



Photo: Colourbox

## Hope is More Than a Feeling

There are many uncertainties in our world, and within such a context, it is not surprising that many people struggle with maintaining a sense of hopefulness as they consider their career journey. In working with clients who are feeling hopeless and discouraged, it is important to start by recognizing that “hope” is more than just a good feeling, it also requires action to increase hopefulness.

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Career theorists such as Spencer Niles, Hyung Joon Yoon and Norman Amundson use the term Hope-Action to discuss the central role of hope and action in the career development process. Andrea Fruhling has added her expertise as a career coach to develop practical exercises and resources to go along with the Hope-Action approach.



Using the model of a pinwheel, developed as part of the hope-action approach, there are seven competencies that we know when activated will contribute to one's sense of hopefulness. Hope is placed in the centre, connected to Self-Reflection, Self-Clarity, Visioning, Goal-Setting and Planning, Implementing, and Adapting. Research shows that when strengthened and working together, the seven competencies will increase the sense of hope and help support career development processes. The environment is also an essential part of this model, and this is demonstrated through the use of bi-directional arrows.

## Self-Reflection

The Self-Reflection competency requires thoughtful consideration of purpose and meaning in life. To engage in this type of reflection, people are encouraged to thoughtfully examine beliefs, thoughts, behaviours, feelings and circumstances. Consider key questions such as the following:

1. What matters to you, and what type of life would you like to create for yourself?
2. How does your career choice fit with who you are and with making the world a better place?
3. Is your life in balance? What are you doing to maintain your physical health, your spiritual health, your emotional health, and your mental health?

The shift here is to move from focusing on solving problems and experiencing uncertainty to becoming self-aware and reflecting on what matters most, by exploring new possibilities. To achieve this mindset, it is often necessary to pause and reflect, creating space to become more relaxed and creative.

## **Self-Clarity**

Self-Clarity focuses on the identification and analysis of skills, interests, values and personal style. In making career choices, people must have a good understanding of these different components. One of the best ways to acquire this self-knowledge is to start by exploring the things that people enjoy doing. What brings joy in life? This is not only about school or work. Instead, people are encouraged to look at their lives broadly. You might want to have clients make a list and then take some time to analyze those moments when they find joy in life. What are they doing? Who are they with? What is it that makes this so special? As they explore these questions and others, what can they learn about themselves and their interests, values, skills and personal style? Moments of joy and well-being often contain important information about the self. Of course, you can also look at the opposite side and identify what it is that leads to frustration. This form of exploratory analysis provides a good foundation for self-clarity.

## **Visioning**

Moving beyond the foundational self-knowledge that comes with Self-Reflection and Self-Clarity, people can be encouraged to envision some new possibilities for the future. The Visioning competency takes into account probabilities but also encourages people to think and dream more broadly. This is a time for brainstorming and exploring new pathways that they might pursue. Ask them to set aside that little voice that might be telling them to “be realistic”. Dream big! Look for those inspiring adventures that might lie ahead. Visioning isn’t just about looking forward; it is also about looking backward. What have they already achieved? What have they learned along the way? They are on a personal and career journey, and some segments have been completed, while others are still unfolding. In crafting these new possibilities, ask them to consult with others, particularly those who are supportive and encouraging. This is not a time to be listening to the nay-sayers.

## **Goal-Setting and Planning**

As people move towards the competencies of goal setting and planning, remind them that they don’t have to have everything worked out. The important thing is to take it one step at a time. You can always change your mind. You can always change direction. The plans people make need to be as realistic as possible. Being aware of who they are and how much they are actually able to do as they go forward is essential. This is the time for doing research and choosing a goal that provides a balance between being attainable, while also being challenging, which will help them build forward momentum. As they identify their goals and develop a plan, they may want to consider the people and resources they have access to that will help them achieve their goals, along with some strategies to help them stay accountable. Developing a plan that works for them will help them move forward, and

also recognize moments when plans need to change, or they are starting to drift away from the goals they had set for themselves.

A common mistake at this point is to try to do too much, to have a career or life plan all set out at the beginning. Planning and goal setting are not one-time events; this is something that they will be doing their entire life as they set a pathway for themselves. Being open to learning about who they are as they have new life and learning experiences will help them navigate uncertainty and notice changes that might need to be made as they continue to grow and take steps in their career and life.

## **Implementing**

Self-Reflection, Self-Clarity, Visioning, and Goal Setting and Planning are all precursors to Implementation. As people put plans into action, they don't have to have it all figured out, but they do need to have the courage to take that first step. Implementing has a paradoxical element to it. You need to be positive and step forward with confidence and clarity while at the same time recognizing that it is okay to be uncertain about what lies ahead. This has been called "positive uncertainty". What this suggests is a balanced and versatile action approach featuring the creative tools of flexibility, hopefulness, and imagination. As people proceed with implementation, it can be helpful to have some form of accountability with others. They need to hang in there when the going gets tough, and it is helpful to connect with people who will offer some encouragement. The effective implementation of action plans often requires the support of others. Traditionally, people have thought that the starting point should be self-reflection. However, a case can be made for "just doing something" without having everything figured out. With this approach, there is a focus on giving yourself time to remain curious about who you are and what you have learned along the way.

## **Adapting**

There are few action plans that are implemented in a straight line. There is usually a need for the competency of Adaptation to keep things moving along in a positive direction. Life happens, and things don't always turn out as expected. If people think about implementation using the metaphor of going on a hike, when hiking through the forest, you are not always moving in a straight line. Sometimes you might need to stop or go backwards before resuming the journey. There may even be large trees or rocks blocking the way or forcing people to slow down and find a new way forward. If people have a pre-planned path through the forest without room for adjustment, or if they are holding onto their route too tightly without knowing that things might change, they might get frustrated, head back, or stop moving altogether.

Ask them to think about times in their life when they have successfully overcome a challenge. What was it that helped them get through the difficulties? It is this resilient spirit that they need to employ

as they continue their journey. Ask them to remember that whatever challenges they are facing, this is not the first time that they have faced difficulties. They made it through in the past, and they will make it through again if they apply some of the same skills, strategies and resolve. The important thing is to remain flexible and be ready to take advantage of new opportunities that might emerge. Successful adaptation is enhanced through curiosity, flexibility and a willingness to explore new learning opportunities. There may be an uncertain outcome, but they will need to be persistent, hopeful and be prepared to take risks in the face of uncertainty.

## **The Environment**

As a final component in Hope-Action Theory, they need to be aware of the importance of the environment to keep that pinwheel moving (the wind blows from different directions). Their ability to be hopeful is impacted by the environment around them, which may include various groups of people and experiences. These may include family and friends, teachers, community members, governments, world events, and even climate change. There is no doubt that the world is chaotic and full of unexpected twists and turns. We can't control everything, but we can be prepared to go with the flow and to take advantage of those opportunities that come our way. Applying the various Hope-Action competencies is not a one-step process. They may come to the point where they need to move from action planning to further self-reflection, self-clarity, and perhaps visioning. The pinwheel keeps moving, and the life/career journey requires the balancing of positivity with uncertainty.

Hope-Action Theory offers a new approach to career development, and there is considerable research supporting both theory and practice. We know that exposing people to Hope-Action Theory interventions has a significant impact on the levels of hope people are able to create and sustain. If you would like to learn more, you may want to purchase our recent publication "Career Wayfinder: Discovering your career through delightfully practical projects", and consider obtaining your Certification in Hope-Action Theory and Practice through Doubleknot Works.