



CS4

# BARBARA

From drifting to directed

**SITUATION:** Barbara was a ‘career drifter.’ She had graduated with a bachelor’s degree in marketing and worked as an assistant account executive for an international consumer packaged-goods company. However, when she introduced herself to us, she was unhappily working as a waitress in an underperforming tourist destination restaurant. She didn’t know what she wanted to do or which direction to move and she had been living paycheck to paycheck for too long. She didn’t see an exit from the career and life she had fallen into.

Though Barbara’s career had derailed at some point, as we came to know her through exercises and in-session, we discovered that other factors contributed to her unhappiness. Her career was merely suffering a symptom of the larger problem: perfectionism.

**RESOLUTION:** In Barbara’s case, JMA sought to find resolution for the career problem Barbara presented through a holistic approach. On the one hand, we needed to help her discover her passions again. On the other, if we didn’t address her perfectionist thought patterns, we knew that her unhappiness would persist no matter where she found herself.

On the career front, Barbara was all over the map. In early assessment exercises at JMA, she had identified everything from river guide to travel agent as possible jobs she might enjoy. Through a series of exercises, JMA found that Barbara enjoyed physical activity and working with her hands, and the tangible

---

world. This explained why she hadn't stayed in her original field, marketing. This insight also enabled us to narrow the field of possible careers she might find rewarding. After four sessions, Barbara fixed upon carpentry as something she would like to pursue next.

She didn't necessarily need to find the career that would take her through retirement. She just needed to know where to place her next step. This is an important distinction. For people that wrestle with perfectionist tendencies, decisions become difficult because of a self-imposed permanence. In other words, Barbara feared making a choice because she thought she had to find an answer that would hold true throughout the rest of her life. Her fear was further complicated by the doubts from a couple of mediocre career decisions.

Perfectionism plagued her in another way, as well. Not only did she expect the utmost of herself, but she expected it of others, as well. Within ten sessions and two months of diligent homework, Barbara started to gain some self-confidence, saw the world in more than black and white, and learned how to give people a break, including herself. "It's okay not to be flawless every step of the way," she wrote. While Barbara has always had the skills to persevere through adversity, she now says about herself, "I have a lot less fear and trepidation as I act...it's less of a mental struggle... and I have a better feeling of being at home in my skin, as I attempt the next thing." Further, JMA had worked out with Barbara an ongoing system that would continue to increase her self-esteem, reduce her fear, and manage her excessive standards. JMA also helped her identify a blueprint that strategically positioned her for a successful career in carpentry.

**OUTCOME:** Barbara writes or calls periodically and lets us know how her career and life are progressing. In a recent update, she wrote, “I successfully graduated from the Chicago Women in Trades Technical Opportunities Program...I was chosen by my class to give a speech at graduation, for which I received a standing ovation. It will also be included in the [school’s] newsletter.” Furthermore, she has developed a support network of friends she met in her training program, and her new job is off to a promising start: “[I] had a review a month or two ago, and my boss told me she considers me to be one of the best....several of my workmates have told me that they like working with me most.”

Most importantly, Barbara continues to love her chosen trade of carpentry and has successfully minimized the perfectionist tendencies that once plagued her.