



LAES has developed a series of immigrant issue instructional modules entitled "Tierra de Oportunidad" for orientation to our complex society.

INSTRUCTIONAL AREA
Advancing Work And Career

MODULE 25

Career Advancement

Overview

Most immigrants to California first work in one of several "immigrant-dominated" industrial sectors -- e.g. farmwork, restaurant work, construction, gardening, housekeeping, electronics assembly, sewing -- where wages are low, working conditions are difficult, and job qualifications are primarily willingness to work hard. For almost all, a crucial and central part of their lives is to "get ahead" in their work lives.

This module provides a framework for thinking about career advancement in terms of three kinds of trajectories: education-based, vertical, and horizontal, a set of issues which class participants should think about in managing career advancement and, some ideas about self-assessment and information-gathering.

The labor market is turbulent and changing constantly, often in ways that are not easy to predict. Because the job market is continually shifting, people need the agility to repeatedly re-evaluate their strategies, their resources, and their prospects. Sometimes things will suddenly look much better. Sometimes they will suddenly look worse.

Because we live in an information-based society and economy, foundation skills in acquiring and analyzing information are the basis for career advancement. There is no single definitive guide for career advancement. To get ahead, people must constantly seek out and evaluate new information, as well as develop new skills.

Career advancement is a team effort in which the person who is planning to get ahead needs the support of others, particularly when the whole field seems chaotic, confused, and impossible. To get ahead, people will always benefit from counseling, that is, interactive and reflective dialogue, discussing ideas and options. Experienced and specialized job counselors can provide unique assistance, but people can and should also talk over their plans with informal counselors, family, friends, or co-workers.

Basic Skills Development

Thinking Skills:	Assessing alternative "solutions" to the problems of career advancement; discovering innovative strategies to achieve high personal aspirations in the face of low educational attainment.
Learning to Learn:	Increasing awareness of the importance of both formal and informal learning, the value placed by employers on learning to learn skills, and the necessity of acquiring information from multiple sources.

Uses resources:	As part of career advancement, using family, friends, employers, counselors, co-workers, strangers, reference materials, specialized publications such as trade journals, on-line information, and information from electronic broadcast media.
Interpersonal Skills:	Engaging family, co-workers, and strangers in one's career advancement strategy, as informants, counselors, and teachers.
Uses Information:	Drawing conclusions about oneself from introspection and external information; weighing information from disparate sources and drawing conclusions, analyzing strategies which include both short-term objectives and long-term goals.
Works With Systems:	Describe employer's systems for screening, transferring, and promoting job applicants and employees; the California labor market; and different segments of the California educational system.
Uses Technology:	Selects the right technology, including Internet to research career opportunities.

Teaching Points

Career Trajectories and Dynamics in General

Career paths are no longer straight or easily predictable. They always involve some degree of wandering. The key to maintaining one's sense of direction is to focus on looking carefully to understand how it all fits together and to be patient in finding one's way in this often changing landscape.

1. **The U.S. labor market in general, and the California labor market in particular, are much more complicated than they used to be.** Now, in much of the labor market there are not clear-cut well-defined occupations; instead one occupation blends fuzzily into another. This is good news since it makes it easier to move from one kind of job to another. However, it means that every employee must see what goes on around them and, also, find out what they themselves like best to do. Alertness, agility, curiosity, willingness to explore, friendliness, flexibility, willingness to work hard on the job and in learning, the willingness to help others, negotiating, collaborating, problem-solving are all key personal qualities and the foundation for career advancement. An important strategy is to transfer skills developed in one context into another (e.g. negotiating skills in child rearing to negotiating skills as a workplace supervisor).
2. **People who hope to work in one career all of their lives will find careers shifting.** Every year some jobs are being eliminated, often ones which are low-skilled, and new jobs are being created. These new fields are often called emerging occupations; they almost always present opportunities for career advancement but they are, also, highly competitive. Career knowledge requires not only knowing, in general, how to get a job, but, in order to get ahead, how to change jobs and move upward in these jobs. In many countries, there is still a tendency to talk about a career and think about old-fashioned, well-developed occupations, e.g. bookkeeper. In reality, the whole world labor market is changing.

Education-based, Vertical, and Horizontal Career Mobility

Continuing education, vocational skills training, or enrollment in adult education, community college, and university courses are all valuable investments in career advancement but they are not always the easiest or the best way to get ahead. One important alternative to consider is to get ahead by becoming better in the kind of work one is already doing -- vertical career mobility. Another important alternative is to get into horizontal job transfers -- from one kind of work to

another, at the same company or with the same employer.

3. **Whatever steps one takes to get ahead need to be thought through carefully and analytically.** Crucial considerations include attention to the costs, in time and money, of trying to get ahead; one's own aspirations and goals; and the constraints on what one can reasonably do, while balancing work with child-raising or caring for older relatives. People are often counseled to be realistic but this often means, "Don't set your hopes too high!" People should set their hopes as high as they possibly can, but high aspirations means high levels of energy and personal commitment. Finally, each commitment, should be thought of in steps, thinking several steps ahead.
4. **If a person pays for vocational training from a trade school, they need to know: a) Will the training provide the needed skills? b) Where are the available jobs? c) Will the school be responsible for finding a job for them.?** In many popular occupations, for example, Web page design, auto repair, television production, aviation, music, and cooking, even highly skilled people may find it difficult to get a job or support themselves from one short job to another. Even if vocational training is free, at a community college or adult school, students need to know that they will get up-to-date knowledge, top-quality skills and help in landing a job. The key to competing for jobs, as one moves upward in a career, is not just to be adequately competent, but to be the most competent.
5. **Vertical advancement -- If a person decides to get ahead in the kind of work they are doing, they need to pay careful attention to the kinds of skills employers actually want, not just the official story.** For example, a person with basic computer skills, such as a data entry clerk, can move into telecommunications system design without going to college for years but only if she or he is entrepreneurial and takes every opportunity to get ahead. Being entrepreneurial may involve volunteering to work on special projects, getting to know the co-workers who can informally help one get started in their field, asking to be sent to special training and justifying that request by explaining how it will help the company.

In many of the immigrant-dominated industries, there is a strong demand for supervisors and managers who are bilingual; have experience in the industry; communicate well; are patient and good at negotiating and problem-solving; and have demonstrated their loyalty to the employer. Career advancement in these industries usually requires that people have solid basic skills in communicating, dealing with forms, reading policies, guidelines, and instructions, and writing short reports and memos but they seldom require very extensive educational qualifications.

6. **Horizontal Advancement -- Getting ahead by moving from one kind of job to another, requires both actively seeking information and reflection on the skills one already has.** For example, if a person wants to move from restaurant work into sales, they can accomplish a great deal by analyzing carefully the kinds of skills actually needed in the sales field and reflecting the extent to which they already have those skills, such as, communication skills and persuasion. Many horizontal career movements involve intensive observation and learning.

Sometimes getting ahead in a broad occupational area involves some horizontal movement, also. For example, a farmworker who does not want to become a labor contractor might want to move into landscape contracting if he or she is willing to build the math skills needed to estimate project costs accurately, negotiate with suppliers, and communicate well with clients, who may include individuals, businesses, and government organizations.

Smoothing the Pathway to Career Advancement

Career advancement does not rest simply on knowing about careers, but on applying what one knows to the ongoing challenge of advancement. Counselors need to remind adult education participants that career advancement is a marathon. Once a person decides what they want to do,

they need to do it -- over a period of weeks, months, or years.

7. **People need to manage their career advancement.** For most people, the main problem is not getting started, but following through. Career advancement is really a lifelong commitment. People will need to pace themselves and choose the right time to make their moves. Usually, but not always, the right time is now. People should move forward aggressively and also take the time to reflect.

Perhaps it will be wise to work another year to save the money to pay for top-rate training instead of taking an inferior vocational training course. Perhaps it is better to finish one's GED before starting out with a course on tax preparation but, on the other hand, maybe both courses will fit together well.

8. Getting over the bumps in the road is an important objective. Many adult education program participants have little experience with understanding that career advancement involves some form of learning, in a formal course setting, or in informal exchanges. Students who need to learn new skills to get ahead in their careers should not give up on learning if they do badly in one course, have to drop a course, or find the course boring. Adult education instructors have a special responsibility to explain to their students that not doing well in one set of circumstances does not mean that a person is a failure.

Reflecting on Career-Related Aptitudes, Interests and Goals

Most vocational interest tests are only tools to assist people in reflecting on their interests and how those interests relate to career goals and advancement. Adult program participants must learn that there is no substitute for ongoing reflection, dialogue, and problem-solving as part of getting ahead. Most of the SCANS competency areas associated with the high performance workplace are relevant to getting ahead in any career, i.e., teamwork, leadership, self-direction, knowing how to learn, understanding systems, problem-solving, skills in acquiring and analyzing information, and understanding technology.

9. **Reflection is not a luxury. Knowing what we like to do, what we do well, what we want to be able to do, is an important tool for career advancement.** Career advancers should talk to experts, co-workers, family, and friends about different interests and options. People should listen actively to the feedback they get from everyone, at the same time, critically analyze each distinctive input. In companies with formal personnel policies, employees can often discuss with their supervisors, how their current skills shape up and how to increase them further, preferably in the context of talking about possible promotion.
10. **Career counselors do not know all about every occupation.** Career counselors have experience in advising people on their careers and usually a broad and better-than-average set of information resources on careers, educational requirements, skills demands, and pay. However, this information is not always complete or entirely accurate because things keep changing and each local labor market is somewhat different. Networking, that is, systematically exchanging information with a wide range of people is an important part of career advancement. Key considerations include: Who is hiring? Beyond the basic skills requirements, what are their organizational preferences? How are people expected to interact there? Experienced job developers recommend that people interested in working at a particular company or in a particular occupation get to know people who are at that company or in that field.
11. **Personal qualities count.** Immigrants' willingness to work hard is an important consideration for many employers, but willingness and ability to learn new skills is also a major consideration. Of course, any job applicant, foreign-born or U.S.-born can convey to an employer that they are willing to work hard, be flexible, to get the job done, and work enthusiastically. What is perhaps less obvious is that employers are interested in the same enthusiasm about learning new things and developing new skills. A person interested in career advancement is usually wise to say "Yes" to any new learning opportunities his or her

company offers.

12. **Most adult education program participants need to reflect on their personal strengths and increase their self-esteem in order to get ahead.** Our society is hierarchical and people with more education, more money, and higher employment status are looked up to, while people with less education are looked down on. Immigrants, because of limitations in English, are often looked down on because of the difficulties they have in communicating. None of this is right, but it cannot be ignored because adult learners need to learn to overcome these external assessments of their personal worth to build their self-esteem. In fact, unlike society in general, many employers are more interested in personal qualities, e.g. ability to work collaboratively, enthusiasm, reliability, motivation, than in educational qualifications. Adult learners need to inventory their own personal qualities, understand that, at least in the workplace, people greatly value their personal qualities and will take these into consideration in considering employees for advancement.
13. **Almost all career advancement involves trade-off between the costs of getting ahead and the rewards of getting ahead.** Class participants should be advised that they need to consider both factors in making personal decisions about career advancement. Career advancement involves a great deal of unpaid work. Adult learners should be clear about the costs and benefits of each career advancement options they are considering. If they are not clear, they will not be as well prepared to persevere when the path becomes difficult. All learning takes time, whether learning takes place in class or as part of self-directed information gathering from books, on-line information sources, or personal networking. The costs of this time are often referred to as opportunity costs. These costs do not always involve out-of-pocket dollars but they are real. Of course, at the same time, the cost of not investing in career advancement are real also. For example, a five dollar per hour raise is worth \$10,000 per year. Moving from typical jobs in unskilled work into even blue collar work can easily yield this magnitude of wage increase, e.g. from six to eleven dollars per hour.

Sample Learning Activities

** Note: Exercises 1-5 are a structured set of activities which might be used to take class participants through several weeks of classroom work. However they can, if necessary, be used in isolation, depending on available time and the class participants' interests.*

1. Ask each class participant to list one possible kind of work into which they would like to advance. In groups of four working together, analyze each job interest as to the skills required. Then attempt to identify three additional jobs for each kind of work, which involve the same sort of skills.
2. Discuss for each job cluster, what educational or certification requirements, skills, personal qualities, and experiences are required. Do class participants think they know enough to say for sure or do they think they need to find out more? If more information is needed on any of these jobs or occupations, this could be an individual or team out-of-class assignment.
3. For each job cluster, discuss whether education-based, vertical, or horizontal career advancement is needed to get there. Explore whether a strategy involving several kinds of job movement would work best.
4. For each job cluster discuss the pros and cons of the career advancer's strategy -- personal interests and abilities, skill requirements, contacts for moving forward, time and money costs, rewards in terms of personal satisfaction and earnings.
5. Based on Exercises 1-4, ask each class participant to develop a personal career advancement plan. This plan may involve doing nothing, or even quitting work to pursue personal interests. Each plan should include, at least:
 - a) selected strategy, pros and cons of the strategy;

- b) preparation steps, getting additional information, talking to people, reflecting further on interests and options;
- c) implementation first steps, enrolling in training, seeking a horizontal transfer, seeking a promotion;
- d) contingency plans, what to do if the first steps run into difficulty;
- e) a rough time schedule for taking each steps;
- f) a two-column inventory of costs and benefits.

An individual's plan may actually consist of a portfolio of several alternative plans which may be explored.

6. Involve the class in compiling information, mostly from their own knowledge, and experience about the viability of "vertical" career movement in some immigrant-dominated industries, including: farmwork, construction, the garment industry, electronics assembly, restaurant work.

* Hint 1: There may be no upward career path in some of these industries.

* Hint 2: Upward mobility will vary from company to company.

* Hint 3: Strategies can include setting up one's own small business.

Continue the discussion by listing the kinds of new skills people need to develop to get ahead in each of these industries. Are there any commonalities that emerge in these listings?

7. Ask class participants to generate a list of what they don't know about jobs they think they might be interested in. How would they find out the information they need to decide about pursuing their interests?
8. Ask each class participant to generate a list of six people who could give the participant different perspectives on his or her aptitudes, current skills, and interests. Taken together, would advice from these people provide a person the information they need to decide on which career advancement strategy is best for them? Or, might it be necessary to talk to other people? Or, does one need to learn more about oneself? Elicit and list ideas for additional self-assessment techniques or strategies.
9. Invite a career counselor or job developer to talk to the class about emerging occupations. Ask a local representative from the Chamber of Commerce or from the California Employment Development Department to come to the class and discuss which of these emerging occupations are important in the local labor market.
10. Ask a representative from the largest company or from several companies in the local area to talk to the class about the kinds of vertical or horizontal transfer opportunities available in their company. Ask the representative to focus on the criteria they use for screening which of their employees get to have these options.
11. Ask the class to identify an occupation which is of interest to most of them. Assign as a class exercise the task of finding out which vocational training institutions train in this area. Invite representatives from each institution which provides training to talk to the class about choosing which course to enroll in. (Ideally, the institutions represented should include at least one free provider such as a community college, or adult school, one JTPA provider, and one private trade school. Ask speakers to address:
 - a) pre-requisites,
 - b) school success rate in placement,
 - c) retention rate for placements,
 - d) special demands in terms of skills and aptitudes, e.g., math, English.
12. Identify a One Stop Career Center in the area, visit the center and report about your experience to the class.

Resources

Employment Development Department Web Page

Commercial Textbooks

Preparing for your Career, Self-Awareness,
Cebco Standard Publishing.

You're Hired!, Charting Your Career Path, Contemporary Books

Career Awareness, Media Materials, Inc.

Career Planning, Media Materials, Inc.

Lifeworks, The Reality Of Work And Promotion, Gregg/McGraw-Hill

ESL For Action, Addison - Wesley
Unit IX, Looking Ahead

How to Get a Job and Keep It, Steck - Vaughn
Unit 8, Changing Your Job

Job Survival Skills, Educational Design, Inc.
Ch. 10, Initiative
Ch. 11, Goal Setting

Ready to Work, Contemporary Books
Ch. 10 Succeeding on the Job

Working in English, Contemporary Books
P. 142, Talking About a Promotion

Workskills Book 1, Prentice Hall
Unit 9, Goal Setting
Unit 10, Job Training/Continuing Education

150 Ways to Keep Your Job, J. Weston Walch
Ch. 8, Getting Promotion and Raises

Authors: Ed Kissam and Holda Dorsey

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