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Career Management Skills

Keys to a Great Career and a Great Life

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Unintentional Careers

A July, 2002 OECD Career Guidance Review team identified among Canada's strengths "the extent and quality of labour market information."¹ One might therefore expect Canadians to avail themselves of this information to plan their careers with clarity and confidence.

However, the majority of Canadian secondary school graduates have no clearly articulated career goals. 67% of females and 57% of males between the ages of 17 and 24 pursue post-secondary education.² The majority go to university or college without clear goals. Too few select apprenticeship, vocational or trades training to meet current and projected demand. Nearly half change programs or drop out by the end of their first year of post-secondary studies. Of those who graduate, 50 percent will not be in jobs directly related to their studies 2 years after graduation.³

Many adults go through their entire working lives without ever making fully intentional, fully informed career choices. Too many end up in jobs through happenstance rather than informed choice, then spend 50 percent of their conscious hours in work settings they do not particularly like. In a recent national Gallup survey in the U.S. seven in ten adults (69%) report that if they were starting their careers over they would try to get more information about job and career options than they got when they began their working lives.⁴ In the same survey more than five times as many people indicated that they entered the workforce by chance rather than by a choice influenced by a career development professional. Many people eventually find their way to satisfying and fulfilling work roles, but too many do not. Those who feel trapped in inadequate work roles are less productive than their satisfied counterparts.

The loss of productivity and waste of human capital are palpable, whether measured in training costs or unrealized human potential.

Economic Consequences

Canada invests heavily to support individuals, groups and regions in need, accepting higher taxes than many countries to ensure a better quality of life for more citizens. Even minimal losses on these huge investments can cost governments, corporations and communities dearly, particularly when balancing budgets is a real challenge. Fallout from gaps between people's skills and workforce needs reduces the return on investment we rightly expect from education, health care and social services investments. Moreover, they cost governments lost revenues and businesses lost productivity and competitiveness.

¹ <http://www.oecd.org/els/education/careerguidance>

² Statistics Canada, Access, persistence and financing: First results from the Postsecondary Education Participation Survey (PEP), September 2003

³ Statistics Canada and Human Resources Development Canada, *School Leavers Survey*, 1997.

⁴ National Survey of Working America, National Career Development Association and The Gallup Organization, 1999.



Productivity “We are sitting on a huge potential boom in productivity – if we could just get the square pegs out of the round holes.”⁵ A 1 percent increase in Canada’s productivity would result in an increase of \$10 billion in goods and services each year. Better mechanisms for helping people connect with work they love and at which they excel would have profound ramifications for businesses across Canada, and would yield standard of living gains in communities from coast-to-coast.

Education A 2003 OECD survey ranks Canadian students as 2nd among 32 OECD countries in Reading Literacy, 5th in Mathematics and 5th in Science. Our \$60+ billion⁶ annual investment in education is paying dividends. Nonetheless, too many students are unsure why they are learning what they are learning. Too many change programs, underachieve or drop out. Some extend their education because they are reluctant to move on. Few students fully understand the diversity of work roles that align with their academic and technical skills. Many graduate with heavy student loan debts and unclear career prospects. Not enough master the skills of career management they will need to complement their academic and technical skills in becoming self-reliant, lifelong career managers. A 1 percent improvement through helping more students become fully engaged in programs that lead them to work they love would release an additional \$600 million each year to help even more students, or to improve infrastructure.

Health Those who are unemployed or in work roles they dislike are subject to increased stress, have increased likelihood of unhealthy lifestyles, and are more prone to substance and physical abuse. Good jobs foster good mental health whereas poor jobs cause distress (Loscocco & Roschelle, 1991)⁷. In a September 2002 Ipsos-Reid survey for the *Globe and Mail* and *CTV*⁸ one in six adults surveyed (17%) said there have been times they were under so much stress they considered suicide. The main causes of stress cited were work (43%) and finances (39%). It is estimated that workers with depression cost US employers an estimated \$44 billion yearly in lost productive time.⁹ About \$80 billion¹⁰ is invested by all levels of government annually on health care. If only 1 percent of health expenditures are due to work-related stress the potential saving in helping more people find satisfying work is nearly \$800 million each year

Social Services: Over \$100 billion¹¹ is invested by Canadians each year on social services, including social assistance and welfare. Fewer recipients would need assistance if more had the skills to find and keep work they love. A modest 1 percent improvement would save over \$1 billion annually.

Protection, Prisons and Corrections: Over \$15 billion¹² is invested annually on “protection of persons and property,” including policing, prisons and correctional services. A 1 percent improvement in helping more detainees acquire career planning and management skills,

⁵ Po Bronson, “What Should I do With My Life? The True Story of People Who Answered the Ultimate Question.” Random House, January 2003.

⁶ Statistics Canada, CANSIM II, Consolidated federal, provincial, territorial and local government revenue and expenditure, August 2002

⁷ Savickas, M, 14 Facts Career Specialists Could Assert in Debates about Public Policy Regarding Workforce Development and Career Guidance, For International Career Development Policy/Practice Symposium participants, Vancouver, May 2002.

⁸ Canadians and Stress: A Special Report, Ipsos-Reid, September 2002

⁹ Stewart, W., Ricci, J., Chee, E., Hahn, S., & Morganstein, D. (2003). Cost of Lost Productive Time Among US Workers with Depression. *Journal of American Medical Association*, 289 (23), 3135- 3143.

¹⁰ Statistics Canada, CANSIM II, Consolidated federal, provincial, territorial and local government revenue and expenditure, August 2002

¹¹ Statistics Canada, CANSIM II, Consolidated federal, provincial, territorial and local government revenue and expenditure, August 2002

¹² Statistics Canada, CANSIM II, Consolidated federal, provincial, territorial and local government revenue and expenditure, August 2002



become realistically hopeful about their future and more self-reliant in getting and keeping jobs they love could save *\$150 million annually*.

Employment Insurance: Human Resources Development Canada pays out about \$10 billion¹³ per year to over a half million EI recipients who get an average of about 18 weeks of payments. For workers in seasonal situations or those subjected to economic forces beyond their control, this income support is invaluable. Some recipients, however, simply cannot secure work they like. If more of these people had the skills to successfully manage their work and learning opportunities, EI disbursements would decrease. A 1 percent improvement would result in savings of about *\$100 million annually*.

Government Revenues: Over \$400 billion¹⁴ is collected by all levels of government each year in income taxes (individual and corporate), property taxes, consumption taxes, health premiums, social insurance contributions, etc. If more Canadians were able to find work they love, revenues would increase for all levels of government. A 1 percent improvement would generate over *\$4 billion* per year in government revenues each year. 5 percent would yield a \$20 billion annual windfall for all levels of government.

Human Consequences

The economic consequences of having too many citizens drifting into the wrong jobs, or no jobs, are high. The human consequences are higher. Too many Canadians are simply not enjoying happy and fulfilling lives. Some will even die before their time. They are so unhappy with the ways their lives and careers have unfolded that they will end their lives or neglect their health, possibly abusing one substance or another to escape their reality. It is not an exaggeration to say that lack of career management skills can be life-threatening. What's more, this isn't just the individual's problem. It profoundly affects his or her relationships with family and community. Families, communities and Canadian society all lose when individuals are unable confidently and effectively to manage their lives and careers.

Time to Shift Paradigms

For too many Canadians the traditional vocational guidance paradigm is not working. It expects youth, possibly with help from a counsellor, to make an informed, long-term career choice before graduating from high school. Yet, when groups of adults are asked if they are now doing what they expected to be doing when they graduated, few raise their hands. The evidence suggests only a small minority of people identify a "calling" in secondary school, despite the pressures to do so.

The industrial age vocational guidance model was about helping people make an informed occupational choice, as follows:

1. Explore one's interests, aptitudes, values, etc. (using tests and professional assistance)
2. Explore the world of work (occupations)
3. Determine a "best fit" occupation by matching personal traits to occupational factors
4. Develop a plan to obtain the prerequisite education and training
5. Graduate, obtain secure employment, climb the ladder
6. Retire as young as possible on pension as a reward for decades of work.

¹³ Human Resources Development Canada, Performance Report, Page 28, March 31, 2001

¹⁴ Statistics Canada, CANSIM II, Consolidated federal, provincial, territorial and local government revenue and expenditure, August 2002



Steps 1 through 4 still apply in contemporary workplaces, but the terms work role, cluster or industry sector may be substituted for occupation. Knowledge societies, however, now make these steps *recurrent*, dramatically increasing the need for information and support services at all ages. Step 5 is no longer assured. Even senior executives and CEO's are not secure in their positions. Step 6 will only occur for those who learn and successfully apply personal financial planning skills. Increasingly, people either cannot or do not wish to stop working at a fixed date.

The new *career management paradigm* is not about making *the* right occupational choice. It's about equipping people with the competencies (skills, knowledge and attitudes) to make the *myriad* choices with which adults are confronted continuously, in all aspects of their lives, lifelong. "While technical and job-specific skills have sufficed in the past, it is increasingly being accepted that the worker of the future will need a more comprehensive set of *meta-competencies* that are not occupation-specific and are transferable across all facets of life and work. The economic value, to the individual and the nation as a whole, of a workforce equipped with these *meta-competencies* cannot be underestimated and their development cannot be left to chance."¹⁵ The key in the workplace, and in life, is not finding the perfect job, friend or life partner: it's *becoming* the best possible worker, friend or life partner.

In the career management paradigm the question, "What do you want to be when ... ?" is replaced by questions like:

"Who are you now, and what do you love to do?"

"What are your special talents and skills?"

"What types of situations, environments and work roles have special appeal for you?"

"What types of organizations need what you can offer?"

"What innovative work arrangements will suit you and potential employers?"

"What do you want to do *first* when you graduate to move toward your preferred future?"

The object is to find work one *loves*, in the process of constructing a great career and life. The pervasive assumption that money is the shortest route to freedom and happiness is flawed, as so many stressed adults have discovered. In fact, "the shortest route to the good life lies in building confidence that you can live happily within your means while doing work you truly love."¹⁶

"People don't succeed by migrating to a 'hot' industry. They thrive by focusing on who they really are – and connecting to or creating work that they truly love (and, by doing so, unleashing a productive and creative power that they never imagined). Companies win when they engage the hearts and minds of individuals who are dedicated to answering their life question."¹⁷ People who love what they do are more productive. In the words of Yahoo chief solutions officer Tim Sanders, "Over and over again, I've discovered that the businesspeople who are busiest, happiest, and most prosperous are those who are the most generous with their knowledge and their expertise. People who love what they're doing, who love to learn new things, to meet new people, and to share what and whom they know with

¹⁵ McMahon, M., Patton, W., & Tatham, P. Managing Life, Learning and Work in the 21st Century. Issue paper explaining why the new Australian Blueprint for Career Development is modeled on Canada's Blueprint for Life/Work Designs. 2003. Perth: Miles Morgan Australia Pty Ltd.

¹⁶ Po Bronson, "What Should I do With My Life? The True Story of People Who Answered the Ultimate Question." Random House, January 2003.

¹⁷ Ibid.



others: these are the people who wind up creating the most economic value and, as a result, moving their companies forward."¹⁸

Tests and computer systems seldom answer people's life questions, and career professionals are not exclusively qualified to ask them. The career management paradigm puts control, and responsibility, in the hands of the individual, not in tests, computer systems or specialists. To be fully in control of their own lives, people need to learn career management skills just as they learn math, science, language or technical skills. Career development must become an on-going, learning process for all rather than an occasional counselling process for the few "who need help." Career development practitioners and human resource specialists who understand the new paradigm become pivotal players in the paradigm shift in their organizations. They play vital coaching, mentoring and coordinating roles. Those not attuned to the new paradigm are being relegated to the periphery, in declining numbers.

To help more citizens master career management skills, career practitioners, counsellors, educators, workforce developers and human resources specialists need programs and resources based on clear career management learning and performance outcomes. They need ways to accurately determine students' or clients' prior career management learning (PLAR) and to select programs, resources and services based on their clients' real needs (gaps). Organizations in the career "business" need to develop comprehensive career management service delivery and accountability frameworks. A common language and map, or framework, of career management competencies and performance indicators is needed.

Blueprint for Life/Work Designs: a framework of career management competencies:

The United States began pioneering work on a career management competency framework in 1988. The result was the *National Career Development Guidelines* that have since been adopted by most U.S. states. Canada began adaptation of the U.S. *Guidelines* in 1998. The result is Canada's *Blueprint for Life/Work Designs* (www.blueprint4life.ca).

The *Blueprint* identifies core career management *competencies* with associated *performance indicators* at four developmental levels across the lifespan. The core competencies are the basis upon which career management programs can be designed. The performance indicators, which are organized by *learning stages*, are used to measure learning gains and demonstrate program effectiveness. The *Blueprint* competencies are arranged in three *domains*:

A. Personal Management

1. Build and maintain a positive self-image
2. Interact positively and effectively with others
3. Change and grow throughout ones' life

B. Learning and Work Exploration

4. Participate in life-long learning supportive of life/work goals
5. Locate and effectively use life/work information
6. Understand the relationship between work and society/economy

C. Life/Work Building

7. Secure or create and maintain work
8. Make life/work enhancing decisions
9. Maintain balanced life and work roles

¹⁸ Tim Sanders, "Love Is the Killer App: How to Win Business and Influence Friends." Crown Business/Random House, February 2003.



10. Understand the changing nature of life and work roles
11. Understand, engage in and manage one's own life/work building process

Included are employability, essential and emotional skills employer groups suggest are lacking in too many prospective employees, particularly youth. In fact, work habits and attitudes strongly influence early adult earnings, so educational and training programs need to emphasize work behaviours as much as they emphasize job skills.¹⁹ Self-reliance grows out of the acquisition of these skills.

The Blueprint recognizes that people at different ages and stages learn differently, and that even young children can learn and appreciate these competencies. In fact, attitudes toward work are formed early in life, so workforce and career management policy must take a developmental perspective. Vocational psychologists such as Super, Crites, Gribbons, and Lohnes have each concluded from their longitudinal studies that planful competence in early adolescence relates to more realistic educational and vocational choices, occupational success, and career progress.²⁰ For this reason, the core competencies are defined at four developmental levels:

- Level 1: Primary/elementary school*
- Level 2: Junior high/middle school*
- Level 3: High school*
- Level 4: Adult, including post-secondary*

Here is an example of *performance indicators for Competency 5 – Level 3 (High School) - Locate, interpret, evaluate and use life/work information*

Learning stage a: Acquisition

- 5.3 a1 Explore the educational and training requirements of various work roles.
- 5.3 a2 Discover how key personnel in selected work roles could become ideal information resources and/or role models.
- 5.3 a3 Explore how trends and work opportunities in various economic/industry sectors impact the nature and structure of work roles.
- 5.3 a4 Explore how employment and workplace trends impact education and training scenarios.
- 5.3 a5 Understand how a variety of factors (e.g., supply and demand for workers, demographic changes, environmental conditions, geographic location) impact work opportunities.
- 5.3 a6 Understand how labour market information (profiles, statistics, etc.) should be used when making life and work decisions.
- 5.3 a7 Explore a variety of work alternatives (e.g., full employment, multi-tracking, contracting, consulting, self-employment, entrepreneurship).

Learning Stage b: Application

- 5.3 b1 Use career information resources such as career monographs, occupation classifications systems, labour market information, mass media, computer and Internet-based career information delivery systems to educate oneself to the realities and requirements of various work roles.
- 5.3 b2 Consult key personnel in selected work roles as information resources, role models and/or mentors.

¹⁹ Savickas, M, 14 Facts Career Specialists Could Assert in Debates about Public Policy Regarding Workforce Development and Career Guidance, For International Career Development Policy/Practice Symposium participants, Vancouver, May 2002.

²⁰ Ibid.



Learning Stage c: Personalization

- 5.3 c1 Determine, according to one's preferences, the advantages and disadvantages of various work alternatives (e.g., full employment, multi-tracking, contracting, consulting, self-employment, entrepreneurship).
- 5.3 c2 Assess life/work information and evaluate its impact on one's life/work decisions.

Learning Stage d: Actualization

- 5.3 d1 Improve one's strategies to locate, interpret, evaluate and use life/work information.

To view the entire framework of 44 competencies and nearly 500 performance indicators sorted by developmental levels and learning stages visit <http://blueprint4life.ca/competencies.cfm>.

This framework can be used by departments of education, labour and workforce development, community services, human resource departments as well as in career management programs in industry. New programs, resources and services are being developed to help more people master these essential career management skills.

Accountability

"What method do we have of checking the results of guidance? We simply must work out some definite method of testing and checking the results of our work. If we do not, some other group will, with possible disastrous results for our work." Payne, 1923²¹

Recent research yields evidence of favourable student outcomes in schools offering comprehensive career development programs. For example, in a recent system-wide evaluation in Utah public schools²² students in schools with highly implemented comprehensive career guidance programs:

- rated their overall educational preparation as better
- rated their employment preparation as better
- took more advanced math and science courses
- took more vocational and technical courses
- had higher ACT scores in every test area
- rated the guidance and career planning service higher

In a recent Missouri evaluation²³ 45,565 students in 420 middle schools and high schools with highly implemented comprehensive career development programs reported:

- They earned higher grades
- Their education was better preparing them for their future
- Their schools made more career information available to them
- Their school had a more positive climate
- School was more relevant for them

These results are both encouraging and reassuring for career practitioners. Yet most services in schools implementing comprehensive career development programs remain largely directed at helping students choose career goals rather than acquiring career management skills. A comprehensive career *management* program would include everything now included in comprehensive career development programs, *plus* systematic

²¹ Payne,, 1923

²² Utah Department of Education

²³ University of Missouri



and experiential learning of career management competencies. The same would apply for as many clients and employees in work and community settings as possible. Twisting the old adage somewhat, the object is to help people to learn how to fish, not how to choose a fish.

Career management skills: these are the keys to a great career, and a great life. As more youth and adults learn and hone career management skills more will find work they love and construct great careers and lives for themselves. Increased happiness and prosperity will be enjoyed by more individuals, families, communities and the nation.

