

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PERSONNEL SERVICES

Independent Study Course Number 16

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UNDERSTANDING THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROCESS: Helping Individuals Realize Their Full Potential

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The career development process represents a series of life stages and events during which a person identifies, selects, prepares for, enters, and progresses through an occupation or career. Few individuals, however, recognize the order of these events and the tasks they must perform to ensure success in achieving their occupational and career goals.

Consultants working in the staffing industry interact with individuals during a number of these life stages. Therefore it is very important for permanent placement or temporary staffing professionals to understand the dynamics of the entire career development process. The following information will help bring the process into focus:

Awareness

This initial stage represents the time when the individual, usually during the middle to late school years, begins to get a sense of self by examining his aptitudes, achievements, interests, personality traits, lifestyle preferences, and values. During awareness, the individual is able to answer "Who am I?" in a realistic fashion for the first time and relate his understanding of self to the world around him. It is also a natural time to fantasize about the future. Career choices made very early are often not the most realistic. Each individual must understand that self-understanding is just beginning and knowledge of the real work world is still extremely limited.

Exploration

During this stage the individual begins to create questions and search for answers that broaden his career understanding. It is also a time when people relate what they have learned about themselves to the investigation of educational and occupational choices they are considering. During the exploration stage people set tentative goals, recognizing that they are evolving, maturing individuals and that the exploration stage will most likely continue for some time.

Decision-making

Rather than a stage or a phase, decision-making represents a number of events that occur throughout the career development process --times when individuals must choose from among the various options they have identified. Individual decisions vary from selecting courses to study in high school or college to choosing a summer job to eventually choosing the occupation or field that will become a career or life work. Decision-making is also a process, one requiring order and attention for success.

The most important aspect of the decision-making process is the recognition that there is a decision to be made. Without this recognition, many individuals fall victim to the possibility of having others make decisions for them. Once each decision point is identified, individuals then must consider the full range of options before them, gather information to help them understand the outcomes or consequences of each choice, and then weigh this information. Finally, they must evaluate the decision once it has been made. All of these factors are vital to healthy educational or career decisions.

Implementation

Following each educational or career decision, individuals must take deliberate steps toward implementing the decision and evaluating whether they have done the right thing. Often this involves acquiring the knowledge and skills that one needs to move into and become successful in an occupation or career. They must follow the educational path (i.e., career training, college, etc.) that is most likely to help them achieve their career goal. Sometimes individuals will need to consider a combination of both educational and work experiences. Throughout the process, each person faces many more decisions that will have some bearing on his future career success.

Orientation

The orientation stage is a "bridging" time, a period of transition when the individual relates where he is with where he wants to be. It is a time of renewed awareness of abilities, interests, and related personal characteristics, and of continued exploration of options. During this stage the options become more realistic as individuals consider possible work settings where they can use their newly acquired career skills.

It is during the orientation stage that many individuals come into contact with professionals in the staffing industry. Often they are fresh out of college, high school, the military, or a specialized career-training program. They have little or no significant job experience and need considerable assistance in learning how to apply their knowledge and skills in a work environment. They also have had very limited experience at finding employment.

Entry/adjustment

This is the period when each individual secures and moves into his occupation or career and involves many of the techniques he has utilized during other aspects of the process. The individual in transition from the world of education to the world of work or from one job to another must acquire (or reacquire) the skills of gaining employment. These will include, but not be limited to, job search strategies, resume creation, and interview skills.

Staffing professionals can provide valuable experience to the novice job seeker, experience that will help him many times over the remainder of his career. When he has found employment, each individual will then go through a transition period of learning his occupational role and adapting his knowledge and skills to a specific work environment.

Growth/mobility/maintenance

The longer one works in his chosen career and achieves a measure of success, the more likely it will be that he will receive added responsibilities and rewards (promotions, salary increases, etc.). Such adjustments are usually accompanied by the need for continued learning in order to stay abreast of new and changing knowledge, techniques, and tools in each career field.

During this part of the career development process, a significant number of individuals learn that they have outgrown the opportunities in their specific work environment and must search elsewhere to realize their full career potential. It is during this time that some individuals also learn they are not suited for their careers or the settings in which they have chosen to work. All of these individuals are likely to intersect with members of the staffing industry as they seek the growth, mobility, or satisfaction that is not available to them in their present place of employment.

It is also during the growth/mobility/maintenance stage of the career development process that individuals will often face the difficult situations of termination due to downsizing, inadequate job performance, and the like. Such situations require the individual to reappraise his work knowledge, skills, and behaviors, and take himself back through the orientation stage identified above. When he is successful at gaining reemployment, he must once again move through an entry and adjustment period in a new work environment. Unlike the orientation, entry, and readjustment phases of the early career, this period can be very stressful and chaotic for individuals who have found themselves suddenly unemployed for the first time.

How can professionals in the staffing industry assist individuals to realize their full career potential? The following strategies may prove useful:

1. Help each individual determine where he or she is in the career development process and aid him in evaluating the various educational and career decisions he has made to this point in his personal career development.
2. Assist each individual in the reassessment of aptitudes, abilities, interests, personality traits and related factors that may be necessary for him to move forward. Each individual is a changing, growing person. The dynamics of those changes and growth may suggest that the individual pursue different career goals (or possibly different work settings) than those originally considered.
3. Make certain each individual has the job seeking skills necessary to grow and move in his respective career. Help him to understand the politics of the workplace and the personal, social, and emotional skills necessary for his development.

4. Encourage each individual to invest a portion of his life to continuing education. Nothing opens career doors more than the advancement of new knowledge and skills and the competence that is acquired through applying what one has learned in the workplace.
5. Encourage individuals to be flexible. An individual's ability to adapt and be mobile will enhance his career development options.

The career development is ongoing and continuous. Rather than viewing the above stages in a linear fashion, the process should be seen as cyclical. Many adults will go back through the awareness, exploration, and decision-making stages as they consider career mobility and growth issues.

No two individuals are ever at the same place at the same time. Finally, each person can exercise a measure of personal control by being conscious of where he has been, where he is now, and where he wants to go. Teach your candidates about the career development process. The more any person knows about the dynamics he is experiencing, the more he can make the process work for his personal career success.

CONTINUING EDUCATION UNIT (CEU) REGISTRATION

Complete the registration information below and forward this page, continuing the independent study examination and your answers, plus payment to NAPS, 131 Prominence Lane, Suite 130, Dawsonville, GA 30534. The processing fee for the continuing education units for each NAPS independent study course is \$10 for members and \$20 for non- members. Feel free to reproduce the registration and examination page to allow additional individuals to apply for CEUs. Following receipt, each examination will be scored and CEU credits will be added to your compliance record..

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EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

Multiple-choice questions. Circle the response you believe to be correct.
Be certain to answer all of the questions.

1. Which of the following is not one of Burtnett's career development stages?
 - a. awareness
 - b. fantasy
 - c. exploration
 - d. decision-making

2. Exploration is a time when the individual:
 - a. begins to create questions and search for answers
 - b. conducts his job search
 - c. "bridges" from school to work
 - d. none of the above

3. During the implementation phase, the individual:
 - a. continues to explore educational and career options
 - b. is able to answer the "who am I?" question
 - c. follows an educational path to career knowledge and skill
 - d. none of the above

4. Staffing industry professionals are mostly likely to interact with individuals during:
 - a. the entry/adjustment phase
 - b. the growth/mobility/maintenance phase
 - c. both of the above
 - d. none of the above

5. The career development process is:
 - a. ongoing and continuous
 - b. ends when an individual finds initial employment

- c. starts and stops over and over again
 - d. none of the above
6. Which of the following skills is most important to individuals in the entry/adjustment stage?
- a. job search strategies
 - b. resume creation
 - c. interview skills
 - d. all of the above are equally important
7. The most important element in the career decision-making process is:
- a. recognizing that there is a decision to be made
 - b. understanding all options
 - c. weighing the consequences of the various options
 - d. none of the above
8. During which stage is the individual most likely to be faced with termination?
- a. entry/adjustment
 - b. growth/mobility/maintenance
 - c. implementation
 - d. none of the above