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# **Career Counseling Theory**

Submitted in Satisfaction of the Requirement for the Degree of

**MASTER OF SCIENCE, COUNSELING**  
(Career Specialization)

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## **NATURE OF HUMAN BEINGS & SIGNIFICANCE OF CAREERS**

Human beings are born innocent, then thrust into a world of both good and evil, then must navigate through the good and evil to ultimately find their inherent good. The significance of work for individuals is that work is more profound than the making of money: career is the most common means by which people join a larger community. It is more than something they do, it is an expression of who they are. People are realized in the projects they undertake for the welfare of others.

## **BASIC ASSUMPTIONS**

Work is a mystical experience, setting up a relationship between the work people do and the product they produce, between themselves, and others who work with them. People have an effect on their work, and their work has an effect on them. Building a life and career takes extremely hard work, perseverance, and dedication in the face of adversity, which will undoubtedly surface for all. Adults have the sole power to make choices about their lives and careers; it is up to individuals to know their strengths and find ways to put them to the service of living a purposeful existence (Existential). Emotions, Cognition and Behavior must be kept in balance. Everyone has emotions at their core. Cognition regulates the volatility emotions innately bring about, and behaviors are the resulting actions of this balance system. Emotions are extremely important as a way to guide people in ways that cognition cannot. Emotions and intuition act as the barometer to make sure their cognition and resulting behaviors are in check with their value system. In the context of ongoing change, systems like these regulate themselves to maintain stability (Gestalt). Individuals have the power to change their environment by way of

their life and career choices. They are able to make their own reality and control their environments by choosing internal and external responses and by taking responsibility for their choices (Existential).

## **KEY CONCEPTS AND CONSTRUCTS**

People must realize that their lives and careers are entirely their own responsibility, and their happiness and fulfillment are solely up to them and nobody else. Ultimately, people must take responsibility for their own personal growth to meet their own needs (Existential/Person Centered). People must accept, and not dwell in the past, but take on problems of the present that are inhibiting their life and career growth. Healthy relationships in life, and in the work place, are key to fulfilling peoples' most basic need of belonging. It is entirely up to individuals to seek out and make choices that foster healthy relationships.

The more work experience people have, the more opportunities they have to make better career decisions (Behaviorism/Social Learning Theory). The quest for knowledge and growth, both in lives and careers, are ongoing processes. There is always room for improvement on many levels including psychological, emotional, social, spiritual, cognitive, behavioral, or basically every possible way people can improve themselves both as individuals and as citizens within the community. Just as there is always room for growth, there will be a multitude of obstacles in the way potentially hindering this growth and testing resilience. This is when people must delve into the deepest resources of their own humanity, to find out what it is that they are truly made of: their inner essence, their true self.

## **DEVELOPMENTAL CAREER PROCESS**

Everything is learned through interaction within the environment (Behaviorism). There are several personality development stages, both in childhood and in adulthood, but for the purposes of this theory, we will look at two: Childhood (encompassing infancy through adolescence) and Adulthood (encompassing autonomy in career/life decisions). Since children do not have the autonomy (and sometimes capacity) to make most of their choices, the choices made by their parents have a direct affect on the quality of their lives. Choices are central to this Career Counseling theory in adulthood (Existential), and children are largely at the mercy of their parents' past choices and present choices, choices that may have an enormous impact on the rest of their lives. Ideally, children will grow up with responsible and loving parents who want to instill that sense of responsibility and a value system that includes strong work ethic. When this is the case, it becomes easier for children to learn adaptive, healthy ways in which to negotiate the environment on their own (when the time comes), and in the process develop a strong and positive personality. Conversely, if parents do not provide a healthy and loving environment for their children, if abuse and neglect are present, the result will more likely be children who grow into dysfunctional adults, with many more obstacles to overcome in their lives and careers.

## **FUNCTIONAL AND DYSFUNCTIONAL BEHAVIOR**

Functional behavior develops with the presence of empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard (Person Centered) displayed by truly loving and responsible parents. When these conditions are present during childhood, they act as the catalyst for adaptive behaviors to be nurtured and developed. Much empathy is given to children in the theory since they do not have the power to make many choices that have a direct and profound impact on the quality of their

lives. Slightly less empathy is given to adults because they do have the capacity to make choices to better their lives regardless of their pasts.

Dysfunctional adults take no responsibility and place blame on everything outside of themselves. They may want better things or better lives and careers, but they lack the fundamentals of responsibility, discipline, perseverance, work ethic and desire for personal growth, to be able to live congruently with these values that are the foundation for fulfilling lives and careers. Dysfunctional adults may equate material wealth with mental well-being and become very selfish and stunted in their growth. They only *care about* themselves yet do not *take care of* themselves which may result in such maladaptive behaviors as alcoholism or drug abuse, making it much more difficult to hold down jobs, build strong careers and ultimately create fulfilling lives.

Functional adults have a clear sense of responsibility for themselves and all aspects of their lives and careers. They strive to strike a balance of all aspects of their lives (Integrative Life Planning). They strive to become better throughout their entire lives and never become arrogant with their knowledge or success. The more people learn and discover about the world and about themselves, the more they will realize how much they *do not know*; humbled by all they do not know but strive to know. They not only take responsibility for themselves, they have a sense of responsibility to the earth and their environment and the world in which they live.

## **CHANGE PROCESS**

Change happens when people are able to acknowledge their past and understand how it affected their growth or lack thereof. They must then be able to accept their past and make choices in the present, as to not allow the past to negatively affect their present and future

(Existential/Gestalt). This is where the present-based aspect of this theory comes into play so reticently and will affect clients differently based on their internal conceptualization of time. Acceptance of the past may also prove to be the single most hindrance to the life and career growth process, and may be exacerbated based upon uncontrollable environmental conditions such as having grown up in a marginalized community or having been abused. Individuals have the power within them to change, and must first understand who they are as individuals and how they became that way in order to be able to move beyond the maladaptive thought processes and behaviors. Once understanding has been achieved, they must be willing and truly motivated to change (Behaviorism). This is the major determinant whether or not therapy will work. The purpose for learning and changing is for individuals to become more in tune to their own values and be able to fulfill their needs in healthy ways. They also will be able to have more fulfilling relationships once they know who they are and what it is they need from others. They will grow toward more fulfilled lives and be able to become contributing members of society, at peace with themselves knowing they are doing the best they can to make positive differences in the world and in their own lives.

## **PROCESSES AND STRATEGIES**

The role of counselors in this theory is that of role models (Existential) as well as coaches and mentors. We are the more knowledgeable party and have a true desire to share that knowledge to help others grow and to better their lives. The relationship is mutually respectful to build rapport (Existential). The processes counselors use first are exploration of the past and how it affects their present. This is accomplished through story telling which is utilized to gain thorough understanding about clients' values. Counselors target unhealthy thought processes and faulty

beliefs through discussions and dialogue with clients. Reframing of faulty beliefs may be necessary to further clarify clients' valuing process and the kind of life they consider worth living. Assessment instruments including the Myer's Brigg's Type Indicator (MBTI) are used for clients to gain deeper understanding of how their personalities affect their beliefs, values and decision making processes. Visualization is used to conceptualize ideal careers for the clients. A very important strategy is the formulation of action plans (Behaviorism) geared toward how to achieve the life and career they envision, by finding ways to implement their examined and internal values in concrete ways (Existential). Other techniques may include having clients use positive self-talk and affirmation if there are self-defeating behaviors present, and relaxation techniques if there are anxiety and stress problems. Both encouragement and positive reinforcement are used as the mainstay throughout the entire counseling process. In the final stages of counseling, hopefully clients would have a sense of rejuvenation and a positive outlook of their new world they are actively creating. When they experience trials along the way, they will be able to employ techniques learned, practiced, and reinforced in the counseling process. If successful, they will experience an awakening to the happiness and peace they can achieve through finding meaning in their lives and their work.

### **DIVERSITY CRITIQUE (LIMITATIONS & CONTRIBUTION)**

This career counseling theory is limited to those who are ready to begin work in the present. If extensive work needs to be done on past issues, a referral would be in order for more in depth personal counseling. The key concept, "the more work experience people have leads to more opportunities" limits this theory to those with adequate work experience. As far as disabilities are concerned in this theory, it would depend upon the kind and severity. Mental disabilities

wouldn't be adequately addressed, in part due to the conceptualization ability inherent to this theory. Regarding physical disabilities, this theory has already been very effective with blind clients, hearing impaired clients, as well as paraplegic clients, all whom were very much assimilated into the dominant culture. This theory has also been very effective with a variety of culturally diverse clientele, of whom their first languages included Dutch, Russian, Spanish, Portuguese and many of the languages inherent to China and India. This theory appeals to a diverse client population who are already highly assimilated into the dominant individualistic culture. Contributions of this largely integrative and humanistic approach to Career Counseling, is that it takes into account fundamentals from many counseling theories including but not limited to, Existential, Person Centered, Gestalt and Behaviorism. This theory allows room for spirituality and holistic approaches, alternative techniques and Eastern philosophies. Having a variety of approaches, techniques and philosophies make this theory more adaptable to a larger population, as people are all unique and respond to everything differently. This theory would be well suited to Career Counselors working with executive level clients who have been laid off or are unfulfilled in their current careers and desire more fulfilling lives and careers. It would work well with mothers who left a career to raise their children, and are now ready to re-join a workplace that has changed significantly since their departure. It would also work well with individuals who are "successful" on the surface, yet who lack meaning and fulfillment in their lives. Everything in this theory starts with individuals and the choices they make, and ends with the positive relations they foster and the contributions they make to society in living meaningful and purposeful lives.

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATION SUMMARY in Order of Relevance

### For Basic Assumptions/Key Concepts/Client-Counselor Relationship, a Humanistic mix of:

- 1) **Existential** (Frankl/May): We choose to make our own meaning to live a purposeful life. Take responsibility solely for own happiness (we have to be able to stand alone before we can stand beside another). Client/counselor relationship is key. Draw on other theories as necessary.
- 2) **Person Centered** (Rogerian): People are good at the core, must take responsibility, counselors use empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard, present-based.
- 3) **Gestalt** (Pearls): Gestalt means “whole”. Holistic, take into account the whole person, systems regulate to maintain balance, present-based as people must move beyond their pasts.

### For Techniques/Strategies/Goals:

- 4) **Behaviorism** (Lazarus/Banduras/Ellis): Learning happens through interaction with the environment, present-based.

### Specifically from this Theory:

- Adults have the sole power to make choices about their lives and careers; it is up to individuals to know their strengths and find ways to put them to the service of living a purposeful existence (**Existential**)
- Emotions are extremely important as a way to guide people in ways that cognition cannot. Emotions and intuition act as the barometer to make sure their cognition and resulting behaviors are in check with their value system. In the context of ongoing change, systems like these regulate themselves to maintain stability (**Gestalt**)
- Individuals have the power to change their environment by way of their life and career choices. They are able to make their own reality and control their environments by choosing internal and external responses and by taking responsibility for their choices (**Existential**)
- The more work experience people have, the more opportunities they have to make better career decisions (**Behaviorism/Social Learning Theory**)
- Ultimately, people must take responsibility for their own personal growth to meet their own needs (**Existential/Person Centered**)
- Choices are central to this Career Counseling theory in adulthood (**Existential**)
- Everything is learned through interaction within the environment (**Behaviorism**)
- The role of counselors in this theory is that of role models (**Existential**)
- The client/counselor relationship is mutually respectful to build rapport (**Existential**)
- They must then be able to accept their past and make choices in the present, as to not allow the past to negatively affect their present and future (**Existential/Gestalt**)
- Functional behavior develops with the presence of empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard (**Person Centered**)
- Clients must be willing and truly motivated to change (**Behaviorism**)
- Together they formulate an action plan (**Behaviorism**) geared toward how to achieve the life and career they envision by finding ways to implement their examined and internal values in a concrete way (**Existential**)
- They will have found true meaning in their lives (**Existential/Systems**)

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