

Career Development Culture

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Life-Role Development Group

One way to take a holistic approach to rehabilitation, or any other developmental intervention, is to centre all efforts at change directly within the person. The trick, of course, is to create conditions in which the average person *wants* to take charge of changes in his or her life. Most people seem to wait for things to happen to them, rather than actively taking charge of their own lives. They seek help only when things go wrong, and they actively discourage a holistic approach to receiving help because they have a specific problem to solve (*e.g.*, “I need a job”) and they need it solved in a hurry.

To help create a context in which people will want to manage their own lives, the Alberta Career Development Action Group, an informal group of public, private and non-profit organizations, launched an initiative designed to begin the development of a “career development culture.” The initiative included newspaper articles published in *The Edmonton Sun* weekly for thirty weeks, articles all designed to encourage readers to take charge of their own career development. The initiative was sponsored by Human Resources Development Canada and Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development.

The following is a sample article from this series, slightly revised, written by Dana Wilson in consultation with Barrie Day and me. I present it here because (a) it illustrates an attempt to create a truly holistic beginning to change within the person and (b) the messages within it reflect a holistic approach to career development.

Top Ten Career Development Resolutions

Why wait ‘til the New Year to make resolutions? Why not resolve to do things differently starting tomorrow? What better area to look at than career development?

This is not just looking at your work life, it is making those decisions that affect every aspect of your life. This is the new career development, career development for the ‘information age.’

It is deciding on the life you want to lead and making decisions that will bring you closer to your ‘preferred future’; that is, career development in the new millennium...

Starting tomorrow, I will:

1. Understand that change is constant and inevitable.

This will lead to a massive reduction of stress in your life. If you can embrace change rather than expending a great deal of energy fighting it, you will be happier and more productive. Rapid and continuous technological, economic and social change means that the labour market is changing into a work dynamic. We need to resolve to stay fluid and adaptable in our reaction to, and positive about, change. Goals need to be re-evaluated constantly to take advantage of the many new opportunities that arise in

changing environments.

2. Develop and/or review my preferred future.

This is, simply, an understanding of who you are and what you want in your life. Although it is simple, it is certainly not easy. This career development tool is about opening yourself up to your possibilities and the futures. Take a large piece of blank paper and begin to write on it (sounds eerily like a metaphor for life). Find out what you have a passion for and try to incorporate it into your work life. This is about being ‘true to yourself’ and to do that you need to find out who, yourself, really is. What excites you and what fulfils you – this does not have to be work related – if it is spending time with your family, it might involve figuring out how to work at home etc. Find out what you want out of work and life and start working toward it.

3. Develop and/or add to my portfolio.

This is a portable collection that includes a record of your skills and accomplishments that you can take with you. It does not replace your resume; it is a complement to it. A portfolio could include samples of your work, awards, letters of reference – anything that can tangibly record your accomplishments so that you can reveal them to a prospective employer. A portfolio also has the side benefit of making you focus on your career. Having one will force you to think of what to include, when to add to it, what you are getting out of your present work circumstance that will go into your portfolio. It is a wonderful tool, not only to help find you work, but to cause you to focus on that work.

4. Treat every decision as a career decision.

When you have a ‘preferred future,’ then you can temper your decision-making process with a simple question: Does this move me closer to my preferred future? Treating every decision you make as a career decision not only takes the pressure off of making the “big” decision and worrying about whether it was the right choice; it keeps your vision of the future fresh and real to you, a creative image just begging to be realised. We have to make decisions every day; making each decision a career one, gives you a focus and a clarity that enables you to move forward more efficiently.

5. Learn something new.

Learning enhances your life. We are vibrant and alive, not to mention more positive about our life when we empower ourselves by changing the one thing we have some measure of control over: ourselves. It is also a necessity in an intensely competitive work dynamic. Learning expands your life and your possibilities. This is not necessarily formal, or academic learning. Learning to arrange flowers will help you in your work life in terms of relaxation, meeting new people/contacts, relieving your stress enabling you to make clearer decisions on the job, etc. Learning something

new is always valuable to you regardless of subject matter.

6. Identify a learning defence and do something about it.

Knowing the value of life-long learning makes it important to recognise any barriers that might get in our way. These learning defences can be anything from a bad memory of a school that might prejudice you against anything learned in a classroom to something as unusual as a phobia against bearded people and a refusal to learn from them. There are many learning defences; if we can identify one of our own and deal with it then we are on our way to life-long learning and the increased fulfilment that can lead to.

7. Do my own performance appraisal (regardless of what my organization does).

This is an amazing tool– you take control of your own performance. You begin to evaluate what things you are doing well and where you need to improve. Doing your own unofficial performance appraisal also helps you focus on your work skills and improving them. You become more involved in your job and this, in turn, can lead to a very positive official performance appraisal.

8. Ask for feedback on areas I want to improve.

Again, this is something that helps you take control of your work life. You have identified some areas you want to improve and instead of waiting around for others to give you feedback, you are going to ask for it yourself. This demonstrates to co-workers your faith in their judgement and honesty, which can lead to a closer, more productive working relationship. It also demonstrates your commitment to doing a good job and gets you actively involved in furthering your work goals.

9. Add value to my work.

Your work is, in many ways, representative of you – why not add value to it and thus to yourself? This is doing something more than your basic performance of your job; it is putting something extra into it that says I take pride and am involved in what I do. If you treat co-workers, clients, bosses and employees as customers, ideally, you will do that little bit extra to try to keep them loyal. You will do a better job and derive more satisfaction out of it.

10. Spend five minutes, every week, thinking about my career development.

Spending a minuscule fraction of your time thinking about your work and personal (career) development will pay untold dividends on the time invested. This is particularly true if you promise yourself that you will make a decision to do something based on this reflection. Creatively thinking about your life and where you want to go with it will make your resulting career development decisions more

effective as well as actively involving you in your own life.

The world is changing and we must change with it. Take any one of these career development resolutions, or all ten, and incorporate them into your life and career. The new you will be thankful.