

DARREN: THE CASE OF THE UNEMPLOYED RUNAWAY

Darren is a 45-year-old Caucasian male who has lived in cities all of his life. He grew up in Chicago. Then when he finished high school, he moved to New York to attend college. Then, when he finished his undergraduate degree, he moved to Houston for graduate school. After completing his MA, he took a job in Los Angeles where he lived for 10 years before moving to Portland, Oregon.

He has entered career counseling because he needed help in identifying a viable career option. He had been unemployed for the past year. Darren possessed a bachelor's degree in architecture and a master's degree in landscape architecture. During his intake interview, Darren reported feeling dissatisfied with his previous jobs. Most recently, he had been employed as a landscape architect and reported enjoying the creative aspects of his work. He also mentioned, however, that he had experienced difficulty in getting along with his supervisor and that this was a pattern for him in his previous employment situations. He also reported a strong dislike for structured work environments. He related that he experienced a high level of anxiety when confronted with challenging tasks. Darren also noted that he was typically very sensitive to criticism. His hobbies included photography, computer-aided design work, and reading in the areas of human potential, spirituality, and psychology.

An additional factor concerning Darren's situation at the time he entered career counseling was that he and his wife were in the process of divorcing. The divorce proceedings were focused on the issues of child support and custody relative to Darren's 4-year-old son.

Darren's father was employed as an engineer and his mother was a clinical psychologist (both retired). Darren has a 37-year-old sister currently working as a homemaker. At the time he entered career counseling, Darren's parents were serving as his sole source of financial support. Despite this financial assistance, Darren stated that he felt that he never received from his parents "what he needed." He perceived his parents as being somewhat distant and his father as being rather critical. His father was especially not supportive of Darren's artistic abilities and emphasized the importance of developing scientific skills and knowledge. Both parents were anxious for him to return to work.

He has taken the Strong Interest Inventory and reports his RIASEC code as ARC and his Myers-Briggs Type Indicator preference code is INFJ.

***Response to Darren: The Case of the Unemployed Runaway
Career Counseling: Facilitating Exploration, Insight and Action
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Career counseling with Darren must extend beyond the traditional matching of individuals and work environments advocated by Parsons (1909) early in the 20th century. More recently, counselors have recognized the importance of an integrated approach to career counseling that addresses the interplay of vocational, self, and interpersonal concerns (Blustein, 1987; Blustein & Spengler, 1995; Gysbers, Heppner, & Johnston, 1998; Lucas, 1993). The most effective intervention for Darren would enable him to explore his feelings and thoughts, gain insight about his behaviors, and move toward changes that will enrich his life. Hill and O'Brien (1999) developed a helping skills model that can be applied to career counseling and used effectively to promote positive changes in Darren's life.

The Hill and O'Brien Helping Skills Model

The Hill and O'Brien (1999) model proposes that counselors move through three stages (Exploration, Insight and Action) for each problem presented by the client during counseling. The goals of

the first stage, Exploration, are to develop a therapeutic relationship that enables clients to tell their stories and to facilitate the expression of thoughts and feelings. The counselor uses basic helping skills (i.e., active listening, open questions, and reflection of feelings) to assist the client in expressing underlying affect and thoroughly exploring thoughts and feelings.

In the Insight stage, clients gain new and deeper understandings of the factors underlying their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Clients examine not only the ways in which they contribute to the difficulties that they are experiencing, but they also identify the strengths and coping mechanisms that they can rely on to implement change. Helping skills used by counselors in the Insight stage include the skills used in Exploration, as well as challenges, interpretations, self-disclosure, and immediacy.

Finally, because expression of affect and increased insight rarely lead to lasting change (Hill & O'Brien, 1999), clients enter the Action stage. Counselors work with clients to brainstorm possible changes, evaluate their ideas, select a plan of action, practice skills, and implement and evaluate changes. Throughout the Action stage, counselors rely on basic helping skills as well as direct guidance and information. The three-stage helping process continues as insights gained in addressing one issue inform clients' understanding of other problem behaviors. Moreover, this model provides flexibility for career counselors to develop creative interventions to affect change with clients (see Heppner, O'Brien, Hinkelman, & Humphrey, 1994).

Several basic assumptions form the basis for career counseling using this model. First, the counselor provides support by creating a caring environment in which the client can explore concerns, improve self-understanding, and take action to change life circumstances. However, this model is predicated on the assumption that change does not occur solely in a supportive context. The client must be challenged to participate actively in counseling (e.g., to struggle to express her feelings, think about his contributions to problems, generate possible action plans, and complete homework assignments). Moreover, the focus of the work includes not only career-related concerns, but also exploration of difficulties in interpersonal relationships and self-identity. Finally, career counseling must assist the client to identify the strengths on which the client can build to compose a healthier life.

The Application of the Hill and O'Brien Model to Career Counseling with Darren

The complexity inherent in most career cases, including Darren's, necessitates cycling through the stages of Exploration, Insight, and Action with respect to several areas of functioning. We have outlined three interrelated areas to address in career counseling with Darren: interpersonal, self, and career issues. Although the issues are presented sequentially, they overlap in counseling as the interpersonal, self, and career issues have a negative impact on Darren's career development and block him from moving forward, and his difficulties in his career development affect his feelings about himself and others. Prior to implementing the Hill and O'Brien (1999) model with Darren, the counselor would assess his psychological status using a structured interview and, possibly, additional testing to rule out significant depression or anxiety. If clinical depression or anxiety is present, the counselor and Darren would take action to alleviate the depression or anxiety using cognitive-behavioral strategies and/or a referral for a medical evaluation.

Interpersonal Issues

Career counseling would commence with an examination of the relationship problems that appear to stymie Darren's growth, both personally and in his career. In the Exploration stage, Darren's relationships, primarily with his parents and wife but also with supervisors, would be explored. The counselor would solicit additional information regarding his interpersonal functioning with his family members, his reason for divorcing, and his reaction to custody issues. The counselor would encourage Darren to express his thoughts and feelings about difficulties committing to a relationship or a place to live. After establishing a therapeutic relationship, the counselor would move toward the

Insight stage to challenge Darren to examine how his moves, divorce, unhappiness, and anxiety relate to relationships with others. The Insight stage provides an opportunity for the counselor and Darren to work together to illuminate unhealthy patterns and obtain an understanding of his positive and negative contributions to relationships. For example, Darren's expectations of self and others may not be realistic. He may view all people as critical and distant like his parents, leading to difficulty with respecting authority and receiving criticism. Despite having the privileges usually attendant with being white, male, and from an upper-class background, Darren perceives himself as powerless and pressured to be something he is not. Furthermore, he has become financially dependent on his parents, but remains angry that they are not supportive. Darren's paralysis and apparent passivity seem to be his way of coping with that anger or hurt. Therefore, it would be highly important to address these issues as he attempts to negotiate a custody and divorce settlement. Otherwise, his feeling toward his wife and possible grief over losing a close connection with his son could lead to more withdrawal and paralysis.

Once Darren explores and gains insight into these issues, he and the counselor could move to the Action stage and identify several ways to improve his interpersonal relationships. For example, he might be encouraged to learn assertive communication skills, set limits with others, identify and change unrealistic beliefs, and attempt divorce/custody mediation.

Self Issues

Darren's self-esteem, which seems confused or fragile, most likely limits his progress. The counselor would revisit the Exploration stage as Darren would benefit from exploring (through journaling, reading self-help books, and talking with the counselor) his feelings about himself and his current life situation. He would be asked to deeply examine his unhappiness and sensitivity to criticism. In addition, the counselor would encourage Darren to talk about how he felt when his dad discouraged his creative endeavors. The Insight stage also would provide the opportunity to address several key questions, such as how Darren limits himself, copes with disappointments and loss, and nurtures himself. Darren seems to feel neglected, and he may need to work at understanding how to care for himself. Finally, Darren would be asked to identify his strengths (e.g., intelligence, life experiences, interesting hobbies) and the ways in which he has placed limits on defining and developing an integrated sense of self.

In the Action stage, Darren would be challenged to brainstorm how he can express and nurture himself. For example, hobbies, relaxation techniques, and support groups might help Darren solidify a sense of self that could result in more effective personal and professional connections with others. In addition, an enhanced sense of self might boost his confidence in managing difficult or stressful tasks.

Career Issues

Once self and interpersonal issues have been addressed to the point that Darren could understand how they affect his career development, the counselor would cycle back to the Exploration stage. For example, the counselor might ask Darren to describe his career history and his feelings and thoughts regarding his previous career choice and his current unemployment. Darren's Holland code (1985) of ARC is fairly consistent with the RIASEC code for an architect (AIR; Gottfredson & Holland, 1989) and suggests that he may be well suited to landscape architecture and could have a viable career in the field. However, he felt dissatisfied with his work and thus needs to understand what contributes to his unhappiness. To facilitate exploration, the counselor might ask Darren to develop a timeline of his career history that delineates his educational experiences and each position he held (including responsibilities, relationships with co-workers and supervisors, emotional state, likes and dislikes, why he left).

Using this information, Darren and the counselor would move into the Insight stage to further understand his conflict with supervisors, dislike of structured environments, and anxiety related to pressure. For example, Darren may discover that his behaviors contributed to problems in work envi-

ronments or that parental criticism and lack of support led him to expect the same at work. To capitalize on these insights, the counselor would encourage Darren to practice assertive communication and stress management in the Action stage. In addition, Darren would learn to take responsibility for work behaviors that are self-sabotaging and identify ways to change unhealthy patterns.

Viewing an overall picture of his career history also might help Darren determine whether he could be happy remaining in landscape architecture or switching to another creative field, such as photography or graphic arts. At this point, Darren might return to the Insight stage to apply his newly gained knowledge about his interpersonal functioning and self-esteem to appreciate how these issues could block future progress in his career.

To deepen Darren's understanding of how he may limit his career development, the counselor might extend the Insight stage to explain that Darren's Myers-Briggs Type Indicator preference code, INFJ, is indicative of people who are insightful, creative, and empathic and who seek meaning from their work (Myers & McCaulley, 1985). However, these individuals may be at risk for failing to pursue their career goals, struggling with career decisions, resenting others, and minimizing their empathic and creative selves (Myers & McCaulley, 1985). Moreover, the counselor would discuss the importance of contextual factors in Darren's life and explore issues related to race and ethnicity (e.g., how being white affects his career decisions and relationships with colleagues), social class (e.g., how having many opportunities may both benefit him and cause stress), parental expectations (e.g., how his parents' successes contribute to their hopes for his future and his feelings about himself), and his role as a father (e.g., how having a child may exacerbate the joys and challenges in his life). Finally, the Insight stage could be a useful time to explore issues that emerged in the therapeutic relationship, as processing these issues could model how interpersonal issues are resolved in work environments.

Guided career imagery might facilitate the transition to the Action stage and would help Darren and the counselor explore his vocational options. Information from the imagery activity and the inventory results could help him identify several possible career directions. For instance, he may be happier self-employed in landscape architecture, or he may want to pursue a career in photography. Darren also would be encouraged to use the resources located in a career center to identify additional careers that seem consistent with his interests and personality. Whatever direction he takes, he would benefit from brainstorming how to increase his enjoyment of his career and develop more satisfaction in his life.

In addition, the counselor could assist Darren in gaining skills that will help him acquire information to use when making career decisions. For instance, Darren might be encouraged to schedule several informational interviews with people employed in a variety of fields of interest to him. Prior to the interviews, the counselor and Darren could role-play and videotape a practice interview to assess his interpersonal interactions and self-presentation and to increase confidence and motivation for this task.

The Termination of Career Counseling: Helping the Runaway Find His Way Home

Counseling would end once Darren has planned and taken action to move forward in his career, became independent from his parents and gained a satisfactory resolution to his divorce and custody arrangements. The counselor would process with Darren the changes that he made (and the work that needs to be done) to develop healthier relationships with others, enhance his self-esteem, and pursue a career direction. Through the expression of his feelings and thoughts and the discovery of insights, Darren has been challenged to recognize and act on his potential for a healthy, stable, self-sufficient and balanced life.

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