

Michael Ternes: The Gift of Hope

Amy: You're listening to "Beyond 1894," a podcast where we hear from Louisiana Tech University scholars, innovators, and professionals on their personal journeys and the impact they're making in the world around them. I'm your host, Amy Bell, and my co-host is Teddy Allen.

Amy: In this episode, we hear from Dr. Michael Ternes. He is an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences in the College of Education here at Louisiana Tech University. His research interests lie primarily in the field of career psychology, but recently he has been studying the concept of hope, and how people behave when they have hope, which he talked about in our interview.

Michael: We don't actually know how many times an average person will switch careers. But the myth that's been spread for the last however long is three to seven career transitions over the course of a lifetime. It's normal for people to look outside of their current work situation and think "Maybe it's time to make a change." The average American worker will change jobs somewhere between twelve and fifteen times in their life. And it may not always be a complete job transition for retraining. Sometimes it's just a shift within the company. But twelve to fifteen times we're gonna change our jobs. So it's not uncommon. So the first thing I want to do is just normalize it. It's okay.

Amy: Very quickly, I noticed Dr. Ternes has a way of making those around him feel at ease. So it was a pleasure talking to him about one of my favorite fields: psychology. He gave good advice to both college students and working professionals on how to approach their careers, specifically a change in their careers. Also, he introduced a new definition of hope. What did you think about that new definition?

Teddy: Well, I'm not sure it's a new definition but it's the definition that he feels is overlooked. It's not just "Oh, I wish, I wish, I wish that this happens." You've got everything crossed. But it's "I wish for this to happen as if it's going to happen" kind of a thing. And how hope inspire people into where... "Okay, let me think back. I'm in a jam right now. Now, I must have got out of the jam a few years back when I was like... let me think how that worked." And so that gives you hope that "I have the strength to do this." Another kind of hope he talked about was maybe that hope, if we look at it correctly, could be used to destigmatize mental illness which people don't want to talk about that much because they'd think it'd be embarrassing. But if we give them some hope, that "No, you can get through this." And there are all these, especially if you're a student, there's a lot of free resources available to you here. So at the end of... what's the movie where the guy breaks out of prison? Shawshank Redemption! You know, the voice of the character has been illegally imprisoned and is now free. Says "Remember, Red, hope's a good thing, maybe the best of things."

Amy: Hmm, that's a good movie quote.

Teddy: And so if we hope in the proper way - again, it's a living thing, it's an active thing, not a passive thing - that should put a little kick in your step. And we need that today. We're living in the ultimate "I don't know" times, of our lives anyway. Michael, in a very inspiring way, gives you different ways to look at it that you might not have considered. Also hope in your career. He wants to help students and young people get on the right career path. "Let's look at this from a strategic point of view, and not just, you know, by happenstance." So he talks about that a lot too which I think would be very helpful if you're a student or you want to change careers. He talks about how much in a lifetime, what seven to twelve times you may change occupations. May change jobs as many as fifteen to eighteen on average. But it's possible to do that: let's sit down and see what we really want to do.

Amy: Yeah. Speaking of that, what was the biggest change you've undergone in your career?

Teddy: It was probably coming here to Tech from years in the newspaper business. And about 12 years ago, I looked around one day at the newspaper, and there wasn't anybody left to crack jokes with and that's the whole reason you were doing it. I mean, besides wanting to write and do good and entertain or inform, you weren't making a lot of money. It's just like right now: you want to be around people you like working with and feel you're getting something done. And newspapers have been great to me, but at the time, they were thinning out and this job was open. And so I applied and what I do now is some broadcasting I've never done before. What you and I are doing now. It's a different way of writing when you're writing for university than when you're putting out a daily newspaper. It's just obviously a different thing. But that's the same vocation really, just not the same job.

Amy: Yeah, it's still storytelling, just a different kind.

Teddy: So I haven't jumped from out of this field since I started. I guess when I was 21, maybe the first time I wrote a story for money. My biggest jump then was from driving a tobacco trailer with a Farmall tractor. That was a pretty big jump from that to going to cover the LSU/Tech game, for instance. Anyway, once I got out of that sort of manual labor and into this, that was the biggest jump. You're too young to have had a jump like that.

Amy: No. I've had a lot of little jumps, though. I worked at David's bridal. I've been a librarian. I've been a math tutor. I've been a social worker.

Teddy: Okay. Well, you know everything from the veil to the Dewey Decimal System to food stamps. That's a pretty wide range, and you're not even 30 years old yet. I wonder if we would have... I wish I'd have had some of this information that Michael shares, you know, when I was 25.

Amy: But I think every time I did a little jump, I learned a little bit more about myself. I learned a little bit more about my strengths and my weaknesses and what kind of environment I want to

be in. And I've been here at Tech, probably the longest that I've ever been anywhere else. So I've been here at Tech since 2016/2017. I mean, yeah, when you're young, that's pretty average. Yeah.

Teddy: Well you've been finding out what you want to do and then what you don't want to do.

Amy: So I feel like my parents did a lot less of that. Like, I feel like, I don't know. You're in the same generation as my parents. Do you think that in your generation it was seen more negatively to jump places?

Teddy: Yes. First, isn't it odd? It's strange that I'm in the generation of your parents because we've never had that conversation before, but I am! Which is weird. It's an embarrassment to your parents that I'm associated with them in that regard. But yeah, you got a job... and there were a lot less kinds of jobs than there are now. Technology is giving you all these different kinds of fields of work that they would never have had the option of doing. So, yeah. The teacher, preacher, this guy's a principal, there's the sheriff. You know, there's Mrs. Slate, she cooks, her husband sells all the other hardware stuff in the store. I mean, that's just what they did. It was real strange if somebody just...

Amy: And nowadays people are social influencers.

Teddy: Yeah. Back then you thought "Oh, God, Harvey's quit and now he's working over in Minden doing something else." You go "Oh, you must be having a midlife crisis or something." "No, I just wanted to do another job. Got a better offer." But you're right. Back in the day, you didn't hear about that happening nearly as much. It was a big deal if somebody went back to school like my mother. We all got to be in elementary school and she went to school to learn how to be a school teacher. Could still see books all over the dining room table. And she ended up teaching for 33 years, but you didn't do that as much. Not as much opportunity as your generation has. So you've got no issues. We have an excuse for screwing everything up. But y'all don't. [laughing] Anyway, a lot of opportunity...

Amy: [laughing] We have our own stereotypes.

Teddy: Michael just... it's a lot of stuff I had never thought about, you know, in ways to think about how do I, you know, get from A to B to C in my job. He didn't know what he wanted to do. He majored in music and in psychology, and thought he more so wanted to be a musician, but it sure seems like once he figured his psychology stuff out and got in the right groove, he's where he needs to be.

Amy: Well, I hope everyone enjoys this interview and that it's easy to listen to.

Teddy: We hope so.

[start of interview]

Amy: So you grew up playing music and having a passion for psychology, right? So what got you interested in psychology?

Michael: So my first passion definitely was the music. And I thought for the longest time that I was going to be a musician. But growing up, I was always that person that people were like “Okay, we've got problems, so let's go talk to Michael.” I remember going to a park in our community at like 3:30 in the morning, because one of my friends was freaking out and needed to talk to somebody. So I was the person that went and talked to them. But I never really thought “Okay, I'm gonna talk to people for a living” or “Psychology is gonna be my thing.” It was always just music. And then undergrad happens, and I'm getting into music, and I'm thinking “Okay, I don't want to be a teacher, because more than likely, what's going to happen is I'm going to end up teaching fifth grade band. And it's going to be people that hate playing, and they don't want to learn how to play but their mom says ‘You've got to play an instrument.’” I didn't want that for my life, right? So that was a *no*. And music performance was appealing, but what wasn't appealing was six to eight hours in a practice room by myself trying to get my techniques right. Meanwhile, all my other relationships and things that I was interested in just kind of fall by the wayside. So when that wasn't a solution, I thought “Okay, what else can I conceivably do and be happy doing it? And I transitioned majors a lot. But through that process, my mind kept returning back to that experience of going to the park and talking to a friend about what was going on. And so psychology became the interest that I decided to pursue and it stuck.

Amy: When did you decide on psychology?

Michael: I decided on psychology junior year of undergrad.

Amy: Okay, so did you basically have one foot in psych and then one foot in music up until junior year?

Michael: Yeah, and I even finished that way. So I do have an undergraduate degree in music, and then an undergraduate degree in psychology.

Amy: So you were a double major?

Michael: Yeah.

Amy: Okay. Great. Wow, that must have been really challenging.

Michael: It was. It was a lot to navigate. I got married summer after sophomore year, and so I was trying to invest in a young marriage, and also track two majors. And music majors... all of my performance ensembles... the credit that they were for was not equivalent to the hours spent in class. And so an ensemble might only be for one credit hour, but it was meeting for

three hours a week. And so if I'd actually received credit for all of the hours, I would have been in between 21 and 24 credit hours every semester for the last three years of undergrad.

Amy: So how did you land on career counseling or career psychology?

Michael: It was a complete accident. So I applied to counseling psych programs, because I determined "Okay, I'm going to go to graduate school because I don't want to be a case manager and that's what a bachelor's degree could get me in psych and health services." And so PhD it was. And when it came time to choose between a clinical or counseling program, I naively chose counseling because I thought "Okay, counseling. I want to counsel people and talk to people. Clinical: that sounds like a doctor's office. I don't want that." And so I chose counseling. And again, naively, I only applied to five programs that first time and did not get into any of them. But the University of Kansas's master's program had an opening and they said "We don't think you're ready for doctoral work yet, but we're interested in having you around." And so I went and I did my master's there, and in that first semester, one of the first courses for that class was career development. And I thought "I really have no interest in this. I don't even know why I have to take this." And I got into the class and it was everything I thought it was going to be, and I thought "I don't want to do any of this ever again." And then a job opened up in the Career Center, and I'm like "Okay, it pays really well, I have some of the knowledge, so why not just test it out and see."

Amy: Doing what? Career coaching?

Michael: Doing career coaching.

Amy: Okay.

Michael: And so I got a gig as a career coach, and got to see a lot of the theories and concepts and principles in action. And that's when I was able to get really excited about it, and to have it be an interest that continues to this day.

Amy: What made it so enticing?

Michael: I think just seeing all the different examples of interconnectivity of mental health, which is, you know, I thought "Okay, I'm going to be a mental health counselor working with anxiety and depression. I don't want to talk about, you know, whether or not someone's interested in being an executive assistant or a florist, or whether the guy... I don't care about that stuff." But then I started to see so much of the spillover theory at work, where people's anxiety and depression very much have an impact on their career choices. And what happens at career very much has an impact on the rest of their life. And so to be able to see that interplay, and to have an opportunity to intervene through the route of career was fun.

Amy: When did the light bulb turn on? Like, do you have a story that really sticks with you, or a moment that really sticks with you that you're like "You know, what, I really love doing this" or "Wow, I really helped this person."

Michael: I mean, there are a number of case examples that come to mind that I was able to get really excited about. And without, I guess, giving too much detail for privacy concerns and all of that, I did have a student who was an international student, and they were really trying to honor their family's request of what their major should be. And he hated it. He had no interest in that major. He was really struggling in the classes, both because he found the material to be really challenging, but also because it just wasn't something he was passionate about. And so we were able to do, you know, interest assessment... really workshop some of those things. And for him, it was "Okay, I'm not planning on going back home. I'm planning on trying to stay in the States." And so then the question was "Okay, so how much of your value set that you've brought with you do you want to continue to honor and how much do you want to change and adapt to the opportunities you have now." And it was through that process that he decided "You know, I don't have to honor my family's wishes for my major. I can branch out and do something that I do care about." And he ended up being very successful in that newly chosen major. But that whole process of being able to look at, you know, his cultural values and how those were influencing his thought process and how he just felt depressed and disinterested by the course material and trying to find a happy medium between those two was a good example of like "Okay, like, I can use this to really help people in the way that I hope to."

Amy: We're going to take a quick break to learn about the Career Center here at Louisiana Tech University.

[Career Center Commercial]

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Amy: We're back with Dr. Michael Ternes. He is an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences.

Amy: While you were getting your doctorate, was there a sub-topic or a topic that you were most interested in studying?

Michael: In addition to career... because, as I mentioned, Tom Krieshok, he and a couple of students develop this theory, the adaptive model, or the trilateral model of adaptive career decision making. And that was really interesting, because it looks specifically at how we make decisions. We use both our intuition, our gut instincts, and our rationality, our ability to think through things, to make decisions. And when we over-rely on either our gut feeling or on our logic, then we can get ourselves into trouble, be that indecision gridlock or if it's just kind of making decisions that haven't been well reasoned through and maybe we get ourselves into trouble. And what they posited is that by engaging in career relevant activities, volunteer activities, going to presentations, attending classes, those kinds of things, that we can gain information about different opportunities in the world of work, and use that to inform our gut decisions and our logical decisions and to find some kind of happy medium between the gut and the logic to make a good adaptive career decision, one that we'll be happy with and one where we'll find success.

Amy: Are you basically saying that some people just don't have the experience they need to make the decision they need to make?

Michael: That's what Krieshok, Black, and Mackay would have said, is that, typically, we engage in occupational exploration activities -- you looking at job ads, doing informational interviews, those kinds of things -- when a career transition is imminent. So if we know "hey, I'm getting fired" or "Hey, I'm graduating" or "Hey, I'm being laid off," that's when we typically engage in these behaviors to start to try and find alternatives. And what those authors would have said is that we need to be doing those kinds of things all the time, not just when a career transition is imminent, and that's what they refer to as "occupational engagement," staying engaged and gathering information about careers so that when we have to make a decision, we have a wealth of knowledge to draw from to aid us in that process.

Amy: What does that look like for a student who is unemployed and what does that look like for someone who is already employed?

Michael: Goodness, so that's kind of two different trajectories there. So for the student who's not employed, if they have the means to do so, finding volunteer opportunities that engage some of the same types of skills that they want to be employing in their future career. But it doesn't have to be that extreme. It can be just talking to people in their lives and finding out "Hey, what do you do for work? How did you get to do that? What would you do if you had

another shot at it? You know, would you be doing the same thing?" I can't say enough about informational interviews of just finding someone who's in the field that you're interested in, and asking them for 10 to 15 minutes of their time to find out how did they get to be where they are. So for students who are not employed, who have the opportunity to gather information in those kind of more applied ways, that would be my first recommendation.

Amy: Yeah. And what about someone, you know, has been 10 years within the same career and has strengthened a lot of skills within that field? What do they do if they realize "You know what, I'm really unhappy with this field. I really just got into this field because I thought it'd make me a lot of money, or I thought this was like a safe pick, or that this was really practical, but I actually really hate it. And I'm depressed, and this is awful." Like, what did they do? Do you recommend just figuring out your skill set and jumping on to a whole other career? Or is it... how can you salvage a career like that?

Michael: I mean, a lot of things are coming to mind. So I just listened the other day to an episode of "Wait Wait...Don't Tell Me!" from NPR and one of the callers that they had playing one of their quiz games said that he actually just quit his job of 10 years, because with the pandemic, he realized the only thing that actually kept him going back to work was having lunch with his coworkers. He hated the work!

Amy: Oh, wow, yeah!

Michael: So when he was just doing it at home, it was too much. And so sometimes that happens for people. They invest so much time in these careers, and they come to a crossroads and go "I don't want this for the rest of my life." And so for those individuals, one, I want to normalize it to say, you know, there are all kinds of stats and figures. And the truth is, we don't actually know how many times an average person will switch careers. But the myth that's been spread for the last however long is three to seven career transitions over the course of a lifetime. So it's normal for people to look outside of their current work situation and think "Maybe it's time to make a change." The average American worker will change jobs somewhere between twelve and fifteen times in their life. And it may not always be a complete job transition for retraining. Sometimes it's just a shift within the company. But twelve to fifteen times we're gonna change our jobs. So it's not uncommon. So the first thing I want to do is just normalize it. It's okay.

Michael: And the second thing to think about too is what type of skill set or knowledge that someone has. There's a lot to be said for "depth skills," specific knowledge that are going to apply to very specific procedures at a given job. Like you had this exact process for an electronic medical health record that someone uses at their doctor's office, right? That is a specific skill for that job. But the "breadth skill" there may be just digital records management, right? So these skills that can be transitioned across different work opportunities.

Amy: Different industries!

Michael: Different industries, exactly. And so it's these transferable skills that someone who's been in a career for 10 years and is looking to make a change needs to start to hone in on to say "Okay, what are the skills that go across industries, across jobs, across careers, and do I like doing any of those things." And usually, our transferable skills do relate to things that we can be good at in some way: communication, organization, research, leadership, all of those types of things. And so then it's "Okay, where can I find opportunities to apply?"

Amy: Okay. Yeah. Well, thank you for all the advice.

Amy: We're going to take a quick break to hear a message from the Department of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences in the College of Education here at Louisiana Tech University.

[Psychology Ad]

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Amy: Let's get back to the interview with Dr. Michael Ternes.

Amy: Okay, so I also wanted to talk about your research on hope. How did you get involved in that research?

Michael: Yeah. So kind of went down the rabbit hole on the career stuff, which was definitely one of the interests that popped out of my doctoral study.

Amy: Yeah.

Michael: But another one is with positive psychology. And the late Dr. Shane Lopez was a prolific hope researcher with C. R. Snyder, who is another past professor at the University of Kansas. And I had the opportunity [to] hear Shane come and speak about his book *Making Hope Happen* to a group of KU students and faculty and donors and things like that. And it was

so fascinating to watch Shane talk about hope, because hope was a construct that I had never given much thought to, you know. Every day in colloquial language, "Hope you have a good day," you know? We write it in emails how many times a day, we say it in the halls, whatever, but I never really thought about what I was saying when I said "hope."

Amy: Or what it means! How did they even define hope?

Michael: Right. So popularly, what Snyder and colleagues -- which Snyder's hope is the version of hope that I've kind've latched on to -- what they would say is that hope is actually a very active process. So we use it commonly as a very passive thing. But really, real hope is an active combination of "agency thinking" and "pathways thinking," pathways being the way in which I can operate or the paths that I can take to achieve a goal, and agency thinking being the will to use those pathways, to move along those pathways, to say "I will achieve my goal using these paths I've identified for myself." By their definition, when we say "I hope you have a good day," what we should be saying is "I wish you to have a good day," because we aren't actively doing anything in that process to help someone have a good day, and that's the distinction for them. So hearing someone talk about hope in that way made me really curious, and I wanted to know more.

Yeah. What happened when you did learn more?

Michael: Right. I've had the opportunity to look at the adult trait hope scale, Snyder scale, in different cultures, because one of the questions that we had is "Okay, this is very kind of individualistic in its approach." It's very focused on "Do *you* have the ability to use your pathways?" not necessarily from a community perspective or collectivist perspective. And so one of the things that we wanted to do is try and validate it in a population that wasn't in the United States.

Amy: What do you mean by the distinction between in an individualistic way or a collectivist way?

Michael: Yeah, so an individualist is going to be someone who's centered on their needs. Not to say that they're selfish, but they're not necessarily thinking about the desires, the values, of their family as a whole whenever they're making decisions for themselves about career or day-to-day life. So someone who's more individualistic is going to be much more concerned with their immediate situation, what's in their best interest. Where someone who's more collectivist isn't going to be thinking about it from the standpoint of "What's going to help me?" but rather "What's going to help my community? What's gonna help my family? What's going to help my city, my town, my village?" whatever the case is.

Michael: Another thing that we sought to do is... what I wanted to do is understand how it could function for individuals who maybe don't have the same level of access to resources in their community, who may be underserved or underprivileged in some way, particularly as it pertains to career. So those engagement activities that we were talking about earlier... think of all the

different things that you have to have in place for those to be viable. Most volunteer opportunities are unpaid. You have to have some leisure time to do reading, to go on interviews. You have to have a network to have connections to ask about job and work interests and things like that. And so there are a lot of resources tied up there that may not be available to every person just by virtue of the resources they have access to in their community. And so one of my curiosities was “Is *hope* something that we can foster in individuals in order to give them an alternative route to pursuing their career goals to making good career decisions?”

Amy: You said, a lot of people basically have privilege, the privilege of opportunity, right? So they have the privilege of having these opportunities to try out different pathways, and thus gather a bunch of knowledge on career paths, and some do not. And I think you said that the people that do not are the ones that you think they could utilize hope.

Michael: Right.

Amy: But why? Why would it be helpful for them?

Michael: One of the things about hope therapy is that while occupational engagement looks at the here and now -- you know, “What could you be doing with resources now?” -- one of the things that hope therapy emphasizes is “What have you done before? Where have you found success? Where have you overcome the odds? Where have you circumvented problems or roadblocks in the past in similar situations, and how can we tap back into those strategies?” And for someone who's maybe looking at the limitations of what they don't have in their community, by tapping into a little bit of their hopefulness, to plan different routes of access to their goals and coming up with alternative access. So you may still have teachers at your school that you can use to leverage *their* network, you know. Who do *they* know that they can connect you with, as an example of a pathway, and then maybe you're shy and reserved. And so having a little bit of agency behind, you know “I could actually stay behind a class and ask my teacher ‘Hey, do you know anyone that does this?’” You know? You went to college. Maybe you still have contacts with someone who's not a teacher or that kind of thing. Or, really it starts to look a lot more like thinking outside of oneself. Rather than “What can I do with my network?” it's “Who do I know that maybe I can tap into their network to start to branch out?” Just as an example.

Amy: How does hope affect someone or motivate them to do that?

Michael: So that is really the agency component of hope that plays into the motivation because remember, that's the goal directed energy portion of our thinking of “I will be successful. I can do this,” that kind of thing, and really finding the will to tap into those pathways and kind of send ourselves along the way. But in this whole process too, there's also this value appraisal that's constantly going on, like “I've identified a goal for myself. How much do I really care about that goal?” Because I could identify 10 different ways for me to lose weight, but so I really value that? Is that a high priority for me? Because if it's not, it doesn't matter how many different ways I can access and it doesn't matter how many different times I start down one of those paths, I don't care enough about the goal. It's going to fall by the wayside.

Amy: So what have you found in your research about hope and its effects?

Michael: Yeah. Some of my research has found that hope can tap into... that hope can help someone be more flexible in their thinking style. That's a relationship that was posited in a lot of the research that came before mine, and something that I've been able to show, that a possible link may still exist there. And one of the ways that I've looked at hope is in relationship to mental health stigma. So mental health is a big concern, especially on college campuses. Only about 50% of students who have diagnosable mental health concerns will actually go on to seek out assistance on their campus, even when services are freely available. And so stigma plays a good portion into the decision of whether or not someone engages in formalized mental health treatment. And so one of the things that I've looked at with my research is to say "Okay, can hope be a way that we can kind of circumvent the stigma process, to get people to think about mental health in a different way, and therefore maybe make them more likely to engage in a formal mental health process when they need that level of support?" And so, by tapping into someone's hope, activating more pathways, maybe generating a little bit more active agency of someone being an author of their own destiny, more or less, can we challenge them to think more flexibly about the different perceptions of mental health, for instance? Can we challenge them to come up with alternative ideas for how to engage in career, for instance, so that they can then go on to be more successful? And so what I want to do is look at different characteristics of positive psychology like hope and resiliency and a few other characteristics to see if there are characteristics that aren't blatantly mental health related that we can tap into and foster whenever a freshman comes into college or even before in high school and grade school such that whenever someone does find themselves in a position to have to make a potentially difficult decision, can they kind of circumvent that stigma around that decision to make the one that's most adaptive and healthy for them?

Amy: And you said earlier about tapping into people's hope. So if you use hope to destigmatize mental health, how do you tap into someone's hope?

Michael: I think, again, it is looking back at what has gone right for people. So in situations where they've had to make difficult decisions before, particularly within stigma, I think maybe looking at other contentious decisions that someone has had to make and "What were the ramifications of those? Did it play out the way that they thought it would? Did they have the ability to kind of follow through on those decisions?" Really helping someone reflect on that, and then find new ways to think about... importantly, think about their role in those previous decisions as active agents of their own change, such that not only are they now able to think about things in different ways with different pathways, but also able to actually invest and immerse themselves in that process with the agency process. So tapping into someone's hope is really just finding ways to foster that hope such that it's much more of kind of like a default to their approach to everyday problems and considerations.

Amy: Okay. So you want to, like, make them believe that they can do something if they knew the path to do it?

Michael: Right.

Amy: And so you are going to try to... I guess you encourage them that they can do Pathway A because in the past they've done Pathway A?

Michael: Right. That's one way to do it, yeah. Another way my advisor Tom Krieshok used to say "Plan A or better." So part of it too is just being open to other possibilities that are going to present. John Krumboltz was another vocational psychologist that had a theory of happenstance: that things just occur to us and if we're open to it and paying attention, sometimes what occurs simply by happenstance can be more profitable, more fruitful, more whatever then what our current plan is.

Amy: Okay. And so it's also kind of about being open to different pathways and different opportunities.

Michael: Right. Which I think is where that cognitive flexibility that hope has been shown to kind of promote really comes into play. Am I locked into "There is one way and that's the only way," or is it "I'm on this path right now, but life is uncertain"? And so I need to be open to the possibility, and really the reality, that alternatives are going to have to come into play.

Amy: What advice would you give students as they're picking their majors now?

Michael: Gosh, I think part of it is, like, it's an important decision, but it's not necessarily the last time you're going to make a decision like this, and that's okay. Sometimes we get so caught up in making the right decision that it leads to us being completely gridlocked about it, or it leads to us making a decision that we're really not happy with. And so part of it is this likely is not going to be your last shot to make this. I was looking at the National Center for Educational Statistics and they reported that, on average, students who switched their major will go on to switch it up to three times on average. And so the transitions are just a natural part of it. And so for students considering about changing their major or picking a major for the first time, I really want them to think about "What is it that I care about? What is it that I value?" and use those values to start to look for different opportunities relative to the world of work or to the world of academia where they can learn more about those values and try to engage in a meaningful way in those values.

Amy: Well, thank you so much for being on the podcast. It was a pleasure.

Michael: Yeah. Thanks, Amy.

[Alumni Association Plug]

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