

Career Issues, Part 1

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What is the recipe for successful achievement? To my mind there are just four essential ingredients: Choose a career you love, give it the best there is in you, seize your opportunities, and be a member of a team.

—Benjamin F. Fairless¹

Don't confuse having a career with having a life.

—Hillary Clinton²

Donald Super defines the word “career” as “the sequence of positions, jobs, and occupations that a person occupies and pursues during the course of a life of preparing to work, working, and retiring from work.”³ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “career” as “a course of professional life or employment, which affords opportunity for progress or advancement in the world.”⁴ In contrast, the *OED* definition of the word “job” is “anything one has to do; a ‘business’ affair, operation, transaction, matter to be done.”⁵

Several things become clear from these definitions. The most evident is that while a career includes the concept of job, it is much more. A job seems to be that which is done to earn a living; a career is more complex, and can offer more satisfaction. One can probably make either a job or a career of any profession. The choice is a matter of individual attitude, effort, and philosophy, as well as some external situations. The quotes from Fairless and Clinton also remind us that careers need to be kept in perspective; we are part of a team and we should have a life beyond those library walls. We are more than just our jobs or careers. Understanding and embracing that is important to both sanity and overall career success.

Each of us has a career journey that begins with the first professional employment and continues along a path that can be a superhighway to a marvelous destination or a series of detours, missed turns, dead ends, and more. Often it is a combination of both. While a great deal of attention is paid to the beginning of a career and many may look forward to the end of a career and the beginning of retirement, those middle years are very important and can be wrought with pitfalls and disappointments as well

as opportunities and joys. In the next two columns we will look at career changes, opportunities, and reinventions.

“All of the top achievers I know are life-long learners . . . those who are looking for new skills, insights, and ideas. If they are not learning, they are not growing . . . not moving toward excellence.”

Niles’s *Adult Career Development* identifies societal career trends and how they affect jobs:

Career concerns evolve as the nature of work changes. Harsh evidence exists to indicate that the nature of work is changing substantially. . . . The “career is dead” authors alert us to the fact that understanding changes occurring in the nature of work is essential for responding effectively to the career concerns confronting adults in contemporary society.⁶

These work changes are real and can be relatively major. In the eyes of many people, work defines the person, and changes in career have a far-reaching impact on lives. The first chapter discusses ten emerging trends that both affect work in general and have specific implications for the library. These are advanced technology, changing social psychology of work, international economic competition, changing numbers in the workforce, new career concepts, increase in educational requirements, the “learning organization,” job movement, changing workforce demographics, and the move from career maturity to career adaptability.⁷

Another theme of interest is the idea of an interconnection throughout the career from the very beginning to the end—“a life career.”⁸ This idea is developed by Vondracek and Porfeli with the Selective Optimization with Compensation (SOC) model: “The basic premise of the model is that selection, optimization, and compensation represent lifelong processes in the development that converge around the objectives of maximizing gains and minimizing losses.”⁹

Chapters are written by different authors who are experts in the career theories reviewed. The arrangement is reader friendly with clear headings and useful graphics and diagrams. It should be noted, however, that this is a well-



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referenced, detailed, theoretical look at the sociology and psychology of career studies and may be more appropriate for the student of career change rather than the career manager. Take a look if you need this level of information or are interested in the topic.

The first sentence in the introduction to Otterbourg's *Switching Careers* states that at one time careers were forever.¹⁰ That is hardly the case today. Changing careers is "as American . . . as fast food."¹¹ It is not uncommon to interview people who have had very successful careers in a wide variety of fields and now are librarians. And it may be valid to say that the reverse is true too. Otterbourg has collected almost seventy examples to illustrate this point. After an introductory chapter with information on reasons for the career switches, myths, and points to consider, the next three chapters illustrate planning, recycling skills into a new career, and improving quality of life with case studies. The next eight chapters look at specific job fields: information technology, clergy, law, medicine, teaching, self-employment, art, and nonprofit organizations. Each chapter has a brief general discussion and then several two- or three-page examples. While one example is a librarian, it is amazing how many of these could apply to librarians with the wide range of skills and life-long learning abilities inherent in the profession. This is inspiring and a good choice for a person wanting to make a change.

Is It Too Late to Run Away and Join the Circus? by Smye has a funny title for a book with a deadly serious beginning.¹² The second edition was published shortly after the September 11 attacks, with some concern by the author as to the relevancy of the book and the appearance of being "an inconsequential question against the backdrop of terrorist attacks, but, like most of the world, I seek to contribute to the rebuilding of bricks and spirit. I believe that we change in good times because we believe we can; we make changes in challenging times because we must."¹³ She states that people spend a significant part of their life at work and even more time thinking about work when away from the office, so a sharper focus is necessary. The image of running away to the circus may date those who read *Toby Tyler* or watched *Circus Boy* on television. Yet Smye is not trivializing the idea as a way to shirk responsibility or be lazy, but instead suggesting to make changes that work and are good for you and yours. As with so many of the books, it is written for the corporate world but has application for librarians in reviewing career situations, aspirations, and reviewing options. The self-evaluations are very good and if taken seriously can result in a critical look at both career and life. The clever use of humor throughout the book makes for enjoyable and productive reading.

Expressly for the mid-career person, Ibarra's *Working Identity* is based on two points.¹⁴

First, we are not one self but many selves. Consequently, we cannot simply trade in the old for a new working identity or upgrade to version

2.0; to reinvent ourselves, we must live through a period of transition in which we rethink and reconfigure a multitude of possibilities. Second, it is nearly impossible to think out how to reinvent ourselves, and therefore, it is equally hard to execute in a planned and orderly way. A successful outcome hinges less on knowing one's inner, true self at the start than starting a multistep process of envisioning and testing *possible futures*. No amount of self-reflection can substitute for the direct experience we need to evaluate alternatives according to criteria that changes as we do.¹⁵

The book looks at questions about self throughout the period of career transition and what one can do to make the transition more successful. Personal examples are used to illustrate the point. The book doesn't take a great deal of time to read and can be useful for its perspective of action and redoing self-reflection.

"Forget about the consequences of failure. Failure is only a temporary change in direction to set you straight for your next success."

How to keep from being sidelined? This important question is core to many, especially in our youth-centric culture. As the third book in a series, Dilenschneider's *50 Plus* states that the over-fifty age group "includes people who are highly accomplished and economically secure, but intellectually bored or emotionally dissatisfied . . . lost their jobs (or can see the writing on the wall) and need to find new direction . . . who have a long-neglected dream that they're finally ready to pursue."¹⁶ Chapter one looks at the new rules of business: add value, be inclusive, think globally and culturally, think strategically as well as tactically, be technologically competent, be substantive, "be a stand-up person," be creative and street smart.¹⁷ These traits pertain to both the business environment for which the book was written as well as the library world. Topics that are developed in later chapters include the importance of image, which he says is realistic, not shallow. While it may be wrong to judge someone based on clothes, image does say something about respect and it is the first thing people will notice. He states it "gets you in the door."¹⁸ After that your substance must take over. Other useful chapter topics include the warnings that indicate when it might be time to look for a new job, getting that job, being a consultant, and "Bridging the Generational Gap." Even if you don't have a generation gap in your library there is often one with patrons, so this chapter is worth a look.

While similar to *50 Plus*, *Critical Second Phase of Your Professional Life* targets a slightly younger age group and therefore has a different emphasis.¹⁹ This title is more focused on dealing with self as one enters the latter part of a career, rather than ways to bridge the gap between generations. It may prove useful for those who would ben-

efit from serious self-evaluation. Also, while not specifically for mid-career people, *Your Dream Career for Dummies* is still worth a look.²⁰ It follows the now infamous model of that series with checklists, step-by-step processes, short examples, and suggestions to pace the reader through the job-seeking process.

Grappo's *Career ReExplosion* introduction features the top ten warning signs of career dissatisfaction that include anger, helplessness, overwhelming fatigue, withdrawal in personal and professional relationships, increased use of drugs or alcohol, lazy attitude, and more.²¹ With this provocative beginning, he guides readers through the means to accomplish the career reinvention of their dreams. The first step is to identify those things that are barriers to this reinvention process. These barriers include attitudes and actions in the past that interfere with forward movement, education, tradition, relationships, and technological issues. Next, he describes how dreams can guide planning. This chapter also considers the role of family and friends in advancing career re-explosion. The end result of this segment is the development of three personal dream careers. The next step is an inventory of skills, research into these careers, becoming involved with groups in your new career choices, earning the necessary credentials, creation of a plan, and the implementation of that plan. The book is written in workbook style with personal assessment questions and numerous lists. It is not only useful for those moving toward a totally different career path, but also very applicable for switching specialties in the library or moving into the constantly changing new aspects of the profession. Even if you aren't looking to "re-explode," it might reinvigorate.

A serendipitous find in an unexpected publication, Reid's "What Do I Do Now" article addresses mid-career fatigue and burnout with self-assessment, personality inventory, consideration of possible job change, and consideration of activities (sabbatical, travel, new courses or degrees, exercise, charitable activities) that can reenergize careers.²² He states this is a "self-assessment strategy that can not only identify problems areas, but empower the librarian to assume responsibility for correction and solve the problem."²³ This is a short gem of an article worth reading.

"The essence of life is finding something you really love and then making the daily experience worthwhile."

In *Snap, Crackle, or Stop*, Quinn says you can sit back or "get into the game and take charge."²⁴ Taking charge and making changes is not a one-time event; it will happen often in a lifetime. The process involves taking your talents and what you love to do and finding ways to create your work around them. She uses the term "mastering destiny" throughout the book—it is the process of action and attitude to take opportunities to make changes and decisions to be happy in your work. She notes the book's

purpose is to inspire the reader to make the changes, to "explore, to have an excellent career adventure."²⁵ The title refers to the terms *snap* (realizing there is a time to move on), *crackle* (time of underlying discontent), and *stop* (no passion for the job, going through the motions) as different stages. Each of these stages is given a chapter exploration followed by several chapters on considering and acting on career change. The style is very casual with bold headers, short paragraphs, many lists of points to consider, actions lists, and numerous sidebar mini-studies. With sections titled "Imagine Firing Yourself," "Life after Snap," and "Does This Dog Hunt?" you know that the serious topic of career/job change is approached with a light touch. A self-inventory and a list of assessment tools conclude this worthwhile and fun-to-read book. It might be the book to open someone's eyes to the available possibilities—not only elsewhere but in their own library.

According to Felicia Zimmerman, there are five options for career reinvention.²⁶ These include reinvigoration of current job, changing jobs with the current employer, enhancing current business, restructuring, or starting a new unit. While written for businesses, each of these immediately brings to mind ways to translate the options to the library. For example, financial aspects discussed in the business context translate easily to changes and improvements in services in a library setting. The seven steps in the process are:

1. Timing
2. Visualization of the change
3. Verification
4. Development of work skills
5. Practical work strategies
6. Execution
7. Attitude management

Each of these elements is discussed in detail throughout the book with case studies and bulleted points that are coded for the different categories covered in the book: reinvigoration, changed job, job enhancement, transition, and starting a new job. Writing is clear and to the point. The book encourages the reader to assess the situation and consider the possibilities of change.

With a basis in scientific theory, *Capitalizing on Career Chaos* by Harkness looks at how "chaos breeds creativity" in careers.²⁷ Knowing how to take control of careers is the goal. She states that chaos and complexity "are mechanisms through which change is initiated and organized, the first steps by which the world increases diversity, rebirth, and renewal. Chaos is everywhere: Mastering chaos for our career success requires new ways of seeing, thinking, and acting."²⁸ This chaos can be seen in a positive way. Change is inevitable and traditional career paths are over. Now people are routinely changing careers and employers. Chapters detail her perspective of the new career environment. After an overview, she discusses

finding personal meaning, authentic self, and the journey of self-discovery. The last section looks at redesigning careers. This includes career self-assessment, assessment of career options, and consideration of where things are going; in other words, look inward, look outward, and look into the future. This is a process that can be repeated several times in our lives. Easy to read, the book has a number of exercises to walk you through the process.

The Ultimate Guide to Getting the Career You Want by Dowd and Taguchi begins with the following statement: "This book is based on the premise that in order to make life-affirming, career-enhancing, positive decisions we must learn from our past, identify what's important to us in the present, envision the future, and be ready to monitor how we are doing and what's next."²⁹ These are big intentions and very important ones that are more than met. The book is arranged around these ten principles:

1. Know yourself
2. Bounce back from setbacks
3. Take measured risk
4. Put money in perspective
5. Make people a priority
6. Plan ahead now
7. Enjoy your life and sustain your career
8. Give yourself a break
9. Just do it
10. Own your career

The first principle involves looking very closely at one's self; very detailed self-assessments lay the groundwork for later chapters. Unlike the exercises in many books that simply require true/false or multiple-choice answers, these questions require careful, critical, and sometimes complicated insight into different aspects of understanding self and career. The same style is continued in later chapters as the authors guide the reader through career analysis, life choices, and better self-awareness. Case studies are used to illustrate the text. Appendixes include useful Web sites, resume hints, the very useful "Values-Based Questions for Evaluating Organizations," and negotiations tip sheet. This is an excellent book that is beneficial for those thinking of changing careers or refining the career they have. And the techniques gleaned translate in many ways to life in general.

"Life is inherently risky. There is only one big risk you should avoid at all costs, and that is the risk of doing nothing."

A few titles that provide targeted, practical advice include *Resumes for Mid-Career Job Change*, *The Career Troubleshooter*, *The Job Search Solution*, and *Winning Job Interviews*.³⁰ These are several titles among dozens that can help with some of the nitty-gritty aspects of career change such as resumes, interviews, and finding

jobs, among other routine but important aspects of career change.

There are also several Web sites that are useful. Check out "HOWTO: Apply for a Library Job" from LISWiki.³¹ The site is for people new to the library profession and those who have not applied in some time. These few pages provide information on interview questions, phone and in-person interviews, preparation, as well as a number of useful links. Also check out the Library and Information Science Professional's Career Development Center, which has links for the job hunt, networking, career planning, mentoring, and more.³² And, of course, do not overlook the number of links from the American Library Association's page on career development and resources.³³

Take Yourself to the Top will "unlock your potential by helping you grow and investing in your ability to achieve. We will usher in the success that you have been waiting for, but not necessarily the one you had in mind."³⁴ Fortgang begins the book with a list of ten frustrations: mid-career and feeling stuck; feeling like you're on a neverending treadmill; want to do something else; stuck in survival mode; new at entrepreneurship; mercy of ups and downs of sales; feel overqualified and underutilized; hero complex; identity crisis; and waiting for a miracle.³⁵ Each of these has a chapter discussing the issue, and these are followed by chapters on self-discipline, relationship in networking, and other tools for success. As with most of these books, the context is the business world, but much can be gleaned for the library professional. Anyone can feel as if they need a change, a challenge, or help in career advancement, and this book provides the tools to address these issues. As the author clearly states, the tools are great aids but they have to be used effectively. The book provides guidance to do that. She suggests to "work it! Read it, do the exercises, and apply them immediately. Don't let this be another book with good ideas that you do nothing about. Be someone who values him- or herself enough to do so. Visit this book often and let it coach you."³⁶ This is good advice from a good resource. And good advice to end our first column on careers.

"Chase your passion, not your pension."

There are so many issues to consider when discussing career change. There is really no one answer for everyone; there are probably at least as many answers as individuals—and maybe even more than one per individual. While some dream of climbing the ladder to the director's office, others look forward to each day on the front line and the myriad questions posed by an ever-changing stream of patrons. Still others tackle each new change in software and advance in technology as a worthy challenge. Yet we have to be honest enough to admit that sometimes the technology is overwhelming, the streams of patrons cause anxiety, and the questions become tedious. For each individual, these issues can be temporary and trivial or

long-term and serious. The career road mentioned in the introduction can be repaired, bypassed, tolerated, or can be the scene of an accident. We will continue our look at issues and options in the next column.

Author's note: All italicized headings are quotes by Denis Waitley taken from Quoteopia!, www.quoteopia.com/famous.php?quotesby=deniswaitley (accessed Nov. 28, 2006).

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