

# Career Coaches: You Only Need Them Twice in your Life.

Maryanne Peabody & Larry Stybel



Consider this scenario:

You are at a social gathering. You meet a friendly stranger who asks, “So, tell me about yourself...”

Is your first response going to be your job title?

In 2017 we wrote in PSYCHOLOGY TODAY about the emotional vulnerability of professionals who confuse what they do with who they are. In the years since that article was written, below is a common situation we find in our client work:

The family business has an exit plan to sell to a strategic buyer. Thanks to the hard work of the investment banker a buyer has been located. There is now a team on both sides of the transaction. They are attorneys, accountants, and human resource people.

At the other side of the transaction is a bigger bank account for the CEO.....and a loss of identity. “If I no longer am CEO, then who AM I?”

This is an existential question like the existential question faced by adolescents as they ask, “Who Am I?” “What Will I Do with My Life?” “Do I Simply Accept My Parents Definition of ‘Success’ or Define It?”

This confusion has profound implications for people who self-define themselves as “heir to the family business,” “associate on track to become partner,” “CEO,”

We are seeing the same issue with CPA partners and law firm partners forced into retirement. Their new status plunges them into similar adolescent existential questions, and they are as well equipped to handle it today as they were equipped to handle it when in their teens.

“Keep Busy and Do Not Think About This.”

What is the definition of a career and when might you consider hiring a career consultant to help you manage it?

### **Look at the Dictionary:**

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines career as “the pursuit of consecutive progressive achievement especially in public, professional, or business life.”

There are two ways career coaches can help you:

(1) be your partner to help you design a program for “consecutive, progressive, achievement.”

(2) be your partner to help you structure your response when the pursuit of “consecutive, progressive, achievement” needs to be questioned as a goal.

Career coaches exist outside the organizational boundaries of the place where you work. Your thinking has been shaped by the last 30-40 years: it tends to be linear. Thinking in nonlinear ways requires an external perspective and someone not tied to your current company business model.

In an earlier PSYCHOLOGY TODAY article, we wrote that professional lives are on an “assignment cycle” rhythm. People can no longer think that their professional lives are defined as enduring relationships within one organization (2015).

### **“Consecutive, Progressive Achievement.”**

During the mid-Twentieth Century “Take care of your company and your company will take care of you” was a famous phrase that guided careers.

Today, this phrase only has value in describing the past.

Your company can and should provide resources to help you do a more effective job. Good companies help you think about next steps in your career. But 21<sup>st</sup> Century companies do not “take care” of you or your career. You do not expect it of them.

You are responsible for your career and your employer may or may not assist.

Hire a career coach to provide a second opinion about what you are doing to advance that career. Career coaches can help you with stay/go decisions, job search campaign management, and techniques for keeping your professional network warm when you are too busy to reach out to people.

### **Campaign Manager for Your Job Search.**

A job search is a campaign. Most successful campaigns are managed. Are you managing your time well? Are you using all the distribution channels available to you or only the distribution channels that are easy for you? Are you even emotionally suited to be the manager of your job search campaign?

Many employees are used to reporting to someone who keeps their “feet to the fire.” Conducting a job search is a lonely exercise. There are too much distractions from other activities that bring more immediate pleasure.

A career coach helps you focus your time. For example:

A partner at a private equity firm was forced out and is now seeking a similar role with another private equity firm. This presents a dilemma. If the partner focuses networking efforts too narrowly, the partner may not receive important information that joining another PE firm is now impossible at his career stage. On the other hand, if the partner comes across as lacking focus, this will create a negative reaction in the partner’s network.

How can the partner network while striking the right balance between being focused yet open to new ideas?

Do the people in your immediate family want to listen to every detail of your job search? Can they listen and not get frightened? Spouses and significant others can be sympathetic.

Can they be impartial?

Other than the fact that your services are free, would you hire yourself to be your job search campaign manager?

### **Keep Your Network Warm.**

Below is a common story in our consulting work:

The job search has come to a successful conclusion. We meet our client for dinner to toast her new success. The client says she made a profound error in letting her professional network grow cold in her last job and promises never to let that happen again.

A year later we meet to check up on how things are going.

The job is going well. Between job demands and family responsibilities, the client has again allowed her professional network to grow cold.

She knows this is an error but cannot find a way to deal with it.

A career coach can help you keep your networks warm through building a practical association management strategy or an association strategy that links family and professional issues. A career coach can also be used as an outsourced resource to help keep your professional brand warm via consistent outreach on LinkedIn.

### **Time to Rethink “Consecutive, Progressive Achievement.”**

The late Harvard Business School Professor Anthony Athos once said that there are three chapters in a professional life:

1. Learn the Game as it has been defined by others.
2. Win the Game as other define the term “winning.”

3. Decide what Game you wish to play for the next ten years.

Some people embrace Chapter Three and wish impartial, objective guidance to help them be successful at it. For example:

The CEO of a tech company that was acquired was expected to assume the role of “serial entrepreneur:” start a new company, raise money, grow the business, and sell it. This CEO wanted to consider something totally different for the next ten years of his professional life but wanted structure to help him figure it out: The CEO now flies sick children and their parents from rural areas into cities with major pediatric care facilities. This role allows him to engage in his passion for flying and providing value to others.

Some people are forced into Chapter Three and have no idea how to move into it.

PSYCHOLOGY TODAY published our blog (2015) on how we work with professional basketball players when they are confronted with “Game Over” scenarios. Not every professional athlete can become a television commentator or a college coach.

A common example of our work is the daughter whose self-concept revolves around being “heir apparent” to the family business. But the family business has now been sold...

A common Chapter Three takes place every year in large professional service firms:

A partner in a law firm reaches mandatory retirement age. He turned in his equity for cash and now must leave the firm. He does not wish to establish a solo legal practice and is not ready to retire. He wants to consider something outside law. But what should it be?

### **Where to Find Career Coaches:**

Are you comfortable talking about your interest in hiring a career coach? If so, talk to people in your network. Employment and labor attorneys often are aware of career coaches in their communities.

Ask the Executive Director of your local professional association for the names of good career coaches who understand your industry/function.

“Google” article about career management. Find articles or books that speak to you? Contact the authors and see if they are available to work with you or could refer you to a local professional.

Has the person ever received certification from a recognized professional body that certifies professional competence? Examples include the Institute for Career Certification International or the International Coach Federation

### **References:**

Stybel, L. & Peabody, M. “Game Over or Job Over?”,2015,  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/platform-success/201507/is-your-...>

Stybel, L. & Peabody, M. “The Future of Careers Part 1”,2015, PSYCHOLOGY TODAY <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/platform-success/201508/future-c...>

Stybel, L. & Peabody, M. “When Work is Who I Am.”,2017, PSYCHOLOGY TODAY <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/platform-success/201704/when-wor...>

###

Maryanne Peabody and Larry Stybel are co-founders of Stybel Peabody Associates, Inc.

Its mission is “Leadership and Career Success:” retained search, leadership development, and executive outplacement.

For a free 15 minute consult, contact [peabody@stybelpeabody.com](mailto:peabody@stybelpeabody.com).