

LIFE PLANNING: HOW TO DEVELOP PROFESSIONAL LIFE AND CAREER DECISIONS WITH BALANCE?

LANEJAMENTO DE VIDA: COMO DESENVOLVER DECISÕES DE VIDA PROFISSIONAL E CARREIRA COM EQUILÍBRIO?

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this work was to develop in the readers and makers of the case, mainly postgraduate students, the capacity for reflection in a critical and contemplative look at their lives and careers. The methodology used was a “systematic observation”. The main practical contribution was, in its application to around 5,000 MBA and post-MBA executive education students, aged between 25 and 35 (90% of the public), to generate the initiative and execution of personal and professional planning, in a harmonious way, so that their professional growth is not accompanied by future regrets. Antonio Cataldi needs to strike a balance between personal and professional development and this is his dilemma: but how? Despite being a fictional character, he was built based on dilemmas, anxieties and shared experiences, based on postgraduate experience and career guidance processes since 2004.

Keywords: Career; Life Planning; Personal and Professional Development.

RESUMO:

O objetivo dessa obra era desenvolver nos leitores e criadores do caso, principalmente estudantes de pós-graduação, a capacidade de reflexão em um olhar crítico e contemplativo sobre suas vidas e carreiras. A metodologia utilizada foi uma



"observação sistemática". A principal contribuição prática foi, em sua aplicação a cerca de 5.000 estudantes de MBA e pós-MBA de educação executiva, com idades entre 25 e 35 anos (90% do público), gerar a iniciativa e a execução do planejamento pessoal e profissional, de forma harmoniosa, para que seu crescimento profissional não fosse acompanhado de arrependimentos futuros. Antonio Cataldi precisa encontrar um equilíbrio entre desenvolvimento pessoal e profissional e esse é o seu dilema: mas como? Apesar de ser um personagem fictício, ele foi construído com base em dilemas, ansiedades e experiências compartilhadas, baseadas em experiências de pós-graduação e processos de orientação profissional desde 2004.

Palavras-chave: Carreira; Planejamento de Vida; Desenvolvimento Pessoal e Profissional.

1 INTRODUCTION

It had been more than six years since graduating in Business Administration and the first million reais sought by the age of 30, the fruit of a potentially dizzying career growth, at that point seemed a long way off, especially utopian, given that the age of 30 was approaching in just a few months. That night, insomnia had fought a hard battle with tiredness and won. "It must be the proximity of my birthday that is making me reflect on life," concluded Antonio, "because now I have little time to reach my first million", sighed the frustrated and tense administrator, who in the midst of a few more clicks on the computer to finish a work report and rummage through an old photo that every now and then came out of the drawer and stuck to the side of the computer, undid the brief yellowish smile of a few seconds.

"I think I am betting all my 'chips' on just this company", pondered Antonio. "Will this career and the path I am following make me happy?", finally a rhetorical question that would contribute to making the night long, very long.

In less than a month, the new regional project manager from the São Paulo business unit of the American Partner Consulting, one of the largest consulting companies established in Brazil, with offices in several of the world's main cities, would be chosen and announced. The decision of the Brazilian partners was that the recruitment and selection of candidates for the vacancy would only be internal. A unique opportunity appeared in front of Antonio, who had already worked at the company for seven years. "(...) from trainee towards the most coveted management position in my unit (...) Regional Project Manager Mr. Cataldi (...) that sounds good,



maybe there will even be a plaque with my name on my office door...”, fantasized Antonio Cataldi, who at first, two months ago, did not hesitate and decided to fight with all his strength to occupy that position. Antonio had the profile for the position and was nominated directly by his immediate supervisor, Mr. Dantas, to apply for project management. In the initial selection stages he left many candidates behind. Two months later, he reached the final stage as one of the favorites for the desired spot.

The position in regional project management involved greater commitment to the company, taking on new responsibilities, working longer hours, coordinating and promoting projects across the entire business unit located in São Paulo and the Southeast, dedicating less time to personal life and, of course, more money and recognition. In addition to an enviable salary, he would also earn excellent commissions for successful projects implemented and a potential opportunity to become a partner in the future, since at that moment his skills seemed to be aligned with the company's career plan. The succession of positions in his company resembled steps on a ‘steep and natural ladder’ to be climbed to the much-dreamed of small ‘minority shareholding’ participation in Partner Consulting. Antonio was ‘skipping a few steps’ with this promotion and the million seemed to be a reality again, but what would be the price to pay?

Antonio's professional life decisions seemed to have been the right ones. His life planning in the material field already anticipated some present sacrifices so that a prosperous future could be designed. After all, if everything seemed fine, why was Antonio worried, restless and uncertain about whether he would continue competing for the promotion? However, what would be the repercussions of a promotion denial at that time in the company? What variables had been neglected in this process so that it did not feel complete? Why has not the question about happiness left his head for days and days?

By learning a little more about Antonio Cataldi's life story, try to discover his origins and doubts and, above all, what was being neglected! What are the variables and what is involved in planning a successful career? (MAYRHOFER, SMALE, BRISCOE, DICKMANN, & PARRY, 2020; SARASWATI, PURWANA, & ERYANTO, 2020).

2 DISCOVERIES DURING COLLEGE



“Tom is going to be a diplomat or a tour guide, because whenever he disappears he is locked in his room studying or planning a trip”, once joked Álvaro, his best friend and classmate on the Business Administration degree course who shared the same dorm room with Antonio. The dreamed trips did not materialize, as Antonio did not come from a family with many resources. The opportunity price of the young man having stopped working to just study, to graduate with honors from his distinguished university, added to the student's maintenance expenses, cost the family dearly and the household budget was tight.

Antonio lived up to expectations. He entered Business Administration at the age of 19, at a renowned public institution in Rio de Janeiro, which, as it was far from the city in the interior of the state where he lived, forced him to give up his part-time job and live close to the university. His parents were Italian immigrants and, with sacrifices and dedication, they managed to take their first-born son to a level of studies that they never had the opportunity to achieve. Antonio felt the weight of responsibility. He would have to “do right” for his parents, for his two younger siblings, for his convictions of “succeeding in life” through his studies, to be a source of pride and an example among the residents of his small provincial town. The struggle of an ordinary person who wants to be and have a little more than their equals, which reflects the desires and expectations of so many other students!

After almost three years of university, despite some lost distraction due to the insistence of his new friend Álvaro and other colleagues, Antonio continued with determination to reproduce his ideal - “winning in life through studies and becoming rich” - in order to have recognition and material comfort, for him and his close relatives.

Once, in a subject in the area of human development in organizations, a professor considered an article from a specialized magazine, which talked about the skills needed to be developed by employees of a large company to achieve an executive position (Annex I). The boy's eyes lit up! This was what he had dreamed of for himself! Recognition, status, high material rewards, benefits, travel and more travel, in short... a great career. No longer would he be known as the shoemaker's son! He would gain an identity, “*un uomo d'affari eccezionale*”, as his father would say, in a loud and eloquent Italian cry. Antonio stubbornly sought to achieve these skills. He began to study the English language heavily, as well as continuing to practice Italian when he returned home from time to time. He decided not to work during the first three years of his degree so that he would be better able to compete for a position at a large,



reputable company and be an executive one day. “First duty, then pleasure’, as my father would say (...) I am going to earn my first million by the time I am 30, so I cannot waste time for nothing, going to parties and putting pleasures before duties”, Tom would announce to his roommate, when Álvaro crossed the line by insistently inviting him to university parties, to play video games or to philosophize about life.

Antonio got very high grades. He had great contact with professors and was a reference in the Business Administration course among students. He did extra activities and complementary courses, was involved in university extension projects and flirted with scientific initiation, without completing it just so as not to lose the proper focus of his development. According to what he had learned in his favorite professor’s lecture about his dream career as an executive, he sought to be qualified so that when the great opportunity of his life arrived, he would be prepared to take advantage of it and achieve his goals.

As he continued to plan his career, Tom signed up to participate in a national meeting of Business Administration students, in the city of São Paulo, in 2012. An event that would change his life. Many college students participated in the event, including his friend Álvaro.

At the time, Álvaro, who never missed a night out, was thrilled with the parties and the new friendships he had discovered at the event. On the other hand, Antonio, always committed, did not miss any lecture and the possibility of meeting ‘influential people’ who could, at some point in his life, leverage a good professional opportunity. After the end of the last day of the event and after talking for a long time with the final speaker, an executive from Partner Consulting, Antonio, still with his books under his arm, had the “luxury” of participating in the farewell party of the national meeting. When he arrived at the party he saw two girls who accompanied Álvaro, all walking towards him. “I did not mention that I had a nerdy friend who does not stop thinking for a minute about how he is going to become the biggest executive in the country and become a millionaire”, Álvaro joked to the girls, “the guy is at a party and brings his little books to here... just this Tom...”.

Antonio could not quite remember if it had really been that phrase or some other joke of the kind, because he could not think of anything or say much, he just stared enchanted into the almond-shaped and well-lined green eyes of Tânia, one of the girls from São Paulo who was there. It was passion at first sight! An encounter that could have led to all of Antonio's plans collapsing, in the snap of a finger. Tânia disconnected



the young man from his “world” for a few moments. After some awkward words, the boy invited her to talk in a less noisy place and share with her the experiences he learned at the event. Tânia found the nerdy guy shy, intelligent, with a certain innocence and full of dreams... the relationship began at that moment.

3 “PRIMO DOVERE, DOPO IL DIVERTIMENTO”

At the age of 22, Tom met Tânia, a beautiful woman from São Paulo who was a year younger, but with an experimentation in life and world view that was unmatched in relation to him, above all, with a charming adventurous vibe. She was also a Business Administration student, and as she called herself: “a free spirit”. Tânia was also a great student, but she did not have a rigid and determined career plan like Antonio's. They admired each other and made a very beautiful couple. Despite their common interest and desire to always be close, they lived in different states and met every fifteen days on scheduled trips to one or another's home. Their relationship grew stronger over the Internet! They shared the same taste for travel and the desire to see other places. Antonio said how important it was for him to start early in a large company and to have a structured career that would lead him to his dream job as an executive. Then, when the time was right and life was on track, the trips would be programmed and would take place with the surpluses from the capital reserve. His motto was: “First duty, then pleasure”.

Tânia thought differently. She wanted to travel immediately after graduation, she wanted to see the world. She wanted to make career decisions only when she was sure of the path she would take... if she was sure one day! The girl was looking for culture, adventure, immersing herself in something new, traveling wherever her money allowed, without long-term plans, without major concerns for the future. Everything that went against Antonio's purposes, who firmly confronted his girlfriend's “carefree” style. Antonio felt that, in a way, Tânia took him away from his ideals and made him weak in the face of the constant attempts to “enjoy life while young”. They started seeing each other less due to final exams and, after almost a year of dating, both close to graduation and with different plans for the future, the separation was inevitable.

Antonio has known the joy of love and the pain of loss. After a few weeks of separation, he received great news: he had been selected for a trainee position at one



of the largest foreign consulting companies, with a business unit in São Paulo. That conversation after the final lecture at the student meeting about a year ago had borne fruit. After sending a resume to one of the hundreds of contacts of 'influential people in the professional world', he was nominated for the selection process and, as he had an excellent academic record and an excellent construction of skills and good competencies, he did well in the tests and interviews. He would work directly with Mr. Dantas, the speaker who remembered the boy's drive and that 'gleam in his eyes' when he spoke about his career planning, at the national student meeting, the previous year. Now he could begin the career that would take him to the executive position he dreamed of and more... he would be close to Tânia, as the office was in the capital of São Paulo, the city where she lived. It would be worth leaving Rio de Janeiro behind and finally be able to "help" the ex-girlfriend to have a "correct" view of the right place for fun and to plan her career. Maybe he could "give in a little and take some short regional or national trips ahead of schedule", who knows!?

Tom completed his last credits and after the end of the selection process, he moved to the city of São Paulo, to finally achieve everything he planned in his career and surprise Tânia. But the ex-girlfriend was packing her bags, as she was going on a student exchange and spending six months in England. Antonio was unable to convince Tânia to stay nor did she persuade him to travel together. Tears and one last kiss. It was the final end of romance and all hopes!



Figure 1: Photo of the couple's last kiss in 2013, kissing behind a tree in Ibirapuera Park. Source: Antonio's personal archive.

Tânia traveled and the new Partner Consulting trainee decided to dive into work and pursue his professional goals. After all, was not that exactly what he had been looking for in recent years?! "Reason must prevail over emotions", Antonio minimized,

“and besides everything, I am young and I prepared myself for this opportunity, it is not fair that I do not accept this challenge. I want to achieve my goals and Tânia is a dreamer, who does not prioritize what is most important, does not understand that duty must come first and then..., over time I will live other passions and soon I will forget her”. Great planning... but that is not exactly how this story was written.

4 CAREER DEVELOPMENT

In 2013 Antonio arrived at Partner Consulting as just a trainee who was dazzled by his first formal job. He was hardworking, learned quickly, had an unusual dedication to the company and, above all, lived up to all of Mr. Dantas' expectations. Antonio's vision of his own career was very traditional. He wanted to progress vertically within the organization, becoming politically and socially involved with the company to increase his stability profile. He had a good and natural relationship with his superiors, especially with Mr. Dantas, who invited him to work in his sector, projects, as soon as the young man was hired approximately two years after joining the company.

As a project analyst, Antonio was already able to support himself well in the city of São Paulo, without financial help from his parents. The expenses were not extravagant and the trips were only to Rio de Janeiro, from time to time, to visit the family. The old travel catalogs had yellowed pages, without the dream trips and experiences coming to fruition. However, the time was not right to think about traveling, as there was a new professional challenge: “reaching the position of project consultant”. For the time being, travel would only be a thought... and speaking of travel and thought... “Where should Tânia be? Why did she never answer his messages?”.



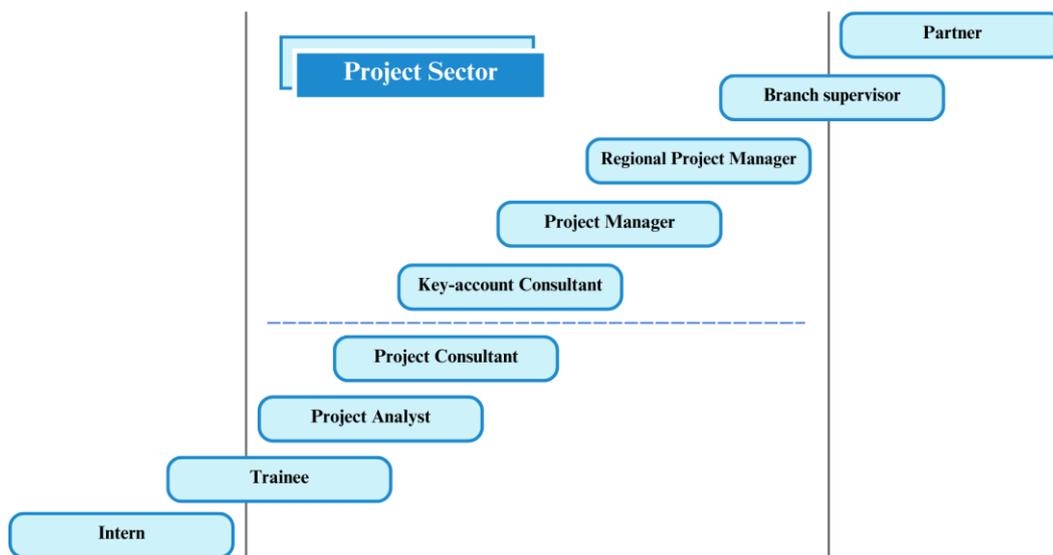


Figure 2: Partner Consulting Career Plan for the Project Sector

Source: Documentary research in the Human Resources Department of Partner Consulting.

Antonio really enjoyed his work! What bothered him, on some occasions, was that he was self-denying and relegating to the background something that he also considered important: his youth. He listened attentively and was intrigued by the stories of co-workers and personal friends who traveled abroad or even across the country. Everything fascinated him: the discoveries, the photos, the landscapes, the local culture, the extravagant foods and the adventures he chose or did not allow himself to live... “yet”. The fact is that after a few years of dedication to the company, his career did not project him the rapid rise in salary and status that he had imagined. Partner Consulting had a very rigid, bureaucratized career plan for the initial stages of the career, which was not developed together with employees.

This career plan did not adapt people's development projects to the company's development project, but Antonio knew that this was “part of the game”. Nevertheless, he sought out Mr. Dantas for a friendly conversation and mentoring, similar to the one they had had about four years before, when they met, he had come to ask for advice and to absorb guidance on his doubts. Antonio sought to be stimulated by the company, so that he could plan his professional future according to the organization's needs, if possible, in conjunction with his predilections. His mentor encouraged him to take an MBA course at a renowned educational institution in the city and, under his influence, Partner would pay for 80% of the course. Furthermore, the course would

generate skills for Antonio to fulfill the requirements of a position that would open soon: project consultant. Again, the sparkle in his eyes returned. Now, his career as an executive was progressing and, for this new position, it would be worth leaving some personal plans for the future. As in all professional and academic stages in our hero's life, success was unfailing. "Postgraduate and project consultant at the age of 27... after he stabilized in his position and mastered his new role, he would begin to live life intensely", pondered Cataldi. After all, "First duty, then pleasure".

After some frustrated and minor relationships, some questions were inevitable: "Where is Tânia? How will her life be? Is she happy? I need to take her photo next to my computer and put a lock on that drawer... I am thinking about her a lot!".

5 CAREER ALTERNATIVE

Over time, Antonio's concerns only increased. He had already been with the company for almost seven years, his career had not taken off in the dizzying way he had imagined during his college days around 10 years ago. The company "sucked up" all his free time, as he took a lot of work home. International trips never materialized and visits to his family in Rio de Janeiro were increasingly rare. His work had provided him with good things, such as buying his tiny apartment and paying for his younger siblings' studies, but the "million reais" was a long way from being consolidated.

The MBA course that Antonio took, more than just leading him to a promotion within the company, allowed him to once again dream of a career as an executive, and above all, it made him rethink his career planning. He was introduced to new career designs, types and approaches, which allowed him to discover that the career plan model used at Partner Consulting did not provide him with all the answers to his anxieties. Over time, he became a little more critical of the rigid model used in his company, in which only the organization decides how an employee's career should develop. He began to study, understand and question concepts such as: Career System, Self-Management, Personal Brand, Career Management and Development, Executive and Life Coaching (ARTHUR, CLAMAN, & DE FILLIPI, 1995; CHANLAT, 1995; BHARDWAJ, MISHRA, & JAIN, 2020; COSTA, BARROS, OLIVEIRA, & SAMPAIO, 2020).

Antonio began to notice that he could contribute to improving communication



between the company and other employees. He saw that there was a real gain for the organization and its employees if there was greater transparency in the negotiation of expectations between these two parties, to direct and integrate the expectations of both. Perhaps he could contribute more if he left the project area and went to work in the organization's human resources area, for example. Or if he stood out from the formal framework and was a legal entity member. Maybe, a little boldness and independence could be appropriate for that moment in career and life. What would Mr. Dantas say?

Excited about the new idea, the project consultant took his course booklets, his notes and managed to locate a subject that at the time, at first glance, seemed like a very vague and unstable career alternative, the *career without borders*, specifically the *protean career*. At first, Antonio did not understand how he could help all employees to have an independent and transactional relationship with his organization. Afterwards, he understood that a *career without borders* is no longer an employment relationship, in which there is no longer any hierarchy or stability in the career. He carefully followed with his index finger the part of the booklet that said: "(...) the individual begins to seek meaning in his/her profession and worries less about the organization, the main goal is psychological success, not financial success, which ends up being a consequence (...)". Ultimately, he realized that at least one Partner employee could be helped to develop this flexible and innovative career path – himself. However, the big problem was just one: "(...) how will I leave my stability behind! After all, the money I earn is important right now, for me and my family. (...) I must be going crazy because this idea of a *career without borders* will not leave my mind".

In borderless careers, workers need to understand their reasons for working, they need to try to build meaning in their professional life and, to do so, they need to make their own personal and professional plans. (HALL, & MIRVIS, 1996; SCHEIN, 1996; DUTRA, 2010; FERREIRA DA SILVA, CAROLINA NETO, & GRITTI, 2020; HAYES, & BURKETT, 2020). After reflecting on the matter, Antonio reasoned: "I think this is not the time for an immediate break with Partner, but rather, to strengthen my network of relationships, identify my main skills in relation to market demands, prepare myself for upcoming opportunities and establish solid partnerships". Ultimately, he would have to create a personal brand that distinguished him from other professionals who performed the same type of service he provided... he was trying to manage his own career, not expecting the organization to do it for him.



6 THE “DREAM” JOB

In the midst of consulting educational materials, searching for more information about protean professionals, strengthening his network of relationships, among other factors, Antonio received a unique invitation:

- “Son, do you have some time to have lunch with me today?” asked Mr. Dantas in a soft, soothing voice.
- “Of course, boss, it would be a pleasure, I really wanted the chance to share some new ideas that I have been mulling over”.
- “Do not call me boss anymore, maybe a good co-worker... you will understand in our conversation”, Mr. Dantas concluded his speech, after agreeing on the place and time for the meeting.

Antonio was anxious! He was free to talk openly with his mentor about his new career plans, and on the other hand, he wanted to know the reason for the unusual lunch invitation. “Do not call me boss anymore?” awakened a sense of alarm in Antonio... “Am I going to get fired?” He rationally did not want to. “I am not ready yet to take the risk of a career as daring as the one I am imagining! I need a bigger capital reserve! And if everything goes wrong?! Did I think too loudly and mumble foolish phrases to the point that others heard what I intended? I do not want to go back to Rio like a failure! What will they think of me?”. These ideas rattled the project consultant's mind as he headed to lunch.

When he arrived at the restaurant, Antonio could not contain his curiosity, but in order not to be rude and show the desperation that was invading him, he allowed the subject to flow normally during Mr. Dantas' dessert:

- “You know, son, after thirty years of loyally serving Partner Consulting, I am finally going to get my golden chance. I was invited directly by the US partners to be the branch president of a new business unit that will be opened in Ecuador. A unique opportunity! I remember when I arrived at this company as an intern and now I can be a branch president. This company is a mother, son! She knows how to take care of our needs. She accompanied me through many events in my life and was always by my side to support me in the most turbulent circumstances. In the heart attack I had due to that turbulent period during the entry of other foreign consultants here in Brazil, which made us lose our main clients, about three years before you arrived at the company. In my first divorce. In the adjustments I had to make to visit my children who moved to another state. In the full reimbursements that the company has always



provided for my work trips and some of our competitors only reimburse some expenses, not all. This company was always present in everything, taking care of me!!! It's a shame Joana does not want to go to Ecuador. This second wife of mine hates hot weather and said she would not go there at all, the other one even liked it... Anyway, if I dedicate myself enough and do a great job, in about five to seven years I could be invited back to Brazil as a partner or even be invited to serve at the headquarters in the USA. A golden chance. This company is a mother..."

As Mr. Dantas described his promotion and his gratitude for the company, Antonio felt that his personal questions and concerns were boiling at the right time. He did not want to spend twenty or thirty years until he received his "golden chance", to see his life torn apart and passing in front of him like "black and white scenes from a theatrical drama".

- "I am happy for you, sir. I see that this is what you expected from the company and you are excited about the promotion", said Antonio.
- "Yes of course! I'm going anyway, with or without Joana! I still have a lot of energy and health to start again" (...) after a pause, after a long coughing session, the mentor continued (...) "but look, I was talking about myself the whole time and I still did not mention the subject that motivated our meeting".

At that moment Antonio thought: "Wow! It was really dismissal. I wanted to build a different career, but I am not ready yet. I needed more time... I think this is the time to ask for a chance to stay or ask to go with him to Ecuador."

- "Antonio, I made an agreement with the Brazilian partners at Partner. Before I leave, I need to train a successor for my position as Regional Project Manager and my natural choice was you!"
- "Me? But I thought I was going to get fired", replied Antonio.
- "Where did you get this ridiculous idea, boy? You are an excellent employee. Dedicated, qualified, diligent and well evaluated in all company criteria. It reminds me of myself when I started building my career here. With dedication and luck, one day you will reach the level I am reaching".

The news made Antonio shudder completely, because despite there being an internal selection in the organization, having ambitious and dedicated co-workers, in addition to feeling qualified, he was the boss's nominee. With his history, his skills and his personal commitment, he could already imagine himself as the new regional project manager, a position at an executive level.

- "You are being rewarded for your years of full dedication to the company. Of course, it will be a transparent selection process. There are also other candidates nominated by influential people within the office. The decision will



be on merit. The entire professional context will be analyzed. But, frankly, no one is on your level, boy. I congratulate you in advance!”

The sparkle in Antonio’s eyes returned again. A movie played in his mind. All the effort to get there and be a reference in the work environment. The sacrifices during graduation. The countless nights of sleep spent at university to get top marks on exams. The MBA and various qualification courses. The building of a network, the hundreds of business cards collected and the countless pats on the back he received. All career planning to reach the executive level. The change of state. Scarce contact with family. Adherence to the motto “First duty, then pleasure”. And the things he had left behind, including the desire to travel and the ex-girlfriend who never left his mind... for a moment, everything seemed small and the conclusion was that, at that moment, everything had been worth it.

- “And what do you say, son? You are silent! It seems like you do not even believe it”, asked Mr. Dantas, effusively.

- “What could I say, my friend and former boss? I thank you for your trust, Mr. Dantas. This was everything I ever dreamed of! Partner Consulting will have the most committed and dedicated regional project manager in its history, after you, of course! I accept the nomination!”, Antonio replied with a legitimate certainty that had invaded him at the moment, followed by a tender hug.

7 THE REENCOUNTER

In the midst of the selection process, the many phases that involved choosing the candidate for the position offered, Antonio's only disadvantage was his young age for the position. He was by far the youngest candidate, but also the most capable. He knew the company well. He already had a good relationship with the main customers and interacted well with the company's other stakeholders. Among other things that spoke in his favor, he had no children and was not married. Therefore, he could dedicate more time to the company than other employees and would be more available for work trips and overtime. The company valued this! Regardless, the idea of pursuing a *protean career* had not yet abandoned him. But now was not the time to think about that. If he were approved for the position as the new regional project manager, he could stay in the position for 10 or 15 years, make a nice “nest egg” and, at the right time, leave the company to build an independent career. Or even, perhaps, embark on an international career as an expatriate, like his friend Mr. Dantas. However, with more



caution. He would have to make time in his schedule to go to a gym, which he had not done in a few years, and, of course, eat better. He was “smarter” than the other executives, as he had already learned the lesson that his mentor had experienced with his heart attack due to stress and the emotional pain of divorce and distance from his children.

He also needed to adjust himself in terms of “attention given to the family”. After all, “family is the most important thing we have”, he tried to convince himself with this jargon, so “the position would be important for them too”, as it would mean “fatter” monthly checks, but the truth it was that trips to visit family were more spaced out and rare. Everyone missed him in Rio de Janeiro. He had lost contact with his friend Álvaro some time ago and his younger siblings were already adults. “Inevitable scars from an arduous struggle to win this war that is life”, he eased his own conscience from time to time, so that he could maintain focus.

Everything seemed well resolved, when, then, an unexpected laconic email message, on the eve of the penultimate phase of the selection process, arrived in his inbox, one morning at work: - “Tom, I need to see you. I am in São Paulo and I am going to stay in Brazil for a few days. Signed Tânia”.

Antonio did not believe the message and reread it several times. “What motivated Tânia to contact me? She never answered to my messages. Is it a bad joke? For her, I am now Antonio Cataldi, without intimacy and, soon, Mr. Cataldi, the executive”, Antonio reasoned, in a confusion of feelings. But it was not a joke. After years abroad, Tânia was passing through Brazil to visit her family and wanted to arrange a meeting in Ibirapuera Park, at a certain symbolic tree, the place where they last saw each other. Antonio wanted the meeting, perhaps for different reasons than Tânia. He really wanted to show how successful he was and that he was about to take on a prominent role in his company, things that would never have happened if he had dropped everything to follow her. She would understand some things and hear others. He responded to the email, sent his telephone number and other contact details, and they arranged to meet in two days, at a certain time, behind a certain tree, at the end of Antonio's workday. She did not look for him on any social network.

On the proposed day, he chose his best suit and rehearsed a speech, which would begin like this: - “some people believe that pleasure should come first, but for those who choose duty first, the inevitable results are”... A little bit of Mr. Cataldi, mixed with a little bit of Tom, went to the meeting together. The latter was definitely not invited.



He was more determined to speak than to listen, after all there was “a lot of stuff that she needed to hear”. He needed to show his ex-girlfriend that she had made the wrong choice. He would finally be an executive! He would have a stable life, with success, money, status and the possibility of many trips, including international ones.

He arrived on time. She was late. The wait was suffocating him. Tânia sent a message: “I am sorry, I am late. Do you want to cancel? If not, meet me in front of Ibirapuera”. More Tom than Mr. Cataldi at that moment, he wanted to see her. The gloom of the falling evening gave the meeting a melancholic tone.



Figure 3: Photo of the couple's reunion in 2020, at the Ibirapuera Auditorium, under the spotlight.

Source: Google Earth.

When Tânia walked towards him, illuminated by the spotlights of the Ibirapuera Auditorium, with those huge green eyes, beautiful, more mature and elegant, with the full form of a woman he had imagined over the years of her absence, there was nothing left of Mr. Cataldi at the present. He became Tom again, the same one who messed up with his words at the student meeting, shy, with a look of desire to be rescued from a reality he did not quite understand. And before he could catch his breath to fire off his memorized speech, Tânia hugged him tightly and asked him a single question that left him monosyllabic for the entire meeting. What was that question? - “Tom, are you happy”?

This question would stay in Antonio's mind for several days and the answer was not so easy to find by looking closely inside himself.

8 ANTONIO'S DILEMMA

Antonio was torn with doubts. Tânia had come back to say that she had never forgotten him and that she wanted to start a family with him. That for personal and professional reasons she no longer wanted to live in Brazil. After the exchange, she embarked on other trips. She had discovered a world out there. A world that welcomed her and made her realize how important seeking happiness, fully, was. Her happiness was influenced by trying to live alongside Tom! Tânia held a senior volunteer position in a humanitarian organization whose mission was to travel to various countries to provide aid and solidarity to children's victims of war crimes. Diametrically opposed to Antonio's professional mission, in this job it was not possible to be rich, much less than that, it was only enough to pay the bills due to the help from sponsoring organizations. On the other hand, she was meeting new cultures, people and countries all the time. She had visited many of the places they had both dreamed of going to together, which were still on the yellowed pages of Antonio's catalogs. She met people, helped people! In his eyes, she was doing something significant in her life and the main thing: there was room for Tom in this organization. She came to take him away with her, to promote a soul rescue! However, a unique professional opportunity had arisen for him in Brazil. The promotion seemed imminent. What would Mr. Dantas think of him if he left now at the end of the selection process? He was not ungrateful! Part of him really wanted to accept the new position at Partner Consulting and perhaps it was the best option for his family, who he cared about so much. The same family he would hardly ever visit, whether he stayed in Brazil or not. At the same time, he had concluded that his personal life was not going well.

Even in Brazil there would be another alternative, since he could be a protean professional, as his career projection was already more flexible before the supposed promotion and Tânia knocked on his door. Maybe it was the best way to be happy, not so much the heart and not so much the wallet. He could build a more flexible career, autonomous and independent of an organization, and devote time to his personal life and leisure. The money would be short at the beginning, but in a few years, with his ability and dexterity in seeing opportunities, he could build a new career. Another alternative could be created if Tânia agreed to stay and, together, build something in Brazil. "Why was she always so inflexible and everything always had to be her way?", but she had made it clear that she would not give up her participation in the



humanitarian organization and was no longer thinking about living in the country.

Antonio could still plan with his company the possibility of being an expatriate, of representing his organization in another country, perhaps even alongside Tânia, as he heard that in some cases the company plans the expatriation of not only the employee, but also the couple (dual carrier). Perhaps the best time for this conversation at Partner Consulting would be after the promotion, but not immediately, after some time in the position. However, this reminded him of two things: maybe he did not have time and maybe he would no longer consider the possibility of promotion. Tom needed answers quickly, but he could not find them easily.

9 FINAL CONSIDERATION

Did you identify with this story or part of it? Despite being fictional, it was built based on the main dilemmas that young adults (some not so young) go through and manifest in career guidance and coaching processes. The protagonist is about to make a very important decision for his future, which involves several areas of life planning. Because he has neglected some of these areas throughout his life, perhaps the best choice for his decision is hidden amidst a lot of emotion. In less than a month Antonio will have to decide what direction his career, and consequently his life, will take. The alternatives that Antonio can see at this moment are:

Accept the promotion and establish his traditional career in the company he works for, adjusting other areas of life planning over time.

Accompany Tânia and leave behind his consolidated career to invest in his family and emotional life. Maybe, with his ability, he will stand out as a volunteer in the humanitarian organization, but resigning himself to living with little means.

Develop an international career through Partner Consulting, even knowing that this career may take some time to come to fruition and that around half of expatriates do not adapt to the new reality. In this alternative, Tânia would have already left the country and finding her again would be a possible search, however, they would have different careers and life goals, as Tânia does not accept abandoning her career as a volunteer, in places of greater need.

Invest in a protean career in Brazil, based on his new career convictions, professional relationships, skills and incredible ability to see new opportunities in the



macro-environmental scenario, still, without Tânia, who absolutely refuses living in the country.

APPENDIX – Glossary

Borderless career: Career option in which the individuals no longer have a vision of traditional career design and are encouraged to create and develop their career projects, establishing an open relationship with the organization. The employee begins to self-manage his/her career and may not be limited to having business relationships with a single employer.

Protean career: It is a type of enhanced borderless career design in which the individuals are solely responsible for managing their career, no longer the organization. It is characterized by the provision of services by a highly specialized professional to companies that value this type of relationship, through performance goals. The professional becomes flexible, develops specific skills and is able to visualize new opportunities to work in organizational scenarios. The term “protean career” was based on the name of the god Proteus, who according to Greek mythology was a maritime deity, god of water.

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