

**Supervisors & Managers: The New Career Development Practitioners?**  
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Most career development happens at work. At work, people learn new skills, build relationships, explore work possibilities, come to understand their interests, make decisions and set goals. Unfortunately, most intentional career development assistance happens when people are not working, not when they are. Much can be gained by providing career development support when people are working: They have momentum, energy, support and finances on their side. The most available “career development practitioners” for workers are their supervisors and managers. Given appropriate skills, knowledge and processes, supervisors/managers can provide significant career development assistance and, in doing so, improve their leadership functions.

**Career Development at Work**

Sareena Hopkins and others at the Canadian Career Development Foundation created a clean and comprehensive model for understanding the components of career development<sup>1</sup>. We use a slightly modified version of this model to show below some of the career development activities that *are already going on at the worksite whether anyone intervenes or not*.

**Believing in Self**

Practitioners devote a great deal of effort to helping individuals believe in themselves. At-risk youth, people who’ve been out of work for a while, social assistance recipients and others often see no future nor their ability to create a future. However, at work, here are some of the “believing in self” events that occur normally and naturally:

- Experiencing pride and confidence due to work accomplishments
- Experiencing a sense of worth due to achievements/productivity
- Experiencing a sense of belonging
- Recognizing that one can overcome barriers

**Knowing Self**

It almost goes without saying that one of the keys to career development is knowing oneself. Here are some of the events that occur at work to help people know themselves:

- Clarifying values and interests through different work activities
- Identifying assets through different experiences

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<sup>1</sup> A full description of this model will be available within software currently being developed by the Canadian Career Development Foundation as part of Human Resource Development Canada’s *Career Circuit* initiative.

- Differentiating assets and re-integrating them into new work roles

### **Making Sense of Opportunities**

There are a host of learning and work opportunities that people need to make sense of for effective career development. The act of “making sense” occurs in many forms at work, only some of which are listed below:

- Learning about types of work, and getting a “feel” for what the types are like
- Developing relationships
- Acquiring information about work

### **Building Work Skills**

Career development is enhanced when individuals acquire and master skills required to (a) work and (b) do specific types of work. This skill development occurs at work on almost a daily basis:

- Practicing all workability skills
- Getting immediate feedback
- Learning new skills, technologies, etc.
- Being measured on performance

### **Making Decisions and Plans**

Many people see the crux of career development as the ability to make decisions and plans. Practitioners spend a considerable amount of time helping clients develop their decision-making abilities and working on action plans. These activities are already taking place at work:

- Assisting in organizational and operational planning
- Planning the work day
- Making continuous work decisions
- Choosing value-add activities

### **Finding/Creating Opportunities**

Finding or creating and then moving toward work opportunities is a central part of almost any career development intervention. Although this is likely the weakest element of most workplace career development, opportunity-seeking happens at work, too:

- Preparing for the future (visioning; scenario-building)
- Engaging in strategic conversations

### **Managing Transitions & Personal Development**

An over-arching theme of all career development interventions is to assist individuals to

continuously manage transitions and to develop so that they are always prepared for change. All of the activities listed above support this aim.

On the following page is a self-reflection exercise that may give you a better feel for these activities.

## Career Development..on the Worksite A Self-Reflection Exercise

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Place a mark ( ✓ ) in the box on the right for each item below *if you have experienced it on a worksite.*

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- A feeling of pride, accomplishment, confidence or sense of worth
- A sense of belonging, community or relationship
- An ability to overcome barriers in the way of what you want to achieve
- A sense of clarity about your true values and interests
- A sense of clarity about your assets, such as skills, knowledge and attitudes
- An ability to put skills and knowledge together in new ways
- A greater awareness of or “feel for” a specific type of work
- A relationship growing and developing
- A greater awareness of different types of work
- An ability to enhance your employability or “workability” skills (*e.g.*, time management, stress management, communication skills)
- Feedback about your performance
- The acquisition of new skills and knowledge
- Measurement of your performance
- An opportunity to assist in organizational/operational planning
- An ability to plan your work activities
- The opportunity to make decisions
- The opportunity to add value to your workplace
- Analysis of how future trends will affect your workplace
- Discussions of a “vision” or “preferred future” for your organization
- Conversations about possible futures and what they might be like

**TOTAL:** \_\_\_\_\_

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## So?

This brief overview of career development activities that occur at work may strike you as obvious. You may be thinking, “Yes, sure this stuff happens at work, but so what?”. The answer to “so what” is this: If these and other career development activities are occurring at work anyway (if randomly), it is much easier and more effective to make sure they happen more consistently and more effectively than it is to try to re-create them in de-contextualized environments when people are out of work. The motivation, context and energy that practitioners strive to create in group or individual counselling/training is already there at the workplace! Further, so are the “practitioners” who can help make these activities more consistent and effective: supervisors and managers.

## Career Coaching

### Kinlaw’s Coaching for Commitment

Dennis Kinlaw<sup>2</sup> developed a general coaching model for supervisors and managers that has very relevant applications to career development. In Kinlaw’s view, coaching is about commitment, and commitment is supported by four “pillars:”

*Influence:* Employees need to be able to shape and control their work as well as the direction of the organization. The more influence they have, the more committed they will be to the aims of the organization and the work they do.

*Clarity:* Commitment is enhanced when workers are clear about the aims, values, beliefs, directions and expectations of the organization. Commitment is greatly reduced when employees are not clear about what they’re doing or why they’re doing it.

*Competence:* Employees who are competent to do the work asked of them will be more committed than those who are struggling because of incompetence. Also, employees who are not overly-competent and therefore bored will be more committed than those who are.

*Appreciation:* Organizations that appreciate their staff and show this appreciation by such activities as providing them with the necessary resources to do their work, interacting respectfully and expressing gratitude will have more committed employees than organizations that do not.

If we look at these four pillars from a career development perspective, we see that the supervisor/manager who actively seeks commitment is also:

- assisting people to explore, envision, choose and create their futures (influence)
- helping people identify values, beliefs, interests, goals and standards of performance (clarity)
- ensuring that people develop the competencies they need and continuously

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<sup>2</sup> Kinlaw, D. (1989). *Coaching for commitment*. San Diego, CA: Pfeiffer.

- challenging themselves to acquire new competencies (competence)
- helping people recognize that they and their work are valued, that others believe in them, and that they “matter”<sup>3</sup> (appreciation)

This all sounds like career development, doesn't it?

### **Coaching Conversations with Magnusson's 5Ps**

With Kinlaw's pillars of commitment in mind, we can review a coaching process we adapted from Kris Magnusson's "5Ps of Planning."<sup>4</sup> Often, supervisors/managers initiate interaction with employees because there's a problem—something is not getting done, something is not getting done right, etc. In a career coaching conversation, we want the supervisor/manager to start with strengths, which is right where Magnusson's 5Ps begin:

*Pride:* In career counselling, one might begin a planning process by reviewing experiences for which the client is proud. In career coaching conversations, a supervisor/manager might ask questions such as:

- What projects have you done that you're proud of?
- What activities leave you feeling the most proud here?
- Tell me about a time you've felt really good about a day at work. What happened that day?

In asking these types of questions, the supervisor/manager is doing two things. First, he or she is immediately generating energy and enthusiasm—who can avoid being energized while talking about experiences that generated pride? Second, the supervisor/manager is beginning to help the individual uncover *passion*, the next of the 5Ps.

*Passion:* As the supervisor/manager is listening to stories of pride, he or she will be hearing recurring themes of values, beliefs and interests that fire up the employee. By listening carefully, the supervisor/manager can detect and reflect back:

- Values: The fundamentals of what is important to the individual (*e.g.*, fairness, harmony, integrity)
- Beliefs: “Worldviews” by which the person lives (*e.g.*, If you work hard, you'll get places; The customer is always right; You should hold your cards close to your chest)
- Interests: Activities and things the person enjoys (*e.g.*, working with my hands,

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<sup>3</sup> Norm Amundson of the University of British Columbia has worked on the notion of “mattering” from a career development perspective. Read his materials, such as *Active Engagement: Enhancing the Career Counselling Process* (1998, Canadian Career Development Foundation, Ottawa) for more on this.

<sup>4</sup> See the *Radical Change in the World of Work* series available from Alberta Human Resources and Employment for more on this.

creativity, people)

In doing so, the employee and the supervisor/manager are identifying the things that really motivate the employee. This brings us to the next “P”—figuring out how to harness the employee’s passion with “purpose.”.

*Purpose.* As the coaching conversation continues, the employee and supervisor/manager collaboratively begin to look at other ways the employee could fulfil his/her passions. The supervisor/manager might ask questions such as:

- How might we find other things you could do here to fulfil the values, beliefs and interests we just talked about?
- Are there other activities you’d like to be engaged in that would line up with your values, beliefs and interests?
- What projects, committees, responsibilities might there be that would allow you to pursue your passions?

The aim is to find a new purpose for the employee (which may be quite confined, initially, such as participating on an organizational committee) that will align with his or her passions and contribute to the organization.

*Performance.* When a purpose is found, the coaching function will shift to a discussion of what the employee will need to be effective within the task. The manager might ask:

- Are there any new skills or areas of knowledge you’ll need in this project/activity we’ve selected?
- How can I help you get ready to do well in this project/activity we’ve selected?

Here the aim is to ensure the employee builds the competencies he or she needs to succeed. If this is done well, *poise*, the last of the 5Ps, will emerge.

*Poise.* At this point, the employee has clarified his or her passions, found a purpose in which to fulfil them, developed the competencies necessary to fulfil the purpose and is now fulfilling the purpose. What will happen, if all goes well, is that the employee will perform the new function well, confidently and comfortably. In other words, the employee will fulfil the purpose with poise. The manager’s only role here is to be available to give the employee feedback when requested and moral support if the going gets rough.

Completing a project or task with poise will lead to pride! Completing the pride-passion-purpose-performance-poise sequence will cycle back on itself to create a new pride experience. This, in turn, will help the employee further clarify values, beliefs and interests, find new projects/activities, learn new skills, perform well, and create new pride experiences. Imagine a workplace in which all employees were continuously engaged in this cycle—satisfaction would rise, productivity would rise and supervisors/managers could focus on the future rather than on fighting today’s fires.

Tying the 5Ps back to Kinlaw’s pillars of commitment, we can see that *influence* is introduced by having the employee choose purposes in alignment with his or her

passions. *Clarity* is part and parcel of the discussion of passions and purposes, and how they align with organizational goals and needs. *Competence* is built right into “performance,” and *appreciation* is shown by the very act of having the coaching conversation.

### **Conclusion**

In a world of more frequent transitions, it seems appropriate to examine ways by which we can help people with transitions in a continuous manner rather than waiting to work with them when transitions have failed and they’re unemployed, discouraged, uncertain and, often, poor. The vast majority of career practitioners devote their efforts to a small minority in the world of work—the unemployed. This is important work, but it seems sensible that we develop “practitioners” working with the majority who do work, who have energy, who are optimistic and who have income—the average worker. In doing so, we may end up with fewer who become unemployed and shorter durations of unemployment. And, the new “practitioners,” managers and supervisors, will find that they have workers who are motivated, enthusiastic, pro-active and committed.