



STAY IN A CAREER? PERSONAL GROWTH INITIATIVE, CAREER COMMITMENT, CALLING AMONG MILLENNIALS

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ABSTRACT

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Millennials are described as the generation that regards personal development and work meaning as important factors to remain in a career. Hence, finding ways to retain millennials through their initiative for personal growth and how millennials perceive their career can provide benefits for individuals and organizations. The aim of this study was to examine the effect of personal growth initiative on perceiving and living out a career calling as well as career commitment among Indonesian millennials. Using convenience sampling, 109 millennials aged 18–32 years were recruited to complete an online survey. Based on structural equation modeling, the model in which living a calling in a career as the outcome of other variables was found better than the model in which career commitment serves as the outcome. Personal growth initiative was also found negatively correlated to living a calling in a career but positively correlated to perceiving calling in career and career commitment. It is expected that Personal growth initiatives would benefit both individuals and organization and help millennials prepare for their careers. The study recommends career counselors to assist millennials develop ability to plan life that would lead to living out one's calling in a career.

Contribution/Originality: This study makes an original contribution to advance the understanding of how personal growth initiative predicts career commitment and career calling by comparing two different models. This is also the first study among Indonesian millennials entering the workforce.

1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding millennials and what they long for in a career is crucial for companies, organizations, and educational institutions. Millennials, who are born between 1980 and 2000 (Budiaty et al., 2018), are the largest number of living generations, according to the data in the United States (Fry, 2020) as well as in Indonesia (Deloitte Indonesia, 2019). Millennials have been reported to experience more frequent career transitions than prior generations (Chudzikowski, 2012) and to develop initiative to navigate their career (Holtschlag, Masuda, Reiche, & Morales, 2020; Lyons, Ng, & Schweitzer, 2012; Thompson & Gregory, 2012). Considering millennials as the dominant force in the workplace, it is important to explore personal constructs that can help them to stay in a career.

Millennials are less likely to identify themselves with their career and to commit to their career during difficulties than prior generations (Ng, Lyons, & Schweitzer, 2018). However, millennials yearn for challenges and seek new skills and meaningful work (Mihelić & Aleksić, 2017). Personal development is regarded as millennials' main reason for leaving one company and joining another (IDN Research Institute, 2019). Moreover, millennials tend to exhibit lower organizational citizenship behavior unless they are able to modify the nature of job for

maintaining the meaning at work (Gong, Greenwood, Hoyte, Ramkissoon, & He, 2018). Existing research seems to suggest that promoting millennials' initiative for personal development and meaning through their work is critical in strengthening millennials' career commitment. Thus, the present study is interested to explore the role of one's initiative for personal growth on career commitment and career calling. Though positive association between personal growth initiative and the presence of calling has been reported in prior studies (Bott & Duffy, 2015; Duffy, Allan, Autin, & Douglass, 2014) but those findings have not distinguished perceiving a career calling from living out a career calling.

This is the first study among Indonesian millennials or new graduates while prior studies have involved employees in the Western communities. The uniqueness of the present study also lies in its comparison of two models to examine the interplay between personal growth initiative, career calling, and career commitment. Moreover, this study aims to provide an important contribution by using perceiving a calling in one's career and living out a career calling as separate constructs in those models.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Personal Growth Initiative, Career Commitment, and Career Calling

Personal growth initiative is one's intention to actively engage in personal development (Robitschek, 1998). This construct is later developed into four dimensions, namely readiness for change, planning, using resources, and intentional behavior (Robitschek et al., 2012). The role of personal growth initiative in predicting work-related outcomes has been documented in prior studies. Robitschek and Cook (1999) reported a positive correlation between personal growth initiative and vocational identity as well as career exploration.

Weigold, Porfeli, and Weigold (2013) reported a positive link between personal growth initiative and career commitment. A recent study among nurses showed that individuals scoring high in personal growth initiative tend to have more work engagement (Vaksalla & Hashimah, 2015). A higher personal growth initiative is linked to a better engagement at work and lower intention to leave (Srivastava & Bajpai, 2020). Individuals with personal growth initiative were more likely to employ job crafting, as an initiative to adjust one's task with one's preferences (Matsuo, 2019) which had a positive link with career commitment, moderated by a sense of calling (Chang, Rui, & Wu, 2021). Personal growth initiative also serves as the predictor of perceiving career calling in a cross-sectional study (Jurica, 2014). Bott and Duffy (2015) as well as Duffy et al. (2014) reported that personal growth initiative was a positive predictor of the presence of calling over a six-month period.

Career commitment measures one's commitment to certain occupations (Duffy, Dik, Douglass, England, & Velez, 2018). This concept comprises career identity (how central one's career is to his/her identity), career insight (realistic perception toward oneself and career goal), and career resilience (an ability to adapt to changes at work) (Carson & Bedeian, 1994). A recent longitudinal study among Indonesian fresh graduates showed that individuals perceiving that their career was driven by their own initiative rather than by the organization were more likely to quit their job, to experience less job satisfaction, and to have less commitment to the organization over six months (Supeli & Creed, 2016). Hattke, Homberg, and Znanewitz (2017) reported that for personal development was regarded as important values for career commitment among millennials. There was a positive link between career values and proactive career among millennials (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2019). However, that research did not investigate whether having personal initiative to direct one's career could facilitate individuals to commit to their career. Being committed to one's career turned out to be a better predictor for turnover intention than job satisfaction and organizational commitment among Chinese employees (Zhou, Long, & Wang, 2009). Those researchers argued that in organizations where there is no advanced career pathway, individuals may change their career by moving to another organization.

2.2. Perceiving Calling in a Career, Living Calling in a Career, and Career Commitment

Perceiving their work as a calling is one way that people relate to their work (Wrzenniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997). Dik and Duffy (2009) defined calling as purposeful work with prosocial intention derived from religious or non-religious sources. Growing research have revealed that calling in career is found among various occupations (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Dobrow & Tost-Kharas, 2012) and across cultures (Douglass, Duffy, & Autin, 2016; Hirschi & Herrmann, 2012; Zhang, Herrmann, Hirschi, Wei, & Zhang, 2015). Results from prior studies among employees showed that the presence of calling in career was linked to increased career and organizational commitment (Duffy, Dik, & Steger, 2011) as well as to decreased turnover intention (Cardador, Dane, & Pratt, 2011). Another finding showed that millennials with self-driven initiative for their career tended to make progress toward their work goals, which in turn caused low intention to leave the organization (Holtschlag et al., 2020). Higher levels of the presence of career calling are associated with job satisfaction through career commitment (Duffy, Allan, & Bott, 2012). Unfortunately, those studies did not distinguish between perceiving and living out a career calling.

Prior studies have documented that perceiving calling and living out a calling in one's career are distinct constructs (Duffy & Autin, 2013). Individuals having opportunities to live out their career calling also exhibit stronger career commitment and other positive work outcomes than those only perceiving their career calling (Duffy, Bott, Allan, Torrey, & Dik, 2012). Another study among nurses reported that perceiving calling in one's career positively predicted career commitment, especially among those living out their career calling (Afsar, Umrani, & Khan, 2019).

Though living calling in career was reported to provide better psychological outcomes than perceiving calling in career, some barriers could hinder individuals to live out their calling in career. Research in developing countries, like India, showed that one's inability to live out their calling in career might be influenced by lower educational and income background as well lower ability to decide about their preferred work (Douglass et al., 2016; Duffy & Autin, 2013). Since not all millennials are better-off and having a privilege in choosing their desirable career, it is possible that they have perceived a career calling and feel committed to that career though they have not lived their calling out yet.

In the proposed model, living a career calling is expected to predict career commitment. However, because career commitment was found as a predictor of living a career calling (Duffy et al., 2018) another proposed model will also be tested to investigate this possibility. Considering prior studies (Douglass et al., 2016; Duffy & Autin, 2013), some millennials might not possess a privileged background to attain high education and income, thus hinder them to live a career aligned with their calling due to family expectations or limited available job offers. Therefore, the present study included perceiving career calling as a predictor of career commitment.

Based on the existing literature, the aim of the current study was to investigate personal growth initiative (PGI) to career commitment (CC) as well as perceiving (CVQP) and living out one's calling in a career (LCS) using a cross sectional design among Indonesian millennials entering the workforce. There are two models that were examined. In the first model, we hypothesized that PGI would positively correlate with CVQP, LCS, and CC among Indonesian millennials. In turn, CVQP would predict LCS and CC. In the second model, LCS was put as the outcomes of other variables. PGI would positively correlate with LCS. CVQP and CC would consecutively predict LCS.

3. METHODS

3.1. Participants

Data were collected using an online survey that was distributed to the social media groups of new graduates, college students, youth communities, and specific student groups for business and networking purposes. All participants provided informed consent. The ethical process was conducted for the study though there was no

formal institutional procedure. The final sample included 109 millennials (aged 18–32 years) from various occupations such as employees, entrepreneurs, volunteers, and *freelancers*. Of these, 62.4% were male and 66% were university graduates.

3.2. Research Instruments

Personal Growth Initiative Scale-II (PGIS-II) is a 16-item scale measuring an individual's active engagement for personal development with readiness for change, planning, using resources, and intentional behavior as its dimensions (Robitschek et al., 2012). Participants responded to each item on a six-point Likert scale (0=Strongly disagree to 6=Strongly agree). Using test-retest reliability test during a 6-week period, the original scale had correlation coefficients ranging from 0.62 to 0.82. In the current scale, internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha coefficient for readiness for change was 0.74, planning was 0.81, using resource was 0.75, and intentional behavior was 0.77. Items included, "I take every opportunity to grow as it comes up", "I figure out what I need to change about myself", "When I try to change myself, I make a realistic plan for my personal growth", and "I actively seek out help when I try to change myself".

Calling and Vocation Questionnaire - Presence Subscale (CVQP) measures perceiving calling in career using 12 items with three dimensions: transcendent summons, purposeful work, and prosocial orientation (Dik, Eldridge, Steger, & Duffy, 2012). Participants rated on a five-point Likert scale ranged from *not all true of me* to *absolutely true of me*. Sample items include, "I was drawn by something beyond myself to pursue my current line of work", "I see my career as a path to purpose in life", and "My work contributes to the common good". The original version has a good internal consistency coefficients ranged from 0.83 to 0.93 (Dik et al., 2012) and so does the Indonesian version, with Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.72 to 0.79.

Living Calling Scale (LCS) is a seven-item scale that measures the extent to which one feels that he/she enacts their calling in a career (Duffy, Allan, Autin, & Bott, 2013). Participants rated each item using an eight-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = absolutely true of me; 8 = no calling). Items included "I am currently working in a job that closely aligns with my calling" and "I am working in the job to which I feel called." There were 15 items, such as "My line of work/ career field is an important part of who I am" and "The discomfort associated with my line of work/ career field sometimes seems too great".

Career Commitment Scale (CCS) is a 15-item scale that was rated on a five-point Likert scale from *not at all true of me* to *absolutely true of me* (Carson & Bedeian, 1994). The original English version showed a good internal consistency ($\alpha=0.81$). Meanwhile, in the current Indonesian scale, Cronbach's alpha consistency for career identity was 0.707, career planning was 0.808, and career resilience was 0.735.

Data were analyzed using the R program with Lavaan packages (Rosseel, 2012). For structural equation modeling, small sample size is possible when the number of indicators of a factor increases (Marsh, Hau, Balla, & Grayson, 1998; Wolf, Harrington, Clark, & Miller, 2013). Fit indices were evaluated based on Matsunaga (2010) that suggests CFI or TLI > 0.95 , RMSEA < 0.06 , and SRMR < 0.10 as good fits to the data (CFI or TLI > 0.90 and RMSEA < 0.08 are considered acceptable). In addition, lower Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC) values were used to indicate the better model (Raftery, 1995). Using structural equation modeling with full information maximum likelihood (FIML) to deal with missing data, two hypothesized models were investigated.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As shown in Table 1, all variables had good internal consistency and the data were normally distributed. The result of Pearson's product moment correlations showed positive correlations between PGI, CVQP, LCS, and CC. Though CVQP perceiving calling in career and LCS had a strong correlation, they were not identical. PGI had a stronger correlation with CVQP than with LCS. Both CVQP and LCS positively correlated to CC.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, correlations, and internal consistency of all variables.

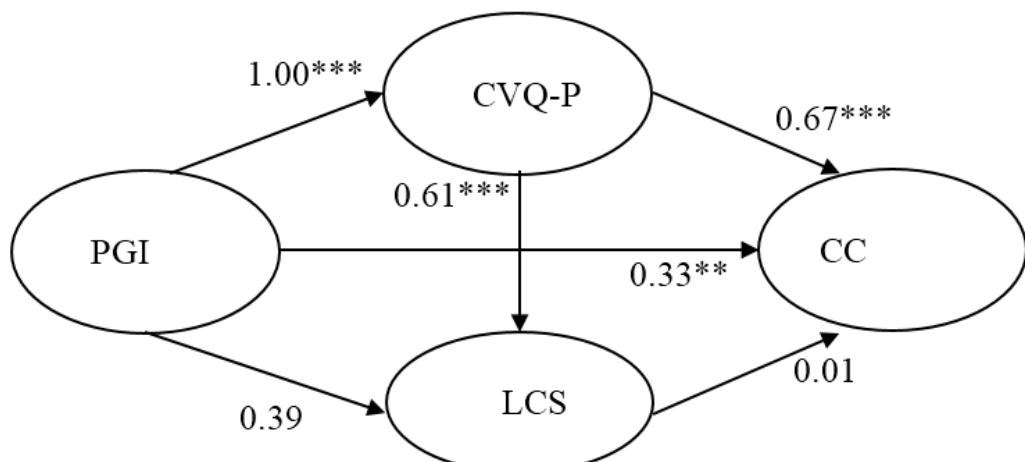
Variables	PGI	CVQP	LCS	CC
PGI	(1.00)			
CVQP	0.56***	(1.00)		
LCS	0.31**	0.69***	(0.94)	
CC	0.30**	0.35***	0.44***	(0.10)
Mean	64.18	44.42	35.16	48.22
SD	8.22	7.05	7.98	7.30

Note: ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; Numbers in brackets are Cronbach's alpha coefficients; PGI = Personal Growth Initiative; CVQ-P = Calling and Vocation Questionnaire-Perceiving; LCS = Living Calling Scale; CC = Career Commitment.

As presented in [Figure 1](#), the model showed an acceptable fit ($CFI = 0.97$, $TLI = 0.969$, $RMSEA = 0.099$, $SRMR = 0.045$). The AIC value of the first model was 13,730. PGI and CVQP positively predicted CC. However, there was no significant effect of LCS on CC. There was a significant indirect effect of PGI on CC via CVQP ($\beta=0.665$, $p<0.001$). Perhaps individuals living calling in a career have not yet committed to their career because they realize that changing to another career depends on where the source of calling may lead them. In a similar vein, another study found that calling is also perceived as an open-ended process, meaning that individuals still look for further opportunities in living out their calling in their career ([Duffy et al., 2012](#)).

Another possible explanation is that though these new graduate millennials may have opportunities to live out their calling in their current career, they have not decided to become committed to their career and consider exploring other career choices they believe to be more relevant to their developmental needs. Millennials expect career development opportunities ([Weeks & Schaffert, 2019](#)) good salary, and because they are aware that lifelong employment are rare nowadays, they are more likely to find security by working where they can enhance their employability ([De Hauw & De Vos, 2010](#)).

Racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism in work environment would deter individual from living out their career ([Duffy et al., 2018](#)) whereas positive environment, such as supportive workers, allowed individuals to live out and maintain their calling ([Duffy et al., 2012](#)). Hence, for millennials seeing their early career as an exploration, though they feel that they have lived out their calling, negative environment they experienced in their work might hinder them to committ to their current career. [Duffy et al. \(2011\)](#) found that calling without career commitment may lead to intention to withdraw from one's current occupation. Hence, the hypothesis that living calling in career serves as a predictor of career commitment was not supported.

**Figure 1.** Relations among variables in which perceiving and living calling in career act as mediators between personal growth initiative and career commitment.

Note: ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; PGI = Personal Growth Initiative; CVQ-P = Calling and Vocation Questionnaire-Perceiving; LCS = Living Calling Scale; CC = Career Commitment.

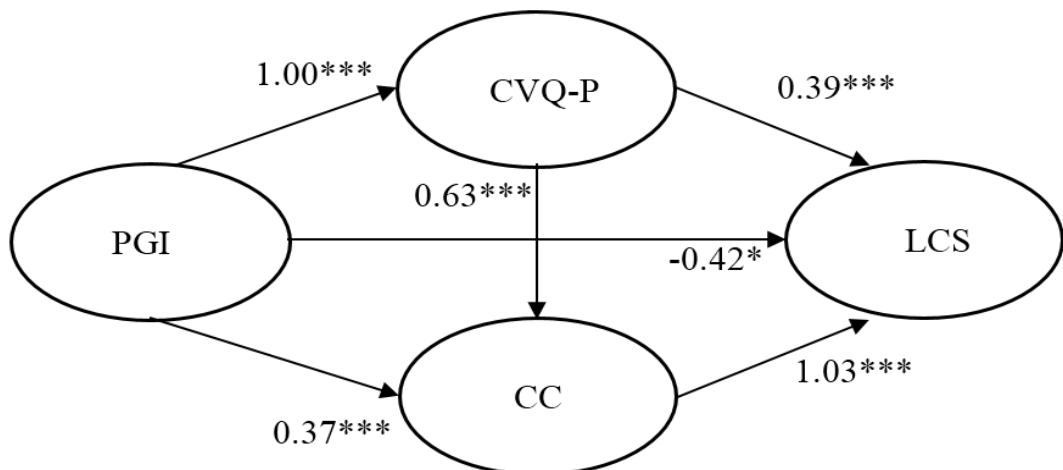


Figure 2. Relations among variables in which perceiving calling in career and career commitment act as mediators between personal growth initiative and living calling in career.

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; PGI = Personal Growth Initiative; CVQ-P = Calling and Vocation Questionnaire-Perceiving; LCS = Living Calling Scale; CC = Career Commitment.

As presented in [Figure 2](#), the second model examined living career calling as the outcome of other variables. The fit indices showed an acceptable fit ($CFI = 0.97$, $TLI = 0.969$, $RMSEA = 0.098$, $SRMR = 0.099$). The AIC value of the second model was 13.704, which is lower than the AIC's value of the first model. This indicates that the second model is better one. Personal growth initiative was *negatively* linked to living calling in career but was positively linked to perceiving calling in career and career commitment. In turn, perceiving calling in career and career commitment positively predicted living calling in career.

Prior studies corroborate career commitment as a predictor of living calling in career ([Duffy, Autin, & Douglass, 2015](#); [Duffy, Douglass, Autin, & Allan, 2014](#)) and living calling in career as a predictor of career commitment ([Duffy et al., 2013](#)). The current result lends support to the former finding. In contrast to the expectation, the more initiative millennials exhibit for personal growth, the less they feel they live out their career calling. Calling has been associated with self-transcendence goals, a cluster of goals focusing on others' needs and things beyond oneself than one's own survival and pleasure ([Allan & Duffy, 2014](#)). Perhaps millennials having active engagement for personal growth have not felt ready yet to enact their career calling because living out one's calling in a career might have some consequences to sacrifice for others' sake, not to pursue monetary benefit or opportunity for better position in organization. Therefore, millennials might consider better equipping themselves before they find themselves ready to live out their career calling. Regarding corroborating the need to improve oneself, another study among Indonesian undergraduates showed that personal growth initiative was positively linked to extrinsic academic motivation since having good grade is still considered as self-affirmation ([Salim & Yuliawati, 2021](#)).

There are three significant indirect effects of personal growth initiative on living career calling. First, individuals with high personal growth initiative are more likely to live out their career calling through perceiving career calling ($\beta=0.391$, $p<0.001$). Second, feeling committed to one's career could help millennials with active engagement for personal growth to enact their career calling ($\beta=0.381$, $p<0.01$). It seems that before living out one's calling, individuals have to discern what kind of career they are called to and gain a clear understanding of which career pathway they should commit to ([Duffy et al. \(2018\)](#); [Duffy et al. \(2012\)](#)). In other words, to live out one's career calling, millennials with personal growth initiative should feel called and committed to the current career. Since different career pathway may have different challenges, not all individuals might obtain the sense of calling and commitment as well as might strive to live out their calling in career.

Third, individuals with high personal growth initiative tend to feel that they perceive their career as a calling, then they also tend to feel committed to that career, which in turn bring them to career calling enactment ($\beta=0.403$,

$p<0.001$). The present finding is consistent with the prior finding that proactive personality are more likely to engage in constructive change to fit to their career goals ([Vandenbergh & Basak, 2013](#)). Discerning calling in a career and committing to a career can help individuals with willingness to grow personally to find ways to live out their career calling.

Millennials are reported to seek meaningful work in their career ([Allan, Owens, & Duffy, 2017](#)). For millennials yearning for work that can support personal growth, provide personal meaning, and have positive contribution to society, the current findings highlight the role of perceiving calling in career and career commitment as the mediators of the relationship between personal growth initiative and living calling in career ([Duffy et al., 2014](#)).

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The current study offers some insights that individuals with personal growth initiative are less likely to live out their calling in career unless they can perceive their calling in career and feel committed to their career. This study has also provided additional evidence from a non-Western sample that career commitment is better treated as the predictor of living out one's calling in a career than as the outcome.

Despite the contribution of the current study, the current study was limited by using cross-sectional design. Thus, the effect of personal growth initiative, perceiving calling in career, career commitment on living calling in career may not persist over time. Further longitudinal studies need to validate the current findings. It is important to assess how millennials and their view in career may progress in the next career stages.

The use of convenience sampling and the online survey was administered for the data collection and must be noted to make the findings less generalizable. The result must be interpreted cautiously for Indonesian millennials from rural areas with unfamiliarity to online surveys. This group perhaps has less opportunity to explore wider career options, possesses less educational advantages, and tends to look for a career to meet their needs without considering further about personal development.

Another limitation in the current study was that the researchers did not collect the data about job role and the type of the company (e.g. start-up business, family business, multinational company) from the participants. Millennials looks for flexibility in working time, opportunities to express creativity, and supportive team to facilitate their self-development ([IDN Research Institute, 2019](#)). Unsurprisingly, as a growing sector in Indonesia, working in start-up business becomes the aspiration of Indonesian millennial fresh graduates since this career option offered competitive salary, flexible working hours, and innovative culture ([Annur, 2019; Deloitte Indonesia, 2019](#)). Since organizational support also plays an important role to align millennials' career calling and the mission of the organization ([Duffy et al., 2018; Elangovan, Pinder, & McLean, 2010](#)) further studies may explore what kind of organizational and management practices that can support Indonesian millennials fresh graduates to do so.

The findings of the present study have some practical implications. Personal growth initiative is argued to provide benefit for individuals and organization to deal with rapid changes and demand at work ([Van Woerkom & Meyers, 2019](#)). Building personal growth initiative followed by discerning one's calling in career can be promoted ([Dik. & Duffy, 2015; Meyers, van Woerkom, De Reuver, Bakk, & Oberski, 2015](#)) as career preparation for millennials during college. Career counselors also could assist millennials in finding a specific career they want to commit to so that they can attempt to live out their calling through an internship or other non-full-time jobs before they really enter the workforce after college. Career counselors could also assist final-year undergraduates and fresh graduates to develop ability to plan life that would lead to living out one's calling in a career ([Yuliawati & Ardyan, 2020](#)).

Additionally, positive support from organizations in managing millennial new graduates can be performed through some attempts. Organizations could facilitate millennials by assigning them a job role that can cultivate personal growth at work based on one's strengths rather than one's weaknesses ([Meyers et al., 2015; Van Woerkom & Meyers, 2019](#)). Moreover, communicating how an organization's mission and values can go hand-in-hand with

one's calling in career may offer insight for millennial fresh graduates that their career calling enactment through the organization is appreciated and valuable. It is possible that some millennials may feel called to organization's mission and values and internalize them as their personal calling in career. Another suggestion is that by providing opportunities for millennials to see how the impact of their career calling enactment matters to the greater good, millennials might be inspired to commit to their career.

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