Career 1-1 Framework & Techniques

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Introduction

Now we have set the overarching strategy, and have a plan for the careers pipeline, we are ready to dive into the logistics of actually running a career 1-1 call. There is no set framework for advising, although there are commonly used templates. We will be thinking about these sessions in the broader context of a member's EA journey, so keep this in mind.

This week we will be thinking more in depth about the actual structure of each individual session and practical techniques for improving your ability to conduct a career 1-1. This discussion may also help you refine your idea of when a career 1-1 will be most beneficial to your members.

I consulted with Daniel Kestenholz, who provided a lot of the insights/observations & resources for this section based on his experiences in the EA community and as a personal coach.

How to read this document

The most foundational sections are asterisked (*). These are really important concepts to get right, and will give you a good foundation on current thinking around advising sessions. I've carroted (^) the more advanced concepts that I think are important, but secondary to the foundational concepts.

Most of the readings that are not asterisked are about problem-solving techniques. It will likely be overwhelming to try to incorporate them all, instead use this as a reference document. If you come across a challenging case, you could look through and see if there is a technique that could apply.

*1-1 Framework

GROW Model

The GROW model is a standard coaching framework. It is a simple model that can be quickly applied to career 1-1s. I have chosen to focus on this model only since it seems like a solid starting ground, and due to time constraints, based on the recommendation of Daniel Kestenholz (an EA who also does life coaching). It is essentially an 80/20 model which works for many different 1-1 calls.

This model could apply to any type of career 1-1, although you'd need to adapt the questions. You can see a discussion on cause-prioritisation calls below as an example.

Many of the career reflection templates (link to folder) already follow this format to some extent, but it's useful to know why they do and what the purpose of such a structure is. The call agenda I used for EA Philadelphia follows this format quite closely.

Overview

- **G for Goal:** The goal is what the advisee wants to accomplish. It should be defined as clearly as possible.
    - The advisee may not know at the start of the conversation what exactly they want to achieve. The goal will often crystallise over the course of the conversation. Pushing them to be very specific early on can break rapport.
    - Here's a sample way to start the conversation:
        - 1. Define the goal: "What would be most useful for you today?" OR "What would you like to get out of this conversation?"
        - 2. Clarify the goal if it's still unclear: "So just to check, you'd like to get X?" OR "Given that XYZ (any context they shared), what would be most helpful for you right now?"
        - 3. Find a place to start: "Where should we start?" OR "What's most challenging for you about this?"
    - Setting goals is important so you understand what is valuable to the advisee. Otherwise they may feel like they didn't get value out of the conversation.

        - An example: If you really want to help your group members with cause prioritisation, for example, but they are more interested in concrete advice, this may not be a productive conversation for them.
- **R for Reality**: That's the status quo, where the advisee is right now. The advisee describes their current situation and how far they are away from their goal.
    - Ask: What have you tried and explored already?
    - Ask: What are your bottlenecks?
    - This gives you a sense of the gaps between goal state and current state.
- **O for Obstacles and Options:** What are the obstacles (roadblocks) that keep the advisees from achieving the goal? Once these obstacles are identified you can find ways to overcome them: the options.
    - This is when you go into brainstorming mode. You want to become very broad and consider all possible solutions to the problem.
    - Make suggestions for things they could try.
    - Hold your advice lightly and be okay if they don't act on it. Offer advice to broaden their set of options, not to constrict it.
- **W for Way forward:** Once identified, the options need to be converted into action steps that the advisee will take to accomplish their goal.
    - What will they execute specifically? When will they do it?
    - What could get in the way of them doing it?
    - Troubleshoot what will happen using problem-solving techniques.

A good reference book on the GROW Model is Coaching for Performance – John Whitmore.
More coaching resources: Coaching Learning Map by Daniel Kestenholz

Open Questions

Please add suggestions to the open questions, or offer answers/further thinking or resources.

- Is there another format that you think is better?
- Are there any downsides to this format?
- What questions would you ask within this format for different types of 1-1 calls?

Techniques

Specific techniques you might use during a call to help the advisee.

*Communication techniques

This is probably the most important section for EAs. The following are some thoughts by Daniel. I've included further considerations in italics.

From Daniel: A critical first step to having a successful career 1-1 is to establish a baseline of rapport and trust. A good way to do this is to approach the advisee with curiosity aimed at trying to understand what they need right now and what kind of help would be most useful for them. It can be useful to meet the person where they are at & invest some time into the connection before getting into the EA content.

- This might be another reason to encourage people to do the actual work and reflection before the call itself, so you have a bit more time on the call.
- *Rapport building could be easier if you already know the advisee outside the call, e.g. through your local group events. One challenge in a single call could be building that rapport & still having time to get into the main stuff of the call.*

Resources

- Summary of Coaching Skills by Julie Starr. You can also read the full book if you are interested — it is a good primer for coaching.
  - Related reference material: Useful Questions to ask during a session & Troubleshooting Tips from The Coaching Manual
- Norway's Communication Cheat Sheet (Daniel said that this was good but requires context)

Open Questions

Please add suggestions to the open questions, or offer answers/further thinking or resources.

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*Cause Prioritisation

Helping people broaden the causes they are considering could be very impactful and could possibly cause a very large change in their actions. However, it can be challenging especially if the advisee is tied to a particular cause.

For this section, I've chosen the discussion of cause prioritisation in Michelle Hutchinson's 80K podcast summary:

- 80K's Process
- Frequent Advice 80K Gives

And a few thoughts from Alex HT at Student Career Mentoring on how they expose people to new arguments or causes:

(Note that Student Career Mentoring does a series of calls, with one call explicitly focused on exploring different problem areas)

- Mainly we just try to expose people to the arguments for longtermism and other views, try to make sure they really understand the arguments, have time to think them through, and have disagreements addressed.
- If after discussion they still disagree, that's fine, and we rely on older 80K stuff. I (Alex) probably rely more on my own impressions in these cases as well.
- In general, I think most people do care a fair bit about the future, and a lot of apparent 'near-termism' is just from longtermism being presented badly. E.g. people might be suffering-focussed, prioritise justice, not think AI is a big deal, or not feel the importance of long term causes… but all of these are compatible with longtermism. So we spend a lot of time helping people work out what they really think about longtermism.

Reference Materials

- Student Career Mentoring Worksheet - Exploring Problem Areas Exercise (see all here)
- You may not need to explicitly use ITN and other common EA frameworks, but it's useful to know them really well & keep them in the back of your mind.

Open questions

Please add suggestions to the open questions, or offer answers/further thinking or resources.

- Student Career Mentoring

    - How do they present longtermism?
    - What readings do they share?
- How much to broaden? When are you done discussing cause prio? When do you narrow down.

^Problem-Solving Techniques

Almost all of these techniques come from the CFAR Handbook. Although you don't need to use these techniques explicitly, this style of thinking has been useful to many organisers. I've linked to individual blog posts to give a quick overview of the technique, but the handbook goes into more depth on each.

I've asterisked a few if you aren't sure where to start.

- Goal Factoring: Help figure out the true values & motivations behind an idea/plan.
- *Aversion Factoring: Similar to goal factoring, except the goal is to identify the core part of a topic the person is averse to. This could be useful for exploring hesitation around different cause areas or careers.
- Murphyjitsu: Help advisees create plans that they are more likely to stick to.
- *Socratic Ducking: Staying silent where your partner just needs to clarify their own thinking, and gently challenging or probing where your advisee needs to change their focus or dig deeper.
- *Hamming Question: Asking questions about the important things to try to get people to seriously consider ideas they haven't before.
- Brainwriting[1]: Good for brainstorming ideas. Can be done collaboratively with the advisee. (Not from CFAR)

Student Career Mentoring's approach to debugging:

- 'Understand their situation really well' (which often makes them realise things)
- 'Check what they've said is true/ask what their evidence is' (often they then change their mind about something)
- Then ask Hamming-style questions and make suggestions of things they could try

[1] From Eirin (Norway): I use brainwriting with the candidate to come up with alternatives for their career plan. I especially use it if it seems like the person is stuck in their thinking. It works fine doing it with two people, and even just one. For two people, each begins with 2-3 minutes, then switches papers and does another 2-3 minutes. If anyone feels like they have more ideas they'd like to add, we do it for another 2-3 minutes. If I'm doing a virtual 1-1, we'll do the brainwriting in a Google doc.

Resources

CFAR Handbook 2019.pdf

Open Questions

Please add suggestions to the open questions, or offer answers/further thinking or resources.

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^Making Connections & Introductions

Since this is a technique I've included it in this session's reading.

This section is preliminary and I hope it will be filled over the course of this pilot workshop. If you have any resources or thoughts to share, please add them below.

Suggestions

Make suggestions here!

Open Questions

- How should you make introductions?
- When should you gate-keep vs connect people?
    - From Yi-Yang EA SG: I tend to want to be as helpful as I can, and that usually means connecting people, who are not as EA-aligned as I would like, to other community members. I've written a short policy about balancing between the two, but I wonder if other people have similar issues and have done the same. What gate-keeping mechanisms can be in place for career 1-1s?
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Meta-level Learning & Improvement

*General Tips

- Get mentorship
- Build peer networks
- Take concise notes after every call about what was covered, what went well/poorly, and what you want to cover in the next session. Reflecting on these is a great way to do deliberate practice session-by-session with each advisee.
- Reflect on feedback from advisees.
    - What kind of questions should you ask?

Open Questions

Please add suggestions to the open questions, or offer answers/further thinking or resources.

- How can we iterate & improve (especially) in the early stages?
- How to share your knowledge of 1-1s and advising with other members of your group?
- From Naomi (EA Geneva)
    - What are the 'crucial considerations' of career coaching? Which questions do people need to think about (and have answered in a sense) to have a successful career coaching?
    - How detailed should a plan be? I have had some discussions with community members about 'career planning is useless because there are so many unknowns'. I think a bit nuanced about this, but when is further planning not valuable anymore and somebody should just start to act?
    - Related to that; when is career advising valuable and when not?
    - How would a successful career coaching look like? I would be interested to have a sense for the outcomes of coaching sessions of others, to better calibrate my expectations (and hopefully be better able to judge if career coaching would be useful)
    - More coaching related; when to ask a question, when to give advice and when to challenge somebody's views and start to discuss?