

TOP TEN CAREER COUNSELING QUESTIONS

By Peter Manzi

Everybody has heard of “Top Ten” lists – top ten favorite songs, top ten CDs, top ten movies, top ten money earners, top ten best and worst dressed celebrities, etc. This led me to wonder: what are some of the “Top Ten” questions clients ask of career counselors?

Having such a list can help counselors to better prepare and improve the services we provide. To come up with this list, I contacted several colleagues in the National Career Development Association (www.ncda.org), the premier organization for career counseling practice, including two members of the California Career Development Association (www.ccca-careerdev.org), a state division of NCDA.

As a result of our collaboration, we ultimately came up with not one but three lists of questions career counselors are typically asked by clients.

The answers can be placed into two categories: 1) questions about counseling process, (the “nuts and bolts of Career Counseling”) such as what will happen in counseling, informed consent, fees/contracts, counseling techniques, tools, number of sessions, outcomes; and 2) questions specific to a client’s situation (“self in career questions”), including career information, guidance, feedback, job search techniques, or other career needs and goals. It is harder to come up with a top ten list of these questions because every client’s situation is unique.

Nuts and Bolts of Career Counseling

- 1) What qualifications and experience do you have as a career counselor in general, and with someone in my situation?
- 2) Are you licensed, certified (e.g., NCC, CRC) or have special memberships in career development and counseling organizations like NCDA?

3) What kinds of services do you provide (counseling, testing, program and college choice, follow-up phone calls/ e-mails, and Internet use)?

And of course a few specific examples from real clients:

4) Can you find or get me a job?

5) How much will it cost, and do you give discounts or lower rates to students, seniors, or unemployed people?

6) What tests and resources do you use to help people?

7) What if I am not satisfied with the results of our work?

8) Can I contact former clients to ask them about your work?

9) How is the Internet used in your work?

10) Do you help people with personal and family problems, too?

Self in Career Questions

According to Rita Horn, (NCC, NCCC, MCC and CDFI, a California Registered Professional Counselor, and leader in the California Career Development Association), some of the next group of questions are of a tactical nature (T list -- reflecting the person who has clear goals and objectives but wants help implementing them), while others are more global, open-ended and strategy oriented (G list- reflecting greater uncertainty about career goals).

The following questions have been compiled with the help of Horn, Linda Warren, a fellow CCDA **leader** and career counselor, Linda Ginac, a counselor and career consultant in Austin, Texas, Dr. Marie S. Hammond, an assistant professor at Tennessee State University, and Dr. Janet Lenz, the president-elect of NCDA, and from some of my own **20-year** experience as a career counselor.

The T List

- 1) How much money can a person with my degree and experience expect to earn in _____ field or career?
- 2) How will the people hiring for the job (I applied for) look at someone of my age and background?
- 3) How can I find out if this is the right college, graduate school or program for me?
- 4) How do I handle gaps in my resume (termination, lay offs, incarceration, rehabilitation)?
- 5) I get regular interviews but only a few offers- How can you help me?
- 6) I am afraid I may get fired... I have had two bad evaluations in two years.
- 7) Can you help improve my resume and cover letter?
- 8) Can you help me identify more job leads or contacts for getting hired?
- 9) I am experiencing a lot of stress at work. I wake early, am edgy and restless, and I'm exhausted by the end of the day.
- 10) I need to declare my major next week—what classes should I register for?

The G List

- 1) What are some of the top fields, careers, or hot jobs right now?
- 2) What fields have the most security? I've been laid off several times.
- 3) I need to make a change. I'm burned out and have wanted to go into a different field for a while...
- 4) What grants, loans and scholarships are available to me?
- 5) What kinds of job will this degree prepare me for?
- 6) I got injured in one job and can't do that anymore? What else can I do?
- 7) The money is good, but I dislike my job a lot. What options do I have?
- 8) I am running out of money and I need to find work soon.
- 9) I am good at a lot of things, so how do I choose one field over another?
- 10) What tests do you give to tell me what I am good at?

Find the answers...

Rather than answering many of these questions directly, a career counselor will show clients how to obtain and use the information or resources available to find their own

answers like accessing labor market and salary sources, web sites for colleges and graduate schools, or organizing a job search or career transition plan.

Counselors often help to construct, clarify and realize a client's career plan, dream or goals. Getting background information about a client's career situation -- the whole picture, inclusive of lifestyle, leisure, family roles and influence, history, and a sense of the future -- is an important function of career counselors.

As a career counselor, I have always liked the variety of questions and situations clients present. And although plans and goals are often set and implemented in counseling, there is always an element of the unpredictable or "happenstance," as Dr. John Krumboltz of Stanford University called it, which makes the counselor and client change gears and activities.

Changing gears and a happy outcome...

One of my clients, a Latino male in his early 30's, initially planned to be an elementary school teacher, but after student teaching, decided he did not want to be a teacher. He felt the classroom needed too much structure and regulation and had too much repetition. He needed to explore other options.

We explored switching to secondary teaching, and work as a corporate trainer. He had prior experience as a salesperson in a high end clothing store. I gave him an interest inventory which showed strong sales, management, social, and enterprising interests. We used a booklet that listed occupations that fit his Holland code (three highest scores on six career types). A separate personality assessment also supported sales and marketing positions in office and finance settings.

He networked with people with knowledge of sales and trainer openings. He got a lead from a friend, a successful bank manager, about a student loan sales position which he ultimately accepted after discussing it with his wife, parents and godfather. The client opined that his wife (a content chemist) and he were about to buy their first house, and wryly added, "We'll have our own kids to teach and play with, soon enough!"

