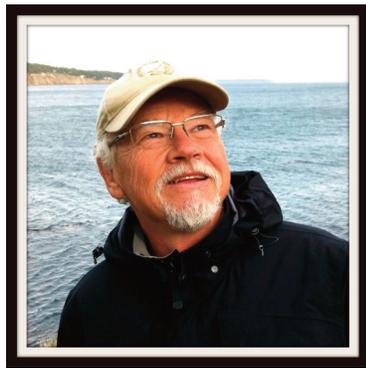

Etta St. John Wileman Award Winner Interview

It is with great honour that the editors of *The Canadian Journal of Career Development* bring you a special series of interviews with past Etta St. John Wileman award winners. The Etta St. John Wileman Award for Lifetime Achievement in Career Development is designed to recognize and celebrate individuals who have devoted their lives within their professions; devoted their lives to the enhancement of career development practice, administration, research, and education; and personify the role of researcher, educator, author, practitioner, and career leader.

These individuals have all contributed in their own way to the identity of the career development profession in Canada. It is through these interviews that our readers will get to see different perspectives, and perhaps gather some inspiration for their own work and career development.



Norman Amundson

Award Winner
2011

In 2011, Norman Amundson received the Etta St. John Wileman Award for his career development leadership in research, counselling education, and practitioner training.

He is a Professor in Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia, Canada. His research focuses on counselling methods, unemployment, and changes in working life, while his numerous lectures, articles, workshops and seminars emphasize the importance of imagination, creativity, cultural awareness, hope, and active engagement in the career counselling process. His publications include numerous journal articles, training DVDs, books, and several career workbooks.

Norman takes an active leadership role not only within the career development sector in Canada but also internationally. He has also been the recipient of numerous prestigious awards in addition to the Etta St. John Wileman Award.

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CJCD: Thank you for agreeing to talk with the Journal. Starting off, can you tell us a little about your own career development?

Norman: There are so many stories to tell about my personal career development. No one in my family had ever gone to university and I guess that is a starting point. My parents

played key roles in terms of their support for higher education. They didn't have much information but they did believe that the key to success was further education.

As someone with a relatively poor family I took full advantage of the opportunity to get scholarships. I had a general idea that I wanted to do something involving people and held on to that vision despite suggestions from a number of educators that I should be working in mathematics or the sciences. I completed an MA degree in Psychology from the University of Saskatchewan and worked as a parole officer. I went on to do my doctorate at the University of Alberta,



shifting my focus to working with children.

After graduating with my doctorate I was hired at UBC and went on to work with adolescents and adults. I started my foray into career development in the early 1980s with some federally funded research on the dynamics of unemployment with my colleague Dr. Bill Borgen. This research expanded to include work with groups and the development of programs such as Starting Points. At that time the federal government was creating some training modules for practitioners and a group of us became actively involved in the creation of the Group Training Module. This training was done throughout Canada and was picked up by several European countries.

“During high school I got a desk job in a hotel and bar on the weekends from midnight 'til 8am. In this position, I had many young oil workers coming to me for counselling help, even though I was only 15 years old. I had very high grades in mathematics and the sciences, but my passion was clearly working with people.”

In the mid 90s I began to question some of the conventions underlying traditional career counselling. This led to the publication of my book “Active Engagement” and laid the foundation for a series of national and international presentations. I had the opportunity to speak in a short period of time in thirty different countries and the books I was writing were being translated into many different languages.

All this activity was good for my career, but not necessarily for my health. In 2010 I had a heart attack and that led to a further period of reassessment. I decided at that

point to cut back on some of my extra work and focus exclusively on those projects that were the most interesting. I expanded my collaboration with Dr. Spencer Niles and together we focused our efforts on ‘career flow’ and an action-oriented, hope-centered career development model. To further this project we developed a hope-centered inventory (the HCCI) and also engaged in a series of research projects (two of the projects funded by CERIC) involving interventions with professionally trained immigrants and unemployed clients.

In addition to the Hope work I started to focus more on metaphors and their use as intervention measures. I am a firm believer in creativity and the power of imagination. Metaphors are one of the ways in which we learn and expand perspective. Having access to multiple metaphors enhances creativity and problem solving.

Even though I am now officially classified as a “senior citizen” I continue my work at UBC. I also have a 16-acre farm on Saturna island where I get away and create some life balance. I am very interested in learning more about the possibilities within this ‘Third Age’. I see myself as a lifelong learner and live by the maxim “Learning Every Day (LED)”.

CJCD: Taking a step back, you said in the 90s you began to question some of the conventions underlying traditional career counselling. What led to your questioning these conventions?

Norman: I realized that we were just repeating the patterns from earlier years. Even though there were many societal changes we kept following the same structures and conventions as before.

CJCD: Sometimes people do not like when the status quo is questioned. Did you encounter any roadblocks or negative responses to your questioning these conventions?

Norman: People were actually quite accepting of the new Active Engagement framework that I was proposing. I won the best book award from the Canadian Counselling Association and many people were excited about this work. I remember Vance Peavy telling me that I should keep developing my ideas about metaphors.

CJCD: Do you have any advice for others who may be questioning conventions of their own but unsure what to do?

Norman: I think it is important to follow your own path, and to not be afraid to do something different. It is really about having self-confidence and risk taking.

CJCD: You also mentioned life balance. Many professionals new to the field and even some long-time ones believe that they need to work long hours and take on as much work as they can. Can you talk to the reasoning behind why you started life balance and how it has influenced your career?

Norman: Some of my early thoughts about life balance were significant and helped to frame some of the ideas I was developing. I even wrote a book about it at one point – “The Physics of Living”. However, as I mentioned earlier I slid away from some of these early insights over time. When I had my heart attack in 2010 I went back to the book I had written and recommitted to some of these ideas.

CJCD: It sounds like you have encountered and interacted with many



individuals in your years. Have there been mentors in your life that have influenced your career development?

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Norman: The most significant mentor in my life has been Dr. Ed Herr from Penn State University. He encouraged the work I was doing and wrote numerous letters of support to research funding agencies. I found his work inspiring and on one occasion we even had the opportunity to do a conference presentation together on the theme of career flexibility. Ed was a very generous man in every respect. I admired his depth of knowledge, his integrity, and his commitment to the field of career development.

CJCD: Did you originally seek out Dr. Ed Herr specifically as a mentor or did he become one over time?

Norman: My first connection with Dr. Herr was in Sweden where we both were speaking and ended up doing some shopping together. Dr. Herr was very encouraging about the work we are doing and it seemed natural to begin discussing our research projects with him. We never had a formal conversation about him becoming a mentor, it just naturally started to happen.

CJCD: Having a mentor appears to have been very beneficial to you. Would you recommend that career practitioners find a mentor for themselves?

Norman: It is very helpful to have someone that can serve as both a mentor and coach. Career decision making is a lifelong process and

having someone to consult along the way is a definite plus.

CJCD: Thank you for that. Moving onto my next question for you, what would you consider to be some of the milestones in Canadian career development?

Norman: I think there have been many milestones in Canadian career development. Certainly there was the foundational work of career development pioneers such as Donald Lawson and Stu Conger. Through their efforts, and the work of others, career development as a discipline has flourished in Canada. There has been exciting work done at the community level, within government and within the education system. Our national conference on career development (now called Cannexus and supported by The Counselling Foundation of Canada) is a good illustration of how career development continues to be relevant in our current context.

CJCD: From your perspective as a professor and researcher, what is some of the current career development thinking and research being done in Canada today?

Norman: I think current career theory and practice is issuing in a new paradigm of understanding with a focus on themes such as designing, crafting, active engagement, uncertainty, chaos, paradox, metaphor, happenstance, mattering, and hope. Some career agencies are also starting to join together under a broad umbrella using the term "career literacy." There is greater awareness of

"I would love to see a more active partnership between academics and the practitioner community."

the need for advocacy and joint effort.

CJCD: Joining forces, that is fantastic! Is there anything practitioners who are not in a research position can do to assist with career development thinking and research in Canada?

Norman: I would love to see a more active partnership between academics and the practitioner community. I have been focusing many of my recent efforts on small research projects with practitioners in the field and the results have been very promising. Many of these projects started with brief conversations at Cannexus.

CJCD: I would now like to ask you, in your opinion, what are some of the challenges facing career development in Canada?

Norman: There are many challenges facing career development. At a foundational level, there still are many communication difficulties due to a misunderstanding of terms. The very definition of the field still is confusing. Many people are stuck in a time warp, believing that career development is just a matter of finding out which job they should pursue. While this is an important component of career development, there is so much more to be considered and developed. Career development is a lifelong process that involves self-understanding, awareness of the labour market, critical analysis, decision making, strategic action, and adaptability.

It is interesting for me to be now in the third age of life and find myself rediscovering the relevance of career development for myself and for many others who were born in the "baby boom" era. Career development is truly a lifelong



challenge and needs to be fully embraced.

CJCD: When you say ‘communication difficulties due to misunderstanding of terms,’ do you mean a misunderstanding on the side of the public or within the field itself?

Norman: I think there is often a disconnect between the public and the people working in the field. Career development has evolved to a higher level of complexity, but many of those outside the area are still operating on more limited paradigms.

CJCD: How do you see this possibly being fixed?

Norman: I think career practitioners need to recognize that they need to be communicating to people at many different levels. There are the “clients” but often there is a need to go broader. For example, running career development programs for parents would be a good place to make a difference.

"Career development is a lifelong process that involves self-understanding, awareness of the labour market, critical analysis, decision making, strategic action, and adaptability."

CJCD: This has all been very insightful and it gives us much to think about. If you could look into a crystal ball and see what the future holds for career development in Canada, what would that future look like?

Norman: My hope for the future is that the full capacity of career development is incorporated into Canadian society. Career development has much to offer to people of all

ages and from all cultures. It also can play a significant positive role in organizational functioning. As people adjust to a rapidly changing world there is a real need for career development awareness and competency.

CJCD: Before we finish up, I am sure our readers would like to hear any advice you have for up-and-coming career development practitioners and researchers.

Norman: I think people need to learn from the past, but at the same time keep an eye on what lies ahead. This means paying attention to the way in which career development theory and practice is evolving. It is very easy to get locked into old paradigms and miss how the times are indeed “a-changing.” Staying up-to-date requires ongoing professional development and this can be achieved through reading current materials and attending professional conferences. Ongoing professional development is essential in a world where change is happening so quickly.

CJCD: Important words to take into consideration. Thank you again for taking time out of your busy schedule to talk with us. I have learned a lot from hearing of your experiences, and I will be taking a few things away to ponder on over the next few weeks. I am sure our readers will find words of wisdom and tips that will benefit them as well.