

ED404580 1995-00-00 The "High Five" of Career Development. ERIC Digest.

ERIC Development Team

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The "High Five" of Career Development. ERIC Digest.

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OVERVIEW

Some experts (1) who were asked to spend a day together, summarized what they knew about career development in five pithy messages. These messages would be used to promote career development in Canadian youth. What resulted is the "High Five" of career development:



1. Change is constant.



2. Follow your heart.



3. Focus on the journey.



4. Stay learning.



5. Be an ally.

THE "HIGH FIVE"



Change is Constant.

The famous American philosopher, Yogi Berra, once said, "The future ain't what it used to be." We Canadians took that statement to mean that predictions about the future are difficult because the processes of change, not just the content of change, are changing. In the world of work, for example, the role of the automotive technician is changing not only due to technological changes in cars but also due to segmentation of the industry. Therefore, the process of defining an "automotive technician" is changing while the content of the technician's work is also changing. Thus, predictions about the technician's role (or any other work role) are tenuous.

Rapid and continuous technological, economic, demographic, and social changes directly influence the world of work. As a result, the "labor market" of the past is quickly becoming a "work dynamic" that is difficult to encapsulate with occupational dictionaries, codes, or titles. For example, dozens of environmental roles exist today that did not exist at the turn of the decade. New jobs are emerging and old jobs are changing to require new skills, knowledge, and attitudes.

Personal change occurs continuously as well. People grow and develop new skills, attitudes, knowledge, beliefs, networks, and other assets at varying rates. Assessment

tools, the backbone of traditional career development, give our clients the impression that change is unlikely; that who they are is who they will be. People who recognize, value, and nurture their own fluidity, will better adapt to their changing environments.

Likewise, goal-setting needs to be reconsidered in light of constant change. Goal-setting can be useful, but the dogged pursuit of goals can prevent people from optimizing chance opportunities. Goals have to be seen in context with serendipitous discoveries. Gelatt's (1989) concept of "positive uncertainty" applies here.



Follow Your Heart.

When change is constant, relatively stable guideposts become all the more important. The "heart" (the set of characteristics that includes values, entrenched beliefs, and interests) is reasonably stable and is well worth heeding. One's "heart" drives one's career path. Skills, knowledge, and attitudes are simply tools that allow the path to be followed.

A corollary to this message is that dreaming is normal, natural, and appropriate. Career development practitioners often concern themselves with helping clients become "realistic" at the expense of their client's dreams. Many people have "unrealistic" dreams, but there is nothing wrong with pursuing them and cherishing them. Ultimately, reality will impose itself on people and trying to accelerate this process may be of little benefit. On the other hand, people can move towards their dreams when provided with the tools and strategies to do so.



Focus on the Journey.

One of the reasons our field has been preoccupied with helping individuals select appropriate occupational destinations is that we wish to help people find work that is meaningful and fulfilling. In doing so, however, we have tended to underemphasize the meaningfulness of the journey towards one's vision. Now, since continual change undermines the predicting of occupational destinations, we must take great efforts to help people enjoy the process: to better fulfill their values, beliefs, and interests with every decision they make. In fact, focusing on the journey means people move away from feeling a need to make "the correct decision" ("What should I be?") and move toward examining the immediate and enduring effects of virtually all decisions ("What do I want to be doing now and in the future?").



Stay Learning.

"Lifelong learning" has become a catch phrase. However, the public's beliefs imply that nothing more needs to be done once an occupational destination is reached. We will be better able to communicate the prescription to "stay learning" when the first three messages of the "High Five" have been adopted. Learning is constant when change is constant, and learning can be enjoyable and meaningful when it is seen as part of a journey that fulfills one's heart.

Unfortunately, many people cringe in terror when they hear about "lifelong learning." People who have had limited success with formal learning are anxious about "lifelong learning" and need to know that most learning does not occur in formal settings. Individuals are continually accumulating assets (e.g., skills, contacts) through experience, but few people have a mechanism by which they can identify, record, and organize these assets. Consequently, they often do not recognize that they have undergone a tremendous amount of learning. People need ways to keep track of their learning experiences.



Be an Ally.

This last theme brings us back to the old idea of the importance of community. Many people do not feel part of a community and do not have the wherewithal to create one for themselves. Many youth, in particular, see the labor market (or work dynamic) as something external, "out there," and distant. They do not realize that the labor market surrounds them, and is represented by their parents, neighbors, friends' parents, and parents' friends. These allies surround youth, yet the two appear unable to connect with each other.

Our field and our society have stressed independence and autonomy; perhaps a reexamination of interdependence and community would be appropriate. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness. Rather, it is a sign of strength when one can identify a need, clearly express the need, and articulate how others can help one meet the need. This is particularly true when one wants to learn continually, keep up with change, and adapt to change.

APPLICATIONS

The "High Five" can be described in a variety of ways. Different client groups respond to different descriptions and examples. We have incorporated these messages in a variety of products, workshops, and speeches, and we have used a variety of ways to explain them. Some examples of their application follow:

ENGAGE is a learning-to-learn system for youth that includes products and workshops

for youth, parents and teachers. The "High Five" messages form the core of the system. (See Robb, 1995 for a description).

"Opportunities with Change" is a career development workshop for professionals, in which the concepts and activities directly follow the "High Five."

"Everyday Career Development" is a course and text for secondary school teachers designed to help them infuse career development into their day-to-day teaching activities. The course is based heavily on the "High Five." (See Millar, 1995 for a description).

We have found that people respond favorably to these messages. Each message has a universal quality which reaches virtually all audiences, as the following testimonials indicate. From a grandmother who read the ENGAGE materials: "Don't know how I reached this age without knowing and achieving some of the suggestions. Good for any age--real treasures. We sure do a lot of muddling along in life without knowing how to improve." Parents respond particularly favorably to the "High Five"; the messages remove some of the intense pressure they feel to help their children decide "what they are going to be."

CONCLUSION

The group for which these messages resonate most strongly are front-line career development practitioners. The "High Five" provides a framework in which they can place all their reservations about elements of their practices (e.g., giving tests, helping clients choose occupational destinations, ensuring clients are "realistic"); elements that they were guiltily subverting without being able to fully explain (to themselves or others) their reasons for doing so. We generally hear a collective sigh of relief from practitioners when we present the "High Five."

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REFERENCE NOTE

(1) These individuals were Pat Butter, Donna Davidson, Barrie Day, Aryeh Gitterman, Helen Hackett, Tracy Lamb, John McCormick, Dave Redekopp and Michele Tocher. Don Myhre, Bev Ross and Marnie Robb formalized the messages into the "High Five."

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