

Leadership ladders:

STEPS TO A GREAT CAREER IN SOCIAL WORK

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career coaching: a valuable resource for social workers

According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, on average people may change jobs over ten times and change careers three to five times (BLS, 2010)

The journey of identifying and achieving career goals can begin following graduation, during a midlife career change, or even when approaching retirement. It involves integrating experiences learned from managing one's career and developing milestones against which to validate career development and decision-making. When social workers are job seeking or reviewing career options, a career coach can help.

Located in most colleges and universities are career centers which provide services and resources for students and alumni. These services, provided by career coaches, can be invaluable for short and long term educational and career planning. Career coaches provide individualized sessions that focus on assessment, self-evaluation, research, portfolio creation, personal short and long term career goals

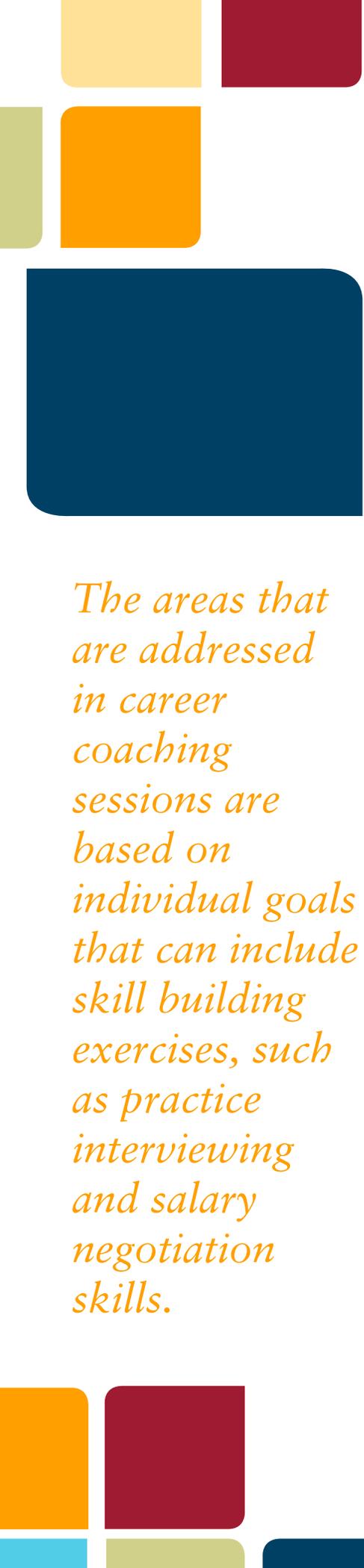
and decision-making. These coaching sessions can help social workers develop needed skills, "such as clarifying job search goals, developing resume and cover letter, understanding the value and how to do networking, researching employers, finding and evaluating job postings, and interviewing effectively" (Simmons, 2012). The areas that are addressed in career coaching sessions are based on individual goals that can include skill building exercises, such as practice interviewing and salary negotiation skills.

» THE CAREER DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

A career coach can be of assistance in helping to guide social workers through the process of career planning and development. Coaching provides a comprehensive approach to help social workers to identify competencies, skills



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and learning objectives and apply them towards lifelong career development and decision making (Simmons (2012). This approach includes:

- › **Evaluation** involves self-assessment which helps to identify those areas needed for change and growth that contribute to personal self-satisfaction.
- › **Exploration** which includes reviewing options such as—learning about what the work entails, what skills and education are needed, what is the typical salary, and what is the job outlook—are areas to be addressed in making job and career decisions.
- › **Preparation** includes development of a career portfolio of documents, such as cover letter, résumé, educational transcripts, certificates and licenses, employment experiences, career and educational goals. This step leads to a plan that takes into consideration a balance of individuality, professionalism, and career field importance.
- › **Implementation/Connection** activates the plan by starting the job search.
- › **Decision-Making/Transition** involves the key components of interviewing, evaluating job offer(s), and accepting a position (Moffett, J. 2009).

Most important for social workers, these steps connect their social work education degrees, “to future career interests and opportunities, prepares them to translate the meaning of their degree to employers, and guides them in making informed decisions in preparation for today’s workforce” (Simmons, 2012).

» **MANAGING A SOCIAL WORK CAREER OVER THE LIFE SPAN**

Social workers will often experience career transitions whereby they will make multiple career choices over their life span. Before considering any career-altering decisions, social workers will want to consider the effect of these changes and the potential for professional and personal growth. When undertaking career changes and transitions, social workers may want to consider these questions:

- › What are the new opportunities?
- › What kind of career information is needed?
- › What are my personal needs?

Career coaches can help social workers to address these questions, to apply skills and talents developed over different work roles and responsibilities, and to translate these experiences and knowledge into new career opportunities and advancement.

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