



Title: Zeteophobia

Grade: 9

Career Development Model:

Self-Awareness

Nebraska Career Readiness Standards:

- Manages personal career development
- Attends to personal & financial wellbeing

Objective:

- Students will summarize how fears can inhibit their decisions about career, and even their willingness to explore it.
- Students will analyze how their values and career barriers interact.
- Students will discover that a difficult economy can make it hard to negotiate.

Materials and Supplies Needed:

- Notebook paper;
- 4 to 5 chairs (not attached to a desk)

Class Instructions:

Zeteophobia is a term or neologism coined by the vocational researcher John Krumboltz. It means “fear of searching out,” but Krumboltz meant by it that people get so trapped in worry about the ambiguity inherent in their future that they stop working on issues. Negative thoughts can sometimes limit our ability to even get started, and we often want to wait until such negative thoughts go away before we get started on something. They may not go away. If possible, therefore, it would be helpful for students to know that they can work on career goals that are important to them even if their mind is telling them they cannot.

1. Write the word “zeteophobia” on the board. To help define it for students, draw out or describe some example of phobias (e.g. arachnophobia, hydrophobia). Explain that zeteophobia is the fear of taking action towards jobs that are important to you. Further explain that often times, figuring out what jobs are best for you is such an overwhelming process that people simply skip doing it and take the first thing that comes available. If you can cope with the intimidating aspects of thinking about your future, it will benefit you.
2. Ask students to tear a sheet of paper in half. Explicitly tell students not to write their names on their individual half sheets, nor to provide any information that might

allow them to be recognized, so that they can keep the exercise anonymous. Ask students to brainstorm fears – try for three, but more are great – that they have about their working future. Examples could be “I won’t be smart enough,” “there is too much to figure out,” “I will get rejected anyways, so there’s no point.” These fears can very much be based in reality – it could be “they probably won’t hire me because I’m “black” or “women would never have a chance doing engineering.” They could also be self-referential – “I am too _____.” Many other examples are possible. Collect the sheets, draw a line down the height of the board, leaving about 1/3 of it for step 3. Write examples of what students came up with on the bigger space of the board (remind them that their comments are anonymous if necessary). It would probably help if the teacher listed some of his or her own fears in a genuine way.

3. Remind students of what they had worked on in the first module in identifying some of who they are. Note that one of the greatest motivators for getting past obstacles is to keep our eyes on what is important to us. Write the following on the board: my family, being a good parent, my love life, my career, my friends, my faith, my sports, knowledge, supporting my community, and relaxing. Though not an exhaustive list, these ten encompass many of people’s most important values outside of career. On the other ½ sheet, have students quickly brainstorm some of their original career goals, and to select however many of the 10 items on the board that fit with them as possible.
4. One helpful starting tool for managing negative thoughts (whether accurate or not) is something called the and/but distinction. We often say to ourselves “I could do this [thing I value] BUT I have this [negative internal experience] that means I cannot start it.” Everyone does this, including all the teachers. A teacher should begin this exercise by describing such a sentence about themselves. One can use one of the ten values above. An example might be “I could be a better graduate student, but when I get home I am so stressed out from the day that I cannot concentrate.” Ask students to write four such sentences, two of which should be about the career they hope to pursue and things they worry about getting in the way of that career, and two of which can be about their personal values from step 3. The goal is sentences of the form above.
5. Once students have generated four sentences, note that the word, “but” comes from the old English word, “be-utan,” which actually means, “be outside.” Often when we say, “I could do BUT” we are actually saying we want some fear or negative thought or bad feeling to “be outside” before we can start doing what we value. Ask students to erase or scratch out all of the “buts” and write “and” in their place.

6. Discuss: What effect did this have on the sentence? What does doing this, suggest the solution to negative self-thoughts is? Changing a word probably won't change a situation right away, but how could you change your "buts" to "ands" in the long term?

Credits/Sources:



"Making my Future Work: A College and Career Readiness Program", U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences.

<https://www.csuohio.edu/cehs/mmfw/making-my-future-work-0>