

How to Forge Your Career Path

A Free One-day Workshop on career planning and discovery for Dispute Resolution students and alumni

Presented by Dr. Robert Barner

Saturday, February 22nd, 2014 8:30am - 4pm Building 3, Room 128
LIMITED TO THE FIRST 20 RSVP's

About the Workshop

This comprehensive one-day workshop is designed to help you establish greater clarity regarding your career values, skills and goals, and to take the first steps in translating them into viable action plans. The workshop will be helpful to those of you who are just starting out in a professional career, as well as those who are making significant mid-career transitions. The focus for this particular event is on long-term career planning. It will not attempt to cover the areas of job search, job interviewing, or resume writing.

Cautionary Note: It is important to understand that this is a **WORKING** session. **To get full value from the workshop you will need to commit to reading the required texts and to complete all recommended pre-workshop activities.** This will involve a personal commitment of about 20- 40 hours over the next several weeks. The attached sheet provides detailed instructions regarding the required readings, and how to complete the pre-workshop activities. Given that we will be limiting this workshop to 20 students, we would ask that you not sign up for it unless you are willing to make a firm commitment to complete the readings and pre-work.

The pre-work guide is below, please review it prior to your RSVP.

About the Presenter

Dr. Barner is a full-time faculty member within SMU's Graduate Program in Dispute Resolution. He holds a PhD in Organizational Psychology and Master's degrees in both Organizational Psychology and Counseling Psychology. He is the author of seven books that have been translated into several languages, as well as over 50 articles on the topics of career development, team building, and talent management. He has also presented on the topic of career development at several international conferences. Prior to joining SMU, Dr. Barner held executive level positions in the areas of leadership and management development, where his duties included executive coaching, career development, and the assessment and development of high-potential leaders.

RSVP to disputeresolution@smu.edu if you plan to attend.

A Pre-Work Self-Study Guide for the Workshop

How to Forge Your Career Path

By Dr. Robert Barner

Introduction

Welcome to the pre-workshop self-study outline that I have prepared for your upcoming career planning seminar! Over the next few pages I would like to introduce you to the workshop, and explain how what you can do over the next few weeks to get the greatest value from this seminar.

As a starting point, let me explain why I have volunteered to present this workshop. Over the last few years many DR students have approached me seeking one-on-one guidance in planning their careers. Unfortunately, these kinds of informal, brief discussions don't go far enough in helping professionals address important questions regarding their careers. This is particularly true if the career planner hasn't had a chance to reflect on key career planning questions, weigh their responses to those questions, and consider the relative tradeoffs involved in making certain career decisions.

For all of these reasons it is important for you to take the time to read the following materials, complete the recommended exercises, and be prepared to build on this information during the seminar. My best guess is that will require you to invest up to 40 hours of pre-work in total. If that sounds like a lot of time, consider the thousands of hours that you are investing in getting your graduate degree, and the huge potential payoffs involved in being able to target in on a career area that provides a higher degree of satisfaction and meaning. With that said, here are the three steps you need to take before you come to the workshop:

Step 1: Complete the Readings

You need to purchase two paperback books. The first is *The Power of Story* by Jim Loehr, and the second is *What Color is Your Parachute?* (2012 edition) by Richard N. Bolles. You might also find it helpful to

purchase *The Quick Job Hunting Map*, a workshop guide that goes with the second text. I would recommend that you purchase hard copy editions of all resources rather than Kindle or ibooks versions, since both books provide forms and graphics for completing the exercises.

Step 2: Select a Career Coaching Partner

During the session I will sometimes ask you to pair up with another participant, to discuss some of the exercises that you have completed. There are three major benefits from working with a coaching partner.

First, working with a partner forces you to more clearly frame your ideas and detail your plans. What I have found in conducting career workshops is that requiring individuals talk aloud about their career priorities and goals, and respond to questions from their partners, encourages them to think more deeply about the underlying issues and values that drive their career decisions.

Second, you and your partner may decide to continue the progress that you've made in the workshop on your own, once the workshop is over. The reason why this is important is that career goals and plans are often refined, elaborated, and tested through these repeated discussions.

Finally, if you are interested in entering the field of executive coaching, working with a coaching partner is one way to build some of the skills related to the area of career counseling/coaching.

This peer coaching process works best when your partner is someone whom you trust, and with whom you feel free disclosing personal information about yourself. In addition, if you have put a lot of work into your career plan you will probably want to make sure that you are partnered with someone who is willing to put in the same level of work and commitment. Working a partner who takes the process seriously will make your discussions a lot more meaningful. For these reasons, you might find it helpful to ask other students if they are planning to attend this workshop, then reach out to a participant whom you feel would make a great coaching partner. As an option, during the first few minutes of the seminar you will have an opportunity to select a coaching partner, although my guess is that by this point many participants will already be paired up.

Step 3: Complete the Following Assignments

I recommend that you order the reading materials the day that you register for the workshop. My reason for suggesting this is that these aren't assignments that can be completed at the last minute, with little forethought. They work best when you give yourself the opportunity to read a chapter or two from one of the texts, engage in some serious reflection regarding the questions posed by the author, and then complete the suggested exercises. If you do this in small chunks and provide sufficient 'soak time' between the assignments, you will get much more out of the process.

Exercises Based on the book, *The Power of Story*

Begin with this book. The author, Jim Loehr, is a corporate consultant who has been widely published in business and professional journals. The basic premise behind his book is that we are always actively engaged in constructing the stories that comprise our lives. Those narratives that we construct provide us with meaningful context for defining who we are as people, what we say that we want out of our lives, and the choices that we make in forging our personal/professional life paths. These stories are not merely after-the-fact descriptions of past and current events and decisions. Instead, they provide frameworks for constructing personal meaning from our lives and for envisioning potential futures for ourselves.

Loehr suggests that these stories tend to center around five major themes; these are the stories that you construct around work, family, health, happiness, and relationships. A couple of thoughts here:

- Some of these stories work for us, while others do not.
- Quite often the stories that we tell ourselves are inconsistent with how we actually live our lives; that is, where we actually focus our time, energy, and passion. An example would be the person who says, "Maintaining my health is a critically important personal value", but who then doesn't take the time or effort to exercise or eat properly.
- We seldom take these stories out for careful examination. They tend to take the form of fuzzy and implicit beliefs and feelings rather than well articulated and detailed narratives.
- Success means actively engaging in clearly crafting the *new stories* that we want to construct for ourselves.

These concepts may sound a bit abstract but I believe that they lie at the heart of career planning. In his book, Loehr provides many examples of “successful” senior-level executives and business owners who, once they engage in the process of examining their personal story construction, come to the realization that they are not making decisions or taking actions that are congruent with both their core personal values and career needs.

In *The Power of Story* Loehr will introduce you to the concept of story construction, ask you to complete several exercises that ask you to examine the old stories under which you have been operating, and forge new stories that represent your ideal future life. I am asking you to read the entire book and complete all of the exercises in it.

The entire process comes together in Chapter 12, which is entitled *Storyboarding the Transformation Process in Eight Steps*. If you complete this process correctly and put a lot of thought into it you should arrive at writing a “new story” – one that conveys the essence of what it is that you want from your career. You will also arrive at how this story pertains to your broader life story that you are constructing for yourself. If these seems self-evident I can assure you that many times this doesn’t happen. I’ve worked with many professionals who, when asked to describe their career goals, speak in terms of simple external marker points: “to have a corner office”, “to become vice president in a Fortune 500 HR department by the time that I am 35”, or “to create my own successful counseling/DR practice.” The work that you will be doing through this text asks you to dig a lot deeper, by asking yourself what it is about a given career that would be rewarding and meaningful to you, and which would be supportive of other areas of your life such as achieving work/life balance and maintaining strong personal relationships.

Exercises Based on the book, *What Color is Your Parachute?*

Upon completing *The Power of Story* you won’t yet have created a detailed a career path, although you will have an excellent starting point for beginning this process. To go further I will be asking you to read the book *What Color is Your Parachute?* Bolles’ text is considered to be the most widely used book on self-directed career planning. It has been in print (revised each year) for the past 40 years, and over 10 million copies have been distributed.

I am asking you to read chapters 11 – 13 and complete all related exercises. For those of you who are also engaging in a job search will find chapters 6 -9 very useful, although these chapters won't be covered in the workshop. Chapter 10, which is optional, provides suggestions for those of you who may be considering starting up your own business.

Chapter 13, the most important chapter in the book, is built around the use of a career self-inventory called The Flower Exercise. This exercise provides a very valuable framework for helping you identify the key factors that you want to fold into your career, as well as those *functional* and *organizational contexts* that are most supportive to the application of your *transferable work skills*. These elements come together in the career graphic (the flower) shown on pp 194-195, and are modeled in the example provided on page 196. (The *Quick Job Hunting Guide* provides additional instructions for completing this exercise, as well as larger worksheets.) This chapter also includes a number of other useful tools, including the *Transferable Skills Inventory* shown on pages 241-244. (Once again, this tool is expanded in the *Guide*). Once you have completed the exercises in this chapter it would be helpful for you to compare what you have written to the exercises you wrote down earlier from *The Power of Story*. In doing so look for common career themes that emerge from both sets of exercises.

Before closing let me provide a cautionary note regarding the appendix. *Appendix A, Finding Your Mission in Life*, is based in part on the author's personal religious beliefs. Feel free to read this on your own, but this section won't be covered in the workshop. *Appendix C, A Guide to Choosing a Career Coach or Counselor*, may be helpful to those who have an interest in working within the fields of career counseling or executive coaching.

That's about it. If you have any questions feel free to drop me an email. Looking forward to working with you in the seminar!

Dr. B