

IS YOUR GUT OR GRIT THE SECRET TO CAREER SUCCESS?



JAYNE NORTH
EXPLAINS

I know from talking to hundreds of young people that growing up today is really challenging. There are huge expectations from many different sources.

Career trajectories are seldom smooth. We know a job for life is virtually extinct and we hear the statistics that young people can expect nine career changes during their working life. So, combined with exponential changes to the labour market, just how do young people make informed and successful career choices?

The media has referred to young people as the ‘Oliver generation’ accusing them of always wanting more and wanting it on a plate! Teachers bemoan the ‘spoon feeding’ and ‘teaching to test’ in the classroom and with more competition than ever for places at university and in the job market, how do we best support young people so they can make well-informed, realistic decisions?

As an advocate of learner-owned decision-making, I appreciate the wider benefits of this model in terms of learner commitment, accountability and ultimately resilience if plans don’t turn out as expected. I had never considered the significance of the unconscious mind in the career decision-making process.

Let your gut be your guide

Research from Canada (Report: *When it comes to pursuing your goals, let your unconscious be your guide* 2011), suggests you should trust your gut instinct when setting goals because your unconscious is smarter than you think. Sarah Moore, a Canadian researcher, believes the unconscious mind can be a great motivator and help you achieve success with long term aims.

‘We recognised that a lot of our decision making and a lot of our feelings are based on things that we are not really aware of. In our study we looked at how our unconscious feeling about objects in the environment influence how we pursue goals.’ Sarah Moore, University of Alberta

The research found that people find themselves responding unconsciously to things that support these long-term aims. Sarah Moore said that as for long-term goals *‘in some sense we are never finished.’*

If we accept this and apply it to the career decision-making/planning process it would allow people to recognise and celebrate successes as they steer towards their ultimate career goal.

It might also contribute to a greater understanding of what constitutes success:

‘Success is a journey not a destination. The doing is often more important than the outcome.’ Arthur Ashe

Sarah Moore added:

‘It’s a cycle: we take a small step, we succeed, we feel good about it; therefore, we continue to feel good about the long-term goal. This process makes us more likely to take the next small step to that goal.’

Conversely if people encountered setbacks with career planning, trusting instinct along the way can help;

Sarah Moore again:

‘You don’t hate the objectives related to the goal because that goal is very important to you in the long run. Your unconscious is telling you ‘now is not the time to pursue the goal’. You just failed; let’s leave it alone for a while.’

How your unconscious mind views that ‘fail’ is also significant, if you can see it in a positive way, as a step in the right direction, you can learn from it.

‘You have only failed if you have given up, until then, it’s learning.’ Anon

Career bounce-back-ability

Grit and resilience are talked about a lot today; many successful people have attributed their success to it.

Resilience is often described as bounce-back-ability, so many profitable entrepreneurs, powerful politicians, victorious sports people, accomplished actors, magnificent musicians will admit to having failed time and time again before achieving their success. *‘I’ve missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I’ve lost almost 300 games. 26 times I’ve been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I’ve failed over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.’* Michael Jordan

When delivering careers education I ask students to complete this phrase:

Sometimes you win, sometimes you ____

They always say **lose**, I ask again at the end of the ‘growth mindset’ lesson and they say **learn!** I go on to reinforce the message by introducing the F.A.I.L acronym



reminding students sometimes it's good to fail, as it's a First Attempt In Learning!

In supporting young people on their career journey it's inevitable they will encounter hurdles along the way. How do we support them to develop the grit to get them through, unlock the potential of their unconscious mind and trust their gut instinct to steer them towards success? Career coaching might be the answer!

Career coaching for success

I have been an advocate of coaching for 20 years. It's transformational and supports people to maximise potential by providing an opportunity for reflection and deep thinking. It provides high challenge within an environment of high support, allowing people to take risks and find their own solutions. Career coaching is a conduit for acting on gut instinct and trusting your unconscious mind. When it is carried out transparently between two people in rapport then it becomes a safe place to think big, day dream and ultimately raise career aspirations. A coaching methodology can be a very powerful tool when delivering careers education.

Are you a daydream believer?

If you are sceptical about the effectiveness of tuning into your unconscious mind then consider the Russian gymnasts who have mastered the art of daydreaming to produce some of the best gymnasts in the world. By reviewing traditional training methods and changing the emphasis, so that 25% of their time was in practice and physical training and 75% in mental training, visualising the successful completion of the routine and winning gold, this eventually enabled them to effectively manifest the success into external reality.

In my experience, the brain cannot make a distinction between something that is real and something that is

vividly imagined. By using a coaching framework we could work with young people to imagine their dream job and how this would make them feel. Repetition will heighten the emotions and intensify the positive feelings which will go into their implicit, long-term memory. Subsequently they can draw upon this to support them when they face challenges/setbacks and it will keep their spirit strong and their focus firmly on the longer term goal.

Moreover by keeping the coachee in the driver's seat they are more likely to be committed to the decisions they make and ultimately more accountable for their actions whether successful or not. In my experience if a young person made the decision to do something largely upon their own volition and then 'the wheels come off' they would bounce back quicker and demonstrate an increased resilience, than if that decision had been influenced by someone else, another reason why coaching is so effective in career planning.

Gut or grit?

It would be foolhardy in these challenging times to leave important career choices to chance, but what about doing the research, getting all of the information and then allowing ourselves the freedom to take a chance or a calculated risk. I believe that, in these uncertain times gut instinct is an unconscious form of intelligence and an important asset, which could inform effective, accountable, career-decision making. Give it a go, listen to your inner voice, trust yourself and remember you have your own best interests at heart! What have you got to lose? as Henry Ford said:

'The only real mistake is the one from which we learn nothing.'

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