

Choosing a career? In a fast-changing job market, listen to your inner self – counsellor

The world of work today, in the 21st century, is far more unpredictable than it was in the 20th century. Jobs come and go, roles change constantly, and automation and digital disruption are the only constants. Many young people will one day do jobs that don't yet exist or did not exist a few years ago. [Change is the new normal.](#)

By [Kobus Maree](#) 31 Dec 2025



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In this world, career counselling focuses on navigating repeated transitions and developing resilience. It is about employability and designing meaningful work-lives – not about finding a single “job for life”. It recognises that economic activity is part of wider social realities.

At its heart is the search for a sense of purpose.

As a career counsellor and academic, I've been through decades of innovation, [research](#), and practice in South Africa and beyond. I have found that the work of US counselling psychologist [Mark Savickas](#) offers a useful way to understand how people build successful and purpose-filled careers in changing times.

His [career construction theory](#) says that rather than trying to “match” people to the “right” environment, counsellors should see their clients as authors of their own careers, constantly trying to create meaning, clarify their career-life themes, and adapt to an unpredictable world.

In simple terms, this means in practice that career decisions are not just about skills or interests, but about how we make sense of our lives. They are about our values and how we adapt when the world shifts.

In my own [work](#) I emphasise that career counselling should draw on people's “stories” (how they understand themselves) as well as their “scores” (information about them). This is why I developed [instruments](#) that blend qualitative and quantitative approaches to exploring a person's interests.

I also think career counselling should be grounded in [context](#) – the world each person lives in. For example in South Africa, young people face multiple career-life transitions, limited opportunities and systemic constraints, such as uneven and restricted access to quality education and schooling, lack of employment opportunities, and insufficient career counselling support. My work in this South African context emphasises (personal) agency, (career) adaptability, purpose, and hope.

This goes beyond “what job suits you best”, into a richer, [narrative-based process](#). Clients recount their career-life story, identify “crossroads”, reflect on their values and purpose, and design their next career-life chapters. Essentially, this approach helps them listen to themselves – to their memories, dreams, prospects, values, and emerging self- and career identities – and construct a story that really matters to the self and others.

I also believe that [career counsellors](#) should try to help people deal with their disappointments, sadness and pain, and [empower them](#) to heal others and themselves.

Tips for career builders

Adaptability is a central theme in current [career theory](#). It has four dimensions:

- Concern (about the future)
- Control (over your destiny)
- Curiosity (exploring possibilities)
- Confidence (in your capacity to act).

When you develop these capacities, you are better equipped to manage career-life transitions, redesign your career appropriately and promptly, and achieve a meaningful work-life balance.

I have found that in practice it's helpful to:

- Reflect on key “turning points” in your career-life and earliest memories
- Integrate self-understanding with awareness of what's happening in an industry, technology and the economy
- Draw on “stories” (subjective information about yourself) and “scores” (objective data)
- Develop a sense of mission (what the job means for you personally) and vision (your [contribution to society](#), not just your job title)

I invite you to reflect deeply on your story, identify the key moments that shaped you, clarify your values, and decide what contribution you want to make. Then (re-)design your way forward, step by step, one transition at a time.

If it's possible, a gap year can be a good time to do this reflection, learn new skills and develop qualities in yourself, like adaptability.

One of the best pieces of advice for school leavers I've ever seen was this: “Get yourself a passport and travel the world.”

How a counsellor can help

One of the key tenets of [my work](#) is the belief that career counselling should be beneficial not only to

individuals but also to groups of people. It should promote the ideals of social justice, decent work, and the meaningful [contribution](#) of all people to society.

For me, the role of practitioners is not to advise others but to enable them to listen to their inner selves.

To put it another way: in a world of uncertainty, purpose becomes a compass; a North Star. It gives direction. By helping you find the threads that hold your life together and your unique career story, a counsellor helps you take [control](#) of your career-life in changing contexts.

There's also a shift of emphasis in career counselling towards promoting the sustainability of societies and environments on which all livelihoods are dependent.

[Career counselling](#) is more vital than ever – not a luxury. It's not about providing answers but about helping people become adaptive, reflective, resilient and hopeful.

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