

Mr. Holland's Opus – A Crisis of Adult Career Development

EAD 864 Adult Career Development

Michelle Valin

Glen Holland's forced retirement is a huge blow to him. He is in shock when he gets the news that the school board decided to eliminate the music program and his job. The context in which this happens, particularly his age, 60, will influence how he recovers and his further career development. Holland would fall into Gene Cohen's first phase -- "midlife reevaluation" -- of the second half of his life. He knows where he has been but not where he is going. So, let's look at where he's been.

Looking back on the entirety of his career, he began fairly unprepared for the actual work of teaching. Although he was a musician and held a teaching certificate, he seemed clueless about classroom management and how to reach students. He viewed his career as a job, not a calling, and one that he says he hated. He eventually develops confidence and is able to guide students and enjoy their successes. His career then begins to develop outside of his own classroom as he learns how to share his love of music with his son and the students of the deaf school. We watch this growth and wonder what else he could have contributed to his profession if not forced to retire. Maybe he would have proved to be a caring mentor for new teachers like his former principal was to him. He may not have described his career in teaching as a calling, but he certainly seemed to embrace the work after many years in the profession.

Part of Holland's self-image is as a teacher. In losing his job he is also losing that identity. However, his identity is also that of a musician, so while his teaching career at JFK may be over; he doesn't necessarily have to stop being a musician. As he is reevaluating his self-image, he will also need to reinvent himself for what comes next. He, like many mature adults who have found their careers abruptly interrupted by downsizing, is at a crossroad. He can choose to look at his age in a negative way, like many do, and become stagnant in his intellectual development and withdraw from purposeful work, or he can engage in what may be a creative period full of personal growth.

Also, before Holland can move forward successfully into this new phase of his life and/or career, he must successfully move through the five stages of loss as identified by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross (shock, denial, anger, bargaining and acceptance). In the movie we watch as he moves through them: his shock and denial as he is told of the firing, the anger toward the choices the school board makes and his bargaining with them during the meeting, and of course the last scene where he seems to have accepted his retirement.

According to Gene Cohen (MindAlert lecture), due to plasticity our brain tissue wants to continue to grow new neuropathways which keep it healthy and vibrant. Holland certainly has an advantage in that his musical talents are an obvious creative outlet that if practiced will afford

him continued brain development. He can also draw upon his talents as a teacher to continue to find meaningful work. I'd like to think Holland's career crisis will provide him the impetus he needs to begin a fruitful encore career composing commissioned works of music.