

## **Is Passion Necessary for Great Careers?**

Abstract: The provocatively titled TEDx Talk, “Why you will fail to have a great career” (TEDx Talks, 2012) has been very useful when we have taught the career development portion of introductory Human Resource Management courses. In this session, the TEDx Talk will be shown in its entirety (15 minutes) followed by an interactive discussion and critical analysis of the premise of the TEDx Talk (i.e., that only those who pursue their passion can have a great career). We will discuss the role that privilege plays in career development as well as other necessary elements in career development other than simply passion for that career. We will also share our experience in using this video to stimulate discussion on career development/planning.

Keywords: Career planning, Career development, TEDx Talks, Privilege

## **Introduction**

This exercise was developed in our response to a perception that students find the career development material in assigned textbooks to be both dry and irrelevant. This perception among students shifted once we showed a 15-minute TEDx Talk by Professor Larry Smith titled “Why you will fail to have a great career” (TEDx Talks, 2012). This TEDx Talk generates a great deal of discussion among the students as they apply the career planning and career development material as well as critique his premise that only those with passion will have a great career. This exercise fits nicely within the theme of the conference on inclusion and diversity because students recognize that those who have privilege often have more career options and may be more likely to achieve the conventional definition of “success” as outlined in the TEDx Talk.

This exercise can be used in a variety of settings (online and face-to-face) and with a diversity of students including both undergraduate and graduate, international, traditional, and non-traditional students in introductory Human Resource Management courses.

## **Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications**

Historically, we have found a disconnect between the relative importance of career development/career planning and most undergraduate students’ levels of interest. Our undergraduate students’ relevantly limited work experience often translates into a reluctance to see the relevance of career development and planning. Thus, this lesson tends to be poorly received by undergraduate students.

Yet, the advantages of effective career planning and development are well outlined in most HR texts (e.g. Dessler & Chhinzer, 2020) for both employer and employee. The employer stands to benefit from offering career development by having more employee engagement and lower turnover (Dessler & Chhinzer, 2020). For the employee, they are more likely to be aware of potential career paths as well as their strengths and skills. Furthermore, essential concepts from the chapter such as career anchors, mentorship and life trajectories/life cycle phases are often important considerations for aspiring business professionals.

The introduction of Professor Smith’s TEDx Talk (2012) consistently generates a great deal of discussion not only on topics pertinent to career development but also on other HR topics. The premise of this talk is that only those who have passion for their career will be successful. This thesis statement is then deconstructed by the students and the class discussion has been much more engaging as a result of this video clip. For example, students note that based on a previous class discussion on privilege (Julien & Stratton, 2014) that those who are male, Caucasian, high socio-economic status etc. may have more options from an early age and throughout their lives with respect to educational opportunities, mentorship, access to internships and other career development supports. Students also note that women often face a career penalty when they take time off to have children and thus ensues a robust discussion about balancing work and family. Finally, students take issue with how Smith defines career success. Smith essentially lays claim that only a great deal of fame or recognition within a chosen career can be deemed “success”. Students are quick to point out that success can mean many things to many people sometimes but not always including material wealth and recognition. Other measures of success raised in class discussions include: successful relationships with parents, spouse and children, meaningful friendships, stability of employment or giving back to the

community via volunteer work. Students are quick to take the TEDx Talk speaker to task for his narrow definition of success.

## **Learning Objectives**

In this interactive session, participants will be challenged to explore the advantages of using this fifteen- minute TEDx Talk when discussing career development and planning. We will task participants with applying several key course concepts from career development as well as other important HR topics such as privilege and work-life balance.

- **Learning Objective 1:** Participants will identify a minimum of two potential advantages to using the TEDx talk entitled “Why you will fail to have a great career”.
- **Learning Objective 2:** Participants will identify a minimum of three key concepts from the career planning chapter and a minimum of one key concept from another HR chapter.

## **Exercise Overview**

Typically, we have assigned the chapter on career development before the class. We typically show the video at the start of class after briefly discussing with the students the overall importance of career development and career planning and outlining a few key concepts such as career anchors and life cycle stages. We then post the questions featured in our session description either on the board in class or on the discussion forums for the students to think about before they watch the video. Our typical class size tends to be 45 students. The introduction on career planning, showing the video and the ensuing discussion make it suitable for a 75-minute period. The only materials required would be access to a computer that can access the TEDx Talk widely available on YouTube and a projection system to broadcast that talk in class. For online students, a link can be posted on the classroom management system (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iKHTawgyKWQ>).

As previously noted, we have used this video with a wide variety of students at stages (e.g. undergraduates/graduates, traditional/non-traditional, mature/relatively young). The video is very well-received and we have found that students who have watched the video can more easily connect core concepts from the career development chapter such as career anchors, networking, mentorship and life cycle/trajectory than their counterparts in previous years who did not watch the video. We were also pleased that students incorporated critical thinking skills by deconstructing the speaker’s definition of a “great” career and the necessity of having passion in that career. This enabled us to discuss what other factors may contribute to having a career in one’s chosen field such as talent, drive, and self-awareness. Furthermore, they recognized the role that privilege may play when discussing who may have unearned advantages along their career paths.

## **Session Description**

We have budgeted one hour for our activity. After a brief introduction to contextualize our previous efforts at teaching career development, we will show the fifteen-minute TEDx talk.

We will then ask the participants for their impressions of the talk and then give them the opportunity to answer the following discussion questions:

- 1) Do you agree or disagree with Professor Smith's assertion that only those with passion can truly have a great career?
- 2) What other career development and HR functions might contribute to someone's career path?
- 3) Do you agree or disagree with Professor Smith's definition of a "successful" career?

After this discussion, time permitting, we will share some of the overarching messages that have emerged from the facilitation of this discussion with our graduate and undergraduate students.

### **Timeline**

We have provided a proposed timeline for our session below:

Activity	Timeframe
Introduction of presenters and topic	5 minutes
Showing the TED talk	15 minutes
Facilitation of discussion with participants	20 minutes
Discussion of how students reacted to the talk and our facilitation in class and online	15 minutes
Conclusion and wrap up	5 minutes
<b>Total</b>	<b>60 minutes</b>

### **Unique Contribution**

This assignment has not been presented at any other conference nor submitted to any journal.

### **References**

- Dessler, G. & Chhinzer, N. (2020). Human Resources Management in Canada. Pearson.
- Julien, M. & Stratton, M. (2014). *Are you privileged?* Harvey, C. & Allard, J. (Eds.). Understanding and Managing Diversity. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- TEDx Talks (2012, January 8). Why you will fail to have a great career [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iKHTawgyKWQ>.