

The Impact of Career Interventions: Preparing our Citizens for 21st Century Jobs

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**Paper prepared as a collaboration of the National Career Development Association
and the Society for Vocational Psychology to celebrate
NCCA's 100th Anniversary in 2013**



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Citation:

Whiston, S. C., & Blustein, D. L., (2013). *The impact of career interventions: Preparing our citizens for the 21st century jobs*. (Research Report). National Career Development Association (www.ncda.org) and the Society for Vocational Psychology (www.div17.org/vocpsych/)

Navigating the many decisions that face people as they develop from children into adolescents and adults is a daunting task, especially given the degree of flux in the world. Making educational and career decisions has always been demanding; it is even more challenging in light of a world of work that is like a moving target with rapid and often unpredictable shifts in the marketplace. Access to quality career development services has been identified as a critical resource for battling the global economic crisis with its ongoing occupational uncertainties.

The *National Career Development Association (NCDA)* and the *Society for Vocational Psychology (SVP)* are two of the most important major professional associations that are providing the leadership, knowledge base, training guidelines, and resources to ensure that highly trained career intervention professionals are available to help people find their way in the world. For the past century, career intervention professionals have helped young people, adults, and retirees plan their transitions and decisions. Given the radical changes evoked by the economic crisis, the needs of students and adults are even more profound, as reflected by the following questions that are often raised when individuals speak to career intervention professionals:

- How can I make the most of my opportunities?
- How can I learn more about myself and the world of work?
- How can I develop a meaningful and individually tailored career and life plan?
- How can I manage expected and unexpected job transitions?
- How can I deal with unemployment and underemployment?

Who are Career Development Professionals?

Career development professionals can provide the light on a dimly lit journey into an unknown, but exciting future. Career development professionals include a wide array of individuals who have training in counseling methods, personality and counseling theories, career choice and development theories and research, ethics, life-span development, multicultural issues as well as other areas depending on their specialization and professional orientation. Career development professionals include doctoral-trained counseling psychologists and counselor

educators; master's trained career counselors, school counselors, mental health counselors, and rehabilitation counselors. In addition, the National Career Development Association provides training for para-professionals who are designated as Career Development Facilitators after completing an evidence-based curriculum.

Are Career Development Interventions Effective?

In short, the answer here is an unequivocal yes! With the current global challenges of unemployment and rapidly shifting needs in the market place, the importance of career development is perhaps more crucial than ever. Increasingly, policy makers and government officials need to make informed decisions about optimal investments based on compelling rationales and strong empirical evidence. In this context, considerable evidence exists supporting the efficacy of career development interventions, as summarized below:

- The standard index of effectiveness is typically determined via meta-analyses, which are formal statistical summaries of research studies. As reflected in numerous meta-analyses, career counseling interventions are effective in enhancing career decidedness, satisfaction with work, and confidence about decision-making skills.
 - For example, college students who take a career and life planning course are more likely to be able to select a meaningful major and are less likely to drop out of college.
- Individuals who receive career interventions are generally able to negotiate career development tasks with greater ease and effectiveness, which is particularly important in the current climate when people often have to retrain and retool for work.
 - An unemployed factory worker who receives career development interventions can identify new and promising training opportunities that will help her prepare for changing labor market demands.
- Growing evidence exists supporting the usefulness of career development interventions in promoting school engagement among students in high school, which is a major contributor in helping students to gain 21st century skills.

- For example, a high school student who receives career interventions can become more focused about his future, which will help him to persevere when faced with obstacles.
- Career development services are cost-effective, relevant, and effective in helping individuals cope with transitions in the world of work.
 - Communities and states that invest in career interventions are well-positioned to help their citizens react nimbly and thoughtfully to changing job markets.

What Are Effective Career Development Interventions?

Career development services vary depending on the individual's circumstances, but we know that career development is optimally facilitated when services begin in elementary school and continue through adulthood. Services for elementary age students include initial forays in exploring one's identity and an introduction to the role of being a worker. As individuals mature, there is a need for more intensive services that involve self exploration and exploration of the world of work. Research indicates that effective career development professionals provide clients with individual sessions that often include some combination of written or computer exercises, individual test interpretation, and exploration of occupational information, depending on a client's needs. A career development professional who is supportive and can model effective career decision-making is also key to the career services process. For unemployed adults, some of these same services are required in helping them gain employment in addition to assistance in job search, identification of transferable skills, and skill development. Therefore, career development interventions need to be provided by a trained professional who can assist the individual in identifying strengths and who can facilitate exploration of the world of work.

Who Typically Receives Career Development Interventions?

Unfortunately, few Americans receive effective career development services. A recent NCDA-sponsored Harris poll indicated that more than half of the randomly selected participants reported seeking out career assistance in the past year. However, only 24% of the respondents in this poll actually reported visiting a trained career counselor at some point in their lives. In

schools, counselors are typically assigned up to 500 students so it is difficult to provide the services researchers have found to be effective. Many services for adults (e.g., Career One Stop Centers) are being cut and most adults are left without any accessible and low-cost services. This situation contrasts markedly to our European neighbors who frequently have more comprehensive services available for their citizens. These countries have realized the economic benefits of career development services in stemming unemployment, curtailing school dropout rates, and lessening underemployment. It seems regrettable that during these times of high unemployment and an uncertain labor market that so few Americans have access to the career services that many desperately need.

We are hopeful that the material summarized in this report coupled with the ongoing initiatives by members of the NCDA and SVP will continue to create the evidence base for the design and development of career interventions that are available to all people throughout the U.S. across their life span.

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