



Helping clients find the right career footing



Francine Fabricant

Francine Fabricant called me one day seeking advice on private practice issues. As we discussed her situation, I discovered that she was a seasoned career counselor with a rich and interesting view on employment, career development and work/life balance. She is also cowriting a career counseling textbook. This is her story.

Rebecca Daniel-Burke: What is your current career counseling position?

Francine Fabricant: I work in private practice as a career counselor and teach career development through adult education at local universities and community organizations. I serve as a lecturer in Hofstra University Continuing Education and as an adjunct instructor at New York Institute of Technology Extended Education.

RDB: What led you down the path toward career counseling?

FF: As with many of my clients, my career initially took a number of turns before I found this path. Before I went to graduate school for counseling, I worked in magazine editorial, then public relations and marketing. Looking back, my volunteer and part-time experiences fulfilled other interests to balance the work I was doing. For instance, I was involved in teaching leadership skills to high school students through a not-for-profit program.

Career coaching was developing prominence and being reported on regularly in *The Wall Street Journal*. I felt a strong pull toward career development as a profession. I went on to receive both a master of arts in organizational psychology and a master of education in psychological counseling at Teachers College, Columbia University.

RDB: When you start with a client, what assessment tools might you use?

FF: I work primarily with individuals seeking to make a career change or

launch their careers, and together we assess whether career assessments might be helpful. If so, I generally use four instruments: the Strong Interest Inventory with the Skills Confidence Inventory, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, the Knowdell Motivated Skills Card Sort and the Knowdell Career Values Card Sort.

RDB: How do those tools and that assessment help you plan a strategy for career counseling?

FF: First, I let the client know that assessments will give ideas for career fields that might be of interest, but that they are by no means the only careers they might find satisfying and rewarding. I let them know we will be using the assessments as a tool for exploration. Initially, the assessments give us a lot to discuss, as I get to hear the client's reaction to the results and learn more about his or her interests, personality, skills, values and history. This helps me build a strategy because I am learning what he or she wants to explore and what needs are most pressing.

RDB: Is there one theoretical orientation that you gravitate toward more than others?

FF: I am very excited about the Happenstance Learning Theory (HLT) recently developed by Dr. John Krumboltz. The HLT offers a foundation for individuals to seek out and take advantage of unpredictable and unexpected events, which is critical during this time of rapid technological development and globalization. It is a very proactive approach involving reframing indecision as "open-mindedness" and addressing lifelong decision-making and transitions. As such, it is not limited to only helping clients find a job or address a current issue.

In addition, I was trained in person-centered psychotherapy, and in line

with that, I focus on using nondirective counseling and coaching interventions.

RDB: I understand you are currently writing a textbook on career planning. How did that opportunity come to you?

FF: My former colleague and coauthor was approached by a sales representative after she had requested review copies of texts for her career planning course. In their conversations, she described what she was looking for in a text and was asked if she would be interested in writing her own. Since I had participated in teaching the same course, my colleague mentioned this to me in a conversation. I was excited about working on a text that could address a wide population because I had been using original handouts for many of my workshops and courses. Our proposal was accepted for publication, and now we are working on our final manuscript.

Our experience is also a great example of how the HLT plays out in life. We knew each other because of our active participation in the world around us, and each of us shared a willingness to keep our options open while focusing on building our skills and experience.

RDB: As you look back on your career in counseling, what has been your favorite position?

FF: Although I love what I am doing now, I reflect frequently on my experience as a career counselor at Columbia University's Center for Career Education. This was a high-traffic environment, serving six undergraduate and graduate schools as well as alumni. I started there as a graduate intern for my fieldwork experience, and this evolved into a full-time position. It was a favorite because, as a career changer myself, this position confirmed for me that I was in the right place with the right people and doing work that was immensely satisfying.

RDB: Did someone in your life see

something special in you early on? Who valued you as a unique individual?

FF: My father has always been extremely supportive. He encouraged me to explore without feeling limited to traditional paths. Instead, he pushed me to look for experiences with strong mentoring opportunities and to branch out into diverse areas. He was also very supportive of my sports activities, which were a big part of my childhood. Living in Manhattan, I couldn't be left alone, and he used to take me to figure skating and bring his work, sitting for hours while I skated. The fact that he brought his work, and that I remember that, goes to show that I was always aware that a balance between work and family was important — and possible. Today, I have structured my own work to integrate a balance that allows me to spend time with my husband and young children.

RDB: Who are your heroes?

FF: I am particularly struck by those women who have paved the way for my work and life as a working woman today. Although I enjoy work and family, and a level of respect in both areas, I realize this is a huge shift in our culture. My mother worked in a brokerage firm as a bond salesperson and was the only woman outside of an administrative role in several of the companies where she worked. Her work schedule was not flexible, and she was very forthcoming about the difficulties she faced and the stereotypes she encountered. I also had a series of wonderful women mentors who were close to my mother's age and had all encountered similar experiences.

In addition, as a college student, I had the unique privilege of working for Gloria Steinem as a research assistant on her book *Revolution From Within: A Book of Self-Esteem* and was amazed by the equality, kindness and work ethic that characterized Ms. Steinem on a daily basis. Working under her guidance was a true education in the impact we can have as individuals, especially when we listen, think, connect and take action.

RDB: Has studying counseling been transformational for you?

FF: I think studying counseling and preparing to specialize in career counseling were both transformational. I had always been a helper and loved to listen to people's stories, but learning how

to listen with the goal of understanding the client's worldview versus working hard to formulate some kind of advice was extremely powerful for me. In a sense, it freed me up because it gave me the tools to support my clients in seeking their own answers.

RDB: What mistakes have you made and what lessons have you learned along your career path?

FF: Early in my career, I was eager to learn and participate in exciting work experiences, but I think I missed out on some experiences because I failed to realize how long one's career would actually be. I didn't realize that there would be plenty of time and that exploration would benefit me so much and give me such a foundation for understanding different perspectives. So, if anything, I would say that some of the mistakes I made were in being too goal oriented and not valuing the journey enough. I probably am still making this mistake! I'll have to take a look at that.

RDB: Is there a saying, a book or a quote that you think about when you need to be inspired regarding your work or when the going gets tough?

FF: I love the quote from John F. Kennedy, "Victory has a thousand fathers, but defeat is an orphan." This quote reminds me that when I'm struggling with a project or case, I probably need to get more support or insight, or go to my resources, books or colleagues. There is an aspect of success in every project, and when something is not going well, evaluate it, make changes and move on.

RDB: Your work must be intense at times. What ways do you find to take care of yourself?

FF: I exercise frequently. I run, which is extremely invigorating for me. I also read a lot. I wish I could say that I read outside my profession, but I love to read about careers. If it's not professional literature or self-help books, then I read biographies. My interests are very aligned with my work.

RDB: Is there anything else you want readers to know about you and your work?

FF: I think there is a lot of opportunity for career counseling or, more broadly, career development as a component of mental health counseling. The rise in unemployment and underemployment

has been a source of stress for individuals, couples and families, and I feel there is a lot of room for integrating career development theory and techniques into other areas of counseling.

I also feel that as technology allows fewer individuals to do jobs that once took large staffs and as outsourcing increases, with many service jobs now moving abroad, there will continue to be a shift in the type of jobs available to individuals here and abroad. Helping individuals adjust, manage and thrive in this time of massive change has become increasingly important. ♦

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