

# HOPE-FILLED ENGAGEMENT



*new possibilities  
in life/career counselling*

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Norman E. Amundson

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chapter one

# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to a journey. For that is what Hope-Filled Engagement is—a journey.

It is a journey of exploration and discovery—a journey further into a world of creative career counselling that started in 1998 with the award-winning book *Active Engagement* (Amundson, 2009). Therefore, it is a journey of active engagement. Engagement not just for the people we work with, but also for our own selves, as life/career practitioners.

It is a journey of creativity in the face of a world of increasing change and uncertainty.

It is a journey of hope. The journey may not start with much hope, but it is a journey that generates hope the further along one travels. Hope for people who have been unable to see any hope on their life/career path. Hope for practitioners who struggle with despair and cynicism, who want to believe again that it is possible to help the people they are committed to.

There will be destinations along the way. But each destination is just a stepping-stone to the next stage of the journey. Our desire is much more than to just get people working. It is to equip them with hope as they discover that it is indeed possible to walk their life/career journey with a sense of dignity and value no matter where that path may lead.

In *Active Engagement*, some people are described as being “stuck in a crisis of imagination”; they just can’t see their lives any different from what they are or have (Amundson, 2009). Many practitioners also seem to be “stuck in a crisis of imagination.” They sincerely wish to help the people they work with but are not quite sure what to do.

There are no simple answers. It would be presumptuous to say that Hope-Filled Engagement will solve all the challenges that practitioners face today. All the issues involved are far too complex for any one book or approach to solve. But perhaps it will give you some fresh new ideas, new perspectives, and new strategies. Hopefully you will find some new

motivation to be involved in the creative task of developing even more new tools and processes for the challenges of today and tomorrow.

We have found that there is usually more commonality between people than there are differences. No matter whether high or low economic status, young or old, male or female, a citizen or an immigrant, educated or uneducated, professional or blue-collar, many people struggle with the same issues in their lives. Many have questions about who they are and what they ought to be doing with their lives. Many struggle with personal and external issues that make it difficult for them to effectively answer these questions in practical ways that can be worked out in today's labour market.

We believe that people need to take responsibility for their lives and for the choices they make. There are some people out there who are stuck in their life/career journeys because of poor personal choices. But it is also true that many face barriers not of their making: age, sex, culture, socio-economic class, local labour market, lack of opportunity, to name just a few. This reality is becoming more common today as counselling becomes increasingly complex. For example, multi-barriered clients are becoming more common, and so practitioners need to be appropriately prepared. As practitioners, we need to do all we can to create an environment that is conducive to all people making good choices no matter the cause of their challenges. Thus, personal responsibility is not just something for people generally but also for practitioners and for those who create and maintain the structures and policies under which practitioners work. In this rapidly changing world, it is not only the people we work with who may need to change but also we as practitioners.

The need for this book became clear through the work we have done with the *Guiding Circles* program. The *Guiding Circles* approach started with a model of career development and some research that was conducted on the career decision-making needs of Aboriginal youth (McCormick & Amundson, 1997; McCormick, Neumann, Amundson, & McLean, 1999; Neumann, McCormick, Amundson, & McLean, 2000). This research supported the need for a career approach that would

make career development more accessible to Aboriginal people and others. Working with Dr. Rod McCormick, we helped develop *Guiding circles: An Aboriginal guide to finding career paths, Booklet 1: Understanding yourself* (McCormick, Amundson & Poehnell, 2002), then *Guiding circles: An Aboriginal guide to finding career paths, Booklet 2: Finding new possibilities* (Poehnell, Amundson & McCormick, 2006), and finally a coaches manual (Poehnell, 2003). Since we will be referencing these frequently throughout this book, we will simply refer to them as *Guiding Circles 1* and *Guiding Circles 2*. We also entered into a partnership agreement with the Aboriginal Human Resource Council of Canada and this led to a national research project to test and validate the Guiding Circles approach with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit practitioners in different regions in Canada (funded by Human Resources and Social Development Canada - HRSDC).

Since 2002, thousands of workbooks have been circulated and over 1500 practitioners in Canada (as well as in Australia and New Zealand) have received training. The workshops have been held with reservations, Aboriginal organizations, non-profit organizations, government organizations, schools, colleges, and universities, and private businesses.

Though *Guiding Circles* was initially directed toward multi-barriered people, it soon became clear that the underlying approach had a much broader application. For example, several school boards have been incorporating it into their curriculum. As well, we have observed this approach helping people not only in direct career matters such as self-assessment and career exploration but also in building self-esteem and a greater sense of identity—essential building blocks for effective life/career development. We recognized that we were not so much training people in *Guiding Circles* but in the hope-filled engagement process that was being expressed in the workbooks. Practitioners kept asking for background material beyond what could be covered in the workshops. It is this appeal for greater elaboration of hope-filled engagement that we seek to address in this book.

This approach seems particularly well suited to

- people who don't fit into the mainstream world of school or work or who feel intimidated by traditional career counselling,
- people who come from a cultural background different from mainstream North Americans,
- people with low self-esteem,
- people who have lost a sense of meaning in their lives, and
- people who are unaware of their career potential.

It is our hope that *Hope-Filled Engagement* will assist you, as a life/career practitioner, in the ethical and practical development of knowledge, skills, and practices for working more creatively and positively with people. It is designed to provide practical help for the challenges you may be facing in your work—challenges such as finding ...

- creative approaches to help people increase their self-awareness and find realistic career possibilities in today's rapidly changing world,
- a flexible realistic framework to guide the counselling process,
- ways to involve community in the counselling process, and
- a counselling approach that is cross-culturally sensitive.

The *Hope-Filled Engagement* career development approach combines a holistic worldview (including spirituality, connectedness, community, values and life balance) with sound contemporary career development concepts. It is a creative approach that encourages flexibility and innovation. It is a person-centered, solution-focused, hope-focused approach that engages people where they are engaged with life and works from there.

In writing this book, it has been hard to know where to put what and what order to follow. There are challenges to face, themes to consider, activities to try. Because these are all so interrelated, we are dealing with a web of ideas. For example, when discussing an activity, it is possible that several challenges or themes might be considered. Therefore, as you read this book, you will want to reference and cross-reference different sections.

We have attempted to group the different inter-related parts of the *Hope-Filled Engagement* approach under 8 broad sections.

**Chapter 2: Diversity and Challenges** looks at the need to critically reflect upon our own assumptions and conventions in the light of the increasing diversity of people today. We wish to encourage the use of the most appropriate tools and processes.

**Chapter 3: Key Themes** that undergird the Hope-Filled Engagement approach: diversity, active engagement, mattering, the backswing, CareerCraft, imagination and spirituality, holistic life/career perspectives, values and life balance, career integrity, community perspective, and creative decision/action planning.

**Chapter 4: Creativity, Spirituality, Imagination, and Hope** are important elements in all aspects of the life/career counselling process. Such elements are needed in the light of the rapidly changing world of work which call for more holistic and flexible approaches, especially for those experiencing hopelessness.

**Chapter 5 Self-Assessment** must engage people in identifying and valuing who they are. It emphasizes finding the best starting points for self-assessment and then the facilitating of storytelling using proven questioning strategies.

**Chapter 6: Storytelling** is an effective and inclusive approach for self-discovery that can be used with a very broad range of people whatever their background, even if they are disconnected from

the mainstream world of school or work and have a difficult time relating to many traditional life/career counselling approaches. This section will explore in depth both storytelling concepts and practical activities, especially finding the right starting points and facilitating storytelling through the use of effective questioning.

**Chapter 7: Career Exploration** applies the same *Hope-Filled Engagement* principles, tools, and approaches used in self-assessment to person-focused career exploration. Practical creative activities, such as the use of stimuli and brainstorming, can enable people to expand the way they view the world of work, to identify potential career fields flowing from their own potential, and then to fine-tune the possibilities in these career fields. We will also explore how to discover uncharted entrepreneurial potential. Finally, we will look at the process of getting the relevant career information needed to make effective career decisions.

**Chapter 8: Creative Vision/Decision/Action Planning** addresses the need for more creative, holistic, and communal approaches to vision casting, decision making and to action planning in today's ever-changing chaotic world. Practical activities are employed that will enable people to keep moving no matter the uncertainties or the barriers that they face.

**Chapter 9: Keeping in Step with a Changing Career** addresses the self-care of practitioners who are facing a changing job in a changing work environment in a changing world. In one sense, every career practitioner is only a step away from becoming a client himself or herself. We all are walking a life/career journey in a very uncertain world. We all need to find ways to engage with hope.

Whether you read *Hope-Filled Engagement* straight through or selectively, read with a spirit of exploration, honest self-reflection, curious experimentation, and creative adaptation. Let us know what you discover on your journey.

HOPE-FILLED ENGAGEMENT expresses a person-centered, solution-focused, hope-focused approach that engages people where they are engaged with life and equips them to walk their life/career paths with dignity whatever their challenges.

*In Hope-Filled Engagement, Gray and Norm offer exceptional insight, inspiration, and a wealth of practical tools and interventions. This book is a treasure, drawing on their personal and professional journeys toward hope to illuminate possible pathways for crafting our careers.*

*It is intimate, extremely thought-provoking, creative, compelling and utterly engaging. This book oozes integrity and practicality. What a combination and what a contribution!*

**Sareena Hopkins and Lynne Bezanson**, Co-executive Directors  
CANADIAN CAREER DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

*Hope-filled Engagement fits well within an Aboriginal perspective because it respects and honours our ways of including community, incorporates storytelling in a positive way, and helps individuals see a new vision for their future ... this resource can be used immediately and with confidence by employment coaches, educators, and human resource managers.*

**Trina Bučko**, National Director, Organizational Inclusion Strategies  
ABORIGINAL HUMAN RESOURCE COUNCIL OF CANADA

*Hope-Filled Engagement is the next evolution in career development theory. This book is like having Gray and Norm with you as coaches while you motivate and engage young people in their career life path. We have used many of the activities as part of our Guiding Circles Training for teachers. The activities are creative, relevant, and fun, and most importantly they work!*

**Lorna McPherson**, Guidance Program Coordinator  
TORONTO DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

*This book serves as our “whack on the side of the head,” forcing us to rethink our approach to career crafting our life/career journey. The resource is practical, intelligent, and passionate.*

*The book contains in equal measure imagination, creativity, and optimism with a spiritual connection to bring about the change we want to see in the world.*

**Linda Farrington**, City Campus Leader  
TASMANIAN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, LEARNING SERVICES NORTH, AUSTRALIA

*This book puts forth a strong foundation that will engage you in deconstructing your own practices, challenge your thinking on cultural relevance and specificity, and assist you in inspiring clients to engage in remarkable visioning of their life work future.*

**Laurie Edwards**, Director, Learning and Workforce Services, Student Success  
NOVA SCOTIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE



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