



I Could Do Anything If I Only Knew What It Was: How to Discover What You Really Want and How to Get It

Barbara Sher , Barbara Smith

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If you suspect there could be more to life than what you're getting...if you always knew you could do anything if you only knew what it was, this extraordinary book is about to prove you right!

A life without direction is a life without passion. The dynamic follow-up to the phenomenal best-seller *Wishcraft, I Could Do Anything If I Only Knew What It Was* (the *New York Times* Bestseller) guides you, not to another unsatisfying job, but to a richly rewarding career rooted in your heart's desire. And in a work of true emancipation, this life-changing sourcebook reveals how you can recapture "long lost" goals, overcome the blocks that inhibit your success, decide what you want to be, and live your dreams forever!

You will learn:

- * What to do if you never chose to be what you are.
- * How to get off the fast track--and on to the right track.
- * First aid techniques for paralyzing chronic negativity.
- * How to regroup when you've lost your big dream.
- * To stop waiting for luck--and start creating it.

I Could Do Anything If I Only Knew What It Was: How to Discover What You Really Want and How to Get It Details

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Gwen says

Started off incredibly strong--I read 2/3 of it in one sitting (2am on a weekday at a 24-hour McDonalds when I was mourning over a rescinded job offer and felt doomed to a life of unemployment and living with my parents) and was encouraged by its message.

Very meaningful during a 2am bout of unemployment-related depression: "Allowing bad feelings to hang around too long can cloud your judgement. When we're depressed, happiness looks stupidly short-sighted. We take the long view, think the long thoughts--looking far into the past and far into the future. We have what I call those 'what does it all mean' thoughts. It's hard to remember at those times that your view of reality isn't accurate. No matter how justified this view may seem, particularly if your entire life has been upended, *despair and bitterness are always the result of blurred vision*. While you can't ignore painful feelings, you can limit their time--and their time is up for today. You'll deal with them again tomorrow morning." (199)

But as the book progressed, either I lost enthusiasm for the topic or the chapters had the same information just repackaged, it seemed to lose strength.

So much of the book focuses on harnessing the past (especially childhood--I don't really remember much about the specifics of my childhood to do enough of Sher's exercises) to impact the present. She also recommends addressing each concern head-on, writing down the reasons why you think you can't do something or why something is impossible. I didn't actually write down my answers, but even a quick run-through in my head was helpful.

Keep in mind that this book is nearly 20 years old, and its age is painfully obvious in any discussion of technology and employment. (Seriously: "...personal development is the real reason you should be working in the first place" (185) is a naive way of looking at employment these days. I want a job to be able to survive--preferably not in my parents' basement. Getting any personal development out of whatever job I'm lucky enough to land would be like finding a unicorn.) Also, there are a few instances where I question her analysis of gender relationships and the role of gender in figuring out one's life plan. And religion. Is it possible to write a book on "self improvement" without including, even ever so subtly, quotes from a religious text?

The chapter that clicked with me was Chapter 6: "I Want Too Many Things; I'm All Over the Map." In it, Sher describes the differences between *scanners* (Or people who "want to taste everything. They love to learn about the structure of a flower, and they love to learn about the theory of music. And the adventures of travel. And the tangle of politics. To scanners, the universe is a treasure house full of a million works of art, and life is hardly long enough to see them all." (102)) and *divers* (Or people who "delight in the depths," (108) like musicians, mathematicians, scientists, artists, and professional athletes.)

I'm definitely a scanner, and it was very gratifying to be told that (at least by this one author) it's perfectly okay to be interested in many things! "Our culture respects specialists. People aren't called 'Renaissance men' anymore; they're called 'dilettantes' or 'jack of all trade!'" (101) "If you're a scanner, *you have extraordinarily special and valuable skills*. You love what is new, and you don't suffer from fear and indecisiveness.** You're highly adaptable to new cultures; you're so flexible you can turn on a dime. You're

a lighting-fast learner, curious about anything you don't already understand; you like and respect all kinds of thinking. Although you may be unwilling to dedicate yourself to one path, you don't lack discipline or have a low IQ. On the contrary, you're dedicated to learning all that you can, and you're intelligent enough to delight in all that you learn." (102-103)

**I might disagree on this one!

Especially these days, when I'm terrified that I will never ever be gainfully employed with anything resembling a career path, it was nice to read that "*you are bigger than any job you'll ever have. You need to know this when no interview turns into a job... The real you is still there, but these challenges to your ego have clouded your sense of yourself. What you need is an identity recovery project*" (174)--what so many of my friends who have previously been unemployed swear by.

Other tidbits:

The importance of action: "Most inaction isn't solely because of indecision--it's because of fear. But every time you do something that scares you, and you dare to do it, your self-esteem goes up a few degrees. ... *You're a success every time you face down fear.*" (21)

Using your "escape dream" to figure out what you want in life: "That escape dream holds a powerful clue to something you really need. ... Whatever in your life is missing, wherever a blank spot exists, it shows up in this fantasy. ... We should all search our escape dreams because they send clues about what's wrong with our lives. And then we should do something about what's missing. *Because if you don't use that information to improve your life, you're using escape dreams to help you avoid life.*" (51)

On the productivity of frustration: "Frustration is supposed to create action, not make you give up. We all need to learn how to handle frustrations so we can stick with things until we have some capability; that's how to develop self-confidence." (112-113)

Stephanie says

I picked this book up on a whim, since I still, at the age of 39, haven't figured out what I want to be when I grow up. It was the perfect choice! I loved the no-nonsense, plain talking way she wrote this book. She's an actual career counselor, and you can just HEAR her debunking all your internal resistance strategies! There are lots of practical exercises, and if you do them, you can't help but feel like you have a better understanding of yourself, your likes and dislikes, and a different way of approaching your career obstacles.

The book is structured with each chapter dealing with another obstacle to finding our best career match: can't get off the fast track (and the associated money), re-entering the workforce after a major life change, having no interest in anything, sabotaging yourself, etc. The one that most resonated with me was the chapter called "I Want Too Many Things; I'm All Over the Map." I've always said that I wished I was really good at just one thing, rather than being pretty good at a lot of things. I found out a name for this - I'm a "scanner." I'm a quick learner, easily adaptable, and I love what is new. Although our culture values the "divers" - those who dedicate their entire lives to just one thing - there is a lot of value to being a scanner. It's actually a freeing thing to be rather than a limiting thing. Think Leonardo da Vinci and Benjamin Franklin! She gives the very practical advice that "if you want to do a lot of things, you can do them all." (either in sequential

careers, in hobbies, or in finding the very rare career that combines many different interests - such as a writer).

I only wish I could have some in-person career meetings with her. I am sure she'd cut right through all my excuses and waffling and the next thing I'd know - I'd be living in the Himalayas or something crazy, and loving it!

Zarya Rubin says

Proceed with caution: this book helped me to quit my job and change my career! Seriously, it is a very powerful, insightful, honest analysis of what might be holding you back from finding true career satisfaction. Through detailed breakdown of different personality types, you can be on a very enjoyable road to self-discovery and a brighter, happier, more fulfilling future! A great book!

Nina says

Considering this is something I really struggle with right now, and have for the last few years, this book was right up my alley. While it told me exactly what professional career advice I had already received, that of "just go and do something because that is the best way to figure it out", the added value came of helping me understand how and why.

It also helped me understand where this uncertainty and being stuck came from, some things I already had gotten explained to me, others which were new. I also see myself in a new and more positive light, having identified with certain 'types', and why if not done in excess it can be good to think life through and check if you are going where you want to go.

I've not done a great deal of the exercises yet, some seem impractical or aren't explained well enough for me, but others certainly have merit.

I got stuck when I started on this book, because I stopped after a few chapters and thought that I'd have to solve a certain thing before I can get onwards. Don't do that. Work through the whole book, and then return to the point where you feel you are at. Pick the chapters that appeal to you, since they aren't a fully linear buildup.

Tatyana Naumova says

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Emmala says

I found this not only easy and enjoyable to read but very beneficial! The exercises, though at times tough, were fun and enlightening. I would definitely recommend this book to anyone feeling stuck in their careers, or in decision making about a career, and to anyone who has been putting off doing what they really love out

of fear.

Vasyl Shymanskyi says

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Elena says

I am one of those people who used to had great career or at least that's what I thought. But in the last two years some weird dissatisfaction thoughts started showing its ugly face, so the first thing I did was change the company. I wrongly assumed the problem was that the position in that particular company was no longer good for me. Being an ENFP I needed to constantly learn new things and develop myself or I would die from boredom. But this company had nothing new to offer anymore.

Moving from company to company in the next two years I realized the problem lied in another place. I no longer felt fulfilled at my position. This realization combined with the fact the company I was working for at that time went to bankruptcy so I was left without job anyway. What a good chance to start on my new path to....if only I knew what! Here is how I came across this book. I had already read another book by Barbara Sher (the book about scanners) so I thought this one will be as good at least.

The book starts with general overview of the idea that something is stopping us from the realization of what do we really want. Once that idea is explored the author proceeds further into discussing what we can do to overcome those obstacles that stop us from going after our dream career. Separate chapter is provided for each possible obstacle discussed by the author.

I come with rather mixed feelings about this book. On one hand it does provide some self-analysis assistance and can be a good start to your new career discovery. On the other hand I find it has way too much self-help spirit in it, and even though it does provide a lot of motivation and support, at one point you start feeling as a lost soul who went to visit a healing group where the leader constantly repeats you can do good, you are doing good, but you see no result no matter what. Some of the exercises provided are not quite practical either. For example, the author refers to a group of friends as an excellent way to help you on many occasions in the book (called 'brainstorming' in the traditional world). There is nothing wrong with it if only you had good friends to get along with who wish to share their time to your troubles.

At the end I did not really come any closer to what I really want compared to when I started the book. I simple quiz site as Sokanu does way superb job than this book. I'd recommend to readers reach out for this book only if they have deeper psychological issues and are not quite aware about their interests. It can serve as a good motivator and kick up your ass to think further. But, to find the real answer reach in another direction - try Sokanu website (the paid account is worth it!), Holland codes, MBTI or another personality assessment. The more you know about your personality the closer you will be to the real clue of what do you want to do with your life.

Anna says

Wow! I had to read this book for a course and had no idea just what nuggets of truth it contained. If there was a 3.5 I would give it to this book. I can't give it 4 or more as the layout made it so hard to read.

This book is one of the things responsible for deciding to take a risk and live my dreams and it's really happening! I wanted to start a book group and I did it! I wanted to have my own classes and teach in a school part-time and I do! I wanted to make friends with people who I usually wouldn't meet and I have! And you reading this, are probably one of them :)

I highly recommend this book to those a bit discouraged in life and for those on the cusp of realising or re-realising what it REALLY is they want to get out of, and give back to, in life.

Amy says

I am one of those people who always thinks I'm not doing what I should be doing--that I have a bigger, better life out there I haven't grasped yet.

This book doesn't say anything groundbreaking BUT it totally organizes your ability to think more clearly on the topic. It actually gives you the mindset to be able to fix your situation.

The author has a ton of exercises for the reader to write out; one of them is writing down everything that made you happy when you were 5 years old; another one is writing down a time line of what you've done at past ages and predicting what you will do at 30, 35, 40 and so on. If you actually do what she talks about you'll begin to delve into your desires and work on a plan for achievement instead of just sitting miserably in the background wishing for things you think you can't have...

Ellen says

I checked this book out of the library, and would love to add a copy to my personal collection. I did not read the whole thing word for word, so I feel a little guilty saying that I've "read" it; but then, it's not meant to be read from cover to cover. The suggestion is to read the first three chapters, and then choose to read the chapters that you think will help you the most. It's designed to help you discover and acknowledge your dreams and then to act upon them. It is full of ideas, usually in the form of written exercises, to help you think through what's keeping you from taking action toward your life purpose. It also has story after story of different people's challenges and how they overcame them. I liked the writer's style. She seemed to know exactly where I'm coming from. Her tone was not condescending or patronizing, but rather full of energy that helped me feel confident in my ability to take action. I will be checking this book out again anytime I need a boost.

Linda says

Ah what a funny and embarrassing title! On my quest to figure out what I want, I saw a blogger mention this book by title and I was instantly intrigued.

First three chapters are written to everyone and after that it's divided by personality. Chapter 6, written for people who don't know what they want because they want too many things had me pegged. (I double majored in biology and philosophy and minored in computer science.) I'm scanning through the other chapters since it doesn't pertain to me.

Chapter 6 particularly spoke to me. Title: "I Want Too Many Things; I'm All Over the Map."

"You are a born scanner - you're a person who delights in the astonishing, unending variety around us."

"Scanners want to taste everything. They love to learn about the structure of a flower, and they love to learn about the theory of music. And the adventures of travel. And the tangle of politics. To scanners, the universe is a treasure house full of a million works of art, and life is hardly long enough to see them all."

"If you are a scanner, you have extraordinarily special and valuable skills. You love what is new, and you don't suffer from fear and indecisiveness. You're highly adaptable to new cultures; you're so flexible you can turn on a dime... Although you may be unwilling to dedicate yourself to one path, you don't lack discipline or have a low IQ. On the contrary, you're dedicated to learning all that you can, and you're intelligent enough to delight in all that you learn."

Avel Rudenko says

The book begins by suggesting our career indecisiveness stems from childhood, and assumes we were all bombarded with messages from our family & friends as to what we should do in life -- and that all along we've simply been trying to be what others want us to be. That may be true to some degree, but the author seems too adamant that that is the root cause. The other thing I found off-putting is that the author uses one exercise, early in the book, in which the reader imagines his/her dream job -- your ideal job. Whatever you envision as being the ultimate great job. Well, isn't that why we're reading the book -- because we don't know what our dream jobs are? After that exercise, and one more in which the reader fine-tunes their dream job, the author writes, "Look who just figured out what she wants." It seemed an oversimplification, to say the least. There was one part I found somewhat helpful, and that was the section about "meaningful work" -- making the reader examine his/her idea of what that is. There may have been a statement here or there that was a good thought point, but overall the author seems to make very bold statements, yet I found myself wondering what her credentials are. I also wasn't fond of her support for BIG PHARMA and applauding drug-taking and medicating for every little mishap or period of depression in our lives.

Manal Saad says

I got the chance to listen to the audio version of this book last week. It was the perfect timing as I have been going through a lot of questioning about the future of my career and considering a drastic change. It was insightful and very helpful. Unlike most of self-help authors, Barbara Sher says it like it is. There's no sugar coating here or fake-it-until-you-make-it talk. It has a realistic approach towards finding one's goals and dreams. We lose sight of our original goals with our hectic schedules and the need to balance everything in this life. In addition to that, we discover new things about ourselves. As we grow we change and hence everything changes, our dreams, goals and our needs. That is perfectly normal as long as one knows what he/she wants in the end.

I want to get my hands on a hard copy of the book as I intend to dedicate some time to do the exercises in the book.

I highly recommend the book for the those who are considering a career change or feel lost and can't put their fingers on what they want to do with their lives.

Josephine says

I decided this is a bad time in my life to read this book. It's a fine enough book with lots of words of encouragement and motivation. See, the thing is, I need a book right now called "I could do anything if only I wasn't pregnant." or "if only I didn't have 3 little kids," or, "if only I had the energy," etc. You get the idea. I actually do know what I want to do, now just isn't the right time for me.

This book put me through a range of emotions. First I was irritated because the author was trying to make me resent my parents and family for turning me into a failure. Then I was irritated because I felt like the author was encouraging me to leave my husband and kids behind to follow my own passions and be selfish. Then I was irritated because I decided I didn't need the authors help after all!

Ok, so that wasn't a range of emotions, it was mainly just one emotion.

No, really though, this is a motivational book that I think could help a lot of people get on the right track. I liked her idea of getting up and getting going instead of just telling yourself how wonderful you are. I agreed with her there. There is a lot of great stuff in this book and I might pick it up again someday.
