

*Francina Harrison on  
Deciding Who You Are Before  
Deciding What You Will Do*

Since August 2003, our economy has witnessed severe layoffs, plant closings and overseas relocations for white and blue collar jobs. As a college graduate you may be wondering, “In this depressed labor market, is it possible to have the “American Dream” and be successful in the workforce and in life?” Absolutely! The proof is in the person. Look at Oprah, Bill Gates, Denzel, Beyonce, Tavis Smiley, and Sam Walton. They’ve found the way. In a nutshell, they focused on their potential, not the economic indicators. Successful people discovered who they were before they decided what they would do. It’s deeper than a job with these folks. It’s about delivering their passion, purpose, personality, and potential.

I’m convinced that the individuals listed above no longer have to go to work everyday. They work hard, but their careers have become another dimension of their personalities pushed beyond the “average” functioning levels. Successful people consistently strive to produce at 100 percent utilizing a true blend of purpose and occupation. But what about the rest of us? Can we attain that level of synergy in our professional career and life? Of course we can. However, understand that success does not come without cost. We must make a personal commitment to explore ourselves at deeper levels than we ever imagined. We must develop the authentic desire to uncover our wants and needs, in

order to let go of old habits and gain new experiences. I challenge you to find out who you are before deciding what you'll do.

I learned the following seven steps to self-discovery as I tackled the real world after graduating from Norfolk State University in 1997 with a master's in social work. I hope the seven steps help you discover who you are in work and in life.

*1. Accept Who You Are:* The ability to be comfortable in your own skin, and to find your own niche, is a must for today's competitive world. There is no one on this planet just like you. Learn to embrace and accept your originality, your body composition, the hue of your complexion, your voice, your essence, and your professional style. Once you have accepted "who you are," you can begin to share "what you bring" to the workforce, relationships, and the world. Your unique "brand" is a selling point that you must deliver in all of your networking experiences. Be the pacesetter who drives class and style. Set your standards and leave the crowd behind. Power Statement: Failure Happens When You Try To Become Something You Are Not.

*2. Tap into Your Gifts and Talents:* If you don't like something, you won't do it very well. In order to find your "fit" with a particular employer, you need to explore your interests, desires, natural gifts and acquired talents. Consider the following questions and write your responses. In what areas of your life have you received compliments with minimal efforts? What do you enjoy? What relaxes you? What would you do for free? How do you feel when you are doing that activity? Do you "dream out loud?" How would you describe your ideal environment? If all of your debts were paid, and you could do anything in the world, what would you be? Your answers may open the door for you to discover the best fit for your personality in the work environment. For instance, I enjoy helping people discover themselves. I need flexible, relaxed environments, open spaces, vibrant colors, limited supervision, and the ability to "go with it." I would not be successful working in the Patent and Copyright Office for

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