

A Student's Perspective Upon Completion of the 9 Lives Activity

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Introduction

Many people, this author included, spend most of their life not knowing what they want to do when they grow up. The thought of choosing a career can be overwhelming, scary, and cause a lot of distress to those who do not know what they might want to do in their professional life. This author knew, in high school, that she wanted a career working with adolescents. She did not know what that would mean as far as career choice was concerned. There was a lack of confidence, clarity, and choice. She did not enjoy the thought of teaching, lacked skills necessary to coach, and was unaware of other careers centered around adolescents.

The 9 Lives Activity was introduced to this author, and she was skeptical. She already knew that she wanted to work with students, so she did not foresee learning anything useful from this activity. The activity focuses on interests of the person completing the activity. It is a tool useful to career counselors because it takes the interests of the client and allows for potential career choices with no extraneous thought. The question is simple: If allowed to do anything what would the client choose to do? The caveat is that the client can choose nine careers, however realistic or unrealistic it may be for them to work in a chosen field. This author learned that a client could feel anxious about activities like this. The fear of judgement from the counselor, or the thought that their ideas may be too unrealistic, or the anxiety of choosing nine different careers all seemed a bit overwhelming. It was necessary for the counselor to recognize the potential anxiety and encourage the client to proceed with no fear or judgment for the possible answers. The client needs to know that their dreams and choices are valid and meaningful. This author left the activity with a renewed sense of purpose, and a stronger desire to work in the counseling field.

Processing

This activity produced three common threads about the author that she would not have connected on her own. All nine of the chosen careers were mission-driven, roles in advocacy, and community-based. These were not things that she would have considered as traits she possessed prior to this activity. She did know that community and advocacy were important, but she would have not seen that they were at the center of her future career plans. It was clear through this process that this author did wish to work with adolescents, and that was not a surprise.

Upon reflection with her counselor, the author was able to learn more about what made these three common threads so important to her. She was an adolescent who experienced a lot of trauma in her life. She did not have anyone to advocate for her, and she relied heavily on her community for emotional survival. Without the community surrounding her she would not be where she is today. She is also a military Veteran who experienced trauma while serving in the United States Air Force. Being resilient and teaching resiliency is important to this author, and her personal trauma is a major reason for that. Ibrahim and Kamsani (2022) wrote, “Although past adversity has been linked to long term negative outcomes, these outcomes are not predetermined. Many people have suffered much adversity and yet return to a state of well being or healthy functioning, and they may even develop an increased capacity for prosocial behaviors and posttraumatic growth”. Because this author did not have the familial support needed, she quickly learned the necessity of community support. Even though she did not recognize that this was important it was not surprising when the counselor informed her of his observations.

Having this information really helped this author narrow her focus and know why she

was doing what she was doing. Prior to the activity she believed that she was making a choice based on a calling. After the activity she knew she was making a choice based on a calling, but also she knew why adolescents were so important to her. She was mission-focused because she believed that adolescents are the future and need to know just how loved and valued they are. She was an advocate because she knew that not every person had the ability to advocate for themselves. She was community-based because it was her community that helped her heal from the trauma of her adolescence. This information really helped this author know why she wanted to pursue a career in counseling adolescents.

This author will use the tools learned during the nine lives activity to help clients figure out their “why”. This activity did more than just identify career choices, it gave renewed purpose. This emerging counselor can use this activity to help other clients renew their purpose and discover what it is who makes them desire their chosen careers. Purpose is crucial to career planning and this activity aids in labeling that purpose.

Incorporating Theory

Using this activity as a steppingstone will prove helpful. As the counselor to the client that produced these results, this author would incorporate the happenstance approach theory, and would also incorporate a trauma-informed career-counseling approach. Working collaboratively with this theory and modality could yield the best results for the client in career counseling.

The happenstance approach theory was developed by Krumboltz, Mitchell, and Levine. This theory suggests that different events, outside of the client’s control, can affect the client in negative or positive ways when it comes to career planning. “HLT draws attention to these random events and encourages transforming them into opportunities for career development. HLT focuses on two attributes: being open-minded to exploration and acquiring a set of skills to

embrace spontaneous opportunities” (Lee et al., 2017, p. 368). The client that completed this activity will be given the opportunity to learn to turn the negative happenstances into a positive future. Working with the client post doing the activity allows for client/counselor interaction to proceed to a future forward mindset. The counselor can work with the client to focus on the things she can control in the future, rather than the things that hindered her in the past.

A trauma-informed counseling approach becomes necessary when collaborating with a client who has experienced trauma in their past. “Trauma informed practices, or approaches, are distinct from trauma specific treatments in that they are not specifically designed to treat the effects of trauma but to promote recovery and resilience through an understanding of the effects of trauma” (Ibrahim & Kamsani, 2022). As a career counselor it is not necessary to treat the trauma, but to be trauma-informed when working with a client with a background similar to this author. It would be a disservice to ignore the trauma and work under the assumption that the client is far removed from the trauma of the past. In the instance of this author, her resilience in the face of her trauma is what led to her answers during the activity.

Some concrete steps for this client would be to collaborate with the counselor to take the common threads of the activity and laser focus the chosen career path. If the client wishes to fully embrace the mission-drive, advocate, community-based career path then the counselor can assist the client in finding the right career. Using a trauma informed practice becomes a necessary tool for the client to have the best results. Trauma is a part of their life and will be present in every area, including career. If this client does wish to continue toward a career in advocacy for adolescents, higher education is most likely necessary. This furthers the need for trauma-informed career counseling because she has experienced trauma in school and will need steps to work through those moments. This author is also a military Veteran and knows the

extended trauma scenarios that can be a factor for Veteran students. The counselor must stay informed and aware to the needs of the client. Smith (2021) wrote, “student-Veterans with a history of trauma actually had better emotional adjustment to the school-transition than did civilians reporting a history of trauma” (p. 189). Schooling would be a necessary step for the client to begin a career in the field of her choice.

Treatment Planning

The 9 lives activity allowed this author to learn more about potential careers available to her because of her apparent interests. The counselor should learn more, through a series of meetings, about the client’s trauma as an adolescent and while in the military. This could become necessary when deciding what career may or may not be a good fit. Knowing the things that might trigger recurrences or PTSD responses would be necessary. The client wants to be successful and working in a career that caused triggering would not add to that success.

In future meetings with the client, the counselor would be able to focus on specific schooling and career goals. The client has a specific area of interest, so future sessions would be focused on next steps to narrow that interest and finding the proper schooling to make a career in the field possible. Future sessions should focus on proper placement, avoiding trauma triggers, and career goal planning.

Conclusion

Resiliency is what this author learned about herself during this activity. The past is not something that brings shame. The past is what shaped her to become the person that she was meant to be. This activity taught her that even though she thought she knew exactly what she was doing, she did not understand the why. As an emerging counselor she will be able to use this activity to help others discover their why.

References

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