

Dec. 1981

CAREER AND LIFE PLANNING COUNSELING PROGRAM

Conducted by BINDER, ELSTER, MENDELSON & WHEELER, INC.

October 1980 to December 1981

for the

NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Irene N. Mendelson  
Project Director for  
Binder, Elster, Mendelson & Wheeler, Inc.

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## THE PROGRAM

From October 1980 through December 1981, Binder, Elster, Mendelson & Wheeler, Inc., conducted a career and life planning counseling program for 119 persons: 65 men and 54 women. This program was under contract to the Management Development and Training Branch of NRC (Appendix III).

The individuals ranged in age from 18 to 63 and from grades 3 through 15. They were seen for a maximum of four fifty-minute individual sessions, a total of 459 hours.

The attitude of the counselees was one of appreciation and commitment. Regardless of sex and grade, few had ever had the opportunity to systematically examine their career goals. They used this chance to analyze their interests and skills and to plot directions for their future. The emphasis on understanding decision-making as a focal point in the career counseling process helped clients to plan steps to achieve career goals.

Throughout this process the participants were reminded that self-reliance was essential -- that they would leave the program having learned how to confront future choices and that this knowledge would give them flexibility about those aspects of their jobs and careers that they themselves were able to control. There was considerable emphasis on developing better communication skills between counselees and their co-workers and supervisors as an aid in career development and in life.

## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Employees can be grouped into categories based on their primary need for counseling.

1. Those who had a pressing need to plan for the future. These individuals who make up over 50% of the counselees can be considered the goal-setters and are generally highly motivated and frequently self-directed. We found an additional component, however. Individuals spoke frequently of having gone as far as they could within the agency and having found themselves with neither further challenges nor place to advance.

2. Those who were dissatisfied with their current jobs due to specific job-environment factors such as inadequate recognition of the value of their work, difficulties with regard to supervisors, or the nature of the work itself.

3. Those who believed that they have been victims of age discrimination. For the most part these persons were in secretarial positions and based their opinion on the fact that they have been rejected for numerous jobs for which they believed themselves to have been qualified. Younger women were seen to move into jobs for which they also applied. There were fewer of these than in the past. Perhaps this was due to the fact that the percentage of women counseled was smaller.

4. Those who had few personal resources with which to begin gaining control over their lives. While these individuals were generally unhappy, their difficulties ranged from emotional problems to severely limited intellectual abilities.

These surfaced during the counseling and they were encouraged to seek additional professional help in these areas.

5. Those with no specific overriding concerns.

Among the reasons these people requested counseling were curiosity and a general wish to discuss their careers to determine whether there were any opportunities available to them. For the most part they simply needed an opportunity to validate the position in which they were staying. Many of these individuals participated in only one session.

Many people in all of the above categories believe their futures will depend on their learning better communication skills for use in daily contact with supervisors and subordinates. They expressed a desire to see such courses made available to NRC personnel.

Quite a few individuals in the mid-level grades expressed concern over whether work at NRC could continue to be meaningful in the future. This concern centers on the fact that they have very little feedback about what happens to their work once it is submitted and accepted. There is a frustration of rarely seeing the project completed. The worker's name almost never appears on the document or report. This leads to a morale problem in some offices.

Many workers at the GS 13-14 level expressed concern over their lack of upward mobility if they remain in technical areas. They describe a double bind -- they cannot become managers without either managerial experience or managerial training. They are, however, ineligible for training if they are in

technical areas. They have been counseled to seek training outside the agency as one strategy to overcome this problem. The feeling that one is not valued if one is "just technical" has been expressed by a number of people. The other impression from clients is that management tends to be "military," e.g., handed down from above. For many with supervisors in this mold, there are, as one person put it, "few pats, mostly kicks."

A new problem which relates to this and which has just surfaced in the past 6 months is a deep concern over performance appraisals. A number of people have voiced the fear that their evaluations set out goals that are impossible to meet. This could be used as grounds for firing, a demoralizing factor.

Areas for training which might be profitably explored at NRC are required courses for managers and supervisors in communication skills and in management by objective.

Assertiveness training for staff and supervisors (but separately) is a form of developing honest, direct communications. The worker is often afraid to ask the supervisor a direct question, and the supervisor often is unable to respond in a manner which facilitates growth and positive change.

Another suggestion might be a workshop in conflict resolution for the personnel of an office which has personnel problems, where the entire staff participates together under the guidance of a skilled group leader.

For people who do not take career counseling, there

should be a regularly scheduled SF 171 group workshop which concentrates on resume writing skills geared specifically to the SF 171 -- perhaps two sessions with instruction and discussion in the first session and follow-up and critique in the second.



APPENDIX I

TABLE ONE

Grade Level of Participants

Grade	Males (65)	Females (54)	
			= 119
3		1	
4		4	
5		7	
6	2	9	
7	4	11	
8	1	2	
9	3	8	
10			
11	2	3	
12	3	4	
13	8	4	
14	26	1	
15	16		
16			

TABLE III

Number of Years of Government Service

No information	2
Less than one year	1
1-4 years	35
5-9 years	38
10-14 years	24
15-19 years	13
Over 20 years	6
	<u>119</u>

TABLE TWO

Level of Education of Participants

No statistics listed	3
Some high school	2
High school graduate	21
Some college	21
College degree - BA, BS	24
Graduate degree - MA, MS	34
Ph.D	14
	<u>119</u>

TABLE FOUR

Age Range of Participants

Under 21	3
21-30	37
31-40	39
41-50	29
51-60	9
Over 60	1
Unknown	1
	<u>119</u>

## APPENDIX II

### SUMMARY OF RESPONSES ON EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Please rate your growth in the following areas:	<u>Very High</u>	<u>High</u>	<u>Average</u>	<u>Low</u>	<u>Very Low</u>
Increased awareness of your own abilities and limitations as they apply to your career goals	25	29	9		
Clarification of your career goals	22	30	11		
Knowledge of options available to you	20	27	15		1
Ability to make career-related decisions	13	33	16	1	
Job finding skills	17	26	18	2	
Confidence in making career-related decisions	16	37	8	1	

What other areas do you feel have been enhanced as a result of the career counseling?

- |   |    |
|---|----|
| Communications with supervisors and/or co-workers   | 20 |
| Clarifications of values and priorities   | 57 |
| Knowledge of job and/or occupational requirements   | 26 |
| Others (Specify)  |    |
| - Methods of exploring job changes  |    |
| - Self-Enhancement -- I found out I have many valuable skills and a better employment background than I realized. |    |
| - Gained tools to make above decisions, better understanding of myself, trying to be more assertive               |    |
| - Establishing long and short term goals  |    |



- Interviewing techniques and preparing S-171
- Preparation of resumes and 171
- Ability to evaluate my career as related to my abilities, personal values and limitations
- Ability to handle difficult office problem in a more professional manner
- Knowledge of available options for career choices
- Finding where I am in relation to others
- Clarify/reinforce my 5-year plan (toward increased responsibilities)
- Self-confidence
- Being able to take control of my life
- "Getting the ball and running with it."
- Awareness of problems in job which cause upsets and resulting reduction in actual upset
- Ideas on how to determine what I need to to in order to get what I want, i.e., talking to employees, networking, etc.

During or since counseling, have you taken specific steps in your own behalf toward realizing greater potential?

56 Yes 6 No

What do you plan to do?

Courses through NRC	24
Courses through an outside educational institution	28
Work toward a degree	11
Specific career investigation	29
Application for other jobs within NRC	38
Initiating communications with supervisors about career-related questions	26
Initiating work with PMA about opportunities within NRC	6
Exploring options outside NRC	36

Other (Specify)

- Plan to investigate lateral transfers into broader jobs
- Go back to school (pt) Type up my 171 to circulate and stop my procrastination
- Stay at present job at NRC while still continuing to pursue real estate field. Also, keep posted on the Dare position status
- Toastmasters Club
- Investigate areas where my skills can be used after retirement from the government: be more assertive
- Pursue a degree in accounting
- Build private typing business
- Research and start interviewing
- Move to an area where I can feel more comfortable; work toward a career that is of my best interest
- Improve SF 171
- Talk to people in my chosen field to see if my skills can be applied there
- Interview with private firms
- Volunteering activities outside NRC
- Think about personal values and maybe revise some of these values
- Seek job possibilities in other government agencies and develop outside interests
- Do those things in my job that are satisfying, reducing to a minimum those that are not
- I plan to talk to more people in my field of interest and to interview for a position to see what comes of it
- I also plan to find out if a potential job may finance my education

Goals attained which were previously unarticulated include:

Goals ... unarticulated included:

- Overall, very useful...Excellent counsel
- Learning something about the interrelationship of my personal and professional skills and needs
- Yes - I have decided to develop my skills to be the best secretary possible and to abandon retraining for computer-related jobs
- \_\_\_\_\_ was an excellent counselor and I would recommend the program and her to other people
- Yes, more secure feeling about possibilities, realities and methods for possible job improvement
- More confidence in making career-related decisions
- I know more clearly what options are available to me under the present circumstances
- Establish priorities in accomplishing agency goals
- Learned how to upgrade 171, assertiveness training, job hunting skills, awareness of current skills
- Better awareness of myself and what I really expect in the future
- Yes, use of the interest test - it helps to look at other opportunities
- Prepared a top-notch resume and SF 171
- Yes, working with small children
- Finding other job-related skills I never thought about before
- I identified non-work-related objectives to enhance overall life-quality and satisfaction
- More confident that I can make a career move that will have long-term benefits
- Found new ways to deal with a supervisor who has poor management skills



## BINDER, ELSTER, MENDELSON & WHEELER, INC.

Old Georgetown Building, Suite 202  
4948 St. Elmo Avenue  
Bethesda, Maryland 20014  
(301)657-1898, (301)652-4983

June 11, 1982

MEMO: To Region IV participants in the Career Counseling Program

From Irene N. Mendelson, (Binder, Elster Mendelson and Wheeler, Inc.)  
Coordinator of the NRC Career Counseling Program

Subject Program Evaluation

The firm of Binder, Elster, Mendelson and Wheeler, Inc. has been contracting with the Nuclear Regulatory commission since 1976 to provide career counseling for NRC employees at Headquarters in the Washington Metropolitan area. We have felt a great satisfaction about the high level of counseling quality we have been able to provide, which has been attested to by the majority of the over 450 employees who have taken advantage of the program.

In March 1982 we set up similar programs in the 5 NRC regions. In order to insure that the career counseling program maintains a standard of excellence in your region, we wish to enlist your cooperation in writing an extra evaluation of the program which is to be mailed directly to our offices. Please include the answers to these additional questions:

- 1) How many sessions did you see the career counselor?
- 2) What, specifically, do you feel could be done to better the program and increase client satisfaction?
- 3) Feel free to make any comments or observations you wish to about any aspect of the counseling experience.

We would appreciate a prompt response, so that we can make our evaluation during the week of June 21. It is not necessary to include your name on the evaluation, but you may do so if you wish.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call me directly at our office or to contact Ms. Anna May Haycraft in region IV.