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AUTHOR	Zytowski, Donald G.
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ABSTRACT

Interest assessment typically consists of a person indicating whether he or she likes, dislikes, or is indifferent to a task. A more appropriate technology for career interest assessment is needed and one such program is presented. Interest assessment in career counseling has been based on the concept of the "discriminant bridge" developed by Strong in the 1920s, which requires assumptions regarding the homogeneity and stability of occupations. This concept, still employed in the premier interest inventories, is in danger of obsolescence. Whereas vocational psychology has been interested in job satisfaction, industrial psychology has employed a parallel concept of the "predictive bridge" to assess potential success in a field. However, occupations today have become more diverse, have more complex conceptualizations, and workers are clearly not as homogeneous as they were when earlier instruments were developed. A test outcome providing the title of an occupation (e.g., "engineers") may not provide much useful information to a client. Persons should be matched either to organizations or to persons in specific organizations, rather than to occupations. Some test case data are offered here, along with suggestions for further research on the concept of person-to-person match. Contains 30 references. (EMK)

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Person-Matching:
Career Assessment for the 21st Century

Donald G. Zytowski

Ames, Iowa

Paper presented at the ERIC/CAPS Conference, "Assessment '98,"

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Person-Matching:
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The typical scenario for the use of an interest assessment in career counseling goes something like the following: "Here is a list of activities. Go through them and identify those that you like, that you are indifferent to, and that you dislike," or, "mark the one of the three that you like most and the one you like least ." After the inventory has been scored, the results are reported in language like "Your interests have (or your code has) been compared with those of people in a variety of occupations, and yours are most similar to those of (for our example) engineers" The counselee may respond, "OK, I'm going to apply to engineering school"

The key phrase is "similar to," or, in more technical language, the "discriminant bridge," as Goldman (1971) called it. Parenthetically, the discriminant bridge is in contrast with the predictive bridge so essential to industrial psychology's parallel application of assessment in employee selection. Vocational psychology has always been interested in the criterion of job satisfaction, while industrial psychology has traditionally pursued the criterion of success.

The discriminant bridge in interest assessment was the breakthrough innovation of E. K. Strong (1927) in the late

1920's. While his student Cowdery (1926) found it possible to differentiate between several occupations on the basis of their interests, Strong apparently developed the methodology that compared the interests of an individual with the several interests that differentiated each of a number of occupations from each other.

The discriminant bridge is also the basis of the person-environment fit model used in Holland's Self-Directed Search, as well as the Dawis & Lofquist (1984) Theory of Work Adjustment.

To employ a discriminant bridge, as interest inventories do, requires two conditions: homogeneity of the characteristics under examination, and stability of those characteristics.

Homogeneity.

Homogeneity means that a group must have distinctive characteristics in common. To say that one looks more like a Dane than an Italian, for example, is only possible because people of Danish heritage commonly tend to have blond hair and blue eyes, and people of Italian heritage tend to be dark haired and have brown eyes. It is not possible to say that anyone resembles an American on the basis of hair and eye color, because Americans are much less homogeneous in this respect.

Strong and his successors do not speak directly to the issue of homogeneity of occupational criterion groups, although it is implied in Harmon, Hansen, Borgen & Hammer's discussion (1994, pp. 111-120) of how items are selected for individual

occupational scales. Kuder (1977) measured homogeneity directly by an index formed from the proportions of any criterion group marking each of the several response patterns to his triadic item form. He found department store salesmen the least homogeneous of all the occupations he tested, and that the interests of women in occupations tended to be more homogeneous than men.

Lack of homogeneity within occupations can be demonstrated in other ways. Mount and Muchinsky (1978) using data from an early version of Holland's (1994) Self-Directed Search found 24% of persons employed in a number of occupations failed to score highest on the scale identified as prime for their occupations. Zytowski & Hay (1984), using cluster analysis techniques, found as many as 20 percent of five selected groups of women professionals did not score highest on their own scale of the KOIS.

As well, some occupations have become more diverse or are conceived more complexly. Engineering, one of Strong's first scales, consisted of only six recognized specialities in his time. The Classification of Instructional Programs (US Educational Department, 1994), the Federal governments' official compilation of college majors, currently lists 36 engineering specialties. In the face of so many options within the occupation, one must ask whether there is real utility in telling career counseling clients that they have the interests of engineers.

Many jobs now comprise flexible groupings of tasks that do

not fall under a single conventional title, such as product manager, executive assistant, customer service representative, etc. Such titles are not known to the official Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT; U.S. Department of Labor, 1991) but can be observed among the job descriptions collected in contemporary works such as the Kuder Book of People Who Like Their Work (Hornaday & Gibson, 1995).

Holland (1996) asserts that people will no longer work in a consistent setting in a conventional occupation, but will attain a kind of career coherence based on working at a set of activities that they value, applied in a variety of settings.

Stability.

Let us now consider the impact of stability on the discriminant bridge. Had the engineers in Strong's (1952) 19 year follow-up study of predictive validity included one particular Stanford University graduate, that individual would have been in MacArthur's (1954) terms a "clean miss,' because he, Herbert Hoover, by then would have been President of the United States.

There is little empirical data on the long term stability of occupational membership. Career counselors often observe instability in occupational membership among their clients. Howard (1995) asserts that occupations and careers in the 21st century will become less stable. Day and Rounds (1997) characterize occupational titles as in continuous transformation.

Hall & Mirvis (1995) summarize these speculation succinctly in what they call the "protean" career-- non-linear, mobile, adaptive, with left turns, regressions, and requirements for re-skilling.

If occupations have and are yet to become less homogeneous and stable, then the discriminant bridge technology of the 1920's, still employed in the premier interest inventories, is in danger of obsolescence. A new technology is needed.

Kuder's Person-Matching.

Kuder (1980) has extended the discriminant bridge from the person-to-group match to a person-to-person match. He argues that a person may resemble the aggregate characteristics of engineers, but more resembles one particular engineer than any others. He asks, "Why not capitalize on that possibility and provide career seekers with information about the individuals whose interests are most similar to theirs?" His concept is echoed by industrial psychologists Day and Bedeian (1993) who suggest that results of personality tests should be compared with those of others in the same organization, rather than with some large normative population. Their underlying position is that candidates are more likely to succeed in a given organization if their personalities fit with those of their co-workers.

Kuder further suggests that instead of information about the occupation in the form of an entry in the Dictionary of Occupational Titles, specific information about the matching

persons's occupational career should be presented in narrative form to the counselee. This approach would facilitate the client's generation of "possible selves" (Markus & Nurius, 1986) in place of "possible occupations," a strategy that has been suggested recently by Hill & Spokane (1995) and Meara, Day, Chalk & Phelps (1995).

Kuder applied person-match only to interests and Day and Bedeian to personality traits, but the concept should be adaptable to other self-reports, such as self-efficacy estimates, work values, as well as to knowledge, skills, or abilities.

Scoring methodology.

A crucial issue in the methodology of the discriminant bridge is the method of representing similarity. There are two general approaches--item-by-item similarity as employed by Strong or Kuder, or scale profile similarity used by Holland or the Theory of Work Adjustment.

Strong's original method simply collects the 40-60 items that differentiate an occupational group from a general reference group, and awards inventory-takers with a unit weight for endorsing items the same as the occupational group does. Raw scores are then normalized on the distribution from the occupational group, in order to make group-by-group comparisons.

The KOIS, in contrast, awards inventory takers a weight based on the proportion of the occupational group that selects the same response pattern of most and least preferred activities,

and by a statistical manipulation makes scores comparable for all occupational groups irrespective of their homogeneities.

Holland's method of representing person-occupation fit uses the profile similarity approach. He assigns inventory-takers a "code" consisting of their three top-scoring scales in descending order. Occupations have been assigned codes on the basis of their characteristics (Gottfredson & Holland, 1996) and the degree of match is calculated on the similarity of their rank orders. (See Holland, Fritzsche, & Powell, 1994) for the several methods of calculating similarity.)

If comparison of a career seeker with various occupational codes or empirically generated criterion profiles is made using scale scores, which is the best approach: a simple D square measure, a rank order correlation (or the various rank order methods of assessing similarity of Holland codes (Holland, 1997), or the "C Index" of Dawis and Lofquist's (1984) Theory of Work Adjustment? The answer is not yet evident. Each fails to capture the essence of certain kinds of profile pairs.

D square: Consider the two profiles in Figure 1. In Pair A, the two profiles present distinct differences. The D square coefficient for the pair is quite large: 2406. Closer inspection reveals that the rank ordering for the two profiles is quite similar; the rank order correlation is 1.00. Pair B of the profiles appear to be rather similar, and earn a minuscule D square coefficient of 27. Yet the rank order r between the two is .03. These complexities are not alleviated by Holland's

several congruence indices nor TWA's use of the C(orrespondence) Index.

In Kuder's Career Search Schedule (Kuder & Zytowski, 1997) application of person-to-person-match, the comparisons of the inventory-takers and the criterion persons are made at the level of item responses, avoiding the complexities described above. Because homogeneity is not a factor in his approach, he simply awards a weight based on the degree of similarity of the preference patterns of the criterion person and the inventory-taker. The most/least preferred triadic item format is well adapted to this approach. Figure 2 illustrates the six possible levels of agreement.

The Information Yield.

A final question concerns what individuals ought to learn from the results of their interest assessment. In person-to-group match, it is the title of an occupation. Many clients believe they know what people in various occupations do. But it has been shown by Beardslee & O'Dowd (1961) and others that such knowledge may be incomplete if not outright erroneous. It has become routine to suggest that interest survey-takers gather information about occupations on which they score high, either via the many publications describing occupations, or by personal interview. If new occupations are emerging and the content of existing occupations is changing this method will be increasingly unhelpful. In person-to-person match, based as it is on the

concept that no two individuals even performing the same job are alike, the survey-taker necessarily needs a description of that person's unique job duties, perhaps extending to liked and disliked aspects, how s/he got into that work, their projected next career steps, and the like. While no empirical test of preference for or utility of first-person job descriptions as compared with DOT-type descriptions, their potential is reinforced by the Vocational Biographies series (19xx) or the recent proliferation of books of worker interviews, such as "Real People, Real Jobs" (Montross, Liebowitz, & Shinkman, 1995) or the "Real People Working In..." series published by VGM/Career Horizons), and the concept of realistic job previews in industrial psychology (*reference needed here*).

A case example.

The KOIS yields person-to-occupational group matches and as the KCSS is scored for person-to-person matches as well. Following is an illustration of the information developed by each approach for a teacher in her late 20s, single, pseudonymed "Ellenore," who is seeking a new occupation that will be more engaging and pay more. In the conventional approach, represented in this case by a KOIS, it is revealed that she is most similar to six occupational groups, from film and TV producers and directors to journalists. We may ask, in the light of our imperfect knowledge of careers in these fields, what is utilitarian for a person in Ellenore's circumstances? And we

will implore Ellenore to read about these careers in the DOT or to "network" them for information.

Ellenore's most similar person-matches from the KCSS are given in Figure 4. Here she has eight people whose interests match hers best. Two of them, special events manager and executive recruiter, are not found in the DOT; two, school superintendent and teacher of gifted are probably well known to most people. The last four represent occupations that Hall & Mirvis (1995) might call "left turns for Ellenore:" two rather diverse kinds of saleswork, law, and media librarian. More important perhaps, is that Ellenore can observe several differences: salaried and commission; self-employed and employee; first job and third- or fourth-job; advanced degrees and degrees unimportant, that no dictionary of occupations can reflect.

Which would be more valuable to Ellenore as we approach the 21st century? Of course, our response should be founded in empirical evidence, but until that is available, I submit that we should be exploring and developing the person-match concept.

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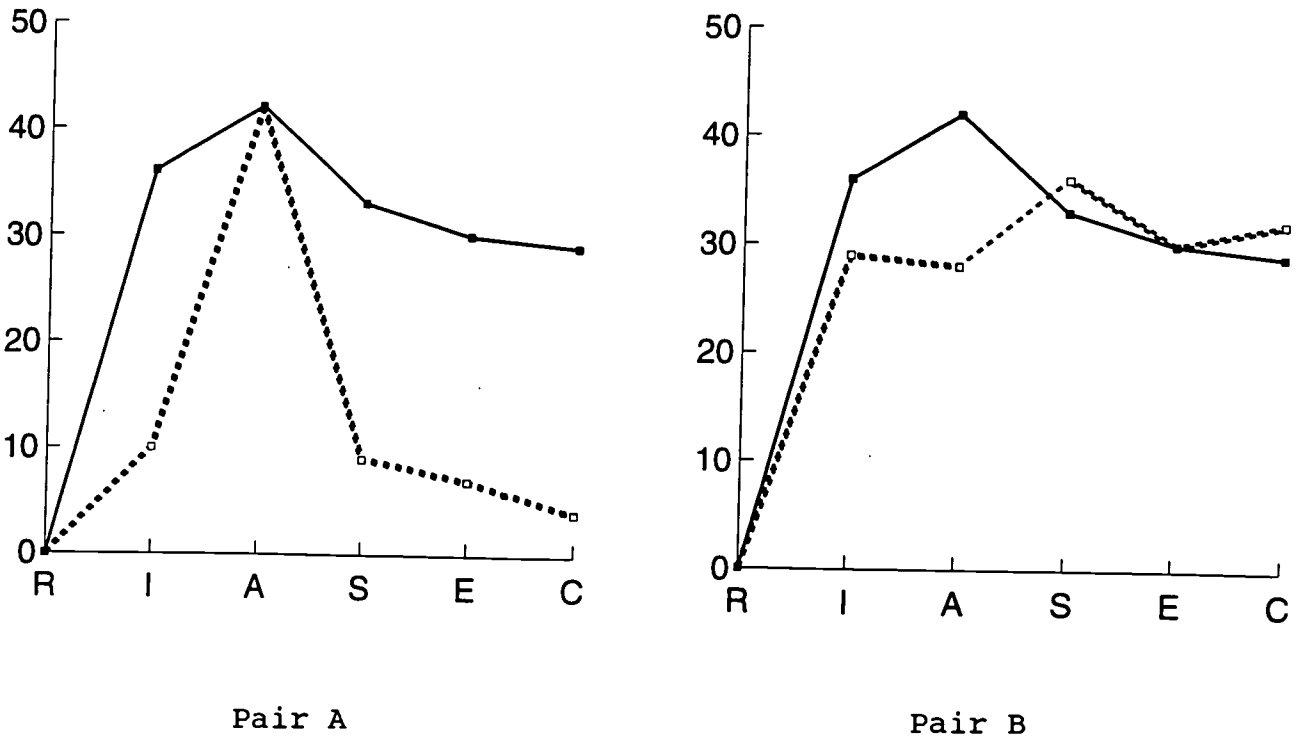

Figure 1. Agreement for two types of profile pairs.

KCSS Scoring

Criterion Person	Survey-Taker	Agreement
M L	M L	
● 0	● 0	
0 ●	0 ●	Perfect
0 0	0 0	
	● 0	
	0 0	Agree on M
	0 ●	
	0 0	
	0 ●	Agree on L
	● 0	
	0 ●	
	0 0	Disagree on M
	● 0	
	0 0	
	● 0	Disagree on L
	0 ●	
	0 ●	
	● 0	Perfect disagreement
	0 0	

Figure 2. Levels of agreement in Kuder Person-Match scoring.

Kuder Occupational Interest Survey Report Form

Name FLOOD ELLENORE

Sex FEMALE **Date** 08/19/97

Numeric Grid No. **SRA No.**

1

Dependability: How much confidence can you place in your results? In scoring your responses several checks were made on your answer patterns to be sure that you understood the directions and that your results were complete and dependable. According to these:

CAUTION: THERE IS SOME INDICATION THAT YOUR INTEREST PATTERNS ARE UNUSUAL.

2

Vocational Interest Estimates: Vocational interests can be divided into different types and the level of your attraction to each type can be measured. You may feel that you know what interests you have already — what you may not know is how strong they are compared with other people's interests. This section shows the relative rank of your preferences for ten different kinds of vocational activities. Each is explained on the back of this report form. Your preferences in these activities, as compared with other people's interests, are as follows:

Compared with men	Compared with women
HIGH	AVERAGE
ARTISTIC	PERSUASIVE
AVERAGE	ARTISTIC
SOCIAL SERVICE	MECHANICAL
PERSUASIVE	LITERARY
LITERARY	SOCIAL SERVICE
LOW	LOW
MECHANICAL	MUSICAL
MUSICAL	SCIENTIFIC
SCIENTIFIC	OUTDOOR
OUTDOOR	COMPUTATIONAL
COMPUTATIONAL	CLERICAL
CLERICAL	

3

Occupations: The KOIS has been given to groups of persons who are experienced and satisfied in many different occupations. Their patterns of interests have been compared with yours and placed in order of their similarity with you. The following occupational groups have interest patterns *most* similar to yours:

Compared with men	Compared with women
INTERIOR DECOR	FILM/TV PROD/DIR
FILM/TV PROD/DIR	PERSONNEL MGR
	REAL ESTATE AGT
THESE ARE NEXT	MINISTER
MOST SIMILAR:	INTERIOR DECOR
	JOURNALIST
LAWYER	
SOCIAL WORKER	THESE ARE NEXT
LIBRARIAN	MOST SIMILAR:
AUDIOL/SP PATHOL	
	AUDIOL/SP PATHOL
	COL STU PERS WKR

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KUDER CAREER SEARCH SCHEDULE

Name: Ellenore Flood Date: 04/25/97

The list below contains the occupations of 25 people whose interests are similar to yours. They have spent a substantial amount of time in the world of work, and all have been fortunate to get into jobs that they find highly satisfying.

The score preceding each title reflects the extent to which your interests are similar to those of each individual. Scores of 600 or more indicate successful and well-satisfied persons whose interest patterns are very similar to yours.

Score	Page	Occupation
677	356	Manager, Corporate Specialty Events
640	231	Executive Recruiter
636	659	Teacher, Gifted & Talented
630	51	Attorney #8
613	335	Librarian, Media Specialist #4
613	575	Salesperson #6
607	579	Salesperson, Natural Food Products
605	46	Assistant School Superintendent
Scores from 599 to 500 indicate moderate similarity.		
599	42	Assistant, Insurance Agency
593	172	Department Officer & Fundraiser
592	552	Registered Nurse, Obstetrics #2
590	106	Commercial Airline Pilot
587	508	Professor, Theology
586	567	Sales Coordinator, Postal Service
586	675	Teacher, Music
586	727	Youth Advocate
574	660	Teacher, High School
572	663	Teacher, High School English #1
571	111	Compensation Administrator
571	609	Speech-Language Pathologist
571	215	Elementary Principal, K-4
570	672	Teacher, Junior High Science/Math
569	486	President, Retail Corporation
567	453	Pastor
566	715	Vice President, Management Firm
566	321	Law Clerk
559	369	Manager, Repertory Company
559	216	Employee Relations Supervisor
555	182	Director, Information Technology
544	574	Salesperson #5
Scores of less than 500 can be regarded as due to chance.		

The page number to the left of each occupation refers to the page in the KUDER BOOK OF PEOPLE WHO LIKE THEIR WORK where that person's job profile is found. Among those with a score of 600 or more, you may find some ideas in their education and work experiences that you may apply to your own plans. Read them as though you were interviewing these people.

Remember that although you are like a particular person in a number of important ways, you are not like them in all ways. You will need to use your judgment in deciding the extent to which the experiences of any fit your own circumstances.

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MANAGER, CORPORATE SPECIAL EVENTS

The best way to describe my work day as an internal communications and special events manager is meetings, meetings, meetings—from 7:30 A.M. to 5:30 P.M. with very little desk time. The meetings are held to conceptualize and to develop detailed planning. Other duties included in my job for this large corporation are managing my staff, coordinating with others in my organization, reading articles, approving videos, generally supervising work, delegating projects, synthesizing ideas plus coming up with creative solutions, and dealing with political realities.

Having a positive, solution-oriented attitude is important to perform this job well. Interpersonal and managerial skills are also necessary. A communications and special events manager must have the ability to conceptualize and then to create and implement detailed plans. Selling ideas and directions is another important ability. Creativity plays a major role in the successful performance of this job.

I find job satisfaction from creating something that shows artistic/creative qualities and meets business needs. It satisfies me to work with a great group of people, break new paths, and the ability to positively impact lives of 10,000+ employees.

Changes in this occupation which I would welcome would be more money, a clearer career path and advancements. Less political realities (or more control over them) would be a good change too.

My occupation evolved from previous positions in marketing and public relations and as a systems and procedures analyst. My mentor, a senior executive, also was involved in my being selected. I chose to accept the job because I like to tackle "never done before" jobs, and I have natural communication abilities.

In the future, I hope to become a Senior Vice President of Corporate Communications.

EXECUTIVE RECRUITER

As an executive recruiter (headhunter) in the computer industry, I enjoy the ability to be my own boss and having the work scheduling flexibility which I need. Because I am a single parent, I needed a well paying job, without travel so that I could work from my home if I needed to do so. With 12 years of experience in computer and real estate sales, I decided that the recruiting business fit the criteria and was an extension of my previous experience. I earned a Bachelor of Arts in Education and a Masters of Science in Education . Before my current career I was also an elementary, junior high and community college teacher.

A typical work day for me is: 50% on the phone calling clients, client companies, applicants, or cold-calling new applicants, 10% meeting new clients of established or new client companies, 10% meeting new applicants—interviewing them for technical skills and personality, and 20% administrative duties.

To perform well as an executive recruiter, it is important to have: Desire to make a deal—close the business. Ability to take rejection—not take it personally. Ability to talk with and meet new people in an effective way. Ability to follow through, taking the initiative to make things happen. Being well organized, smart, and timely.

One thing I think I should mention is that I work on 100% commission. I only earn money by placing clients. I would like it if I had better administrative help to make me more productive.

In spite of the drawbacks, I like the kind of work very much and enjoy the people I work with, and the flexibility. I receive satisfaction from closing a deal, and earning good money. It is rewarding when I find good people for jobs and find good jobs for people.

Career sketches excerpted from J. A. Hornaday & L. A. Gibson, The Kuder Book of People Who Like Their Work, Copyright 1995, by permission of Motivation Press, Amherst MA.

SALESPERSON #6

I like my work as a salesman for contract furniture enormously. Right out of college, where my major was general studies, I met the owner of a company that sold contract furniture and went to work for him.

I call on architects, designers, and people who will use the furniture—end users—to educate them on why my product is best. As a salesman, I try to get these people to buy or to use our products. I also call on a furniture dealer network to help sell to the end users. Job satisfaction for me is the "rush" I get from a sale. I enjoy the freedom I have in doing my job, also. It's a commission-pay basis, which means the more I sell, the more I earn.

The downside is that there's little opportunity for advancement. I'd also like to see a better commission rate or pay scale, which would mean higher commissions paid.

My plans for the future are to stay in sales. I want to make money while developing a profitable sales territory. Making as much success as possible for myself and for others is my goal.

SALESPERSON, NATURAL FOOD PRODUCTS

While working in an administrative position in a sales group, I found I had a knack for dealing with people. I applied to a firm looking for entry level sales people and got my start in this career.

As a salesperson handling natural food products, I sell to manufacturers, distributors and retailers. Part of the process of selling the product is turning up the leads and qualifying the potential buyers. My kind of sales work is very hectic. I must continually make new contacts and remain enthusiastic and optimistic. It is also important to be detail-oriented, organized, and self-motivated in order to perform well as a salesperson.

I am so confident that sales work is the ideal career for me that even if given the opportunity to start over and prepare for any kind of work, I would again choose this. I am not satisfied with the people and organization I work for, but I definitely like the kind of work, the people I work with and the opportunity for advancement. I enjoy working with people and view sales as "helping" people to fulfill their needs.

My future career plans are to stay in sales and eventually manage a sales group.

ASSISTANT SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT

There is no such thing as a typical day in my work as an educator serving as an assistant superintendent. That's why I love my career. For me, knowing my work makes a difference is the greatest satisfaction.

I have a Bachelor of Arts degree, a Master of Arts, and a Doctorate in education. While in college, I worked in merchandising as a means of earning extra funds. In a public school of 3,600 students, kindergarten through adult, I am responsible for the personnel, administration, and curriculum. I love my work; students basically remain the same throughout their school years—bright, curious, challenged, and often at risk.

My work requires a thorough knowledge base, including excellent communication skills. Versatility and flexibility are key characteristics for a person in my position. Further, one needs skills in leadership, in the ability to work with people, the belief that all people are basically good, and the conviction that young people are great.

It would be more satisfying if there were not only fewer meetings, but also more educational focus in those meetings which are required. More input from educators, as opposed to decisions being made by public officials, is needed. I also would like to see more educational projects implemented. My future plans are to retire—and then to start teaching again!

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TEACHER, GIFTED & TALENTED

As a teacher of the gifted and talented students in my school district, I work with all the gifted and talented students at the junior high and high school levels. In addition to both Bachelor's and Master's degrees, work in this field requires a positive attitude, enthusiasm, a willingness to work many long hours, the ability to communicate well with parents, good oral and written communication skills, an understanding of group dynamics, and the confidence to be at ease in front of large groups.

I like the kind of work that I do. I believe my work is important, and I enjoy working with children and seeing them grow in many ways. I also like the fact that teaching gives me the summers off. Although I sense a general lack of respect within the community, I believe that mine is an isolated complaint. The teaching profession holds high esteem in our society. I always wanted to be a teacher, and it was my major in college. I worked as a teacher's aide before accepting my present job.

I am currently studying to learn more about the education of gifted and talented students. Education for me is and will continue to be an ongoing process.

ATTORNEY #8

I always knew I wanted to be a lawyer; I loved to argue positions, even those with which I disagreed. My family had a history of labor involvement and my school had a great labor program, so it was labor law for me.

A typical week in labor law for a union includes researching legal issues and new developments in the law; meeting clients; writing legal memorandum, motions, complaints and answers to complaints. A lawyer answers correspondence and telephone calls from clients and attorneys, responds to other attorneys' inquiries, and spends some time in court. Court intervals consist of motions, depositions, and sworn testimony.

Thoroughness, compassion, and trustworthiness are vital to a successful lawyer. Persuasive writing and speaking skills are required. Credibility is mandatory to a union lawyer. Being able to do research well is also very important. I have a Bachelor of Arts Degree, a PH. D., and a law degree.

I'm very gratified when I can help individuals solve a disaster in their lives. It's great to know you gave a regular gal or guy a second chance. I would like more contact with people and less desk work, but the desk work is a necessary part of the job. I work 30 hours at the desk for every one hour in the courtroom.

LIBRARIAN, MEDIA SPECIALIST #4

My job as the librarian and media specialist in a high school is to organize and direct the activities of the library. I teach research skills as well. I've always been interested in areas of visual and performing arts, radio, TV, and education. Going into library work while combining educational media and technology seemed the perfect career combination.

One specific quality needed to be a good librarian is patience. Liking people and having the desire to help them are both equally important. You should, in addition, be well organized. Having a good sense of judgment is needed as well.

A typical day in the library is quite varied. I might order new materials or teach a class on research skills. Assisting a teacher in preparing a lesson or researching some point or issue myself are possible activities. I usually have to prepare curriculum statistics and keep accounting records. My duties also include processing and cataloging new materials for our library collection. Some days I prepare a display or a bulletin board.

I received my Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degree and taught for a while before changing to media specialties. After 20 years in library work, I particularly enjoy working with young people. What is lacking, which would make my work more satisfying, are really outside issues, such as better support for schools and adequate funding. For the future, I want to become better at what I do. I'd like to lead our library and media center into the 21st century.

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Signature: Donald G. Zytowski	Printed Name/Position/Title: Donald G. Zytowski	
Organization/Address: 21a Wildflower Dr. Ames IA 50014	Telephone: 515-292-6884	FAX: Same
	E-Mail Address: dzytowski@AOL	Date: 2/18/98