COGNITIVE CAREER COUNSELING: A RATIONAL-EMOTIVE APPROACH TO CAREER DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT: The application of cognitive techniques to the career counseling process has been minimal. Since the career and personal development of individuals is interwoven, practitioners from a variety of disciplines are faced with a wide range of complex presenting problems regardless of their specialty. Providing occupational information and assessing job skills are partial components of the career counseling process. This paper addresses the cognitive barriers which interfere with successful career development. Cognitive career counseling (CCC) is described as a methodology for helping clients modify their vocational irrational beliefs (VIBes) so that they may achieve their career and personal goals during realistically unstable changes in economic conditions.

Career counseling has been viewed as a discipline which solely focuses on work-related issues. It has been distinguished from psychotherapy which applies a more intense methodology for treating a wide range of problems presented by disturbed individuals. While this dichotomous thinking has served to superficially clarify the difference between roles of counselors and psychotherapists, it is a view which can be detrimental for practitioners and their clients. It is quite evident that work and personal life problems are interwoven (Brown, 1985; Ellis, 1972; Manuele-Adkins, 1992; Quick, 1992; Richman, 1988a, 1988b; Zedeck & Mosier, 1990), and that work in itself can have a damaging or enhancing influence on the individual’s well-be-
So often career counselors have asked me how to treat their clients when issues other than career decision-making and job-finding techniques are presented or resistance towards obtaining employment occurs. Psychotherapists have frequently requested information on traditional career counseling resources and occupational information when clients present work-related problems. This narrow, limited style of thinking is prevalent in the workplace as well (Richman, 1988b, 1992). Organizational behavior reflects the belief that personal problems should stay out of the workplace. Employees believe that the workplace should fulfill their personal needs and they often experience difficulty accepting the reality that organizations expect the job to get done without having to hear personal complaints from staff. Beliefs of individuals, as they present both personal and work-related problems, remain a constant factor which needs to be addressed by any practitioner who treats problems through the life cycle of the total human being. Recognition by psychotherapists, career counselors, and organizational consultants that personal and work-related issues play an interactive role substantiates the advantage of providing a methodology which can address individuals' beliefs about their personal and work lives within the realistic expertise of the various helping disciplines and the reality of external conditions.

Clients seeking assistance often reinforce this all-or-nothing view of work and personal issues. Some individuals register for career development workshops as a safe, comfortable entry into psychotherapy. Seeking information and advice about specific job problems is often viewed as a quick, easy solution independent of deeper personal issues. However, in some cases external work-related events may be more resistant to rational interventions and to change than other life conditions (Ellis, 1992). The current economy, pervasive corporate downsizing, and rapid technological changes, combined with the tendency for individuals and organizations to maintain unrealistic expectations about themselves and each other (Richman, 1992), substantiate the need for a methodology which addresses the cognitive as well as the behavioral and emotive components of clients' personal and work lives.

As a cognitive-behavioral psychologist and organizational consultant with extensive experience in career counseling, I have conducted many individual sessions, workshops, and seminars for clients at all levels of the organizational hierarchy and at various stages of their