

## INTEGRATING CAREER AND PERSONAL COUNSELING

Career and personal counseling are inextricably intertwined. Career problems have a strong emotional component. Career indecision and procrastination may be better interpreted as zeteophobia, the fear of career exploration. Trait and factor theory pictures career counseling as unrealistically simplistic and leads neophytes to view it as boring. Training all counselors to integrate career and personal counseling would lead to better service for clients.

By using the term career counseling and distinguishing it from personal counseling, I am already contributing to the very problem we need to solve. The two terms convey the impression that there must be sharp distinctions between career and personal counseling. If counselors believe there are sharp distinctions, then it will seem logical to take separate training courses in each, have separate professional organizations for each, provide different certification for each, and even administer the services through separate agencies. All of these consequences have come to pass to various degrees as a result of language that points at differences rather than integration.

Richardson (1992) preferred to avoid the word "career" and to talk more broadly about the role of work in people's lives. For the present I shall retain the familiar terminology and advance the thesis that career problems are inextricably intertwined with personal problems and must be treated as such by professional counselors.

### EXAMPLES

When we discover the complex circumstances that are interwoven into our clients' problems, it becomes almost impossible to categorize any given problem as either "career" or "personal." Consider some case examples.

Linda is depressed because she lost her job and doesn't think she can ever find another one. Is this a career problem? Or a depression problem?

Greg is worried about losing his job as a sales manager. His employees are unhappy with his management style, and he has been warned by his boss. Is this a career problem? Or a social skills problem?

Michelle wants a job she can perform at home because she is afraid to leave the house. Is this a career problem? Or an agoraphobia problem?

Fred returns home after work each day burdened with insoluble problems and the victim of a punitive supervisor. He feels sexually impotent with his wife. Is this a career problem? Or a problem of sexual dysfunction?

The problems of real people in real life defy our best efforts to categorize them. By arbitrarily classifying problems as "career" or "personal," we make it more difficult to help people whose real problems involve elements of both.

### Varieties of "Career Problems"

Problems usually categorized as career problems come in many shapes, sizes, and varieties. Some of the more common types may be summarized as follows:

Locus of Control: Who is in charge of my career?

Career Direction: If I am in charge, in what direction should I start?

Career Obstacles: How can I hope to achieve my career goals when I face so many obstacles?

Job Search Knowledge: How do I go about finding the kind of job I think I would like?

Job Search Motivation: How can I keep looking for a job in the face of real and potential rejection?

Job Relationships: How can I learn to get along with my boss and co-workers?

Job Burnout: What should I do when I am no longer satisfied with my current job?

Occupational Advancement: How can I become more successful in my career?

Retirement Planning: How can I arrange a satisfactory transition to my retirement years?

Each of these career problems is laden with emotional content. Retirement planning, for example, is not a simple case of learning some new hobbies. Giving up one's work environment requires a profound shift in values and relationships. It can pose emotional problems just as severe as those triggered by divorce.

### **Zeteophobia**

Career counseling has usually been conceptualized as an intellectual exercise, while personal counseling was seen to involve treatment of emotional concerns such as phobias. The existence of phobias in career counseling has been totally overlooked.

Career decisions are crucial to human happiness. A career affects the way one spends most of the waking day. It affects the kind of people with whom one socializes. It affects the choice of a marriage partner, vacation plans, neighbors, and retirement possibilities. With so much riding on career decisions, one might expect people to be eager to spend time mapping out the best possible decisions for themselves.

In fact, career planning is often avoided until the last moment. Counselors at Stanford's Career Planning and Placement Center report that it gets to be spring quarter of their senior year before many students arrive in a panic wanting to know what to do with the rest of their lives. Why is that so?

Is it because students do not realize the importance of their career decisions? I think students do realize the importance. More likely, the reason they avoid facing the problem is because they see the problem as too important--so crucial and

overwhelming that they cannot bear to face it. The problem has been misdiagnosed as procrastination. The correct diagnosis is zeteophobia.

Zeteophobia is based on a Greek word and means literally "fear of searching out." The problems of finding a new direction and seeking a new job are so monumental that they create panic reactions just as severe as those associated with agoraphobia or any other phobia. Although skill and knowledge deficits may be part of the problem, they are not the whole problem. The emotional concomitants of career planning are integral to the process.

We have typically treated career problems as skill deficits or cognitive gaps. We have tended to overlook the tremendous anxiety associated with these decisions.

Part of the anxiety is related to the way in which the problem is stated. Suppose a student says, "I must decide now how I am going to spend the rest of my life." Phrased this way, the decision is earthshaking, there is no time to deliberate, the consequences are awesome, and the task is overwhelming. Faced with an emotional problem of this magnitude, there are three possible courses of action:

1. Avoid the situation for as long as possible.
2. Make a quick decision--any decision will do.
3. Confront the fear directly, reformulate the problem and begin investigating alternatives.

Successful treatments for other phobias demonstrate conclusively that facing feared situations directly and learning to cope with the panic reactions are the quickest and most effective ways of overcoming the phobia. Avoiding the feared situation seldom works.

Young people are sheltered from having to make important decisions about structuring their life until they graduate. The educational system is a "co-dependent" in enabling them to avoid difficult career decisions. Then suddenly they are turned loose with little skill and a strong case of zeteophobia. Treatment would logically involve gradually increasing exposure to career exploration tasks, but research will be needed to test alternative approaches. The treatment of zeteophobia by career counselors would involve them in the emotional concerns of their clients and would tend to minimize differences between career and personal counseling.

### **Trait and Factor Theory Underrepresents the Complexity**

Trait and factor theory is still rooted in the cognitive three-step model proposed by Frank Parsons in 1909: self-knowledge, occupational knowledge, and matching the two. Thus to do a good job a counselor needs to know how to measure many human qualities, how to obtain quantities of occupational information, and how to pair the two.

The process may intrigue some people, but most counselors find it boring because it seems simplistic and ignores emotional complexities. Administering large test batteries can become routine in short order. Learning occupational information about 20,000 occupations is uninteresting and unnecessary. And attempting to match a profile with 50 variables to the same 50 variables in 20,000 occupations is a job only a computer could love.

I am not arguing that a matching of individuals with work environments is inappropriate. On the contrary, it is essential, and it must be done well. Some counselors do enjoy the matching process, and the welfare of our clients depends on that part of the job being done, well.

Fortunately, we now have the technology to perform large parts of the matching process. We can administer and score assessment instruments efficiently, make relevant occupational information appear at the touch of a keystroke, and compare complex profiles of personal characteristics with potential occupations. If those three tasks constituted the entirety of career counseling, we would just about have made ourselves technologically obsolete.

Trait-and-factor theory would have us believe that career counseling was a purely cognitive matching process. No feelings. No fears and anxieties. No zeteophobia. No false assumptions. No hopes and aspirations. No family involvement. No status considerations. No racial or gender stereotyping. No religious or community pressure. Just a nice game of occupational scrabble--placing the right chips on the best squares to maximize the total score.

My discontent with the trait-and-factor theory led me to develop the social learning theory of career decision making (Krumboltz, 1979). In a nutshell this theory depicts the development of career interests as a consequence of an uncountable number of learning experiences. Every time a child swings a baseball bat and either hits or misses the ball, the child is learning: "I'm good at baseball" or "I'm bad at baseball." The learnings are summarized by each child as self-observation generalizations. Task approach skills encompass attitudes and emotions associated with various occupational tasks. Environmental and cultural factors provide either blocks or access to additional learning opportunities. Over time children tend to gravitate toward activities that are rewarding and valued by those they respect. Eventually they move into occupations that provide what they think is best for them, given the circumstances.

Of course what they think is best for them may or may not be best in fact. People make assumptions and generalizations based on their learning experiences. Some are true, some are false. Whether true or false these assumptions guide our behavior. Counselors need help in getting their clients to express the assumptions that may be blocking career progress. The Career Beliefs Inventory (Krumboltz, 1991) is used to help identify some of those assumptions.

Then the counselor needs to arrange additional learning experiences to help people test their assumptions and change them if needed. The counselor is needed to motivate, design, schedule, and reward a sequence of learning steps. Counselors need to appreciate fully the extent to which emotional assumptions are integrated into career planning and the extent to which personal problems impinge on the work place. Career counseling requires constant learning, not one-time matching.

### **Counter-Arguments**

If the case for integrating career and personal counseling is so strong, why isn't everyone already doing it? Let's consider some arguments on the other side.

1. While some problems may be 50% career and 50% personal, there are other cases where one domain assumes an overwhelming proportion of importance. Good point. Clearly there are personal counseling cases where the career issues are tangential or virtually nonexistent. And vice versa. When the concerns are intertwined even partially, however, counselors need to treat the whole person. The marital problems of dual career couples, for example, cannot be dealt with by ignoring either the career concerns or the personal concerns.

- 2. Counselors have the right to specialize in dealing with whatever types of problems interest them the most. Another good point. No one would attempt to deny that right. But counselors also have an obligation to provide the best possible service to their clients. Defining a counseling practice too narrowly denies clients the opportunity to see clearly how the multiple dimensions of their lives can be integrated.
- 3. Each type of problem has so many ramifications and complexities that no one counselor is capable of handling them all. Special knowledge and skills are required to deal with different kinds of cases, and not every counselor has every skill. It is unethical for counselors to deal with problems on which they lack competence. The skills can be learned, however. Certainly the majority of counselors could develop the competence to handle integrating career and personal concerns. All counselors need their training to include components from both domains.
- 4. Some professional counseling organizations are structured around presenting problems. For example, one could name the National Career Development Association and the American Mental Health Counselors Association. No one would quarrel with the right of counselors to join associations structured around common presenting problems. A common interest should not lead to exclusivity, however. Each group can define the scope of their work broadly. Remley (1992) has argued that "Specialists within counseling who declare themselves separate and distinct cause confusion--and possibly damage--to the counseling profession" (p. 4).

- 5. Some universities provide separate administrative units for career counseling and for personal counseling. The fact that there are separate agencies is a symptom of the problem, not a justification for the distinction. The question is what happens to our clients. Compartmentalizing their concerns diminishes our ability to help them see how their feelings, beliefs, abilities, and interests are interconnected.

Richardson (1992) has forcefully argued that "we need to move beyond career development to a broader emphasis on fostering the development of individuals considered as whole persons in relation to the work in their lives. I no longer think it is tenable to separate out the study of career from the multiple and interacting strands and trajectories of development which make up the texture of lives over the life span" (pp. 20-21). Metz (1992) has shown empirically how work and family factors combine in intricate ways to influence both job and marital satisfaction. Career and personal counseling are inextricably intertwined--let's act as if we believe it.

## REFERENCES

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