

## **Leveraging Transformative Learning in the Job Search Process**

Sarah E. Schoper, Kristen J. Wyse, and Todd R. Rotgers, Western Illinois University

In 2004, both ACPA—College Student Educators International (ACPA) and NASPA—Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) asserted that transformative learning is a purpose of the field of student affairs. Since 2004, several publications supported the same assertion, including *Learning Reconsidered 2* (Keeling, 2006), *Transformative Learning Through Engagement: Student Affairs Practice as Experiential Pedagogy* (Fried, 2012), and *New Leadership for Student Learning and Accountability: A Statement of Principles, Commitments to Action* (Association of American Colleges & Universities, & Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2012).

### **Transformative learning**

Mezirow and associates (2000, p. 25) defined transformative learning as, “a phased and often transformative process of meaning becoming clarified through expanded awareness, critical reflection, validating discourse, and reflective action as one moves toward a fuller realization of agency.” ACPA and NASPA (2004, p. 2) describe it as, “a comprehensive, holistic, transformative activity that integrates academic learning and student development, processes that have been considered separate and even independent of each other.” If transformative learning is indeed a purpose of our profession, it seems worthwhile to consider what it means not just for our practice when working with students but what it might also mean in regard to our own student affairs journey. Using the learning partnership model in reference to the job search process is one way of exploring transformative learning.

### **Learning Partnerships Model**

The learning partnerships model (Baxter Magolda, 2004) is designed specifically to promote transformative learning. The model surfaced from a 25-year longitudinal study conducted by Baxter Magolda (2001) on the learning and development of young adults. Specifically, three principles and three assumptions comprise the model, and each raises important insights into the job search process.

#### **Principle and assumption #1.**

The first principle within the learning partnerships model is, “validating the learners’ capacity to know” (Baxter Magolda, 2004, p. 41). Applying this principle to a job search means recognizing you bring your own unique knowledge and experience to the process. Within the first principle surfaces the assumption “knowledge is complex and socially constructed, thus it requires your participation” (p. 41). It is incongruent with this principle and assumption for you to be told exactly how to articulate past experiences for the job search. Instead, it is important to spend time reflecting on what you already know, and what that means for the job search process. A few questions designed to help surface what you know and to connect it to the job search process are:

- What experiences from your past jobs or graduate work are significant to you?
- How do those experiences relate to that specific job or institution?
- If you were sharing those significant experiences with someone else, how would you articulate their significance to your professional journey?

#### **Principle and assumption #2.**

The second principle within the learning partnerships model is, “situating learning in the learner’s experience” (Baxter Magolda, 2004, p. 41). Applying this principle to your job search process requires you to see yourself as the learner and therefore actively connect what you are learning about a potential position to your own lived experience. The

assumption connected to this principle is, “the self is central to knowledge construction” (Baxter Magolda, 2004, p. 41). Essentially, within the job search, question “who am I?” and how who you are connects to potential job opportunities. The following questions are designed to help you put yourself into your job search process:

- What do you most value within your life?
- How do your values align with the office/department/institution of that job?
- What are your beliefs about the purpose of student affairs?
- How do your beliefs align with the responsibilities of potential positions?

Principle and assumption #3.

The third principle within the learning partnerships model, “defines learning as mutually constructed” (Baxter Magolda, 2004, p. 41). Connecting this principle to the job search process reminds us the entire process is mutually constructed. Finding a good fit in a job is equally as important as the institution finding a good fit for their office or department. The assumption tied to this principle takes this one step further by stating that there is, “a sharing of authority and expertise through this mutual partnership” (p. 41). Acting in accordance with this assumption means you need to actively participate and contribute to the interview process, rather than leaving all of the interviewing to your interviewers. A few points to consider for your search related to this principle and assumption are:

- Get to know the people interviewing you; ask about their values, past experiences, and how that connects to the work of that office/ department/institution.
- Think of an interview as a conversation rather than a question and answer session.
- Be aware of the interactions and relationships you begin to form through your interviews and reflect on if those are relationships you would like to continue to build.

### **Conclusion**

The job search process can be exhausting. However, it is important to spend time reflecting on who you are continually throughout the process and considering what that means for the decisions you are making. Spending time with the questions and thoughts presented through an exploration of the learning partnerships model can help you find a position that will not only align with your experiences and values, but a position that will also foster your own continued growth and development. Just as we look to promote transformative learning in our work with students (ACPA & NASPA, 2004), we need to also consider how to promote it within our own lives. Leveraging transformative learning through the learning partnerships model for the job search process is a good place to start.

## References

- American College Personnel Association, & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. (2004). *Learning reconsidered*. Washington, DC: Authors.
- Association of American Colleges & Universities, & Council for Higher Education Accreditation. (2012). *New leadership for student learning and accountability: A statement of principles, commitments to action*. Retrieved from <http://www.newleadershipalliance.org/images/uploads/new%20leadership%20principles.pdf>
- Baxter Magolda, M.B. (2001). *Making their own way: Narratives for transforming higher education to promote self-authorship*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Baxter Magolda, M.B. (2004). Learning partnerships model: A framework for promoting self-authorship. In M.B. Baxter Magolda & P.M. King (Eds.), *Learning partnerships: Theory and models of practice to educate for self-authorship* (pp. 37-62). Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Fried, J., & Associates. (2012). *Transformative learning through engagement: Student affairs practice as experiential pedagogy*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Keeling, R. P. (Ed.). (2006). *Learning reconsidered 2: A practical guide to implementing a campus-wide focus on the student experience*. Washington, DC: ACPA, ACUHO-I, ACUI, NACADA, NACA, NASPA, & NIRSA.
- Mezirow, J., & Assoc. (2000) *Learning as transformation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.