

Take a look at yourself

■ BY DR SUSIE LINDER-PELZ AND MICHELLE DUVAL

Career counselling has evolved into developmental coaching that helps people change how they think, feel and act in relation to work.

Developmental career coaching is based on the principle that a person must be supported by their own beliefs, emotions and actions if they are to improve their work-life situation.

Vocational assessment, occupational research, planning and job-search skilling alone often don't bring about the desired change.

Changes in the nature of work, and in workplaces themselves, have caused fear and frustration among some workers. People commonly seek career coaching to understand, expand and get feedback on their options. They also often want to deal with confusion, frustration or fear, to build confidence and find more excitement and fulfilment in their work.

Developmental coaching shows a client how to modify beliefs, values and their identity. It can be transformational, leading to changes in vocation, direction or purpose, or it can be more specific, improving self-esteem, confidence, decision-making or dealing with problems such as procrastination and fear of failure.

From an employer's point of view, career coaching can reduce sick leave and absenteeism, and increase job satisfaction, productivity, morale, staff retention, efficiency and revenue.

Corporate career development is a component of family-friendly and work-life programs. Companies offer employees assistance in identifying personal values, dreams and motivations, and integrating them with company goals and plans. Sometimes it leads to discovering additional skills and taking on new responsibilities or a new role altogether. Sometimes it becomes clear there is no fit between what an employee wants and the company needs, and it's better for everyone if they part ways.

But, as managers and training professionals know, even when people have clarified what

they want and set goals, they are often held back by fears and other unhelpful beliefs and emotions. This is where developmental career coaching comes in.

The career development profession worldwide has yet to fully mine the wealth of coaching resources available in the field of cognitive behaviour psychology. In the mid-20th century, career counselling focused on how people's interests and values influenced their career choices and on how choices change over a lifespan. Theorists and practitioners sought to understand career choice and adjustment in terms of socioeconomic status, mental and physical abilities, personal characteristics and exposure to opportunity.

In the 1970s, social learning and self-efficacy theories came to the fore, followed in the 1980s and 1990s by cognitive approaches which look at how people process, integrate and react to information. According to cognitive theories, which have informed much of career counselling practice in recent years, clients build or refine a hierarchy of thinking and decision-making skills that influence career development.

The term career counsellor grew out of the traditional model of the helping professional who diagnosed problems, helped the "patient" understand the origins of their dysfunctional beliefs and behaviour, and offered advice. Increasingly, career counselling has been moving away from this, towards a partnership model where the "client" takes responsibility for self-assessment, gathering information, making decisions and taking action. The counsellor is a facilitator who questions, listens, clarifies, gives feedback, makes suggestions, offers information, sets tasks, and generally supports and motivates.

In the late 1990s, some practitioners using this new model started calling themselves coaches for differentiation and to emphasise that they assisted "well" people to think, feel and perform better. The distinction between counselling and coaching has become blurred and both increasingly call themselves career development professionals.

Much of what is called career development is more accurately career planning and management. This involves assessing personal characteristics, researching appropriate occupations, and preparing for job-search and other career actions. It is concerned with modifying existing behaviour

GINA'S COVER-UP

Gina is a 38-year-old IT manager.

"I do the managerial thing well, but it doesn't feel right," she says. "Should I stay in this job or look for another? I should be able to sort this out by myself, but I seem to be going around in circles. Often I'm full of fear about how I perform. I feel overburdened with the workload and responsibility. I'm not enjoying the work and I want to know what will make me happy."

Gina's crisis is not so much about finding more suitable work as about confronting her fears. Asked about the times when things had gone wrong, she says: "Actually, there has never been an issue with my competence. It just doesn't feel right. I know I'm smart, but I feel unworthy. Of course, nobody realises this—I guess I cover it up quite well."

It took Gina only a few hours with a skilled coach to understand how her beliefs created the feelings of fear and frustration. She edited some of her beliefs, clarified what she really wanted, set goals, and learnt how to make herself feel calmer and more successful. She then started achieving her goals.

Through conversation and questioning, she saw that the real issue was a deep-seated chain of thought that went something like this: "I'm unworthy, which is why I feel fearful, and that makes me take on too much responsibility for others' actions and inactions."

Gina started to see that these beliefs were neither true nor logical, and yet she was under their direction. Wanting to feel better, have more options and make better decisions, she made a commitment to learn how to change her thinking, feeling and acting.

and skills such as writing resumes, interview techniques and small business practices.

The starting point of developmental and transformational coaching is self-reflexivity—the ability to step back and notice and explore one’s thoughts, feelings and behaviour. In cognitive behaviour psychology, this is the “meta-cognitive skill of self-reflection”. This is called the “step-back” skill by Dr Bob Bodenhamer and Dr Michael Hall, who developed the neuro-semantic models of personal change, based on the cognitive behavioural science of NLP (neuro-linguistic programming).

These models show clients how to become aware of the mental movies and scripts they create that directly affect how they feel and act. At the heart of neuro-semantic coaching models is the systemic nature of mind and body, involving multiple layers of thinking and feeling. We have thoughts about thoughts, feelings about feelings, and so on. Once we understand the structure or pattern to how we run our brains and behaviour, it is surprisingly easy to change.

Most career coaches and counsellors are

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skilled in rapport-building, clarifying outcomes, active listening and supporting, questioning, and giving and receiving feedback. Neuro-semantic coaching skills also include detecting intricate and layered patterns of thinking and feeling, helping to change beliefs and emotional states, giving clients tasks to develop skills, and holding them accountable. Neuro-semantic coaches are trained to work with a person’s language patterns and personality style, and their perceptual filters, emotional states and the mental movies they make. (For more on Neuro-Semantic coaching, see www.neurosemantics.com.)

“People who are unhappy or not feeling successful are not wrong or broken. It is simply a matter of finding out how they work

their beliefs, values, interests, occupations and preoccupations so that they can be changed to ones more useful and desirable,” say NLP experts Joseph O’Connor and Ian McDermott (*Principles of NLP*, Thorsons, 1996).

To become a developmental career coach, those new to NLP and neuro-semantic undertake three-step training: accelerated NLP practitioner training; three days of gateway training in neuro-semantic; and five days (including live and distance learning) on application to career development and career management coaching.

Helping people become more confident and successful in their work, with the flow-on benefits to their health and personal lives, comes from combining expert career knowledge with leading-edge coaching methodologies.

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