

Guidance counsellors

Choosing a career is like choosing good wine

Twenty years ago, thousands of people worked in the woods, clearing roads for logging operations. Today, this occupation has almost disappeared. Many woods workers have been replaced by new machines operated by just one person.

The job market is a confusing place, full of industrial and technological change. Those who know their way around it are rare.

Woodworkers and guidance counsellors have one thing in common: their jobs have changed a great deal over the years. At one time, the role of guidance counsellor — those who helped young people choose among career options available — was entrusted to teachers with no special training.

Today, Peter Johnson and hundreds of guidance counsellors around the province have access to specialized training and effective work tools to help young people develop career plans.

Johnson, a guidance counsellor at James M. Hill Memorial High School in Chatham and president of the Guidance Council, New Brunswick Teachers' Association, has taught in Ontario and Newfoundland. He says



Counsellors help young people make wise career choices.

the system in New Brunswick is one of the best in the country.

The career information centres, conveniently located in all New Brunswick high schools, are bursting with information about trades and professions, labor market trends, and the programs offered at community colleges and universities. They also have a range of profiles to measure young people's interests and aptitudes.

In addition, many schools organize visits by representatives of colleges, universities, the

armed forces, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, private schools and employers who talk to students about future plans.

In the past few years, some schools have acquired another powerful tool. CHOICES, a computerized expert system, enables students to explore their career options according to 12 factors. With the help of a counsellor, the student enters data into the computer, which then suggests a short list of trades or professions that meet the criteria specified by the student.

The system is able to provide detailed descriptions of 900 trades and professions, including the necessary training, prerequisites and information about the institutions which offer the programs.

But it takes more than documentation and machines to help a student decide on a career.

"Counsellors can alleviate the initial anxiety experienced by students confronting the labor market for the first time," Johnson explained, noting many workers will go through similar

experiences several times in their working lives.

"While helping students prepare their first career plans, guidance counsellors teach decision-making and self-exploration skills — powerful tools that will be useful to the students for the rest of their lives."

He noted career counselling is a scientific process that helps students discover their own strengths and weaknesses, the world of work, communities, programs offered at post-secondary institutions and future trends.

"Career counselling has some things in common with making good wine," Johnson said. "One needs to give it care and attention, a time-proven method and all the finest ingredients."

However, he warned, students must not wait until the last minute to begin the process of choosing a career. Counsellors believe students and their parents should start to think about career choices in Grade 9 or even earlier, not in Grade 12.

"Become connoisseurs! Don't settle for the cheap stuff. Treat yourself to the best! Wise decisions grow better with proper aging," Johnson said.

Setting priorities

12 issues to consider in career decision-making

1. EDUCATION LEVEL

How much education do you have? How much are you willing to get? If your goal is to become a doctor, you will need at least eight years of university. If you are not willing to go to school that long, maybe consider something else.

2. WORK SITE

Do you want to work inside all the time, outside all the time, or a combination of both? If you work outside, you need to be prepared to work in all weather conditions.

3. PHYSICAL DEMANDS

This is the amount of physical strength needed to do a job each day. Sometimes, it is necessary to use extra effort. Some jobs require the ability to lift things that weigh 4.5 kg (10 lbs) or less and sit most of the time. Other jobs require heavy physical exertion and handling loads weighing more than 23 kg (50 lbs) or more on a regular basis. There are lots of jobs in between.

4. TEMPERAMENTS

Temperaments are personal qualities found in work activities

or situations. People who find work that suit their temperaments are more likely to be satisfied with work. For example, if you would rather work by yourself, you probably would not want to consider psychology as a career.

5. APTITUDES

Aptitudes are ratings of a person's ability to learn different skills — how quickly and easily you learn. To get an accurate measure of your aptitudes, many tests are available. Contact your counsellor for information on how to take one.

6. EARNINGS

Most people want to make a lot of money. However, other things may be more important to you. If you try only for high-paying jobs, you may not find something that suits your interests, abilities or personality. Understand you have to start out at a lower pay and work your way up.

7. INTERESTS

What you like to do has a big impact on job choices. The more

your interests match your work, the more satisfied you will be. If you are not sure what you are interested in, consider asking your counsellor for an interest inventory.

Sometimes you can't have the job of your dreams right off. Keep in mind the possibility that you may have to take a lower level (or entry level) job and work your way up to a higher level job with more responsibility.

Deciding on a career to pursue is difficult at best. Many factors go into making a career decision: How much money will you make? Will you like what you are doing? Will you have to (or get to) travel? Will you be able to do the work? Decide what's most important to you.

8. FUTURE OUTLOOK

Future outlook is a prediction of how many jobs there will be in the near future. It will tell you whether there will be an increase in demand for trained workers or whether demand will stay the same.

9. FIELDS OF WORK

Fields of work represent broad, general areas of work activity. Occupations that have similar types of work can be found in the same field.

10. PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

Some jobs require physical activities that not all people are able (or willing) to do. If you are not willing or able to do certain physical activities, you probably will not want to consider occupations requiring those activities. However, keep in mind that some employers may change job duties to suit people who have physical limitations.

11. HOURS OF WORK AND TRAVEL

Some jobs require travel or working hours which would affect your lifestyle, thus causing you to be unhappy with your work. If you are not willing to consider working hours other than *regular* work hours (8 to 5, Monday through Friday) you may want to consider only occupations that do not require these factors.

12. ENVIRONMENT

Environmental conditions refer to the physical environment of a worker. If you are unwilling to work in extreme heat, extreme cold, where it is damp or wet, where there is a lot of noise, dust, odours or vibrations, or where there might be risk of an injury, you may want to consider occupations wherein these conditions do not exist.

To decide what is most important, pick a few of the areas listed. Is how much you earn more important than being interested in the job? Is how much schooling you are willing to get a big factor, more important than how much you will make?

Your career decision will affect all areas of your life. Setting priorities may not be easy, but it can help you to make a wise, informed decision and find an occupation that will contribute to your happiness and satisfaction in life.