

Formula for Success in Career Building

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Abstract

In the author's opinion, traditional education and training systems have failed to equip youth and adults for the continual life and work transitions they will face beyond graduation. The way people prepare for life and work transitions is changing, as are the goals of career education and counselling. The focus is shifting from an emphasis on helping people choose an occupational goal, then develop plans to meet its educational and training prerequisites, to also helping them learn essential life/work skills they need to be satisfied, self-reliant citizens, able to make the most of the myriad transitions life will present.

Formula for Success in CAREER BUILDING

Prevailing wisdom in the twentieth century held that given reasonable access to good career information and guidance citizens will make good career decisions. The result will be improved human resource allocation, labour force mobility and productivity, and improved cost-effectiveness of employment, education and training programs (Krumboltz & Worthington, 1999). Many countries have invested heavily in developing and distributing print, video, computer and web-based resources on this premise. Watts (1999) made a good case for "The Economic and Social Benefits of Career Guidance." Recent analysis of school-to-work and work-to-work transition processes raises doubts about whether simply providing good information and

guidance, which remains vital, is sufficient to reap the benefits Watts describes (Blustein, et al., 1997; Krumboltz & Worthington, 1999; Lent, Hackett, & Brown, 1999; Savickas, 1999; and Worthington & Juntunen, 1997).

In addition to academic and technical skills, youth and adults need to learn essential life/work skills that empower them to become healthy, productive and self-reliant citizens. Gysbers (1997) refers to this concept as life career development, defined as "self-development over a person's life span through the integration of the roles, settings, and events in a person's life". An important part of "life career development" is giving individuals life/work skills that empower them to locate and process information, and to make good choices at the many transition points they will inevitably encounter on their life journey. The Conference Board of Canada (2000), representing many of the largest employers in Canada, insist that employability (life/Work) skills are as important to employers as the communications, mathematics and science skills all students are expected to acquire before leaving formal education. Krumboltz and Worthington (1999) state that "The goals of career counseling and of the school-to-work movement should be to facilitate the learning of skills, interests, beliefs, values, work habits, and personal qualities that enable each participant to create a satisfying life in a constantly changing work environment" and Savickas (1999) suggests that students need to learn to "look ahead" and "look around" before they leave school to develop competence and skill in the following five domains: (a) self-knowledge, (b) occupational information, (c) decision making, (d) planning, and (e) problem solving. According to Worthington and Juntunen (1997) "When employers are asked why they prefer not to hire youth, or why there are high turnover rates among youthful workers, they will tell you that

today's youth frequently fail to demonstrate essential employability skills." Employers implore educators to ensure students "don't leave school without them," yet life/work skills have not found the prominence they deserve in "mainstream" curricula.

Canada prides itself in the quality and quantity of career and labour market information available for youth and adults. Excellent resources like the National Occupational Classification, Job Futures, *WorkinfoNET*, Choices, Career Explorer, Career Cruising, Career Directions, Canada Prospects, The Realm and The Edge magazines, Destination 2020, Smart Options and many more are readily available to citizens of all ages across Canada. Yet, although most students have ready access to quality career information and guidance:

- 70% of secondary students expect to go on to post-secondary studies (university, college, technical or trade school) and 80% of their parents have the same expectation, but only 32% go directly to post-secondary, and only about 50% of them will graduate
- Nationally 26% of secondary students drop out of secondary school before graduation
- 9% of secondary students expect to work after they leave secondary school, yet 64% of secondary students actually do go to work before any other career destination
- 47% of post-secondary students change programs or drop out by the end of their first year, and 50% of those who graduate are not in work closely related to their programs two years after they complete their programs

These statistics (Statistics Canada School Leavers Survey, 1997) suggest that fewer than 25% of Canadian youth arrive at their short-term career goals, let alone longer term goals.

Are the 64% of secondary students who go directly to work ready?

Perceptions vary. One recent survey (Enviro-nics Alberta, 1995) yielded the following results to the question, "Are secondary students ready for work when they leave school?"

Response from:	Ready for the Workplace	Ready for Post-Secondary
High Sch. Students	80%	87%
Parents (K-12 Students)	40%	65%
Post-Secondary Teachers	35%	53%
Employers	35%	70%

Secondary curricula focus on preparing students for post-secondary studies, yet most will not go on to post-secondary studies. To receive a secondary diploma, students are expected to master complex academic material many will not need in the short term, if ever. At the same, few students systematically learn essential life/work skills all will need as young adults. In short, the majority of Canadian youth are not adequately prepared for life after secondary school. The system is not meeting their needs as well as it might. It is testimony to their personal resourcefulness that most students eventually find their way to acceptable, if not optimal, employment and lifestyles.

Adults are often ill prepared for their career transitions. Many encounter involuntary career transitions due to privatization and "right-sizing," especially older workers, must overcome larger obstacles in re-connecting with work and learning opportunities. Many have responsibility for dependents, while dealing with issues of lost income, shock, anger, fear, uncertainty, diminishing self-esteem and dignity, ageism, loss of identity, and emotional and financial risks as they cope with transitions (Newman, 1995).

The traditional goal of career interventions has been "to help people make informed career decisions." It was assumed that at some point, usually between their 9th to 12th year of education, students could assess their interests and abilities, analyze their options, choose a suitable occupational goal, then develop and implement plans to reach their goal. Recent projections in Canada suggest that young people now entering the labour market are likely to experi-

ence a succession of different work roles, with as many as twenty-five jobs (with elements of multiple occupations) in up to five different industry sectors during their lives (Alberta Learning, 1999). At times they may have concurrent part-time jobs, while at other times they may have no paid work. Work periods will be interspersed with periods of learning, either full- or part-time while holding one or more jobs. Krumboltz and Worthington (1999) describe a future where

"... there will be more of a need for worker flexibility as worker requirements change more frequently and new teams are formed to work on specific projects. Workers will increasingly be expected to move from project to project doing whatever work needs to be accomplished, and not merely to fulfill a written job description."

The oft-heard question from parents, teachers and counsellors, "What do you want to be?" loses relevance in labour markets characterized by this magnitude and frequency of change. It is unrealistic, even self-defeating, to expect students to commit to one occupation for a lifetime. Any answer they give will be either incomplete, or wrong. "Learning how to adapt to changing conditions in the workplace will be one of the essential skills for success" (Krumboltz & Worthington, 1999). It is difficult for teachers and counsellors, who may work in the same building for much of their careers, to imagine this new work world let alone prepare students for it.

The end of work is not in sight. With all our "labour-saving" technologies, people have never worked harder. The notion of jobs is shifting dramatically. Except in unionized settings, those who say "That is not my job!" may not keep their jobs for long! Career is increasingly being viewed as something every human has, and the word is not being used as often synonymously with profession, occupation or job (Gysbers, 1997). The concept losing ground most rapidly is "occupation," yet it remains the cornerstone of most career information systems and databases, guidance processes and tertiary education and training.

Society expects youth and adults to define themselves in terms of an occupa-

tional goal, then choose education and training to prepare and qualify for their goal. Once on the path to their goal they are graded on acquisition of academic and technical skills, not essential life/work skills. Academic and technical qualifications are needed to get an employer's attention, but life/work skills determine subsequent success and advancement (Krumboltz & Worthington, 1999 and Worthington & Juntenen, 1997). Job seekers who market themselves as skilled in a narrow occupational specialty do themselves a disservice. Those who can describe the skills they bring to helping the organization meet its immediate challenges and achieve long term success, in whatever combination of roles, are more in demand (Worthington & Juntenen, 1997).

People need to identify broad work sector destinations and secure foundation skills that will equip them to take on multiple roles within them. This is more about education than counselling. Mastery of the skills essential to realization of their goals should be learned in mainstream curricula.

According to the school-to-work transition literature, a good school intervention would: include simulated work experiences that excite students with the opportunities presented and motivate them to explore their occupational possibilities with more enthusiasm (Krumboltz & Worthington, 1999); teach them about the consequences of making decisions in life (Varenhorst, 1968,1973); allow them to test the adequacy of various decision making models (Krumboltz, Scherba, Hamel & Mitchell, 1982); allow students to sample various work roles (Krumboltz, 1970); incorporate role-playing, which is deemed the most useful intervention technique (Krumboltz & Worthington, 1999); facilitate the learning of skills, interests, beliefs, values, work habits, and personal qualities that enable participants to create a satisfying life in a constantly changing work environment (Krumboltz & Worthington, 1999); be developmentally appropriate and be distributed throughout the school years (Lent, Hackett, & Brown, 1999); and, allow students to develop employability skills (Worthington & Juntenen, 1997). Mastering the skills needed to find and maintain fulfilling employment also equips people to be better students, marriage partners, parents and citizens.

To illustrate, the indicators for competency 2 at the high school level follow:

COMPETENCY 2: Interact positively and effectively with others
<p>Level Three (High School): Develop abilities for building positive relationships in one’s life and work</p>
<p>Learning Stage I B Acquisition: acquiring knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discover the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to work effectively with and for others. • Explore helping skills such as facilitating problem solving, tutoring and guiding. • Examine appropriate employee-employer interactions and client-contractor interactions in specific situations. • Explore personal management skills such as time management, problem solving, personal financial management, stress management, life-work balance, etc.
<p>Learning Stage II B Application: experiencing acquired knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate behaviours and attitudes required for working with and for others. • Demonstrate personal management skills such as time management problem solving, personal finances, stress management, life/work balance, etc. • Express feelings, reactions and ideas in an appropriate manner. • Demonstrate helping skills such as facilitating problem solving, tutoring and guiding.
<p>Learning Stage III B Personalization: integrating acquired and applied knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine the helping skills one feels comfortable with and wishes to contribute in relationships with others. • Acknowledge the positive effects of expressing one’s feelings, reactions and ideas. • Integrate personal management skills such as time management, problem solving, stress management and life/work balance to one’s life and work.
<p>Learning Stage IV B Actualization: striving towards full potential</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in further learning experiences that help build positive relationships in one’s life and work.

The Blueprint maps essential life/work skills all citizens would be well-served to master in order to proactively manage their life/work building process. It also provides administrators and practitioners with a systematic process for developing, implementing, evaluating and marketing career development programs or redesigning and enhancing existing programs.

A national framework of essential life/work competencies and indicators helps service providers achieve a number of aims:

- Clarity of outcomes: The Blueprint framework enables practitioners (and their funders) clearly to articulate, and measure, the outcomes they are seeking and achieving.
- Service consistency: A common language within and between services and products helps citizens know what they need, and get what they need, as they move from one service or product, agency or organization, or geographic region to another.
- Efficiency: A common language for

life/work skills helps clients and practitioners more efficiently review, compare and select programs and products.

- Reduced ambiguity: Assumptions abound regarding the meanings of terms such as *career planning* or *self-awareness*. Spelling out these assumptions for all to review enhances communication significantly.
- Career development culture: Having a common structure by which to discuss career development issues and aims helps all citizens become more conscious of career development and life/work issues.

The Real Game Series

Essential life/work skills, like literacy and numeric skills, should be mastered by students at all stages of their education (Lent, Hackett & Brown, 1999; Fouad, 1997; and Savickas, 1999) and by adults. Increased attention to these skills helps students see the relevance of their school studies, and can positively impact

attendance, achievement and completion rates. Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Australia, New Zealand, Hungary and Denmark are working together on The Real Game Series to help learners at all ages master essential life/work skills. The Real Game Series is everything the career transitions literature suggests (above) a good intervention program should be.

The are six programs in Real Game Series:

- The Play Real Game Ages 6-8
Grades 3/4
- The Make It Real Game Ages 8-10
Grades 5/6
- The Real Game Ages 11-13
Grades 7/8
- The Be Real Game Ages 14-15
Grades 9/10
- The Get Real Game Ages 16-18
Grades 11/12
- Real Times, Real Life Adults
Post-secondary to Retirement

All programs involve role-playing and are set in participants' futures. Realistic scenarios, based on contemporary labour market realities, are so engaging that participants don't realize they are learning. Participants establish lifestyles, budget time and money, transition through job-loss and acquisition scenarios, plan business trips and vacations, balance family and work, engage in community activities, for example, in safe roles allowing them to experiment risk-free. Students see clear connections between adult life and work roles and the subjects there are learning in school. "Students who believe that high school education has relevance for their future success are strongly and significantly more likely to work hard in school, even after parent, peer, school, and psychological variables are controlled" (Rosembaum & Nelson, 1994). Teachers also learn about a broad cross section of contemporary life and work roles, and have fun with their students!

These programs lend themselves to team-teaching, involvement of student mentors, and participation by community members and parents. Participants are more motivated to seek out, process and absorb traditional career and labour market information resources (print, computer, video, Internet). For more information see: www.realgame.com.

Conclusion

Canada's school-to-work transition efforts have failed too many youth and adults because we have not had a national framework of essential life/work skills to be learned by all. These essential life/work skills complement the academic and technical skills now required for completion of formal education and training. Adopting such a framework, and implementing curricula and resources such as The Real Game Series to help citizens master these skills, help more youth and adults become fulfilled and self-reliant citizens.

As the title of this paper suggests, a new formula for success in career building is:

- Acquisition of Good Foundation Academic and Technical Skills**
- + **Mastery of Essential Life/Work Skills**
- + **Access to Quality Career and Labour Market Information and**

Guidance

= **GREATER SUCCESS IN CAREER BUILDING, AND IN LIFE!**

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