Overcoming Barriers to Development: Talent Discovery and Inspiration
A New Model for Career and Life Planning Using the PCDP

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Introduction

Two of the many tragedies of our society are still with us. One is the failure of large numbers of people to direct and productively manage their careers and lives in rewarding ways. The second is the failure of some career counselors, educators and corporate leaders to know and understand the hidden talents of the persons with whom they relate and work.

These tragedies become apparent with the mounting concerns of disadvantaged and minority groups for equality in career and educational growth opportunities. They are evident in the number of legal disputes which occur when people are treated inequitably by university admission practices, and by corporate executives because of their current selection, promotional, forced retirement and downsizing practices.

Clearly, people experience varying degrees of frustration about their educational, job and career progress in life. And, many of our university administrators, career counselors and corporate executives become frustrated by employee turnover, increased operating costs, and reduced productivity that can be attributed to a lack of deliberate career planning. Many times, this is due to a common set of barriers to career development.

Barriers to Career Development

Success in coping with the barriers to development has been elusive for the most part. Efforts to overcome this have included:

- Embarking on career path studies to discover the pivotal positions for training and development.

- Surveying employees to identify the critical job-related skills important to better match jobs with qualifications of candidates for them.

- Conducting in-house career management programs to help people define their career and life objectives and how to attain them.

While all of these efforts are good practices for career development, they may not enable one to gain fully from the process unless the more systemic barriers to development are addressed first.

Using Authority-Centered Programs

A common solution used by many executives, managers and administrators, is to rely on traditional authority-centered assessment approaches to career development. By relying on this antiquated strategy, many of them find it difficult to understand the following:

- Significant individual differences are important.

They press to mold people into their value systems as to what is required for achieving on-the-job success and success in one's personal life activities.

- Involving the individual in the career development process is critical.

They tend to hold to the belief that they must assume total responsibility for the assessments being made and the decisions which affect the futures of their personnel. They tend to over-control the assessment of the people's skills and qualifications, and find it hard to trust in the abilities of their people to share in the responsibility for achieving their own personal career development.

There are other equally powerful obstacles blocking success in finding the right persons for the right jobs and careers - the persons involved themselves.

Self Imposed Barriers to Career Growth

Some people avoid seeking self-knowledge to avoid their responsibility for making decisions and taking actions that affect their present and future life. How many times has one heard these comments? "Well, I'm about as far as I can go because all I have is a

high school education," or "There's not much I can do to change my situation. I'm afraid it's too late for me."

Self-imposed barriers frequently become very convenient rationalizations for lack of achievement and self-directiveness, because when goals for career and personal growth are aroused, action is required. As a consequence, these people gradually stop growing. Sometimes their adjustments to the status quo occur so subtly that they see no difference between present reality and the reality of their innermost desires.

The Illusion of Success

One of the most powerful barriers to personal and career growth is really an educational and occupational hazard - the illusion of success. Money, power, prestige and the status of position are symbols often associated with success in life. But symbols sometimes do not necessarily portray reality. Symbols can effectively conceal failures which give the appearance of success.

Systemic Barriers to Career Growth & Development

- Using authority-centered programs
- Self-imposed barriers to career growth
- The illusion of success
- Delegating responsibility for one's future to others

Many people, such as students who find a reason to leave college and even successful professionals terminated without warning, actually feel a profound sense of relief once they find that they had finally been "set free". Shortly after taking time to really do some meaningful soul-searching to examine what was truly important in their lives, many find a more realistic definition of success, and an action plan which enables them to succeed.

When people take the time to look back at what has been right or wrong in their job, career and life, they discover a clearer picture of their true interests, hobbies, skills, talents and dreams. They develop a more accurate self-understanding which enables them to see possibilities in life that they formerly did not believe even existed for them. This begs the question: why not integrate this type of thinking into a more participant-centered process?

Delegating Responsibility for One's Future to Others

Most people want to feel that through their education and experience they can develop the best that is in them and realize as much of their potential as possible. But many people still hold a belief that it is important to follow the plans and suggestions of persons who are perceived as superior to them. Career counselors, managers and professional consultants are looked up to for guidance and direction. People often presume that these perceived experts have an accurate and comprehensive grasp of their unique abilities, experience, interests and career hopes.

As a consequence, many people fail to perceive and understand the worth and value of their own self-knowledge. Instead, they tend to over-rely on others because security and dependence can in some ways be very gratifying. But, there is a subtle danger here. Reliance on advice and suggestions of others encourages complacency and may inhibit one's ability for self-discovery. An overdose of security and dependence on others may have side effects that produce a shrinking self-image.

Many persons, therefore, seem to hold to the belief that it is best to delegate the responsibility for assessments and decisions to others who should be expert in their fields of endeavor. They find it hard to believe that they, themselves, possess enough self-knowledge to actively share as a partner in their career and life assessment and planning process.

Are You Running a Participant-Centered Development Program?

- Voluntary participation by the participant
- The freedom to withdraw at anytime
- Joint inquire, discussion and decision-making by the participant and facilitator
- Retention of documentation by the participant
- The option to either share, or not share, the results with their superiors

It is not easy for many people to create opportunities for sharing self-knowledge of talent and skills with others. What makes it so hard for some persons to honor and respect their own self-knowledge? Why do some people so willingly delegate responsibility upward for evaluation regarding the worth of their talent and skills? Perhaps the answer has to do with their over-learned relationships with persons perceived to be superior to them.

People learn from their infancy to want and to expect to be cared for, instead of wanting and expecting to create opportunities to reach out and extend themselves. Security and dependency can in some ways produce a shrinking self-concept. But, people can develop the best that is within them when they come to grips with their dependency needs and with

the needs necessary to strive for individuality and an expanded sense of self-worth.

A New Model for Career and Life Planning

The traditional assessment and decision-making approaches used to ensure success in managing the career progress of people are still used in most organizations. And, barriers which block people from the achievement of their personal career success remain within those who wish to make significant contributions to their organizations. But it is these barriers which led to the development of the participant-centered model for career development and the Personal Career Development Profile (PCDP) report.

An Overview of Participant-Centered Programs

Participant-centered programs are a shift away from traditional programs for discovering and inspiring talent to perform. Some of the basic characteristics of participant-centered programs include:

- Voluntary participation of the persons involved
- The prerogative of participants to withdraw at any time
- Joint inquiry, discussion and decision-making by both the participant and facilitators (either managers or personnel consultants)
- Retention by participants of all of their personally composed documentation
- The option to either share, or not share, the results with their superiors

A participant-centered approach to personal assessment and career life planning also requires an effort by the individual to reconstruct his or her personal career and life history. A program should include self-introspection about accomplishments and failures in life. Hence, the individual's self image must be tested against the world in which one lives. Reality testing to validate self-knowledge is needed and can be accessed through objective assessment of personality.

Adopting a participant-centered model to development should result in greater opportunities for the participant to self-determine his or her next career steps; as well as more superior subordinate interchange about personal career planning.

Field Testing Participant-Centered Programs

Between January 1973 and today a number of participant-centered programs were conducted in a variety of settings. These included:

- A series of personal career planning workshops within both large and small organizations
- Women-only workshops - women hoping to return, break into, or break through the glass ceiling at work
- A summer extension course in personal career planning at a university
- A program for assisting teachers to find new careers
- Programs as a central part of corporate assessment center endeavors
- Personal life planning and development seminars for members of religious communities as part of yearly self-renewal retreats

The results of these events were used to fine-tune the model for participant-centered development, as well as provide behavioral evidence for the information contained in the Personal Career Development Profile (PCDP) report.

Assessment-Based Reporting As a Foundation

Once it is decided to use a participant-centered approach to development, career and life planning, it is important that the individual and facilitator adopt an assessment-based strategy to compliment the program.

Selecting and planning to succeed in the right career, occupation or college major are some of the most important decisions everyone needs to make. Yet most people come unequipped to the task of making their career choices. Many people are uncertain about how their personal strengths match up with the academic programs, career fields or occupations they should be exploring. It is these concerns about the usefulness of one's self-knowledge that led to the creation of the PCDP.

About the PCDP

The PCDP was designed as a unique computer-generated personal career planning report based on the original measure of normal personality, the 16PF® Questionnaire. This is a valid and reliable assessment of job-relevant personality developed by Dr. Raymond B. Cattell. Therefore, the PCDP was designed to be used in partnership-centered assessment and counseling endeavors being conducted in university career centers, as part of any career assessment and counseling practice, or as human resource activities in corporate settings.

Features Included In the PCDP Report

- Detailed narrative interpretation emphasizing personal strengths
- 16 Primary Factor and Big 5 Global Factor score section
- Predicted Broad Patterns in various performance areas
- Predicted leadership and subordinate role patterns
- Predicted activity scores in 27 different career fields
- 98 occupational interest projections

Unlike other career planning tools which simply reflect what people say about their career interests, the PCDP is different. The PCDP provides an accurate summary of a person's personal and career strengths, interests and hidden talents. It matches an individual's unique strengths to those of people who enjoy and have found success in a wide variety of different academic programs, career fields, and job related activities. The PCDP provides people with a well-researched reality check about what they are like "behind the mask" rather than what others may say or believe to be true of them. This information, combined with sharing the knowledge about their strengths, can help them reach their personal and career objectives.

Using the PCDP

Over the years of experimentation, development, and use, the PCDP has proven helpful to persons involved in personnel selection, placement, on-the-job performance effectiveness planning, outplacement counseling, career transition consulting, and other personal-career assessment, counseling and consulting endeavors. More specifically, the PCDP has been employed as an integral part of the following:

- Selection and placement by providing executives, managers and consultants with a powerful tool for selecting the right person for the job.
- Assessment centers by identifying the hidden talents of employees in order to train them to do what is needed to further their personal and career success.
- University, company and consultant sponsored career development and career management programs.
- Out-placement consulting programs by assisting displaced persons in undertaking mid-career exploration and job searches.

- Career and personal development counseling as part of career guidance efforts to assist clients in selecting specific college-level studies and other educational and training programs.

The PCDP is Different

Fundamental to the design and development of the PCDP is the belief that people possess unique personal strengths – not weaknesses. Weaknesses are nothing more than another's judgments about what a person needs to become aware of and change in order to fulfill the expectations of the persons doing the judging of them. However, the PCDP summarizes a person's strengths and helps one to learn what is needed to work to one's fullest potential and to progress in one's career and personal life.

Conclusion

We belong to a society founded on the principles of freedom to live and to work to the limits of our capabilities. We work in an educational and corporate community founded on the freedom to profit from our endeavors. But these ideals can be realized only if talent is identified and encouraged to grow. Furthermore, only superficial improvements in human resource and career management may be possible, unless people discover for themselves that they can benefit from the processes of talent discovery and inspiration.

The principal decision to be made involves removing the barriers between operating demands and human needs. The tools for personal development are available inside of concerned executives, managers and professional consultants and the people with whom they work and consult. Once people commit mutually to the difficult task of talent discovery and their personal growth and development, it is our theory that they learn to believe in themselves and in each other.

"In my professional experience, the payoff has been found to be commensurate with the effort made and is worthwhile when it builds the worth of a person."

Dr. Verne Walter
Author of the PCDP
(now 16pf Career Development Report)

Case Study A: Self-Imposed Barriers to Growth

A young metallurgist had performed well as a product specialist before his promotion to the position of sales manager. He was the first man from outside the sales force to receive such a promotion. All previous sales managers, including his new boss, had come up through the ranks of sales.

He was pleased with his appointment, although he had some reservations about how his new boss and the salesmen would accept him. It was evident that he questioned how effectively a metallurgist could manage salesmen, especially without having field experience in selling.

A year after his appointment he was still not accepted by either his boss or his salesmen. His trouble was that he just could not conceive of himself as a sales manager. He still saw himself as a metallurgist. He could not accept his new role and seldom functioned with the degree of confidence necessary to win the respect of his superior or his subordinates.

Case Study B: The Illusion of Success

In the mid-2000's this executive had a high-paying job and everything that goes with success. Then, he was let go by his company. He was caught in the period of changing times, in tumbling markets and downsizing.

He had been employed by his corporation for a long period of time. He had married, had two children, and had moved up the ladder of success. Then, suddenly, he was let go. He felt forgotten, unwanted and had no prospects for another job opportunity. He was 43 and had a 90% home mortgage. He, however, was provided outplacement counseling. His counselor administered the 16PF Fifth Edition Questionnaire and ordered a PCDP report for him to help him determine and confirm what his personal strengths and career patterns were.

Oddly enough, his report showed that he had many characteristics of a person who might have interest in working for himself, and starting his own business. First, however, he had to find employment with a firm to learn the ins and out of this type of business venture. Then after three years of hard work, he was able to form his own company, and finally he progressed to the point that he now has several employees, a large number of clients and a successful company and career.

Case Study C: Delegating Responsibility for One's Future to Others

A general foreman in a heavy equipment manufacturing company held hopes for broader and more responsible management experience. He had been a general foreman for approximately five years. He was in charge of fabrication and assembly functions on the production line. He heard of the General Manager's plan to create a new position in the division – Manager of Planning and Control. He strongly desired to be the candidate for it.

However, he believed it would be presumptuous of him to express his feelings to his superior. He was very apprehensive about being perceived as overstepping his bounds. He rationalized that both his superior and the General Manager knew him well, and that undoubtedly the administrative and planning ability he had shown on projects over the past would be recognized by them. As a consequence, he did nothing to convey his desires, and in essence, left his future in the hands of those above him.

Unbeknown to him, the General Manager, when asked if he had thought of this man as a prospect, said: "Heavens, no. I wouldn't think of it. His strength is in line operations. We'll be expanding his operation within the next three years and he's looking forward to the added responsibility our expansion plans entail."

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