



Careers Across Your Lifespan

By Edward Anthony Colozzi

*The traditional view of career work is not sensitive to the reality of multiple roles that comprise peoples' lives. As career development professionals, we must promote a more dynamically relevant holistic paradigm called **Career Life.***

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Career Work vs. Career Life

The evolution of the term career and its association with paid work activities, aka career work, has blossomed into a more richly complex paradigm, *career life*, that acknowledges other roles as important vehicles for expressing self in meaningful ways (Super, 1980). This non-traditional focus offers a powerfully effective context for career counseling interventions even in its application with current economic realities. People with or without paid work still have relationships and responsibilities that require time and energy in various roles. The emergence of *career life* reflects a sensitivity to the numerous challenges facing most people as they struggle to balance multiple life roles. This paradigm also helps clients appreciate the normalcy of dealing with starts, delays, detours, and stops in roles across the lifespan and gives them the opportunity to make wiser decisions about navigating the roles. Why has it taken so long for our profession to understand and articulate this notion that work is only one facet of the diamond of the human experience?

Back to the Future: The Origin and Growth of Multiple Roles

Imagine a society where everyone lived alone and had the same daily routine that included getting up each morning, dressing, eating breakfast, immediately going off to work, arriving at home each evening to eating a meal, and then off to sleep. Notice there is no access to a computer, radio, television, books, cell phones, pets, leisure activities, or friends. Even if your work tasks were enjoyable, this scenario would still be bleak.

At some point in the evolution of humans could this ever have been a reality? This seems unlikely given our human nature and propensities to have relationships with others and participate in non-work activities. It is evident that people probably played multiple roles such as spousing, parenting, and homemaking as they simultaneously engaged in their primary work role. As evolution occurred and societies developed, many basic homemaking and caregiving or parenting roles continued and became more complex, including more time devoted to friendship and spousal relationships. Time spent in the learner and leisure roles also increased.

The multiple roles that comprise career seem to be rooted in the very nature of the human experience and shaped by people’s responses to what needed to be done on a daily basis to get by, to survive, to move forward and make progress. Perhaps *career life* was the real prelude to career work, and we have recently become sensitive to its value in our counseling, our society, and our worldview of the human journey. This understanding and application of *career life* that articulates how people can contribute their time and talents across life roles and make a difference might truly be a step back to the future.

The Challenge to Discover Moments of Meaning

People’s experience of the work role and other life roles today is different compared with what their parents and grandparents experienced.

- Workers today expect to be employed in 7-10 jobs.
- These jobs might be in 2-3 different fields.
- The average 27 year-old has completed 7 jobs.
- Many adults will be a caregiver to an elderly parent while still parenting their own children.
- With the Internet and instant live news, events can often have immediate global effects.
- Global finances are so intertwined that the mismanagement of a few dishonest and greedy people can affect entire nations.

Yet through all these challenges, people still hold onto hope and yearn for meaning and purpose across their life roles and their lifespan. There seems to be an innate compass in each person that encourages a search for more meaning in their life journey. It is through active involvement across various life roles that people can choose to discover *moments of*

meaning. This notion that meaning and purpose is attainable provides hope and raises self-efficacy. The opportunity to discover meaning and purpose in *any* career life role is a step towards fulfillment and genuine happiness; the opportunity to do this in multiple life roles across the lifespan is an emersion into self-actualization and an authentic implementation of self-concept.

Promoting the Career Life Paradigm

Time spent in various career life roles can provide a sense of purpose and serve as outlets for meaning-making (Savickas, 2007). The traditional view of career work as “a nine-to-five job that pays the bucks and hopefully is enjoyable” is myopic, outdated, irrelevant, and at some levels even detrimental emotionally considering the reality of what is occurring in the daily lives of most people. During these fiscally challenging times, a huge majority of people are struggling to keep afloat with

two major endeavors; maintaining their work role *and* balancing all their other life roles that are affected by their tenuous work role. Concentrating only on the work role negates the client’s involvement in other life roles. *Career life* opens the discussion enormously for progress on many fronts and is based, not on an either-or, but rather a both-and approach.

Work is the key role that provides income, but *emotional income*, meaning and purpose, can be acquired through several other life roles, rich reservoirs that can sustain one through the depression associated with a shifting work role. Encouraging clients to reframe their view of career work to *career life* is especially useful during stressful financial times when clients might naturally focus on their work role as they deal with shifting job markets, possible downsizing, and job loss resulting in little or no time and energy being devoted to other important roles.

A *career life* framework reminds people that children still need effective parenting, spouses and partners still need

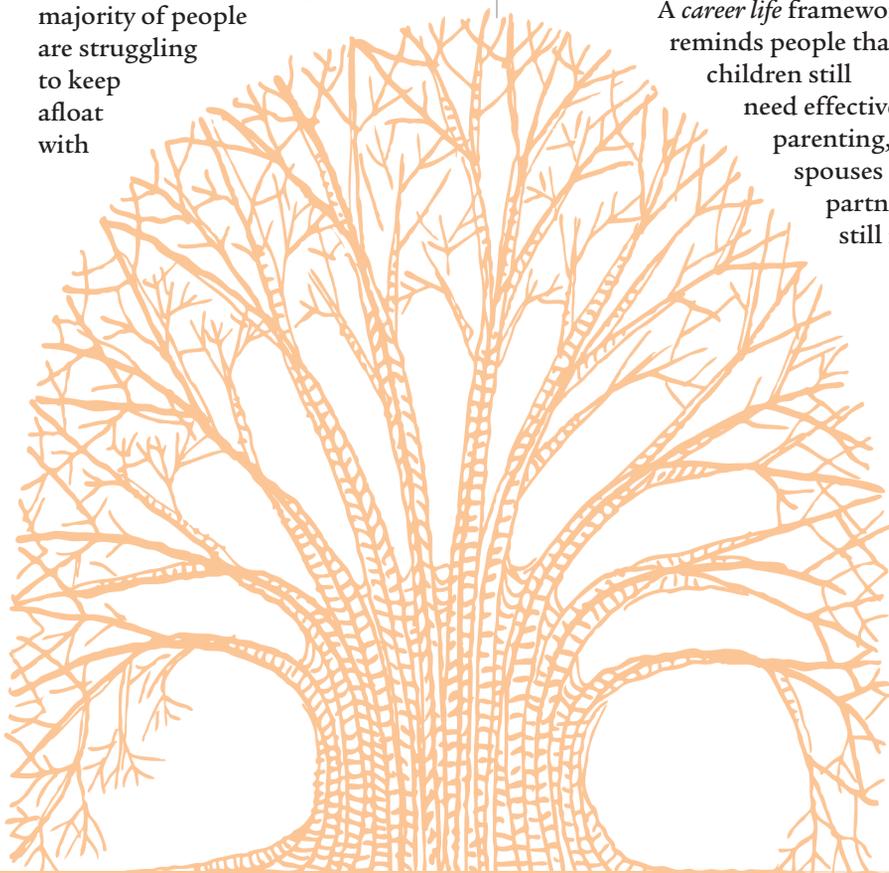
empathy, affection, and nurturing, and schools still need viable collaboration with parents. The elderly and disenfranchised still need care-giving activities that are often provided on a volunteered basis. Likewise, people need wellness-oriented outlets (exercise, healthy eating, hobbies, friendships, and support groups, etc.) to facilitate dealing with their many frustrations or reliance on addictive behavior (drugs, sex, alcohol, overeating, etc.).

The traditional view of career work is not sensitive to the reality of multiple roles that comprise people’s lives. In effect, this old view promotes a denial and devaluation of time and energy spent in many other life roles that can sometimes provide more meaning and purpose than the work role.

As career development professionals, we have an important obligation to promote this richer and more dynamically relevant holistic paradigm called *career life* that acknowledges the time and energy put into multiple roles simultaneously played throughout one’s life that are important outlets for meaning-making and self-expression as the work role is available for money-making and sustenance (Colozzi, 2007). Super’s (1980) life-career rainbow provides an articulate and visually appealing representation of nine major roles played by people throughout the life-space and life-span continuum of their lives. The *career life* paradigm is a response to many societal changes, and our profession must actively engage others, colleagues and clients, in discussions about this concept.

Reflection as a Powerful Catalyst

One discussion can be a silent reflection with self, a brief inner dialogue to assess one’s own career life situation as a means of gaining perspective and appreciating the richness of the *career life* paradigm.



Ten Tips For Negotiating Career Life Across The Lifespan[©]

This activity is adapted from “Evaluating My Present Career-Life Roles” in Ed Colozzi’s book, *Creating Careers with Confidence*, Published by Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2009.

Review Super’s nine major life roles listed below and indicate, on a separate piece of paper if preferred, your evaluation of your current level of attention using OK (Needs Little or No Attention); NS (Needs Some Attention); NL (Needs Lots of Attention). Include trends, themes, desired changes with brief notes. Use the tips below to aid this exercise.

Life Roles	OK	NS	NL	Brief Notes
Child				
Learner				
Worker				
Spouse/Friendship				
Homemaker				
Parent/Caregiver				
Leisure				
Volunteer				
Annuitant				

- Carefully reflect on the time and energy you presently put into each role.
- Set realistic, time-based goals for roles identified as NL. Deal with NS roles later.
- Take baby-steps and select actions that are easy to accomplish and move you ahead toward your overall goals.
- Assess your progress and create a simple and enjoyable reward system to acknowledge your progress.
- Be willing to make adjustments to your goals as you progress, noting specifically what needs to be done.
- Identify a friend or other support person and share your experience as appropriate.
- Learn and practice the art of patience as you grow.
- Be open to major positive changes and accept any change without judgment.
- Develop an attitude of gratitude with or without evidence of changes as you progress.
- Take five minutes each day to be quiet and close your eyes and allow your spirit to rest. Increase this to ten minutes over time. This is the most important tip.

Take a few moments to briefly reflect on the following questions that relate to some of the career life roles you are presently playing.

- Do you get up in the morning and look forward to your day, your work tasks, and interacting with your colleagues?
- Are you enthusiastic about any piece of your life, a pet, an event, a book, a hobby?
- Do you have a meaningful relationship with your spouse or partner, immediate relatives, or several close friends?
- Do you truly believe you make a difference, a *real* difference, in the lives of your clients?
- Have you volunteered a couple of hours of your time and talents in the last month?
- When is the last time you took at least one hour to do whatever you wanted to do without feeling guilty about letting others down?
- When is the last time you took even five minutes to be alone and quiet, close your eyes, move aside all thoughts and worries, and just be calm and peaceful as you experience your breathing, your spirit stretching, your whole being sighing with relief and contentment?

If you are like most people, you are probably experiencing numerous *emotional bumps* across several life roles, including work. Part of a successful intervention for clients seeking career counseling is to offer them a *career life* context for making their decisions and encouraging them to fully reflect on and carefully assess the status of all the roles that comprise their daily life experience. This reflection process can be a powerful catalyst for noting important life themes, harmful behavior patterns, negative scripting tapes, and developing positive strategies that can shift perceptions and significantly raise self-efficacy. The net effect

from such a reflection can be best summarized as expanding a client's options from a traditional approach of coping, a somewhat defensive and passive strategy, to a constructivist approach that challenges clients to *create their careers with confidence*, a more proactive strategy (Colozzi, 2009). Assisting clients with some soul-searching across life roles is a useful strategy for powerful insights, immediate correction of attitudes and behavior, and a fuller appreciation of the prevalence of relationships across life roles and throughout their life span. One such exercise is included with this article.

The Role of Relationships in Career Life

An examination of *career life* indicates a common theme that seems to permeate across each role and throughout the lifespan: *Relationships*. Each of Super's roles implies there is some aspect of a meaningful relationship that is occurring with oneself, other humans, animals, nature, or even an event or activity. *Career life* offers people connections; career work offers people tasks that provide income and potentially involve meaningful relationships depending on the opportunity and willingness of clients to choose careers with a purpose based on their inner values, sometimes referred to as discovering a calling (Bloch & Richmond, 1998; Colozzi, 2003; Colozzi & Colozzi, 2000; Duffy & Blustein, 2005, Hansen, 2000).

It is this salient characteristic, relationships, that defines the power of **career life** because relationships are pivotal to every person's life, their life journey, and virtually all aspects of the universe. Every thing and every person is somehow connected to every other person and everything. This relational character of reality is supported by theoretical views of both theologians (Keating, 1986) and scientists (Polkinghorn,

2001) who recognize a unified understanding, derived from Einstein's general theory of relativity and quantum theory that also has its own relational character, that space and time and matter are all linked together. There is a scientific basis for appreciating the power of relationships that might explain the relevance and effectiveness of using *career life* in our career counseling interventions. Career life *is* all about relationships across the lifespan. We should use this paradigm as a framework for *all* career counseling interventions in K-12, secondary and higher education, agency, and private practice settings. It is powerful, it is relevant, and it works!

Implementing Career Life

There is much work to be done on many local, national, and international levels in a variety of settings. Frontline practitioners, theorists, counselor educators, program administrators, and many more stakeholders have important contributions to make. Get involved in ways that allow you to use your best gifts and passionate feelings about the career development field. Offer to speak at your local school. Write an article for your local newspaper or NCDA's Career Convergence. Submit a program proposal for your local CDA. Challenging times require that resourceful people step up to the plate and make a difference.

Each of you brings your own special set of resources and inspiration to NCDA. This year's NCDA theme has been "Inspiring Career Development Practitioners". It is relevant because our profession is so relevant to the successful functioning of our society on multiple levels. Our profession is relevant because our work is so

relevant to all aspects of people's career life journey as they deal with angst and self-doubt to ambition and self-actualization. People's career life journeys are relevant because dealing with those journeys is what excites us and matches what we are called to do, individually and collectively; this is our way to matter and count, our special and sacred calling.

Nationally and globally, this is the most challenging and exciting time ever to be involved with NCDA, promoting excellent career development, including research, advocacy, and improving best practices, doing what we love while making a difference in the lives of others across all their career life roles and lifespan. Do we touch this planet? You bet we do, one day, one role, one relationship at a time!

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