

# The New Worker

The nation's oldest, quarterly newsletter published for professionals concerned with human factors and disability management in the workplace.

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## The Importance of Career Counseling in a Depressed Economy

CEC Associates, Inc., has more than 25 years of experience in career counseling. We conduct career assessments and provide career counseling to school students as well individuals of all ages who have acquired occupationally significant medical impairments. Recently, we have thought about the validity of these overall experiences in respect to the depressed economy and have written about them for inclusion in our current issue of *The New Worker*. The issues we revisited follow.

## Job Search in a Broken Economy

In the past, well-managed companies have provided outplacement and job search classes for the workers they had to lay off. In a recession, many employers may no longer be able to afford these services.

The single most important component of outplacement assistance is that individuals need to realize what specific skills they have to offer in the market. That is, they need to see the results of a work skills assessment. So, while employers may not be in a position to offer comprehensive job search experiences, they should be able to afford, for each of their laid-off workers, a quality skills assessment.

The objective of identifying skills is to narrow the list to, say, ten skills that will be most attractive to potential employers. Identification of personal and job skills is executed through a variety of processes, including thoughtful interviewing and testing.

Skill assessments should be an integral part of our public schools. That is, students should be provided with the results of a quality assessment as an essential lead into post-secondary choices. Employers need to recognize that their local public schools should be providing these assessments, and if they are not, employers, as significant taxpayers in the district, should assist schools to recognize the need and, through the expertise of the company's

Human Relations professionals, advise on quality instruments for the assessment.

Where career counseling does exist in the local school district, employers can play an important advisory role. Elementary and high school counseling should help students to determine whether they should prepare for a career by attending college or should prepare by learning a marketable trade. This is not to suggest that employers know more about career preparation than counselors but that they can contribute to the process by actively cooperating in it. Each school district should have an active advisory panel made up of education and industry professionals. If no such panel exists, it is up to local employers to urge their districts to create one (with rotating school-industry leadership).

One tool employed by many Human Resources professionals that is not as widely used in the schools is the O\*NET database created by the U.S. Department of Labor. The value of the O\*NET is its identification and listing of actual jobs in the marketplace and a description of the "essential functions" of each of these jobs. Employers might want to make education professionals aware of O\*NET resources. Further, employers needing to lay off employees may make O\*NET searches available to those employees.

A significant reality of the job market in difficult economic conditions is that some jobs continue to be in demand, while the demand for others falls. Teaching job search skills will include identifying job classifications that are in short supply as well as those that remain in strong demand. Jobs in banking and investing are obviously less available, while jobs in the medical and education fields remain strong. Again, the results of career assessment will answer whether an individual has the suitability and basic skills that can be transferred to these fields, and an aggressive job search will favor those willing to retrain for entry into these fields.

In addition to providing workers with career assessment results, employers may also provide workers with access to set-aside computer resources so that they may search online for available jobs. Like the skills assessment itself, this valuable service is low cost. Some of the best known job search tools online include: [www.monster.com](http://www.monster.com); [www.careerbuilder.com](http://www.careerbuilder.com); and [www.jobsearch.com](http://www.jobsearch.com) (by state).

There are also, of course, web sites that guide the job seeker through specific job search methods. Employers could serve their laid-off employees by providing them with documented resources to look into for the search process. The AARP web site, for example, offers a number of resources including a "Work Search" page to its members.

There are federal resources that may apply to certain employees when they are laid off including:

- U.S. Trade Adjustment Assistance Program
- Alternative Trade Adjustment Assistance Program
- Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN)

There is also a federal program called WARN on which employers will want to keep up to date. WARN requires the employer to provide 60 days notice of layoff. Recently, a company in the Chicago area made headlines when the employees went on strike because the employer had not provided the required notification time.

Each state also has a "Dislocated Worker" Unit. In Pennsylvania, this unit is staffed by the Pennsylvania Department of Labor. (Laid-off workers should also be apprised of the federal COBRA law that provides for the continuation of medical insurance for a specified time. Presently, the employee is required to pay the premium, but the Obama Administration is working with Congress to pass legislation to cover this cost for a period of time.)

Many employers have working relationships with either direct or third-party providers of disability management

methods and materials. These specialized professionals may be enlisted to help craft the employer's assistance to laid-off workers.

There are two important reasons employers should carefully consider their policies in terms of downsizing. By aiding laid-off workers, management earns goodwill while boosting the company's reputation.

## Definition of Career Counseling

Career Counseling is a process in which a counselor and a counselee (client) are in collaborative relationship focused on identifying and actualizing the counselee's goals. To help the client achieve these goals, the counselor employs standardized techniques and processes.

Factors that play into the career development process include the counselee's preference and suitability. Detailed factors include the counselee's:

- abilities/disabilities
- values
- interests
- skills
- age
- world of work knowledge
- physical attributes
- aptitudes
- self-concept
- personality
- beliefs
- health

### ***Career Counseling: A Program Designed for Companies Downsizing Staff***

The economic slowdown of 2009 has required many employers to reduce their workforce. More individuals are seeking employment now than usual, and the competition for jobs is intense. **The success of the job search will depend on the skills of the job seeker in the job search process.**

Some employers are providing job search training to their laid-off workers. In this interest to serve their loyal employees, these employers are **searching for established and experienced counselors** to guide the process. Resources are too limited to invest in anything but experienced counselors with proven track records.

CEC is a company providing employers with both career assessment and counseling services. CEC has more than 25 years of direct, hands-on experience working with employers to provide quality staff training and job search services. CEC's career counselors are master's degree or terminal degree professionals and are certified and licensed. They have experience in assisting companies and individuals with career counseling and outplacement services.

The single most important aspect of job search is a quality career assessment. The findings of the assessment determine how the search will be structured. Not all assessments are equal, and it is important to fully understand the assessment process, to choose the appropriate instrument for a specific assessment, and to know how to use the results of the assessment to set job search goals and objectives.

Specifics of the job search in the CEC Career Counseling process include:

- interpreting and understanding assessment results
- setting measurable objectives for the search
- researching specific resources for the search
- creating a working list of potential employers with whom to apply
- preparing interviewing skills
- teaching self-directed job search
- creating modifiable résumés and cover letters
- soliciting meaningful references
- reviewing the success of the search to date and re-setting objectives on a regular basis.

While CEC supports and references such professional entities as the National Career Development Association and the National Counseling Association, CEC's experience is in working directly with individuals and employers for more than 27 years.

## Career Change Assessment

Career change assessment instruments are designed to measure where a person may be in the career decision-making process and provide insight into other factors that affect the career development process. The outcome of the "process" is a decision that the individual will make based on the results of the assessment.

As defined by CEC, the "career" will be the occupation/profession one will enter after attending either a college or a "trade" school or transferring required skills and abilities to alternative work. The assessment is designed to identify options that are most likely to match the interests, temperament, and especially the aptitudes of the individual being assessed.

The product of a career assessment by CEC will be a comprehensive, documented report that will identify the options for which the individual is best suited.

The "value" of an individualized assessment by a qualified and experienced career counselor is in **avoiding wasted time and money** from pursuing an inappropriate career path.

## A Simplified Decision-Making Model

There are a number of effective Decision-Making models ranging from the simple to the sophisticated. For the purpose of guiding a job search, a simple model will suffice. Although a simple model will do, it is critically important to apply decision making at several stages in the job search process.

1. Identify the decision to be made. Write down the specific decision you want to make. Carefully consider how you chose to define the decision.
2. Write down your personal attributes (i.e., skills, interests, strengths, weaknesses) that relate to the decision to be made. Do not forget to consider your passion. What about a particular career that arouses you?
3. Create a list of the options you can conjure up with respect to what the decision should be.

4. Research and compile information that relates to the decision you need to make.
5. Evaluate all the options you have listed and prioritize them.
6. Use the outcome to generate a course of action/plan.

## **Career Management: *A Survivor's Guide***

Sequential steps:

1. Determine a career to pursue.
2. Research the requisite background for that specific career.
3. Evaluate the potential (trends, societal needs, economic conditions, etc.) for the career field you are targeting.
4. Identify the requirements for entry into your career field and plan (in measurable objectives) to fulfill the requirements if they are not currently present (e.g., courses to take). Distinguish between short- and long-term objectives.
5. Review the personal traits essential to succeed in any work (e.g., resilience, self-efficacy, adaptability, flexibility). Research decision-making models and chose a model with which you feel comfortable.
6. Create and document a career plan including measurable steps to be taken.
7. Create a list of individuals who can (and will) help you to achieve your plan. The list will identify the specific assistance the individual can provide.
8. Identify individuals willing to provide supportive references. Provide them with some guidance (as needed) to provide a quality reference.
9. Research what an effective résumé looks like. Create a résumé.
10. Research what an effective cover letter looks like. Create a cover letter. The cover letter must be modifiable for each submission.
11. Create a list of potential employers and research what they do and who specifically to address the cover letter to, as well as their address and telephone number. Customize the cover letter and résumé. The start list should include at least 10 potential employers. Send out the cover letters.
12. In appropriate time, telephone the potential employer to discuss their situation. Try to make every contact worthwhile. Although there may not be a job with one prospective employer, try to encourage that employer to help you identify another employer that might use your skills. Create a network as you go forward.
13. Create another list of 10 potential employers and repeat.

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## Using Positive Psychology Resources in Career Counseling

**The Standard Approach:** Two basic tools of Career Counseling are Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA) and Person-Environment-Correspondence (PEC).

TWA posits that there are two major aspects in terms of the "fit" between the workers' needs/values and his/her skills matched to the requirements of a specific job. TWA defines the first of these as "satisfaction," and the second as "satisfactoriness."

Satisfaction is the first critical aspect of work adjustment. It refers to the degree that the worker feels satisfied by his/her job. Satisfactoriness, on the other hand, relates to the worker's performance in a given job and whether or not the performance meets the expectations of the employer. In reality, satisfactoriness is pre-requisite to whether the worker can achieve satisfaction from the job.

The PEC theory is based on the fact that each individual brings both unique abilities and unique needs to a given work environment, and the combination of these abilities and needs must represent a "correspondence" between the individual and the job. The requirements of the job are defined as an "objective fit," and the relationship of the worker to the job is defined as the "subjective fit." The objective fit determines whether the worker has the ability to do the job and the subjective fit determines whether employee's perception of what the job entails is accurate and satisfying.

### Positive Psychology: A New Approach to Career Fit

Positive Psychology, an advance in psychology, holds the potential to enhance the measurement of an individual's work adjustment and environmental fit. Vocational match and long-term happiness in work may very well be discoverable through the worker's appreciation of his or her strengths and virtues and finding ways to satisfy those "values in action" (VIA) through employment.

Building on the core concepts of TWA and PEC, Positive Psychology can further these traditional tools and serve as the critical underpinning for a new approach to career counseling. Positive Psychology relies on identifying the "strengths" an individual possesses. To do this, Martin Seligman and Christopher Peterson, two pioneers of Positive Psychology, have developed a series of inventories, including the pivotal "VIA Signature Strengths Questionnaire."

In summary, achieving a positive outlook on life is dependent on how many of and how well one has assimilated his or her strengths into daily living, including work. The VIA Signature Strengths Questionnaire can be accessed by visiting the Positive Psychology website (<http://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu/Default.aspx>).

## Keep Your Job: A 10-Point Survival Guide

On January 7, 2009, Anne Fisher, a senior writer for *Fortune* magazine, published a 10-point survival guide for employees looking to hold onto their jobs. Fisher does a regular feature in *Fortune* magazine called "Ask Annie."

In response to questions on the uncertainty of continued employment in a down economy, Annie (Fisher) cites the advice of Deb Bright, an executive coach ([www.drbright.com](http://www.drbright.com)) who is counseling Wall Streeters concerned for their futures. Bright wrote: "The key to weathering a crisis like this is, first, to understand what you can control and what you can't." She then goes on to suggest 10 steps employees should consider taking.

1. **Create successes for yourself:** "When there's a lot of negativity around, you need to find ways to feel successful."
2. **Set 30-day and 60-day goals:** "Your boss needs to know what his department is accomplishing..."
3. **Watch your attitude:** "A pessimistic, bleak attitude makes it hard for people to work with you."
4. **Keep your network active:** "People always talk about networking, but they don't do it."
5. **Update your skills:** "Take a class, read a book, keep up with trade publications."
6. **Make sure your work serves the larger goals of the organization:** "Take on as many responsibilities as you can, especially the tasks no one else wants."
7. **For now, forget about work-life balance:** "Having time for outside interests has to go right out of the window now."
8. **Take a hard look at your finances:** "Do you have the resources to coast through a seven- or eight-month (or longer) job hunt? If not, it's time to put yourself on a budget and stick to it."
9. **Never badmouth anyone:** "If you can't be positive toward someone at work, be neutral."
10. **Remember, in the knowledge economy, you are the product:** "So take care of yourself. Get enough sleep, eat right, and take time to work out a few times a week."

## Background Information for Parents Assisting High School Students to Plan a Post-Secondary

# Career Provided by CEC Career Assessment Center

CEC is a professional organization located in Valley Forge Pennsylvania. Esther V. Weiss, the principal career counselor in the company, is a licensed professional counselor with more than 27 years of experience in vocational counseling. The following ideas were developed for parents requesting more information about the **Career Assessment** process.

1. Start a dialogue with your teenager about his/her post-secondary plans early in his/her junior year. The dialogue should continue on a regular basis over the next two years but should not be cajoling. Each new introduction to the ongoing conversation should be based on new information that you are providing.
2. The best source of information will be the internet.
3. It is not a bad thing if your teenager does not know what he/she wants to do after high school. That leaves all the options open for exploration.
4. Sometime during his/her junior year recommend that the teenager take an "interest inventory." There are basically two kinds of tests: an interest inventory and a **career assessment**. A difference in these two kinds of tests is critically important. The interest inventory is a way to explore **informally** possible fields of interest, but it is **not** a quality, validated test like the career assessment. The teenager can most likely obtain an interest inventory in school from the guidance counselor. If your teenager does not approach the counselor on his/her own for the inventory, contact the counselor yourself via email. If email is not possible, call the counselor and request an interview or a recommendation on how to find an inventory. There are a number of free interest inventories on the internet. Remember, the inventory may be a general guide, but it should not be interpreted as a definitive, final answer or as meaningful as the **career assessment**.
5. Discuss the results of the inventory with your teenager. Discussion should be centered on how he/she feels about the findings. Reinforce the idea that the inventory is just a general indicator, not a set-in-stone direction.
6. Interest inventories are general in nature. To provide more useful information in terms of the teenager's **suitability** for a specific career, you will want your son/daughter to have a **career assessment**. The career assessment is designed to focus on the **aptitude and temperament** of the student. The most widely used and most highly regarded career assessment is the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB). The difficulty is that the ASVAB is not generally available outside of the armed services or as administered in some high schools. However, there are some other sources for a comparable, high quality career assessment. **The important things in choosing a quality career assessment are the qualifications and the experience of the professional offering the assessment.**
7. As with any proprietary SAT preparation or tutorial program, there is a cost associated with the career assessment. Since only qualified and experienced professionals are in a position to offer them, and since they represent a greater investment of time than the interest inventory, they will be more expensive than the (usually free) inventory.
8. Using the results of the career assessment, search for information. Use the internet as the primary source of information. You can find such things as what duties the trained/educated professional performs for a given job, average starting salaries for that job, how difficult it may be to get a job in this field after post-

secondary education, etc. Information like this should be parceled out to your teenager over time. Inundating her/him with too much information at one time will not be as productive as a continuous flow of materials.

9. **The product of a career assessment is a comprehensive, documented report that will serve as a road map for the post-secondary journey.** The professional counselor should also continue to be available for questions and support after the report.
10. Encourage your teenager to consider a number of schools. For many teenagers, a career in some professional "trade" may be more appropriate than college. The career assessment is as essential for identifying an appropriate professional trade as it is for an appropriate college major. When you have the results of a career assessment for guidance, you have another line to pursue in terms of research: finding schools/colleges that offer programs to meet the best course of action as identified in the career assessment. It is critically important that you base the search for an appropriate school/college on the results of the career assessment. Choosing a school/college before knowing the results of a career assessment is generally unproductive, wasteful, and expensive.
11. On the basis of the decisions you and your teenager have made from the results of the career assessment, draw up a short list of schools/colleges to attend. Then visit with each of these before making a decision. Do not rule out private schools/colleges because they cost more. Most of these institutions have scholarship programs that can make the cost competitive with public institutions.

To discuss the options for your son or daughter, call Esther at (800) 246-9767, or email her at [Esther@cecassoc.com](mailto:Esther@cecassoc.com).

## **In Conclusion of Our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

In celebration of 25 years, we identified two causes very dear to our hearts: the needs of our troops serving overseas and the maintenance of our precious environment. In the first quarter of the year, we started collecting empty inkjet cartridges for Give2TheTroops, a non-profit organization to help defray the postage costs for care packages they ship to the troops. During our anniversary year, we collected over 150 cartridges. We will continue to collect cartridges while Give2TheTroops requests them. We also sent letters and postcards to the troops through Give2TheTroops.

**In June 2008, we compiled a CD of global environmental issues. The CD promotes** awareness of global environmental issues, including global warming, pollution, and water conservation. In another effort to help the environment, we planted 100 trees to improve air quality and for beautification during the fall of 2008.

During the holiday season, we focused our efforts to bring a bit of home to the troops overseas. We supplied care packages to 26 "Narmy" soldiers stationed in Iraq. Personal hygiene items, magazines and books, homemade cookies, as well as cards from students and girl scouts were among the treats sent to the soldiers.

As our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary comes to a close in March, we would like to take a moment to acknowledge those of you who are instrumental to our vitality. We wish to express our profound gratitude to our loyal clients and to pledge that we will continue to work hard to maintain your trust and support. Our sincerest thank you for your business and friendship.

*Gratefully yours,*

*Jasen Walker, Esther Weiss, and the staff of CEC Associates*

### **Online CEU Program Through CEC's Web site**

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CEC's online program to earn CEU's for CRC, CCM, and CDMS certification is in its seventh year. To earn CEUs, individuals read articles created by CEC and answer 10 questions for each article.

There are a total of 30 articles that have been approved for different focus areas for each of the relevant commissions. The articles are currently divided into seven series and each series is worth 10 credit hours. In addition, 16 of these current credits have been approved as Ethics credits.

The convenience of the online program continues to attract more subscribers each year. A number of larger rehabilitation companies/entities have made special arrangements with CEC for discounts for their employees who participate.

For more information about how the online program works, call Dina at (800) 246-9767 or visit our Web site:

<http://www.cecassoc.com/credits.htm>