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Advancing
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Career Work in Action

Discussions and Activities for
Professionals

KAREN SCHAFFER & JULIANA WIENS

UNEMPLOYED LONG TERM



Based on CERIC's Guiding Principles of Career Development

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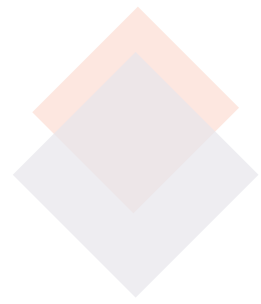
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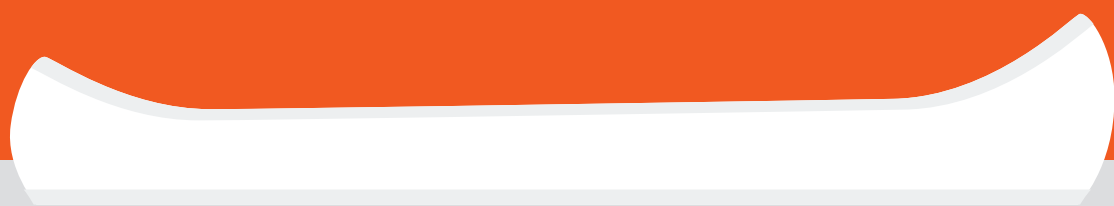


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Introduction: Where we are starting from?



■ Purpose

The purpose of this action plan is to provide you - the professional - with insights and ideas for working with your clients that align with the CERIC Guiding Principles of Career Development. We begin by painting a picture of clients who are unemployed long term (and looking for work) that speaks to how they are situated within the Guiding Principles, and we then suggest discussion questions and activities that professionals can use when providing career support to this particular population. We have grouped these questions and activities according to 5 five key areas of career work, and we anticipate that professionals will draw upon all of these different areas based on client need, and according to the Organic Career Support Framework that we present and define in the *How do we help?* section.

■ Definitions

Throughout this document, we use the term **professionals** to refer to the action plan's intended recipients because we recognize that individuals from a wide range of occupations - both inside and outside of the career development field - may provide career-related support to those with whom they work. You will notice as well that we define the demographic group in question - clients who are unemployed long term and looking for work - very precisely. Our intention is not to exclude anyone, but rather, to provide specific enough parameters to allow for meaningful discussion. We recognize that lives and circumstances vary widely, and that not all unemployed individuals will identify with the themes and ideas that we discuss. We also recognize that some of the discussions and activities described below could apply to individuals who do not fit within our identified parameters.

“

“This work is not standardized and cannot be scripted.”

“

“Working effectively with clients means recognizing that career is lifelong and complex.”

■ Philosophy

As authors, we adhere to certain philosophies in our work that stem from our professional identities as Career Counsellors, and our experiences of working with a range of populations. We believe in the importance of locating ourselves, and for that reason, we identify as white, middle class, and raised in a colonial system. We emphasize that other worldviews, cultures, and social locations are equally valid, and that each professional has a responsibility to understand how their own location impacts their practice.

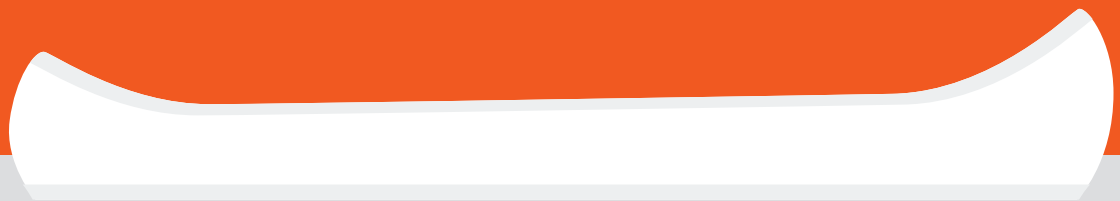
Most importantly, we believe that while recognized best practices do exist within the career development field, this work is not standardized and cannot be scripted. Each client is different, and working effectively with clients means recognizing that career is lifelong and complex. Navigating career work requires knowledge, empathy, patience, compassion, intuition, cultural competence, and the effective use of theories and frameworks. We invite you to engage with this action plan as it works for you and for the client in front of you.

“

“Navigating career work requires knowledge, empathy, patience, compassion, intuition, cultural competence, and the effective use of theories and frameworks.”



**The Guiding
Principles:**
Situating
Unemployed Long
Term within the
principles of career
development



Who's in Front of You?

Unemployed Long Term

Mature adults with previous work experience, who have been unemployed for one year or more, and who want to work. Unemployment could result from struggles with personal or family illness, time spent out of the paid workforce caring for children, and/or a prolonged, unsuccessful job search. These individuals experience a disconnect from work, and are often anxious about working or about the steps involved in finding employment. In most cases, the length of time an individual spends job searching is a key factor in determining their level of discouragement.

Before getting to the action, let's look at how the experiences of those who are unemployed long term line up with each of the Guiding Principles...

**For a full version of
the Guiding Principles
infographic, see
Appendix D.**

CAREER DEVELOPMENT...



IS A LIFELONG PROCESS OF BLENDING AND MANAGING PAID AND UNPAID ACTIVITIES: LEARNING (EDUCATION), WORK (EMPLOYMENT, ENTREPRENEURSHIP), VOLUNTEERISM AND LEISURE TIME.

For the long-term unemployed, the job search is always the primary focus, even when it's not taking place. Members of this group often feel guilty about spending time on activities that don't lead to finding work, even though these activities could function as confidence boosters, or possibly fill in a gap on a resume (e.g. renovating a house). The constant presence/pressure of the job search makes self-care more difficult. Education and leisure activities may help people feel positive and connected, but they also cost money, which can be a problem given the financial constraints of unemployment. Some individuals are able to maintain side businesses, which can help with both income and overall well-being. Volunteering can also potentially enhance feelings of well-being and connectedness.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT...

ENTAILS DETERMINING INTERESTS, BELIEFS, VALUES, SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES – AND CONNECTING THOSE WITH MARKET NEEDS.



The self-exploration aspect of career development can be both positive and negative for those who have been unemployed long term. Individuals returning to work after a voluntary employment gap often relish this part of the process, especially when it's part of a greater identity shift (i.e. remembering the “work self” or figuring out a new work identity). The challenge for these particular individuals, however, often lies in transitioning from self-exploration into job search, which can feel exponentially more risky.

Those who've been job searching for awhile and/or who possess a high level of self-awareness may grow frustrated with professionals who push them toward self-exploration. (“I already know about myself. I just need a job. We're wasting time.”) Unemployment can erode confidence, so part of this frustration can stem from fear and self-doubt. These individuals may feel as though they can no longer trust their own abilities, or in turn, the process of self-exploration.

Depending on their fields, some long-term unemployed job seekers may have out-of-date skills for the roles they've held previously. Barriers such as new technology and new certification/education requirements can cause them to feel “out of date.” While self-exploration may prove helpful in restoring focus and building confidence, additional interventions may be required to address these external barriers.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT...



SHOULD BE SELF-DIRECTED;
AN INDIVIDUAL IS RESPONSIBLE FOR
HIS OR HER OWN CAREER, BUT IS
NOT ALONE – WE ALL INFLUENCE
AND ARE INFLUENCED BY OUR
ENVIRONMENT.

Individuals who've been unemployed for a significant length of time are vulnerable to internalizing labour market realities as personal failures. If professionals place too much emphasis on personal responsibility, these individuals can reach a point where they blame themselves entirely for not finding work, when in reality they may be facing structural barriers to employment. Long-term job searching eats away at self-confidence and in turn impedes self-directed behavior. It's important to remember that being self-directed stems from feeling positive and confident, and that unemployment can harm this positive connection.

Society as a whole does not provide a lot of support for people who are unemployed, over and above government and non-profit programs that serve mainly those who meet specific, funding-driven criteria. In some cases, the longer someone is unemployed, the more uncomfortable things become for everyone around them, and the support moves further and further away. An unemployed individual can become unmoored from the structures and practices that keep them healthy and happy, such as seeing people regularly and feeling as though they have new things to talk about. For some, extended unemployment can lead to anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, and other severe psychological reactions, which can further hinder self-direction.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT...



IS OFTEN SUPPORTED AND SHAPED BY EDUCATORS, FAMILY, PEERS, MANAGERS AND THE GREATER COMMUNITY.

Support is a key ingredient of success, but maintaining a sustainable support network through a longer period of unemployment can feel challenging. Some job seekers may worry about overburdening their sources of support, while others may experience feelings of disconnect from the people around them. Additionally, long term job seekers are also vulnerable to the well-meaning suggestions of friends, family, and colleagues, and may start down career paths or apply to jobs that aren't a good fit based on these suggestions.

If an unemployed person is the main breadwinner of their family, the pressure to find a job becomes intense, and they can internalize their lack of a job as a personal failure. This pattern amplifies for men if they see themselves in a more traditional gender role of "provider" but lack a wider support network. Overall, despite family being a source of emotional support, long term unemployment can put a strain on personal relationships, particularly if family members don't understand the employment issues involved.

On a positive note, if long term job seekers are able to connect with others in similar situations, they can access support from one another, and can derive comfort from connecting with people who validate their experiences.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT...



IS DYNAMIC, EVOLVING AND
REQUIRES CONTINUOUS
ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCE
THROUGH MULTIPLE TRANSITIONS.

This is the career stage at which an individual's resilience is tested most strongly. The extent to which someone values other areas of life and can experience accomplishment and success in those areas will determine how resilient they are able to be. For example, if someone self-identifies as a parent, or as a writer in a writing group, or as a church member, they will be better equipped to weather the identity uncertainty of unemployment.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT...



INVOLVES UNDERSTANDING
OPTIONS, NAVIGATING WITH
PURPOSE AND MAKING INFORMED
CHOICES.

At the start of their job search, someone who's unemployed may well navigate with purpose and make informed choices. As time progresses, however, they may start to doubt their own understanding of what's happening in the job market, or they may struggle to maintain clarity around what they want. For example, someone might start their job search with a clear picture of their desired role in mind, but as time passes and no jobs materialize, they might consider applying to different types of jobs or even jobs that have nothing to do with their field, just to get working. Unemployed individuals often struggle with the decision of whether to take "any job" in order to become employed more quickly, or to hold out for the "right" job. Neither option is inherently better or worse, but the pull in both directions can make goal-setting more difficult and confusing.

As time goes on, purposeful navigation may disintegrate into more anxiety-driven decision-making for some job seekers. They may shift wildly in job ideas, search plans, and career options as their initial intentions don't pan out. Sometimes these shifts are positive and strategic, and other times they take focus away from the job seeker's ultimate goals and also confuse their supporters.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT...



MEANS MAKING THE MOST OF
TALENT AND POTENTIAL,
HOWEVER YOU DEFINE GROWTH AND
SUCCESS – NOT NECESSARILY
LINEAR ADVANCEMENT.

Unemployed job-seekers are full of talent and potential, and they may feel as though the world isn't letting them shine. The longer they go without using their skills in a professional setting, the less confident they might become. They may feel excluded from growth opportunities, and may operate in survival mode rather than in success mode. Those who do best are those who see themselves as having multiple talents, and who are able to claim success and growth in other areas. For example, a person who learns a new language while unemployed may be able to access a feeling of accomplishment despite their circumstances.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT...

CAN BE COMPLEX AND COMPLICATED, SO CONTEXT IS KEY – THERE MAY BE BOTH INTERNAL CONSTRAINTS (FINANCIAL, CULTURAL, HEALTH) OR EXTERNAL CONSTRAINTS (LABOUR MARKET, TECHNOLOGY).



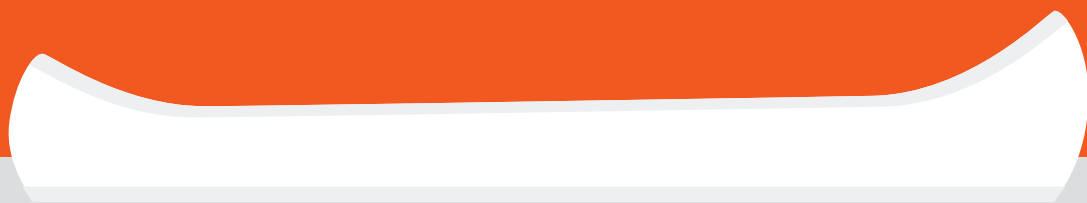
Canada is experiencing a wave of change in the job market as technology shifts jobs, industries, and professions in profound ways. These changes will continue over the next decade, transforming some industries and rendering others obsolete. This fast pace of change means that it may be difficult for some unemployed people to anticipate what skills they will need to succeed in the job market, particularly if they have been out of the paid workforce for a number of years. At the same time, change creates opportunities for innovation, and given the right circumstances and supports, some might find ways to re-engage with the paid workforce in new and interesting ways. It is therefore essential that professionals provide their unemployed clients with a wide range of information, and encourage their desire to explore new possibilities.

Internal constraints relate strongly to identity. Individuals who have been unemployed long term may grieve for a past working life (real or imagined), which may impair their current job search. If someone became unemployed as a result of traumatic job loss and never identified or dealt with their grief, that feeling of loss can impact their positivity, sense of possibility, and hope. Their ability to see themselves in new ways also remains impaired.

Physical and mental health issues can take people out of the workforce long enough to make re-entry challenging. Someone who is unemployed may wrestle with a fear of encountering the same situation at a new job that caused their previous illness. Conversely, the stress of an extended job search can cause new health issues to arise. It is critical that professionals remain aware of career and mental health-related issues when working with this population.



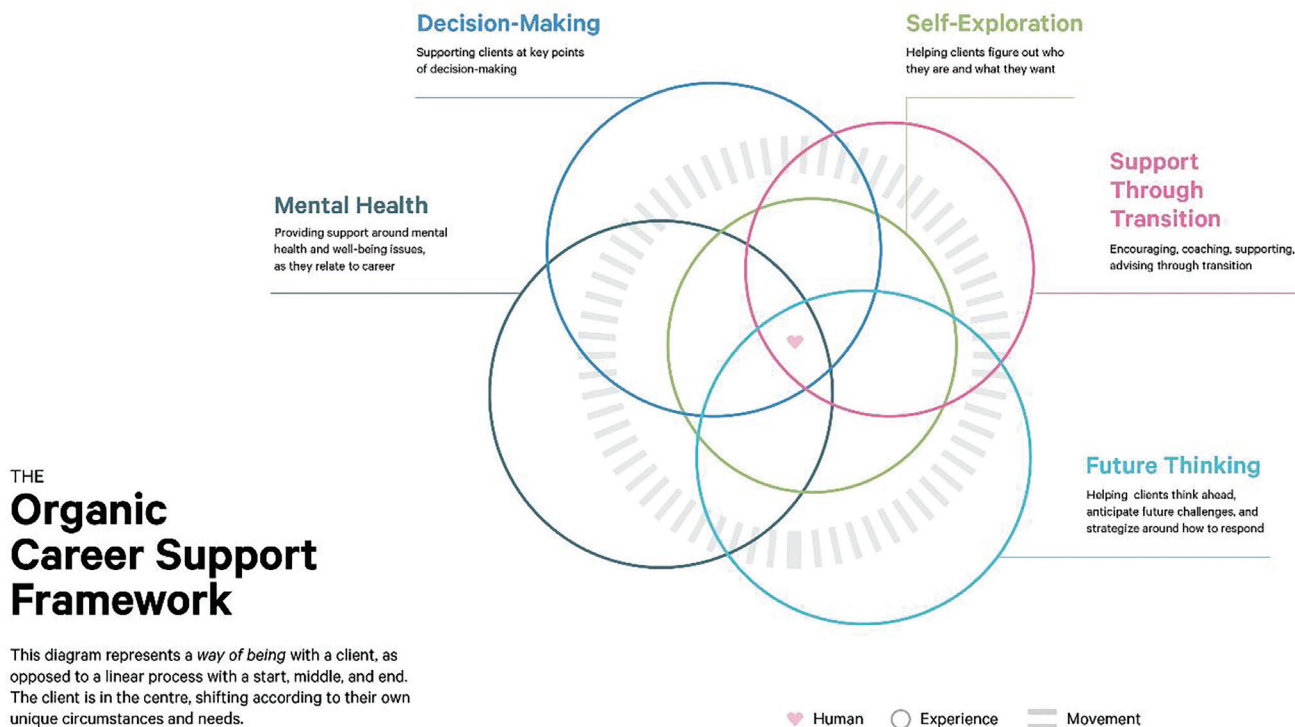
The Organic Career Support Framework: How do we help?



Having situated Unemployed Long Term inside of the Guiding Principles and having seen where this group's particular complexities lie, it may seem as though the next logical step would be to present a "script" of what to do next - a step-by-step process outlining exactly how to deal with identified issues. **We can tell you with certainty that no such script exists, and that no predetermined process can speak to all needs and situations.**

Instead, each professional's style of communication and understanding of what's essential evolves over time. No two professionals will say the same thing in quite the same way - nor should they. The art of career work lies in striving to understand a person's experiences and then working with the presenting need. That need can shift from session to session, or even within a session itself. The role of the professional is to move fluidly among states, and to provide the types of discussions, interventions, and information that will support the client in moving forward.

We capture this fluidity using the Organic Career Support Framework, a client-centered approach that highlights movement among 5 key areas of practice. We then move to Suggested Discussions and Activities. Our intention is to provide you with some relevant discussions, conversational starting points, opening questions, concrete interventions, and fun activities for each of the 5 key areas of career support.



Career Work in Action: Unemployed Long Term

This diagram represents a *way of being* with a client, as opposed to a linear process with a start, middle, and end.

In the sections below, we capture this fluidity using the Organic Career Support Framework, an approach that highlights movement among 5 key areas of practice. The positioning of the client in the middle of the diagram emphasizes the importance of client-centeredness, as each client navigates the world of career development according to their own unique circumstances and needs, while the professional plays a supportive role in this process.

- **Self-Exploration:** Helping clients figure out who they are and what they want
- **Decision-Making:** Supporting clients at key points of decision-making
- **Support Through Transition:** Encouraging, coaching, supporting, advising through transition
- **Future Thinking:** Helping clients think ahead, anticipate future challenges, and strategize around how to respond
- **Mental Health:** Providing support for issues around mental health and well-being, as they relate to career

The arrows pointing back and forth represent the multiple ways in which clients can shift among these 5 key areas. *Career is complex, and as such, this movement occurs organically*, sometimes within a series of sessions, sometimes within the space of one session, rarely in a linear fashion, and always according to the unique journey of the individual in question.

Examples:

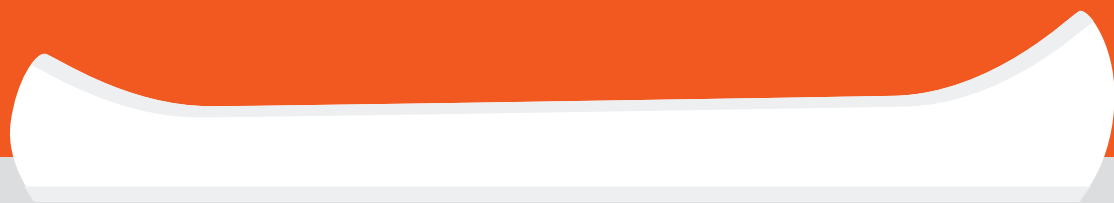
- ✓ Mike meets with a Job Coach to explore networking strategies (**Support Through Transition**), but feels so angry and depressed about having lost his previous job that he can't find the motivation to follow through on a new action plan (**Mental Health**).
- ✓ Jan meets with a Career Practitioner for resume help (**Support Through Transition**), but becomes frustrated because she's not actually interested in any of the jobs she's applying for (**Self-Exploration**).
- ✓ After exploring a few different options, Maya decides to continue to apply for banking jobs (**Decision-Making**), but doesn't have a clear sense of the changes taking place within this industry (**Future Thinking**).

Organic career support is fluid and dynamic, and as such, professionals must be prepared to shift with their clients in and out of these 5 areas, as needed.



Guiding Principles in Action:

Suggested
Discussions and
Activities for use
with clients who are
unemployed long term



From Principles to Action: Discussions & Activities

Starter Discussion

On a scale of 1-10, how hopeful are you feeling about the process of finding work?

Important Because

This initial assessment question can help guide where to go next within the Organic Career Support Framework. For example, an individual who's feeling very hopeless about their employment situation may require support around Mental Health before moving forward with any further exploration, while someone who has to make pressing decisions around finances or a school program may benefit the most from Decision-Making support. This starter question can also be useful as a means of checking-in at the beginning of each session.

Self-exploration: Helping clients figure out who they are and what they want



Suggested Discussions

1. The Deep Frustration Debrief

The purpose of this discussion is to provide your client with a safe space in which to unload their deep frustrations around unemployment. The longer someone is unemployed, the more likely they are to have used up a lot of their listening support from friends and family. First and foremost, your client needs a place to tell the story of their unemployment and to share/process all of the emotions surrounding their situation.

- **Questions to ask:** Please tell me about your experience of unemployment. What has happened so far (in as much detail as you'd like)? What have you learned during this period of your life?
- **While Listening:** Use sustained compassionate and reflective listening, and continue to hold hope for your client, while looking for opportunities to highlight potential strengths such as resilience and self-awareness. Provide empathy (e.g. "I can hear how frustrated you feel"), and avoid empty platitudes (e.g. "It will all work out in the end").
- **Important Because:** Clients can sometimes find comfort in having an opportunity to talk about their experiences in a safe, compassionate space, without having to protect the feelings of others or minimize their frustrations. For professionals, this discussion provides an opportunity to build trust, to gain a sense of what steps the client has taken thus far, and to start to identify what might need to happen next.

2. What Happened

This discussion encourages your client to talk about events leading up to their current period of unemployment.

- **Questions to Ask:** Let's explore your circumstances prior to this stretch of unemployment. Please tell me about your work, and about your experience of leaving your last job. What do you think happened? Has your understanding of what happened shifted over time in any way, and if so, how?
- **While Listening:** Look for opportunities to acknowledge that your client made the best decisions they could have at the time. Did they take a thoughtful gamble that didn't work out? Were they making a healthy choice to get out of a toxic situation? Did the market change right when they made a decision? If they were let go, were there external factors that played a part? Highlight times when your client showed resilience, and help them reframe "bad decisions" as "good decisions given the circumstances and information available." Remind your client that they may feel differently once they've landed new work.
- **Important Because:** Sometimes the "what happened" around previous jobs can provide clues to as to why clients are struggling to reconnect to employment (e.g. they came out of a toxic workplace, they were let go multiple times and lost confidence, they encountered changes in the field/job that impacted employability, etc.). By working through what happened and perhaps reaching a new understanding, clients can hopefully start to move past internalized feelings of shame, blame, or guilt that may be getting in the way of moving forward. The *Completion Exercise* activity may be useful at this point.

3. Exploring Values

The purpose of this discussion is to help your client reflect deeply on their values, as values are the strongest predictor of career satisfaction. Initiate this conversation at a point in Self-Exploration where your client has identified some of their values already, either through discussion, or with the help of the *Identifying Values* exercise, located in Suggested Activities.

- **Questions to Ask:** Why is (value) important? Is (value) something you need in your paid work, or can you satisfy this need outside of your paid work? In what ways does (value) appear your life right now? What did (value) look like for you previously? What does (value) need to look like for you in the future?

- **A Positive Spin:** Encourage your client to speak to their values in the positive, rather than in the negative. For example, if they answer the first question by stating something like “I value community because I hate being lonely,” you might respond with “I can hear that you feel lonely when you don’t have community, can you tell me how you feel when you DO have community?”
- **Important Because:** Values root us back to our core beliefs and strengths. Clients who are able to connect with their values become better equipped to make decisions based on their authentic selves rather than on their fears.

4. Who I Am List Review

This conversation is a review of the *Who I Am List Exercise*, located in Suggested Activities. Its purpose is to help your client draw out multiple “titles” - both real and metaphoric - that they can claim as their own (e.g. Parent, Technology Fixer, Programmer, Active Listener, Home Stabilizer, Organizer, etc.). You may find that clients who are very discouraged will require support to complete this exercise.

- **Questions to Ask:** Let’s review the roles that you’ve identified and claimed for yourself. Why were these roles important for you to capture? What do these roles mean to you? What are you proud of in these areas? Can we add a couple more titles from our discussions together, from your personal life, from who you are to other people, from your previous work before this last job?
- **Important Because:** So much of work is about identity, and clients who are unemployed long term often struggle with a loss of identity. This discussion highlights aspects of a person’s identity that are solid and constant, whether they’re engaging in paid work or not. Focusing on who/what they are *right now* helps clients to reclaim their inner power and to hopefully draw upon that surge of positivity to envision new possibilities.



Suggested Activities

1. Completion Exercise

Instructions:

- Read through the Completion Exercise (Appendix A).
- Write down answers as they come to you, in your own time. You do not need to answer questions in order, or in one sitting. If any of the questions feel too emotional (i.e. too “heated”), let them go in the moment, and revisit them at a later time.
- What you write is just for you. You will not be required to show your answers to anyone.

Directions for Professional

Use this activity to help clients work through what happened in the past. The questions can be modified to suit your client’s specific situation, and/or to focus on a period of unemployment as opposed to a job.

Debrief

Check in with your client around the activity, and offer them an opportunity to discuss/process their responses. If the questions invoked a strong emotional response, your client may not be ready to let go of what happened. In that case, continue to acknowledge and validate disenfranchised grief, with the understanding that grief is a process that one moves through eventually.

2. VIA Survey of Character Strengths Activity

Instructions:

- Go to <https://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu/> and select VIA Survey of Character Strengths from the drop-down menu under Questionnaires. Create a username and password, then complete the assessment.
- Choose one of your top strengths, and focus on amplifying that strength at least 3 times/day for one week. For example, if your strength is Humour and Playfulness, explore ways of incorporating more humour into your life, such as trying to make someone laugh or watching stand-up comedy.

Or, if your strength is Leadership, reflect on what it means to you to be a leader, and seek out opportunities to demonstrate leadership in formal and informal settings.

Directions for Professional

Encourage your client to focus on a positive trait that they value. You may need to help them brainstorm ideas to get things started, but invite your client to identify for themselves ways of amplifying their strengths.

Debrief

Draw your client's attention to the shift in energy that comes from doing this exercise.

3. Identifying Values

Instructions:

- Rate each value on the Values Checklist using the scale provided (Appendix B). Consider the extent to which each value is important to you in your life as a whole, and not just in your work.
- Make a list of your top 10 values. You can copy your highest scores, and/or add any values that are not on the checklist.

Directions for Professional

Emphasize that the Values Checklist is the starting point for a deeper exploration of values.

Debrief

Use the *Exploring Values* discussion to debrief this activity. Ask your client to think about their career path, and to identify which values they will need to connect with in their future work in order to experience job satisfaction.

4. Who I Am List Exercise

Instructions:

- Make a list of all your life roles. Include official roles (e.g. Nurse, Real Estate Agent, Administrative Assistant), unofficial roles that reflect your actions and activities (e.g. Project Manager, Coordinator, Mediator, Problem-Solver), and roles with playful metaphorical names (e.g. Good Witch, Boundary Setter, Storyteller, Silent Supporter, Cleaning Machine). Include occupational roles that reflect your identity, even if you're not performing the job currently (e.g. surgeons are always surgeons, even when they're not operating).
- Roles can come from any area of your life, not just work. Think about yourself as a friend, family member, volunteer, or hobbyist, and translate the actions you take into roles (e.g. Peacemaker, Devoted Listener, Game Changer, Cheerleader).
- Try to name at least ten roles from different parts of your life.

Directions for Professional

You can introduce this activity in a session, or assign it as homework, depending on your client's level of confidence and engagement. If your client gets stuck, help them brainstorm a few more possibilities. Remember that larger roles can contain additional roles. For example, Teacher can also include Kid Champion, Course Prepper, and Report Card Expert.

Debrief

Once your client has written down at least 10 roles, ask them to read each role out loud to you, starting with "I am a..." Ask them how it feels to hear this list. Encourage them to keep this list nearby, and to read it when they need a reminder of who they are.

Decision-Making: Supporting clients at key points of decision-making



Suggested Discussions

1. Stick with the Plan or Consider Something New?

This conversation encourages your client to evaluate their original career plan, and to weigh their current occupational goals against any new ideas or possible directions. In doing so, they can review pros and cons, determine whether or not changes to their plan are necessary and/or feasible, and then either recommit to their chosen path or make a new plan.

- **Questions to Ask:** What new ideas have come your way since you started searching for [original plan job]? How open are you to considering these new ideas? What are the pros and cons of sticking to your original plan? What are the pros and cons of each of these new ideas? Which plan makes you feel energized, excited, willing to take new actions?
- **Holding Space:** During this discussion, resist leading your client toward making a decision, and instead, encourage them to hold off on deciding anything right away. Though it may seem counter-intuitive, the ability to think through these questions without the pressure of having to commit to a path will help bring to light any factors that your client may need to consider before deciding how to continue moving forward.
- **Important Because:** Your client may not have had the opportunity to assess their current path without some anxiety, pressure, or fear. They may be doggedly pursuing their original plan without success but also without reflection, or they may have changed course several times, muddying the waters with their networks and contacts. Clients can benefit from the opportunity to consider all ideas thoroughly, with the support of an unbiased listener.

2. Creating a Full List of Options

This discussion involves putting all viable “what to do next” options on the table, in order to evaluate the full range of possibilities. Options may include various kinds of jobs, new career paths, interim job possibilities, further education, a new job search plan, a recommitment to the current job search plan, a geographical move, and entrepreneurship.

- **Questions to Ask:** Which options do you find most interesting? Which options make you feel the most hopeful or excited? What are your fears around pursuing these options? Which options have consumed the most time and energy thus far? How do you feel about pursuing some of these options further?
- **Long Term vs. Short Term:** If clients are not in a space where they are able to think about long-term direction, encourage them to consider the following question: What is the best decision for me *right now*?
- **Important Because:** Clients will sometimes focus solely on one option at a time, but they can benefit from taking a bird's eye view of all of their options (maybe even ones they hadn't considered) to determine where they're putting their energy, and where they're actually feeling committed. This discussion has the potential to help clients consider new options at times when they might be feeling stuck.

3. The “Other People’s Ideas” Sort

This discussion helps your client sort out the many suggestions and ideas that they've received from other people throughout the course of their job search.

- **Questions to Ask:** Let's make a list of the job search ideas that people have given you over the past few months. Have you made decisions about any of these ideas? Which of these ideas can we take off the list entirely? Which ones are you still considering?
- **A Visual Exercise Option:** Write down other people's ideas on individual slips of paper, then divide the slips of paper into 3 piles: keepers, discards, more information needed. Check with your client to find out whether or not they would like coaching on how to decline offers gracefully.
- **Important Because:** When someone is unemployed, especially for a long time, friends and family often try to help by offering ideas and suggestions. Some of these suggestions may be helpful, others not so much. In some cases, clients may find it difficult to separate the good ideas from the impractical or ill-fitting ones, especially when they're struggling with diminished confidence and self-doubt. They may also feel guilty about turning down ideas when they are in need of a job. This discussion provides clients with an opportunity to walk through the suggestions they've received, validate the good ones, and shake off confusing or distracting alternatives that complicate decision-making.



Suggested Activities

1. Creating a Full List of Options

Instructions:

- Make a list of ALL of your ideas and options (e.g. continue with current job search, look for a new type of job, go back to school, start a business, etc.). Be as specific as possible.
- Consider each option individually. Rather than trying to make a decision right away, visualize each option playing out in a positive way. Notice how you feel when you imagine each option.
- Write a "T" beside any option you feel yourself *moving toward* (i.e. you feel excited or energized), and write an "A" beside any option you feel yourself *moving away from* (i.e. you experience a feeling of wanting to pull back). Write an "X" beside any option you no longer want to consider.

Directions for Professional

Clients who struggle with anxiety or who have difficulty discerning emotions may benefit the most from doing this activity in session. Invite them to take three slow deep breaths before starting.

Debrief

This exercise can help your client discern which of their options are rooted in genuine interest, and which of their options are rooted in a desire to escape unemployment by whatever means possible. If an option elicits a strong negative reaction, your client may want to take it off the list.

2. Using Mind Maps to Explore Decisions

Mind Map Exercise #1 – Clarify the deeper issues around making a decision

- Write the words "My Possible Options" in the middle of a blank piece of paper and circle them.
- Write down possible options anywhere on the page, circle each option, then draw lines to link all of the options back to the centre.
- For each option, write down any related concerns, issues, and obstacles. You can also add another layer by breaking each concern down further (e.g. "money for school" ⇌ "looking into funding," "borrowing from parents is tricky").
- Review your mind map. Pay attention to which points highlight specific actions that you could take in order to make a decision.

Mind Map Exercise #2 – Areas of Interest

- Write the words “My Possible Options” in the middle of a blank piece of paper and circle them.
- Write down general areas of interest anywhere on the page, circle each one, then draw lines to link all of your areas of interest back to the centre.
- For each area of interest, dig down one layer, and write down more specific interests that relate to the general area (e.g. “hospitality” ⇔ “Parks Canada,” “hotel work”)
- Using a different colour, circle the ideas that interest you the most.
- Brainstorm one or two actions you could take to learn more about each of the ideas you’ve circled.

Directions for Professional

Mind Maps can help clients consider their options from different angles as they dig down into deeper layers of a particular decision. Introduce this exercise in session. Encourage your client to spread their ideas around the page (see Appendix C). **Hot Tip:** Make it fun! Use big paper and coloured markers.

Debrief

Invite your client to reflect on their experience of mind-mapping, and explore with them any insights that may have emerged in the process.

Support through transition: Encouraging, coaching, supporting, advising through transition



Suggested Discussions

1. You Deserve a Break

This discussion encourages your client to reflect on the expectations they have of themselves with regard to “down time,” and to explore ways to relax and rejuvenate.

- **Questions to Ask:** What expectations do you have of yourself with regard to time and energy spent job searching? What are the expectations of those around you? How do you create balance in your life, given the amount of mental and emotional energy that job search requires? How can you create space in your life that’s job search free (as part of self-care)? What rejuvenating activities can you seek out that are accessible and affordable?
- **Important Because:** People who are unemployed often find it difficult to rest and rejuvenate, primarily because a) they feel as though they can’t take time for fun activities until they’ve found work, and b) fun activities often cost money, which can make them less accessible. Yet relaxation and rejuvenation are important components of self-care, and are vital in helping clients cultivate the energy required to continue job searching. We all need breaks!

2. Sometimes It Just Takes Time

This conversation addresses the reality that sometimes a job seeker can do everything right - troubleshoot their job search, improve their resume, network, practice interviewing - and *still* not find a job within their desired timeline.

- **Questions to Ask:** How are you feeling about your job search? What are some factors beyond your control that might be impeding your hiring (timing of funding, economy, changes in the field, holidays, etc.)? How can you continue to feel confident about the steps you’re taking, even though you haven’t yet found a job?

- **Importance:** Job searching is difficult because one never knows when efforts will pay off, and sometimes clients need to hear that they're taking the right steps, even if they haven't found a job yet. This reminder can help clients focus on the strengths of their job search without internalizing their current lack of employment as a personal failure.

3. Job Search Allies

The purpose of this discussion is to help your client identify their allies - people who are safe, encouraging, reflective, and supportive. Allies can be friends, family, spouses, or even networking contacts. Allies are the people who can help your client sustain their job search focus.

- **Questions to Ask:** Who do you feel safe talking to about your job search? Who encourages you? Who helps you to reflect and make plans? How do you stay connected to these people? Is it important to you to find additional allies? How can you honour and appreciate your allies in ways that are meaningful to them?
- **Additional Discussion:** Extended job searches are hard on spouses, who are in the complex position of wanting to be supportive and understanding, but who are also having to experience the direct impact of their partner's unemployment. Your client may wish to explore strategies for relieving some pressure in this relationship, given the challenging circumstances.
- **Important Because:** Allies are essential for sustaining resilience during a long job search process. Clients can keep their most important relationships strong and nourished by identifying their allies and showing them appreciation.

Additional Discussion Questions

- **The Resume Gap:** How do you talk about "the gap" that's on your resume? What other activities have you been involved in during that time? How can we name the gap in a way that paints a positive picture of your time away from paid work (parental care leave, sabbatical, refresh period, business development, self-employment, house renovation, etc.)?



Suggested Activities

1. Realistic and Affordable Self-Care

Instructions:

- Practicing self-care means actively and purposefully protecting your own well-being and happiness, particularly during times of stress. How do you protect your well-being and happiness? Make a list of the ways in which you practice self-care right now.
- Think of new ways in which you could practice self-care, and add those items to the list. These don't have to be clichéd "self-care" activities like yoga and bubble baths. Genuinely consider how you can protect and nourish space inside of yourself in order to have energy for the day. If "self-care" was not a chore and not a financial burden, but rather a way of rejuvenating on your own terms, what would you be doing?
- Choose at least one new self-care practice or activity to try in between sessions.

Directions for Professional

The brainstorming part of this activity may work best in session, as your client may need validation that it's okay for them to focus on self-care. When offering suggestions, try to avoid activities that are costly and therefore less accessible. Think outside the box: self-care might involve not talking to a negative family member, or cutting down on hours spent job searching.

Debrief

Check-in to see if your client is practicing self-care in between sessions. Are they giving themselves permission to rest from their search? If not, talk about why self-care is essential for mental health, and point out to your client that they deserve self-care, just like everyone else.

2. Checking in With Allies

Client Assignment

- Name your job search allies, i.e. the people who listen to you talk about your job search and provide support.
- Set up a time to connect with one of your allies - perhaps a coffee date or a phone call.
- At this meeting, make a point of expressing direct and specific appreciation for their support. (e.g. "It means a lot to me that you listen so carefully when I tell you about my job interviews. I find it so helpful to be able to process them out loud.")

- Remember that the main purpose of the meeting is to check in with *them*. Ask: What's happening with you? How are you feeling about supporting me? Do you need a break from listening to me talk about job search? How can I support you? What do you need from me?
- Listen to your ally's answers and make space for whatever they need to say. If necessary, make adjustments in your relationship to accommodate their needs.

Directions for Professional

Your client might require a bit of coaching on how to handle this type of conversation. Remind them that the goal is to nourish and strengthen their most important relationships.

Debrief

How did the conversation(s) go? What did you learn?

Future thinking: Helping clients think ahead, anticipate future challenges, and strategize around how to respond



Suggested Discussions

1. Thinking Ahead

The purpose of this conversation is to help your client remain engaged with their industry by exploring possible ways in which rapid technological change and other factors might impact their field over the next few years.

- **Questions to Ask:** What is changing in your industry? Have you been reading, watching, or researching what people are saying about your industry, and if so, what have you learned? What are some possibilities that might arise from these changes? What will these changes mean for your work in particular? What problems or challenges will your industry need to solve? Which of these challenges interest you the most?
- **Important Because:** This conversation encourages your client to think about their field of work more deeply, and keeps them connected to their industry as it continues to evolve. Clients who engage in this type of ongoing research can potentially anticipate new opportunities and can then use their insights to provide more in-depth answers to interview questions.

2. Identities Outside of Work

This conversation encourages your client to develop themselves outside of their work identity. Areas of focus could include new skill development (e.g. taking an improv class, learning to play an instrument), relationship-building (e.g. parenting, non-violent communication techniques), home improvement, spirituality, etc.

- **Questions to Ask:** What are some interests and skills that you might want to develop outside of your job search? What are some free or low-cost ways to begin moving in these new directions? Which parts of your life would you like to grow and develop over the next couple of years?
- **Importance:** A broader sense of identity builds confidence and resilience.

3. Envisioning a Positive Future

This discussion helps your client design their preferred future, so that they can picture this future clearly, even when it seems far away or hard to believe. This discussion can be very difficult for a client who is highly discouraged but it can also be very powerful for a client who's ready to consider a positive future as opposed to an uncertain present. The *Imagine the Feeling* exercise can be useful in helping clients anchor their positive feelings about the future.

- **Questions to Ask:** Let's picture you in the future. What will you be doing? What will success look like? What will success feel like? What needs and values does this vision include? If you were to articulate this vision as a positive intention for the future, what would you say? How does it feel to speak your intention out loud?
- **Intention Creation:** Remember that an intention uses positive language in the present tense (e.g. "I am in a job with great coworkers and my work is stimulating. I am earning a fulfilling, meaningful living doing something I enjoy"). If the intention feels too out of reach for your client, then it's probably too big. Encourage your client to create an intention that feels positive and achievable.
- **Important Because:** A coherent vision of the future anchors clients to their preferred ways of being.



Suggested Activities

1. Artificial Intelligence and Career Predictions

Instructions:

- Learn more about AI and machine learning, specifically as they relate to your industry. Research technological advances, theories, predictions, and current uses of AI in your field by finding a few articles that discuss the subject.
- Consider how AI might change your industry. Think about products, services, competitors, and problems that will require solutions.

Directions for Professional

Encourage your client to reflect on the kinds of skills or knowledge they might need in order to help solve the problems of the future.

Debrief

Once your client describes where they think their industry might be heading, discuss with them the possibility of speaking to their insights in cover letters or interviews. Highlight the value of remaining attuned to the future direction of one's field.

2. Imagine the Feeling

Instructions:

- This exercise is a meditation designed to shift your thoughts and energies around work. Imagine what it would be like to come home after a day at your ideal job. How do you feel? Where are those feelings in your body?
- Try to maintain the positive feelings that you conjure up for at least 30 seconds.
- Meditate on this vision every day for 30 seconds, recalling how you imagined yourself feeling in your ideal job.

Directions for Professional

If your client struggles with this exercise, practice with them in session. Start by inviting them to take three deep, slow breaths. If they're unable to manifest their own vision, suggest that they find a guided meditation online that works for them.

Debrief

Discuss the transformative potential of a daily focus on positive feelings.

Mental health: Providing support around mental health and well-being issues as they relate to career



Suggested Discussions

1. Discouragement and Depression

Part of checking in on how your client is feeling about their current state of unemployment involves recognizing potential signs of distress and referring to supports if discouragement turns to depression, and/or if depression becomes severe or ongoing. Scaling questions may be useful (e.g. On a scale of 1-10, how discouraged are you feeling right now? On a scale of 1-10, how hopeful/hopeless are you feeling right now?), and can help you keep track of whether your client can handle more complex and high energy conversations, or whether they might require more reflection and support. It's important to normalize the reality that unemployment – a constant state of uncertainty – can lead to depression if the person who is unemployed isn't feeling hopeful about the future.

2. Job Search Anxiety

This discussion involves naming all of the different factors that contribute to anxiety during a job search, in order to help your client acknowledge their fears and address them directly. Possible questions: What are some of things you say to yourself that make you feel more anxious? If we were to make a list of these thoughts, which ones are causing you the most distress? Find good mindfulness exercises and/or anxiety management strategies that your client can pair with their job search to help mitigate anxious feelings, such as journaling three things they're grateful for every day, and deep breathing.

3. Disenfranchised Grief

While our society generally acknowledges that unemployment is difficult, people often don't recognize that an individual who is unemployed is experiencing grief and loss - loss of connection, loss of meaning and purpose, loss of previous colleagues, etc. It may be hard for clients to identify their feelings as grief, or to express this aspect of their experience to friends and family. They may therefore benefit from an opportunity to speak to their grief in a safe, compassionate space. Possible questions: What losses are you experiencing? Can you name these losses? Note that it's vitally important to stay away from "positive thinking" language. Your role is to allow space for your client's feelings, not to challenge them. Acknowledge whatever feelings are present and whatever losses your client chooses to identify.

4. Severe Psychological Reactions

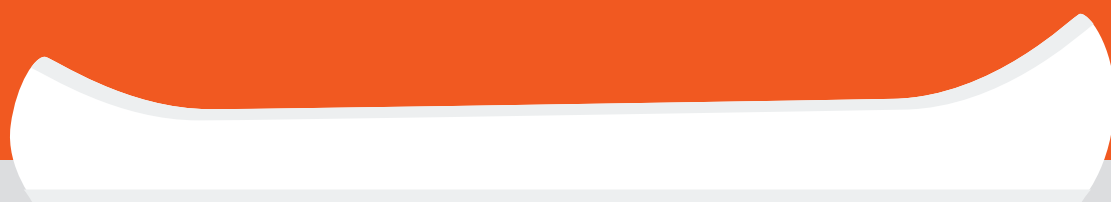
For some individuals, prolonged unemployment can lead to severe psychological reactions including suicidal ideation, violence, and psychosis. If you suspect that your client may be suffering to this extent, refer to mental health supports immediately.

Mental health: Steps for the Professional

- 1. Use scaling questions to evaluate feelings and symptoms. (E.g. “On a scale of 1-10, how anxious are you feeling?”)**
- 2. Support your client in learning more about their issues through local or online groups, blogs, articles, or podcasts.**
- 3. Support your client in identifying when they need to see a doctor for prescriptions, refills, medication adjustments, checkups, changes in symptoms, etc.**
- 4. Provide information as needed/requested on accessible mental health services, including crisis lines and counselling resources.**



Appendices



For a full version of the Guiding Principles infographic, see Appendix D.

Completion exercise

This exercise can help you work toward completion - a sense of closure, a feeling of being done. Take your time with these questions. Read them over, then answer them one at a time. Trust yourself to know what you need - you may not need to answer every question. Be thoughtful. Your self-reflective inquiry lets you move deeper into the process of completing whatever happened at the end of your last work experience. If you struggle to answer a question, move on for the time being.

The first 3 questions are about acknowledging your career.

- 1. What did you accomplish at your last job? Acknowledge everything that went well, even the small things.**
- 2. What was missing for you at this job? What wasn't working for you?**
- 3. What didn't happen that you wish had happened?**

The next 3 questions provide you with an opportunity to say whatever you want to say to the people in your previous workplace. Include anything you wish you had said, or anything you continue to imagine yourself saying. Get it all out there. *No one will see what you've written unless you choose to share.*

- 4. What would you like to say to the people who were involved in your departure? What do you want to say to managers or co-workers that you didn't have a chance to say at the time?**
- 5. Do you have any regrets, and if so, what are they? When you look at your regrets, what could you tell yourself to reframe these regrets into something positive?**
- 6. Who at your previous job would you thank, and what would you thank them for?**

Now let's think about the bigger picture.

7. **What insights do you have now that you didn't have when you first left your job?**
8. **What has your experience taught you about what's important to you?**
9. **Imagine if the same thing that happened to you happened to someone else. How would you encourage them to reflect on their experience with "kind-sight" (i.e. look back with compassion)?**
10. **What is your intention for your work going forward? What do you want out of your next job?**

Possible Next Steps:

Once you've worked through these questions and processed anything that needed attention, you may want to create some kind of completion ritual, e.g. throwing your notes in a bonfire or creating a visual display of some of your positive insights. Perform your ritual when you feel ready to let go. A ritual is the end point at which you say, "I'm ready to let go and move on."

Values checklist

Begin by reading the entire list, and then rate each item using the scale that follows:

1 = Very Important

2 = Somewhat Important

3 = Not Very Important

4 = Not Important At all

- Achievement:** Using my skills and knowledge to accomplish something noteworthy in my work and/or personal life
- Advancement:** Moving into roles and positions of increasing responsibility
- Adventure:** Engaging in activities that involve risk-taking and exploration of unknown territory
- Aesthetics:** Having a sensitivity to and an appreciation of beauty
- Affiliation:** Being recognized as a member of an organization whose type of work or status I regard as important
- Artistic Creativity:** Doing creative work in any of several art forms
- Belonging:** Feeling connected to a group of people, organization, and/or institution
- Change and Variety:** Engaging in activities that often change or are done in different settings
- Community:** Living in a town or city where I can get involved in community affairs
- Competition:** Comparing my abilities against others; being energized by a sense of rivalry
- Continuous Learning:** Seeking out formal and informal learning opportunities throughout my life
- Creativity (general):** Creating new ideas, programs, organizational structures, or anything else that has not been developed by others
- Decision Making:** Having the power to set policy and determine a course of action
- Excitement:** Engaging in activities that are very exciting or often exciting
- Fantasy/Play:** Engaging in activities that are playful and imaginative, and that provide personal amusement

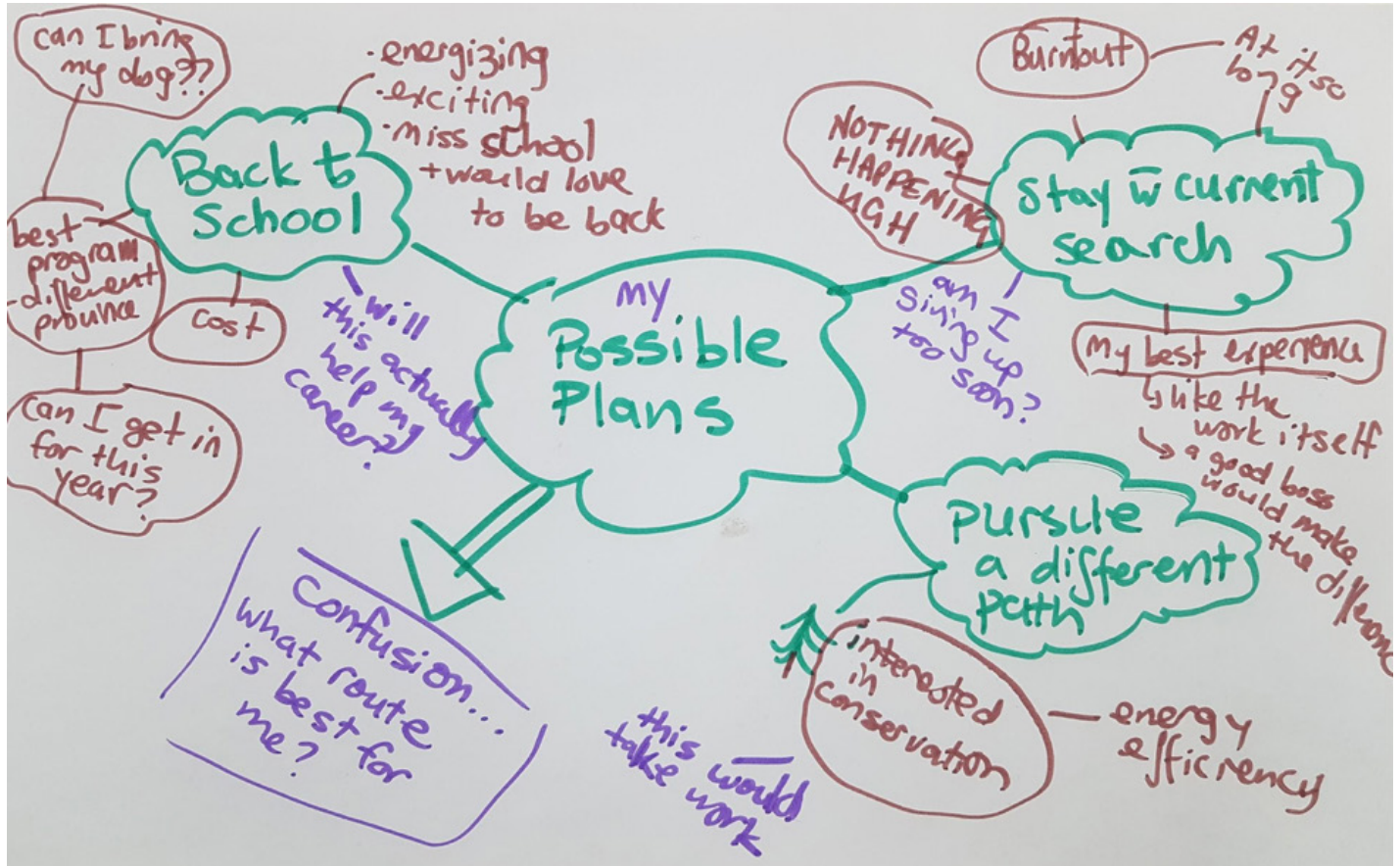
- ___ **Fast Pace:** Working quickly; keeping up with a fast pace
- ___ **Flexibility:** Changing plans or courses of action as required
- ___ **Friendship:** Developing close personal relationships with others
- ___ **Growth/Expansion:** Working toward the development and expansion of an idea or organization
- ___ **Helping Others:** Helping others directly, either individually or in small groups
- ___ **Helping Society:** Contributing to the betterment of the world in which I live
- ___ **Independence:** Deciding for myself what kind of work I'll do and how I'll go about it; not having to do what others tell me to do
- ___ **Influence:** Being in a position to change people's attitudes and opinions
- ___ **Intellectual Status:** Being regarded by others as an expert or a person of intellectual achievement
- ___ **Knowledge:** Seeking knowledge, truth, and understanding
- ___ **Location:** Finding a place to live (town, geographic area) that matches my lifestyle and allows me to do the things I enjoy most
- ___ **Moral Fulfillment:** Feeling that my work contributes to and aligns with a set of moral standards that I uphold
- ___ **Organization:** Bringing order to disorganized environments; being in organized environments
- ___ **Physical Challenge:** Engaging in activities with challenging physical demands
- ___ **Power and Authority:** Exercising control over the activities of others
- ___ **Precision Work:** Doing work that allows little tolerance for error
- ___ **Problem Solving:** Finding solutions to complex problems and challenges
- ___ **Profit, Gain:** Earning large amounts of money or other material possessions
- ___ **Public Contact:** Having a lot of daily contact with people
- ___ **Recognition:** Receiving recognition for the quality of my work in some visible or public way
- ___ **Risk Taking:** Engaging in activities that involve calculated risks
- ___ **Social Justice:** Engaging in activities and/or being involved in groups and organizations that aim to address discrimination and social inequalities
- ___ **Stability:** Being in situations and circumstances that are largely predictable and not likely to change over long periods of time

- ___ **Status:** Occupying roles that carry status and respect within society
- ___ **Structure:** Being in situations where an established set of rules and expectations are in place
- ___ **Time Freedom:** Operating according to my own time schedule
- ___ **Working Alone:** Doing things by myself, without much contact with others
- ___ **Working Under Pressure:** Working in a situation where deadlines and high quality work are required
- ___ **Working with Others:** Having close working relationships with a group; working as a team toward common goals

Adapted from <http://www.lehigh.edu/~inalm/download/Checklist.PDF> (overall structure)

Appendix C

Mind map example



Guiding Principles of Career Development

Guiding Principles of Career Development



THE WORD "CAREER" COMES FROM THE LATIN FOR CART OR CHARIOT (CARRUS), A MEANS TO CARRY YOU FROM ONE POINT TO ANOTHER. A CAREER IS ABOUT THE LIFE YOU WANT TO LEAD – NOT JUST A JOB, OCCUPATION OR PROFESSION. IT INVOLVES DECIDING AMONG POSSIBLE AND PREFERRED FUTURES. IT ANSWERS: "WHO DO I WANT TO BE IN THE WORLD?," "WHAT KIND OF LIFESTYLE AM I SEEKING?" AND "HOW CAN I MAKE AN IMPACT?"

AS CANADIANS, WE LIKE THE METAPHOR OF A CANOE TO REPRESENT OUR CAREERS – WE USE IT ON OUR JOURNEY, WE STOCK IT WITH THE TOOLS WE NEED, AND WE PROACTIVELY STEER IT TO OUR DESTINATION; SOMETIMES WE FACE RAPIDS, AND AS CONDITIONS CHANGE SO MIGHT OUR COURSE.



PURPOSE

THIS DOCUMENT IS INTENDED TO BRING GREATER CLARITY AND CONSISTENCY TO OUR NATIONAL CONVERSATIONS ABOUT CAREER DEVELOPMENT. THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES UNDERPIN CERIC'S VISION TO INCREASE THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL WEALTH OF CANADIANS THROUGH CAREER COUNSELLING AND CAREER EDUCATION. THEY ARE A STARTING POINT TO INFORM DISCUSSIONS WITH CLIENTS, EMPLOYERS, FUNDERS, POLICY-MAKERS, FAMILIES AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS, AND A BASIS FOR COLLABORATION.

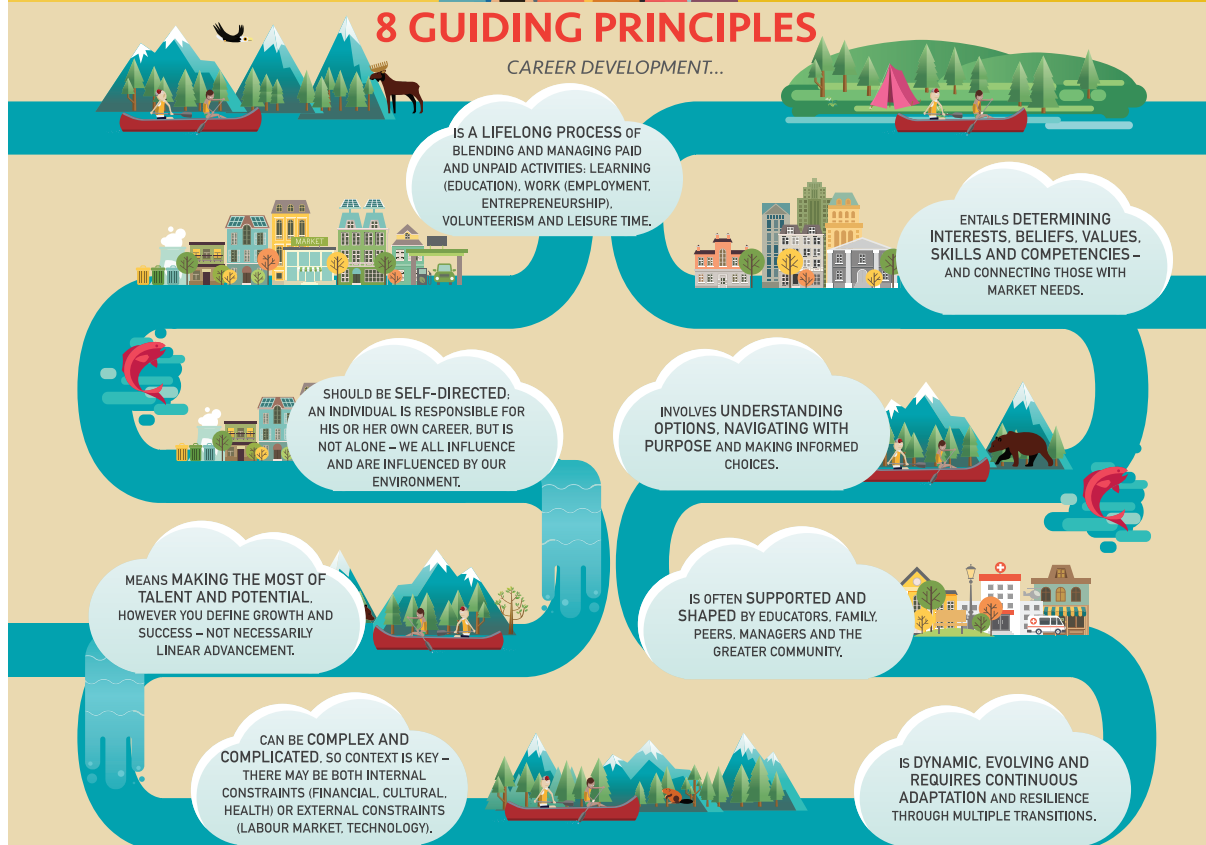
BENEFITS

RESEARCH SHOWS CAREER DEVELOPMENT IS ASSOCIATED WITH MANY EDUCATIONAL, SOCIETAL AND FINANCIAL BENEFITS. INDIVIDUALS REALIZE GREATER WELL-BEING AND SATISFACTION IN LIFE. SCHOOLS LIFT STUDENT SUCCESS AND GRADUATION RATES. ORGANIZATIONS FILL SKILLS GAPS AND IMPROVE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND PRODUCTIVITY. GOVERNMENTS REDUCE UNEMPLOYMENT, BOOST SOCIAL MOBILITY AND STRENGTHEN ECONOMIC GROWTH. AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF AN INCREASINGLY FREELANCE ECONOMY AND THE RAPIDLY SHIFTING NATURE OF WORK, CAREER DEVELOPMENT MATTERS MORE THAN EVER.



8 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

CAREER DEVELOPMENT...



THESE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT REFLECT MULTIPLE VOICES FROM CERIC.



ceric.ca/principles

CERIC further resources: Where can I find more information?

This action plan contains a basic overview of circumstances you may encounter when working with individuals who are unemployed long term, as well as some accessible discussion questions and activities. At this point, you may wish to go deeper, and to gather more information. The CERIC website contains a rich array of career development resources:

- CareerWise by CERIC is an ongoing initiative that provides up-to-date career related news and information. Visit <https://careerwise.ceric.ca/> to subscribe, browse, or conduct a site search on “unemployment,” “employment gap,” “transition,” etc.
- For additional information that is primarily research based, try a similar search through the Canadian Journal of Career Development archives: <http://cjcdonline.ca/>
- CERIC’s publications page features a wide range of resources pertaining to career development theory and practice: <https://ceric.ca/publications/>

About the authors



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Karen Schaffer is the author of three books on careers (*Hire Power*, *The Job of Your Life*, and *The Complete Book of Resumes*) and writes screenplays in her spare time. She has been a Career Counsellor for over 20 years, for the last 10 at Saint Mary's University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and is currently doing narrative research in the career development field. Karen holds an MA in Counselling Psychology from the Adler School.



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Juliana Wiens is a Registered Counselling Therapist (RCT) with experience in career development, counselling, facilitation, management, research, and writing. She is currently employed as a Career Counsellor at Saint Mary's University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Juliana holds an MEd in Counselling from Acadia and an MA in Women's Studies from Dalhousie. She is passionate about helping others navigate meaningful career paths, and is happiest when the sun is shining.

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- EDUCATED AND UNDEREMPLOYED
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