



Refuse to Choose!: Use All of Your Interests, Passions, and Hobbies to Create the Life and Career of Your Dreams

Barbara Sher

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Don't know what to do with your life? Drawn to so many things that you can't choose just one? *New York Times* best-selling author Barbara Sher has the answer--do **EVERYTHING!**

With her popular career counseling sessions, motivational speeches, workshops, and television specials, Barbara Sher has become famous for her extraordinary ability to help people define and achieve their goals. What Sher has discovered is that some individuals simply cannot, and should not, decide on a single path; they are genetically wired to pursue many areas. Sher calls them "Scanners"--people whose unique type of mind does not zero in on a single interest but rather scans the horizon, eager to explore everything they see.

In this groundbreaking book, you will learn:

What's behind your "hit and run" obsessions When (and how) to finish what you start How to do everything you love What type of Scanner you are (and which tools you need to do your very best work)

Refuse to Choose!: Use All of Your Interests, Passions, and Hobbies to Create the Life and Career of Your Dreams Details

Date : Published March 20th 2007 by Rodale (first published January 1st 2006)

ISBN :

Author : Barbara Sher

Format : Kindle Edition 296 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Self Help, Psychology, Business



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Judith says

I just love Barbara Sher and wrote her and she actually replied and gave me advise.

Her books are about living your wishes and dreams. And it's good advise.

I'm reading all of her books and waiting for more.

And I'm reading them all a second time. Her advise is right up my alley. I love lists, being on task, charts, schedules and accomplishing things. She talks about childhood dreams and how they keep coming back and don't feel you can't accomplish anything. She tells us how and uses people she's helped do so. I love biographies so these little snippets help me to see I can do it too. She puts every blocker in the way and shows you how to get it out.

Yes, I will travel the world. It might take time but after all that's all we have in the end.

Kerrie says

Not surprisingly, I "scanned" this book in one day... because I also wanted to make some bread, do some research on World War I, work on my quilt, and do some sewing modifications to a pair of tattered jeans that I should probably throw away, but I know I can do something REALLY COOL with them!

This book was suggested to me when I mentioned that I needed to "get serious" and find a "real job" but didn't know what I wanted to focus on because I'm interested in so many things. A few of those require going back to school and racking up loans again, which I'd prefer not to do.

This book begins with a lot of self-esteem boosting rhetoric for those who haven't come to grips with the Scanner aspect of their personality. I think that her suggestions of organizing the chaos by having shelves of binders and such would only add to the clutter that is usually present in a Scanner's life. I have moved quite a bit over the last few years, so I've developed a very minimalist personality to avoid the packing/unpacking headaches. If I haven't done anything with an interest for a year, I've forced myself to GET RID OF IT. It's usually not missed, because I've gone on to something else. It has helped me avoid the endless "collecting" that Scanners do. I also schedule in a hour or 2 on every interest so I feel like I'm accomplishing something. All stuff that Sher suggests, and all stuff that I figured out on my own.

I was more interested in the last half of the book that focused on possible career paths, and I guess I'm a "Sybil" Scanner. It simply reinforced what I figured was the path I should take - get a Good Enough Job and keep all my interests as hobbies rather than making it a career, because I know I can't pick any one thing and stick with it. That's what I'm already doing. Sigh.

So this gets 2 stars because I can see where it would be helpful for those who are totally confused about why they are the way they are and need some validation because their friends/family members give them grief for their "flightiness." But it did not provide me with any help or advice that I hadn't already worked out for myself over the last several years. Too bad I don't have an entrepreneurial bent so I could be a self-help guru. :)

E.K. Carmel says

Do you have trouble sticking with anything or are interested in so many things you can't focus on just one? Do you get bored as soon as you learn how to do something? Are you unwilling to commit to a specific career path so work at low-paying jobs instead? Do you keep changing your mind about what you want to do and end up doing nothing? Do you quit because you think you'll miss out on something better?

If you said yes to any of these, chances are good that you're a Scanner. The term itself describes people who constantly scan the horizon, always looking and excited to explore the next thing – or everything.

In *Refuse to Choose: A Revolutionary Program For Doing Everything That You Love*, Barbara Sher explains, “Unlike those people who seem to find and be satisfied with one area of interest, you're genetically wired to be interested in many things, and that's exactly what you've been trying to do. Because your behavior is unfamiliar—even unsettling—to the people around you, you've been taught that you're doing something wrong and you must try to change...What you've assumed is a disability to be overcome by sheer will is actually an exceptional gift. You are the owner of a remarkable, multitalented brain trying to do its work in a world that doesn't understand who you are and doesn't know why you behave as you do.”

This book is designed to help Scanners understand themselves, reverse years of misunderstanding, and teach them tools to become more confident, productive people.

There are several types of Scanners and Ms. Sher describes each and provides tools for motivation and productivity, choices of lifestyle, and types of careers that fit best, all illustrated by dozens of examples from her decades as a speaker, career/lifestyle coach, and best-selling author.

If you look around the internet, Scanners are also called Renaissance people, Multipotentialites and probably a dozen other labels. There's advice out there, but nothing with the wide range of practical information I found in this book.

Jamie Belanger says

I think it will be difficult to write a review of this book without exceeding the 20,000 character limit. But I'll try.

Refuse To Choose! is about Scanners - people who simply *cannot* immerse themselves in just one career for their whole lives. Scanners have so many interests (and find new ones just about every day) that they often have trouble focusing on any one interest for an extended period of time. I know I fit in with this group, because in the process of composing this review, I alt-tabbed to my TODO list three four times to make notes on new ideas I had. I always do things like that. For years I thought I was broken, that I'd never complete anything, that I'd never amount to anything. That I'd spend so much time planning new projects that I'd never finish my existing ones. And yet, I've already finished quite a few projects.

At times it really feels like the author knows who I am. She lets readers like me acknowledge that we're

different, and then reassures us that there is nothing wrong with that. In fact, it puts people like me in good company with the likes of Aristotle, Ben Franklin, and Leonardo da Vinci. It's perfectly okay to be an artist, writer, musician, mathematician, **and** inventor. Go ahead and be a chef, painter, photographer, **and** a physics teacher. You shouldn't have to choose one thing to stick with for the rest of your life. You really can do everything. At least, that's the message of the book.

Once you acknowledge that you *are* a Scanner, and that it's okay to be different, then you learn about different types of Scanners. The author acknowledges that everyone will fit at least two of the Scanner types she lists. And that's where the real strength of this book lies. Once you've identified what types you are, you can learn ways to make yourself more efficient, and career options that will keep you motivated and excited.

As for me, I found that I'm part "Plate-Spinner" and part "Serial Master". This is a little humorous, because I've often said I have too many things "on my plate," when in reality that is my greatest strength: the ability to manage several projects simultaneously. The most surprising thing I found was in the Serial Master category, which I figure is a smaller portion of my Scanner abilities. But even that small part of me explained something that I hadn't figured out yet. Most of what the author suggests are things I've already been doing for a couple of years now -- with the exception that I've gone digital with the vast majority of the methods. I figured out most of these things on my own. But I wonder how much more I could have accomplished in my life if I had read this book ten or fifteen years ago.

While I'm forced to agree with the author that there are great benefits to writing and sketching things by hand, I've found some success with having notes, diagrams, and TODO lists on my computer. This is one area that she almost never mentions. Perhaps she hasn't found decent software to help manage what she wants to do in life. Personally, I found I wasted too much time (and paper!) copying my TODO lists to less messy sheets of paper. Not to mention the time I wasted trying to decipher my handwriting. Having my lists on my computer (where I do the vast majority of my work anyway) makes things neater and more efficient for me. I would like to see either an updated version of this book or an additional book that discusses ways to organize yourself digitally. Why print out things from Wikipedia and tape them in a Scanner Daybook if you can just copy and paste the link into something like Microsoft OneNote, Evernote, or BasKet?

Overall, I found the book to be very motivating and thought-provoking. Like I said, I had already discovered all the methods she suggests for my types of Scanner, and have been using them for a while now. But if you've ever been told you need to choose a career, or if you have a pile of unfinished things that make you sad, or you find you just can't stop reading random articles on Wikipedia... grab a copy of this book. It could just change your outlook on life.

Linda says

The initial "You're a Scanner! It's okay! You're SPECIAL!!" intro got a bit tedious. I think that's because the author self-identifies as one and is giddy with the thought that "it's not wrong to be this way!" Like other readers, I think some people would grab onto these ideas as excuses. But some people will grab on to anything they can distort or interpret in extreme ways, so I don't think that fact invalidates the general idea. (I would call that a "slippery slope" argument, btw.)

The early chapters that most resonated with me were Ch 5 ("Too busy to do what I love." - starting on p 62), Chapter 6 ("I won't do anything if I can't do everything.") and Chapter 7 ("I can't get started.")

In those chapters, I think that some of her strategies/advice work for procrastinators, perfectionists, and people who simply have not learned to tune into their own desires. As someone who has fit all of those descriptions at varied times, I found them useful. “The Big List” was telling - as she predicted, it wasn’t nearly as big as I thought. While all the ideas presented won’t work for me, even a few would make the time spent reading worth it.

Overall, here are my Big TakeAways:

- 1) Reassurance and reminding. There are a lot of tools I already use, and they work for me. The book reminded me of some, or suggested new spins for making them more useful. I liked that.
- 2) New tools that look promising, which makes it worth the read right there to me.
- 3) Most importantly, a Big Picture Structure to think about and use for my own life.

What do I mean by that third one? Well, for each type of Scanner, she proposes a Life Design Model, potential Careers, and some specific tools that might serve them. I like these descriptive terms.

The life design talks about how you structure your time to fit your natural inclinations, so that you can be happy and productive. The one that caught my attention was the “physician model”, (p. 156), where you spend a few days a week doing one thing, a few days a week doing another type of thing, and a couple weeks a year doing something-completely-different. That maps well to academia too, but being conscious about it may make it...well, fit better. I’ve already become aware that I need certain things in each day/week to feel good about myself, and the term “Life Design Model” and the examples are helping me to translate that knowledge into action.

In terms of potential careers, she talks about specific ones, but she also talks about some ways of classifying them (mixed - my logical-classifying-self would break them out a bit). The ones that caught my attention here were “The umbrella job”, which lets you do varied things under it, “the good-enough-job,” which just brings in enough \$\$ for you to manage (without sapping your soul) so you can do the stuff you care about, and the “multiple streams of income” where you make a bit here and a bit there, and get by that way. I think I have had sequential “umbrella jobs” up to now. That may be what I look for next... Or not, since I’m at a transitional point in life. I like being able to think about them this way. (Not a full list, of course - I’m focusing on what-I-found-useful.)

And of course, the shiny tools made me happy. I have a mind like a magpie, attracted to bright shiny ideas, especially in the form of models and metaphors. Plenty of that to amuse me.

To;dr version: despite the tediousness of the intro “you’re different/speshul” bit, I found this book useful and would recommend it to others.

Amanda says

I read this more for affirmation than for practical advice. I don't know if I'll use all the techniques Barbara Sher recommends for pursuing lots of interests at once (though I do like the sound of having several "avocation stations" -- little wheeled file carts with work surfaces on top so you can have multiple projects ready to go for whenever the whim strikes you). But what I really did like about this book was the permission it gives to go ahead and be interested in lots of stuff, to move from one thing to the next when one wants to. Coming from a very academic background, in which one's career is supposed to be one's Grand

Passion in Life, or at least a Very Big Thing, I found it such an incredible relief to have someone tell me, in effect, that it's OK if I just want a pleasant, reasonably interesting job that'll allow me plenty of time to pursue the other stuff I'm interested in, and that that doesn't mean I'm lazy or stupid or lacking in something.

Sheryl Tribble says

I thought her suggestions of careers often unrealistic, I'll never use half her suggestions (some of which would just add to the clutter, IMHO), and she's a bit too much of a cheerleader for me, so why did I give the book five stars? Because I have read a ridiculous number of "figure out your career" kinda books, and she is a breath of fresh air. In my teen years, I loved the idea of marrying someone who, like me, wasn't interested in "a career," and then sending each other to school, repeatedly, as we switched careers our whole lives. This is the first "figure out your career" kinda book I've read where I get the impression the author could even understand that dream.

And while she is over-optimistic about the money some scanners could earn, she also recognizes that some people just don't care about money or prestige, and that that's okay. I've run across books for artists or actors that do that, but never a generic career kinda book. And I don't think it's just people who see themselves as artistic who feel that way, so it's nice to see it recognized that someone who could succeed as a real estate salesperson or whatever could be just as excited by a career where they don't make the big bucks, and nice to see someone say that it's okay to make that choice.

When I was a kid, *What Color Is Your Parachute* was considered revolutionary because he recommended figuring out your true passion and getting a job doing what you love. The other career books around back then were more about figuring out what you *could* do that would make good money. While there's a sense where this book is kind of retro -- finding a "Good Enough" job was pretty standard before *Parachute* -- it's also revolutionary as a career manual by encouraging people to not choose a career, or to make the most important thing in their lives something that doesn't earn money.

Where *Parachute* said, "You can be a success by doing what you love," *Refuse to Choose* makes a pretty good case for the idea that our current definition of "being a success" is a bad plan for many and should be abandoned. The people most in need of the knowledge that the "pursuit of happiness" is not the same as "finding the perfect career" are much more likely to read this book than the many books on other subjects that make that point.

Scwisher says

Stumbling on to this book at the age of 44 leaves me with feelings of relief and despair. How did I not ever find this author before? But I'm glad I did. This book helped me see that I'm not flawed, I've been using the wrong tools to measure myself.

Jane says

Where I got the book: my local library.

My name is Jane, and I . . . am a Scanner.

At last someone has put a name to what I tend to think of as my Low Boredom Threshold. My ability to get interested in a great many different things has resulted in a good many careers (some carried on simultaneously), far too many hours in higher ed. and a general feeling of frustration that I'll never be able to get my life "together." It wasn't until I rather unexpectedly quit a job in 2009 (long story) and, instead of rushing to find another one, allowed myself a few weeks to think about what I really wanted, that it occurred to me the one thread that had always run through my jobs was writing. It was either what people hired me for or what they discovered I was good at after a short while on the job. "Jane, you are a writer," I said to myself. And I was right! I'd finally discovered the activity that never got boring because there was always something new to write about and always something about writing to learn.

Barbara Sher gives the name Scanner to those of us who have multiple interests and don't want to spend their lives working on one career. How we envy those who are engaged enough in their everyday jobs to stick with them, working their way up the career ladder to the merry tune of promotions and pay raises. We thought we'd finally found our niche, and here we are a year later, bored out of our skulls. What's the solution?

Sher comes up with several. She tells us that we really can have it all, if we look at our lives the right way. Many of her suggestions for careers and productivity techniques suited to our particular needs are so mouthwatering I wanted to get started on all of them right away . . . heh . . . Of course no guru can suggest a course of action that suits every reader perfectly, and I quickly found myself thinking about how to adapt one or two of her ideas to my own working methods. I made a list of the most likely techniques in my Daybook. I shall forever be grateful to Barbara Sher for the idea of a Daybook, which has become my go-to place to write down all those lists and brainstorming that kept invading my journal, to the point where I'd stopped journaling because it was annoying me. Now I can download all that stuff into my Daybook and maybe I can begin journaling again.

Sher identifies several different kinds of Scanner—I thought it was hilarious that every time I started a new chapter about a different kind of Scanner I thought "Oh hey, that's so me." Because we've got these brains that go in all sorts of different directions—mine never works quite the same from one day to the next. I'm finally learning to appreciate the value of being able to read about something, connect it to something else and come up with a completely new idea—now I just have to learn how to turn those ideas into something solid that I won't get bored with. The way I describe it is that my brain fizzes—it seems to need new ideas like a whale needs plankton, and excretes them at high speed like—what, exactly, do whales poop out? On some days, that is, when I'm not so overwhelmed that the fog descends and I can barely get anything done.

Anyone who's followed my reviews for a while will know that I generally get very snarky over self-help books but this one, I liked. I'm going to stick my neck out and give it five stars for being a self-help book that was actually worth my attention from cover to cover, even if I did find it a bit heavy on examples at times. It might even be worth re-reading at some point in the future.

Toby says

This book has real potential to change my life. Many self-help books are 'good' because of what psychologists call the Barnum Principle. That says that if you make things generic enough, what you say is bound to apply to just about anybody. However, this book is **not** like that. This book is specific enough

that most people will find that it doesn't apply to them at all. But it definitely does apply to me. Barbara Sher defines several types of what she calls Scanners. There are Indecisives, Specialists and Masters, as well as sub categories within each one. Scanners are people who scan through various interests and careers, not being content to settle on any one thing for long. This, in contrast to the type of people who are perfectly happy being a banker during the day, reading finance books at night, and joining investing clubs with their free time. Scanners might be in a cooking club, work as a freelance writer for software, and train monkeys in their free time. I am most definitely a Scanner.[return][return]Being 'diagnosed' as a Scanner is extremely relieving for most of us, because society is constantly telling us to settle. Knowing that there are many others like us and that being a Scanner isn't a disease feels great. But that wouldn't really do much if she didn't also provide Scanners with a lot of tools that help us to be both happy and productive as a Scanner. There are two main approaches that she takes. The first is to possibly find a career path or a single career that provides the variety a Scanner needs. The second can be done at the same time, or can be done on its own. That is, get a "Good Enough Job" that pays the bills and *enables* variety in regular life even if it doesn't provide it as a vocation. [return][return]She teaches a lot of other tools that both foster and manage the Scanner nature. One example is the "LTTL" tool. That provides the Scanner the ability to Learn, Try, Teach and Leave a given interest rather than feeling forced to commit for a lifetime. To help that be acceptable, she explains that all people leave a given activity, relationship, or job when they have received what is the reward for them. For Scanners, in most cases, learning the thing to some varying level of competency (thus the different types of scanners) is the reward we are looking for in an activity. Once we have learned it to our desired level, we are done with it and the activity becomes boring and excruciating to endure for us. This last point was a real eye-opener for me. I'm not lame, or a flake, it's just that once I've learned enough about something, there is no longer any reward in it for me. Once I reach that point, further involvement is so painful, I become almost incapable of learning more or progressing further.[return][return]Barbara Sher also presents a lot of other valuable tools such as the Life's Work Bookshelf and a system of record keeping that helps a Scanner keep track of all their fast coming and fast going ideas.[return][return]If you think you might be a Scanner, you would be making a huge mistake not to devote some time to looking through this book (scanning it maybe?). It will take me a long time to process and incorporate all the things that I learned, but man was this book written for me!

Teresa says

This is a manual of sorts for people Barbara Sher refers to as Scanners.

Scanners are people who enjoy doing a lot of different things — with absolute passion! They are multi-skilled, well-read and interested in countless topics, professions and hobbies; they are challenged to choose between a "favorite" or "dream" job by traditional standards. And their days and homes are literally cluttered with a wide variety of clues with regard to this reality.

Scanners find it easy to start jobs, projects, etc. but they are often challenged to complete said adventures due to their span of interests and their distinct ability to dart about in multiple directions. Their minds are literally filled to the brim with ideas and directives, and more inspirations that humanly possible — even when considered over a lifetime!

Sher comes alongside and inspires the reader to embrace who she is as well as presenting insightful exercises and useful tools to equip a Scanner (and to aid her in determining what type of Scanner she is).

Becca says

If you are the type of person that jumps from interest to interest and you either have judgments around that, want to find a job suited to you, or just want to know it's okay to do that, this book rocks.

I don't have ADD, but I feel like I do because I just LOVE learning. But I've been trying to stop jumping from thing to thing because it's culturally alienating. Well now I feel proud of my insatiable appetite for learning, I feel more confident looking for jobs and less pressured into finding my ONE career for life. I want to do it all.

This book really cleared up some things for me and I recommend it to anyone who is still saying "I don't know what I want to be when I grow up." Chances are, you are ALREADY that person. Celebrate it!

Lightrainbow says

Laura says

For you, if you feel a lifetime isn't nearly long enough to pursue all your interests and make use of all your abilities.

Barbara Sher addresses those of us with a multitude of interests and talents, the ones who swooned when they got a look at the course catalog in college, the ones who wanted to major in all of human knowledge. Not only does she describe us so accurately that I felt the book was about me personally, but every chapter had insights and techniques I could (and did) put to use immediately.

We have a unique set of problems to go with our thirsty minds, such as feeling so overwhelmed by the possibilities that we don't know where to start. Or feeling we can never study as many things as deeply as we want to, so why try? Not only did I recognize much about myself that I hadn't ever put into words, but as soon as I did she began to expand my thinking in a way that freed me from much self-criticism. Limiting

beliefs I hadn't ever examined were laid out on the page, and then illuminated with such insight that they disappeared, the way the dark disappears when you turn on the light.

When I read a book with "exercises" I almost never do them. Except this time, when I couldn't wait to get out my pen. I learned something useful about myself from each one. There are lots of practical suggestions for making room in our lives for all our riches, and keeping track of them too! This book gave me new hope (and practical new ways) for actually learning and doing all those wonderful things I feel so drawn to. And in just one lifetime.

Hamidreza says

yes , actually i am a multi potential scanner . and i thank you for making somewhere for us . a home to belong
