10 Questions for a Successful Working Professional

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1. Why did you decide to become a ________?
   I always knew that I wanted to go into a helping field, but I was not quite sure what that was, or what career that would be. I contemplated social work, being a high school counselor, and eventually I decided that I wanted to be a college counselor. I realized that a master’s degree was required to work in a college setting. I then decided to pursue my masters in counseling and came upon a great internship experience at ULV’s Career Services. It was then that I realized that I was born to help individuals with their careers. I loved the fact that there was variety in the profession and that you never get bored. There are so many aspects of career counseling that every day is a different day. Plus, I am a strong believer that working with students keeps you forever young. That is my own selfish reason. I realized that what I value most and what I am most passionate about is education. I am a strong advocate for higher education. I realized that if I worked in an environment where I get to promote what I am most passionate about, that I would always be happy, love what I do, and feel that I am making a difference in what I value the most.

2. What are the educational requirements to become a ________? Is an advanced degree or certification necessary or beneficial to gaining employment in your field?
   • In order to become a Career Counselor, you typically need a master’s degree in counseling, career counseling, college student development, or college counseling. In addition, I highly recommend being certified or knowledgeable of conducting and interpreting career assessments, i.e. the Strong Interest Inventory and Myers Briggs Personality assessment. I am currently the Assistant Director of Career Development at CSUF’s Career Center, and having a master’s degree has been paramount in my role. Most positions at the Assistant, Associate, or Director level in most career centers in higher education settings require a minimum of a master’s degree.
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3. What is a typical work day like for you? (i.e. job responsibilities)
   There is no typical day, which is what I love the most. However, if I needed to describe a typical day for me it would go something like this:
   - One or two meetings a day (i.e. staff meetings, other campus-wide meetings, or one-on-one meetings with the individuals that I supervise)
   - On average, 1-3 scheduled 1 hour appointments with students
   - Perhaps a scheduled workshop or presentation
   - 1-2 hours of walk-in advising hours at the Walk-in Advising Desk
   - Attending a career center event, or participating in other on-campus events that are co-sponsored by the career center
   - Getting back to my phone messages, emails and other faculty and student requests.
   - Streamlining, troubleshooting, programming, implementing and overseeing the functions of the Walk-In Advising Desk, the center, and training and supporting other staff members and interns.
   - Planning programs, events, workshops, for the upcoming semester and overseeing other staff members in their implementation of their programs and events.

4. What do you like and dislike most about your job?
   - I love seeing the light bulb go off inside students' heads when they feel that they finally realized what they want to do for a career, or when they have learned something that relates to career planning and job search strategies. The other aspect that I love about my job is supporting and training other staff members. I run a graduate internship program and I love teaching future young professionals how to do what it is that I love to do the most. I also love working at a large 4-year public institutions because of the diversity and the various activities that you can get involved with on-campus (i.e. New Student Orientations, Freshman Programs, Gradfest, Outreach, etc.).

   - What I like the least about my job is when I meet with students who have not put in any effort or time in their career or job search planning and expect that one meeting with me is going to solve all of their problems. Often times, students have the misconception that we operate as a staffing agency. It is also difficult to work in this field when the economy is down, because students get really anxious and frustrated. It can be frustrating when there is a lack of resources and you have to operate a career center with limited resources (i.e. staff & financial resources)
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5. What kind of individual (in terms of talent and personality) would be best suited for your job, and why?
   - Definitely someone who likes to give presentations and is comfortable addressing small and large groups. Therefore, public speaking skills are crucial.
   - In addition, someone who likes planning events because we coordinate a lot of workshops and events.
   - I also think you need someone who is going to be a good listener and who is patient and who can work effectively with diverse students (race, ethnicity, age, gender, people with disabilities, etc.)
   - Patience- you need a lot of patience in this field, because everyone is at a different learning level and you need to remember that what comes easy to you may not come easy to others. Counseling skills are crucial.
   - Someone who can give constructive criticism. A lot of what I do is providing feedback to students (i.e. interview techniques, dressing for success, resumes, cover letters etc.) You need to be comfortable in providing constructive feedback to students.
   - Great multitasking skills- this job entails a lot of variety, action, projects, etc. Therefore, being good at multitasking is important.

6. What kinds of jobs are available for someone entering into your field today?

   Because of the economy and budget constraints at several higher education institutions, there are limited jobs in this field at the moment. However, if an individual has a master's degree in counseling or related field, there are several other aspects of higher education they can go into. I would encourage individuals to continue networking, interning, volunteering, considering part-time jobs, grant-funded positions, temporary positions, and being active in the field they are most interested in. I would also suggest that if there are limited career counseling opportunities, they should consider other positions where they might utilize similar skills (i.e. advising, university outreach, or working at a non-profit organization).

7. What are some suggestions you could give to a student to give him/her an edge on the competition?
   - It is a very competitive field, even when the economy is good. Therefore, I encourage students to do informational interviews with individuals who are in careers they have considered. This always gives you an insider's perspective and it will allow you to network and make connections. Gaining hands-on experience is extremely important (i.e. internships, volunteering, service learning, part-time jobs, temp-
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assignments). Students need to start molding themselves in the direction they want to go. Doing research is important, knowing what the job process is like in that field, what type of resume or cover letter would you need, and how people in that field typically find jobs. In addition, you need to be proactive, purposeful, and dedicated. Nobody is going to do your homework for you or do your job search for you. Most importantly, attitude is key. Although there might not be many jobs out there, the only thing you can control is your attitude, and attitude goes a long way.

8. What was your interview process like (i.e. one on one, panel), day long? What kinds of questions did they ask?

My interview process consisted of a panel interview and a one-on-one interview with the Director of the Career Center and an open forum. It also consisted of a second interview with the Associate Director of the Career Center and Director of the Career Center. Most of the questions they asked revolved around career services, assessments, event planning, workshops and diversity questions. In addition, there were various questions asked about what I knew about that specific college and their students and how I planned to help their student population. They really wanted to know how my experience met their needs.

9. What is the pay scale like for your position, and are there possibilities for advancement?

The pay scale for my position really varies depending on the type of institution you work in. For instance, community colleges and public four year institutions pay more than private institutions. However, a typically salary range for my position varies from $50,000 to $65,000 a year.

10. Lastly, what is one piece of advice you would give to someone wishing to pursue a career in your field?

It is a very fun field, but it is also a small field. Therefore, networking is key and you are going to have to put in a lot of volunteer and internship hours to get your feet wet and let others in the field know who you are and the type of work that you do. It is crucial to be multidimensional in this field- it’s not just about counseling students. In order to be successful in this field, you have to stretch yourself and be good at a little bit of everything (such as counseling, public speaking, research and assessments, and event planning).
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