for at least a few years).

Their experience means they'll have met more people and become aware of a lot more, and this can inspire great ideas. One of the reasons we don't think about a certain career is just that we didn't know it existed.

## ACTIVITY 2

# How to write a career mission statement

writing a career mission statement helps you clarify what kind of work you think you'd like to do – and why. There are three steps to this process:

1. Finding **who you are**
2. Finding **what matters to you**
3. Finding **what satisfies you**

Let's explore each so you can write your mission statement.

## PART 1: Who are you?

As individuals, we're constantly getting information and making decisions. But did you know we do this in different ways?

Some people prefer big-picture information. Others prefer detail. Some people naturally use objectivity and logic to make decisions, while others use personal values and concern for others.

The combination of these two things is a huge influence on your personality type. It also indicates the type of company and type of work that might resonate with you.

Here are four combination statements. Which one fits you best?

1. **I like to get things right.**  
(Details, precision, accuracy, and efficiency matter to me.)
2. **I like to do practical things that make people's lives better.**  
(Providing support matters to me.)
3. **I like to make a difference to people.**  
(Helping people fulfil their potential matters to me.)
4. **I like to gain knowledge and be the best at what I do.**  
(Competence, in myself and others, matters to me.)

You now have a good indicator of the essence of your personality. If your career, role, or working environment satisfies this essence, you're more likely to feel fulfilled.

## Want to know your personality type?

The information on this page is based on the MBTI® (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®) assessment. It's a self-awareness tool that helps you understand your personality type and preferences.

## PART 2: What matters to you?

Answer the three questions below.

Don't just think about work. Also think about hobbies, jobs, or activities that you really enjoy or felt you were good at.

The key to this is to **do it quickly**. Don't overthink it. Five minutes maximum is all you need.

### 1. What is most important to you about work?

### 2. What do you value most about what you do?

### 3. What do you want to accomplish through your work?

Got your answers? Now combine them with the **I LIKE** statement you chose from Part 1 and write in the space below. For example:

*I like to make a difference to people. It's important for my work to have a positive impact on people in some way, and to use my creativity and empathy to help people. Ideally, I want to work with people who are positive and open-minded. I'd thrive at a company that appreciates work-life balance and that I can be proud to tell others that I work for.*

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### Why does this make an effective statement?

By combining **what you want** from work with **who you are** as a person, you do two things:

- Clarify what matters to you.
- Understand your authentic self.

Authenticity at work has a direct impact on our well-being, our productivity, our energy levels, and our satisfaction.



# Inspiring Career Development

Want to learn more about how interests and self-awareness can help students in their career paths?

Visit [themyersbriggs.com/education](https://www.themyersbriggs.com/education)

If you have a question or would like to get in touch, just complete the form at the bottom of the page.

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