
CAREERS FORUM

TOWARDS AN ACHIEVING SOCIETY

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When I created the National Consultation on Career Development (Natcon) in 1975 I had to give it a name and to this end I might have called it a conference, but mindful that I expected all participants, like myself, to be in search of advice from both experts and peers, and to think and work as a fellowship endeavouring to improve the methods, status and effectiveness of career development, I chose to call it a consultation. I believe that participants in each subsequent Consultation feel strong comradeship as they mentor one another in their quest for improvement as career practitioners. I wonder whether we can, in fellowship, raise our goals to continue to make differences in individual lives, but also to have a larger influence on social policy governing career development and therefore the lives of all Canadians.

We could persuade governments to adopt policies that will represent an achievement culture in Canada. There is a need in this country for a massive and universal career achievement movement that prompts all citizens to be better and to do better. We need a labour force that is fully capable and keen to make maximum use of their energies and abilities and participate fully in the labour force with the talents for upward occupational mobility, competence to create new enterprises, competence to staff successful and progressive enterprises, and fully prepared to knowledgeably lead our social institutions. Career development can create social, economic and personal good.

To some, calling for a career development culture may seem very self-serving on our part, and I am sure such suspicions are aroused when we propose it, and thereby it puts people off our real message which is the

mobilisation of an achieving society in which career development only plays a supporting role—but a key one. The important feature of an achieving society is that citizens achieve more in their lives for themselves, their careers, their families, their communities and their country by means of utilising their own talents more effectively and making efficient use of resources available to them.

A second key feature of an achieving society is that all Canadian organisations—business, educational, voluntary, entertainment, fraternal, religious, governmental, social and sporting—accept responsible roles in furthering the achievement of Canadians and Canadian society, and they have ready access to appropriate forms of assistance in fulfilling this role. An organisation that exemplifies what can be done is the WarAmps, with its Champions program of providing young people who have a missing limb with the best prosthetic devices and other support to succeed. An excellent example of their work is the young Canadian violinist, Adrian Anantawan, who was born with just one hand but had a burning passion to play the violin and did achieve remarkable skill. The WarAmps stepped in and got him the most advanced form of bionic hand plus a scholarship. Adrian has been accepted into the renowned Curtis School of Music in Philadelphia. He won a place in the National Arts Centre's International Summer Music Institute. Both Adrian and the WarAmps are models for an achieving society.

A society which embodies a career achievement culture is characterised by governments and organisations that base their programs on principles such as the following:

- Every citizen has access to interesting and adoptable everyday career advancement exercises broadcast through television, the Internet and print media.
- Every employer ensures that the work experience of every worker involves undertaking relevant career development tasks.
- Every citizen has ready access to career planning by a professionally qualified career practitioner,

backed up by a fully equipped and staffed career resource centre.

- Every student, at every level of learning, receives training in appropriate career development tasks, and makes responsible use of them.
- All parents have ready access to career planning for themselves and their children.
- Every teacher at every level of education receives instruction in mentoring and coaching students.
- All supervisors receive instruction in career mentoring and coaching of their workers.
- Every career practitioner meets the *Standards and guidelines for career practitioners*.
- There are standards and guidelines for career services and all organisations ensure that their service and program meet the criteria.

The pursuit of an achievement society through the implementation of principles such as these would mean that we would reframe current career programs in terms of achievement rather than equity, regional balance, anti-poverty, etc. Our current social programs provide minimal support to the disadvantaged through employment insurance, subsidies, counseling, retraining and other programs that only maintain them in a marginal status. We need programs that prepare all Canadians to achieve all they can, and we need Canada to truly want to be an achieving society. As career practitioners, we and our employers must be active members of the education, social and economic development industry, and work at transforming the current culture of social services from a culture of poverty to a culture of achievement. We need to identify with and be identified by our allegiance with organisations that are oriented to helping people succeed rather than just subsist.

ROLE OF THE ACHIEVEMENT-ORIENTED COUNSELLOR

In recent years I have had the opportunity to observe the training of musicians, actors and dancers, and I have been very impressed with the dedication of the instructors to instilling in their students a passion for outstanding accomplishment. I am sure that sports coaches have the same enthusiasm. It was particularly instructive to observe world famous artists like Pinchas Zukerman and Celia Franca drill even advanced students in the position of their fingers, the movement of their wrists, the angle of their elbows and the level of their shoulders. I was reminded of Ian

Millar's slogan: 'A thousand unseen changes make the difference between mediocre and magnificent'.

I believe the time has come for career practitioners to give less time to introspective exercises for clients and much more attention to teaching the skills of success and achievement.

Career Achievement Values

In the context of an achieving society, career development programs would include these features:

- We would be coaches and active mentors to our clients so they can be better and do better, and we would intervene with third parties who put road-blocks in the career paths of our clients.
- We would actively promote in private career sessions and in public an achievement belief system as represented in phrases such as the following: if it is worth doing, it is worth doing well; help others to do very well; keep on failing until you succeed; and failure is no option.

The above short list of value slogans may appear too gimmicky but are used here to emphasise the importance of imbuing conscious achievement values as opposed to some more popular ones that lead only to mediocrity.

The development of an achieving society includes something that counsellors like to avoid—advocating values—but these are the motivators of our lives and of our civilisation and they need our support. An achievement belief system as an integral part of our national culture, supported by universal career development programs and services, will equip people to become healthy, self-reliant citizens, able to cope with constant change in rapidly changing labour markets, to fully exploit opportunities and to utilise resources available, and to succeed all along the way.

Features of a Career Achievement Culture

Career development programs are not just to prepare students for the transition from school to work, or to help displaced workers get employment, but also to enable workers to be the best they can be, to realise their full potential, and, by so doing, add greatly to the economic development of the country. To accommodate the needs of the entire population there must be a self-managed career development process that is appropriate to most workers and can be taught to them through a public education program, through their employers, through a mass media

campaign and through the Internet. Let's consider some possibilities.

In recent times we have witnessed some important and effective social movements, including Mothers Against Drunk Drivers, the anti-smoking lobby, the women's movement and ParticipAction, all of which have influenced us to lead more responsible lives. A similar movement can be created for a career achievement culture, and thereby greatly support a learning culture and the determination of people to become more competent in their careers.

Let's suppose a government department decided to promote a career development culture in which all citizens would be encouraged and assisted to achieve to their fullest for their economic, social and personal betterment. A career development mobilisation program would aim to promote the empowerment of individuals in helping themselves, their friends, neighbours and relatives to achieve education and career goals.

A number of activities would be promoted under this 'achieving society' umbrella, including:

- how to: do your own career check-up; identify your talents; learn; control your anger; assess what's going on at work; help your spouse's career; get ahead in your job; help your children study; and, start your own business;
- a campaign to raise awareness of the value of thinking and acting positively about self, studies and careers. It could be organised by a department of employment and focus on such a theme as: 'Take control of your life', and citizens would be helped to develop a greater sense of 'self as active agent' through addressing factors such as self-talk;
- a campaign to encourage people to count the number of times they support themselves and the number of times they knock themselves. It is a fun thing to do, and an eye-opener. We criticise ourselves many more times than we praise ourselves;
- a family career development process that families can use in their own homes 'around the kitchen table' to help each other. Parents typically understand the talents of their children, but are unaware of how these talents can be used most profitably in education and in work. A complicating factor is that most parents themselves are haunted by feelings of doubt about their own careers and lives. Thus, many parents need assistance more than they are able to give it.

- encourage people to check out jobs that they see and might like, how to find out what skills they require, how closely their talents match them, and what they need to do to qualify. People can be encouraged to enrol in evening classes, or other self-development activities, which teach skills that they can use in their present job, or in their next one.

A Call to the Arts to Popularise Career Achievement

Some of the above activities could be widely promoted as the keys to survival and success. You can imagine some comedians demonstrating how they monitor their own self-talk, including their own self-contradictions. They could make excellent comedy routines that would motivate people to monitor their self-talk. The comedians could also use humour to teach work values, perhaps drawing on their own experience in perfecting their own skills.

Similarly, songwriters could play a great role in promoting a career achievement society. Musicians work hard to excel in their trade, they make many sacrifices to get ahead, and they have to battle many obstacles to stay on track to the top. Few, however, think about telling their story of achievement against many odds. Few musicians automatically see that their striving to make a career for themselves can inspire others (with or without musical ambitions). Lyricists are always looking for ideas for their songs, and musicians are also looking for meaningful songs that will connect them with growing audiences. A storyline of personal doubts, difficulties, struggles to achieve, and then triumph has a lot of potential for songs to inspire audiences.

The arts development branch of government could collaborate with the department for employment to encourage writers to develop competent achievement themes and musicians to sing the songs at every opportunity. A similar effort could be made to enrol comedians in the campaign. There is a great potential for an achievement society initiative. We need to advocate that a government department undertake a serious program to create an achievement culture and to make sure that career development specialists plan, organise and implement the program.

Career Achievement at Work

A department of employment is in an ideal position to increase the job retention rate through promoting a career achievement program for new employees to

help them orient themselves to their new organisation and to learn career development tasks and apply them appropriately. This is a service that career development offices can readily provide to employers and their new hires, especially in the case of small firms that do not have the resources to conduct such a program. On the other hand, medium and larger firms may need only to be encouraged to offer such a service to their employees and perhaps given some useful resources for the program.

A part of the career achievement program for new employees would be to train established workers in the firms how to mentor and coach new employees. Many successful people credit part of their achievement to the assistance of a somewhat older and more successful person who took a special interest in guiding them at a crucial stage of their career. This process of mentorship is the sharing of knowledge about how to learn; how to work with others; how to be results oriented in managing one's own tasks; and how to estimate what one can accomplish in various circumstances. A mentor also opens doors to new opportunities for a person.

Organisations do not particularly want a career development culture because it sounds like it is intended for the employee rather than the organisation, but they would actively promote an achievement culture which holds promise to enhance the performance of the organisation through employees knowing the intent of their work better, getting help to match their talents to the opportunities in the organisation, getting help, learning, and enthusiasm to attain targets. There are many good business reasons for an organisation to have a career achievement culture that reaches all employees and serves the accomplishment of the mission of the organisation including productivity and profit.

In addition to the programs described above governments might establish achievement centres which will: provide citizens with an assessment of their potential; recommend individual courses of action for them to achieve the next step in their careers; provide coaching during the rough spots of their career progressions; intervene on their behalf with parents, educators and supervisors; encourage people to go forward; provide instruction to educators and supervisors on mentoring and coaching; popularise achievement slogans and routines to implement them; provide career planning courses for parents; broker learning opportunities for

clients; provide business development loans. In keeping with an achievement philosophy these centres will be co-located with learning institutions and with economic development offices rather than with social welfare or employment insurance agencies.

LEADERSHIP AND ORGANISATION

Above I wrote: 'We need to advocate that a government department undertake a serious program to create an achievement culture and to make sure that career development specialists plan, organise and implement the program'. In the eyes of government, who are we? Why should they listen to us? Who are our constituents? Today our answers to these questions can only be a pathetic bleating that while we don't have an organisation and can't provide a list of supporters we, as individual supplicants, do have great ideas for the country.

This is a very sad situation and one that can only lead to our quick dismissal from the halls of power and influence. The time has come for us to create a national association of career practitioners. If we don't do this our ideas will not even merit a footnote in history. On the other hand, if we do create such an organisation we will be in a position to change history.

A national professional organisation typically has four main features: a membership organisation; one or more journals and newsletters; an annual conference; and provincial affiliate organisations. We are in a rather peculiar position. We have a national conference (NATCON), a national journal (*Canadian Journal of Career Development*), a newsletter (*The Career Counsellor*), Standards and Guidelines for Career Practitioners, appropriate websites (Career Resource Centre and Contact Point) and nationally recognised leaders—but no organisation. I suggest that we could readily create a membership organisation from among those who attend NATCON. Bringing these elements together would quickly give career development a national voice. In addition, several provinces and territories now have strong and vibrant career development associations which could be ideal partners in creating a national movement.

The creation of an achieving society is my plea to our leaders today.

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INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

COURSE CHANGE AND ATTRITION FROM HIGHER EDUCATION

Each year, a number of university students in Australia leave the courses in which they are enrolled. Some change to other courses, while others defer their course or leave the university altogether. What motivates students to change or leave their university course and does the decision result in a positive or negative outcome for the students involved? These are among the questions addressed in a new report, *Course change and attrition from higher education*, the latest study completed in the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) research program. Source: http://www.acer.edu.au/publications/newsletters/eNews/2005/Jul/0507_LSAY39.html

NEW RESOURCE FOR WOMEN IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

Women in industry: A resource booklet, published by the building and construction industry redundancy fund

Incolink is a resource for women considering entering the building and construction industry. It contains:

- an overview of the perceptions of women in the industry and the opportunities available to them;
- a review of statistical research on employers' attitudes to women in the industry;
- interviews with women who have had successful careers in building, including a number who started as apprentices and have progressed into other roles;
- listings of support services in the community designed to assist women.

Women in industry: A resource booklet will be distributed through Victorian secondary school careers teachers, TAFE colleges, a range of industry organisations such as the MBAV and the Victorian Trades Hall Council. To obtain information on how and where to obtain copies, call Margaret Poustie, Incolink Careers Services on (03) 9668 3061.