



National Career  
Development  
Association

## **Career Development: A Policy Statement of the National Career Development Association (Adopted March 16, 1993; Revised 2011)**

The development of any person's career takes place over most of his/her lifetime. The purpose of this statement is to describe and define the nature of and the need for career development through a series of National Career Development Association (NCDA) policy statements with respect to various life stages. These stages are: (a) pre-school age youth; (b) K-6 school grades; (c) 7-9 school grades; (d) 10-12 school grades; (e) adults (ages 18-65), and (f) retired persons.

Each of the following statements represents a basic career development policy strongly supported by NCDA as an organization:

1. Freedom of occupational and career choice is one of the most important birthrights of every U.S. citizen. This freedom will be protected and enhanced throughout life.
2. Professional career development assistance – including but not limited to career counseling – should be available to all persons throughout the lifespan.
3. Career development assistance is a community partnership effort involving the education system, the home and family structure, business, industry, and a wide variety of community agencies and organizations. It is not carried out by career development professionals alone.
4. Equity, not just equality, of career development opportunities should be available for all persons. This means that, when two equally qualified persons compete for the same position, preference should be given to the person classified as belonging to the group most likely to have been kept out of the position in the past because of bias and stereotyping.
5. The right to change occupations and/or career directions is fully as important as the right to choose an occupation and/or career direction.
6. Accurate, up-to-date information about educational and occupational opportunities is vital.
7. Helping individuals increase self-understanding of their abilities, interests, values, and goals is a vital foundation of the career development process.

### **The Bedrock Importance of "Work" in Career Development**

NCDA policy is that the multiple key concepts are central to career development. The first such concept is “work”, which represents the need to do, to achieve, and to know that one is needed by others and is important. A commonly accepted definition of work, as advanced by O’Brien (1986), is “the expenditure of effort in the performance of a task” (1986, p. 1). At its best, work provides a means for survival, social connections, and self-determination (Blustein, 2006).

The career development movement contends that work is a core aspect of human functioning. Work has been and continues to be central in human survival. As technology has made survival easier, work has evolved and, many individuals now have an increased array of career options.

### **Career Development in the Home/Family Structure for Pre-School Age Youth**

NCDA policy is to recognize and reinforce the critical role of the home and family structure in the career development of youth prior to the initiation of formal schooling. It is within the home and family structure where a

non-biased view of occupations -- one devoid of stereotyping -- can and should first be presented to youth. It is in the home and family structure where the positive societal contributions of all honest work can and should first be communicated to youth and where youth should first be exposed to the concept that a strong relationship exists between education and occupational success.

Most importantly, within the home and family structure pre-school age youth can first be exposed to true work experiences as family members trying to do something that will be helpful to other members of the family. NCDA policy is to encourage and actively reinforce the concept of the home as a workplace and ALL family members as workers. NCDA's position is that work, not drudgery, should be included as a centerpiece of the home and family structure.

## **Career Development in Grades K-6**

NCDA policy is to encourage elementary and secondary schools to form partnerships with parents to continue the kinds of pre-school activities discussed above during the entire period of schooling. In addition, each of the following major kinds of activities is endorsed by NCDA as needed and especially appropriate for use by teachers and counselors beginning at the K-6 level:

1. **Making the Classroom a Workplace.** NCDA policy is to strongly support recent recommendations of both the Secretary's (of Labor) Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) (1991, 1992) and of the Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce (1990) for changing the classroom from one based on the "assembly line" concept of the industrial revolution to the "high skills" concept of the coming high productivity American workforce where work -- not drudgery -- of both students and educators is emphasized. This emphasis holds high potential for helping each student acquire a positive set of work values as part of his/her value system and thus for helping each pupil want to work. This must begin at the K-6 level if the total effort is to be successful.
2. **Teaching/Reinforcing Productive Work Habits.** NCDA policy is to encourage all teachers to emphasize and reward the practice of the kinds of work habits needed in a high productivity occupational society. These include such habits as: (a) coming to work (to school) on time, (b) doing one's best in carrying out work (school) assignments, (c) finishing assigned work tasks on schedule, (d) cooperating with other workers (pupils) in team efforts, (e) participating in problem solving and creative thinking, and (f) following directions given by supervisors (teachers). NCDA's position is that, when such habits become part of the pupil's lifestyle during the K-12 years, it is more likely he or she will possess these habits when seeking employment, after leaving school.
3. **Helping Pupils Understand Career Applications of Subject Matter.** NCDA policy is to encourage all teachers to help pupils to understand how the subject matter they are being asked to learn is valuable for success in a variety of occupational areas. This is especially true with regard to the basic academic skills of reading, mathematics, and oral/written communication to be learned at the K-6 level. NCDA policy is to use this kind of motivation as one among several means of encouraging pupils to learn -- not as the only one or the most important one.
4. **Using Community Resource Persons To Emphasize both Work and Occupations.** NCDA policy is to encourage the involvement of resource persons representing various occupations in the community as one means of helping pupils understand career applications of subject matter. Such resource persons should be selected, in part, because they are able to illustrate clearly to pupils the importance of subject matter -- and especially of basic academic skills -- in their occupations. In part, resource persons should be selected based on their commitment to work as illustrated by their commitment to the importance of what they are doing, why people need them to exist, and how people are helped through what they do. Only persons with a demonstrable commitment to work should be selected as occupational resource persons.

5. **Emphasizing Career Awareness But Not Specific Occupational Choices.** NCDA policy is to encourage all elementary school pupils to become aware of a wide array of occupations existing within and outside of their community. NCDA policy is to emphasize the societal contributions and natures of occupations but not to encourage specific occupational decision-making by K-6 pupils.
6. **Reducing Bias and Stereotyping In Career Awareness.** NCDA policy is to encourage career development facilitators and all other educators, beginning at the K-6 level, to help pupils become aware of occupations in ways that demonstrate the potential of occupations being open for choice without restrictions based on sex, race, ethnic heritage, age, sexual orientation, creed, or disability. The emphasis should be on the possibility of openness, not on the likelihood of bias and stereotyping.

## **Career Development in Grades 7-9**

Most of the career development activities recommended for the K-6 grades should be continued at Grades 7-9. In addition, NCDA policy is that career development in Grades 7-9 should place a strong emphasis on increasing self-understanding through career exploration for all youth but not on helping youth make specific occupational choices. During these years youth should be helped to become aware of the concepts of career interests, career aptitudes, and work values as they apply to various occupations and to themselves. Such self-knowledge should be valuable in zeroing in on tentative occupational choices to be given serious consideration during the remainder of the secondary school. The prime goal is to increase youth self-understandings with respect to these things.

NCDA policy is to encourage strongly community volunteer work experience for all youth in Grades 7-9. Such work experience should be primarily aimed at helping youth (a) better understand and value the concept of work; (b) increase understandings of their own occupational interests, aptitudes, and values; and (c) make tentative occupational choices that are acknowledged to be susceptible to change as self and environmental understandings increase.

NCDA policy is to promote, in Grades 7-9, readiness for participation in such occupational preparation programs as (a) youth apprenticeship, (b) tech-prep, (c) internships, and (d) work-study, but not to actually begin such programs at this level. The primary goal, in Grades 7-9, is to maximize the options available for choice at the senior high and post-secondary levels. Thus, NCDA opposes educational programs designed to force youth to choose in Grades 7-9 whether or not they are "college-bound." On the contrary, NCDA supports a strong academic program for ALL youth at this level.

## **Career Development in Grades 10-12**

NCDA policy calls for the continuation in Grades 10-12 of those activities specified earlier as appropriate for all educators in the K-12 education system. In addition, the primary kinds of career development emphasis in Grades 10-12 should center around helping youth make quality decisions regarding their educational/career plans at the post-secondary level. To provide such assistance demands the presence of school counselors with expertise in the career development process. NCDA's position is that the ideal is to provide ALL school counselors with this expertise and urge them to use it with ALL of their clients.

Three basic kinds of career development options are available for Grades 10-12 youth including those who plan to (a) seek employment immediately after leaving high school, (b) seek post-secondary vocational/technical education and/or apprenticeship as preparation for employment, and (c) seek a four-year college/university degree as preparation for employment. NCDA supports programs designed to make it possible for persons to transfer from any one of these three basic options to another at various times during Grades 10-12.

1. **Youth Seeking Immediate Employment After Leaving High School.** NCDA policy is to support post-secondary education/training as preparation for employment for ALL secondary school leavers. NCDA is committed to systematic program efforts aimed at avoiding current practices

that see approximately 1.5 million youth (including both high school graduates and dropouts) leaving secondary schools each year to enter low-level, dead-end jobs in the secondary labor market. For a variety of reasons, however, it seems almost certain that several hundred thousand youths will continue to seek employment immediately after leaving high school. NCDA supports a policy calling for strong efforts aimed at equipping such youth with general employability skills (including productive work habits) and positive work values leading to a desire to work coupled with strong job placement programs leading to employment in specific occupations. The active involvement of a variety of career development specialists, including school counselors, job developers, employment service counselors, and placement specialists is needed. Career development assistance to these youth should be provided under an assumption that most will change occupations frequently during their adult working lives. Attempts to concentrate strongly on helping them make a single occupational choice are discouraged as NCDA policy. NCDA supports cooperative education, work-study, and high school youth apprenticeship programs carried out in collaborative partnerships with the private sector for these youth -- provided that youth are given professional career development assistance in making decisions with regard to entering such programs. It is NCDA policy that freedom of career choice demands that career development assistance to such youth should include multiple educational and occupational choices. No person should be faced with only one available route and, thus, no real freedom of career choice.

2. Youth Seeking Some form of Post-secondary Vo-Tech Education. NCDA policy is to contribute toward creating a high-skills occupational society for America through helping most of the 70% of high school youth who will not be four-year college or university graduates to acquire high levels of occupational skills through enrollment in post-secondary vocational and/or technical education. NCDA strongly supports a policy calling for employer contributions to such training either through creating and operating their own training programs or by providing financial support to others who are operating such programs. Among the other kinds of training programs strongly supported by NCDA are: (a) youth apprenticeship, (b) tech-prep programs, (c) vo-tech training programs in secondary schools, (d) vo-tech training programs in community colleges, (e) post-secondary vo-tech training programs in area vocational schools, (f) post-secondary vo-tech training in accredited proprietary schools, and (g) post-secondary vo-tech training in the all-volunteer armed forces.

Since these kinds of institutional programs are obviously oriented around preparing persons for employment in specific kinds of occupational settings, NCDA policy is that career development professionals become as knowledgeable regarding these kinds of institutions as they are regarding offerings in four-year college and university settings. NCDA considers it particularly important that each of these kinds of institutions supply professional career development specialists with three basic kinds of data, including: (a) occupational placement data for use by professional career counselors; (b) evidence of their emphasis on producing graduates with the kinds of high-level occupational skills necessary for America to compete in the international marketplace; and (c) evidence of their emphasis on quality of effort -- that is, on doing one's best -- on behalf of each student.

NCDA policy calls for professional career development specialists to help clients consider available educational and/or training opportunities in the widest possible variety of post-secondary vocational/technical settings and to help each client select the specific setting that appears to the client to be best for himself/herself. NCDA does not consider any one kind of setting as necessarily superior to any other. The primary concern of the career development professional is the client, not the setting. Thus, NCDA policy endorses exploratory tryout pre-enrollment programs that enable clients to consider various kinds of post-secondary vocational/technical training before making a final choice of one over all others. Options must be left open.

At present, serious gaps exist between the ways in which many employers continue to structure their available jobs and the ways such jobs will be structured in a high-performance occupational society. NCDA policy is to emphasize to clients the nature and advantages of the emerging high-

performance occupational society while simultaneously helping them recognize and adapt to the "here-and-now" nature of the "low-skills" occupational society still in existence in many places. NCDA policy is to view adaptability skills and attitudes leading toward understanding and appreciating openness to change as of great importance in preparing persons for work.

3. Youth Seeking Enrollment in Four-Year Colleges/Universities. In view of the fact that "careers" concerns are stated by a sizable majority of entering college freshmen as the most important reason for pursuing higher education, NCDA policy calls for urging that career counseling -- not merely academic counseling -- of high school students contemplating college or university attendance be an important concern of school counselors. NCDA policy is to encourage school counselors to help college-bound high school students consider most occupational choices as tentative and subject to change in direction during undergraduate education.

NCDA policy is to support actively various forms of work-based learning for college-bound youth and youth enrolled in colleges and universities as career exploration experiences during the high school and college/university years. These include: (a) internships, (b) shadowing of employed professionals, (c) work-study programs, (d) tech-prep programs, and (e) youth apprenticeship programs designed specifically for college-bound students. In each of these programs, NCDA policy supports extensive use of adult role models who are four-year college/university graduates.

NCDA policy is to emphasize education -- work relationships -- and, therefore, the necessity of relating educational and occupational choices -- to both youth planning to attend four-year college/university programs and to college/university students. In this regard, NCDA policy calls for four-year college/university programs to supply occupational follow-up data to high school counselors for use in helping high school students make educational and occupational choices and to youth enrolled in colleges and universities.

NCDA policy is to encourage secondary school counselors to discuss, with college-bound youth, the multiple goals of higher education, not just the goal of education as preparation for work. NCDA policy urges school counselors to discuss with college-bound students the potential that college graduates have for contributing to society through paid and unpaid work undertaken as personal growth and productive use of leisure time. NCDA policy is to encourage secondary school counselors to discuss, with college-bound youth, work values as part of one's system of personal values.

NCDA policy is to encourage secondary school counselors to discuss with college-bound youth, the probability, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics projections (Sargent & Pfleeger, 1990) that many will be forced to seek employment in occupations that do not now require four-year college degrees. Career counselors must enter into such discussions carefully based on changing the American occupational structure from a "low-skill" to a "high-wage" high productivity society. The probabilities for many more occupations to require a four-year college/university degree are increasing, and school counselors must keep themselves current on these changes. The surplus of college graduates in the labor market may soon be greatly reduced.

NCDA policy is to recognize and encourage both secondary school counselors and counselors in college and university settings to help students recognize that the four-year college/university degree, itself, represents a set of general employability skills that will be helpful to many college graduates in job placement. College and university students experiencing difficulty in choosing an occupationally oriented major are as deserving of professional career counseling as any others. The potential marketplace value of a liberal arts-oriented program of studies should be recognized by both career counselors and the students they serve.

## **Career Development for Adults**

Many ways currently exist for assisting adults Ages 20-65 in career development. In addition to those already widely established, NCDA policy is to support professional career development assistance to persons during these years through operation of a "Community Career Development Center" that is funded through a combination of public and private sector financial support and fees charged to persons using the Center's services. Each Center should provide opportunities for both adults and youth in the community to use: (a) extensive career appraisal, including self-appraisal, of a wide variety of appraisal instruments including both paper and pencil and performance measures, (b) extensive career information facilities including local, state, and national data concerning a wide variety of occupations and the education/training needed to enter each, (c) career counseling services conducted by qualified professionals, (d) career training facilities designed to help persons acquire job seeking/finding/getting/holding skills, general employability skills, career decision-making skills, and a personally satisfying set of work values, and (e) career placement and follow-up services.

Each Center should serve as the primary place where active job seekers begin looking for specific jobs and where employers begin to look for new employees. Major kinds of clients to be served at each Center include: (a) recent school leavers seeking to enter the occupational society; (b) displaced adult workers in need of new occupations; (c) couple teams with each partner seeking employment in the same general community; (d) persons who have been discriminated against based on physical and/or mental disabilities, race, ethnic heritage, gender, sexual orientation; and/or age; and (e) persons wishing to change jobs and/or occupations in order to maximize their career development.

1. **Recent High School Leavers.** In addition the need to help those who seek immediate employment after leaving high school with no specific job skills must be emphasized. Many such persons seem highly likely to wind up in what Hamilton (1990) has called the "secondary labor market" ...low-level, low-paid, dead-end jobs with no retirement or health benefits and no tenure. Persons with such jobs are unlikely to find frequent opportunities to acquire the personal meaning and satisfaction that comes from work. On the contrary, most of their on-the-job time is spent in drudgery. NCDA policy is to provide these youth with an abundance of information concerning how the human need to work can be met through unpaid, volunteer productive use of leisure time. NCDA policy also calls for counselors to help such youth reconsider their decisions not to seek any form of post-secondary occupational education or training.
2. **Displaced Adult Workers In Need of New Occupations.** Faced with the fact that plant closings and corporate downsizing have displaced about two million workers per year since the 1970s (National Planning Association, 1990), NCDA policy is to place a high priority on helping to meet the comprehensive career development needs of such persons. To implement this policy, it will be necessary to make the several facets of career development available including (a) career awareness, (b) career exploration, (c) career planning, (d) career decision making, (e) career placement, and (f) career adjustment.

Since many displaced adult workers are faced both with (a) the necessity of choosing new occupations paying less money than the ones they have left and (b) the necessity of undergoing the displacement process more than once during the adult working years, it is especially important that high quality career counseling be made available to such persons. NCDA policy is to support the establishment and enforcement of validated performance standards for all persons employed as professional career counselors and/or career development technicians.

3. **Dual-Couple Teams Seeking Employment.** NCDA policy is to recognize three kinds of dual couple teams seeking employment, each with distinctively different kinds of needs for career development assistance. These include: (a) the dual career couple (with both partners placing a high value on the personal meaning of work in his/her job), (b) the dual earner couple (with neither partner placing a high value on the personal meaning of work in her/his job), and (c) the one career/one earner couple (with only one partner placing a high value on the personal meaning of work in his/her job).

In the case of dual career couples, NCDA policy is for professional career counselors to give equal priority to the career development needs pertaining to paid and unpaid work of both partners with variations from this policy based on decisions made by both partners during career counseling.

In the case of dual earner couples, it is NCDA policy to help each partner, through professional career counseling, to (a) seek to find personally meaningful work in her/his occupation and/or (b) seek to discover the personal satisfaction that comes from volunteer work carried out as productive use of leisure time.

In the case of the one career/one earner couple, NCDA policy is to provide equal priority to (a) meeting the needs of the "career" member to experience meaningful work in her/his occupation and (b) meeting the needs of the "earner" member to discover the personal satisfaction that comes from work carried out as part of his/her productive use of leisure time.

4. **Persons Whose Career Development Has Suffered Because of Bias and/or Stereotyping.** NCDA policy is to value diversity and a multicultural workforce through supporting and engaging actively in programs aimed at providing full equity of career development opportunities to ALL persons at ALL age levels. Such program taking place through K-12 career development programs need to be supplemented by active programs designed to meet the career development needs of adults. NCDA policy is to promote such programs as total community efforts involving both community organizations and employers as well as the education system with career development professionals being members -- but not necessarily directors -- of such efforts.
5. **Adults Seeking To Advance Their Careers Through Changing Occupations.** NCDA policy is to support strongly the concept that the right to change occupational choices is fully as sacred as the right to choose an occupation. The Community Career Development Centers described above should provide comprehensive career development opportunities for ALL adults at ALL age levels. The same kinds of help described earlier as needed by adult displaced workers should be available to any adult in the community interested in considering occupational change. NCDA policy is to support the provision of such help.

## **Career Development for Retired Persons**

NCDA policy is to recognize and provide for meeting the continuing career development needs of two major kinds of retired persons including: (a) those whose job needs grow out of financial needs; and (b) those whose job needs and/or needs for productive use of leisure time grow out of the human need for work.

1. **Job Needs Growing Primarily Out of Financial Needs.** NCDA recognizes that current retirement plans for many adults are either nonexistent or inadequate to meet basic financial needs. The primary occupational needs of such adults are for current income, not for long-term career advancement. Many jobs exist in the secondary labor market in most communities that can be easily filled by retired adults. Many other retired adults can find part-time or even full-time jobs available to them if they enroll in relatively short-term occupational training programs in their communities. Still other retired adults will find it possible to perform part-time paid productive work for their former employers under conditions where both the employer and the worker benefit. NCDA supports programs aimed at meeting the career development needs of all retired adult persons but does not support one of these avenues as being necessarily superior to the others.
2. **Those Whose Career Development Needs Grow Out of the Human Need To Work.** NCDA recognizes and acknowledges that, for many retired persons, loss of their jobs results in loss in personal meaningfulness in life and in living. For such persons, NCDA policy is to support a variety of programs aimed at meeting the human need for work through productive use of leisure time in volunteer, unpaid work. NCDA supports programs designed to recognize and emphasize the use of job skills acquired prior to retirement. NCDA also supports programs designed to provide retired persons with new skills required for effective performance as community volunteer

workers. NCDA policy is to support the volunteer efforts of retired persons to add qualitative improvements to the efforts of currently employed persons but not to replace currently employed persons with retired adult volunteer workers.

NCDA policy is to emphasize and recognize the efforts of adult retired community volunteer workers at all age levels with no specific age where such efforts are no longer supported.

## **Concluding Remarks**

The purposes of this document are to: (a) formulate a basis for official actions taken by the NCDA Board of Directors, (b) serve as a rationale for various official NCDA positions taken by the NCDA Board of Directors, (c) serve as a basis for revision and/or extension of NCDA policies on the part of the NCDA Board of Directors, (d) serve as a basis for revision of NCDA three-year plans and annual plans, (e) serve as a basis for revisions and/or extension of NCDA policies on the part of individual NCDA members, and (f) serve as a stimulus to greatly increase the emphasis on career development in counselor education programs. As such, this document is viewed as only the first of many steps to be taken in the formulation of a set of NCDA policies that truly represent the members of NCDA.

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