

## **What if I can't afford a career coach?** **by Rose Jonas, Ph.D.**

### **Where can I go for help?**

The best-selling career planning books will have a prominent display in the book store. If you can't afford to buy one of them, you can usually find Bolles, Lore, Moses, Kay, Haldane in the library.

Books have great counsel for you, but the problem with them is they're like chocolate Easter bunnies. You can devour them quickly, but what do you have at the end? Maybe a tummy ache, maybe a bigger job to do in the gym. But have you advanced your career search just because you have more knowledge about the process? For many people, the answer is "No."

These books work for you if you behave more like a blackberry picker than a bunny-ear-nipper: The sun's so hot you feel uncomfortable. You have to bend over. You have to scrabble your fingers through brambles in your careful search. But, oh, the juice as you fill your bucket with those tasty morsels! That's how you should work your way through career books. Go through the books, but take out only what seems meaningful to you. Keep a notebook. Jot down the key questions and answers, the skills that come to light, the things you would hate to have in a job. Eventually, it adds up to a career dream.

A lot of folks buy the books, but they aren't able to take that step-by-step journey through them. They need people to help them.

### **How can I get people interested in helping me with my career search?**

Get the career book that most appeals to you. Divide it into manageable chunks. Ten chapters in ten weeks? Or are we in a hurry and gotta do it in three? Decide what amount of time you think is reasonable to work on this self-assessment process.

Call a friend who's supportive and knows you well. Ask this question: "I want to spend the next three weekends going through this book. Will you meet me for coffee for three Saturday mornings? It'll take you an hour. I'll review what I've gotten done in the previous week. Your job is to listen and give me feedback and encouragement. My job is to do the work and not cancel our meetings. Can you help me in that way?"

You can also accomplish this by weekly phone calls, but you should ahead of time fax or e-mail any materials you'll be discussing. It puts you both on the same page. The important thing is to have the conversation, but helpers do better when they see, as well as hear, about your work.

If the one-on-one won't work for you, start a Mastermind group like steel magnate/philanthropist Andrew Carnegie did. Gather a group dedicated to everyone's mutual success. It can be as simple as having Saturday breakfast once a month. The agenda is to share accomplishments and to talk about next month's dreams and plans. It can help all involved keep on target with career or business or spiritual goals.

As with many efforts, the only difficult aspect is getting it going and cheerleading it, letting go with love when people leave and always looking for success-minded people to join you.

### **Are there existing groups you can join?**

Someone in your area has organized a job seeker's club. If it's relatively free, i.e., you pay a modest fee to join, it's probably operated by a church.

Here's the problem for you if you are using this as a substitute for a career counselor. The people in it are out of work, so the focus may be on the job hunt rather than broader career issues. Also, they meet during business hours; bad for you if you're working.

Career counselors and outplacement firms may have an evening group, but those are for existing clients.

Whether you organize one, join one, or take a class, you're smart to become part of some group. Research consistently shows that you'll move faster through the search process (whether self-assessment or job search).

### **Are there classes you can take?**

College students (and some high schoolers) can attend career planning classes at school. For people already in the workplace, continuing education programs through junior colleges or municipalities often offer eight- to twelve-week career planning workshops. They're offered in the evenings and tend to be low cost, from \$50 to \$200. If you're an alumnus of a college, you can sometimes use limited services of the career office. (More schools should give access to graduates if they're interested in building a strong organization of alums grateful for the school's help, not just requests for money.)

Classes have three components: A process, other people in the same boat, and a teacher. You would like all three to be great, but as much as I believe a good teacher/counselor is important, I also know that the process and the people are the key factors.

Put yourself in the class with an open mind and a willing heart, and work diligently through the questions, confusions, resistances you'll experience, and it could be well worth the money you spent on it. Keep yourself emotionally separate, criticize the proceedings, and halfheartedly do the exercises, and you'll wonder why you wasted the money.

Getting through a class successfully pretty much depends on you.

### **The point**

Having been at this for 20 years, I've seen how much faster people progress working with another person. Think about what your career is worth to you. The money you'll spend will be well worth it.