

Career Portfolio Development - Part 7

Continued from Vol. 1 No.30

Last week I presented part one of a two-part interview with David Crowe (a 21-year-old youth from Surrey). David participated in several Career Portfolio Development workshops and agreed to be interviewed about his thoughts on the process. Here is the second part of the interview:

Q: What about career decision making in relation to portfolios?

A: It (the portfolio) will be able to help in clarifying your job search and career search. If you don't have a good guide it's like trying to drive somewhere without a map and without really knowing where you've been.

Q: Why is a portfolio a map?

A: It allows you to reflect on your past experiences, skills, and employers, and really meditate on what you liked and disliked.

Q: Does the portfolio define or help to define your future career path?

A: Oh, for sure, just reflecting on what I've done I can say that I didn't like working at McDonalds, but that I liked working in a team atmosphere or in an office or in planning or promoting events like youth soccer matches. And knowing what you like or dislike is crucial to choosing a career path best suited for you.

Q: How long do you think a career portfolio workshop should be?

A: If it's in a group of 10 people it should take (to get a good feel for the process) about a week. In that time the participants would probably do a lot of work on their own, collecting and reflecting on artifacts. If it is one-on-one, three or four days should be enough, and at the end your portfolio should be well on the road to assembly.

Q: Why do participants have to work on their own?

A: Everybody is different. And for that reason, their artifacts and the direction their portfolio takes is going to be different, and you need that time on your own to decide on that direction.

Q: Where would this personal time be spent?

A: I think it is important to spend time at home looking for artifacts that say: "*Hey, this is me !!!*", and also thinking on the direction you want to go in. I think it is important to spend a lot of time at a Job Search Centre where you can work on a computer to develop the portfolio. It helped being at the Job Search Centre because there were many times I hit a bump in the road, and it's easier to ask an expert right away rather than putting it off until you see one again. It helped keep the creative juices flowing.

Q: Do you think that youth (aged 15-30) need portfolios?

A: Yes, not just youth though, but everybody should have one. Because soon the youth won't be youth anymore. It is a tough world out there and those who have a portfolio are going to get jobs over those who don't. It's easier to think of it (the portfolio) as an extension of your resume. You wouldn't apply for a job without a resume, and you wouldn't go to an interview without a portfolio.

Q: Are you in the "portfolio mindset" right now?

A: As you progress in the process of portfolio development you develop that "portfolio mindset". In the beginning I had no idea what you (Jake) were talking about, and now I look back and understand. For example I see a memo or a napkin or a picture of myself volunteering that I can catalogue for a portfolio, whether personal or professional, that before I just dismissed as stuff that accumulated and happened.

Q: So do you think of objects as having more value now?

A: I see the value in the common-day objects which are now much more than just "memorabilia". It's like getting an uncut diamond or memo, and with some polishing and some proper display you can show what a prized object or skill you have underneath.

Q: When you are measuring the value of these objects, what is your comparison?

A: I don't compare them to anything. I look at them as a mere reflection of me. I value myself quite highly, so those objects that reflect me better have a higher value. I compare the artifacts to myself and the ones that represent my skills and experiences more and more valuable. I see each artifact even if it were a napkin, holding a priceless value, because it is a reflection of me.

Q: What would you say to other service providers that help job seekers, since nearly all of them don't offer career portfolio development?

A: Not offering this is like trying to make chocolate chip cookies without the chocolate chips. If you (Employment Counsellors) are trying to counsel your clients to the best of your ability you may inadvertently not be mixing in that final ingredient that will push them over edge in landing that job and finding that career. It (the portfolio) is not so much for job advancement or bettering your skills, it is a "guide" to bettering yourself through a career and the skills you acquire, and it allows you to reflect on the skills and experiences you've had. And during that reflection you may notice that you have stopped or slowed down for whatever reason, for instance in your continued learning, and this process of portfolio development is a good way to jump-start it again. I just find that some people get into a "rut" and are unhappy in the career or type of work they have chosen, and by reflecting on their skills they can begin to choose work in other fields too. But getting the job is the ultimate goal. The portfolio will help job seekers choose a job that they will be happy doing. The career portfolio is more of a guide, not a career decision making tool. Often the decision comes from within, but this helps to make that decision better and easier.

Q: Tell me more about the reflecting and meditating process?

A: The process of reflecting started out by collecting the artifacts. With the collecting of the artifacts and meditation on the value of my skills I started to grow. It's like a revelation, literally turning on the light switch. It was a clear statement within me saying: "*Look at what I can do !!!*", and finding out that these things can open new doors. That is the key to any kind of reflection. It is the clarity that everyone seeks. When the lights go on that's when clarity is found.

Conclusion:

This interview has really brought forth the main points in regards to portfolio development. The entire process of creating a portfolio has far reaching effects on the way that we see ourselves, as well as the way other see us. The growth potential created by the portfolio reflection process can assist in career decision making as well job searching. This last fact is of great importance to employment counsellors, career practitioners, school counsellors, parents, and all social and economic development programs within the public sector. For example, a person with a portfolio would be able to present a more clear picture of their career development and training options to a government officer when trying to apply for training dollars. In turn, government employees would be assessing individuals with portfolios in a more holistic manner. This holistic approach to any assessment process can facilitate better matching of a client to appropriate interventions and thereby increasing outcomes significantly. The portfolio, acting as a "guide", would better prepare people in creating and reaching their goals, and in turn help others in assisting them on their journey. As I always say to participants: "*If you don't have clear goals for yourself, then you immediately subscribe to someone else's goals*". The portfolio has intrinsic elements that facilitate goal setting and thereby guides people in that process. I hope everyone has a great holiday and will start the year 2001 with a resolution to work on a portfolio. If you have any suggestions or feedback in regards to these articles on portfolio development or job seeking, please feel free to contact me at jakes@pepjob.com.