

Planned Happenstance: Constructing Unexpected Career Opportunities

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Chance plays an important role in everyone's career, but career counseling is still perceived as a process designed to eliminate chance from career decision making. Traditional career counseling interventions are no longer sufficient to prepare clients to respond to career uncertainties. Work world shifts challenge career counselors to adopt a counseling intervention that views unplanned events as both inevitable and desirable. Counselors need to teach clients to engage in exploratory activities to increase the probability that the clients will discover unexpected career opportunities. Unplanned events can become opportunities for learning.

Traditionally, career counselors act as if chance plays no role in their clients' career planning. We intend to explore how chance events inevitably play a major role in everyone's career and how events attributed to chance are often indirect outcomes of effective behavior. Career counselors can teach their clients to act in ways that generate a higher frequency of beneficial chance events on which clients can capitalize.

The popular Tom Cruise movie *Jerry McGuire* (Crowe, 1997) is based on the life of a high-powered professional sports agent, Leigh Steinberg. In a recent interview, Steinberg explained that he got his start through "pure, random chance" (Snider, 1997). But did he? Tracing a sequence of events in Steinberg's life provides key points to be considered.

During the early 1970s, Steinberg was a student at the University of California at Berkeley working his way through law school as a dormitory counselor and serving as student body president. Steinberg planned to pursue either a job opportunity with the County District Attorney's Office or opportunities in the field of environmental law. As luck would have it, the freshman football team moved into his dormitory. He befriended several of the student athletes including one named Steve Bartkowski, who went on to become an outstanding professional football player. (Note that Steinberg had managed to get admitted to law school, that someone

had detected qualities in him sufficient to appoint him as a dormitory counselor, that Steinberg had persuaded a majority of university students to elect him as their student body president, and that he had become good friends with a star athlete. Were all these events the result of pure random chance?)

During his final year at the university, Bartkowski was selected as the first draft pick of the Atlanta Falcons. Bartkowski asked Steinberg to represent him in contract negotiations with the Falcons, and "the rest is history" because Steinberg has gone on to represent many professional athletes and other celebrities during the last 20 years. (Was Steinberg the only person capable of representing Bartkowski? Obviously Bartkowski must have observed qualities in Steinberg that gave him confidence that he would be well represented. Did his subsequent clients choose him through pure random chance? It is very likely that other clients must have observed the results of his performance while representing Bartkowski.)

It certainly did not hurt Steinberg's cause that he began his career by representing a National Football League first round draft choice. His decision to accept Bartkowski's invitation was a risky move. He had no actual experience in the highly competitive, pressurized, and sometimes cut-throat arena of professional sports. Steinberg could have said "no," but instead he took the risk and said "yes."

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The only element of luck in this story is that the freshman football team happened to be assigned to Steinberg's dormitory (although, admittedly, how that decision was made is not known). What would have happened had the football team been assigned to another dormitory? What is known is that Steinberg and Bartkowski both capitalized on that lucky pairing, much to their mutual benefit.

THE ROLE OF CHANCE IN CAREER COUNSELING

This story of Leigh Steinberg illustrates several important issues for career counselors. Chance plays an important role in everyone's career. No one can predict the future with any accuracy. On any given day no one knows for sure what people will be met, who will call, or what letters or e-mail messages will arrive. If one day cannot be predicted, what is the likelihood that future plans spanning 2, 5, or even 20 years can be realized with any accuracy? Most people agree that "chance," "luck," or "happenstance" has played an important part in their careers (Betsworth & Hansen, 1996). In fact, it is hard to believe that anyone would seriously claim that unpredictable events had no influence on their career direction. Yet career counselors rarely discuss unexpected or chance events with their clients.

A few authors of career development literature have recognized, to a certain degree, that chance events are present in career exploration (Bandura, 1982; Betsworth & Hansen, 1996; Cabral & Salomone, 1990; Hart, Rayner, & Christensen, 1971; Miller, 1983, 1995; Scott & Hatalla, 1990). However, some believe that including chance events in a career counseling model is a complex and formidable undertaking.

For example, the authors of two separate articles have claimed that whereas happenstance is a component of career development, it is problematic to include happenstance in a career counseling model. Cabral and Salomone (1990) wrote, "While it would be difficult to develop a model that incorporates chance into the counseling process, it is nonetheless essential that the counselor help clients to recognize its effects and develop coping behaviors that anticipate unforeseen events" (p. 14); and Scott and Hatalla (1990) stated, "The thought of including chance factors such as unexpected personal events into the theory and practice of career counseling is disconcerting because it is, by its very definition, unpredictable and untidy" (p. 28).

It is interesting that Scott and Hatalla (1990) conducted research on chance and contingency factors identified most strongly by women. The authors defined *chance factors* as those elements contributing to a vocational choice that have no predictable relationship to it, for example economic situations, unexpected personal events, and unexpected information. The major chance factor reported was "unexpected personal event," and the authors recommended further research on this factor.

Miller (1983) advocated a quite different point of view, questioning whether rational career planning is even possible or desirable, and stated that counselors would benefit by viewing happenstance as a normal aspect of career choice.

Cabral and Salomone (1990) called for a model of career decision making that integrates some combination of planfulness and happenstance.

Rational planning alone would serve its purpose if careers were to follow a simple, straightforward, and logical path. Unfortunately, due to major technological advances, the world of work today is not what it used to be. In virtually every employment sector, job descriptions are changing, some occupations are becoming obsolete, and unforeseen occupations are being created (e.g., web page designer). Although one of the main goals of career counseling has been to help clients to identify the name of a future occupation, it will be increasingly difficult for career counselors to continue to be effective, given the traditional model.

Planning has remained a strong component in career exploration. Frank Parsons, credited as the father of career counseling, developed his theory of career development during a time when people were moving from a largely agricultural society to the beginning of the industrial age (G. A. Watts, 1994). People left the farm and moved to newly developing cities to seek work. Parsons developed the first effort to assess workers' values, skills, and interests (Jones, 1994). The emphasis in his assessment questionnaire was on matching the client to appropriate jobs. Chance events were not included in the questionnaire developed by Parsons.

Probably because of Parson's emphasis on "true reasoning" (Jones, 1994) as the basis of matching, career counseling is still perceived as a process that is intended to eliminate chance from career decision making. Many career counselors are reluctant to admit that their own current occupations were not totally the result of rational planning. The traditional trait-and-factor approach of matching individual interests, skills, and values with specific occupations is seen as a way to reduce the role of chance, luck, or happenstance. In fact, career counselors prefer clients who seem to be heading in a definite direction or seem on the right track as the counselor has helped them to define it. The purpose of interest inventories and many other available tools is to help clients to identify a successful career direction. Clients who reject this push toward certainty are often viewed as "difficult" or "problem" clients—certainly as "indecisive." Some career counselors even believe that these indecisive clients should be referred to counselors who focus on so-called personal issues.

PLANNED HAPPENSTANCE THEORY

Planned happenstance theory may be considered as an amendment to the learning theory of career counseling (Krumboltz, 1996), which was an expansion of the social learning theory of career decision making (Krumboltz, 1979). The basic propositions remain the same. Humans are born with differing characteristics and predispositions at a given time and place to parents not of their own choosing. They grow up in an environment where innumerable unpredictable events occur that provide opportunities for learning of both a positive and negative nature. Individuals can also generate events

on their own and can capitalize on all kinds of events and resources to maximize their learning. The counselor's job is to facilitate the learning of skills, interests, beliefs, values, work habits and personal qualities that enable each client to create a satisfying life in a constantly changing work environment.

Planned happenstance theory is a conceptual framework extending career counseling to include the creating and transforming of unplanned events into opportunities for learning. The goal of a planned happenstance intervention is to assist clients to generate, recognize, and incorporate chance events into their career development. The words "planned happenstance" have been intentionally united as an oxymoron. Clients must plan to generate and be receptive to chance opportunities. A strong component of planned happenstance is facilitating the client's actions of generating and anticipating possible opportunities. Planned happenstance theory should not be confused with magical thinking or reliance on fate. Clients should not merely meander through experiences initiated by others while passively awaiting a "knock on the door." They need to learn to take action to generate and find opportunities.

REFRAMING INDECISION AS OPEN-MINDEDNESS

The term *open-mindedness* displaces *indecision* in planned happenstance theory. Blustein (1997) suggested that counselors help clients learn to tolerate ambiguity and to develop an exploratory attitude. He defined exploratory attitude as "an open and nonrigid way of relating to the world such that one is able to approach the vast number of new situations and changes that individuals face in a manner that encourages growth and further self-definition" (p. 270).

Clients should not leave everything to chance. There is a crucial difference between someone who passively relies on luck to solve problems and someone who is actively searching while remaining open to new and unexpected opportunities. The career counselor can play a crucial role in helping clients to create positive chance events. As a result, clients may not end up where they requested, but they may very well end up where they want to be.

The advantages of open-mindedness. Most of us credit small children with possessing great curiosity. We take joy in watching children explore new objects through turning, touching, and smelling. Curiosity introduces the world to the child through exploration of sights, sounds, and textures. However, what if each time a child reached for an object, a parent asked, "What is your goal?" Much wonderment, joy, and knowledge could be denied to the child. Somehow, when a child explores, adults are able to stand back with protective interest and trust that the experience will bring the child more deeply into the world.

Yet, when people experience a career dilemma and seek the assistance of a career counselor, in many cases, the career counselor moves quickly to fix the puzzlement with a solution, a definitive answer—administering a battery of tests so that the client's anxiety about lacking an occupa-

tional goal can be alleviated. Too often, career counselors have not been trained to be comfortable with a client who remains undecided for very long. In fact, some researchers in career decision making suggest that counselors go beyond merely acknowledging client uncertainty and advocate distinctions between categories such as "undecided" and "severely indecisive" (Fuqua & Hartman, 1983; Hartman, Fuqua, & Blum, 1985; Hornak & Gillingham, 1980). The implication is that any form of uncertainty is to be diagnosed and treated.

An alternative to a "quick fix" may be more appropriate in many cases. Imagine a counselor stating as a client goal, "Let's work at your becoming more comfortable with your undecidedness." When friends ask the client, "So what are you going to do?" the client would then respond, "I'm learning to keep an open mind about future possibilities." Do we have an appropriate cultural response to that? Generally, no. When we ask, "What are you going to do?" our American culture frequently causes us to expect a definitive response, for example, "I am going to study engineering," "I am going to work for IBM." The specificity of the answer seems to be a well-established cultural expectation, even if the answer has no basis in reality.

Typically, in our American culture, a decisive person is thought to be one in charge—one who knows the way. An undecided person is thought to be "wishy-washy" and easily swayed. However, Krumboltz (1992) argued that indecision about making definite long-range plans is actually more sensible than making firm commitments when the future is so uncertain. In our world at present, more prestige accrues to the person who gives a definitive answer—no matter how poorly investigated that answer. The trouble occurs when the people who feel pressured to state a definitive occupation then have to implement the decision—ready or not.

An open-minded person is in the middle of what was and what will be. Being undecided means that all the data are not in. The person has a chance to develop the skill of asking questions just to know, not necessarily to do anything about the answer. The person has an opportunity to be curious, to be guided by "what would happen if" questions and to explore options, not to be bound to a plan that may be obsolete before it is formulated. The story of Laura is a case in point.

The case of Laura. Laura has been a social worker for many years. She had entered social work full of idealism and the desire to help other people. A chance requirement of her job, which she had not anticipated, was that she had to write up case notes on her clients. She entered career counseling hoping to leave the field of social work and find a new occupation. She described vivid tales of human suffering, neglected babies, and drug-addicted parents. Home visitations were trips into human misery replete with unclean living conditions, populated by people who felt trapped by poverty and lack of hope. It was becoming more difficult for Laura to maintain enthusiasm for her work, despite her idealistic aspirations.

Her respite from the sights and sounds of her encounters came at the end of her work day when she would close her

office door, sit in front of her computer, and in detailed narratives recount what she had seen, heard, and recommended. This solitary activity of writing reports, originally an unexpected and onerous chore, became the thread connecting her to a new career interest. Although the subject matter of her reports was depressing, she discovered that the act of writing itself could be insightful and invigorating.

Laura wanted to pursue her writing interest and requested that the counselor tell her the name of a suitable occupation. Her career counselor responded that job titles could eventually be found, but while the vision of her interest was forming, job titles might foreclose possibilities. Instead, they looked at the purpose for Laura's writing, the stories she wanted to tell and to whom. The counselor helped her identify an initial topic, some possible publication outlets, and some authors and editors to interview. One editor suggested that Laura submit a query letter on her topic. Her proposal was accepted, and she wrote her first article that was soon published. Other publications responded favorably to her letters, and she continues to be published regularly to this date. Her exploration into writing introduced her to people who she never dreamed were available to her and who enabled her to capitalize on her curiosity, sensitivity, reason, and creativity to translate stories of human misery into inspiring challenges for social action.

Although Laura presently remains employed as a social worker, something monumental has shifted in her attitude about her clients and her life. The chance happenstance of report writing deepened her sensitivity to her clients and renewed her commitment to ease their struggles through advocacy and action. She sees their lives not as cases to be closed but as stories to be told.

Generating, Recognizing, and Encouraging Beneficial Chance Events

Unplanned events are not only inevitable, they are desirable. Gelatt (1989) proposed that being uncertain about goals and wants leads to new discoveries. Counselors need to teach clients to engage in exploratory activities that increase the probability that they will be exposed to unexpected opportunities. Counselors need to teach clients to approach new opportunities with an open mind, to ask questions, and to experiment.

Betsworth and Hansen (1996) found that two thirds of the 237 participants in their study believed that their careers were significantly influenced by chance events. The authors identified 11 categories of serendipitous events that participants reported as significant to their career development. "Professional or personal connections," "unexpected advancement," and "right place/right time" were cited most frequently. Clients often overlooked the steps they took to get to know significant people, or the actions they performed that led to a promotion or placed them in the right place at the right time.

The case of Ted Robinson. "It was just a fluke," said San Francisco Giants' broadcaster Ted Robinson during an interview with Gary Radnich (1996) on San Francisco radio

station KNBR when he described how he started his career in broadcasting. He attained his initial job in the major leagues by calling the Oakland Athletics (A's) office and was surprised to find that team owner, Charlie Finley, was on the other end of the line. "The next thing I knew I had a job interview lined up." Before these chance events turned "lucky" for Robinson, he had worked as a college sports broadcaster during his student years and provided broadcasting for a minor league hockey team. In his second season, the hockey team went out of business, and Robinson seriously considered giving up on his dream to become a major league announcer. His father encouraged him to call the Oakland A's because Charlie Finley had a reputation for hiring inexperienced people at low salaries. A chance event then occurred; Finley answered the phone. Robinson was able to talk Finley into giving him an audition and eventually an opportunity to broadcast a few innings a week. As Robinson continued to develop as a broadcaster, he went on to become a full-time major league broadcaster. It was more than luck that got him started. He had acquired prior experience as a sports broadcaster. He sought advice about a team owner who might be open to new talent, and he took the initiative to make the telephone call. He did not know who would answer the phone, but he placed the call and seized the opportunity to sell his talents.

Planned happenstance theory includes two concepts: (a) Exploration generates chance opportunities for increasing quality of life, and (b) skills enable people to seize opportunities. Blustein (1997), in his work on career exploration, concluded that people explore as a way to express their natural curiosity and that the benefits of career exploration, can cross over into other life domains. Austin (1978) perceived that responses to chance opportunities vary according to one's preparedness and receptivity to possibilities. Salomone and Slaney (1981) proposed that chance factors may indeed create vocational options; however, these authors cautioned that for career possibilities to be realized, people must take action.

Planned happenstance theory proposes that career counselors can assist clients to develop five skills to recognize, create, and use chance as career opportunities. These five skills and the accompanying definitions are as follows:

1. Curiosity: exploring new learning opportunities
2. Persistence: exerting effort despite setbacks
3. Flexibility: changing attitudes and circumstances
4. Optimism: viewing new opportunities as possible and attainable
5. Risk Taking: taking action in the face of uncertain outcomes

Bandura (1982) recommended teaching entry skills as a way of influencing or controlling chance to one's advantage. Entry skills can be as diverse as interpersonal communications, networking, and social support building (as cited in Cabral & Salomone, 1990, p. 15). Planned happenstance can also be facilitated in other ways.

Using assessment instruments to generate chance events. Interest inventories provide an efficient exposure to job titles and offer clients a link to the world of work. The degree to which a counselor engages a client in dialogue and discussion is often determined by the counselor's style and knowledge of and comfort with a particular assessment instrument. More often than not, interpretation sessions focus more on the counselor telling than on the client discussing.

The planned happenstance model for interest test interpretation is constructed from questions that invite discussion. For example, in traditional Parsonian test interpretation, emphasis is placed on identifying career fields similar to the client's interests. The planned happenstance session would focus on dissimilar areas also. Interests are learned and can continue to be learned. Clients need to consider the idea of developing new interests, not merely matching occupations to prior interests (Krumboltz & Jackson, 1993). The counselor might ask such questions as "What happened to discourage your interest in these areas?" "Did someone significant discourage your interest?" "What would have to change for you to become interested in these fields?" "How do you think people who work in these fields developed their interests?" and "If you wanted to develop an interest in one of these areas, how would you go about it?"

Counselor interpretations of assessment results can easily discourage dialogue and restrict exploration. Engaging a client in discussing both prior and potential interests can reveal vital values and liberate client exploration.

Eliciting encouragement. We are not born knowing how to encourage ourselves to investigate new interest areas; we learn the skill of self-encouragement from someone who has encouraged us to take action on our own behalf. Before we can be encouraged, however, we must provide the person with a glimpse into our curiosity. In a study to investigate significant factors that enabled people to integrate previously unrecognized talents or personality traits into their lives, Young and Rodgers (1997) found the role of *witness* as significant. A witness in their study was a person who observed a talent in others and encouraged them to develop the talent or interest. This encouragement was sometimes a brief encounter, yet the exchange left the participants willing to take risks.

Scott Adams (1997), the creator of the popular cartoon *Dilbert*, attributes his persistence and risk taking to encouragement. He shared this wonderful example with his readers over the Internet:

In January of 1986 I was flipping through the channels on TV and saw the closing credits for a PBS show called "Funny Business," a show about cartooning. I had always wanted to be a cartoonist but never knew how to go about it. I wrote to the host of the show, cartoonist Jack Cassidy, and asked his advice on entering the profession. A few weeks later I got an encouraging handwritten letter from Jack, answering all of my specific questions about materials and process. He went on to warn me about the likelihood of being rejected at first, advising me not to get discouraged if that happened. He said the cartoon samples I sent him were good and worthy of publication.

I got very excited, finally understanding how the whole process worked. I submitted my best cartoons to *Playboy* and *New*

Yorker. The magazines quickly rejected me with a cold little photocopied form letter. Discouraged, I put my art supplies in the closet and forgot about cartooning.

In June of 1987—out of the blue—I got a second letter from Jack Cassidy. This was surprising since I hadn't even thanked him for the original advice. Here's what the letter said:

Dear Scott:

I was reviewing my "Funny Business . . ." mail file when I again ran across your letter and copies of your cartoons. I remember answering your letter.

The reason I'm dropping you this note is to again encourage you to submit your ideas to various publications. I hope you have already done so and are on the road to making a few bucks and having some fun, too.

Sometimes encouragement in the funny business of graphic humor is hard to come by. That's why I am encouraging you to hang in there and keep drawing.

I wish you lots of luck, sales and good drawing.

Sincerely,
Jack

The cartoon strip *Dilbert* emerged as a result of this encouragement. Adams dragged out the prints he had abandoned and reengaged his creativity. Today, *Dilbert* appears in books, calendars, and many other art forms.

The encouragement Adams received did not really come "out of the blue." He initiated the encouragement by bringing his interest to the attention of Cassidy. He was not blocked by the belief, "Cassidy is a big name; he would never take time to respond to my questions." Instead, he took the risk of writing to Cassidy, thus generating an encouraging response that helped to launch Adams into becoming a much sought after cartoonist. Adams was persistent and optimistic even though he had been rejected. He took a risk and submitted his work again even though he had no guarantee that his cartoon strip would be accepted.

Learning as the Purpose of Career Counseling

Instead of matchmakers, career counselors should conceive of themselves as educators—facilitators of the learning process (Krumboltz, 1996). "I want you to find me the ideal job," clients appeal. Clients often expect counselors to match them up with ideal jobs, and counselors often play into the client's unrealistic expectations by failing to challenge the assumption that a career counselor can actually meet this request. Instead of "playing along," perhaps it would be better for counselors to say, "If I had the ideal job for you in my pocket, I'd take it out and hand it to you right now. But that's not the way the system works. You want to build a satisfying life for yourself. I'd like to help you learn how to do it." Instead of striving to help clients identify their one "ideal job," career counselors may be of far more value to clients by teaching them how to enhance the quality of their lives.

Counselors must equip clients with new attitudes and skills to embrace the twenty-first century. Savickas (1997) called this new attitude "adaptability" and defines it as "the readi-

ness to cope with the predictable tasks of preparing for and participating in the work role and with the unpredictable adjustments prompted by changes in work and working conditions" (p. 254). Offering an additional perspective to the goal of traditional career counseling, Savickas underscored that career counselors must help clients to develop into the person they want to be rather than to encourage the client to adhere to a "linear continuum of developmental tasks" (p. 254).

Reconceptualizing informational interviews. Informational interviews have traditionally been assigned to clients by career counselors to facilitate information gathering. The formula for conducting an informational interview is to find someone involved in work of interest to the client, to ask prepared questions, and to evaluate the information for suitability to one's own career plan.

Informational interviews can also be used to generate unexpected events. Suppose the client shows up for an informational interview, but the interviewee says, "I don't have much time to talk with you now—I have so much work to do." The conventionally polite response would be to withdraw and offer to reschedule the appointment later. The happenstance-generated response would be to say, "Wonderful! I'll help you. You don't have to pay me anything. Show me something I can do to take some of the load off you." Teaching clients to respond in this manner gives them a way to demonstrate enthusiasm, a willingness to work hard, and an opportunity to get better acquainted with someone already working in a field of interest. Even if the offer is declined, the spirit behind the offer is likely to make a favorable impression.

The planning part of the informational interview is identifying the field of interest, finding a person to interview, and preparing pertinent questions. The happenstance part of the informational interview can occur at any time before, during, or after the interview. For example, while waiting for the interview to begin, the client can begin a conversation with someone else in the waiting room. Through the unplanned conversation, the client may discover information about a job opening or an academic program of interest.

The career counselor can apply the planned happenstance model by preparing the client for unanticipated events. Cognitive restructuring is a counseling technique for helping clients interpret events in alternative ways. Clients can be taught to reframe unplanned interruptions as opportunities for learning, not as annoyances to be endured. The counselor and client can practice on past events, cognitively restructure current events, and anticipate ways of reframing possible unplanned future events.

Making the most of educational opportunities. In the arena of educational planning and career exploration, emphasis has traditionally been placed on decisiveness. Entering college students are often asked, "What is your major?" The expectation is that the student should be decisive even before the educational process begins. Baumgardner (1982) cautioned students against making a commitment to a currently marketable major early in college because job

market demands change so rapidly, the major may become obsolete by graduation.

Planned happenstance is a useful career counseling intervention in that it replaces "What is your major?" with a question such as "What questions would you like your education to answer?" A student might respond, "How can I explore my curiosity about graphic design to build a web site?" Specific questions like these will motivate and self-direct the student to helpful classes and programs.

Career counselors can help students formulate questions that express their values, interests, skills and curiosity; unexpected events can happen in classes to cast light on salient questions. By enrolling in classes that are relevant to the student's questions, the student is more likely to learn from the chance events that occur there (Bandura, 1982).

The career counselor may also discuss ways to integrate unexpected events into the student's experiences. For example, if the student reports to the counselor a new and exciting idea introduced by a guest speaker in a class, the counselor and student may discuss how that idea relates to the student's major questions. Career counselors can be very helpful in encouraging clients to record chance events and to identify the steps they took to respond to presented opportunities.

People who have adopted the planned happenstance model are willing to change plans, take risks, work hard to overcome obstacles, and be actively engaged in pursuing their interests. They may see initially that unplanned events play a role in their careers, but most are modestly unaware that their own actions contributed to the unplanned events from which they benefited.

Overcoming obstacles. Counseling by itself is of little value unless it leads to constructive action. It is easy to talk about good intentions, but actually implementing them is far more difficult. Counselor efforts need to concentrate on enabling clients to take the necessary actions. Actions are often inhibited by the clients' beliefs. The Career Beliefs Inventory (Krumboltz, 1991) provides one tool for assessing blocking beliefs and initiating discussions of ways to examine them. For example, Scale 3 (Acceptance of Uncertainty) provides an opportunity for clients who are feeling pressured to make a quick decision to think through the sources of that pressure and the advantages of being undecided. Scale 20 (Persisting While Uncertain) helps clients think about the value of doing excellent work now, even if they are not sure how that work is related to an unknown future.

Obstacles are sometimes inherent in the way clients express their goals. Counselors can help their clients reframe goals in such ways that progress toward them is possible. The following are some examples:

- Stated Goal: I want to change jobs; I am going to start sending out résumés.
Reframe: I am getting more and more dissatisfied with my job. What are the steps I can take to begin to look at other options?

- Stated Goal: I want to go back to college; I am going to start applying to schools now.
Reframe: I have wanted to complete my college education for a long time. What are the steps I can take to investigate the subjects I'm interested in and the colleges offering those subjects?
- Stated Goal: I want to find what I am really interested in; I'm going to take a lot of tests to find my interests.
Reframe: I know that interests are acquired and developed throughout my life. What steps can I take to investigate my interests as possible career interests? How can I remain open to acquiring and developing new interests?

The expectation that careers should follow a planned and logical path seems to be deeply ingrained in the American public despite innumerable case studies to the contrary. Many prominent people attribute their successes to luck, although they seem genuinely surprised that luck could play a role.

COUNSELOR ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT PLANNED HAPPENSTANCE

Pasteur's adage "chance favors only the prepared mind" (as cited in Bandura, 1982, p. 750) challenges us to prepare for unexpected events. Yet, how does one prepare for unexpected events in career exploration?

A. G. Watts (1996), in an eloquent narrative of the changing role of career counseling, had the following to say about the role of chance and career development:

Careers are now forged, not foretold. They are based on a long series of iterative decisions made throughout our lives. Career counseling needs to be available at all these decision points. Without it, there is a risk that decisions are reactive rather than proactive and focused on survival rather than on development. People need to be encouraged to set trajectories for themselves, but to revise them constantly in response to the changing context and the new possibilities offered. The core concepts need to be oxymorons: Gelatt (1989) suggested "positive uncertainty"; I offer "planful serendipity." Lifelong access to career counseling can help to deliver such concepts. (p. 46)

Applying Planned Happenstance to Career Counseling

Counseling procedures under a planned happenstance model would differ in several important respects from traditional career counseling. The goal is to prepare clients for a counseling process in which unplanned events are a normal and necessary component. Explain the following:

- Anxiety about planning the future is normal and can be overcome.
- Plotting a career path is a life-long learning process that requires you to make innumerable decisions in response to unexpected events.
- Our goal is to facilitate that learning process by discussing how your curiosity is excited, how you can take advantage of unplanned events, and how you can create future beneficial unplanned events.

Counselors would include the following steps.

Step 1: Normalize planned happenstance in the client's history. In traditional career counseling, the first session begins with establishing rapport with the client and asking about the client's background or history. In the planned happenstance model, history taking would have an additional purpose: to make clients aware of how their own actions can contribute to constructing unplanned career opportunities. Clients would be asked to identify examples of happenstance in their lives, and most important, they would be asked specifically to identify actions that they had taken to enable, contribute to, generate, and benefit from happenstance events. Many people feel guilty that their careers benefited from chance—as if they really did not deserve what they achieved. The purpose of this first step is to help clients become aware that unplanned events affect everyone and that actions taken before or after the event can have a profound impact. The following questions could be asked by a career counselor:

1. How have unplanned events influenced your career?
2. How did you enable each event to influence you?
3. How do you feel about unplanned events in your future?

Step 2: Assist clients to transform curiosity into opportunities for learning and exploration. When unexpected events do occur, clients must learn to see them as opportunities to be explored. Each telephone call is a chance to forge a new relationship and exchange valuable information. Clients often have the false expectation that career counselors can identify the one perfect career for them. In the planned happenstance model, career counselors will reframe such requests by helping clients to identify opportunities for learning and exploration. The counselor might say something like the following: "If I had a way to identify the perfect occupation for you, believe me, I'd do it right now. Instead let's start a learning process that will expand your options and teach you how to take advantage of events you could never have anticipated." The career counselor would ask the following types of questions:

1. How is your curiosity excited?
2. How have chance events contributed to your curiosity?
3. How have you acted to heighten your curiosity?
4. How could you explore the career implications of your curiosity?

Step 3: Teach clients to produce desirable chance events. Stovall and Teddlie (1993) developed a student guide designed to lead young students into self-evaluation and analysis of career opportunities open to them in the twenty-first century. A section in the guide titled "Chance or Luck" acknowledges that many people benefit from chance. However, the authors proposed that students should not leave their future passively to chance but must take concrete steps to become open to chance. The authors advised that students

constantly learn new things and that they actively look for chance opportunities in everyday activities.

Career counselors will need to stress to their clients that not only will unplanned events inevitably occur, clients can also initiate constructive action to generate more desirable chance events. Visiting sites of interest, taking classes directly or remotely connected to an interest, sending letters and e-mail messages, networking, conducting informational interviews, and surfing the net are a few of the possible actions clients can learn in order to generate unexpected but beneficial information. Possible counselor discussion questions include the following:

1. Tell me a chance event you wish would happen to you?
2. How can you act now to increase the likelihood of that desirable event?
3. How would your life change if you acted?
4. How would your life change if you did nothing?

Step 4: Teach clients to overcome blocks to action. Counselors need to help their clients actually engage in constructive actions, not merely discuss them as abstractions. Some clients may be resistant to constructing unexpected opportunities because they lack the skills of curiosity, persistence, flexibility, optimism, and risk taking. Moreover, clients may possess deeply held beliefs that block their willingness to take action, to experience their curiosity, and to take advantage of unexpected opportunities for learning and exploring. Problematic career beliefs are commonly related to seeing problems as being overwhelming, having fears about the reactions of others, and being unwilling to change course or learn new skills. The career counselor could ask questions like these:

1. How have you been blocked from doing what you want to do?
2. How could you find out how permanent that block is?
3. How have other people overcome blocks like that?
4. How would you begin overcoming that block?

Dealing With Client Questions About Planned Happenstance

The Appendix includes questions that anticipate what a client might ask. We suggest possible counselor answers from a planned happenstance point of view.

Suggestions for Further Research

The influence of chance events has received relatively little attention in career development. Almost all research efforts have focused on measurement, matching, prediction, and reducing indecision. The planned happenstance theory opens up four important areas for researchers to advance our knowledge and improve counseling practice.

Identifying demographic links. To what extent do people attribute their current and past occupations to chance events? How do these attributions differ by demographic

categories? From one point of view, it could be said that unplanned events affect 100% of career choices. No one chooses his or her own parents, place and date of birth, and first language or initial educational experiences, yet these events inevitably affect subsequent career paths. At the same time, people do plan and implement actions that affect their careers.

Prior research indicates that the majority of those studied attribute major responsibility to unplanned events, for example, 57% of workers, with a higher percentage among unskilled workers and a lower percentage among professionals (Hart et al., 1971); 72% of college graduates (Baumgardner, 1975); and 100% of prominent female counseling psychologists (Williams et al., 1998). Much depends on the way the sample group is recruited and the exact way in which the questions are worded. It would be valuable to know whether attributions to chance differ, for example, by occupation, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, marital status, or age.

Developing needed skills. The following five skills have been hypothesized as aiding people to benefit from chance events: curiosity, persistence, flexibility, optimism, and risk taking. These five skills were also identified by Williams et al. (1997) along with other characteristics such as a low tolerance for boredom and being unconventional, hard working, motivated, self-confident, alert, and stable. What skills can be confirmed as distinguishing those who generate and profit from chance events from those who do not? How can counselors teach their clients to develop the skills that are most beneficial?

Relating outcomes to different types of chance events. Chance events are not all positive. Some are negative, for example accidents, illnesses, and rejections. Some people react to negative events with discouragement and inaction. Others are challenged to exert even greater effort. Williams et al. (1997) identified outcomes not only in career direction but also in altered self-concept. Some were revitalized by certain types of chance events. What kinds of chance events have what kinds of outcomes on which types of individuals?

Improving counseling interventions. Planned happenstance theory proposes a four-step intervention model. To what extent does the counselor's normalizing of chance events contribute to reduction in client anxiety and an increase in motivation to engage in career exploration? How well does a counselor's engaging client curiosity promote new learning activities? What are the most effective ways for counselors to inspire clients to generate their own chance events? How can clients be helped to identify and overcome both internal and external blocks to action?

CONCLUSION

Career counseling has been laboring under an over-simplified theory that has distorted the ways in which career choices are actually made, has led some counselors to feel that their task is boring, and has left clients mystified about essential steps in advancing their careers. The basic three-step theory of matching the name of an occupation to cur-

rent client characteristics may have sufficed in 1895 (the year Parson's offered vocational counseling; Belkin, 1980) but is insufficient for the twenty-first century.

Everyone's career is affected by events that could not have been predicted. Rather than ignoring or decrying the influence of chance events, the planned happenstance theory advocates that clients and counselors acknowledge the pervasive role of unplanned events, take advantage of these events, and actively take action to create these events.

The planned happenstance theory offers some radically different advice for career counselors as follows:

1. Acknowledge that it is normal, inevitable, and desirable for unplanned events to influence careers.
2. Think of indecision not as a problem to be remedied, but as a state of planful open-mindedness that will enable clients to capitalize on unforeseen future events.
3. Teach clients to take advantage of unplanned events as opportunities to try new activities, develop new interests, challenge old beliefs, and continue lifelong learning.
4. Teach clients to initiate actions to increase the likelihood of beneficial unplanned events in the future.
5. Follow through with clients to provide continuing support for their learning throughout their careers.

Career counseling is not a simple three-step process that is completed when the client names an occupational aspiration. Career counseling is an exceedingly complex and fascinating process that involves both personal and work-related issues, knowledge and wisdom about the realities and possibilities of life, and a profound care for the welfare of humankind.

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APPENDIX

Client Questions About Planned Happenstance

1. *Isn't it amazing how chance events have affected my life?* Can you think of anyone in the world who has not been affected by chance events? Everyone has. You had no choice of your parents. You did not decide which language you would learn first. Your choices of schools and friends

were enabled by the happenstance of your geographical proximity to them.

2. *If chance events play such a big role in everyone's life, do we have any power to control our own destiny?* You actually do have a great deal of power to affect the course of your own life. You are making decisions every minute about words you speak, clothes you wear, places you go, sights you see and sounds you hear. You can make big decisions, too, such as what part of the world to live in, what kind of work you want to do, what religious organization (if any) you wish to join, or with whom to form a relationship or to marry. Much depends on how you state your goals, how you set your priorities, and how carefully you examine your own beliefs.

3. *Would you agree that there are constraints on my power to decide?* There are obviously constraints for everyone. The world is not set up to grant your every wish. However, it is important to examine carefully the constraints you think exist.

4. *What kinds of constraints are there?* It is helpful to think of constraints falling into four major categories: (a) physical limitations, (b) permission of others, (c) costs, and (d) your own beliefs.

a. *How do physical limitations constrain my decisions?*

Much depends on how you state your goals. If you were to say, "I want to fly by flapping my arms," you would soon discover the physical impossibility of your wish. However, if you were to say, "I want to fly like a bird" and then learned hang gliding, you might achieve a portion of your wish.

b.i. *Why should the permission of others be required for what I want to do?* Only sometimes is permission required, and it is important for you to distinguish when permission is needed and when it is not. Permission is required when an action depends on the active participation of another person or persons. Permission is not required when you merely hope others will approve of what you want to do.

b.ii. *What happens if the active participation of another person is not required, and still permission is not given?* You want your parents to approve your choice of an occupation. You want your friends to approve your new clothes. You want your boss to think you are smart. Although such admiration and approval might be nice, it is not required. You can seek any kind of employ-

ment you wish, whether your parents approve or not. You can wear whatever you like, whether your friends approve or not. You do your job the best you can, and the boss can think whatever she likes. You do not need to run your life to win the approval of other people.

c. *How do costs constrain my choices?* Costs can be measured in terms of money or time. Some people do have more money than others. A vacation in Europe will cost money. If you do not have it, or cannot borrow it, you will not go. Even if you do have it, you may well decide that you would rather use your money for some other purpose. Your choices depend on your own priorities. If you want something badly enough, you economize in other areas. *Time is different.* Everyone has the same amount of time—24 hours each day. The question is how to allocate those hours. Some people say, "I don't have enough time to do that." A more accurate statement would be, "I choose to spend my time doing other things that I consider to be more important."

d. *How could I possibly be constrained by my own beliefs?* It is hard to recognize your own beliefs and assumptions. They seem so self-evident that you would almost never question them. You may believe, for example, "Whatever I do, I must not fail." A belief like this inhibits you from taking risks with which you might either fail or succeed. Fear of failure would constrain you to take the easiest path, even though you might ultimately be happier and more successful doing something quite different. An alternative belief would be, "Whether I succeed or fail, I'll still learn something valuable, so I'll give it a try."

5. *What should I do with the rest of my life?* Maybe this question is a bit too broad to start off your career exploration. Perhaps you might want to begin with "I would like to investigate the things that keep me curious and the type of work settings and people with whom I am compatible. I would like to try out some relevant work experience to see how I like it." You do not need to plan your whole life now. Take it one step at a time and evaluate your options as you proceed.

6. *What if I make a plan and something happens to interrupt it?* All plans have that possibility. Look at surprises not as interruptions or disappointments, but as new opportunities.