

Finding Your Best Career Path with ADHD... and Dr. Seuss

by Wilma Fellman, MEd, LPC

You're off to Great Places! Today is your day! Your mountain is waiting. So GET on your way!

STEERING ONE'S CAREER is an evolving process for everyone. Dr. Seuss, or Theodor Seuss Geisel, was an American writer, poet, and cartoonist famous for children's books written and illustrated with humorous wisdom. Over time, he also wrote many delightful treasures aimed at also giving adults clever ways to look at coping with life. He began his lengthy career by writing articles and illustrating them. He evolved into making political statements, philosophical observations, published more than fifty books, and received numerous awards, acclaim, and respect for his work and contribution to society.

Dr. Seuss evolved into one of the most outstanding communicators of our time, with his silly rhymes, rhythms and eye-catching larger-than-life "beings" with names that make us chuckle. He helped us get serious about not being so serious. He helped us focus on the unfocused. He helped us to remember what is important in life—and what to let go. He evolved. His career evolved. We ALL evolve...

*Today you are you,
that is truer than true.
There is no one alive who is
YOUER than YOU!*

Dr. Seuss began with a passion for writing and illustrating, communicating, and comforting others. That was who he was. From that "kernel of truth" he began to build on that passion, adding one block at a time, until his career was created. We all

have passions: directions and tasks that energize us rather than deplete us. It is on these passions that we must begin to build each of our careers, one block at a time.

The way to create our "kernel of truth" is to follow a systematic approach to identifying what we are all about, and then to find matches for that out in the current world of work. It sounds simple and yet, for many of us, particularly those with challenges or "mountains" before us, it can appear insurmountable.

As it was with Dr. Seuss, career paths are a *process* and not the *product* of a single thought, act, career test or suggestion

from a valued supporter. It begins by identifying who you are, and **what is true for you!**

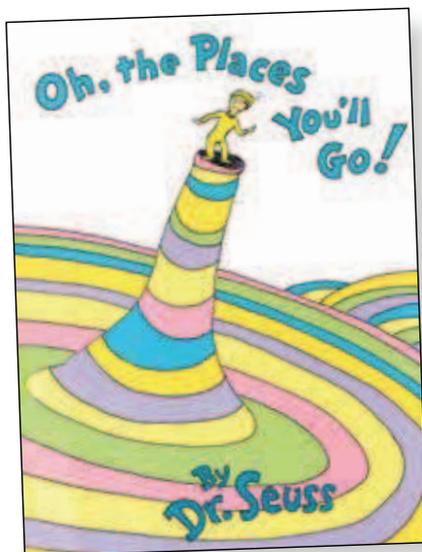
And when you're alone there's a very good chance you'll meet things that scare you right out of your pants. There are some, down the road between hither and yon, that can scare you so much you won't want to go on.

A career service provider's dream, *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* (Random House, 1990) is a wonderful Dr. Seuss way of looking at the process of deciding on a life path. YES, it's a scary process and we often don't know where we are going. Yes, we may fall down once or twice, but we have the ability to keep getting up.

But, yes... we all need help. Most people cannot naturally describe themselves in ways that are helpful to the career process. For most of us, we benefit from using an approach that forces us to see ourselves as a puzzle, comprised of many pieces that fit together to make us "YOUER than YOU!" It is most often helpful to complete this process with a knowledgeable service provider—such as a career counselor, career coach, ADHD coach, career development technician, mental health provider, etc.—who understands the career development process. Because WE are complex, this process is much more complex than simply taking an interest inventory that "tells us what to be."

No one assessment can give us all the information we need. Instead, it's best to gather many pieces of our puzzle such as:

- Interests (both work-related and leisure)
- Skills (mental, interpersonal and physical)
- Personality traits: What innate characteristics do we have that make some things more comfortable to do than others?
- Values (both work-related and leisure)
- Aptitude (verbal, numerical, abstract reasoning, clerical speed and accuracy, mechanical, spatial, spelling and language)
- Energy/Focus patterns: Are we "Sprinters" or "Plodders?"
- Workplace habits (what is optimal and how do we measure up?)
- Job History: Extracting valuable pattern information
- Challenges: How does your unique set of ADHD symptoms combine to get in the way? Are these removable as barriers, or should we choose something that feels more "hand-in-glove?"
- Synthesizing all of the above (probably THE most impor-



tant piece of the puzzle, for without it, all that we have is a pile of printouts. With a knowledgeable helper, we can finally put your whole puzzle together and see how everything fits, what doesn't fit, what can help it fit, and what matches best with the new "viewpoint.")

It's important to note that in the collection of data that makes us "YOUER THAN YOU," we need to first focus on and combine all of the strengths that drive us. We need to see what our unique skill sets are that, given the right circumstances, could be done in a way that energizes us and not depletes us.

*You will come to a place where the streets are not marked.
Some windows are lighted, but mostly they're darked.
A place you could sprain both your elbow and chin!
Do you dare to stay out? Do you dare to go in?
How much can you lose? How much can you win?*

Sometimes when we are confused about in which direction to go, we shut down. Without guidance, our instinct is often to close our eyes, and blindly choose, hoping for the best. For folks with ADHD, there may have been (and usually HAVE been) many such blind selections, which have led to failure, and then attacks on self-esteem. Once our self-esteem is low, the cycle tends to repeat itself and we begin to believe that nothing will change things for the better. In the short run, it seems a quicker idea to move forward, going... ANYWHERE... keeping our eyes shut, rather than to open them wide, take a long, hard look at the bigger picture, and then make much better decisions... based upon some hard, believable data!

Where can we best obtain this data? There are no quick fixes. In general, it takes an average of six to eight weeks to collect sufficient data and "process" it with someone who understands career development and the complexities of ADHD. Therefore, it is important to get help for this process in any number of possible ways:

- **Community colleges and universities have an office called the Career Center** in them. This is *not* the same as speaking with an Advisor or Academic Counselor. This is usually a computerized career center that allows students (and often nearby residents) the use of the career assessments, including many of those listed above. There is usually no cost or minimal cost, and results in the collection of data described, piece by piece. Then, there is typically a service provider who assists individuals in synthesizing the data and making sense of the pile of printouts collected. We cannot do this step alone. We need the help of those who are able to see our patterns and help us to make meaningful conclusions from them.
- **Vocational rehabilitation centers** offer this type of structured process as well. There is usually a very low-cost, sliding scale fee system in place or fees are waived if the individual seeking services is a community health client.
- **Career centers** can be nonprofit or private, and while the services will

probably be similar to the above-described methods, the fees can then vary depending on their funding.

- **Private practitioners** vary greatly in both skill level and fee structure. They might be **career counselors** (and hopefully ones who also understand the complexities and inconsistencies of ADHD and how those affect the work environment), **career coaches**, **ADHD coaches**, **social workers**, **psychologists**, **career development technicians** or **paraprofessionals** who have training in the synthesizing process mentioned above.

Since the possibilities here are all over the board, in terms of how skilled the service provider is, it is important to ask for qualifications (listening for skills in *both* career development *and* ADHD) and ask for a summary of the process used. If it sounds too quick, too simple, or too cookie cutter, run! Remember that you are complex, requiring that the process of obtaining your full picture must be complex as

well. I promise you it is well worth the gift of time and cost to finally realize what makes you "tick" and what careers are out there that would allow you to be energized and not depleted by your work!

Thank you to Dr. Seuss, for allowing us to explore this important subject using his wise-isms. We work more than we do anything else in our life. Yet, all too often we just float through our career hoping to settle on what works. It's risky and perpetuates our greatest fear that there isn't something out there that really matches what we are all about.

When an individual with ADHD finally has the all-important "ah-HA moment" and realizes what he can do better than the "average bear," that lights him up, that gives him a sense of extreme competency... well... that "AH-HA moment"

is worth all the hard work it took to get to that point.

*You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes.
You can steer yourself in any direction you choose.
You're on your own, and you know what you know.
And you are the guy who'll decide where to go. 🐻*

Wilma Fellman, MEd, LPC, has been a career counselor for over thirty years, specializing in ADHD, LD, and other challenges. She is the author of *The Other Me: Poetic Thoughts on ADD for Adults, Kids and Parents* (Specialty Press/ADD Warehouse, 1997) and a contributing author to *Understanding Women with ADHD* (Advantage, 2002). The second edition of her book, *Finding A Career That Works For You* (Specialty Press/ADD Warehouse, 2006) contains a special foreword by Richard Nelson Bolles, author of *What Color is Your Parachute?* A past president of the Michigan Career Development Association, she served on the ADD Association (ADDA) board for eight years. Fellman also teaches online classes on career development with ADHD; her newest offering is a partnership with the Edge Foundation and Victoria Roche, in which she has developed and will give a course in career services specialty training to seasoned ADHD coaches.