Introduction

My first attempt at using group counseling in career development was in 1979 while serving as the Director of Advising, Counseling, and Career Development at Alma College in Alma, Michigan. I had the good fortune of managing a Kellogg Foundation Grant directed at enhancing career development for liberal arts students. The grant encouraged and provided resources for creative work with career development and called for a career development program at each grade level. As is generally the case in institutions of higher education, students were expected to declare a major at the end of their sophomore year. For many this created anxiety and stress because they generally had little awareness of how their liberal arts education related to a career. Although there were several approaches to informing students about the world of work (e.g., lectures and internships), it was apparent that more was needed to help students gain a deeper perspective about a career decision.

During my doctoral studies at the University of Florida in the mid-1970s, I was exposed to two new career development programs: computer-assisted career guidance and the Vocational Exploration Group (VEG), a highly structured small group career guidance program. My doctoral research had been on computer-assisted career guidance as a consequence of the Educational Testing Service piloting the System of Interactive Guidance and Information (SIGI) at the local community college. VEG contained a series of structured interactive exercises that educated students about the world of work. I had found both VEG and SIGI helpful in my career decisions and as resources in my work as a secondary school and community college counselor.

I had been enamored of and interested in group counseling after participating in a 1969 workshop led by Carl Rogers at the University of California, San Diego. Since that time I have made use of group counseling principles in many aspects of my work and life. The use of facilitative responses to help assure maximum participation and to build trust and rapport within the group has been especially helpful. Small group efforts have included everything from working with troubled adolescents to teaching church school classes where group interaction and sharing was the goal.

With this background, I put together a program that combined the VEG, computer-assisted career guidance, and client-centered group counseling. The model described in chapter three evolved from this initial effort. I was pleasantly surprised by the enthusiastic response of the students who participated in the initial group program. They reported more confidence in choosing a major and in making a career decision while enjoying the process which, in many cases, involved up to 6 hours of small group work. In some cases, the members continued to meet informally after the group ended. I personally enjoyed leading the groups and applying my interest in client-centered counseling and computer-assisted career guidance to a small group activity aimed at enhancing career development.

The definitions of career development, career, and work used in this book are not limited to assisting with occupational choice but include a broader conceptualization of what contributes to career satisfaction and success. The following three definitions are taken from an article by Susan Sears (1982) in the *Vocational Guidance Quarterly* and further developed by Reardon, Lenz, Sampson, and Peterson (2005). *Career development is the total constellation of economic, sociological, psychological, educational, physical, and chance factors that combine to shape one's career*. Reardon et al. (2005) noted that this is a big concept affected by money and financial resources, group membership and social class, mental health and personality, educational level and record, physical abilities and traits, and chance factors. All of these factors, both within and outside the individual, combine to influence how one's career path unfolds. It is important to note that no single one of them determines a person's career, but they combine in complex ways to shape it.

Career is the time-extended working out of a purposeful life pattern through work undertaken by the person. There are some important ideas contained in this definition of career that have practical importance for all persons engaged in career planning. Reardon et al. (2005) note that *time extended* is important because it indicates that career is not something that happens as the result of one event or choice. A career is not time limited or tied to one particular job or occupation, but it is life-long affected by forces within and outside of a person. Some experts in the field even use the term "life/career" as a way to connect life processes to the idea of career.

Working out indicates that career is the result of compromises and trade offs between what a person might want and what is possible, between the ideal and real. There is no "perfect" career path for a person, but there may be one that is optimal. *Purposeful* is important because it means that a career has

meaning and purpose for a person. A career doesn't just happen by accident or luck; it is planned, contemplated, worked on, and executed. A career develops because of the motivation, aspirations, and goals of the person. It reflects the person's values and beliefs. *Life pattern* is important because it means that a career is more than one's employment or job. Career interacts with all the adult life roles (e.g., parent, spouse, homemaker, student, etc.) and the ways in which the person blends and arranges those roles.

Finally, *work* is probably one of the most misunderstood words in the career field. In this book it is defined as *an activity that produces something of value for oneself or others*. Leisure activities, then, can be part of one's career, and probably a very important part. Work, not employment, is the way in which the concept of career is operationally defined.

My philosophical orientation to counseling is grounded in client-centered counseling and heavily influenced by Carl Rogers. I view the primary work of the counselor as assisting the client to think more effectively and to gain insight toward problem resolution. At the time of my graduate education in the 1970s, Carl Rogers and E. G. Williamson greatly influenced our profession. Williamson provided counselors with a framework and structure for delivering *guidance* services. These two men were viewed in terms of "indirect" (Rogers) versus "direct" (Williamson) in their counseling approaches. It has been my experience that career counselors tend to be more "direct" in their approach to working with clients, probably because of the emphasis on testing and the use of occupational information. A more indirect and client-centered approach appears to be less of a norm for career counselors.

Other professionals who have shaped my thoughts include Donald Super (career as an implementation of self-concept and the concept of career maturity), Martin Katz (the role of values in career decision making and his work with SIGI), JoAnn Harris-Bowlsbey (the computer-assisted guidance program DISCOVER), John Holland (RIASEC theory); Dale Prediger and Kyle Swaney (World-of-Work Map), and David Tiedeman (stages of career decision making). I am attracted to cognitive and behavioral therapies that focus on the ways that thinking affects feelings and behavior. This is particularly true in instances when prejudicial, stereotypical thinking based on ethnicity, gender, and/or age influences career decisions. I respect the psychoanalytic emphasis on early psychosexual and psychosocial development. I think an exploration of early experiences, as those experiences relate to perceptions and understanding of the world of work, is an essential part of enhancing career growth and career maturity. However, I reject the deterministic notion that humans are the product of their early conditioning and thus a mere consequence of the past.

I view the client/counselor relationship as the major factor leading to constructive personal change. It is my experience that this can best be achieved within a small group setting if the counselor can effectively facilitate group interaction and take full advantage of peer influences.

I see the primary goal of the career counselor as helping the client to grow in understanding of self, the world of work, and the interaction of the two. In this regard, the work of Donald Super and John Crites on career maturity has had an important influence on my thinking. Whereas, early in my career I naively saw the goal of career counseling as helping the client achieve a specific career decision, I now see it as enhancing career maturity and helping the client to move forward with a plan of action. It is on this foundation and set of beliefs that my efforts in group career counseling are based. I hope that my group career counseling model will be useful to practicing counselors and paraprofessionals, and that it will be critiqued and built upon for the benefit of individuals who seek to maximize their career development and potential.