

ONE-TO-ONE GUIDANCE CAN RESTART CAREERS (from the Boston Globe)

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How does one-to-one career counseling help with job problems? Experiences of satisfied consumers supply some clues.

Their counselor, Phyllis Stein, has her own private practice in Cambridge and directed Radcliffe Career Services for 21 years until it closed a while ago. Clients report she's supportive, practical, upbeat, knows lots about the work world, and has extensive information and networking sources in many fields.

One client, who asked that she not be identified, said that after several years in investment banking she "didn't want to go on with it." Now 34, the Harvard graduate met with Stein early in 1997.

"Phyllis asked questions right to the point, pulling books from her shelves to help me. We discussed problems with my work, an art fair I enjoyed, a long-ago art internship.

"`Sounds like you might combine art and administration,' Phyllis said. `Why not contact the internship people?' "

She got caught up in her current job until "we decided to change from one monthly hourlong meeting to weekly 15-minute telephone sessions. It helped. Phyllis knew I was easily distracted by my job, understood what I was trying to find, gave me many referrals."

The job she just started in the arts field "crystallized" from an information interview she had months earlier, "when it wasn't far enough along yet."

Cynthia Thompson moved to Boston in June after her job at a publishing company was cut. She first met with Stein before the move. Now 54, Thompson has a doctorate, experience in writing, research, and editing. She realized a career change might be needed.

"Phyllis gave me helpful ideas and materials, including a list of One-Stop Career Centers. I visited some," she said. "A Job Club gave me emotional support and useful career information. One speaker talked about temporary work, new to me. I found some with a technical journal."

With Stein's guidance, she had information interviews about training, librarian, technical writing work; she took librarian and technical writing courses. Thompson was also in touch with a former employer in Louisville who had received a letter she sent to 100 professional contacts about her move. "They invited me to work there again, communicating from the Boston area."

She's now a full-time telecommuter.

When the small nonprofit that employed Sharon Evans for 16 years -- from teacher of English as a second language to program director -- decided to close in 1997, she was in her early 50s. "[I

was] ready to go in a different direction," Evans said.

She met with Stein because "I didn't know what was out there, what I could do, how to go about it." Visiting One Stop Career Centers at Stein's suggestion got her started on months of research and study.

She talked with Stein an hour a month or more about what she was doing, learning, "read books she gave me, used materials to identify my skills, values, what I want from a job -- making a difference in people's lives. I explored the training field, decided against it, had information interviews. 'Do as much as you can,' Phyllis said."

Evans also had been exploring private language schools, "my idea," and started a job at one last month.

After her divorce and a fruitless job search, Carolyn Toll Oppenheim, now 55, began counseling with Stein in 1996. She'd been a reporter before staying home to raise two children and taught journalism for 10 years at a college in Boston, where her husband relocated.

"Phyllis wanted me to be open to what did I think I wanted to do. We brainstormed, came up with PR at a college, combining my experience in higher education and journalism. She knew of an opening as head of PR, suggested people to talk to who knew the college, issues to address in the interview, coached me well in many other ways."

Toll Oppenheim got the job, left it after six months. "I learned I don't want to be an administrator."

Stein, "still the friend in the wings," suggested books and workshops on starting a consultancy. She followed through. "I just won a competition for a grant to do media training for child care groups with another woman. I'd like to focus on this kind of work for nonprofits with goals I support."