Deciding what you want to do with the rest of your life seems to be a daunting task. Yet in reality, you only need to decide what you want to do with the next several years of your life. Maybe you will fit into this new career and keep it forever, but more likely, this choice will often expose you to new opportunities that will spring-board you into yet another career path. So keep an open mind about your future as you explore your career path of today, because you are not stuck if you decide that it isn’t for you.

To get started in your career exploration, the first step is to simply get started. You need to understand that choosing a career is a long-term progressive process that you will fine-tune as you gain more knowledge. The process involves exploring education, training and jobs that fit your interests and skills. In order to find the right career path for you, it is important to understand yourself. In order to do this, it is recommended that you identify your accomplishments, take assessments, understand time management and then create career goals. Understanding what is important to you and your future is the first important step to career exploration.

Now that you have a better understanding of what you are looking for, begin the process of exploring careers. Watch career videos and view occupational trends and wages, research employers, explore work options, and find resources and assistance. Create a portfolio of your findings. Take notes on the different career options to better understand how each career fits into your personal profile. Keep in mind that no job will meet all of your interests and preferences, so you may have to make some trade-offs.

Hopefully, now you have a better understanding of the careers you want to pursue and what types of skills will be necessary to achieve this career goal. At this stage, you need to identify your education and training needs, find the necessary education and training, and explore internships and work-based learning. At this point, you need to decide if the education and training is something that you are committed to pursuing. If not, you may need to go back to the career exploration phase and find something more suited to your current knowledge and skills.

Once you have the education and skills necessary to land that job, it is now time to start the job search. Keep in mind that you may not land the job of your dreams to start with. If you know what your goals are, you can find jobs that will best put you in a position to get you to those goals. Be realistic in your expectations. It is okay to dream big but be prepared to start at a lower level than you anticipated. Consider pay expectations, willingness to relocate and opportunities for advancement when considering job offers.

Once you have your foot in the door, you can re-evaluate your career path. Explore other jobs within the company that you find interesting and challenging and determine what skills you need to gain to attain that level of accomplishment. As you gain more knowledge and experience, it is likely that your career goals will change. Ultimately, you may have to go back and revisit previous steps in the career exploration path to re-evaluate your goals.