



The Loss of Values in Career Development

From time to time, friends of mine in the career development field ask me what I think the main problem is facing career counselors these days. I have been very reluctant to reply. No one appointed me as the conscience of this profession; besides it is a role for which I lack the requisite qualifications: I have enough trouble monitoring my own life, without also taking on the job of monitoring the profession. But, I saw a film the other day—a marvelous film—called *Chariots of Fire*. It was, ultimately, a film about passion—not the erotic, man-woman type of passion—but the kind of passion which means *caring intensely about something*. These men featured in the film cared intensely about their profession: their profession as runners and their identity as Jew and Christian. As I left the theater, I felt a surge of self-recrimination, as I thought to myself, “I care passionately about this profession of ours, called ‘career development,’ yet I have never really said that to anyone, nor stated what it is about it that causes me to feel this passion.” So, this seemed like a good time to talk with you about some of the things I feel about the loss of values that I sense in career development—and what it is, perhaps, that we can do to restore a true sense of values to the field.

I know, of course, the Myth. The Myth that while the career

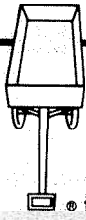
development field is filled with highly ethical men and women, when it comes time to perform our craft we are all to act as though we had a recent operation: in the words of one famous wit, “an ethical bypass.” It is our job to facilitate other people’s values, not to impress upon them our own. It is not for us to say, “No, no—you can’t be a deodorant salesperson. The world is bleeding. The world is starving. It is these needs you must seek to ameliorate, it is these which must be your profession.” We may think such thoughts, but—by our alleged ethical bypass—we are prohibited from saying so. We are “the neutral midwives,” who assist at the birth, but care nothing about the form of the child that is born.

That is the Myth. In point of fact, however, it is patently false. We care and we care greatly about the professions our clients choose—at least within certain limits. Those limits are given to each of us by our birth, by our upbringing and by the needs of the society. The limits are pretty much common denominators throughout the profession—at least that is the sense I get, as I talk with people all around the country who bear the title “career counselors.” By common consent, the limit at one end is that we do not easily consent to assisting a client who wants a murderous profession—say, that of an assassin. Those who would

have their lives flourish by taking away the lives of others will gain neither comfort nor assistance from us.

The limit of our ethical neutrality at the other end is that we will not recruit on behalf of a particular profession or professions. There may not be enough managers or CEO’s, or enough missionaries in China, or enough peacemakers, or enough people bending every resource and wit to solve the wretched problem of starvation, which so blights the face of this planet. Still, it is not the function of a career counselor to take some hapless undecided liberal arts major, or someone on the brink of starting what looks to be a very successful boutique, or someone who is stale in their middle-management position of ten years, and try to talk them into offering their lives instead to one of these more “altruistic” professions. As career

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counselors, we are at best mid-wives; we can never be the parent of the child. That is our code, and that is the definition of our profession. Within the above limits, we define ourselves as those operating with the ethical bypass aforementioned.

All of this may be why we do not talk much about our own values as career development specialists, about what values we ought to have and about what values the world very desperately needs us to have. But I sometimes see a vision, and I know it is an outlandish vision—but I see it, nonetheless. It is a vision of a world which eventually blows itself up. And it blows itself up because the world of individuals, as well as the world of nations, becomes so locked into "everyone doing their own thing" that no one relates to anyone anymore. The sense of any community, any bonding, any

interdependence between people, is long since lost. It is total estrangement, man from man, woman from woman, man from woman.

My heart feels dread, for the vision seems all too possible, and all too real—even now. I read the pundits saying a year and a half ago the 1970s had been "the Me Decade," but that the 1980s would be "a season of sharing, an era of emotion, relationships and, above all, family." There may be signs here and there that they are right, hopeful signs, like the distant French horn sounding the first brief statement of the later great theme in a symphony. But by and large, I don't see that the Me Decade has really ended.

The symbol which haunts me, for I think it all too likely to be the symbol of the 1980s, is that of the monkey, electrodes planted in the pleasure center of

its brain and attached to a button it can push, sitting there hour after hour in a cage, pushing that button—all thought of eating or of relating to others totally pushed out of its consciousness or desire.

If you prefer a more human symbol (I thought the monkey sounded pretty human already), I give you a group of teenagers, riding a New York subway, each of them with a walkabout stereo attached to his or her belt, private earphones clamped to his or her head, thus shutting out all other sounds—none of the teenagers relating to one another by even so much as a nod of the head—each of them lost in his or her own private stereophonic world.

If you prefer a slightly more adult example (but not by much), I give you this statement by Diane Margolis, who summarized her extensive interviews of corporate managers in the following fashion: "The most notable characteristic of the managers I interviewed was their mannerly lack of intensity. Nothing seemed to matter very much. No values seemed to be deeply held. There appeared to be no connection between the managers' beliefs or even their descriptions of their own experiences and emotions. Their characteristic mode was trivialization. Their response to virtually every social issue was, 'Ridiculous!'" The managers did not see, she said, that their indifference could pose dangers for society: "Persons trained to trivialize their own feelings, as well as the political and moral climate in which they live, are not likely to see the need for change, nor to be strong enough to affect it." (*The Managers: Corporate Life in America.*)

Everyday we find fresh evidence that so many people are opting for a world in which all that matters ultimately is themselves. *And the monkey again sat pressing the button that would give the feeling of pleasure.*

Now, at this point you may suppose that I am done with my vision; that it ends with a world in which each individual is

hopelessly turned in upon himself or herself, a world that then blows up. But I am not, and it does not. The vision ends, rather, with an attempt to assess what it was that helped to turn the world into such an individualistic hell. And—in my vision—career development received a large share of the blame.

I behold a newspaper article, in that day, which reads as follows:

As sociologists and other analysts tried to put together the pieces of what went wrong, career development was seen as both the stepchild and the catalyst of the individualism-out-of-control. Career counseling full-blown first arose in the 1970s, as the logical extension of the Me Decades. It gave to each individual the tools by which every man might trample his brother and every woman her sister in the race to find the best possible jobs that would further facilitate “the endless smile, the total serenity, the complete fulfillment of self, the supreme orgasm and the perfect doughnut,” to quote one of the pundits of that time, Russell Baker. As a consequence, career development immediately was adopted with enthusiasm by the Me Decades; every publisher put out books on the subject and millions of readers bought them—while in some urban areas a career counselor seemed to spring up in every other organization and on every other streetcorner. In career development, each individual saw the means by which he or she could get what they wanted—better ways to compete, better ways to excel, better ways to outdistance his or her brother or sister. Career development produced an army of individualistic drones, who fully subscribed to such sentiments as: “I am out for myself and my business, and personally do not care if you can’t handle yours.” Despite the transparent need in that day

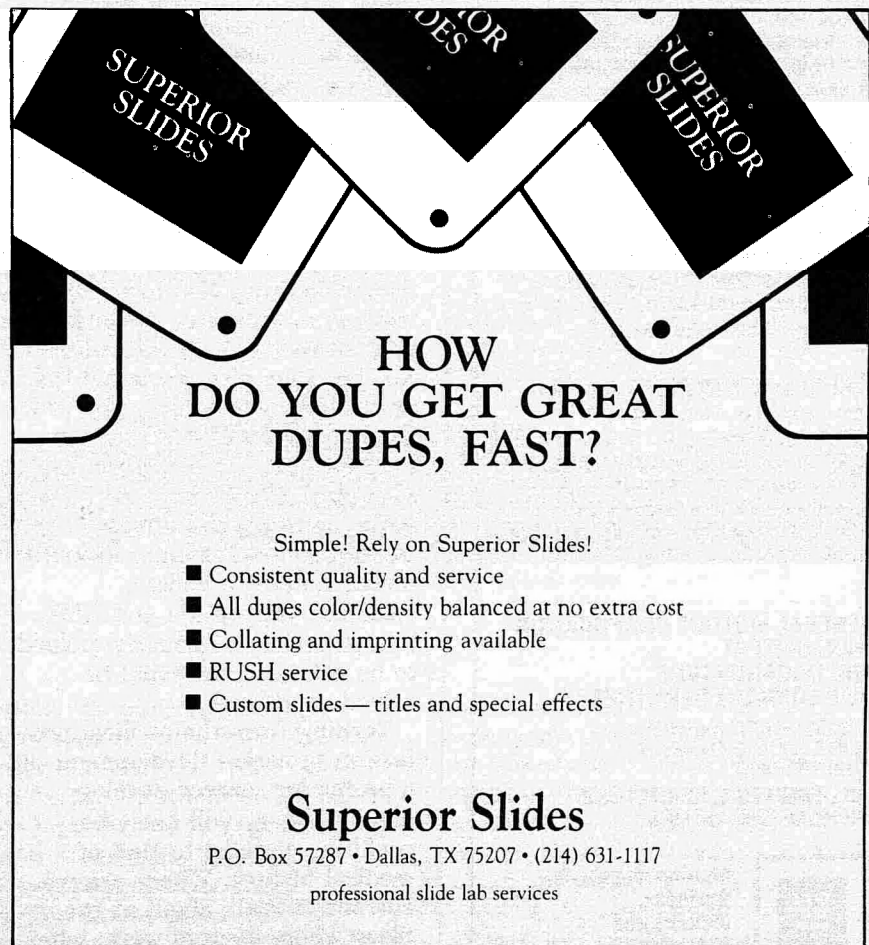
for more community, more cohesiveness and more of a sense of interdependence, career development continued to turn out an army of lemmings who rushed headlong to their individualistic sea.

I do not like this vision. But I think what it says about the current direction of career development, nationally and internationally, is accurate. To be sure, the vision gives too much power and responsibility to the field; as a profession, we are not nearly so influential on society, at least currently...for better or for worse. On the other hand, as we look toward the future, this may change. As I said earlier, books and pamphlets dealing with career development are being bought by thousands, not to say millions of people...and read. The Vietnam peace movement started

with a nucleus far smaller than that.

These quibblings aside, I believe that career development at its worst lends itself all too readily to an individual’s concern only for himself or herself, contributes toward an attitude of “I will get ahead, regardless of what happens to others” and the like. Career development specialists not only teach these attitudes unwittingly to clients, they very often live them in their own lives.

In considering where our profession is currently, it is instructive to consider the history of the medical profession—for in many ways our history parallels theirs. In the days before the term psychosomatic was ever heard of, doctors were engrossed with the simple miracle of healing. Striking out against darkness, superstition and ignorance, they



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taught personal hygiene, cleanliness and awareness of cause and effect. Such ideas were so needed, needed desperately by people of that age, that doctors never looked beyond this marvel to the fact that in order to isolate disease they were looking at each individual part of a human being—body, mind, emotions, spirit and will—in absolute isolation from one another and treating these parts of the whole individually. So engrossed were they with healing that they failed to notice the tremendous separation they were making between parts that belonged together. Not only was this a philosophical error and an error in their perception of reality, it also was a professional error—for it kept them from perceiving how *true healing* could come to many otherwise grievously unhealed conditions. Locked as these doctors were into the idea that illness in the physical body required a physical remedy and illness in the emotional body required a suitably emotional treatment, they failed to see that illness which stunned the mind might be due to something going on in the body, and illness which appeared in the body might be due to something going on in the mind. But when at last the good doctors *did* realize the interdependence of that which they had formerly treated as separate, not only did they correct a philosophical error, but they also increased the proficiency with which they practiced their trade or profession. *They became better doctors*, as they moved from physical medicine to psychosomatic treatments and thence—in more recent times—to holistic medicine, prevention and cure. Problems which formerly yielded to no solution now could be solved...and were.

Turning from the medical profession to career development, as a profession, career development's history will likely be—could be—parallel to that of medical history. Where are we currently? Well, about at the place where doctors were, when, coming out of an age of supersti-

tion and ignorance, they began to teach people to wash their hands and to observe cause and effect. Like doctors then, we come proclaiming good news: "You do not have to live your life as a stunted victim in the world of work. You have much more control over what happens to you in that world than you had imagined. You *can* find meaningful work which gives you a sense of satisfaction in the deepest part of your being and enables you to use the rich diversity of gifts which God (or life) gave you." That is good news indeed to this age which thought it did not matter much what they wanted. That is good news to people who thought their birthright as individuals was forever lost in the midst of the huddled masses yearning to be free. Men and women have recovered a sense of their own individual uniqueness—and that is a great gift indeed. Those who bring this gift to them—career counselors by whatever name they are known—are entranced justly with the healing borne on the wings of such ideas. Touching gratitude, tears, an importuning look of inexpressible thanks, notes, letters and the like, are the rewards of today's career counselor. (I didn't say money.)

But, so entranced have we become with this turn of events, that—like doctors before the dawning of psychosomaticism—we have failed to notice how much we have divided the body politic, the body of work. A rife individualism has invaded our whole conception of our work, just as it riddled the doctors' conception of what a human being was. In our case, as in theirs, this is not merely a philosophical error—it is also a failure to be totally in touch with reality. It is also a professional error, greatly inhibiting our effectiveness as career counselors.

The model from which we have unwittingly been working is that of the world of work as a race with many runners. We have perceived our work as career counselors to be that of preparing the runners who are our

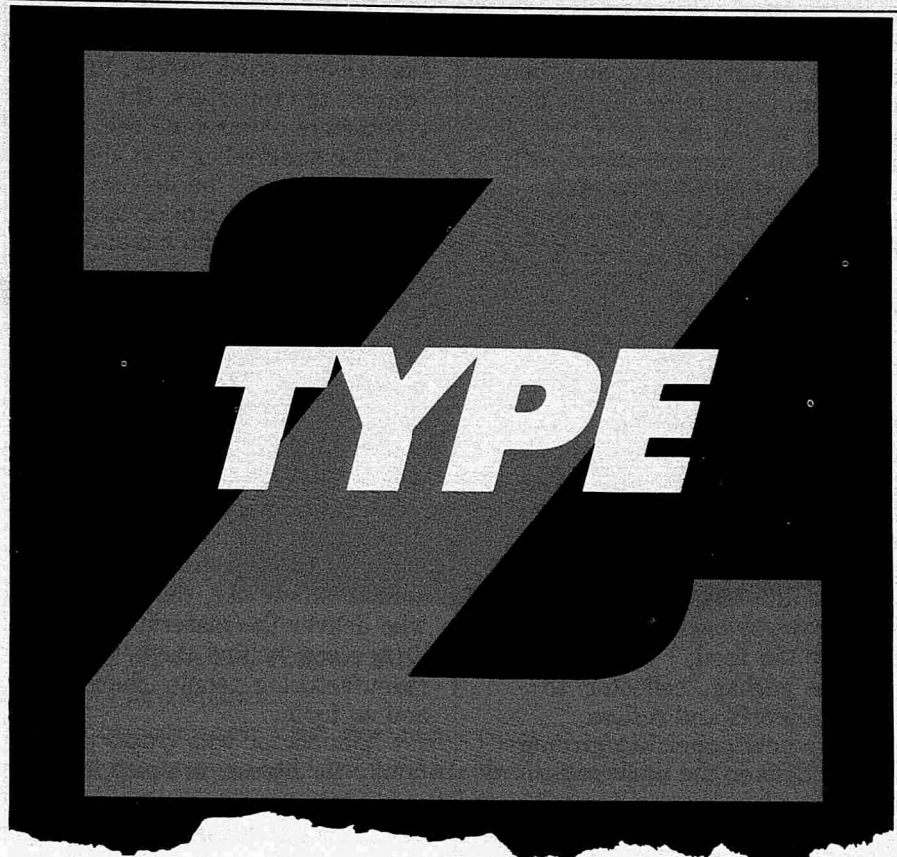
charge to run the best race possible, so that they will win. It is not our business—so we have seemed to say—to know much about the other runners. Our business rather was to put our charges through the proper calisthenics, regimen of practice sessions and exercise, to ensure the very best performance. Our focus was on them and on them alone.

Unfortunately, such a model cannot help but ultimately drive individuals further in upon themselves and further dissolve the fabric of society in the acid of self-centered individualism. It is time to say, we need a new and better model, just as the doctors once did. What model? Well, for a first stab at it, we could do worse than choose the metaphor for the world of work of a symphony orchestra. Consider that orchestra. Every individual is obviously and consciously related to every other individual. The oboe player knows it is his or her function to learn the part—to know it and know it well. But the oboe player would never think of stopping there. Once the part is learned, it is equally important to know *what the other players are doing and how his or her part fits in*. The oboe player is not the orchestra, just a part of it—an important part to be sure.

Thus conceived in this model, the world of work is not *primarily* competitive, but is primarily cooperative. Thus conceived, it is the task of the career development specialist to do two things, not one:

- Help the person decide what instrument they want to play in the orchestra, and then show them how they can learn the part;
- Once they have secured the position of oboe player in the orchestra, or whatever, teach them how to be sensitive to the other players, to what they play and how all that fits in with the part given to the oboe.

Given such a model and conception of our work, career counselors would obviously be doing things differently. If, for ex-



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ample, we were counseling homemakers who were about to enter the world of work outside the home, we would not think it our task merely to help them know what skills they already possessed and where they wanted to use those skills in their next job. That would be like merely helping the oboe player to

learn his or her own part but no one else's. Rather, we would add to this another whole dimension, namely, the dimension of community. We would ask the homemakers, for example, to tell us all the people they depended upon in their role as homemaker. If they had trouble depicting this, we might ask them to

visualize some natural disaster, such as an earthquake, and then ask them to visualize all the people they would need to reestablish communications with, somehow, if normal life was disrupted. The list would not be hard to put together:

- A gas repairperson to fix ruptured gas lines;
- Someone from the water department;
- Supermarket personnel, to supply food; behind them, the delivery people who brought the food to the store; behind them, the food warehouse people from whom the delivery people picked up the food; behind them, the canners and farmers and others who grow, or bake or otherwise produce the food;
- The garbage collector, to remove debris and refuse;
- The newspaper boy/girl/person, to deliver the daily paper;

behind him or her, the printers, the delivery truck driver, the editors, the reporters, the typesetters or machine operators;

- The bank teller who allows access to money, on deposit at the bank; behind him or her, the series of people who handle the money and process the checks, as well as the bank president;
- The gas station attendant for gas for the car; behind him or her, the driver of the tank trucks that bring the gasoline to the station; behind him or her, the people who refine the gas; etc.;
- The druggist, who provides medicines and bandages with which to treat injuries or illness; behind him or her, the people who deliver the materials to the drug store; behind them, the manufacturing people, chemists and so forth;
- The doctor who treats the family for illness or injury;

behind him or her, the nurses, the x-ray technicians, chemists and other specialists;

- and—well, you can complete the list.

A traditional symphony orchestra has some 60 to 92 players, and so does the homemakers' symphony orchestra: that community of which they are an intertwined, interdependent part.

Once we had helped the homemakers become sensitive to the community of which they had been a part, we would teach them the importance of likewise understanding all the people they would be interdependent with, or dependent upon, in whatever new jobs they chose.

Expanding this further, we would teach them how to identify the even larger community beyond their own particular chosen organization that they inevitably would be interrelated with. We would lend them tools for understanding what they would give to the community, and what the community would be giving to them. Not until they had both a sense of their own true individuality, uniqueness and splendor and a sense of the larger orchestra of which they were a part, would we consider that our job as career counselor was truly completed. But if we conducted ourselves in this fashion, we would build a sense of community into all of our work with our clients—and I mean *all* our clients, regardless of whether they were homemakers, military personnel, professional people, managers, teachers or helpers, blue collar workers or whatever.

This larger conception and definition of career development's proper function (not to build up the individual's sense of his or her own uniqueness at the expense of community, nor to try to build up community at the expense of an individual's sense of his or her own uniqueness, but rather to build up an individual's sense of *his or her own uniqueness within community*) could not help having a rippling effect throughout the whole world of



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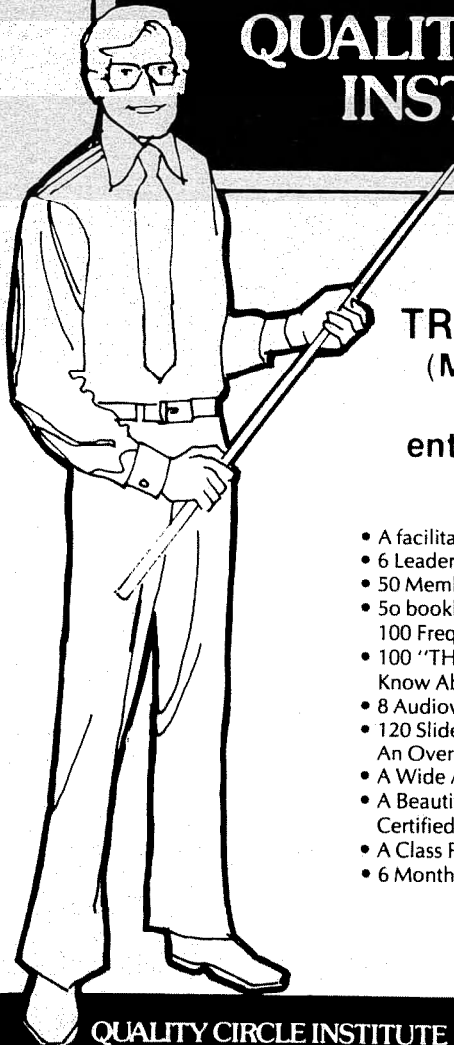
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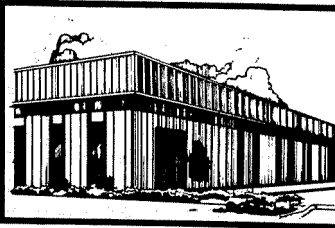
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work, vastly ameliorating the fierce sense of struggle and competition and dog-eat-dog world that currently exists. Given a stronger sense of community, we would find people conscious of their interdependence with their fellow human beings, even in the midst of crises and moods of some desperation.

If you would like some illustra-

tion of how this could affect even such harsh competitive enterprises as the job-hunt, let me share with you a true story, told to me by a 70-year-old woman. When she was a little girl, she said, her father used to work in any open mine. One time, however, many such miners were out of work, for jobs were hard to find. Announcement of some

impending hiring brought a number of men one early morning to a line shack near one of the pits. Her father struck up a conversation with the man behind him while waiting in line. It turned out that man had five children (her father had four). When it came her father's turn to go into the shack, he went in and was told that he was a lucky man, for there was but one opening remaining and it was to be his. "No," he said, "Give it to him," (gesturing to the man he had befriended, who was next in line) "For he has five children to support, while I have only four; he needs the job more than I."

Her father, of course, eventually found work; but the women concluded her story by saying, "Isn't it sad that things have changed so? You can't imagine such a thing happening in our day. But it was nice when there was such genuine caring for one another, even a stranger."

The fact, however, that there once was such a time (and not *that* long ago) means there can be such a time again. This sort of thing is the natural outgrowth and fruition of sensing that the world of work is a community, or orchestra if you prefer, where we are all bound together.

Career development, in some later day, can be given a good part of the credit for having helped to bring that about—if only we rethink our task and define it as helping our fellow employees/clients/fellow workers/family to *find a sense of their own uniqueness, within community.*

But we may be sure of this: in industry, or in our own private consulting or counseling, we cannot legitimately expect to be able to help others find for themselves that which we have not first found for ourselves. We *must* know our own uniqueness, yet hold on at the same time to a sense of appreciation of the larger community, or we will preach "community" with our lips, while we teach our clients "rank individualism, every man for himself and every woman for herself" by our lives. In a word,

we need to clean up or own act before we will be able with total clarity, consistency and integrity to teach a sense of community to others.

Currently such a sense of community is transparently missing in altogether too large a part of the career development field. If you would like chapter and verse about this loss of values, I can serve it up in as much detail as you can stand.

Let me say, before beginning this penitential litany of our profession's sins, that this list describes only *some* career counselors. There are many splendid men and women in this profession, so as to make us all proud, and they are the very contradiction of this list. However, it is my observation that the longer a man or woman is in this field, the more likely it seems to be that—contrary to all his or her earlier high-minded principles—he or she will lapse into the following:

- We betray no consciousness of community when we choose this profession not out of any burning desire to free people to use their gifts, but out of some accidental promotion or—worse still—out of some cynical calculating decision that there is good money to be made doing this, and, after all, a job is a job.

- We betray no consciousness of community when we decide to make a name for ourselves in this field by blatantly stealing others' ideas and baptizing them as our own, in barely altered language or tools.

We betray no consciousness of community when we are determined to make a name for ourselves in this field, at any price.

- We betray no consciousness of community when we deny we ever had mentors, though in truth we did, and we rigorously suppress all mention of our roots in all our public utterances.

- We betray no consciousness of community when we use people (in the basest sense of the word "use") on our way up, and then turn them away rudely

when in some latter day they ask us for a favor.

- We betray no consciousness of community when we feel the need to disparage or pour contempt upon other career development theories (or other career counselors) in order to exalt ourselves and our way of doing things.

- We betray no consciousness of community when we start to expect that in our professional performance every person who comes up to us to speak has come to give their energy to us, with no concomitant need on our part; we look to them to give us some gift—words of praise, admiration, affection, respect—and to talk about us, rather than seeing every such encounter as a mutual exchange, in which it is equally important that we give them the gift of talking about them, inquiring who they are and what they do, and tendering to them some word of praise, admiration, affection or respect.

- We betray no consciousness of community when we see our managers, clients or counselees as problems, rather than as opportunities.

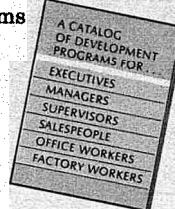
- We betray no consciousness of community when we see other counselors as adversaries rather than as allies, forgetting that with more than 100 million workers out there, and with more than 20 million of them out of work in any given year, we need all the help we can get.

- We betray no consciousness of community when we start getting protective about our profession and cry out for some process of accreditation "as a means of guaranteeing a client will get good counseling," when what we really mean is that we want accreditation because we have become a frightened profession, with our thoughts turned inward—examining how we can save ourselves from too much competition within the profession—rather than turning our thoughts outward, as they should be, to helping our clients or organization.

- We betray no consciousness of community when more and

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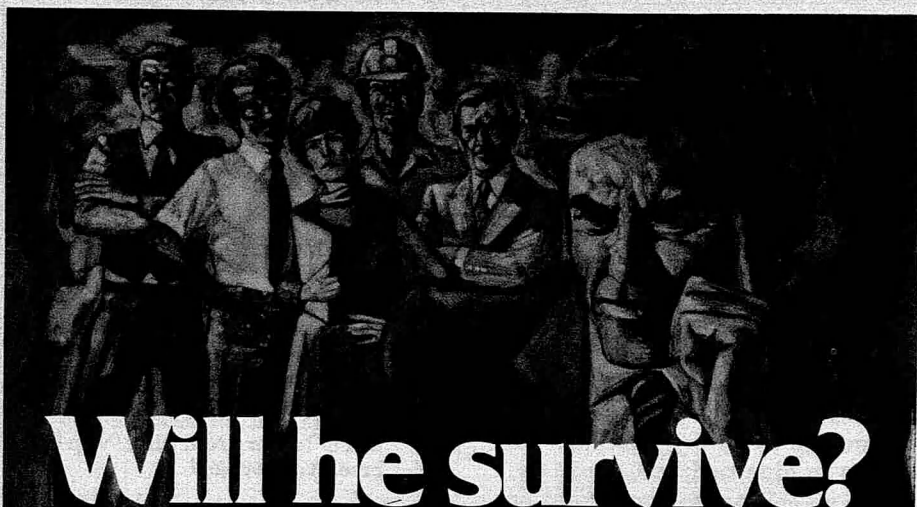
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A sense of community is transparently missing in altogether too large a part of the career development field.

who have therefore determined that they will be a different breed of career counselor from here on out—dedicated to discovering their own uniqueness indeed, but within a strong consciousness of community—and then helping others to that same discovery and consciousness.

For such people, a suggested plan of action; or if you will, a "renewed code of values":

- I will sit down and make a list of all those who have been or are a part of my community, *in my work* as a career counselor. I will write down what they gave me, or give me; what it is that I gave them, or am giving them, or could give them, in return. Thus I will begin to sense the way in which I am a part of a community.

- I will also make up a list of all those upon whom I am dependent or interrelated with, *outside* my work (including, but not restricted to, the kinds of people mentioned on our homemakers' list earlier), so that I may realize the larger group of people with whom my life is intertwined.

- If I have not done so in the last year, I will sit down and make inventory of the gifts that I have been given, asking not "what kinds of gifts do I have?" but rather, "what kinds of gifts have I been given for the sake of the community?"

- I will write out an essay on how I perceive the function of work, taking into account the definitions given by "Right Livelihood," and taken from E.F.

more our profession becomes "we" and our clients become "them," and "we" adopt more and more complicated jargon or "in-expressions" in order to shut "them" out.

Well, if we search for *where* it is that some career counselors, at least, have lost their values, this is what I think we will find. And what do you suppose are the consequences of such lived-out examples of rank individualism among career counselors? Our clients are not stupid. They are often in desperate situations, which means they are often living off their intuition rather than their logic. They see us in an uncanny way, and they see us more clearly for who we really are than many of us would ever like to think.

If we live out our work in career development as though we sprang fullblown from the head

of Minerva without roots or origins, without mentors or teachers, without a sense of gratitude to anyone in the past and without a sense of debt to anyone in the future, taking energy from people rather than giving energy to them, treating our profession as an "in-group" and our clients or students as "outside the camp"—what should be expect but that *their* model for how they should behave once they have "made it" in their next job, or the one thereafter, will inevitably be *Us*?

Clearly we need remedies. We need more and more people in the field of career development who sense that "me-first" individualism has the capability of blowing up this planet, and that career counseling—wrongly conceived and wrongly lived—can unwittingly be a powerful catalyst for that tendency and

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The key is behavior— mainly, yours

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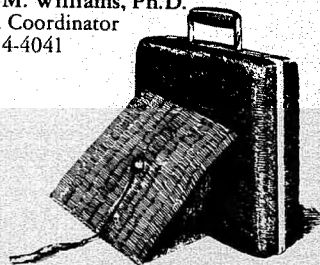
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Schumacher—that the function of work is threefold: to give us the joy of exercising the skills and gifts we have been given; to help us overcome our ego-centeredness by learning that it takes all of us to do the tasks that need to get done—that alone, each of us is incomplete; and to bring forth the goods, services or information that altogether are needed by the community as a whole, without it being at the expense of *part* of that community.

- I will compose for myself a code of values, which shall guide me in all that I do with my organization or clients. Included will be such ideas as these: I am part of a global village, and I will do career counseling in order to help this village by diminishing the needs of my clients in order that they may find self-fulfillment, rather than trying subtly to increase the needs of my clients so that I may make myself more indispensable (and/or well-off); I will search for ways to acknowledge that I am part of a community called career development, each of us in that community having different gifts, and all of us together needed by the global village. I will not try to conceal my roots, or that I am an evolving student in this field. I will speak freely of those whose ideas I use; I will seek, the more established I become in the field of career development, to see that my energy in every individual encounter goes out to the other person, rather than expecting that his or her energy will flow toward me. The purpose of the encounter is not that they should give me a gift, but that I should give them one; better yet, that we might give to each other curiosity, interest, respect and affirmation. Peace.

—Richard Bolles

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