

Career-Assessment: A Proclivity for Effectiveness and Evaluation

By Glenn M. Gring

The preparation of this paper is the result of an invitation from the editor to consider career-assessment from the viewpoint of a campus minister. I am to discuss what is involved and give suggestions for accomplishing this somewhat specialized measurement of life and work.

The topic has well-timed personal meaning as well as discernible professional significance for me (and, I would estimate has real value for many colleagues). The invitation to write this essay arrived on the occasion of my fiftieth birthday anniversary, an appropriate time to do career-assessment; that is axiomatic.

This is not to infer that one's career-assessment must wait for the arrival of middle life. Rather, the objective of this paper is to provide some perspectives for assessment, somewhat irrespective of one's age. I am proposing the utilitarian value of a proclivity for effectiveness and evaluation. Also being offered is a design for a "career log," a tool for implementing assessment.

My growing interest in life/work planning, an interest spanning the past six years, has a theological orientation. Is life/work planning a dominant, preferable model for ministry? The familiar "inward-outward spiritual journey" model may very well dilute the forceful meaning of Christian discipleship by sloganizing a holistic approach to faith and life. That discussion, however, is beyond the objective of this essay. Let successive discussions show that epigrammatical models for ministry are at best an exercise in theological reductionism.

In the instance where a life/work planning model for ministry is missing, it is missing centrally. I suggest that life/work planning is a focus for programs and rises out of theological understanding. Questions of theological import are not being explored in the topic of this paper. There are, to be sure, questions for theological inquiry and reflection; those questions deserve serious consideration by campus ministers.

What is really important to you? Is it essential to stop and ask yourself, "Am I using my time and energy in ways I feel have true and ultimate value?" What matters most to you? We all need to be encouraged to check basic assumptions and priorities.

What is needed, I suggest, is an inclination, a proclivity for career-assessment. A person maintains an attitude which values the measurement of effectiveness and welcomes evaluation. Moreover, axiological questions are inseparably linked with assessment.

Campus ministers have a functional role where direct involvement with students is inevitable. Many students come to the campus minister for assistance and counseling. With the values of our society changing, we must not only consider our own attitude toward the concept of work in terms of self-fulfillment, we must also give some thought to our attitudes about workers in a variety of occupations. This involves reasearch, and, hopefully, continuing education for the campus minister.

A growing number of social scientists are writing in the areas of vocational counseling and life/work planning. Two of them have influenced my thinking and my practice in career counseling, namely, Richard N. Bolles, and John L. Holland. Their separate emphases relate to "clarifying" for the client what is happening in order to explain a wide range of variables, with special reliance on the "self-directed search" in the quest for jobs/occupations. This appeals to me.

Bolles is considered an enabling teacher and trainer, empowering others with comprehensive life planning skills, not in a piece-meal fashion. As he himself puts it, ". . . and L/wp, by definition, means looking at all parts of your life, together."¹ His books have received wide acceptance, due in part to his "down-to-earth" practicality, coupled with a penchant for self-actuated processes.

I am suggesting that an inclination, a proclivity for career-assessment, is at once rewarding, desirable, and available to self-actuated processes familiar to campus ministers. One is reminded of Professor Super's hypothesis that,

" . . . by relieving tensions, clarifying feelings, giving insight, helping attain success, and developing a feeling of

competence in one important area of adjustment, the vocational, it is possible to release the individual's ability to cope more adequately with other aspects of living, thus bringing about improvement in his general adjustment. The second hypothesis is that this is best done by building on the individual's assets, by working with his strengths rather than with his weaknesses. The emphasis is not on pathology, but rather on *hygiology*.²

Newly developed programs are being released in which seminars and workshops in career motivation deal with personal strengths, interest inventories, potentialities, values, and vocational fantasies. Something in our religious heritage prevents people with obvious religious sensibilities from considering their strengths, related to activities they enjoy. Indeed, persons with a Puritan heritage influenced by Calvinistic traditions, may feel that career development opposes belief in divine sovereignty and one's submission to the will of God. In these instances what happens to the individual's struggle for personal meaning and the search for answers to the problem of feeling increasingly powerless?

How may we define career development? "Life career development is defined as self-development over the life span through the integration of roles, settings, and events of a person's life."³ Bolles conceives this integration in terms of learning, working, and playing, which may in reality be restrictive, distressing "boxes" or stages in the life span, occupying separate and somewhat distinct time frames. Bolles proposes a balance where learning, working, and playing are seen as "**. . . three different aspects of every time frame.**"⁴

Selecting a Criteria for Assessment

The form that career-assessment takes depends on the **criteria** by which you measure your effectiveness. As Bolles has stated it, "**. . . we tend to evaluate our own effectiveness by one or more (or all) of the following kinds of criteria:**

- How busy we are able to keep.
- How much we enjoy our work.
- How much of a sense of achievement or accomplishment our work is giving us.
- How much of a sense of power our work is giving us.
- How much our relationships at work (with fellow staff and/or clients) are satisfying our affiliation needs.

- How much our work fits in with our need to love and/or our need to be loved.”⁵

Vocational choice is supremely important to the individual because “what you do is what you are.” One’s personality and vocation are substantive aspects linked throughout life and career. The Holland theory of vocational choices is based on the idea that vocational interests are an aspect of personality, and that the description of an individual’s vocational interests in turn describes the individual’s personality.

Career-assessment is also of particular consequence as an aspect of career development. Bolles is quite correct in saying:

“Evaluation is merely a ‘systemic way’ of trying to get at the issue with which every worker must ultimately be concerned: the issue of his or her effectiveness. The secret of that effectiveness begins with a correct match between job and worker, where the skills the job requires are the skills that the worker not only has, but most enjoys using.”⁶

The Career Log

Try an individualized experiment. Write out your own constructive Life Review. You may also call this document your Career Log, an instrument implementing your decision to estimate your effectiveness while working through a process of evaluation.

What follows is a collection of ideas for developing a career log. I disclaim originality since I cannot recall all sources from which these specific suggestions have been borrowed and, obviously, I am making reference to a comprehensive project involving your time and skills of reflection and memory. Use this outline for whatever worth you may discover in it. Write your Life Review using this list as a point of reference.

I. Personality factors.

1. Self-concept (cf. Donald Super)
2. Personality type (cf. John L. Holland)
3. Relationships
4. Values
5. Other factors

II. Career history.

1. Dreams and fantasies (vocational)

- How much our work fits in with our need to love and/or our need to be loved."⁵

Vocational choice is supremely important to the individual because "what you do is what you are." One's personality and vocation are substantive aspects linked throughout life and career. The Holland theory of vocational choices is based on the idea that vocational interests are an aspect of personality, and that the description of an individual's vocational interests in turn describes the individual's personality.

Career-assessment is also of particular consequence as an aspect of career development. Bolles is quite correct in saying:

"Evaluation is merely a 'systemic way' of trying to get at the issue with which every worker must ultimately be concerned: the issue of his or her effectiveness. The secret of that effectiveness begins with a correct match between job and worker, where the skills the job requires are the skills that the worker not only has, but most enjoys using."⁶

The Career Log

Try an individualized experiment. Write out your own constructive Life Review. You may also call this document your Career Log, an instrument implementing your decision to estimate your effectiveness while working through a process of evaluation.

What follows is a collection of ideas for developing a career log. I disclaim originality since I cannot recall all sources from which these specific suggestions have been borrowed and, obviously, I am making reference to a comprehensive project involving your time and skills of reflection and memory. Use this outline for whatever worth you may discover in it. Write your Life Review using this list as a point of reference.

I. Personality factors.

1. Self-concept (cf. Donald Super)
2. Personality type (cf. John L. Holland)
3. Relationships
4. Values
5. Other factors

II. Career history.

1. Dreams and fantasies (vocational)

2. Interests, hobbies, avocations
3. Part-time jobs, work activities
4. Full-time jobs
5. Present leisure activities
6. Present vocational objectives
7. Where are you headed, vocationally?

III. Evaluate your **values** and **attitudes** toward campus ministry.

1. Briefly write your job description, including related tasks and assignments, salary range and benefits
2. Environment and work conditions
3. Duties, responsibilities, required work
4. Personal work satisfaction
5. Feedback received from students, faculty, others
6. Your specific feelings about your career
7. What effect did parents or friends have on your vocational choice?
8. Describe a typical day's work
9. If you had a career-related problem, to whom would you go for help?
10. If you had it to do all over again, what job would you choose?
11. In five, ten, or fifteen years from now, what would you like to be doing?

If a career log is somewhat overwhelming to you in prospect, be aware of its important utilitarian value. Additionally, should you choose to defer making your assessment in written, organized ways, consider what Richard Bolles offers when he writes:

“. . . Am I preoccupying myself with the sorts of activities that I really want to be doing? And, if so, am I doing these activities in the most effective, efficient, and competent manner possible?

. . . We might call this the issue of Evaluation and Re-evaluation, except that Evaluation is so often interpreted these days as something that **others** do for you (or to you). Effectiveness, however, is essentially a self-actuated, self-directed form of questioning. It springs out of a particular task; and to improve the way in which you are working toward your goals.”⁷

Ministers needing specific guidance in shaping their assessment data with recommended exercises, may wish to review "A Career-Assessment Manual for Ministers," by Fred McGehee. The author is a career assessment consultant in the Career Guidance Section of the Sunday School Board's Church Administration Department. Dr. McGehee says the material ". . . can be used best for assessment purposes by a person who is waiting for an individualized career-assessment consultation."⁸

The exercises in the McGehee manual are concerned with Personal Assets, Calling, Mission, Role Expectations, Sources of Help, Skills, Career, Fulfillment, Decision Making, Celebration, and Planning to Grow.

Whatever means one uses for assessment, the point in all of this is to be able to discover and to express career-relevant characteristics about oneself. We all have a need to generate self-confidence. It is accomplished by drawing on success experiences and debunking myths concerning employees of religious institutions and denominational agencies. We do live and work in the real world and need not be entranced by the pressure to compartmentalized ministerial vocation.

I suggest that campus ministers will enhance the building and preservation of a distinctive ministry (Bolles calls this "Elegant Effectiveness") through organized assessment. Stanley Marcus calls it "mystique."

" . . . it will take time and repeated demonstrations of ability, performance, integrity, and consistency before the mystique emerges. I doubt seriously if anyone has ever achieved a mystique by setting out **consciously** to build one. The core of mystique is an idea—widely and fondly held by a large number of people—that has been built on 'remembrances of things past'; acts of kindness and thoughtfulness, deeds of courage and conviction, repeated demonstrations of leadership and reliability, proofs of devotion to the public welfare as well as to profits, all tied together by the qualities of humor, talent, and integrity.

. . . So, if you are fortunate to have a good mystique, be faithful to it and treat it with understanding and care."⁹

Whatever the Life Review (career log) reveals to you, it must not be seen merely in terms of a sentimental remi-

niscing. It is more a constructive review, a judgment of life and work based on criteria one selects. The log may begin with past experiences to help a person set new goals and aim for new directions.

Maintaining an inclination, a proclivity for effectiveness and evaluation may mean breaking with patterns with which we are comfortable. It may also introduce a person to satisfying, fulfilling attitudes about life and work.

My intuition is that career-assessment, if organized at all, is often organized in idiosyncratic ways. This means that the criteria is selected "willy-nilly," sometimes on impulse alone, resulting in frustration for a person who may wish to examine life and work in a more successful, purposive way which produces positive results.

As the late Paul Tillich wrote: ". . . we can know what we are (although this is the hardest knowledge of all), but we do not know what we can become. And we should not simply measure what we can become by what we are today."¹⁰

I am in debt to the persons who have encouraged me to develop "a climate for career-assessment." May I join you in this current attempt to maintain an inclination, a proclivity for effectiveness and evaluation?

Footnotes

1. Richard N. Bolles, **The Three Boxes of Life**, Berkeley, California: Ten Speed Press, 1978, p. 1.
2. Donald E. Super, **The Psychology of Careers**, New York: Harper & Row, 1957, p. 300.
3. Stephen G. Weinrach, editor, **Career Counseling: Theoretical and Practical Perspectives**, New York: McGraw-Hill, p. 315.
4. Bolles, p. 330.
5. Bolles, pp. 303-304.
6. Bolles, p. 461.
7. Bolles, p. 16.
8. Fred McGehee, **A Career Assessment Manual for Ministers**, Nashville, Tennessee: Convention Press, 1981, preface.
9. Stanley Marcus, **Quest for the Best**, New York: The Viking Press, 1979, pp. 161-169.
10. Paul Tillich, **Theology of Culture**, New York: Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 204.

Suggested Reading

- Gordon W. Allport, **Pattern and Growth in Personality**, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963.
- Richard N. Bolles, **What Color is Your Parachute? A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career Changers**, Berkeley, California: Ten Speed Press, 1980.
- John L. Holland, **Making Vocational Choices, A Theory of Careers**, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1973.
- Charles Guy Moore, **The Career Game**, New York: National Institute of Career Planning, 1976, 1978.