

2300 words

Transforming Career Management

Dr Susie Linder-Pelz and Michelle Duval

Summary: Developmental coaching differs from other kinds of coaching and is the methodology increasingly used by internal coaches and career practitioners to assist employees become focused, fulfilled and productive.

Along with the massive and unrelenting changes in workplaces and jobs has come an epidemic of fear and frustration among workers and jobseekers. In fact around 50% of employees dread getting up and going to work.

Gina is a 38 year old IT manager. "I do the managerial thing perfectly well, but it doesn't feel right. I want to know what will make me happy. Should I stay in this job or look for another one? I feel I should be able to sort this out by myself, but I seem to be going round in circles. Often I'm full of fear about how I perform. I feel overburdened with the workload and the responsibility. And I'm not enjoying the work. It's so frustrating."

Do the people you work with sometimes feel stuck, frustrated or fearful about their work? Do you wish you could be even more effective in helping them manage stress, achieve work/life balance and maintain productivity and morale?

In today's world everyone is required to deal with constant change. They face constant uncertainty as to whether they will have too much work, too little or none at all. People are told to manage their own careers, keep learning and stay flexible; 'employability' and 'career resilience' are buzzwords. 'Career success' now means enjoyment and fulfilment, not just income and status. Yet many don't enjoy the role or field of work they find themselves in, feel their talents have not been recognised or valued by their employer, feel they don't fit the culture of the organisation in which they work, struggle to balance work and non-work responsibilities, and experience high levels of stress and ill health as a result of

bigger workloads and the constant need to upskill. No wonder so many people feel confused, frustrated and fearful!

And all of this is happening at a time when, according to management experts such as Alistair Mant, the ultimate imperative for companies and managers is performance ("System Failure", HRMonthly June 2003).

So do you—as a manager, HR practitioner, internal coach, training and development consultant or career counsellor— sometimes wish you could do even better at helping your colleagues improve their lives? Can you imagine your people being so focused, motivated and confident that they improve not only their working lives but also their health, relationships and family life?

The next step in career management has to be the empowerment of people, not as a management technique but to enable them to be and do their best. The methodology for actualising potential in the 21st century is *coaching*.

In the current coaching climate the emphasis has been on executive coaching, performance coaching, business coaching and life coaching. However, there is also a growing need for *career coaching* for employees—and not just executives—to enable them to better manage work/life changes and challenges. The need for career coaching is felt not only in the corporate world, concerned as it is with productivity and performance, but also by the growing proportion of the workforce outside the corporate sector. The most common reason people seek career coaching is to see, understand, expand or get feedback on their career options; the second most common reason is to deal with their confusion, fear or frustration and find more excitement, confidence and fulfilment in their working lives.

More and more businesses now recognise the value of developing their people and keeping them (though not necessarily for life). For example, a manager of an insurance company personally experienced the benefits of career coaching—finding it a "a very productive experience"—and offered career coaching to other staff. A department of the NSW state government recognised the value of career coaching for senior women and that offered them personal career coaching sessions. Reported bottom-line results of career coaching include reduced sick leave and absenteeism as well as increases in productivity, morale, job satisfaction, efficiency, revenue and staff retention. One company we worked with in the call centre industry offered personal and career coaching to employees reported an increased net profit by more than 120%.

Corporate career development programs constitute a component of family-friendly and work/life programs. Companies offer their employees support in identifying their personal values, dreams and motivations and assisting employees to integrate their goals and plans with that of the organisation. Outcomes can be that employees discover additional skills and take on new responsibilities that enhance their current job or they may take on a new role within the organisation. Either way, the organisation benefits. If it's clear that there is no fit between what the employee wants and the company needs, then it's better for both parties if there is a parting of ways. The employee moves to another position and organisation where they are more likely to feel fulfilled while the company gains a more satisfied and productive worker who adds value to the business.

But, as managers and training and development professionals know all too well, even when people have clarified what they want and set goals, often they are held back by fears and other unhelpful beliefs and emotions. As psychologist Dr L. Michael Hall, who has developed many leading-edge change models based on the cognitive behaviour sciences of NLP and Neuro-Semantics, writes,

“A quiet revolution is under way as companies and businesses have come to realise that training alone is not going to transform the people in the work field into creative, excited, passionate, responsible, and focused people who can work as a team and produce peak performances” (International Society of Neuro-Semantics, egroup post, Sept 2003).

So what is needed is a *coaching methodology* that specifically facilitates people overcoming fears and beliefs that hold them back and that facilitates the changes they want to make in how they think, feel and act in relation to their work. This is *developmental* career coaching.

The career development profession worldwide has yet to fully mine the wealth of coaching resources available in the field of cognitive behaviour psychology. Career counselling in the mid 20th century focused on the influence of peoples' interests and values on their career choices and on how choices change over the lifespan. Career theorists and practitioners sought to understand career choice and adjustment in terms of socioeconomic status, mental and physical abilities, personal characteristics and the opportunities to which people were exposed. In the 1970s social learning and self efficacy theories came to the fore, followed in the 1980s and 1990s by cognitive approaches which look at how individuals process, integrate and react to information. “Cognitive theories suggest ways to help clients

build or refine a hierarchy of thinking skills and decision making skills that influence career development". (Samual Johnson, "Career Development Theory", www.careernet.state.md.us/careertheory.htm). These theories have informed much of career counselling practice in recent years.

The term 'career counsellor' grew out of the traditional model of the helping professional who 'diagnosed problems', helped 'the patient' understand the origins of their 'dysfunctional beliefs and behaviours' and offered 'expert advice'. Increasingly, the practice of career counselling has been moving away from that traditional model and towards a partnership model where the 'client' takes responsibility for self assessment, occupational information gathering, decision-making and actions while the counsellor-as-facilitator asks questions, listens reflexively, clarifies, gives feedback, makes suggestions, offers information, sets tasks, supports and motivates. In the late 1990s some career practitioners started to use the term career 'coach' to differentiate themselves from the traditional helping model and to emphasise their focus on assisting 'well' people to think better, feel better and perform better. Nowadays the distinction between counselling and coaching is less clear and increasingly both refer to themselves as 'career development professionals'.

It is important to note, however, that much of what is called *career development* is more accurately described as *career planning and management*; this involves assessing personal characteristics, researching appropriate occupations and preparing for job search or other career action steps. Insofar as career planning and management involves modifying existing skills and behaviours or learning new ones (such as writing resumes, improving interview skills, researching alternative occupations, learning small business skills, etc) career coaching involves *skills and performance coaching*.

Developmental career coaching, by contrast, is more about assisting people to find better work/life solutions by assisting them to think, feel and act in ways that serve them better. No amount of vocational assessments, occupational research, action planning and job search skilling will enable a person to make changes if their beliefs and emotional states do not support them.

The focus of *developmental coaching* is showing clients how to modify their beliefs, values or identity; how to change how they think and feel about their self-worth, confidence and what 'success' means; how to achieve better work-life balance, become a better decision-maker, stop being a procrastinator, fearing failure, etc. Coaching can even be *transformational* when the change work enables the coachee to find a new direction, vocation or purpose.

Gina's crisis was not so much about finding work that is more suitable as it was about confronting her fears. When asked about the times things had gone wrong she said, "Well actually, at work there has never been an issue with my competence. It just doesn't *feel* right. I know I'm smart but I feel *unworthy*. Of course nobody realises this—I guess I cover it up quite well." Through skilled conversational questioning Gina saw that the real issue was that she was operating with a deep-seated connection of thoughts which went something like this: "I'm unworthy, which is why I feel fearful, and that in turn makes me take on too much responsibility for others' actions and inactions." Gina started to see that these beliefs were neither true nor logical yet they nonetheless directed how she felt and acted. As Gina wanted to feel better, have more options and make better decisions, she made a commitment to learn how to change how she thought, felt and acted.

The starting point of *developmental* and *transformational* coaching is *self-reflexivity*—the ability to step back and explore, notice, hear and think about one's thoughts, feelings and behaviours. In the field of cognitive behaviour psychology this is known as the 'meta-cognitive skill of self-reflection'; the fostering of this skill is, as Dr Tony Grant, head of the coaching psychology unit at Sydney University says, central to the coaching process. (Anthony M Grant, "The Impact of Life Coaching on Goal Attainment, Metacognition and Mental Health", *Social Behavior and Personality*, 31(3), 253-264, 2003).

Drs Bob Bodenhamer and Michael Hall, who developed the Neuro-Semantic models of personal change, call this the 'step-back' skill. They show clients how to become aware of how they create mental movies and scripts that directly affect how they feel and act. At the heart of the Neuro-Semantic coaching models is the systemic nature of mind and body, involving multiple layers of thinking and feeling; we have thoughts about thoughts, feelings about feelings, etc. Once we understand the structure or pattern to how we run our brains and behaviours it is surprisingly easy to change those patterns. Neuro-Semantic coaching models operates not only from a cognitive-behaviour framework but also from a systemic one that addresses the complexity of subjective experience in ways and to an extent that other frameworks do not. The effectiveness of coaching based on NLP and Neuro-Semantics—in terms of sustained changes in the ways people think, feel and act—are seen, heard and well documented in feedback from clients.

It took Gina only a few hours with a coach to understand how her beliefs created the feeling of fear and frustration. She edited some of her old beliefs, clarified what she really wanted, set goals, learnt how to get herself into a state of feeling calm and successful, and started achieving her goals.

What is involved in *developmental career coaching*? It starts with the skills that all counsellors and coaches use: rapport-building, clarifying outcomes, active listening and supporting, questioning, giving and receiving feedback. Neuro-Semantic coaching skills also include detecting intricate and layered patterns of thinking and feeling, helping clients change their beliefs and emotional states, tasking clients to take actions to develop skills and holding clients accountable. The Neuro-Semantic coach is trained to identify and work with a person's language patterns, personality style and perceptual filters, emotional states and the mental movies they make of their experience. (For more insight and understanding on Neuro-Semantic coaching see www.neurosemantics.com.) As NLP experts Joseph O'Connor and Ian McDermott say,

“People who are unhappy or not feeling successful are not wrong or broken; it is simply a matter of finding out how they work their beliefs, values, interests, occupations and preoccupations so that they can be changed to ones more useful and desirable”.

(Principles of NLP, Thorsons, 1996)

What does it take to become a developmental career coach? People who are new to the fields of NLP and Neuro-Semantics undertake a three-step training. This includes an accelerated NLP practitioner training, followed by the three-day 'gateway' training in Neuro-Semantics, and then three days (including live and distance learning) on the application of NLP and Neuro-Semantics to coaching for career development and management.

In summary: coaches and counsellors can help people really become more confident and successful in their working lives (with flow-on benefits to their health and personal lives) by combining expert career knowledge—including career and job information, skill assessment techniques, methods of occupational research, linking personality and values profiles to career choice and behaviour, developing a career action plan, preparing resumes, practising interviewing and negotiation skills—with best practice coaching methodologies.

Career management has made a journey over the last century that began in psychotherapy then moved into counselling. At the end of the last century it began to discover the power of coaching as a methodology. The transformation of career management is just beginning.

Dr Susie Linder-Pelz is the director of the Good Decisions P/L and author of *From Fear to Courage: Managing Career Crises* (www.gooddecisions.com.au). Michelle Duval is a Master Executive Coach and co-author of the forthcoming *Coaching Conversations* (www.equilibrio.com.au)