

New approaches to career coaching

A new paradigm for career development has come about as a result of the massive change that has happened in the business environment over the last 5 or so years. For the coaching and career counselling fraternity this means that we need to rethink our approach to doing career work with clients. Traditionally, where work environments were stable and roles defined, career assessments based on career theory provided us with a level of understanding about the career potential for an individual. Career theory was rooted in the assumptions that personal traits are stable and that career development follows a sequence of predictable life stages. Although assessments and inventories are very useful, the competencies and confidence required to navigate the work environments of today require so much more than understanding an individual's values, interests and career drivers. So much more is also required from the practitioner to assist the client to transform the environmental limitations that affect us, such as government or corporate policies, market forces, economics (recession) and globalisation. Now, we need to enable our clients to construct lives that are meaningful by opening up possibility for higher levels of control and flexibility and help them to recognise that one's career identity is not separate from the whole-of-life reality.

A paper published by Mark Savickas and others in *The Journal of Vocational Behaviour* (April 2009), suggests that practitioners should develop the "discipline of change". In other words, they need to be 'change agents' who deliver 'life-design' interventions (holistic approaches that look at the whole-of-life experience) in order to help people to deal with the challenges of a very changeable world.

This lack of stability presents the need for a whole new framework for career coaching.

A framework that enables people to focus on:-

1. Validating personal stories and subjective experience. This enables a willingness to take responsibility for choices and experiences, and the learning gained from these.
2. The need for adaptability: being open to addressing developmental tasks, workplace issues and transitions in order to build resilience and optimism.
3. The importance of taking action: engaging in diverse activities and feedback to build new life and career dimensions.
4. Being intentional: reviewing, refocusing and proactively making change to increase confidence and sense of control.

Organisations and individuals who use the services of career practitioners and coaches come to us with a very different set of challenges than they did 5 years ago. People are now dealing with enormous amounts of complexity.

When looking for a career coach look for one with the following qualities:-

- has an 'authentic' approach and will tell you whether they can meet your expectations by their process

- has a strong understanding of the corporate/business experience yet who offers a 'holistic' or 'whole-person' approach
- has the confidence to go deeply without getting into a therapeutic process
- has a strong ability to stimulate storytelling and can pick up on themes and context dynamics from those stories
- whose experience and diverse skills and facilitation ability can open up worlds of possibility to increase confidence
- has an ability to 'enable' a client's understanding rather than 'telling' or 'advising' too much

In summary, career coaching now requires a process that offers more in-depth work with people to enable them to cope and respond to the challenges they face now with greater confidence. A simple structure of 3-5 sessions with a career coach would provide the space and focus for people to talk about their stories of life and work, to identify themes and personal development opportunities, then to look at new ways to open up their experience in a more positive and helpful way and to create goals and steps which are meaningful and aligned. Finally, a good coach will motivate people to believe in themselves and provide practical tools for making the transitions required to make positive change with greater confidence.

Kaye Avery

Career Coach

www.career-coach.co.nz