GENERAL SEMANTICS FOR BETTER TRANSFERABLE JOB SKILLS

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When people learn highly specialized skills and later their particular type of job disappears through economic or technological change, they may have difficulty in finding new work; they need to identify their transferable job skills.

Transferable job skills include basic skills that we can take from one job to another, for example, office skills, or writing, communication, critical thinking, and leadership skills. What connections can we find between general semantics and transferable skills? Can transferable job skills be enhanced through learning and practicing a general semantics orientation? Can developing GS-related transferable skills ease the pain that young people often encounter when trying to decide just what to do with their lives?

Carole Kanchier defined transferable skills this way: “These are generic and can be used in a variety of jobs and settings....” Kanchier categorized these skills as follows:

Communication—writing, editing, ... researching, ... speaking, ... translating, interviewing, ... speaking a foreign language.

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Humanitarian—advising, coaching, counseling, mentoring, … training, … explaining, listening, negotiating.

Creative—performing, … cooking, designing, … inventing …

Organizational—leading, deciding, delegating, scheduling, supervising, calculating, budgeting, evaluating, planning, coordinating …

Analytical—analyzing, … synthesizing, conceptualizing, categorizing, problem-solving, … researching, observing …

Technical—repairing, … building, keyboarding, measuring, testing, … programming …

Physical—body coordination, … finger dexterity, physical strength …

Kanchier goes on to say that “to further pinpoint your skills, identify three things you’ve done that have given you a great sense of pride, accomplishment and satisfaction. These successes can come from any area of your life. … The skills you used to accomplish these … are your power skills. They can be personal, transferable, or professional.” (1)

According to Urban Whitaker (2, 3, 4), transferable skills are those abilities that employers believe are the most important for employees to have. A list of 76 transferable skills was compiled by researchers at San Francisco State University. This list was the outcome of two conferences on transferable skills: one at the University of California at Los Angeles, and the other at the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development in San Francisco. Each conference consisted of more than 150 employers, employees, and educators who tried to answer one question, “What skills contribute most to career success?”

Whitaker wrote, “The 76 answers that emerged are grouped in nine categories ranging from [spoken and written] communications and critical thinking to information management and interpersonal relations.”

By studying and applying general semantics, one can cultivate many of the transferable job skills noted by Kanchier and Whitaker. Transferable skills such as critical thinking, communication skills, and interpersonal skills are perhaps the most important, and the most frequently cited in general semantics publications. The choice of general semantics as a subject of study can also help reduce the confusion and distress that arises when young people are under pressure to decide, perhaps prematurely, just what they want to do in life.

Today’s 21st century students face difficult and agonizing questions as the numbers and types of career possibilities continue to grow. I can appreciate their reluctance to commit to a major in college at such an early stage in their journey of self-discovery. They may have only a vague idea of the variety of
careers that a particular college major could lead them to. They probably don’t know what their strengths are, or what they like. They probably have more questions than answers:

“Who am I now?”

“What can I become?”

“What do I want to do?”

“What are my talents, aptitudes, values, and passions that set me apart from other people?”

“What kinds of people do I want to work with?”

“Who can I help?”

“Which kinds of companies, organizations, or other groups in society would appreciate my skills and potentials?”

“Which of these potentials can I develop for a satisfying career?”

“In this puzzle of society, this puzzle of myself, where will I fit in and what will I be?”

In spite of their uncertainties, students may feel pressure to declare a college major or a career path, and then head out into the world with the hope that they know what they’re doing. But students may also fear that they have committed themselves to years of education, training, or spare-time study that could turn out to be largely irrelevant if they change their minds, change their majors, and then follow a different career path, or if the job market changes in certain ways.

Kathleen Mitchell, a counselor and instructor at City College of San Francisco, points out that feeling uncertain about what type of career to pursue is very appropriate in an increasingly complicated work world. She wrote that, “People who are reluctant to answer questions like ‘What do you want to do?’ and ‘What will you do with that college major?’ are ... unfairly labeled...indecisive.” She concluded, “Uncertainty inspires our curiosity. ... By taking action on our curiosity, we place ourselves in situations where we will create and transform unexpected events into career opportunities.” (5)

Most of the thinking and living skills that students can learn through general semantics will be useful in almost any future career.
REFERENCES


3. Whitaker, Urban. (2002). Five Steps to Career Success: The Essential Guide for Students, Job Seekers and Lifelong Learners, 3rd edition. Oakland, CA: West Coast Print Center (books@westcoastprintcenter.com; (510) 663-7061). “Whitaker’s perceptions about career development and the importance of making clear and thoughtful choices are presented in a practical, methodical, and enjoyable workbook format, with worksheets of grids and lists that can be easily copied, giving the reader the opportunity to redo exercises for interesting evaluative follow-up. [This workbook]…takes essential concepts in career and life planning and creates a productive five-step plan for the search for career and job satisfaction.” —Patty Cassidy, Director of Career Advising at Reed College in Portland, Oregon; National Society for Experiential Education (from her review of the book at the amazon.com web site).


GREGORY SAWIN
1950-2004

With deep sadness, we report that Gregory Sawin died on Friday, March 12, 2004. A dedicated, hardworking, very competent writer and Assistant Editor of this journal, and a valued friend, Greg continued to work on the above article while in the hospital. A kind and caring person, he had a powerful vision of how we can use the formulations of general semantics to improve our lives, which he shared in his many ETC articles. He had a special interest in bringing GS to young people, which he did effectively in his 1995 book Thinking & Living Skills: General Semantics for Critical Thinking. We will miss his enthusiasm, kindness, humor, friendship, love, wit, and courage.

— Paul Dennithorne Johnston, Editor, ETC