

Career Counselling

Counselling in Practice

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Career Counselling

SECOND EDITION

Robert Nathan and Linda Hill

 SAGE Publications
London • Thousand Oaks • New Delhi

Dedication from the first edition

To my parents, who gave me such
a good start in life

LH

To my daughters Louise and Deborah,
who will always be special to me whatever
careers they choose

RN

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First edition published 1992

Reprinted 1994, 1996, 2000, 2002

This second edition first published 2006

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SAGE Publications Ltd
1 Oliver's Yard
55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP

SAGE Publications Inc.
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320

SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd
B-42, Panchsheel Enclave
Post Box 4109
New Delhi 110 017

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data

A catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library

ISBN 1-4129-0837-X (hbk)

ISBN 1-4129-0838-7 (pbk)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2005926976

Typeset by C&M Digitals (P) Ltd., Chennai, India

Printed on paper from sustainable resources

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Athenaeum Press, Gateshead

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Foreword to the Second Edition

What is understood by the term 'career counselling' at the beginning of the 21st century? The more fluid and unpredictable nature of work seen today has been accompanied by an upsurge in demand to balance the differing parts of our lives. The need for financial and emotional security has not gone away. Many people still aspire to continuity of employment, and some still see progress in terms of promotion up a hierarchy, in spite of many years of downsizing, restructuring and 'delaying'. The chances are that clients coming for career counselling will have experienced several versions of 'reality' – from security of employment to the shock of redundancy, accelerated promotion or development, the pressure for profitability with fewer resources, and being faced with a complete turnaround of corporate values. Such a variety of experiences requires some key survival skills, including the ability to forge and maintain good relationships, the commitment to, and skill of, setting goals and the flexibility to respond to change.

When the amount of employer-led change is seen to be inequitable by employees, many have responded by demanding, through the annual employee survey, better career development opportunities in return for the 'self-managed career development' expected of them. In the competitive market place much is made of the McKinsey-coined term 'war on talent', as employers see the provision of career help as one way to support their goals of increasing retention of valued staff and becoming the 'employer of choice', as well as minimising any damage to their reputation by employees who leave.

These changes have been accompanied by an increasing demand for career support at key 'career transition' points, both by employers for their employees as well as by individuals acting on their own behalf. Thus, from the line manager and human resource professional, through to all those providing adult guidance, and the independent career counsellor, more and more people who are seen as prospective 'helpers' are being asked career-related questions.

These people are not solely career counsellors; they are making use of *career counselling skills*, along with many other skills and responsibilities. The chart in Chapter 1 (see p. 4) indicates the wide variety of contexts in which career help is sought, and this is increasingly the case within employing organisations. Hence this second edition of *Career Counselling* devotes an entire chapter to the place of career counselling within organisations.

The past 12 years have seen both a mushrooming of people with no allegiance to a professional code of conduct offering career-related help as well as a parallel desire to develop clear ethical and professional standards. Organisations as different as the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

(BACP), the International Coaching Federation, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) Forum on Counselling and Career Management, and the Institute of Adult Guidance have all produced codes of ethics. Interest in professional career counselling training has also increased. Postgraduate qualifications in Career Counselling, such as the MSc offered by Birkbeck College, University of London, are seen as routes to a potential second career (see Appendix E).

Inevitably, people offering career help are being asked to assist with a wide variety of career-related issues (see the definition of career counselling on p. 2) in addition to the more traditional questions raised in career counselling (see Chapter 1). Many of the following examples draw on the survival skills mentioned in the first paragraph above:

Forging and maintaining good relationships

- How to network?
- How to ‘partner’?
- How to manage ‘upwards’?

The commitment and skill of setting goals

- Learning and development – what is on offer and what do I want?
- How can my learning goals fit in to my career goals?
- What kind of work–life balance do I want?

The flexibility to respond to change/managing uncertainty

- How to manage change effectively?
- How to transfer skills?
- How to manage flexible working patterns?
- How to acquire or re-learn skills?
- How to ‘self-manage’ in lean periods of employment?
- How to make the best use of time?
- How to deal with the stress caused by change and uncertainty?
- How to manage loss?

Self-employment and creativity

- Entrepreneurship – what it is and how to develop it?
- How to express creativity?
- How to make the choice of whether to make the leap?

These ‘questions’ are not only the province of the career counsellor. Some can be addressed effectively by many others, including guidance workers, coaches or mentors. In recent years, the question of how counselling, career counselling, coaching and mentoring differ or overlap is one we have heard regularly. The potential for confusion in both practitioners and clients underlines the importance of establishing clear boundaries. Practitioners need to know when they are offering

career counselling, how to manage client expectations and contract accordingly with their clients. They need to be aware when they are operating outside of their skill set and be prepared to refer appropriately (Nathan, 2003).

Thus, the contexts in which career counselling takes place have multiplied, as much as people offering, and being approached for, career counselling have done so. In spite of, or perhaps because of, the vagaries of the employment marketplace, many clients who approach a career counsellor are still looking for 'the answer'. In our experience, no matter what the formally agreed contract has stipulated, that desire still remains covertly waiting in the wings. It needs to be acknowledged, but managed carefully.

Rob Nathan

London, January 2005

Acknowledgements

Career Counselling would never have been written were it not for the experience, support and skill of Linda Hill. Tragically, Linda died less than two years after the first edition was published. Not only did I lose a friend and colleague, but the profession of career counselling lost someone who brought a unique combination of warmth, wisdom and practicality. She knew how to get through to people in a way that always moved them forward.

For the second edition, I would like to thank Sue Moseley for her meticulous research; Eric Decker, Anton Fishman, Gilly Freedman and Antoinette Gaskell for their incisive comments on the new chapter Career Counselling in Organisations and other amended sections; and Jacey Graham, whose experience as a Diversity Consultant was invaluable in bringing that section up-to-date.