

A Way Out of the Woods

If a toxic work environment is getting you down, the North Shore Compass Centre is the place to be.

"I see people stay way longer at a job than what's healthy or optimal," said Compass program director Sharon Clarke.

Oftentimes people in jobs for several years have a fear of what's out there or loathe the thought of the entire job search process.

"Being in the wrong work takes an incredible toll on your health. Being unhappy takes an incredible toll on your health," said Clarke.

The key may be in finding work that's rewarding in both the financial and personal perspectives.

The Compass program, which is free for participants and federally funded by Service Canada, welcomes people in any career field and helps individuals discover a career path. It is open to beginner job-seekers and workforce veterans alike.

"Basically it's a process of self-discovery with a career focus," said Clarke who added that participants benefit from a combination of self awareness and tools to help them understand how careers develop.

The four-week full-time program has several components, including the implicit career search, which is billed as a "lively experiential career exploration and planning model" and job search workshops.

"The implicit career search is an amazing resource to help people understand themselves better. In the process, self esteem is built," said Clarke.

"What you've got at the end is not only a clear sense of direction, but also all the skills to go out and make it happen."

From the employment side of things, the program is comprehensive and topics covered include how to write a resume, how to handle an interview and how to develop a networking strategy.

On the other side of things is the inner journey looking at the questions: What is it I most want to contribute? How do I find a job in alignment with that?

One feature of the program is that it fosters and coaches around giving empathy and compassion rather than judgment and criticism. Clarke explained that a supportive environment is particularly crucial for job seekers since delving into issues like self-awareness can be quite a humbling venture.

As a whole, Clarke noted that the program isn't a quick fix.

"Nobody's going to open the magic (career) envelope - people have to be active participants," said Clarke.

Clarke said that the program, which has seen about 1,000 participants since it opened its doors in 1999, is great for anyone since the more you know about yourself, the easier it is to progress in your career. Although it first started by restricting its intake to residents of the North Shore, three years ago it broadened its scope.

"People are willing to come from as far as Richmond and Coquitlam because there's nothing else like it," said Clarke.

Not only is it unique, but Clarke estimates that 95 per cent of participants leave satisfied, saying that the program is more than worth the month-long time commitment.

While Clarke would not divulge specific figures related to job-finding success rates, she noted that their goal is to have people working within three months of taking the program: "Basically we meet our target or exceed it." The four-week full-time Compass program runs 10 times a year and intake is ongoing. Participation is free. For more information about Compass, visit www.northshorecompass.com