

NINE LIVES

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CAREER CHOICES

Over the course of my life, as far back as I can remember, my career choices have varied and evolved over the years. When I was a little girl, I wanted to be a teacher and I held on to that dream job for most of my childhood years growing up. When I entered high school I found that my career choice(s) started to evolve as I grew older.

In my junior year of high school, I had a few personal setbacks. My parents got divorced, I got pregnant, and I started my senior year of high school at a totally different school. Different in every way, culturally, socially and definitely in the minority. That's when life started getting real and I had to start making real, concrete choice for me and my newborn son's future.

I started focusing on my strengths and my interests. I liked to type and after school I used to work in one of the administrative offices. I enjoyed this type of work, and I decided I would pursue this career choice. After graduation I matriculated at our local community college in what was then called secretarial studies.

It was when I was taking a course in criminal justice that my course changed. I became interested in the legal system, most especially criminal justice. I shifted my studies to be a paralegal. Getting deeper into the program I was fascinated. I started to explore going to law school to be a criminal attorney.

That pursuit was quickly eradicated when I started working for an attorney. It was actually working in this arena that I saw the reality of being a lawyer. It appeared to be a stressful career and I didn't want or need that in my life. So, my career choice transitioned yet again.

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The career path switched to nursing. I was in my thirties. At this point the career choice was not so much about doing something for fun but something that I liked. But the career choice I made I need to earn real money at the same time. By this time, I had gotten married, and I had a total of four children and a household to support.

One major setback with nursing though – I was horrible at math and science. I was still taking classes at the community college. While there I enrolled in chemistry and algebra. I struggled through algebra, and I absolutely failed chemistry. After struggling through both classes which were basic requirements for the nursing curriculum, I realized that this was not for me.

As I evolved and matured enough to start focusing on a real life job. At the same time, I knew that I wanted a career in which I could help people. It was around this time that I rededicated myself to Christ and started going back to church. For a while I was in a state of indecision. I knew what I wanted to do but I needed a career that would help me to do it. At the same time it had to be something that that was interesting and attainable.

After being called to the ministry, I enrolled in an upper-level college and received a bachelors in Community Health and Human Services. Now I finally had a degree, but I didn't know what to do with it. Working in the church as a Sunday School teacher working with the youth shifted my focus yet again.

In my capacity as a Sunday School teacher, I often “counseled” my students. Most times in doing the lesson many of the things that were happening in their lives often arose. My method of teaching was applying our real life situations and relate it to the bible lesson of the day. This helped the students to make the lesson more “real” to them and relatable.

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Teaching and a little informal counseling made my stint as a Sunday School teacher fulfilling. I was excited about this because I had finally found my “niche.” My next focus was on becoming a psychiatrist. Not only was this something that I found fascinating but it would also be a part of my “retirement” plan. Something that would give me the flexibility in my older years and my own boss and set my own hours.

So again, I enrolled in a university, transferred my credits what I could and started that new journey. It didn't take long for me to change the course of my journey though. After I found out that after taking prerequisite courses that I would also need to complete a couple of years of medical school which is EXPENSIVE! Having a family to take care of and student debt mounting this was not an option.

In all this time, my ministry in the church was expanding. While still teaching Sunday School I received the call to the pastorate. After counseling with my pastor, I entered seminary. I believe I had finally found my true calling. I know seminary is not a career but the path to a career and I thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

While attending seminary, there were classes were required in pastoral counseling. It was these classes that solidified and started my journey into counseling. I decided that I could marry counseling and ministry together. There were/are a lot of hurting people in the church. Often people would come and talk to about whatever family/personal problems they are having after church. They would often seek me out. But not only in the church but in the community as well.

After receiving my MDiv. from seminary, I enrolled in an online university to pursue my doctorate in pastoral counseling. Taking courses in this field was truly enriching and I found I

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very helpful. Unfortunately, one year into my thesis I became sick. Trying to juggle work, take care of myself and my family, proved to be too much and I eventually had to stop my thesis work.

In the interim, my pastoral path continued to grow. I became an assistant pastor and was ordained. With my ordination came additional pastoral duties. Yearly my senior pastor would go down to Florida for the winter and I was left in charge of the church. It was then that I started contemplating becoming pastor of my own church. But as reality started to set in and I dealing with the all of the problems of senior pastoring entailed, that changed my mind.

Even through all these experiences I still wanted to help people while still attending to my ministry. My student loan debt was steadily climbing so I needed to do something that was affordable. But at the same time, I wanted something that wouldn't keep me in school for another few years. I needed a career!

I was nearing my fifties and I needed to do something soon. It was then as if a light bulb went off and I realized what I wanted to be when I grew up. After witnessing my daughter go through her life transitions with her marriage and having children, she started to see a mental health therapist. This intrigued me and I started to look into this field.

Being a mental health counselor checked off every box that I had envisioned my ideal career would be. In this career path I could use this in conjunction with my ministry. I still wanted to help people and minister to them, but I needed to do it the right way with credentials. More training was needed to give the tools that I need to truly counsel people soundly. Dealing with people in crisis and real-life problems this is a necessity. Being a mental health counselor would not extend to those in the church but to the community as well.

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THEMES

Even though my interests and career paths have changed over the span of my life, there are common themes. One of the recurring themes that I have found is the need to help people. Even from a young age I have wanted to do something that would make a difference. The desire to be a teacher in my childhood was the desire that I had to help shape young lives.

Growing up I remember being a shy child. In 3rd or 4th grade I had a teacher Mrs. DeVito, who took time to make sure that I was okay. Our family home had caught on fire, and we lost everything. I remember Mrs. DeVito bringing in clothes and other necessities for me and my family. That really stood out to me, and I never forgot that, even now over 40 years later. She made a difference in my life. That is difference I want to make in some other person's life.

This desire to help was more solidified when I started to get involved in the church. In my capacity as a Sunday School teacher, my students would often come to me and talk with me about their issues. I even had parents and grandparents come to me to help with their child. It was also important to be genuine and protect their privacy which built up a relationship based on trust and respect for all parties.

Another recurring theme is my faith. As far back as I can remember church was always a big part of my life. Growing up church was not an option it was a requirement. My grandmother played a very big part in my spiritual development. I did not fully understand the extent of my spiritual walk as a child.

It was not until I gave my life to Christ at the age of 15 that God became a necessity in my life. Even though I have veered down different pathways, God has remained the one

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Constant in my life. There was a period in my life that I put my relationship with God on the back burner, but those theological ideologies and God was still in my life. I still said my prayers and things but I had stopped attending the church and was doing my own thing.

Eventually I found my way back to church. Being older and more spiritually mature, God had become more important than ever in my life. On my career journey, the desire to intermarry my ministry with helping others became my focus. The career path I wanted to pursue was starting to take shape.

Self-employment was another theme. I wanted to be my own boss with my own hours. When I was in between studies I was still working in a job that I enjoyed. I actually set up a LLC to make the work I was doing a side business. Unfortunately, that didn't pan out. When I finally settled on a career choice being self-employed was a key factor. But another deciding factor was it was something I could do in my "old age." I made the pursuit of my mental health counseling degree and license a part of my retirement plan.

CAREER THEORY

My career theory, I believe, can be found in two theories. First, is Parson's theory of trait-oriented theory (Zunker, 2016, pgs. 21-27)¹. Following the premises of this theory many of my personal traits have guided by career decisions. I agree with this in that exploring who I am I can see many of my personal traits playing a part in my career choices. In many, if not all, of the career choices I have made it requires someone who is empathetic, helpful, concerned with the care and well-being of others. This is where it ends.

¹ (Zunker, 2016). *Career Counseling: A Holistic Approach*. (9th ed.). Cengage

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The career theory that I most identify with is Holland's typology (Zunker, 2016, 27-33). This theory supposes that an individual gets more career satisfaction from one that matches their personality. The success and satisfaction rate are higher under this theory. He also theorized that each person has a personal career theory (PCT). (Reardon & Lenz, 1999, pg. 103)². A PCT is a set of ideals or beliefs that an individual has that they use as they think about careers. It helps them to understand these beliefs and ideals and helps them as they make career choices (Reardon, p. 103).³

According to Holland there are six personality types, reality, artistic, social, investigative, enterprising, and conventional. The theory that pinpoints my personality type is social. Under this theory this personality likes to help people, are social and has a high regard for people. Careers most likely to be chosen are teacher, counselor, social worker, nursing etc. Holland's theory most closely matches my career theory. Aspirations to help others and growing up in the church I believe have helped to shape my ideals for valuing people but also to helping and being empathetic to others (Pope, 2000, pgs. 194-211).⁴

NEXT STEPS

In deciding be a mental health counselor some assessments tools may be used. Some clients may be unsure of what their personality type is. Career personality profiler tests your interest in all six of the Holland Code areas. The result of this that it will match the client with the appropriate career according to their personality.

² (Reardon & Lenz, 1999). Holland's Theory and Career Assessment. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 55(1), 102-113.

³ (Reardon & Lenz, 1999). Holland's Theory and Career Assessment. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 55(1), 103.

⁴ (Pope, 2000). A Brief History of Career Counseling in the United States. *Career Development Quarterly*, 48(3), 194-211.

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There is also another tool, the Holland Code Assessment. This assessment helps in determining which tool most career most closely matches your personality. Using this tool helps the individual to determine what their interests are.

In family therapy Murray Bowden, used a genogram to help depict how the family functioned through the generations. Under the same premise, a chart which was called a genogram was created by targeting career development. This genogram or chart was called The Career-O-Gram was developed to focus on career history and the influences of the life choices of an individual. This tool has been used in conjunction with Holland and other theorist models to gain further information and insight. (Thorngren & Feit, 2001).⁵

Once the career path has been matched and chosen, the client can move forward in achieving those goals. First educational learning, if applicable. Secondly, most of these career choices, counseling, social work and the like, requires going through a process of learning and honing skills through internships. Hands on experience is essential. Lastly, putting into practice what skills we have learned.

⁵ Thorngren & Feit, 2001). The Career-O-Gram: A Postmodern Career Intervention. *Career Development Quarterly*, 49(4), 291-30.

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