

Modern Careers *and* Today's Professional



The *Oxford English Dictionary* says a career is a person's "course or progress through life (or a distinct portion of life)."

The Changing Face of the Modern Career

Traditionally, a career was a course of successive situations that made up a person's work life. Today, it is acceptable and expected that a person will have multiple "mini" careers. With more personal choice and self-direction, aided by the power of the Internet, the idea of a career is shifting from a certain set of achievements, like a chronological résumé of past jobs, to a defined set of pursuits looking forward.

In its broadest sense, career refers to an individual's work and life roles over a lifespan. No longer can employers expect to hire someone for the mail room and watch him work his way up the corporate ladder.

With so much choice, especially in the range of potential professions, and access to widespread education, it is common to plan—or design—dual or multiple careers, either sequentially or concurrently. As a result, professional identities have become hyphenated or hybridized to reflect this shift in work ethic.

BC Notaries personify this new definition of career. Most come to us from other careers and bring knowledge, skill, maturity, and training to complement the education they receive to qualify for admission to our membership.

The concept of continuing professional development is not new to them. They are people who have spent their careers learning new things and developing new skills, so they recognize and embrace the need for constantly upgrading their skills. For most of our members, professional development is business as usual.

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Maintaining Professional Standards

The *Oxford Dictionary* also defines a profession as a specialized work function or economic activity within society, generally performed by a professional. In a more restrictive sense, profession often refers specifically to fields that require extensive study and a mastery of specialized knowledge, such as law, medicine, finance, the military, nursing, the clergy, or engineering.

In the latter strict sense, a profession is a regulated occupation generally requiring entry by examination and usually regulated by statute. A profession is a job requiring mental adroitness, as compared to a trade, which requires manual dexterity.

It has been suggested that there are four main criteria that identify a profession.

1. Custody of a clearly definable and valuable body of knowledge and understanding associated with a long period of training
2. A strong unitary organization that ensures the profession generally speaks with one voice
3. Clearly defined and rigorous entry standards, backed up with a requirement to register with the professional association
4. An overriding responsibility to maintain the standards of the profession for the public's benefit

The professional carries additional moral responsibilities to those held by the population in general. That is because professionals are capable of making and acting on an informed decision in situations that the public cannot, because they have not received the relevant training.

For example, a layman member of the public would not be held

responsible for failing to act to save a car crash victim because he or she could not give emergency medical assistance. This is because they do not have the relevant knowledge.

In contrast, a fully trained doctor would be capable of taking steps to try to stop bleeding. We would think it wrong if he stood by and failed to help in that regard.

This knowledge comes with authority and power. The client places trust in the professional on the basis that the service provided will be of benefit to him or her. It would be quite possible for the professional to use his or her authority to exploit the client.

An obvious example is that of the dentist who carries out unneeded dental work on his patients so that he can charge them more money. It is likely that the patient will not have sufficient knowledge to question what is being done, and so will undergo and pay for the treatment.

Questions arise as to the ethical limits of the professional's

responsibility and how power and authority should be used in service to the client and society. Most professions have codes of practice that members of the profession must follow to prevent exploitation of the client and preserve the integrity of the profession. This is not only to the benefit of the client but to the benefit of those belonging to the profession.

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Disciplinary codes allow the profession to draw a standard of conduct and ensure that individual practitioners meet this standard by disciplining them if they do not practise accordingly. This allows those professionals who act with

conscience to practise in the knowledge that they will not be undermined commercially by those who have fewer ethical qualms. It also maintains the public's trust in the profession, meaning that the public will continue to seek their services.

Today's career is very different from what it used to be. The benefactors of that difference are the people who seek our services. Not only do they reap the benefits of the education and experience a Notary accumulates over the course of a career as a Notary, but also the benefits of the education and experience the Notary accumulated in the career that came before. ▲

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