

ASK THE SONIC COACH (Q&A)
Career Advice for Aspiring Health Researchers
September 2007

From a Grade 9 Student: *I'd like to ask a question, but the answer's probably simple and don't want to look like an idiot.*

SONIC Coach: First of all, there is no such a thing as "stupid" questions. You've probably heard this before and don't really believe it. But please let me reassure you: If you have a question about something, chances are, MOST people have the same question. But how can I help if I don't know what's really on your mind?

Second, I will not publish anyone's name unless they specifically ask me to do so. It *would* help if you told me whether you're a student (and grade), teacher, etc., because then I can make my comments specific to your age and stage in life. But you don't have to.

Finally, if I see that many people are asking similar questions, I will reword or combine them. So you may not recognize the question as yours (because of the wording), but you'll have an answer anyway. The important thing is that you ASK.

From a student entering Grade 12: *A few of my classmates sound like the person you described in your introduction—they know exactly what they want to be: Doctors. Biologists. Engineers. Most of my friends don't really know. I mean, how can we, really, if things are changing so much, like you say? But we have to make some decisions this year.*

SONIC Coach: This is a very good point. In my many years of coaching and mentoring students I have observed that the people who have a clear conviction about what they will do in their professional life are the EXCEPTION, not the rule. Most of us have a general idea about what we're good at, what we enjoy doing, and what we're interested in. But we don't feel we have a "calling" or "vocation." This is normal, and need not be a cause for worry.

The fact that you are thinking about this at all tells me that you have already taken an important, first step: You recognize that YOU are responsible for your own choices, and want to learn how to plan and manage your career.

From a Guidance Counsellor: *I've been working in the guidance field for quite some time and keep up with new developments as best I can. But I still find myself unsure of the definition of some of the basic terms, particularly the word "career." Some authors use it when referring to a specific field or profession—as*

in “a career in science”—while others used it to mean something much broader. Can you clarify this for me so that I can use it correctly with my students?

SONIC Coach: The contemporary view among career professionals in the West is that a “career” is a “lifestyle concept that involves the sequence of work, learning and leisure activities in which one engages throughout a lifetime.”¹ By this definition, a career encompasses more than a job or a profession. Rather, a career is unique to each individual and unfolds throughout her/his life.

This is what I usually mean when I use the word. However, there will be situations in which I’m referring to something narrower, because the word seems most appropriate. “Emerging Careers in Health Research” is a case in point. No other word seems to work as well, and readers understand its meaning from the context.

¹ National Steering Committee for Career Development Guidelines and Standards, 2004, p.139.
http://www.aacc.org.au/mediaReleases/AACC%20Briefing%20Paper1%20_NS%20Project_Overview.pdf

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