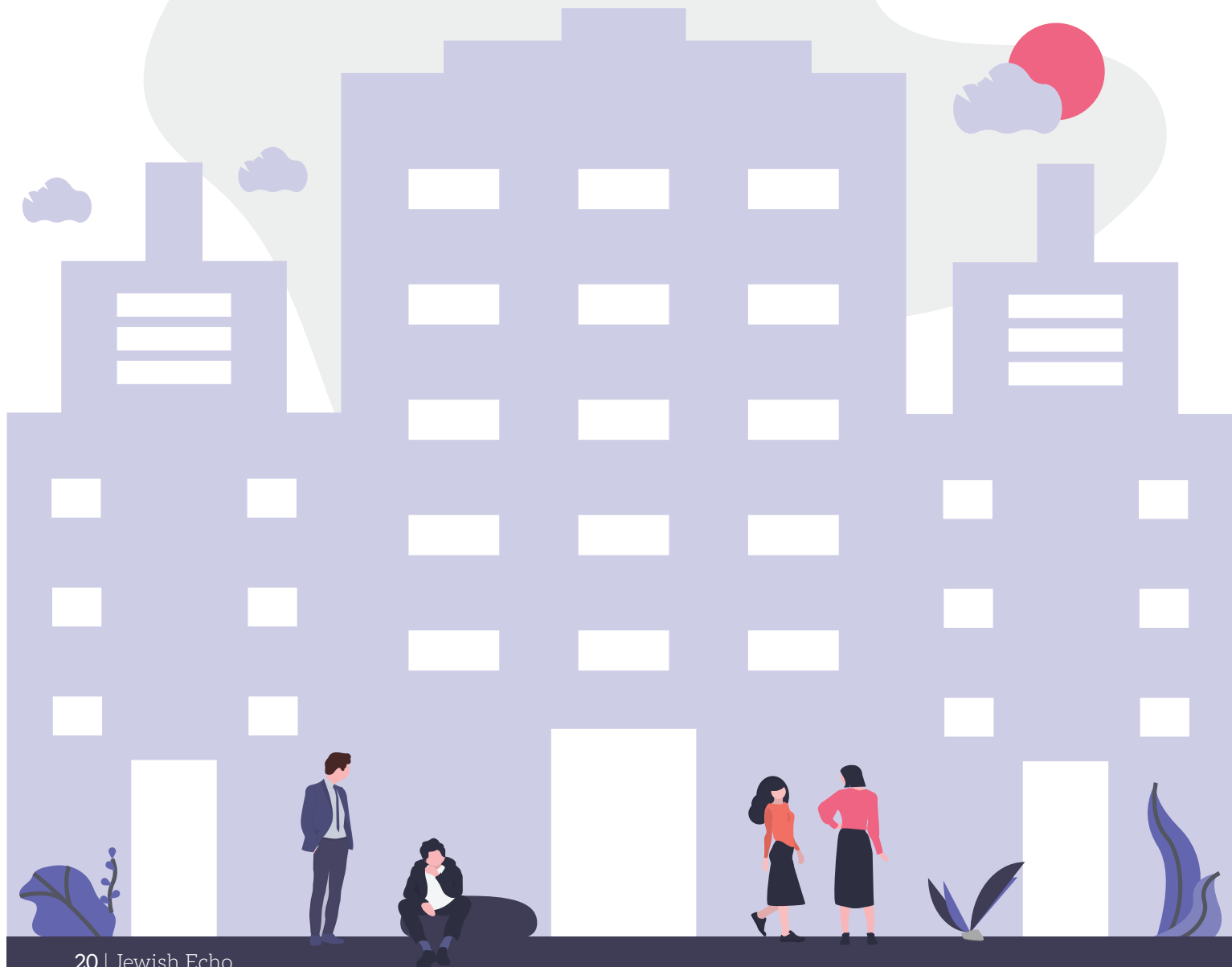


TAKING THE FEAR OUT OF CHOOSING A CAREER

SANDY ELLER



write these words just one day before my youngest is due to come home from seminary and find myself facing a jumble of mixed emotions. I am excited and joyful - my baby is coming home! - but swirled in with all that happiness is an element of trepidation. For me, the prospect of a daughter returning from seminary is a lot like jumping off a cliff.

Allow me to explain.

From the time you enroll your child in preschool, the steps on the ladder of progress are well-defined: preschool, elementary school, high school, and for many of us, seminary for girls and *beis medrash* for boys. For the girls, especially, landing on the tarmac in JFK or Newark means that the future looms large and the time has come to follow a direction that may be different from those of their friends.

Having been down this road with my three older daughters, I have seen girls who have had no idea how to choose a career path and no one to guide them in that decision. While it may seem logical to consider our children – whom we deem mature enough to get married - adult enough to choose an occupation, the reality is that a vast majority of them don't have the vision, objectivity, or knowledge of the career world to make that decision on their own.

FINDING A PATH

Lawrence resident Adele Dubin found herself facing a conundrum several years ago when her daughter returned home from seminary.

“I saw how she was making decisions,” Adele says. “She was focused on the short term and how quickly she could finish school. She jumped on the bandwagon of what everyone else was doing without looking inwardly to see who she was and what she would enjoy.”

The process made no sense to Adele, especially in a day and age when most couples in the Jewish community need two incomes to survive. She couldn't help but wonder how the same parents who agonized over finding the perfect high school and seminary for their daughters were letting them choose college programs that were on point from a hashkafic perspective but not from a career standpoint.

“How were we not paying attention to this?” Adele reflects. “I could see how they were making decisions, flip-flopping all over the place without really getting anything out of the programs they chose. They were wasting time and not feeling good about themselves. Basically, it was a train wreck.”

From her own experience, Adele understood that there were several elements that anyone making a career choice needed to consider, such as analyzing interests and skill sets, setting out long-term goals, and understanding the full gamut of employment opportunities. Having left an ambitious career to raise her children more than a decade earlier and contemplating a return to the workforce in a way that would be more meaningful than taking another corporate job, Adele teamed up with Natasha Srulowitz. Together they founded WayFind Careers to guide clients towards productive, rewarding careers that were

well-matched to their talents and interests.

“We all know the typical jobs like OT and PT, but there are so many other things these boys and girls can be doing,” observes Adele. “We are trying to educate them about who they are, what they bring to the table, and how to use the abilities Hashem gave them while showing them what is out there and what they can be doing daily. It is so important to enjoy what you are doing to feel good about yourself. We need to educate people about themselves and what jobs are out there so they can choose wisely.”

Even parents who are fully engaged in their children's career choices may not be aware of all of the potential job possibilities that exist in today's world, many of which do not require a master's degree. Adele notes that there are many professions with solid earnings potential and has steered clients towards positions such as EKG technicians and hearing aid specialists, and fields such as product management, digital marketing, mental health, ABA therapy, industrial psychology, insurance, data analytics, cybersecurity, and other high-tech areas. Her own daughter got an online bachelor's degree from Touro College and went for a 12-week boot camp program in the field of UX design. She is already at work and earning a salary while many of her friends are still in school.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

WayFind's process begins with an assessment and the Highlands Ability Battery, an online natural ability test which objectively assesses and measures an individual's natural capabilities in over a dozen areas. After reviewing the results, Adele meets with clients to discuss the findings and understand what they mean.

“We use the test results indicating their



natural abilities as our foundation,” explains Adele. “After that, we blend in their interests and goals. What kind of lifestyle do they envision? Do they want flexibility? Are they expecting to earn a big paycheck? We have them take us down the road of their dreams and explore what gives them satisfaction in their lives.”

The Highlands Ability Battery is just one of many tools that can guide a person to a satisfying career choice. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is probably the best-known personality quiz for identifying traits including spontaneity, confidence levels, creativity, sociability, and willingness to try something new. There are also numerous free online tests that can help a person better understand themselves, an important step in choosing a prospective field that best meshes with their unique preferences and skill sets. Some exams even offer a list of possible career choices based on the test-takers’ results.

Of course, there are other ways to chart a path towards a rewarding profession, many of which are low-tech. While introspection doesn’t always come easily, taking the time to sit down with a pad of paper and pen to create a simple handwritten list of personal strengths and weaknesses, as well as likes and dislikes, can be an effective tool in the march towards a satisfying career. Since a variety of factors can often color our opinions of ourselves, it can be helpful to ask friends, family members, former employers, teachers, or school staff for their unbiased perspectives on what skills one can bring to the table.

For those who are zeroing in on a particular

job, it can be helpful to speak with people who are already working in the field to gain a broader understanding of what life is truly like in the trenches. Working as an intern, both paid or unpaid, can also be a valuable investment of time, giving you a first-hand preview of what day-to-day life is like in a particular job before making a serious investment of time or money in a specific career choice. In addition to providing invaluable work experience that can be listed on a resume, it can also yield excellent job-related references and an inside track to future paying jobs and advancement opportunities.

CHANGING TIMES

Career-wise, today’s Jewish community presents a unique set of challenges. It wasn’t all that long ago that four-year college was the norm, with a significant percentage of yeshivah boys taking advantage of night courses as they worked their way towards a bachelor’s degree. In my own time at Queens College, I found myself in classes filled with Bais Yaakov girls and other members of the Orthodox Jewish community, many of whom spent four years finding their respective niches and going on to pursue careers in fields such as computers, accounting, speech, and law.

Today, the situation is different. Secular colleges are a far cry from what they were a generation ago in our liberal society, leaving many to contemplate other educational options. Our Bais Yaakov system is producing a large percentage of graduates who want their husbands to stay in yeshivah for as long as possible, making it more important for

our girls to find lucrative careers than ever before. With girls starting to date as soon as they come home from seminary, many cannot afford to invest four years in college discovering what field of study most appeals to them. While accelerated programs that get young adults into the workforce as quickly as possible are a viable and necessary solution to that problem, it is crucial to step back, do some serious thinking, and take concrete steps to pinpoint suitable career choices to ensure the best possible outcome.

Things are even more complex for boys, many of whom are so focused on their yeshivah studies that they don’t even begin contemplating employment prospects until their late twenties, with several small children and mounting financial obligations. While they may be bright and have much to offer career-wise, many are too buried in bills and parenting responsibilities to invest adequate time in schooling at this time in their lives.

“They just want the short-term job because they have bills to pay,” says Adele, who estimates that approximately 40 percent of her clients are men, many of whom come to her when they are already in fairly dire straits. “I try to explain to them that this decision will shape the rest of their lives. If they invest the time, they can have a job where they will be happy and have a great salary.”

The results can be disheartening, and Adele says she has seen too many cases where dissatisfaction at work has spilled over to *shalom bayis* problems. The stories extend to girls who picked careers because they were popular choices at the time, only to find out later on that they are miserable in their chosen profession.

JUMPING OFF THE CLIFF

There are no one-size-fits-all answers to ensure that our sons and daughters will find jobs that are tailor-made for them. As with everything else in life, *siyatta diShmaya* is the key to that particular puzzle, but there is plenty of *hishtadlus* that can be done on our part.

For starters, the time to start having the job discussion with your kids is not when they return from seminary or are winding down their yeshivah careers. By the time your kids are in high school, they likely have some idea of their areas of interest. Take note of their strengths and preferences and have frequent conversations about career opportunities that seem well-suited to them. If at all possible, encourage your children to take CLEP exams



in high school, while the coursework is still fresh in their heads. College-level material may be a bit above their current coursework levels, but many high schoolers do well enough to pass, earning them college credits at bargain prices. Consider having your child take AP courses in high school as well if they are offered. Those extra college credits can be a lifesaver, especially in accelerated programs, paving the way to a degree from a respected institution in a relatively short amount of time. Finally, it is always helpful to speak with that cousin, neighbor, parent, professional counselor, or the guy in shul who has his finger on the pulse of the job market and always seems to know everything. Have your child spend some time chatting with them to identify potentially meaningful employment opportunities.

Currently, in the Eller household, we are engaged in this phase for the fourth and final time. I feel fortunate to be married to someone talented in navigating the college maze. Having a solid number of CLEP credits behind her, and having completed several online courses, my daughter is on track to get her bachelor's degree from a highly regarded college next summer so that

she can move on to her master's in her chosen field without delay.

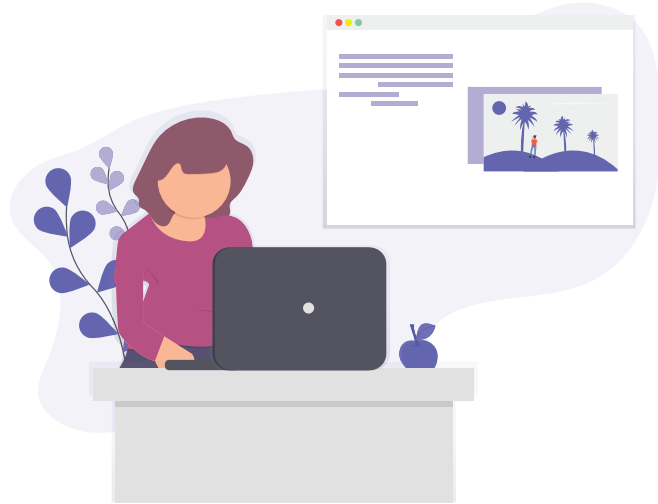
Although I have done this with all of our other kids, it does feel as if my baby is jumping off a cliff from childhood into adulthood as she embarks on this next chapter of her life. I would like to think that the time and effort spent ensuring that she maximizes her potential will serve as a parachute, guiding to a safe landing in a

career and a life where she can truly shine, both at the job and throughout her life.

Because, after all, isn't that what we all want for our kids? | JE

.....

Sandy Eller is a freelance writer who writes for numerous websites, newspapers, magazines and many private clients. She can be contacted at sandyyeller1@gmail.com.



TEN THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING A CAREER

1. PERSONAL INTERESTS

Your hobbies and favorite activities can offer insight into possible professions that will keep you engaged and feeling accomplished.

2. SKILLS

Think of subjects you have studied as well as your people and life skills, all of which are components to future success.

3. TALENTS AND STRENGTHS

Think of areas in which you excel. Feel free to ask others for their input as well. Utilizing your inherent talents can help you shine in your chosen career.

4. PERSONAL STYLE

Consider your thought and behavior

patterns, including whether you are a follower or a leader. Do you prefer to work alone or in a group setting? Think about how those factors and others could influence your future success.

5. VALUES

Know your priorities, including what matters most to you and what parameters are negotiable.

6. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Understand what kind of investments, both educational and financial, are required to get you up to speed in a particular career.

7. JOB POTENTIAL

Explore potential career choices and verify that there are openings and

growth opportunities in that field.

8. FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS

Crunch the numbers to make sure that a potential career can produce a salary that meets your needs.

9. LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Certain careers are location-specific. Research possible geographic considerations to ensure that they are suitable for you.

10. WHY DO I WANT TO PURSUE THIS CAREER?

As you hone in on a particular field, ask yourself why it appeals to you and if it is something that will ultimately be rewarding and satisfying.

Source: EHL.edu