

Changing Careers: Personal Reflections and Guidance from a Career Counselor

By Eileen Dey, M.A.

What do you do when going to work no longer has any meaning for you?, when you realize that you are not living your life's purpose? As a woman who has worked for the last 10 years as a crisis and career counselor, as well as having gone through my own career change, I feel qualified and experienced to give some suggestions that can make this period of transition much easier and insightful for you.

Like many people who invested much of my time and finances going to college, I found out that I had never really taken time to truly research, let alone experience the careers my degree was training me for. There were and are career services on most if not all college campuses(2 and 4 year). As an undergraduate, however, I never knew this. Not until I went back to graduate school did I explore such services and actually interned at the career center in my school. Although the experience of graduate school can prepare you for your career, you still may find, as I did, that only experience and time in the field will begin to make you into a true 'professional'. In my case, I had felt in going through my graduate program that there were many parts of the counseling session that were not being addressed-I got a feeling then that it was what you didn't see or hear from a client that would end up telling you the most about them. I later learned this is what is called subtle energy or 'chi'. After graduation, however, I realized that most employers did not believe in paying attention to client's 'chi'. I worked first as a counselor in a domestic violence shelter, a center that sought employment for the mentally disabled and then worked in three different career counseling centers, one in academia, one a non-profit, and the other, within an infamous airplane manufacturer. As I counseled each client, I began to realize, what I had thought in school. I couldn't ignore the fact that there was much more going on in the session than the dialogue we were exchanging. I began to 'sense' problems lurking behind polite smiles. Sometimes I even saw what I later learned were energy fields around them, which would fluctuate in color depending on the client's mood. I asked my colleagues if they experienced such phenomenon. Most thought I was working too many hours and needed better boundaries. Like others who feel constrained by their job title, I was determined to learn more about what I was experiencing, even if it meant going beyond the realm of my profession. I began studying practices such as Polarity Therapy, Reiki and Therapeutic Touch to explore the other levels of reality I kept encountering in my sessions. As I studied these therapies, I

began to realize that although I was helping people as a counselor, I wasn't truly able to offer them all the alternatives I felt would have made their session more therapeutic. With little support from employers or colleagues, I didn't see how I could combine my new knowledge with the traditional counseling I was doing. Did I even want to continue doing that? In career counseling, we often administer personality and interest inventory tests to determine people's strengths and abilities. When I would take them myself, I always came up scoring high for counseling and educator. That made sense. As a counselor, I was always educating my clients on techniques they could use to enhance their resume, or to successfully go on an interview, etc. I had the information I needed about myself but no concrete plan of how to implement it. It seemed I was doing what I was 'born' to do. For months I questioned what I should do. Should I leave the profession I was trained for? It seemed as if I had barely gotten started. After several years and seeing hundreds of clients, many of whom seemed to be finding their own way toward manifesting the kind of life they wanted, I sank into a bit of depression. When I tried to rationalize what was occurring, I thought maybe it was the job setting that prevented me from staying with any organization beyond one year. Gradually I realized it had more to do with the kind of work I was doing than the environment in which I was in. One day, practicing techniques I had learned from a self-help workshop, I surrendered to my higher power and amazingly, the answer to what I needed to do just clicked. A colleague said to me, why don't you take some time off and spend some time with yourself, it will do you good. Somehow, I got the courage up to ask my employers and just as I had seen so many of my clients do, I took the risk of a sabbatical to re-evaluate where I was going. This step proved to be invaluable. I took two months off and went on a women's retreat, coming back with a renewed sense of myself. I signed up for an Artist's Way group and gradually opened up to my creativity after years of watching others express their own. I journaled daily. I attended support groups through the Centerpoint Institute in Seattle to help me clarify where I had been and what I wanted to envision in my future. I recorded my dreams and during the sabbatical I painted anything I could get my hands on. I was becoming surrounded by my true self. As I had always been interested in holistic health, I began to reconnect with Reiki and other energywork practitioners. I decided I wanted my own Reiki practice. I wanted to be able to give workshops on holistic health and the personal growth techniques I had learned and experienced. Coming back from the retreat, I had a vision of my business: Crystal Sky Studios, where not only could Reiki be given and taught, but workshops on other energy modalities and methods for achieving personal growth could

be held. I let my imagination loose and began to brainstorm. The more I was in touch with my own Self, the more I realized it would almost be impossible for me to return full time to a job description thought up by other individuals. That was over a year ago. After taking that initial risk of leaving my full-time job, I have come full circle in creating my own teaching and healing practice.

So, you feel you resonate with this story. You have some idea of what you want to do but no “clear” vision of what you see yourself doing. The first place to start may be taking some time off and NOT filling it up with chores and errands. Go out to a park or go on a structured retreat. During this time, having a coach, counselor or a mentor can aid in assisting you along the path. Many clients have asked me why talking to their relatives or colleagues about their issues doesn’t work as well as that of talking with a counselor. My feelings and experiences are that although family members and friends can mean well in offering their advice, they have also gotten used to you being stuck in your situation, might be afraid of what your changes would mean to them and will suggest less risky alternatives for you. Making any kind of change involves taking a risk, and for some people, this might mean that when they leave their job they also need to leave their relationship, because both were defined by the job in the first place. Career/life transition organizations such as the Centerpoint Institute in Seattle can help in offering this structure.

I have also found the following career related books to be of great value helping you get started in looking at what dreams you have (or once had) for a future/life you want to create: [What Color is My Parachute](#) by Richard Nelson Bolles, [The Road Less Traveled](#) by M. Scott Peck, [Wishcraft](#) by [Barbara Sher](#) or [Creating the Work You Love](#) by Rick Jarow. If you require more training to enter the profession of your choice, your career counselor can offer local resources for education (including the abundance of distance learning opportunities now available at many colleges).

Perhaps it is your own business you wish to begin. The SBA (Small Business Association) and Women’s SBA all offer low cost classes and provide mentors to help guide you along in the creation of your business. Having a support group to encourage you in a career transition is important as you develop your business. The Women’s Business Network is also a wonderful resource for meetings, support groups and other professionals that can help you in building your dream.

Finally, some individuals find going through such changes quite stressful. Receiving bodywork, such as massage or Reiki can help aid in releasing blocks that are preventing you

from creating the life you want to lead. Practices such as yoga, meditation or the martial arts can also help alleviate stress and give you focus and concentration for your next direction. The Seattle Holistic Center offers a comprehensive schedule of these practices and bodywork options.

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