



THE Century THAT Redefined Work

Never before in the history of humankind has a one-hundred-year period been as eventful as the one just ended. The 20th century will be remembered as the century of World Wars, the automobile, flight, television, man's first steps on the surface of the moon, and the computer. And it began with a fantastic event, Marconi's famous transatlantic wireless message received in St. John's Newfoundland, ushering in a century of remarkable transformations.

In Canada's career counselling community, itself a child of those hundred years, much that happened can be seen as part of its process of maturation. Almost everything that occurred in the 20th century represented a change in the nature of work, whether it was the advent of mass manufacturing, mass communications, information technology or nuclear arms. Whenever something new appeared, it had an impact on jobs—on what people did, and where and how they did it.

As the 19th century drew to a close, Canada remained a vast frontier, home to scarcely more than five million people. Well over half the population still lived in rural areas, while some two million had migrated into a relatively few cities and towns.

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1900: Haying in Saskatchewan. Wheat would become Canada's primary export as agriculture continued to grow.

The Canadian workforce consisted of roughly 1.8 million people, the vast majority of whom were men. For most, work was a means of survival and anyone who wanted work could generally find it.

In large part, the work of the era was physical. Manual labour demanded people with strength and stamina who knew how to use their hands. Even the most skilled craftsmen of the day—carpenters, stone masons and blacksmiths—relied on manual abilities.

There was work to be found for saddlers, shoemakers, textile workers and printers. Labourers built sidewalks, roads, bridges and railways.



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1910: Immigrants came in the thousands looking for a new productive life in a vast country.

Those willing to venture into the Canadian wilderness found work trapping or in logging and mining camps. In small coastal communities, people fished for a living. And everywhere in the raw, new land, there was farming. As the century began, over 700,000 people worked in some form of agriculture.

The vast expanse of prairie, stretching west across the country, had not yet been settled to any great extent. Aside from the burgeoning port of Vancouver and a few thousand pioneering souls in rough-hewn frontier towns like Calgary, the country was still largely made up of what had been called Upper and Lower Canada, plus the Maritime provinces.

Massive numbers of immigrants poured into Canada each year, often without money, counting on finding work. Many headed west, in search of land, but fully half the new arrivals ended up in Canadian cities, where slum-like areas spread rapidly and health concerns became increasingly common.

In Montreal, Halifax and Toronto, there were cabinet-makers, distillers, wagon and carriage builders. Industrialization, still in its infancy, had nonetheless already begun its transformation of work; the free market economy it encouraged was gathering strength. Many of the early factories were “little more than huge craft shops,” observes social historical, Alvin Finkel. “You’d have a lot of people operating their craft, but operating it for an employer.”

Career counselling, to the degree that it existed at all, was dispensed by lay persons and social workers in community agencies or church basements. And no one had yet put the words “career” and “counselling” together to describe a process intended to help individuals determine where in the workplace their interests might be best served.

Among the most powerful forces that would promote change throughout the century were the needs for guidance and direction felt by those in Canada’s increasingly sprawling, diverse workplace. Changing social, economic and political realities created the need to help young people leaving school or people leaving the farm and moving to cities looking for work; the need to help people acquire new skills to deal with changing technology; and the need to help those new to the county.

From its earliest years, Canada was a country of immigrants. Throughout the century ahead, there would be tremendous pressures on new Canadians to adapt and become productive members of society. People of many nationalities with widely differing backgrounds and skills needed help getting settled, looking for work and finding their way in a strange land.

As the 20th century began, however, there was little recognition of these career and workplace needs, and little expectation among those in need of career counselling that help would be forthcoming.

Then, as now, entrepreneurs flourished. A couple of major Canadian retailers—The T. Eaton Company and Simpson’s Ltd.—already had large stores in downtown Toronto and extensive catalogue divisions.

And there were corporate mergers. In 1891, Ontario’s Massey Manufacturing Company and A. Harris and Son joined forces to become Massey-Harris, Canada’s largest corporation, manufacturer of over half the agricultural machinery sold nationwide.

Throughout the course of the coming century, there would be both good and bad employers and an individual’s quality of working life would depend, to a large degree, on which sort one worked for. As well, the needs of employers would change time and again, as market forces transformed the means of production and skill requirements were altered accordingly.

In the early years, most establishments remained small, with fewer than a hundred employees; workers and employers formed personal relationships. As the Industrial Age advanced however, and companies and institutions grew, managers began to represent the employers’ interests to the workers.

The roots of career counselling in the community

In those years, many of the sectors that would eventually play a role in responding to workers' needs for direction were busy grappling with their own realities. Governments, for example, were preoccupied with finding ways to build the new nation. Generally they saw the interests of employers as closely linked to their own. Education was largely a local concern. One-room schoolhouses dotted settled areas; larger school boards could only be found in major cities. "By 1905," says Alvin Finkel, "with the exception of Quebec, Canadian provinces had legislated free schooling and compulsory attendance for youngsters under the age of twelve."

Public education, for the most part, was oriented toward building basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. Already, however, there were calls from social reformers to include practical instruction on manual training and household science in the schooling of young people. In cities, private training institutes had begun to appear as well, providing clerical training and, in a few trade organizations, technical training.

Craft labour unions provided some help, but only to union members. "The labour movement at the time was really a group of skilled workers," says labour educator D'Arcy Martin. "You had large numbers of street smart, highly skilled workers banding together and negotiating with skills as their main lever; unskilled workers were perceived by these journeymen as the great unwashed."

Only in the community agencies of the day was there much help with employment and training concerns. Organizations like the Salvation Army, the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) and the YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association) had set up offices in the country's major cities, offering help finding accommodation, work and, at times, even training to those who came to their doors.

Canada was still a British colony (and Newfoundland an independent colony) and British expatriots and social activists were prominent among those providing assistance. In most communities, there were social workers who gave their time to churches or religious organizations.

For people who found themselves truly destitute, the only refuge was the civic poor house, where "relief" was often dispensed in a parsimonious and begrudging way.

World wars and times of great upheaval

Ahead lay a century of tumultuous change. Wars would both drain the economy and revitalize it. Economic contraction and expansion, industrial growth and decline, consumerism, and astonishing technological advances all would have their impact on the workplace. Canada's colossal geography would demand creative responses in transportation and communications. And somewhere in the distant, unimaginable future, people would be crisscrossing its vast expanse in massive jetliners and eventually conducting "virtual" interactions in cyberspace.

Over and over again, work and its role in society would change,

buffeted by market forces, political shifts and international events until, by the end of the 20th century, no corner of the Canadian workplace would be immune... and few workers unaffected.

Career distress, the bane of the low-skilled or disadvantaged, would become commonplace. Displaced workers would need relocation assistance. Unemployed executives would need help learning how to look for work. The long-term unemployed would need motivation and help rebuilding lost self-esteem. New entrepreneurs would require financial support to get started. Young people would need higher education, training and ever more sophisticated skills. And virtually everyone would need better, more comprehensive information and the skills to adapt to an ever-changing job market and workplace.

As the years of the 20th century passed and individual needs grew, society would be pressed to respond. During times of upheaval, there would be calls for sweeping government programs to deal with complex workplace issues creating, by century's end, a huge bureaucracy to help individuals and employers deal with workplace issues.

As early as the middle of the century, some corporate employers would find it in their own best interests to help workers address their personal career counselling needs. By the end of the century, education would advance in unimaginable ways, ultimately becoming part of a global "learning market," offering instruction and training to millions of young people and adults each year.

Even organized labour, while continuing to be concerned with wages, benefits and workplace regulations, would increasingly shift its gaze to the needs of individual members for career guidance and counselling.

New beginnings

Innovation in career and employment services, and the impetus to see them widely adopted across the country would come from individuals working within these various sectors.

Far-sighted business philanthropist Frank Lawson would see the need for vocational guidance and devote his ample energies to meeting that need. Early psychologist Gerald Cosgrave would work diligently to provide people with personal vocational insight.

Clarence Hincks, an inspired social activist, would find his way into schools and corporate boardrooms, galvanizing people to action. Educator Morgan Parmenter would create some of Canada's first labour market information for young people. And public servant Stuart Conger would help to shape the role played by the federal government in developing youthful human capital.

Often working independently and inspired by their own visions, these pioneers and many, many others would find a common cause, ultimately helping to create a field that would benefit the country's capacity to compete globally and meet its own needs. They would contribute to the establishment of a profession of career counselling practitioners, whose role evolved from placement agents supplying the labour needs of a diversifying



Two pioneers
Frank G. Lawson (left)
and Morgan Parmenter

economy, to professionals helping Canadians assess their skills and interests and equipping them to chart their own career path in the new economy.

As work was redefined by the 20th century, so too was a profession that helped Canadians adapt and ensured the economy had a reliably skilled labour supply to meet its needs. *A Coming of Age: Counselling Canadians for Work in the Twentieth Century* provides an overview of Canada's social history, with particular emphasis on work and the economy that supplied it. It provides the context within which career counselling emerged as an inherent part of every working Canadian's life.