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By Michelle Casto

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By Michelle L. Casto, M.Ed.

A career is the sum total of all of your work-related contributions to society in a lifetime. This includes time and effort spent to provide goods, services, or benefit to others. A career includes paid, un-paid, volunteer, part-time, and full-time positions. Your career includes many life roles you may not think of: student, homemaker, babysitter, office worker, doctor, lawyer, etc. A career encompasses all the roles you play and duties you perform. You may have many jobs or positions that make up your career, but you only have one overall career. There are various career options in the modern world of work: Self-Employed, Organization Employed, or Project-Employed.

By definition, career development is the interaction of psychological, sociological, economic, physical and chance factors that shape the sequence of jobs, occupations, or positions a person may engage in throughout his or her lifetime. Career development is an ongoing process that includes the aspects of planning and strategizing your career based on information about your self, the world of work, the match between them, and the action you will take to create your life's work. Formal career development occurs in high schools, colleges and universities, adult education programs, business and industry, military, community and government agencies, trade and technical schools. Consider all the places you have developed your career with either academic or work experience. Where can you go next and what can you do to further develop your career?

You have the power to create what you want, whether you wish to be self-employed, change career fields entirely, hold a certain kind of position, or volunteer your time. Smart career development requires you to be self-reflective, resourceful, motivated, flexible, and able to keep your skills and competencies up-to-date.

Contemporary Career Concepts

Statistics say that we will experience many job transitions throughout our life. For example: the U.S. Department of Labor says that the average person will have 3.5 different careers in his lifetime and work for ten employers, keeping each job for 3.5 years.

From the 1995 National Association of Colleges and Employers Journal of Career Planning, "The average American beginning his or her career in the 1990s will probably work in ten or more jobs for five or more employers before retiring."

In the mid 1990s, Richard Knowdell said, "Career planning in the 1950s and 1960s was like riding on a train. The train remained on the track and one could quite possibly stay on that track until retirement day. In the 1970s and 1980s career planning was like getting on a bus. One could change buses and it was a little closer to driving than on a train. For the 1990s and beyond, career planning is more like an all-terrain vehicle. The worker gets to drive, has to read the map, and has to

be attuned to the terrain, which could change from moment to moment.”

When I attended a recent California Career Development Conference, I heard several other metaphors to describe the career development process. One person said, “The old career was a marriage. The new career is a date.” And someone else mentioned, “A career is like going to an amusement park, where you go from one ride to the next.”

Obviously, the concept of climbing the career ladder is antiquated. Rather than “moving up” in one organization, you will find yourself moving up, down, and even off the ladder. It could, in fact, seem more like a maze, with many twists and turns, stops and starts.

My own concept of career is like a wardrobe, where you “try on” different outfits throughout your lifetime, and continue to check the mirror to see if it still fits and matches your current style and taste. In the modern world of work, you will need to find work that is “suited” to you. Think of your life’s work as your wardrobe. It is ever-changing as you move through life, changing as your styles and interests change. Throughout the process, you will be tailoring yourself to fit different roles, and to meet changing work styles and expectations.

Thus, today, the way in which we go about planning and strategizing our work life is constantly changing. We are taking a more proactive---therefore more exciting and challenging approach--- to managing which way our career takes us. People are daring to walk their unique paths, and ignoring traditional routes. In fact, tomorrow’s jobs are relatively unknown to us at this time, as there will be new titles and new career fields that will develop. If a modern career is like a wardrobe, you will wear many kinds of outfits throughout a lifetime, sometimes mixing and matching ensembles, but always checking to see that it still reflects your current style and remains a good fit. It has been said that clothes make the man—what you are displaying to the world through your choice of clothing is how you express yourself. Similarly, how you express yourself and what you value is reflected in the work you choose to perform.

As Mark Twain said, “There is no security in life, only opportunity.” Given today’s changing times, we cannot hold onto one idea for very long---there is so much good work that must be done to help us evolve to our fullest potential. We are multi-talented, multi-faceted beings with many gifts to share. We cannot lock ourselves into any one job or job path. We must walk our path, but remain flexible and open to new experiences. We also need to learn our lessons along the way. Each job, no matter how small, is meaningful and is part of our career plan in that we are always building onto our careers. Today’s work will prepare us for tomorrow’s opportunities.

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