



PROFESSIONALISM AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROVIDERS

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When change affects the workforce, quality career development coaching is an effective intervention for all concerned, says Kaye Avery. But where do people find the help they need and do the providers have the necessary skills to help them on their career journey?

More and more businesses care that their people get the right career development support at the right time. Awareness in HR circles is growing and there is strong evidence, backed by research, that quality individual support reduces risk to both the employer and the employee affected. It gives a good return on investment. And when change affects the workforce, the provision of quality career development coaching or counselling is an effective intervention for all concerned.

Having employees in the right job for the right reasons means they are motivated and likely to perform. And when managers provide the right conditions for them to do their best work—everyone wins. Such a culture is resilient and individuals feel that the company is looking after them.

But employees, at all ages and stages of their career journey, meet challenges and opportunities to work through. Managing one's career these days is a complex concern—and life is demanding.

Work is not easily compartmentalised, allowing us to go to work each day, do what is expected, learn what we need to, and then get on with our lives. Life, learning and work are a complex and interdependent mix, each aspect having an impact on the other.

THE REQUIREMENTS

Career development requires good management, good luck, stable lives and most often good allies, managers and sponsors. But from time to time, aspects of this set of optimal conditions are missing.

There are difficult decisions to make around direction—to stay or to leave when things get tough, to apply for an internal role or not, to take on the extra commitments of study, to continue working in an environment where there is tension or relationship difficulties, and

to know what a 'good job fit' is now, when redundancy creates high levels of self-doubt.

So given the ups and downs of the career journey, where do people find help when they need it? How are employers supporting their people to stay engaged, performing well and enjoying their work—even when life presents its challenges?

Managers and HR practitioners do their best to have 'career conversations' but an employee may not disclose the personal issues and feelings that are causing them to be confused, disengaged or on the threshold of leaving. External providers also do their best to help someone through these transitions—but do they have the skills needed to facilitate the development and change needed, especially when the core of the issue is career alignment or interpersonal?

Individual career development is very personal and goals are normally private, so understanding the individual's needs is best facilitated in a 'safe', neutral setting—clear of the business agenda. Having trained career professionals to do this 'careful' work with employees, in-house or using external providers, is necessary for real and positive change to happen.

Quality career development interventions ensure that employees are aware of their own skills, interests and talents, and more certain of their potential and how it fits within their own life structure. With the focus on the individual, motivation for training, future paths within an organisation, and the challenge of new opportunities are clear and supported.

Why does access to a trained career professional matter? Practitioners involved in career work should have broad face-to-face intervention skills such as counselling, coaching, motivational interviewing and even

some advising and training when this is necessary. Often all of these are utilised when such support is tailored to the individual.

Specific knowledge of career theory, psychology, assessment tools, personal brand management, personal development, industry trends, the job market and familiarity with employment legislation and HR processes are all in the mix of expertise a good practitioner should have in order to provide quality service and support.

Unlike in many countries, the New Zealand government and business sectors in general do not give recognition to the need for professionalism in career practice to the degree we in the industry believe employees deserve. In most OECD countries, qualifications and registration are essential. In New Zealand, these services are not always provided by professionally trained career practitioners.

The Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA) has set a benchmark for career practitioners. Their professional standards:

- Define the career industry, its membership and its services;
- Recognise the diverse skills and knowledge of career practitioners;
- Guide practitioner entry into the industry;
- Provide a foundation for designing career practitioner training;
- Provide quality assurance to the public and other stakeholders;
- Establish a benchmark against which career practitioners can be assessed, evaluated and judged by their peers and by others;
- Require career practitioners to undertake continuing professional development;
- Create an agreed terminology for the industry.

The full set of professional standards can be downloaded from cica.org.au.

These standards inform our own New Zealand career development industry and the qualifications in career development practice available through AUT, NMIT and Otago Polytechnic. They also inform the set of career development competencies which the Career Development Association of New Zealand (CDANZ), the professional body for New Zealand career practitioners, is guided by.

Although the career industry is still young, CDANZ is fortunate to have a strong and dedicated practitioner community. It was established in 1997 and has over 500 members with different client groups across all industry sectors, including corporate HR. CDANZ provides professional development opportunities and advocacy for its members. Most importantly it offers a Code of Ethical Conduct that members must abide by, and a complaints procedure; both of which give assurance that the practitioner meets the minimum requirements of the professional body and its standards of practice.

In New Zealand, corporate HR is a growing area for career practice; however, overseas it is where the largest practitioner cohort resides. Here HR/OD practitioners are signing up to study career development and although the study curriculum is broad, elective papers and choices are available.

Having qualified and experienced people helping employees make career decisions and during times of change makes real sense.

