



AMERICAN COUNSELING  
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# VISTAS Online

*VISTAS Online* is an innovative publication produced for the American Counseling Association by Dr. Garry R. Walz and Dr. Jeanne C. Bleuer of Counseling Outfitters, LLC. Its purpose is to provide a means of capturing the ideas, information and experiences generated by the annual ACA Conference and selected ACA Division Conferences. Papers on a program or practice that has been validated through research or experience may also be submitted. This digital collection of peer-reviewed articles is authored by counselors, for counselors. *VISTAS Online* contains the full text of over 500 proprietary counseling articles published from 2004 to present.

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Article 1

**Wit and Wisdom: What I Have Learned From the  
Career Stories of Others and My Dog**

Robert C. Chope, PhD  
Professor Emeritus, San Francisco State University

This contribution is based upon a presentation made as part of a panel discussion at the 2011 NCDA Global Career Development Conference in San Antonio, Texas. The panel was titled:  
*Wit and Wisdom from Those Who Teach Career Counseling.*

Chope, Robert, is Professor Emeritus of counseling at San Francisco State University after 36 years of teaching. He founded the CACREP accredited Career Counseling there in 1980 and was the coordinator for 26 years. He is also a psychologist with the Career and Personal Development Institute in San Francisco, a practice he founded in 1979 and which is now arguably the longest running private career consulting practice in the country. Robert is a fellow of ACA and NCDA and is an NCDA Eminent Career Award winner (2012), NCDA Outstanding Career Practitioner of the year (2004) and NCDA Merit Award Winner (2007). He has published four books and over 100 articles and chapters and has been interviewed regularly on radio and television.

Whether we are practitioners or counselor educators, career coaches or consultants, all of us probably learn about engaging in the career counseling process from our clients, students, and the significant others who are a part of our lives. We also learn about the career counseling process from the career stories of others that we find in newspaper accounts, radio and television broadcasts, and our daily interactions with individuals who supply us with personal goods and services. Herein is a brief summary of what I have learned about career counseling from two interesting career stories and my interactions with my dog.

First of all, what I think I learned most about career counseling, and perhaps even counseling in general, came from my late 16-year-old Golden Retriever: His name was Coby. Frankly, much of what I taught and practiced about career counseling was reflected in who he was. He was the embodiment of both an active and passive listener. Consider what I learned and how it can be applied to your personal and professional lives.

- Don't pretend to be something you're not. Coby was a dog and he knew it. He had a clearly articulated identity and he liked hanging out with other dogs at various dog parks. As I watched him in his numerous interactions with other dogs, dog owners, people on the street and feral animals in our woodsy neighborhood, I wondered about the professional identities of my students. I'm not convinced that they understand the vast

potentiality they have as career counselors. They, like so many others, aspire to be MFTers (marriage, family, and child therapists). Career counselors have complicated identities, but in the end should recognize and relish the notion that they are career counselors. They do not need to compete or feel put down by other counseling professionals, especially therapists. Career counseling is real counseling and our clients talk about real and meaningful issues...and sometimes they even cry.

- Coby taught me that when a client is feeling badly, I should listen, be silent, stay with the feelings and perhaps even extend a paw. Career counselors can be quite effective with a minimum amount of directed guidance and interaction, particularly in the initial stages of the process. Moreover, Coby always maintained eye contact with me when I was talking to him. I try to give my clients the respect that he showed me by attending to them and keeping a watchful eye.

- If you want what lies buried deep, like Coby, you've got to dig for it. Coby reminded me of that every time he came home with deer dung on his breath. Doing in-depth career counseling requires persistence and patience, but if your work stays focused on the outcome, you will reap great benefits from the process.

- When familiar people enter your office, greet them like Coby greeted every stranger he met and let them know you are really happy they came to see you. I think that everyone Coby met felt better about who they were because he made them feel special.

- All counselors should be sure to let their clients know when they have invaded their territory or moved beyond appropriate boundaries. Coby was very clear about boundaries and he knew what belonged to him. As much as we had an intimate and meaningful relationship, I never got closer than three feet to him when he was enjoying a bone from a pot roast. When he growled and showed his massive incisors, I knew that I should keep my distance and respect the boundaries he established.

- In a similar vein, it is most helpful to clients if counselors do not grimace when there is tension in the room and remember to show their teeth when smiling.

Second, what I learned about career counseling, coming in second, and reframing your career goals, I learned from George Wein. Most of you don't know who he is, but you will after a minute or two. I described him in my book, *Family Matters: The Influence of the Family in Career Decision Making* (Chope, 2005). George was a pianist. His father was a doctor and always assumed that George would become a doctor. George Wein was never the winner of any major piano competitions, although he often came in second. To his chagrin, in his young adulthood he realized that he would not be able to make a living at performing on the piano. His father assumed that after George's "failures" in music, George would return to pursue a career in medicine. That didn't happen. George took his love of music in a new direction.

For more than half a century, George Wein was the founder and impresario of the world renowned Newport Jazz Festival. He is credited with creating an unparalleled respect for jazz and his festival serves as a model for over 1,000 jazz festivals worldwide. He is now chief executive of Festival Productions which produces major events each year like the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival and the JVC Jazz Festival in New York. He has been responsible for having jazz accepted as an art form. And financially, he is probably much more successful than he would have been as a physician, making millions of dollars.

In the spring of 2011, I happened to be in New York and read in the morning paper that 90-year-old Dave Brubeck (from my town of Oakland, California) was the headliner at the Blue Note in Greenwich Village. But following him at 10:30 pm was George Wein on the piano with his orchestra. Still number two and loving it. Even though he never made a living as a performer, George Wein maintained his love and passion for entertaining others on the piano.

Third, what I learned about career counseling, happenstance, and embracing change I have had validated by Bill Neukom. As a fledgling Stanford Law School graduate, Bill Neukom joined a respected law firm in Seattle, Washington. As a young associate, one of the senior partners came by and asked Bill Neukom if he would be willing to help the senior partner's son with some legal aspects of a business he was trying to start. His son and 11 others had a plan but they needed some legal assistance to help them set up their company. Neukom agreed to assist with the project even being informed that his new client could be somewhat demanding. He also knew that this effort would take time away from his highly paid corporate legal work.

Neukom's law firm was then known as Shilder, McBrown, Gates and Lucas. The senior partner's son was Bill Gates and the new company he was forming was called Microsoft. Neukom helped set up the company and then left his law firm to become the lead attorney for Microsoft. When he left Microsoft, there were 200 lawyers in the legal department.

With the millions he made with his Microsoft stock, Neukom formulated the World Justice Project. More recently he also became one of the owners as well as the managing general partner of the San Francisco Giants. A great joy of his life was guiding the Giants to the winning of the 2010 World Series. Imagine how his life might have been different had he told his senior partner that he was too busy to participate in his son Bill Gates' endeavor.

We learn about taking risks and embracing change from Neukom. We also learn how benevolence can pay off in substantial ways even when initially there doesn't necessarily appear to be much payout. We also learn that as people and careers evolve, people move out of their boxes into opportunities that they had never dreamed of.

Our work is to help career stories to be told and to unfold into new possibilities. Opportunities are everywhere and career counselors can help clients to take advantage of these opportunities by having them become more mindful and vigilant. Career counselors need to be able to capitalize on their own expertise and identities as career counselors and by doing so will always be able to have an impact on the career choices and life planning of their clients.

### **Reference**

Chope, R. C. (2005). *Family matters: The influence of the family in career decision making*. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

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