

Suggested APA style reference: Gelardin, S. D., & Muscat, E. D. (2010). *Exploring the concept of "slow career."* Retrieved from http://counselingoutfitters.com/vistas/vistas10/Article_02.pdf

Article 2

Exploring the Concept of "Slow Career"

Sally D. Gelardin and Eugene J. Muscat

Paper based on programs presented at the California Career Development Association Conference, November 7, 2009, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA and California Counseling Association Tele-Interview, June 19, 2008.

Gelardin, Sally D., Ed.D. (International & Multicultural Education), is a National Certified Counselor, Distance Credentialed Counselor, and Career Development Facilitator Instructor. Gelardin provides continuing education courses for counselors and career practitioners, and conducts tele-interviews with industry experts on Slow Career issues.

Muscat, Eugene J., Ed.D., MBA, is a faculty member at the University of San Francisco School of Business and Professional Studies. He holds the rank of full professor and teaches courses in Management, Information Systems and Family Business Management.

So much time and so little to do. Wait a minute. Strike that. Reverse it.
-- Willie Wonka (Burton, 2005)

Willy Wonka is a character who runs around in circles, searching for an honest, loving child, to whom he can transfer his legacy. He then meets Charlie Bucket, a boy with a vision, family values, and heart. In their tour of the legendary chocolate factory, Willy and Charlie experience what has been termed "Slow Career," a cultural shift toward slowing down life's pace to find meaning in life and work, based on the "Slow Movement." Those who experience "Slow Career" recognize that a shift in career (i.e., being ready to move on or change direction, being downsized, not earning a sufficient salary, or failing to get a promotion) is a signal that provides them with the impetus to develop a stronger life/career understanding in order to meet the demands of the workplace, employment market, and life in general (Gelardin, 2009). While touring the chocolate factory, both Willy and Charlie are in career transition -- Willy is preparing to hand down his business to a young person who could carry on his lifework; Charlie is entering the job market, becoming aware of his workplace values and strengths, and exploring his lifework.

Why and How We Are Exploring "Slow Career"

According to Parienti, "We need to continually seek information and education so that the choices we make support our efforts to live life in balance with the needs of the

environment and our own health” (2007, p. 14). Just as Willy and Charlie were touring the chocolate factory to find meaning in life and work, so the Slow Career movement will be explored by reading print and online literature, writing and talking with others, interviewing green leaders and world career experts who make it their business to see patterns and trends, and developing strategies for individuals to manage slow career.

Roots of the Slow Movement

The Slow Movement first began with a protest against the opening of a McDonald’s restaurant in Piazza di Spagna, Rome. This protest led to a variety of other movements that extended to Slow Food, Slow Travel, Slow Cities, Slow Money, Slow Schools, Slow Books, Slow Shopping, and Slow Design (Gelardin, Muscat, & Whitty, 2010). Growing in popularity within the Slow Movement is the consumption of locally produced, sustainable food. This is just one example of how the Slow Movement has grown, and how it continues to infiltrate many industries, including music, art, architecture, health, business, and education. The Slow Movement is a protest against hectic time pressures. Like technology, it is both synchronic and asynchronous. As the character Mike Teevee disappears into the television screen in the book and movie, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, individuals in career transition experience Slow Movement (and its offshoot, “Slow Career”) by crossing time and space boundaries to find meaning in life and work.

What Slow Career Is NOT

Career counselors in private practice, career professionals in college or university career centers, and career advisors in workforce investment centers often focus on intense job search strategies with clients. Clients will then move into occupational training or begin jobs that do not necessarily relate to their lifestyle needs and values. As a result, they do not complete their training programs and do not remain at the job. According to Jacobson (2009), “that so many dislocated workers sign up for courses that are unlikely to raise their earnings suggests that they do not carefully consider the full range of possibilities when selecting a course of study.”

Slow Career is not about power networking, the perfect elevator speech, the perfect resume, calling twenty leads a day, five days a week, or finding the perfect job. Nor is Slow Career about “24/7 texting, blogging, ‘friending’ and tweeting” that keeps “many people in a constant state of REACTING, with little time for reflecting” (Strauss, 2010). On the other hand, Slow Career does not mean “no career” or not working. Earning an income to put food on the table, paying the rent or mortgage, and saving for old age still come first; however, these responsibilities do not replace Slow Career, which is a lifetime process.

What the Slow Career IS

Slow Career gives you an opportunity to take stock of where you've been, where you are now, and where life is taking you professionally and personally. It is believed that if you know yourself, then you can present yourself more effectively to others, such as potential employers or clients who need to know, like, and trust you. For higher educational institutions, the Slow Career concept may pull together student interest in non-profit employment, sustainable enterprise and work/life options. Colleges that

attempt to provide career counseling beyond job placement may find the Slow Career concept an opportunity to define the many services they provide. Defining the purpose of a college career center may greatly reduce student dissatisfaction by clarifying expectations. People do not trust something that seems ambiguous. This article explores the emergence of the Slow Career concept in business higher education, and what career counselors can do to support conscious, sustainable career motivations of both transitional age students and workers of all ages in career transition.

“Slow Career” and the Economy

Before the current downturn, a record interest was seen among seniors who were "re-careering" to lower-paid less-stressful jobs (Gioia, 2009). Those who have not been laid off are just hanging onto their current jobs. Baby boomers who are not ready, or cannot afford to retire, are choosing to get out of the fast lane and become entrepreneurs or consultants. Recent college graduates, unable to find jobs in their fields of interest and aware of the importance of living in harmony with their environment, are joining experienced workers to volunteer, take on part-time work and internships, and explore the country/world.

Business schools in the United States and elsewhere are seeing a strong increase in enrollments in majors that deal with entrepreneurship (including family business programs), sustainability, and social entrepreneurship (Muscat, 2009). This trend is fueled by poor employment in the corporate sectors. Many students are choosing “values-based” careers due to the improved career counseling services on college and university campuses. Students who seek out career counseling and values-clarification on a college campus, rather than just job placement, are more likely to pursue a career/life direction that is values-based (Geller & Muscat, 2008), which includes elements of what this article defines as “Slow Career.”

In the current sluggish economy, Slow Career is here, whether it is welcome or not. Therefore, it is important to make the best of it and learn from the current situation as much as possible. With the economy affecting workers of all generations, following are examples of what University of San Francisco Professor Mark Cannice terms “Forced Entrepreneurs”:

- Alex Andon, 24, a graduate of Duke University in Biology, was laid off from a biotech company last May. For months, he sought new work. Frustrated with the hunt, Alex decided to create his own work. He started a business in September building jellyfish aquariums, capitalizing on new technology that helps the fragile creatures survive in captivity. Since then, Alex has sold three tanks, one for \$25,000 to a restaurant. To support his business, he is starting a website to sell desktop versions for \$350 (Richtel & Wortham, 2009).
- Ryan Kuder, 35, understands the notion of scaled-down start-up fervor -- and the worry and exhilaration that goes along with it. He was laid off in February 2008 from Yahoo!, where he was a senior marketing manager. After job-hunting for a bit, Ryan decided to start an Internet company that would let people do social-networking at the neighborhood level. It then transformed into a new company called Koombea that designs and builds websites for businesses. Koombea has

grown to nine people, most of them in Colombia, where the cost of living allows them to do Web design relatively inexpensively (Richtel & Wortham, 2009).

- Lisa Marie Grillos, along with her brother Hernan Barangan, started Hambone Designs after her full-time contract position with Williams-Sonoma as a production manager was not renewed in January. Hambone Designs makes bicycle bags to hold items such as keys, wallets, and cell phones. Between online marketing and the street fairs, they have sold 70 bags thus far, retailing for \$20 to \$40. Each sale results in a profit (Meece, 2009).
- Jackie Burke, 68, a retired schoolteacher, and her daughter, Jackie McAlister, 38, a schoolteacher on maternity leave, used their off-time in February to form the Cup and Saucer Cookie Company in Ocean City, N.J. (Meece, 2009).

Slow Career is a model that attracts workers of all ages. Older workers are finding housing challenges that affect their employability. This has been observed as more and more clients and students (and their clients) are dealing with care-giving and mid-life issues. Thus, interest is growing in living a more sustainable lifestyle, from having a shorter commute, to less work-related stress and more community involvement.

In the past ten years, it has been noted that students who have participated in FBA (the Family Business Association) at the University of San Francisco, some of whom have majored in the Humanities, have supported one another in embarking on careers outside the industries of their parent's enterprises. These informal club activities have accomplished what formal classroom curriculum has not, empowering students to seek a more values-centered career.

In general, most people cannot start or maintain their careers doing what they want to do where they want to live. The goal of the Slow Career movement is to reverse this trend. Like many important occupational roles (teachers and artists, to name a few), compensation levels often do not support housing costs. When you couple this dilemma with environmental and quality-of-life issues growing out of commuting, one can see the need to develop housing options that are both affordable and appropriate to the vocation (Gelardin & Muscat, 2009; Muscat, 2008). The University of San Francisco (USF), with local civic and professional housing advocates, has launched a research effort to define some optimal housing options for work-at-home professionals, including caregivers. The Enterprise Housing initiative at the University of San Francisco, in partnership with Asian Neighborhood Design (AND), has identified the many benefits that caregivers, care-receivers, and communities can receive when working caregivers and their loved ones are proximate. This effort has been seminal to the development of the Slow Career movement in the San Francisco Bay Area, since finding affordable housing is one of the most stressful elements that enables talented workers to live close to the most attractive employment opportunities (Adams et al., 2007).

The Slow Career Trend in Business Higher Education: Rooted in Values-Clarification

Change occurs slowly in the academic world. Ironically, resistance is found in programs that teach innovation and entrepreneurship. Business schools with a strong

commitment to social justice and community service, such as the University of San Francisco, show clear evidence of change in curriculum. This includes the addition of values-focused topics, new sustainability-focused course offerings, an increased interest in the non-profit and sustainability sector careers, the expansion of service-learning activities, and the new market niche for values-based business schools.

Management education curriculum is increasingly reflecting contemporary social issues in the community. For example, *The Wall Street Journal* regularly offers special supplemental teaching materials in areas such as the growth of the green economy and the implications on business development and employment. Stories documenting the non-traditional career paths of graduates from the nation's top business schools, such as the story of Alex Andon, above, lend support to the Slow Career movement.

While courses in business ethics have existed for decades in many business schools, other values-based topics including sustainable (slow) career options are increasingly being given equal coverage in core curriculum areas, as compared to the previously dominant corporate career ladder. The green economy, sustainability, and business ethics have become essential topics in required courses (management, finance, marketing, etc.) at business schools worldwide. In order to achieve a true long-term global ethic for people and planet, as well as profit or sustainability, more values-based topics will need to emerge (Muscat & Whitty, 2009).

What Can Counselors Do?

Counselors in private practice, as well as counselor educators and career counselors at colleges and universities, can support clients and students in making slow and sustainable lifework decisions and practice what they preach. Following are examples of what counselors are doing:

- Rick Carroll often takes clients for walks during therapy sessions in a wetlands park near his office. He says, "Nature can be a wonderful sanctuary for the healing of grief and loss. It can also heal us emotionally, in part because nature is nonjudgmental" (Rollins, 2009, p. 28).
- When she retired from her position as director of the JFK University Career Counseling Program, Sue Aiken chose to build community. She says "For many years I have been interested in community. This interest was fed by my involvement in the field of career development, and more recently, by living in co-housing. In both communities, I have experienced creativity, endless discussion of ideas, support, feedback and consensus" (http://eduspaces.net/profile/extended.php?profile_name=suea). After moving to a co-housing community, Aiken now presents workshops on alternative housing solutions to her colleagues at career conferences.

The Slow Career concept integrates individual, social, and environmental sustainability. It relates to the integral philosophical and psychological theories of Ken Wilber (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Integral_Theory). To implement the Slow Career concept, counselor educators might consider broadening the curriculum to include interdisciplinary approaches that target the social, physical and sustainability interests of

younger generations, as well as the later-life bio-physical, intellectual, and spiritual needs of older generations (<http://integralaging.org>).

By asking yourself if you would want your children to live the way you do when they reach your age, you recognize the value of living and working in ways that sustain and nourish body and soul, as well as benefit one's local and global community. Career counselors are encouraged to examine their own living and working situations and answer the following questions (Aiken & Gelardin, 2009):

- What does living a "sustainable" lifestyle mean to you?
- What current needs do you have associated with living and working in a sustainable way?
- What strengths do you have that will sustain you to meet these needs?
- How are you capitalizing on your strengths to benefit your local and global community?

To begin making changes toward slowing down your life, Eells et al. (2010, p. 67) suggest that you eliminate something that you can do without. They recommend that you identify what you will eliminate, make a game plan, improvise how to fill the gaps, and evaluate what you learned.

Concluding Remarks

The increased interest in Slow Careers is supported by several observable trends in career counseling and management education. The following initiatives demonstrate this support: values-focused services in career centers, new sustainability-focused course offerings in management education, an increased interest in the non-profit and sustainability sector careers, the expansion of service-learning activities on college campuses, volunteerism in communities, housing that supports at-home businesses, and a new market niche for values-based secondary and postsecondary institutions. Encouraged by these social and academic trends, the maturity of the "slow career" phenomenon will be reported in future publications.

At the end of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, Charlie Bucket inherits a chocolate factory and Willie Wonka inherits a family – exemplifying how you can receive unexpected benefits when you take the time to reflect upon what is really important to you.

We can run around in circles trying to be successful in our work and personal lives, but if we want to be "human beings," rather than "human doings," then we need to slow down and reflect upon what is really important to us. Life is too short and frustrating or too long and boring for us to ignore our unconscious yearnings (Gelardin, 2009).

References

- Adams, D., Coyne, A., Kirby, A., Lucaccini, L., Marti, F., McNulty, R., & Muscat, E. (2007). *Enterprise Housing for San Francisco: The future of home-based businesses*. Asian Neighborhood Design and USF School of Business and Management. Retrieved from <http://www.andnet.org/>
- Aiken, S., & Gelardin, S. (2009, November 7). *Slow Career: Creating a slow and sustainable lifestyle*. Presentation at California Career Development Association Annual Conference. Retrieved from <http://slowcareer.org>
- Burton, T. (Director & Producer). (2005). *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* [Motion picture]. United States: Warner Bros. Based on the book by Dahl, R., first published in 1964. Retrieved from http://thinkexist.com/quotation/so_much_time-and_so_little_to_do-strike_that/346247.html
- Eells, J., Fornoff, A., James, P., O'Connor, S., Sharpe, K., & Smillie, E. (2010). In defense of time off. *Good, Winter*, Issue 18, p. 67.
- Gelardin, S. (2008). Aging in place and live/work options. *Career Planning and Adult Development Journal*, Volume 23, Number 4.
- Gelardin, S. (2009a). *Career & Caregiving: Empowering the shadow workforce of family caregivers*. National Career Development Association. Retrieved from <http://campus.digication.com/careerandcaregiving>.
- Gelardin, S. (2009b). Exploring the concept of "Slow Career." *Career Convergence*. National Career Development Association, Search for "Sally Gelardin" retrieved from <http://www.ncda.org>
- Gelardin, S., & Muscat, E. (2009a). The emerging workforce caregiving housing dilemma. *The Business Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 4, Issue 2.
- Gelardin, S., & Muscat, E. (2009b). Meeting caregivers' live/work dilemma: Working from home. In Gelardin, S. *Career & caregiving: Empowering the shadow workforce of family caregivers*. National Career Development Association. Retrieved from <http://campus.digication.com/careerandcaregiving>
- Geller, D., & Muscat, E. (2008). The role of strategic planning in the connected economy. *E-Business Review*, Vol. 8.
- Gelardin, S.D., Muscat, E.J., Whitty, M.D. (2010: April). Slow career: Mapping out a slow & sustainable lifework process. *Business Renaissance Quarterly*, 5(1). www.brgjournal.com
- Gioia, J. (2009, August 12). The approaching senior surge. *Herman Trend Alert*. Retrieved from <http://www.hermangroup.com>
- Jacobson, L. S. (2009). Strengthening one-stop career centers: Helping more unemployed workers find jobs and build skills. *Unemployment, Social Issues, Labor, U.S. Economic Growth*. Retrieved from http://www.cew.wisc.edu/docs/0402_jobs_skills_jacobson.pdf.
- Meece, M. (2009, August 22). On to Plan B: Starting a business. *New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/23/business/smallbusiness/23venture.html?_r=2&pagewanted=1
- Muscat, E., & Whitty, M. (2009). Social entrepreneurship: Values-based leadership to transform business education and society. *Business Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 4.

- Parianti, S. (2007). Sense and sustainability. *Yogi Times*, Issue 53, p. 14.
- Richtel, M., & Wortham, J. (2009, March 13). Weary of looking for work, some create their own. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/14/technology/startups/14startup.html>
- Rollins, J. (2009). A natural resource. *Counseling Today*, p. 28.
- Strauss, C. (2010). SlowLab hare brain, tortoise mind. Retrieved from <http://www.slowlab.org/>

Note: This paper is part of the annual VISTAS project sponsored by the American Counseling Association. Find more information on the project at: http://counselingoutfitters.com/vistas/VISTAS_Home.htm