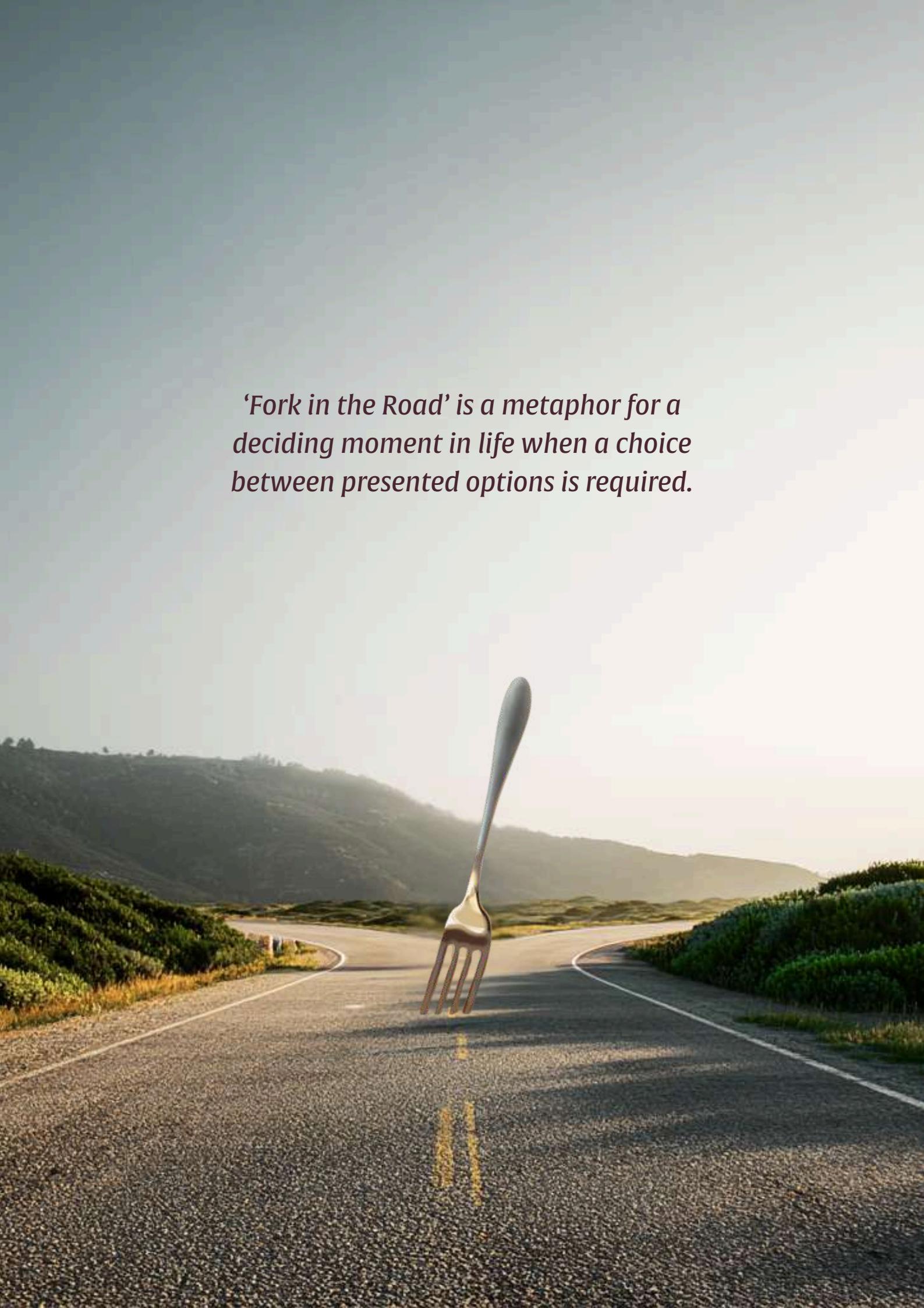


KennedyFitch

A FORK IN THE ROAD

A career guide to grow, to reflect, to get creative,
and to get crystal clear on your next step
in your career





'Fork in the Road' is a metaphor for a deciding moment in life when a choice between presented options is required.

Every day, we sit across from people who are wrestling with the big question: What's next? And here's what we've noticed: there is no shortage of advice out there on building the perfect CV, nailing interviews, or discovering your dream job. But when it comes to the messy, real part? The actual doing? That's where people get stuck....

Let's be honest: we are living in an employer's market right now. Fewer openings. More competition. Companies holding their cards closer to their chest. It's not the same landscape it was a few years ago, and pretending otherwise won't help you. But here's the thing, the tight market doesn't mean there are no opportunities. It means you need to be smarter, more strategic, and yes, a little braver about how you pursue them.

So we decided to stop gatekeeping and start sharing. This guide is our rebellion against the cookie-cutter career advice that leaves you feeling more confused than confident. Whether you're chasing change by choice or navigating it by necessity, we're here to help you find your way forward, with real talk, practical tools, and a healthy dose of encouragement tailored for the reality you're facing.

But before we dive in, let's get one thing straight: You don't have to do this alone. Career transitions can be exhilarating and exhausting, often at the same time. That's why we're not just here to hand you a playbook. We are here to remind you that this journey, however uncomfortable, is also an invitation. An invitation to grow, to reflect, to get creative, and to get crystal clear on who you are and what you're really made of. In a tight market, the people who succeed aren't just the most qualified, they're the most intentional.

So line up your support squad: friends, family, a coach, a mentor, or all of the above. Because resilience isn't built in isolation. And if you need a partner who's been in the arena, knows the terrain, and understands what it takes to navigate a challenging market? Well, that's exactly why KennedyFitch exists. Our Career Transition Advisory service is designed for people like you, ready to move forward with clarity, confidence, and a little rebellious spirit, even when the odds feel stacked against you.

Now, let's get to work.

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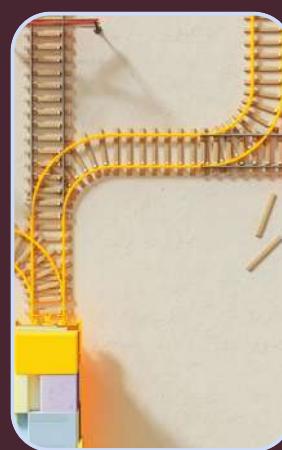
Lead Your Journey To The Right Place



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WHAT KIND OF
JOBSEEKER
ARE YOU?

What Kind of Jobseeker are you?

I am still employed but actively looking



The Strategic Explorer

If you are looking to change jobs, think about who you might want to tell within your company. Not being too secretive about it makes it a lot easier and could also open up conversations about opportunities within your company that you are not aware of.

If your goal is to progress your career in a sustainable way, try to think beyond your next step. Think of two steps or roles ahead and analyse how the next step could be a stepping stone on the path to your goal. Your next role needn't always be a formal promotion or lead to something 'bigger' – bigger title, team, P&L, geography, etc.

I am happily employed but curious



The Opportunity Keeper

Try adopting the mindset that you are always on the (internal and external) market for a job and spend some time on your career every day. And, be open to opportunities when they present themselves if they appeal to you, even if you don't consider yourself to be on the market. If someone approaches you with a job, don't say 'I'm not interested', don't get stuck in your comfort zone! Get out there and explore the opportunity.

I am no longer employed and actively looking



The Unbound Seeker

If you are in between jobs, do not feel demoralized! It may not feel like it, but there are advantages to your situation:

1. You have the time and the mental space to find your next one.
2. You are an interesting candidate and you could be more attractive out of a job: you can start tomorrow, you are always available for interviews, and there is no bonus or equity to be bought out.

You may feel a lot of pressure to secure a job, which is fully understandable. We still recommend going through the steps we outlined in the guide, as it will increase your chances of a successful job search.

When defining your strategy and positioning, however, you may choose to focus more on the pragmatic (where am I a perfect match?) than the ideal (how can I make a career pivot?).



Career self-check

Ask yourself these three questions regularly:

- **What's my relationship with my company?**
- **What's my relationship with my job?**
- **What's my relationship with my boss / leader / manager?**

Ideally, you should avoid falling below good or great levels in any of these areas and only on a short-term basis.

Whose Market Is It?

Employer Market

High unemployment

More candidates than jobs

You need to be more strategic and flexible:

- **Cast a wider net:** Apply to more positions, including roles slightly outside your ideal criteria. You may need to compromise on salary, title, or specific requirements.
- **Stand out through differentiation:** Invest heavily in your personal brand, portfolio, and demonstrating unique value. Generic applications won't cut it when competition is fierce.
- **Be patient and persistent:** Expect longer response times, more interview rounds, and potentially lower salary offers. Don't get discouraged by rejections or silence.
- **Upskill proactively:** Use any downtime to gain certifications, learn new tools, or build projects that demonstrate initiative and relevance.
- **Network intensively:** Referrals become even more critical when employers are flooded with applications. Personal connections can get you past the initial screening.
- **Consider interim solutions:** Contract work, freelancing, or roles that aren't perfect can keep you employed and build experience while you search for something better.



Employee Market

Low unemployment

Talent Shortage

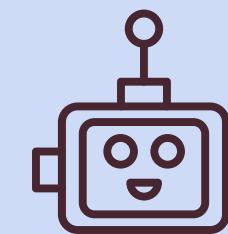
You have more leverage and can be selective:

- **Be choosier:** Focus on roles that truly align with your career goals, values, and compensation expectations. You can afford to wait for the right fit.
- **Negotiate assertively:** Higher starting salaries, sign-on bonuses, remote work, equity, better benefits - everything is more negotiable when employers are competing for talent.
- **Move faster:** Employers may expedite hiring processes and make quicker decisions. Multiple offers become more common, so be ready to evaluate and decide.
- **Prioritize growth and culture:** When compensation is competitive across the board, focus more on learning opportunities, company culture, and long-term career trajectory.
- **Leverage competing offers:** Use offers strategically to negotiate with your preferred employer. They're more likely to match or exceed to secure you.
- **Consider internal mobility:** If currently employed, you might have strong negotiating power for promotions or lateral moves before looking externally.

The Constant

Regardless of market conditions, always maintain:

- A clear value proposition and personal narrative
- An updated LinkedIn profile and resume
- A professional network you engage with regularly
- Understanding of your industry's trends and salary benchmarks
- Authentic enthusiasm and cultural fit in interviews
- In tough markets, you're selling yourself harder. In strong markets, you're carefully buying into the right opportunity. Your mindset and approach should reflect which position you're in.



PROMPTS

These are ready-made prompts you can copy-paste into ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot or any other AI assistant to get personalised guidance for your next career step.

What kind of jobseeker am I, really?

You are my personal Fork in the Road guide, a career guide expert for the next step in my career.

There are three broad types of jobseekers:

- still employed but actively looking
- happily employed but curious
- no longer employed and actively looking

Goal: Help me clarify where I truly am right now and what that means. Run this as a step by step interview, not one big questionnaire.

1. Ask me a few questions about:

- My current work situation and contract status.
- How urgently I feel I need a change.
- How open I am to opportunities inside my current company.
- My main worries and hopes about a move.

2. Then:

- Place me in one of the three types (or a mix of two) and explain why.
- Describe the advantages and risks of my current position.
- Name 3 mindset shifts that would help me make better decisions from here.

Keep it concise, practical and honest.

Career self-check: stay, shift, or go?

You are my personal Fork in the Road guide, a career guide expert for the next step in my career, doing a career self-check with me.

Use these three lenses:

- What's my relationship with my company?
- What's my relationship with my job?
- What's my relationship with my boss?

Run this as a step by step interview, not one big questionnaire.

1. Ask me to describe each relationship in a few sentences: what works, what doesn't, and how it makes me feel.

2. From my answers:

- Summarise each relationship in 3 bullets.
- Flag where I'm in a "below good" zone or only in a spot that works short-term.
- Tell me whether my situation looks more like: stay and redesign, stay and prepare a move, or start planning a concrete exit.

3. End with:

- 3 pointed questions I should answer before I make my next big move.

Use direct, grounded language.

Job search strategy from my starting point

You are my personal Fork in the Road guide, a career guide expert for the next step in my career.

Goal: Help me choose a job search strategy that fits my situation.

Run this as a step by step interview, not one big questionnaire.

1. Ask me:

- Which of the three jobseeker types best fits me now (still employed and looking, happily employed but curious, not employed and looking)
- My time horizon for a move (urgent, within 6 to 12 months, exploratory)
- Any hard constraints (location, salary, caring responsibilities, health)
- How much risk I can realistically take

2. Then design a tailored strategy:

- 3 to 5 key moves I should focus on in the next 90 days
- What to do inside my current company if I am employed
- What to do outside (network, visibility, applications, recruiters)
- 2 common mistakes people in my situation make, and how I avoid them

Keep it sharp, prioritised and realistic for someone with a busy life.



WORKBOOK EXERCISE

ALIGNING YOUR WORK-VIEW AND LIFE-VIEW

Our career dreams as children hold symbolic truths about our values. What did you want to be when you were a child? What underlying values or desires were present in that dream?

Understanding your values and how they relate to your work is crucial. Aligning your "Workview" (what work means to you?/why do you work?) and "Lifeview" (your broader life philosophy/what matters most to me in how I live?) is then key when looking for a new role.

YOUR LIFE-VIEW

- What gives my life meaning beyond my job title
- What are the non-negotiables in my life right now (for example family, love, health, time, freedom, financial safety)
- How do I define happiness and fulfilment at this stage of my life
- What do I believe about the role of relationships, time and personal growth
- How much space do I want for friends, learning, rest and play
- What kind of person do I want the people close to me to experience

YOUR WORK-VIEW

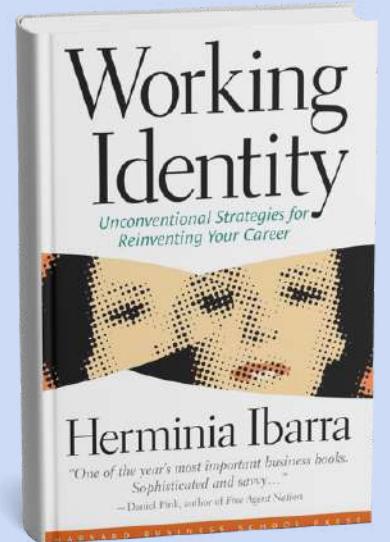
- What does "good work" mean to me today (for example, impact, learning, autonomy, recognition, security)
- Which values must be present in my work for it to feel right (for example growth, service, stability, creativity, fairness)
- How do I see the role of money, status and responsibility in my work
- What is "enough" for me, and where does "more" stop adding real value
- Who benefits from the work I do when it really goes well.
- What kind of change or progress do I want to help create
- What does success at work look like to me? What beliefs have I inherited about success or work? Whose definition of success am I following?

PUTTING IT TOGETHER FOR YOUR NEXT STEP

Take a few minutes to read back both columns and then answer:

- Where are my work-view and life-view strongly aligned
- Where do they pull in different directions (for example, the way I work today makes it hard to live my non-negotiables)
- What does this tell me about my current situation as a jobseeker
- What is one concrete implication for my next move? Something I clearly want to protect or change in any future role

FURTHER READING

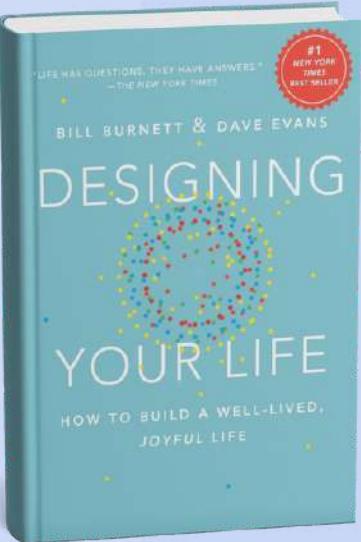


Go deeper on career reinvention:

Working Identity

Herminia Ibarra

How to reinvent your career through small experiments and new roles, instead of one big leap in your head.

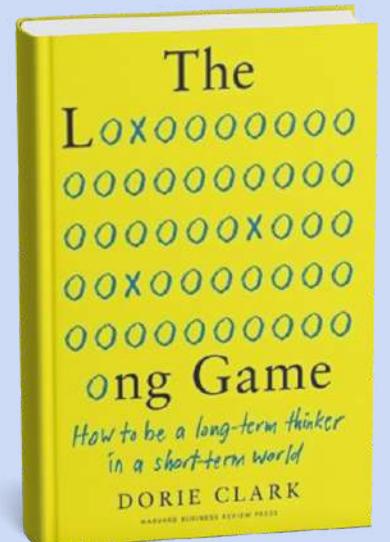


Redesign your current job:

Designing Your New Work Life

Bill Burnett & Dave Evans

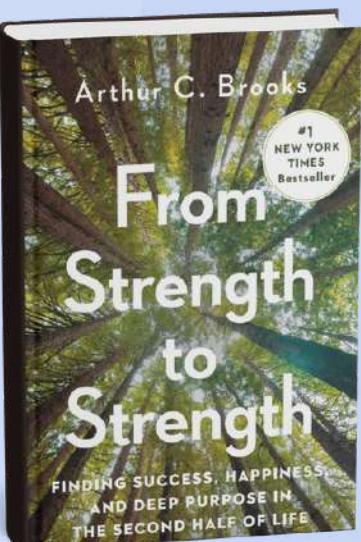
Practical tools to redesign your current job and workday so they fit your values, energy and life better.



Think beyond your next role: The Long Game

Dorie Clark

A guide to thinking and acting like a long-term strategist in your career, making choices today that pay off over the next decade.



Redefine success in your second half:

From Strength to Strength

Arthur C. Brooks

How to update your definition of success and design a more meaningful "second half" of your career and life, instead of just pushing for more of the same.



Prefer to listen

? Try a reflective walk with the "Disrupt Your Career podcast" with Claire Harbour and Antoine Tirard, and capture your insights in a career journaling app like Cody.



DEFINING YOUR STRATEGY

Defining your Job Search Strategy

Before starting on any job search, it is important to get clear in your mind what your strategy will be.

If you don't do that, you risk spreading yourself too thinly and leaving people in your network unclear on what you are looking for. This will diminish the chances that they will refer you. So, take the time upfront to define clearly what you are looking for to make your search efficient and effective. And consider this too: instead of looking for a job, look for work. A job is just one form of how work can be organized. Work can also come in the shape of an interim, short-term role, or consulting.

What opportunities would you consider?

The more granular you can be as to what job opportunities you would be open to, the better. If you have already done the pre-work of defining what you are looking for, you should be able to answer the seven questions below. If not, then take the time to think them through.

Which roles would you like and why?

Job title

Say you want a role in Finance or Marketing, it is worth thinking about the different job titles that you would look for. Manager vs Division Head, Internal Communications vs Marketing & Communications, for instance.

Different companies call the same role different things, so make a list of the various titles you think would fit the role you are looking for. Think about why you are interested in those specifically and the previous experience you can link to them – in other words, what has prepared you for such a role.

Team size

Do you want to manage a team? Do you want to be part of a team or are you fine with a standalone role? How big should the team be and do they need to be in the same location as you or can they be dispersed?

Budget / P&L responsibility

What kind of budget would you like to manage?

Level in the organization

How high do you want to be in the organization (CEO minus....) or does that not matter to you?

Travel

What percentage of time would you be willing to travel? How much time do you want to spend commuting on a daily basis?

Which industries would you like to be in?

Do you prefer to work in a B2B or B2C industry? For profit or not-for-profit? And why? This is especially important to verbalize when you want to switch industries. Try to also think along the whole value chain of that industry, you can often find interesting players up and down the value chain which you may have never heard of or considered. Lastly, think about the industry from the perspective of your purpose (if you have defined one) – can you stand behind what the company is doing / offering? Does it excite or inspire you?

Which companies would you like to work for and why?

Size

Do you want to work in a small, medium, or large company? Or, if you prefer start-ups, in which stage would it need to be? Seed, early growth, expansion, etc? Keep in mind that moving from big to small is easier than the other way around and that once you have moved from big to small, moving back to big can be a challenge.

Entity

Would you prefer to work in a headquarter or in a country/regional office? When working in headquarters, you often have a much broader perspective of the business, whereas in a local office you will get a more narrow but far more in-depth insight into the business.

Culture

What kind of company culture would suit you best? Culture is abstract and so hard to gauge from the outside, but you can look at elements that shape a culture. Some of those elements are:

- Speed: Fast-paced or one with long cycles (e.g. software vs construction)?
- Heritage: Traditional or modern (e.g. banking vs e-commerce)?
- Scope: A global versus a local player? Decision making: Centralized versus decentralized?
- Work location: Fully remote working or office based or somewhere in-between?
- Ownership structure: Publicly-listed, Family-owned, or Private Equity-backed?

What kind of business situation would you like to be in and why?

Startup, turnaround, accelerated growth, realignment, or sustaining success? Merger, acquisition, or spin off? Each of them requires a slightly different skillset and will have different demands, so it depends on what excites you.

What kind of ownership structure are you looking for?

Ownership shapes how organisations make decisions, set priorities, and define their culture. Are you energised by the pace and ambition of VC- or PE-backed environments, the stability of a listed company, or the long-term perspective of a family-owned or publicly-governed organisation? Think about where you have felt most aligned with how decisions were made, how success was measured, and the type of stakeholders you enjoy engaging with.

What kind of leader are you looking for?

This might seem a bit out there but it's important to have this in mind. We all know what kind of people we thrive under and what kind of people we don't. And, in a selection process, you are evaluating them as much as they are evaluating you. So think of your previous managers and which leadership styles work best for you.

What kind of team are you looking to join?

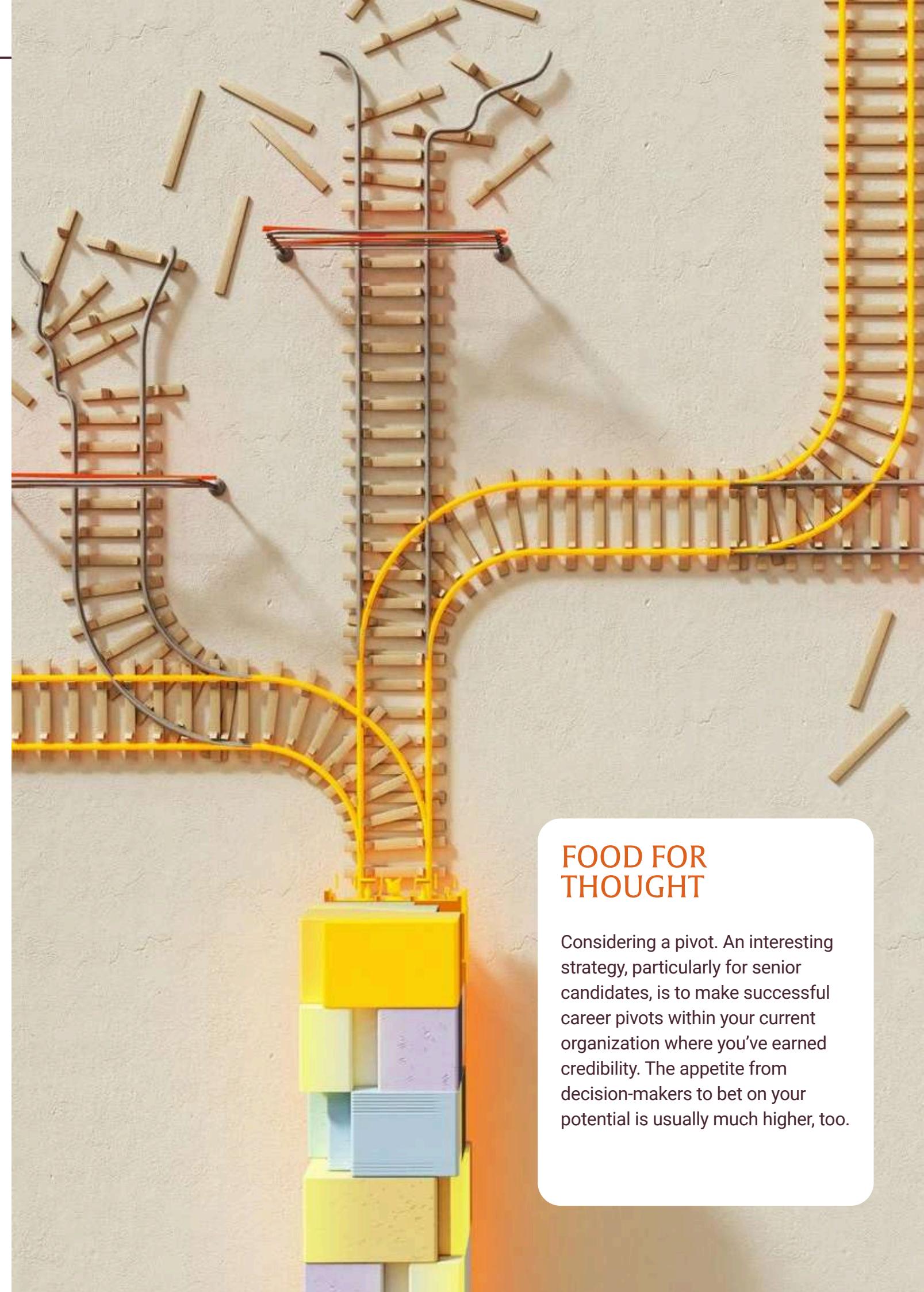
Beyond the leader, the team you step into can deeply influence your growth, impact, and day-to-day experience. Think about what kind of peer group enables you to do your best work. Do you thrive in a diverse, high-performing team where you can learn, be challenged, and stretch your professional positioning? Reflect on which team environments have brought out the best in you — and which have held you back.

What kind of compensation are you looking for?

What would your ideal base, bonus, LTI, and benefits package look like? What is your minimum requirement, in other words what overall package would you consider for meaningful and relevant work?

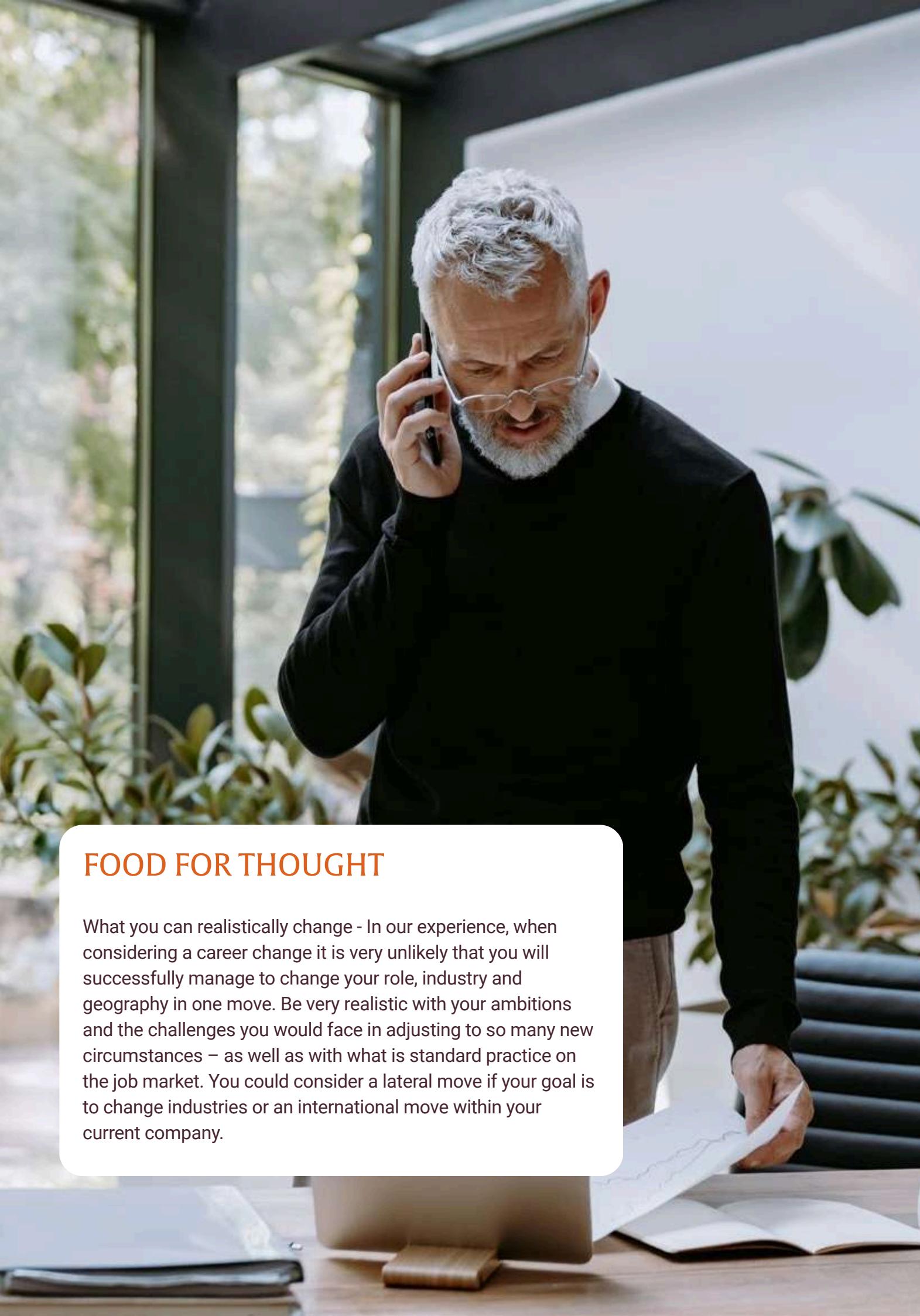
What kind of company, role, culture, etc. are a definite NO for you and why?

Knowing what you don't want helps narrow down the list, even if you are still in the process of figuring out what it is that you do want.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Considering a pivot. An interesting strategy, particularly for senior candidates, is to make successful career pivots within your current organization where you've earned credibility. The appetite from decision-makers to bet on your potential is usually much higher, too.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

What you can realistically change - In our experience, when considering a career change it is very unlikely that you will successfully manage to change your role, industry and geography in one move. Be very realistic with your ambitions and the challenges you would face in adjusting to so many new circumstances – as well as with what is standard practice on the job market. You could consider a lateral move if your goal is to change industries or an international move within your current company.

Which opportunities have priority?

You should have now clarified:

Your ideal role(s)

Your ideal industry(ies)

Your ideal company

Your ideal business situation

Your ideal boss

Your ideal compensation

What you don't want

These will be the goals in your job search. BUT.....experience tells us that the chances of getting 100% of what we want are not exactly 100%. Depending on how much you are changing - role, industry, geography - it can be more or less challenging. Changing one aspect is not that hard, changing 2 is a bit more challenging and changing all 3...well that takes real grit and determination!

The key is to set your priorities: the most important aspect(s) for you, the one(s) you are not willing to compromise on. And what is more of a “nice to have”? If this is not yet clear in your mind, we recommend to read “What color is your parachute?” by Richard N. Bolles to help you figure out what your priority list looks like. This will help you focus your search and ensure that you are not spreading yourself too thinly by going after everything at once. If you have given yourself a set amount of time to find a new job, you can then also stagger your job search.

For example, if you have given yourself 6 months to find a job, you can agree with yourself that you will spend the first 2 months focusing on your 1st priority. Then, if after 2 months you find you do not have sufficient traction, you can decide to expand your search to include 2nd priority positions and so forth.

Define your search in stages

1. Primary Search:

- Role:
- Industry / Companies:
- Location:

2. Secondary Search:

- Role:
- Industry / Companies:
- Location:

3. Tertiary Search:

- Role:
- Industry / Companies:
- Location:

When looking for vacancies or setting up job alerts, the key search criteria are the role (job title), industry and/or companies, and location. Unfortunately, job sites to date don't allow us to search on the basis of things like company culture, values, skills or compensation.

Although the best way to find new roles is still through NETWORKING and we will explore this in depth, setting up job alerts is always good. Even though it may not result in your ideal job, these alerts will give you a sense of what is going on in the market or in a particular company.

Even though you cannot search on job conditions, you should still have them front of mind. This information will come into play during networking conversations (to help you explain to someone what you are looking for) and during the interview process.



Consider your preferred conditions

1.
Business
situation

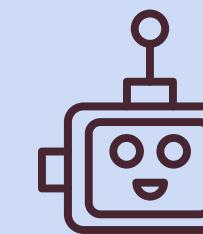
2.
Leadership
style

3.
Compensation

If you are someone who works better with structure and goals, you can also consider making a 'deal' with yourself on how much time you will spend each week on the job search and blocking time in your calendar.

Setting goals on the number of people you reach out to each week is also something to consider. Less feasible is committing to a number of applications each week, as this depends on the availability of vacancies.

Keep in mind though that finding a job can be a fulltime job! So, make sure you manage your time and your energy well in this process.



PROMPTS

These are ready-made prompts you can copy-paste into ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot or any other AI assistant to get personalised guidance for your next career step.

Clarify my ideal role, industry and company

You are my personal Fork in the Road guide, a career guide expert for the next step in my career. Run this as a step by step interview, not one big questionnaire.

Goal: Help me clarify my ideal ROLE(S), INDUSTRY(IES) and COMPANY(IES).

1. Ask me targeted questions about:
 - Roles I would like and why.
 - Job titles I am considering (and why they fit my experience).
 - Whether I want to lead a team, be part of a team, or work standalone and ideal team size.
 - The level I want in the organisation
 - How much travel and commuting I am willing to do.
 - Industries or sectors I am drawn to (B2B/B2C, for-profit/non-profit) and why.
 - Company size and type (start-up, scale-up, mid-size, large corporate).
 - Whether I prefer HQ, regional or local roles.
 - What attracts me in specific companies I already have in mind.

2. From my answers:
 - Summarise my ideal ROLE PROFILE in 5-7 bullets.
 - Summarise my ideal INDUSTRY / SECTOR profile in 3-5 bullets.
 - Summarise my ideal COMPANY profile in 3-5 bullets.

3. End with:
 - 3 short sentences I can use to explain to others what I am looking for (role, industry, company).

Keep it concrete, concise and aligned with what I say.

Define my preferred business situation, leader and conditions

You are my personal Fork in the Road guide, a career guide expert for the next step in my career. Run this as a step by step interview, not one big questionnaire.

Goal: Help me define the CONDITIONS under which I do my best work.

1. Ask me specific questions about:
 - What kind of business situation I want to be in (start-up, turnaround, accelerated growth, realignment, sustaining success, merger, acquisition, spin-off) and why.
 - What kind of leader / manager I thrive under (style, behaviours, what I need and what I cannot work with).
 - What compensation range I am looking for (base, bonus, long-term incentives, benefits) and what my true minimum is for meaningful work.
 - What kinds of company, role, culture, or situation are a definite NO for me – and why.

2. From my answers:
 - Summarise my preferred BUSINESS SITUATION in 3-5 bullets.
 - Summarise my ideal LEADER / MANAGER profile in 3-5 bullets.
 - Summarise my COMPENSATION expectations and non-negotiables.
 - Create a clear “DEFINITE NO” list (what I should not waste time on).

3. End with:
 - 3 non-negotiables I should keep front of mind when I evaluate opportunities.

Use clear, grounded language and be honest about the trade-offs.

Prioritise and stage my job search

You are my personal Fork in the Road guide, a career guide expert for the next step in my career. Run this as a step by step interview, not one big questionnaire.

Goal: Help me prioritise my search and define PRIMARY, SECONDARY and TERTIARY search targets.

1. Ask me:
 - Which aspects I am trying to change: role, industry, geography (one, two or all three).
 - My time horizon for finding a new role (for example 3, 6 or 12 months).
 - Which of my preferences are MUST-HAVES and which are NICE-TO-HAVES.
 - How much time per week I can realistically spend on my job search.
2. Based on this, help me define:
 - PRIMARY SEARCH (role, industries/companies, locations I will focus on first).
 - SECONDARY SEARCH (where I am willing to compromise next if needed).
 - TERTIARY SEARCH (last wave options if the market is tough).
3. Then:
 - Suggest how to “stage” my search over time (for example: first 2 months focus on primary, then widen).
 - Propose 3-5 concrete weekly actions (networking, outreach, applications, research) that fit my time budget.
4. End with:
 - A short summary of my search priorities in one paragraph I can keep next to my desk.

Keep the advice sharp, realistic and structured, so the plan is focused rather than spread too thin.



WORKBOOK EXERCISE

ALIGNING WHAT GIVES YOU JOY AND WHAT YOU ARE GOOD AT

Work should align with our nature, not just our skills. We may have an aptitude for something we don't love, or an interest in something we haven't practiced. We encourage separating "what I'm good at" from "what energizes me" and finding the sweet spot where these align to aim for it. We will use a matrix to identify areas to explore, develop, enjoy, or optimize. Let's take a look at each of our skills and place it into the appropriate quadrant based on your self-assessed level of skill and joy.





WORKBOOK EXERCISE

BARRIER IDENTIFICATION

This exercise is designed to help you understand and confront internal and external obstacles that may be preventing you from pursuing meaningful work. It also guides you to harness the power of reframing, which means shifting your perspective to view challenges as opportunities. For instance, instead of thinking, "I'm stuck in this job," consider, "What aspects of my role can I redesign to align better with my interests and strengths?"

Internal Barriers

I doubt my abilities because...

I fear changing my career because...

I avoid pursuing my passion because...

External Barriers

What do family, friends, or society expect me to do?

Are there financial or lifestyle constraints shaping my decisions?

Past Experiences

A time I failed or was criticized for doing something I cared about:

How that shaped my current hesitation:

Reframing the Narrative

What fear or belief can I begin to challenge?

What small step could I take to break the barrier I have identified?

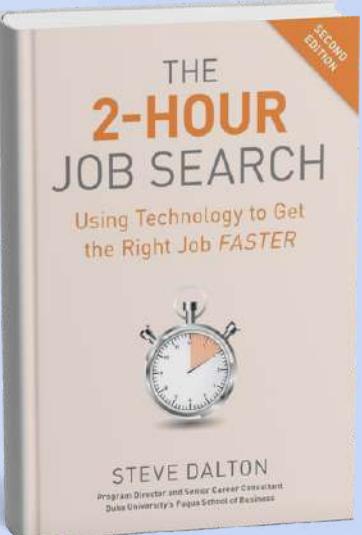
FURTHER READING



Structure your whole search: HBR Guide to Your Job Search

Harvard Business Review

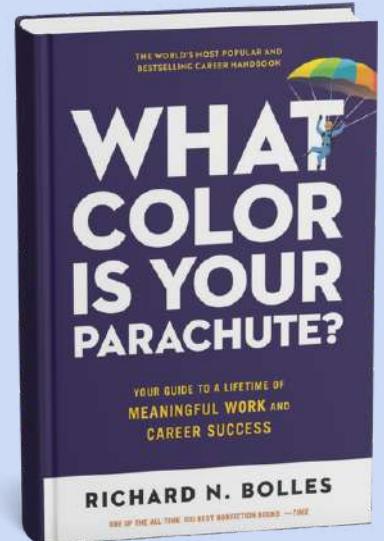
A very up-to-date, practical playbook on how to define what you want, structure your search, activate your network and position yourself as a candidate.



Turn strategy into concrete weekly actions: The 2-Hour Job Search

Steve Dalton (2020)

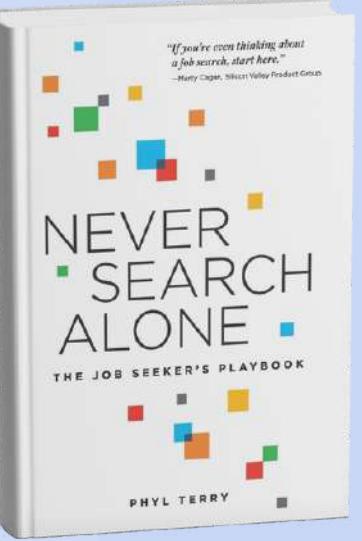
A science-based method to build and prioritise a target company list and run a focused, outreach-based job search instead of spraying applications.



Clarify what you want and your priority list: What Color Is Your Parachute?

Richard N. Bolles

The updated classic on job hunting and career change, with exercises to nail down your must-haves, nice-to-haves and realistic options in the market.



Make the process less lonely and more strategic: Never Search Alone: The Job Seeker's Playbook

Phyl Terry

A playbook for running a structured search with a "job search squad," focusing on accountability, peer support and smart use of tools and templates.



Prefer to listen ?

Try The Mel Robbins Podcast for research-backed mindset tools, habit frameworks, and expert insights on confidence, anxiety, motivation, and relationships, so you can stay steady and consistent while you navigate change.





YOUR WORK VIEW

What does “good work” mean to me today
(for example impact, learning, autonomy, recognition, security)

Which values must be present in my work for it to feel right
(for example growth, service, stability, creativity, fairness)

How do I see the role of money, status and responsibility in my work

What is “enough” for me, and where does “more” stop adding real value

What is “enough” for me, and where does “more” stop adding real value

Who benefits from the work I do when it really goes well.

What kind of change or progress do I want to help create

What does success at work look like to me? What beliefs have I inherited about success or work? Whose definition of success am I following?

DEFINING YOUR POSITIONING

Defining your Positioning

Finding a new job is all about presenting and selling yourself. A labor market is exactly that – a marketplace – and so we need to look at ourselves as a “product” or “service.”

Which of the needs that buyers (companies) have can I fulfill? What sets me apart from the others? Unless you are a born salesperson, the thought of selling yourself probably makes you feel slightly uncomfortable. If it's been a while since you've been in an interview process, you might feel a bit rusty. The keyword here is - preparation. The more you work on developing a clear and concise narrative around who you are and what you have to offer, the easier it will be.

What are your core skills and competencies?

We often use skills and competencies for the same bucket of ‘things we can do’ but they are not the same thing and it’s good to distinguish between them.

Skills are the specific learned abilities that you need to perform a given job well, sometimes also called technical or functional skills. Examples are accounting, coding, or knowledge of the semiconductor industry. Competencies, on the other hand, are your behaviors that lead you to be successful in a job. Examples of competencies are strategic thinking, the ability to cope with change, or relationship building. In short, skills are ‘what’ you do at work and competencies are ‘how’ you do your work.

Skills

Defining our skills is usually not so difficult. We know what we know. The key is, however, to identify those skills that you not only enjoy but are also transferable, the ones that are important in the new role you are seeking. If you have already identified the type of role(s) you want, take some time to look at the skills that are most often listed. This will give you an indication of what is considered a ‘must have’ in those roles.



Difference between skills & competencies

Skills are the specific learned abilities that you need to perform a given job well, sometimes also called technical or functional skills.

- Coding
- Accounting
- Market knowledge

Competencies are your behaviors that lead you to be successful in a job.

- Strategic Thinking
- Problem Solving
- Negotiating

- **Assessments:** If you have ever taken an assessment, privately or through work, go back and reread it. Most assessments will have an indication of strengths / preferred styles of working.

- **Personality tests:** There are a lot of personality tests freely available online. One of the more extensive tests is the 16 Personalities test, which is based on the Myers-Briggs model. The free version already provides a lot of valuable insights.

- **Your network:** Don't shy away from simply asking people you know what they feel are your key competencies! So ask your friends, partner and colleagues.

Competencies

We often struggle more when it comes to defining our competencies because they are more abstract, less measurable. If you need some structure to start thinking about your competencies, you can reflect on how you deal with the following:

1. Leadership / Teamwork
2. Communication
3. Adaptability Reliability
4. Motivation Integrity
5. Decision Making
6. Initiative Work
7. Standards Problem
8. Solving Stress
9. Tolerance Organizing



As you're defining your next step, ESCO offers a common European vocabulary to describe your skills, competences, and experience. It helps you express what you bring in a clear, standardised way and match more accurately with the right opportunities. Discover how your strengths align with the market, [visit ESCO](#).

If you still find it hard to come up with a few ideas, there are a few resources that you can tap into for help:

- **Performance reviews:** Take some time to go through your previous performance reviews. See if you can identify the competencies that are usually mentioned as your strengths or for which you get most positive feedback.

Which needs do your CORE skills & competencies fulfill?

Now that you have your list of skills and competencies, it's time to distil your core ones. They are what sets you apart from the rest, the unique combination of what you can do and how you work. To help define them, think of the times at work (or outside) where you felt very challenged or you felt at your best. What were the skills and/or competencies that made you thrive, made you successful? And what are the most common themes in the positive feedback you receive from others? What are you most recognized for at work - the thing that makes others come to you for advice or see you as the 'go-to' person?

Ideally, you want to end up with a list of between 3 and 5 core skills and competencies. At this point, we need to start making them as concrete as possible. Especially with competencies, we tend to be a bit fluffy and then we end up saying nothing at all really. And what is most important to a potential employer is which of their needs your skills and competencies can fulfil – in other words which problems you can solve for them. So think about phrasing them through the lens of a "buyer" – what would a company gain by bringing you in?

Most important to a potential employer is which of their needs can your skills and competencies fulfil – in other words which problems can you solve for them.

For example: you might have identified good leadership skills as one of your core competencies. This is great, but it says little about the kind of leader you are. Compare that to "I am an inclusive leader who focuses on enabling my team to be the best they can be." This is much more descriptive, it paints a clearer picture of how you operate.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Include as much of your equity as possible in your personal summary and don't forget to describe yourself on LinkedIn through the equity lens. When applying for roles, be specific about how your know-how equity matches the challenges the company is facing – mention your knowledge and experience of post-merger integrations, business transformation, culture change, leading successful turnarounds, leading a startup to scale up, to name just a few.

What is your equity?

Another important element of what makes you unique is what we call your equity and the more experienced you are the more weight hiring managers put on your equity. Your equity, as we see it, is the sum of your total know-how: industry expertise, organizational and business understanding, functional know-how, leadership experience, geographical exposure, languages, network and so on. All the wisdom you have gathered over the years.

Hiring someone from outside the company is always a risk and not every hiring manager is willing to bet on potential. So the more you know about a role, industry etc. the smaller that risk is for companies. It is therefore important to list out / summarize your equity through the lenses of the hiring managers of your preferred job targets.

Telling your story

STAR Stories

Just saying that you have a core skill or competency will often not be enough. In interviews and networking conversations, your audience will expect you to back up your statement with examples. The next step you should therefore take is to build a story around each skill and competency. The easiest way to do this is using the STAR method.

For each skill and competency, pick one concrete example in which you applied them at your best. Write out that situation using the following structure:

- **Situation:** Set the scene of what the situation was
- **Task:** Describe what your responsibility was in that situation
- **Action:** Explain what actions you took and why
- **Result:** Share what the result was of your actions

When you have written down your STAR examples, test them out on your partner or a friend. This will help you check if they are easy stories for you to tell and if they are easily understood.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

You can also work shortened versions of your STAR stories into your LinkedIn profile. It helps others to get a more in-depth understanding of your profile.

Elevator pitch

An elevator pitch is normally something you develop when you are trying to sell an idea, service, or product. But in a job search, you are essentially trying to sell yourself so it's worth having your own elevator pitch. The easier you get at telling people who you are and what you are best at, the easier networking and interviews will become.

Key components of a good elevator pitch

Brief

Try to keep it under 30 seconds.

Easy to understand

Don't use a lot of specific industry/functional jargon, company acronyms etc. Keep it simple.

Compelling

It needs to make your audience want to hear more, to pique their interest. So more storytelling, less rattling off a list of your accomplishments.

Relevant

It needs to clearly communicate who you are and what you are looking for.

Differentiated

It needs to reflect YOU, clearly set you apart from others.

Authentic

You need to believe in what you are saying, otherwise your audience won't.

Your elevator pitch should contain certain key information. You can play with the structure, but when someone you have spoken to walks away, he or she should walk away knowing these things:

Who you are

It's not easy, but try to condense who you are into at most one or two sentences. Look, for example, at your value proposition on your CV, this is often a good start.

What you do

One or two sentences on what you do, but try to word it around goals and needs that companies typically have (drive business performance, sustainable growth, etc.) rather than function (CFO).

Who you serve

One or two sentences on the industries or type of companies that you have worked for or want to work for. If possible, try to work in why you like those industries. Play on passion rather than experience alone. See if you can work in who are normally your 'clients' – C-Suite? Boardroom? Regional Management?

What makes you different

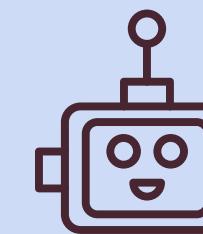
How do you stand out from the crowd? This is where your core competencies, skills and know-how equity come in.

The hook

What do you want to get from your audience? The elevator pitch should be the start of a conversation, so how can you engage with your audience to start that conversation? Think of a grabbing question, one that will make them want to start sharing. In the job search setting, it's usually about getting information from someone – a new contact, information on a vacancy or a company – but you can't make that your first question.

The first one needs to be about them, to give them the feeling that you are genuinely interested in them rather than just looking for what they can do for you. You can think about making two different hooks, based on the situation in which you would use them – interview or networking. In Annex 4, you will find an elevator pitch worksheet.

The key is to practice your STAR examples and elevator pitch – the more you practice, the more natural and authentic they will come across. You can practice in front of a mirror, your friends or record yourself with your phone. It's awkward at first but you will get used to it.



PROMPTS

These are ready-made prompts you can copy-paste into ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot or any other AI assistant to get personalised guidance for your next career step.

Clarify my core skills and competencies

You are my personal Fork in the Road guide, a career guide expert for the next step in my career. Run this as a step by step interview, not one big questionnaire.

Goal: Help me identify my core SKILLS and COMPETENCIES and express them in clear employer language.

1. Ask me:
 - What roles I am targeting now.
 - Which tasks I am best at and enjoy most.
 - Examples of projects where I felt proud of my contribution.
 - Any feedback from reviews, assessments or colleagues about how I work.
2. From my answers:
 - Separate SKILLS (what I do) from COMPETENCIES (how I do it).
 - Propose 3 to 5 CORE skills and 3 to 5 CORE competencies.
 - Rewrite each one in buyer language that answers: "Which problem does this help a company solve"
3. End with:
 - A short list of my core skills and competencies that I can use on my CV and LinkedIn.

Be concrete, specific and avoid vague words like "strong" or "good".

Map my equity for target roles

You are my personal Fork in the Road guide, a career guide expert for the next step in my career. Run this as a step by step interview, not one big questionnaire.

Goal: Help me map my EQUITY, the total know how I bring to a new employer.

1. Ask me focused questions about:
 - Industries and business models I know well.
 - Functional expertise and leadership experience I have built.
 - Types of transformations I have led or lived through.
 - Geographies, cultures and languages I have worked with.
 - The level of stakeholders I usually work with.
2. Then:
 - Summarise my equity in 6 to 10 bullets grouped by theme (industry, function, leadership, geography, network).
 - Highlight which elements are most valuable for the roles and companies I am targeting.
 - Suggest one or two sentences that describe my equity in a way that reduces risk for a hiring manager.
3. End with:
 - A short equity paragraph I can use in my LinkedIn about section and personal summary.

Keep the language business focused and outcome oriented.

Create STAR stories and a sharp elevator pitch

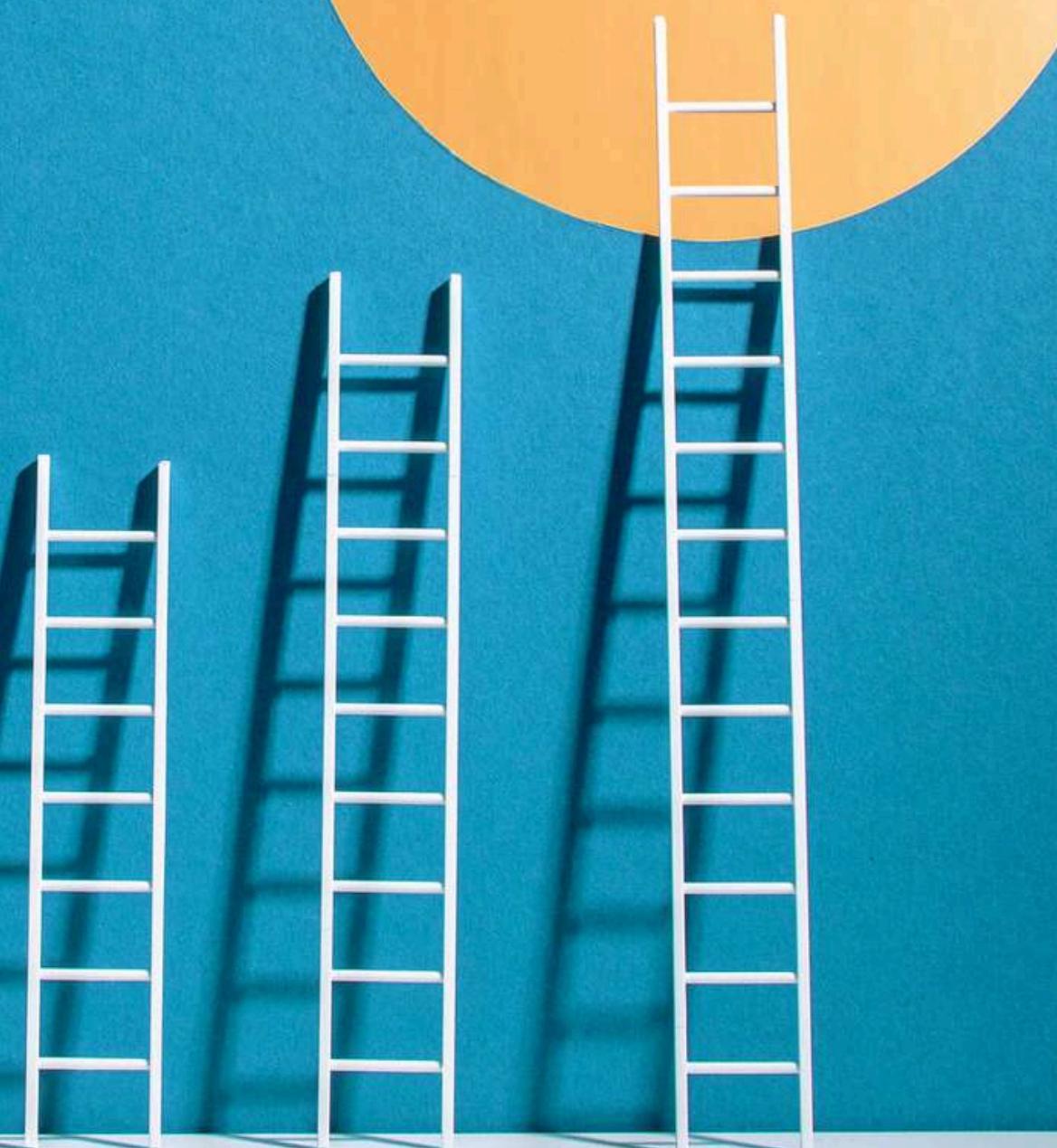
You are my personal Fork in the Road guide, a career guide expert for the next step in my career. Run this as a step by step interview, not one big questionnaire.

Goal: Turn my positioning into STAR stories and a clear elevator pitch.

1. Ask me to share 3 to 5 specific achievements that relate to my core skills, competencies and equity.
2. For each achievement, help me build a STAR story:
 - Situation
 - Task
 - Action
 - Result, with numbers or concrete outcomes where possible
3. Then create a 30 second elevator pitch that covers:
 - Who I am and what I do best
 - The type of companies or situations I am best suited for
 - What makes me different, based on my core skills, competencies and equity
 - A simple hook or question I can use to start a conversation

Give me the STAR stories in bullet form and the elevator pitch as one short paragraph I can practice.

WORKBOOK EXCERCISE



COMPETENCIES

Personal values and character

- Energy
- Integrity
- Loyalty
- Perseverance
- Discipline
- Ambition
- Determination
- Courage
- Independence
- Showing initiative
- Stress resistance
- Sociability
- Assertiveness

Leadership and people management

- Leadership
- Group-oriented leadership
- People-driven management
- Coaching
- Motivating
- Delegating
- Managing conflict
- Confronting
- Entrepreneurship

Thinking and analysis

- Problem analysis
- Situational awareness
- Organizational sensitivity
- Creative thinking
- Critical thinking
- Judgement
- Conceptual thinking
- Analytical skills
- Financial awareness
- Impression Accuracy
- Understanding of the environment
- Tactical behavior
- Vision
- Anticipating
- Decisiveness

Working style and execution

- Results-oriented way of working
- Organizing
- Planning and organizing
- Attention to detail
- Adaptability
- Flexibility
- Monitoring progress
- Acting innovatively

Communication and interpersonal skills

- Interviewing
- Communication skills (verbal)
- Communication skills (written)
- Customer-oriented
- Cooperation
- Networking
- Responding flexibly
- Responding sensitively
- Presenting
- Listening
- Persuasiveness
- Negotiating

Learning and self-development

- Independent learning
- Ability to learn
- Self-development
- Self-knowledge

WORKBOOK EXCERCISE



PREPARE YOUR ELEVATOR PITCH

Preparing an “Elevator Pitch” helps you clarify your positioning and personal brand for the role you are pursuing. By understanding and articulating your unique skills, competencies, and value, you can confidently present yourself as the best candidate.

Who I am:

Hi, I'm [Your Name], a [your professional identity or role] with over [X years] of experience in [types of organizations or industries] [achieve specific outcomes or transformations].

What I do (based on value creation):

I specialize in [key area of expertise], turning [describe a challenge or input] into [specific outcomes or results]. My work often centers on [example of strategic or valuable projects you lead].

Who I serve (industries, clients):

I've primarily worked with [industry or client type], but I've also partnered with [optional: adjacent industries or emerging sectors]

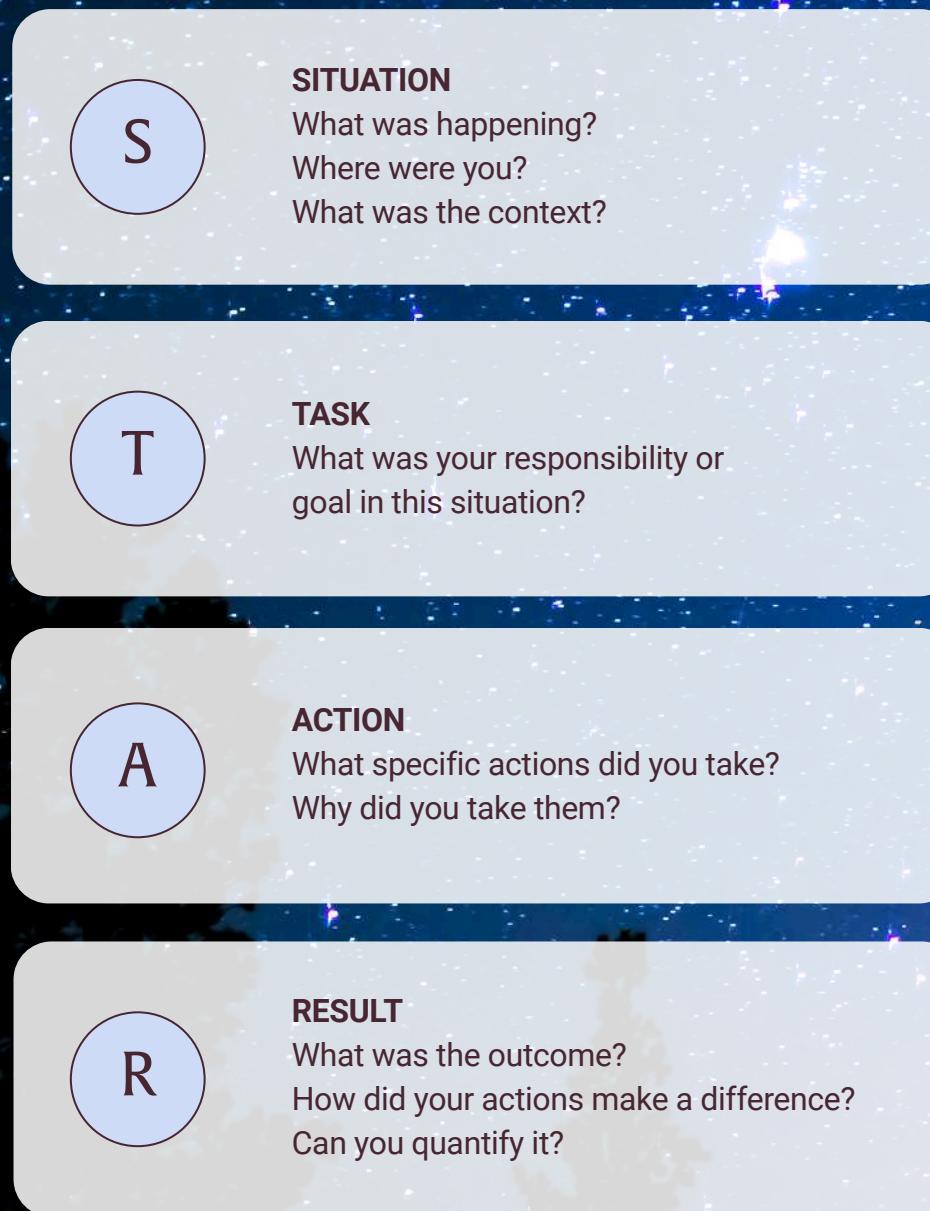
What makes me different:

I bring a blend of [two or more qualities or capabilities you combine]. I've [summary of achievements or scope of work], and I'm known for [how your work stands out or delivers impact].

My conversation hook (what I ask or share):

I'm currently exploring [your career transition, goal, or area of curiosity], and I'd love to hear how [something specific about their role, team, or company] is evolving—especially around [topic, trend, or challenge of mutual interest].

WORKBOOK EXERCISE



CREATING A STAR STORY

Practice turning one skill or competency into a compelling story that demonstrates your value.

Pick one core skill or competency you want to highlight.

Example: Leadership, problem-solving, communication, teamwork, analytical thinking.

Identify a Concrete Example.

Think of one situation where you applied this skill effectively. The example can come from: Work experience, Volunteering, School or projects, Personal experiences

Structure your story using the four STAR components and the prompt questions in the table below.
Write full sentences and aim for 1–2 minutes when spoken aloud.

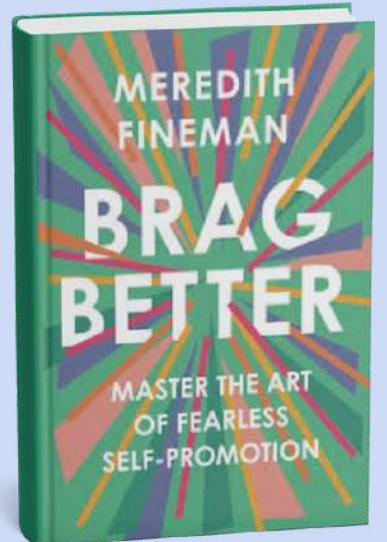
Reflect:

- Did this story clearly demonstrate the skill?
- Could the result be stronger or more specific?
- How confident do you feel sharing this story in an interview?

Practice Telling Your Story.

Share your STAR story with a friend, mentor, or partner. Get feedback on clarity, engagement, and how well it showcases your skill.

FURTHER READING

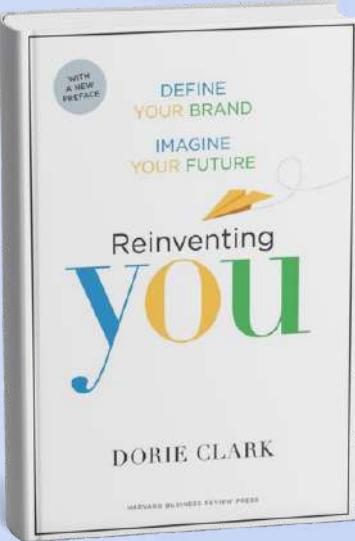


Turn your brand into visibility:

Brag Better

Meredith Fineman

A very practical playbook for “qualified quiet” professionals on how to talk about achievements without cringing, perfect for STAR stories and elevator pitches.

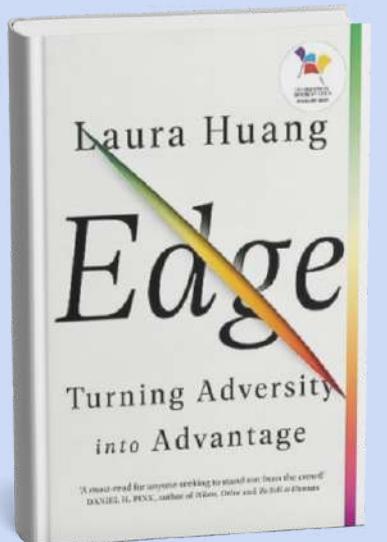


Define your brand and value:

Reinventing You

Dorie Clark

Step-by-step guide to assessing your unique strengths, developing a compelling personal brand and making sure others actually see the contribution you can make.

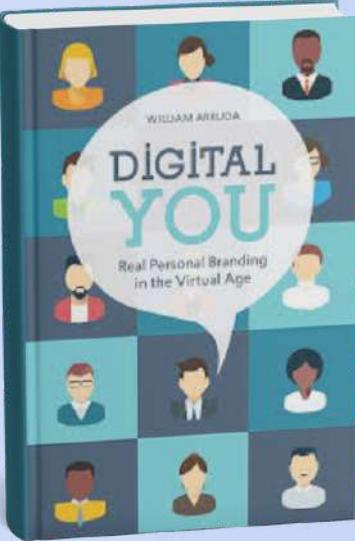


Turn perceived weaknesses into an advantage: Edge

Edge

Laura Huang

Shows how to build a real professional “edge” by understanding how others see you, highlighting your strengths, and turning constraints or flaws into assets that make you stand out.



Build your online positioning:

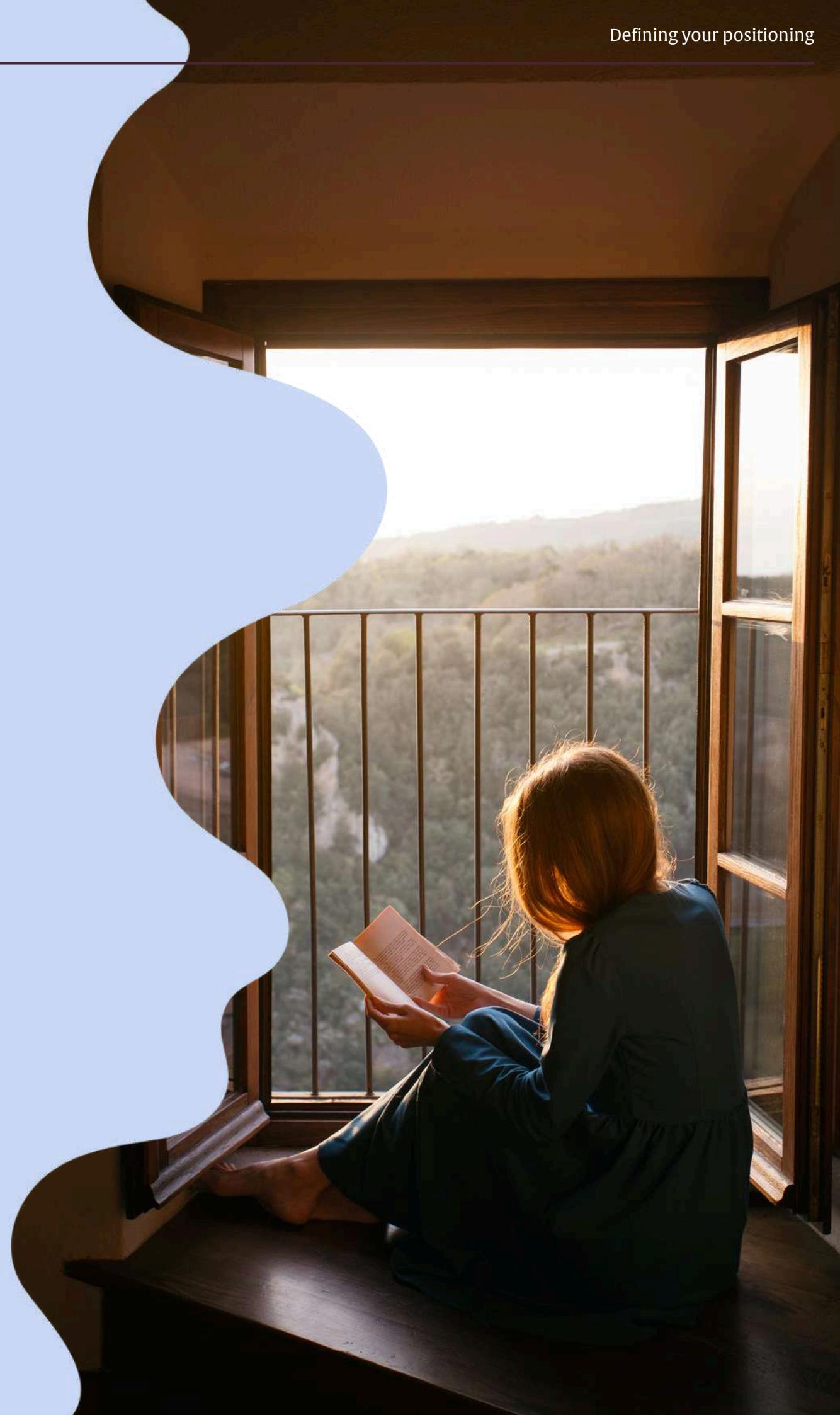
Digital You

William Arruda

Focuses on translating your real-world strengths into a clear, consistent digital presence (especially LinkedIn), treating personal branding as a serious career strategy.



Prefer to listen? The CliftonStrengths Podcast (Gallup) helps you identify your top strengths and apply them in real work and career situations.



STRENGTHENING YOUR PERSONAL BRAND

What They Say About You When You Are Not There

In this market, very few moves start with someone clicking Apply and an ATS doing the rest.

They usually start earlier, in conversations you do not see: a hiring manager debriefing with a recruiter, a founder asking their network for names, an ex-colleague mentioning you to their new boss, a client recommending you after a project.

A role opens up, a team needs a different kind of leadership, an investor wants someone who can steady the ship. Names come up, and each name arrives with a short line: "She is the one who can walk into a messy situation and calm it down."

"He is sharp, steady, and people follow him when things get tough."

That one line is your personal brand in action. It is the shortcut people use when they decide whether to put you on a shortlist, make an introduction, or quietly move on.

You have already done the rational part of your search. You know what you want and which kinds of opportunities you would consider. This chapter looks at the less visible side: what your name actually evokes in the rooms, calls and chats where decisions start.

From CV facts to a feeling

CVs and profiles carry facts. In a classic application, your CV is often the first thing someone sees. But even then, they are scanning it for signals that create a feeling, not reading it like a legal document.

In other cases, the feeling comes first. When a recruiter approaches you, when a client recommends you, or when your name comes in through a referral, someone has already said a line about you. A hiring manager has checked your LinkedIn. Your current company or role comes with a certain reputation. The CV then confirms, sharpens, or contradicts that early impression.





Either way, the decision maker is trying to answer three questions:

- Can this person handle the work
- Will they add something distinctive here
- How much risk do we take by backing them

If your name and your story point in a clear direction, those questions feel easier. If what they see and hear is vague or outdated, they hesitate. In an employer's market, that hesitation is often enough to move on.

When the market is stuck on an old version of you

We often see people who are ready for a next step, but the market is still working with an earlier chapter of their story. You may recognise this:

- You have started to shape strategy, but are still introduced as "our operational rock."
- You can operate beyond your current industry, but all visible examples freeze you in that space.
- You aim for roles that set direction, while your reputation is built on delivery and firefighting.

Nobody is doing this on purpose. People use the most obvious story they have about you. In a warmer market you might still be spotted despite this. In a tighter one, that gap between who you are now and how others see you becomes expensive.

Treat your reputation like an asset

You cannot script what others say about you everywhere. But you are not a bystander. Over time, your brand is shaped by the patterns people see:

The kinds of problems your name is attached to

- How you behave when a project goes sideways
- The topics you speak about with energy, online and offline
- The way you show up in interviews, pitches, boardrooms and team meetings
- The trace you leave behind with colleagues, clients, suppliers, investors

When those patterns point in one direction, people know what to do with you. When they are scattered, you become interesting but hard to place.

Seeing your reputation as a career asset does not mean inventing a new persona. It means deciding which parts of you need to move into the foreground for this next phase, and which can sit in the background.

That is where the XYZ lenses come in. They give you simple language for three things that already exist: the way you create value, what matters to you, and how you land with others. Once you see those more clearly, you can start to close the gap between the opportunities you are aiming for and the way the market currently reads you.

Your X, Y and Z Factors

Before starting on any job search, it is important to get clear in your mind what your strategy will be.

Up to now you have clarified what you want, defined your search strategy and started to shape your positioning in the market. This next step goes one level deeper.

Your personal brand is simply your reputation. It is the consistent experience people have of you: what you do, how you do it, and the feeling you leave behind. When that experience is clear and consistent, it opens doors. When it is fuzzy or inconsistent, it creates doubt, especially in a tight market.

We use three simple lenses:

- X Factor – your super skills, the way you create value
- Y Factor – your values, passions and purpose
- Z Factor – how you show up in the room and online



Your X Factor – super skills that create value

People with strong brands know what they are exceptionally good at. Your X Factor is the small set of strengths that show up again and again when you are at your best – the answer to: “In what situations do I consistently create disproportionate value?”

Use three simple steps:

Look back at your career and note, without editing:

- What others most often praise you for
- Roles you naturally pick up in teams
- Projects that worked particularly well and why
- Moments where you really made a difference

Write down skills, behaviours and patterns.

Distil – cluster into 3–5 super skills

Read your notes and group recurring themes. Give each cluster a short label that feels like you, for example “Make the complex simple” or “Calm crisis problem solver”. Aim for three to five super skills.

Validate – reality-check with others

Ask 5–10 people from different circles:

“When you think of me at my best at work, which strengths or qualities stand out?”

Compare their answers with your list and refine your X Factor so it reflects both your view and theirs. You will use this later in your CV, LinkedIn, elevator pitch and STAR stories.

Your Y Factor – values, passions and purpose

Your strategy and positioning answer what you want. Your Y Factor explains why it matters.

When your work aligns with your values and passions, you have energy and direction.

Step 1 – name your top values

Look at your life and career and ask:

- When did I feel proud, or very frustrated, and what value was touched?
- Which qualities do I admire most in people I look up to?

From this, choose five core values in your own words (for example: fairness, growth, independence, creativity, contribution). For each one, write what it means for you and rate, on a scale of 1–5, how much you live it today.

Step 2 – identify passion themes

Passions are the activities and problems that give you energy. Ask:

- What could I talk about for hours?
- Which topics keep surfacing in what I read or listen to?
- Which tasks make time fly at work?

Group your answers into two or three themes, such as: developing people, building from scratch, making complex things understandable, working between business and society.

Step 3 – draft a purpose statement

Combine values and passions into a simple working sentence, for example:

“I help [type of people or organisations] to [what you help them achieve] in a way that honours [your key values].”

It does not need to be perfect. It is a compass for choosing roles, employers and projects.

Your Z Factor – presence and visibility

You can have a strong X and Y Factor, but if your presence does not match them, people will not see your value. Your Z Factor is how your brand shows up in daily behaviour and online.

Think of three layers:

Professional presence in the room

- First impressions: greeting, eye contact, body language
- Communication: clarity of ideas, quality of listening, how you handle disagreement
- Reliability: being prepared, on time, and following through

Reputation over time

- Are you known as someone who delivers and keeps confidences?
- Does your name come up when opportunities appear?

Online presence

- Do your LinkedIn, CV and other profiles tell a consistent story about your X and Y Factors?
- Are there posts or photos that no longer fit who you are professionally?

You do not need to become louder or more extrovert. The goal is that how you show up supports your brand instead of quietly undermining it.

From Profile to Proof

When your name starts doing the heavy lifting

Once you have language for your X, Y and Z Factors, nothing dramatic changes overnight. Roles still take time to explore. Processes are still sometimes slow or opaque.

What does change is how you move through it all. You stop showing up as a list of jobs and dates, and start showing up as a clear story: this is what I am good at, this is what I care about, and this is what it is like to work with me. In any market, that clarity is a signal.

How you choose your battles

A clear X Factor makes you more honest about where you actually create value. When a recruiter calls, you are not only asking whether the role is bigger or sounds good on LinkedIn. You are listening for something else: does this really need what I do best, or just a generic version of my CV.

That shift matters. If you say yes to every vaguely relevant role, you spread your time and energy thin. It is easy to end up chasing options that were never a real fit, or stepping into a job that looks like progress but underuses the strengths you actually want to grow.

Your Y Factor adds a quiet filter. It brings your values and motives into the decision. You look at the kind of work and context you are attaching your name to. You can still make trade offs, but you are clearer about what is non negotiable for you and what is flexible.

How you land in the first five minutes.

Your Z Factor shows up the moment you enter a conversation: a first call with a headhunter, an interview with a panel, a coffee with a founder or investor.

They are not only listening to your answers. They are also asking themselves: what will it feel like to have this person around the table when things are complex or uncertain

If your X, Y and Z are aligned, there is less friction in that first impression. The person they meet matches the person they saw on paper. The way you talk about your work connects to the problems they are actually trying to solve. Your presence fits the kind of role they have in mind.

That coherence builds trust. It makes it easier for people to picture you in the role, not just on the shortlist.

How your story travels without you

Once you are clearer on your XYZ, you become easier to talk about. Recruiters can position you without falling back on “strong all round profile.” Ex colleagues know which roles belong in your inbox and which do not. A former boss can introduce you with a line that actually helps: “If you need someone who can stabilise a business and rebuild trust in the team, talk to them.”

That is your brand working in the background.

It is not about being loud or famous. Some of the strongest personal brands move almost entirely through private conversations and trusted networks. The common thread is that people can explain, in a sentence or two, what you stand for and where you fit.

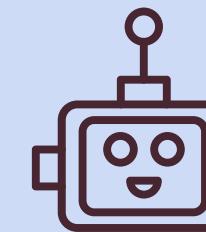
Not a performance, a clearer signal

Personal branding often sounds like acting. As if you now need to play a role, stay on message and worry about optics. That is not what your XYZ is for.

The point is to stop underselling yourself by being vague, and to stop letting the market work with an outdated version of you. It is about sending a clearer, more accurate signal so people can make better decisions about you.

Your X Factor will show up in different forms as you move. Your Y Factor will guide choices in good times and hard ones. Your Z Factor will keep evolving as you grow. Your brand is not a fixed label. It is a living pattern you keep refining.

You still have to do the work. But when your name comes up in a conversation, in an inbox or on a shortlist, people will have a sharper sense of who you are and why you might be exactly what they need next.



PROMPTS

These are ready-made prompts you can copy-paste into ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot or any other AI assistant to get personalised guidance for your next career step.

Audit my current reputation (what they say now)

You are my personal Fork in the Road guide, a career guide expert for the next step in my career.

Goal: Help me understand my current reputation – the one-liner people probably use when they talk about me in rooms where I am not present.

Run this as a step by step interview, not one big questionnaire. Ask me about:

- How people typically introduce me today (ex-colleagues, managers, clients, recruiters).
- Recent feedback on my strengths, style and “role” in teams.
- The last 3-5 projects where my name was attached to a result.
- What my LinkedIn headline and About section say today.

From my answers, synthesise:

- One short sentence that captures “what they likely say about me now”.
- 5 bullets that describe my current X (super skills), Y (values/energy) and Z (presence) as others probably see them.
- 5 concrete risks or limits of this current brand for the roles and level I want next.

End with a clear “Old story vs Emerging story” overview: what is essential and should stay, what should move to the background, and what is missing that needs to be added.

Turn my XYZ into a signature personal brand story

You are my personal Fork in the Road guide, a career guide expert for the next step in my career.

Goal: Turn my X, Y and Z Factors into a clear, memorable personal brand story that others can easily repeat.

Run this as a step by step interview, not one big questionnaire. Ask me for:

- My X Factor (3-5 super skills) with 1-2 short examples.
- My Y Factor (top values, passion themes, purpose sentence).
- My Z Factor (how people experience me in high-stakes moments and day-to-day).
- The specific roles and types of organisations I want to be considered for.

Use this to create:

- One core brand sentence someone could use when recommending me (“If you need someone who..., talk to them”).
- A short narrative (5-7 sentences) that connects my X, Y and Z to the problems those target roles need to solve.
- 3 concrete STAR-style mini stories that prove my brand (one for X, one for Y, one for Z).

Finish with 5 “do / don’t” guidelines for me, so my CV, LinkedIn and interview answers all reinforce this same personal brand story.

Turn my personal brand into a 60-day visibility & reputation plan

You are my personal Fork in the Road guide, a career guide expert for the next step in my career.

Goal: Help me treat my personal brand as a career asset and make my XYZ story travel in the right circles over the next 60 days.

Run this as a step by step interview, not one big questionnaire. Ask me about:

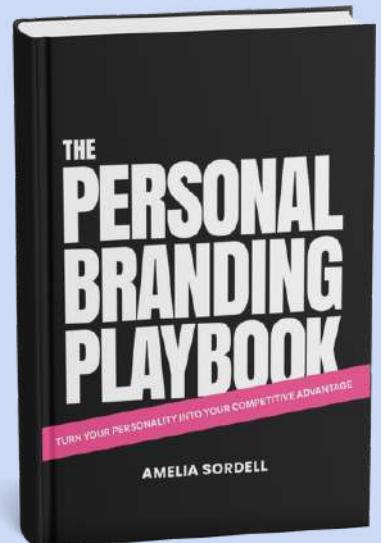
- The key decision-makers and influencers for the roles I want (for example: specific recruiters, CHROs, founders, investors, ex-bosses).
- who already understands my updated brand and who is still working with an older version of me.
- Where I am currently visible (LinkedIn, events, internal meetings, client work, content, referrals).
- How much time and energy I can realistically invest per week.
-

Based on my answers, design:

- A focused 60-day “reputation plan” with concrete actions per week (conversations, intros, posts, small signals) to seed my updated XYZ brand.
- 3-4 example outreach messages or conversation openers that naturally communicate my brand without sounding scripted.
- 10 everyday behaviours that strengthen my Z Factor in calls, meetings and follow-ups so people experience the brand I claim.

End with a simple weekly scorecard (for example: key people reached, quality of conversations, signs my updated story is being repeated) so I can see whether my personal brand is starting to do more of the heavy lifting.

FURTHER READING

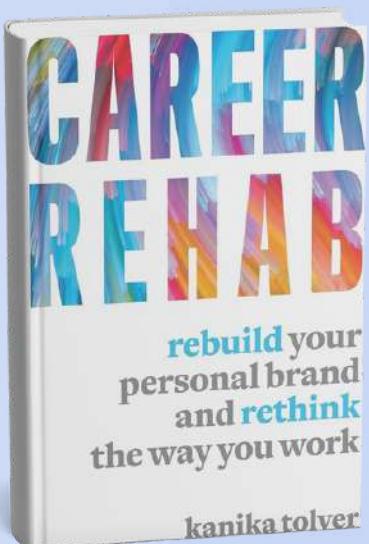


Clarify and amplify your professional brand:

The Personal Branding Playbook

Amelia Sordell

A practical guide to turning your personality, story and content into a clear, visible brand that pulls the right work toward you.

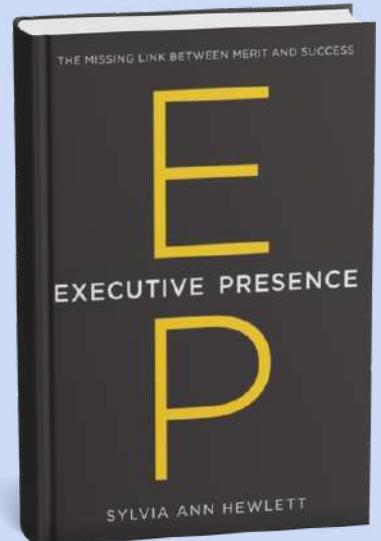


Rebuild your story for a new chapter:

Career Rehab

Kanika Tolver

Shows you how to "renovate" an outdated professional identity and reposition yourself for more meaningful, future-proof roles.

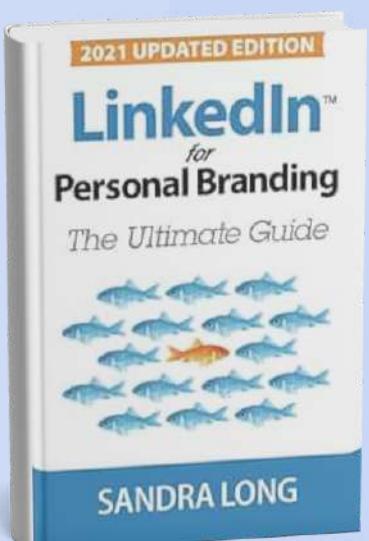


Upgrade how you show up as a leader:

Executive Presence 2.0

Sylvia Ann Hewlett

Explores the mix of gravitas, communication and authenticity that shapes your leadership brand in rooms, calls and crises.

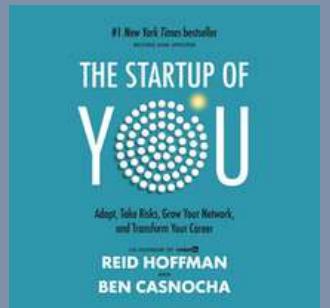


Make your online footprint work for you:

LinkedIn for Personal Branding

Sandra Long

Step-by-step advice to align your profile, content and activity so your LinkedIn presence matches the personal brand you want.



Prefer to listen ? Try The Startup of You podcast with Reid Hoffman and Ben Casnocha for smart, practical ideas on building and leveraging your network as a long-term career asset.

WORKBOOK EXERCISE



Be a Keeper, not a Sleeper

Personal branding is about standing out while being yourself—your best self. You need to step up to stand out. Let's investigate the ways to help you be a keeper, not a sleeper.

How will you tell your story? What impact will your presence make before you even say a word? How will you make sure that you're memorable? How will you remain yourself while putting your best foot forward? How will you prepare to pursue the opportunities that align with your road map? What will you do to create a network that will open those doors to allow you to powerfully introduce yourself and stand out during an interview? Telling your story goes beyond what you say. What you do says a lot about you as well. Remember, first impressions last. Don't let something as small as professional attire or body language block all your roads before you've even said a word.

Let's assess where you are right now. Choose your response. There is no right or wrong answer.

How comfortable are you with ...?	(1: Not at all				5: Very)
Being yourself in all situations?	1	2	3	4	5
Easily and openly expressing your ideas/opinions in a group conversation?	1	2	3	4	5
Knowing how to dress appropriately for each setting and event you attend?	1	2	3	4	5
Speaking before a group of people?	1	2	3	4	5
Making eye contact with people you have just met?	1	2	3	4	5
Introducing people in formal settings?	1	2	3	4	5
Starting conversations with people you don't know well?	1	2	3	4	5
Disagreeing with someone else in a way that doesn't cause conflict or angst?	1	2	3	4	5
Apologizing when you're wrong so that the other person accepts it?	1	2	3	4	5
Accepting responsibility when your efforts fall short?	1	2	3	4	5

How consistent are you at...?	(1: Not at all		5: Very)		
Following up and delivering on promises?	1	2	3	4	5
Being prompt for appointments, deadlines, due dates, class, dinner, meetings?	1	2	3	4	5
Doing what you say you will do, when you say you will do it, at the quality to which you commit?	1	2	3	4	5
Keeping track of details, calendar events and commitments?	1	2	3	4	5
Keeping confidences?	1	2	3	4	5
Not repeating, encouraging or engaging in gossip?	1	2	3	4	5
Conveying positivity in your interactions?	1	2	3	4	5
Entering a room with confidence?	1	2	3	4	5

How consistent are you at...? (1: Never / 5: All the time)

Preparing your thoughts in advance of a discussion?	1	2	3	4	5
Practicing how you will articulate your thoughts? Writing your goals?	1	2	3	4	5
Evaluating your goals?	1	2	3	4	5
Seeking out a mentor or coach as a sounding board?	1	2	3	4	5
Being aware of your body language?	1	2	3	4	5

Distil

Highlight areas for improvement and focus on necessary changes.

- Select two items that are most in need of improvement and that you believe will have the most impact on your life and opportunities.
- Write them in column one of the table below. Next to them, write a description of how each will be different when you have mastered them.
- Next to that, write three practice opportunities where you will use these throughout the next month.

Improvement item	Description of desired outcome	3 Practice opportunities
------------------	--------------------------------	--------------------------

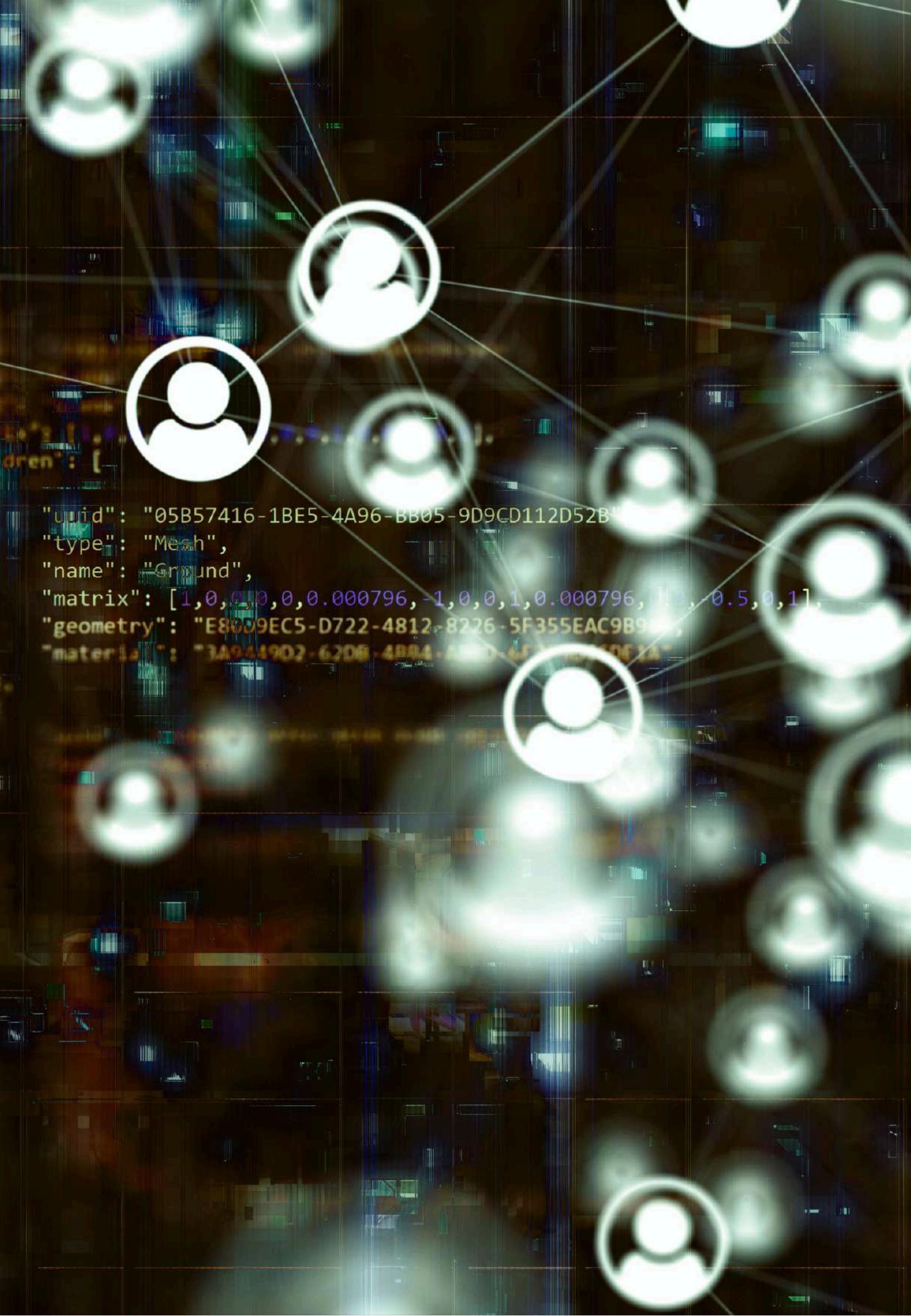
1.
2.
3.

Validate: 30 days result

Do you...?	(1: Not at all		5: Absolutely)		
Have an email address that projects a professional image?	1	2	3	4	5
Re-read email before you hit "send?"	1	2	3	4	5
Have social media that you would show to your prospective employer, manager or parents?	1	2	3	4	5
Have a voicemail greeting that conveys your best self?	1	2	3	4	5
Take notes when making commitments, listening in meetings or gathering details?	1	2	3	4	5
Have a great handshake?	1	2	3	4	5
Have a professional and memorable self-introduction?	1	2	3	4	5
Focus on your grooming and professional appearance?	1	2	3	4	5

Validate: 30 days result

LEVERAGING YOUR NETWORK



Leveraging your network

The most effective way to find a job is through networking. Here's why: The majority of jobs (4 out of 5) are not actually advertised.

Around 80-90% of job seekers make their applications following the 'traditional' route – in other words, they find themselves competing for that 1 job in 5 that has been advertised.

It would therefore make sense to put yourself in a less crowded space and focus on those 4 out of 5 jobs that are not advertised, where you are in competition with far fewer candidates. Referrals are an incredibly powerful tool to get you on the radar of companies – that's why your focus should be on networking to success. That's not to say that you shouldn't apply to vacancies – if you see a vacancy that matches what you are looking for, go for it!

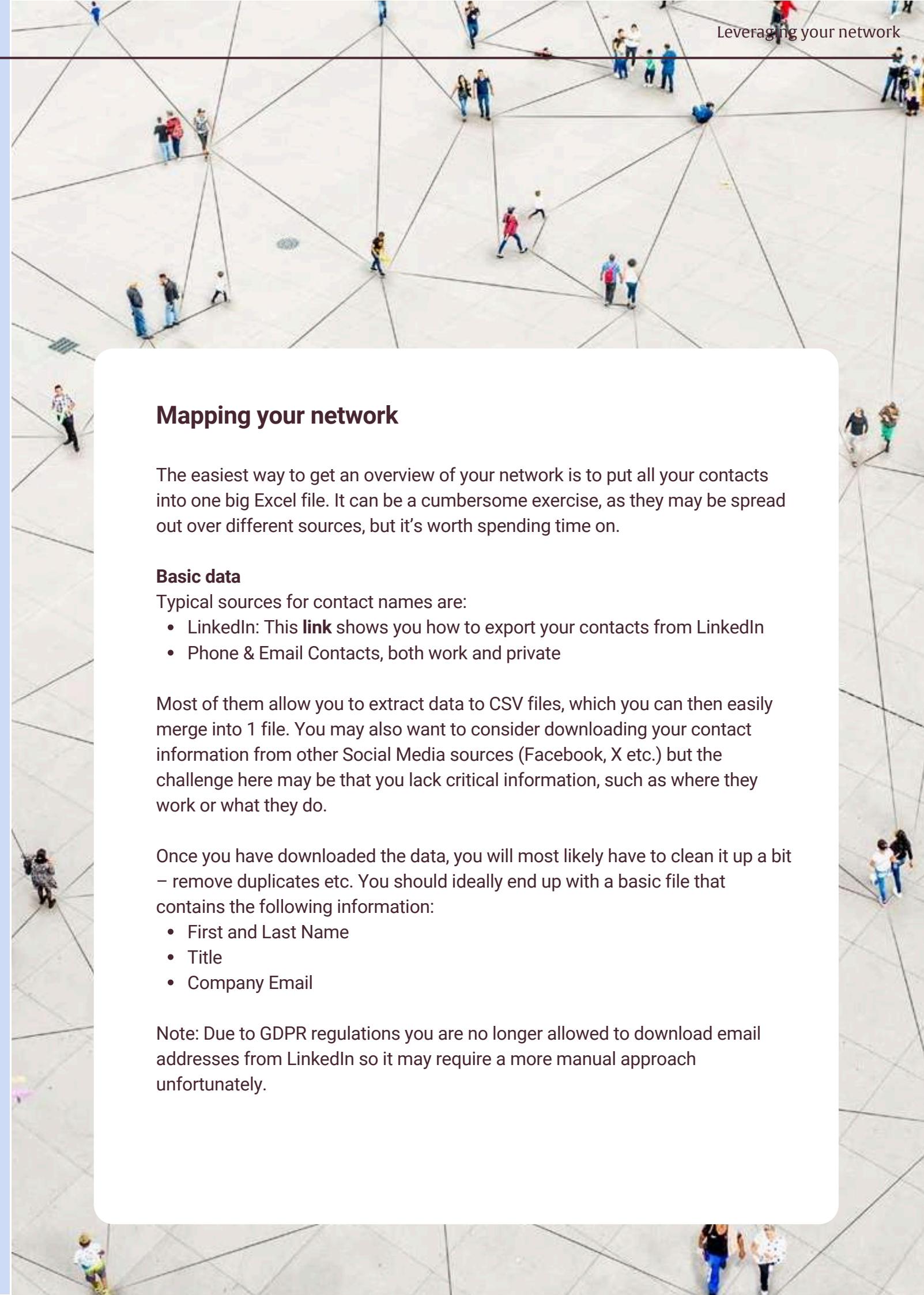
But you should be spending at least 50% of your job search time on networking and there are ways to do it in a very targeted manner. So, let's start by mapping your network.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

When following the 'traditional' route and applying for advertised jobs, be patient, don't be frustrated when you don't get immediate results.

Here are some factors to take into account that will ease you through the process:

- Applying to different posts and sending a CV can still make sense, particularly for an active job seeker – but please remember this is a high numbers game. Unless you have a very sought-after or niche skillset or experience, the response rate resulting in an invitation to interview is around 5%. Keep this low yield in mind if sending 20 CVs brought no outcome.
- In many job ads the role is not always perfectly described. So do some research! Try to look deeper, find more details to understand if your USP fits and where you can bring value - and if possible find a contact within the organization.
- Stay close to the industries you are coming from or where the value chain of the product or service is quite comparable, the seniority level is similar, or if you have experience in the geographies where the company operates.
- If you see a job ad, try to get in touch with the hiring manager to express your interest and suitability, or someone related to the role, team and department, or who knows the work environment.



Mapping your network

The easiest way to get an overview of your network is to put all your contacts into one big Excel file. It can be a cumbersome exercise, as they may be spread out over different sources, but it's worth spending time on.

Basic data

Typical sources for contact names are:

- LinkedIn: This [link](#) shows you how to export your contacts from LinkedIn
- Phone & Email Contacts, both work and private

Most of them allow you to extract data to CSV files, which you can then easily merge into 1 file. You may also want to consider downloading your contact information from other Social Media sources (Facebook, X etc.) but the challenge here may be that you lack critical information, such as where they work or what they do.

Once you have downloaded the data, you will most likely have to clean it up a bit – remove duplicates etc. You should ideally end up with a basic file that contains the following information:

- First and Last Name
- Title
- Company Email

Note: Due to GDPR regulations you are no longer allowed to download email addresses from LinkedIn so it may require a more manual approach unfortunately.

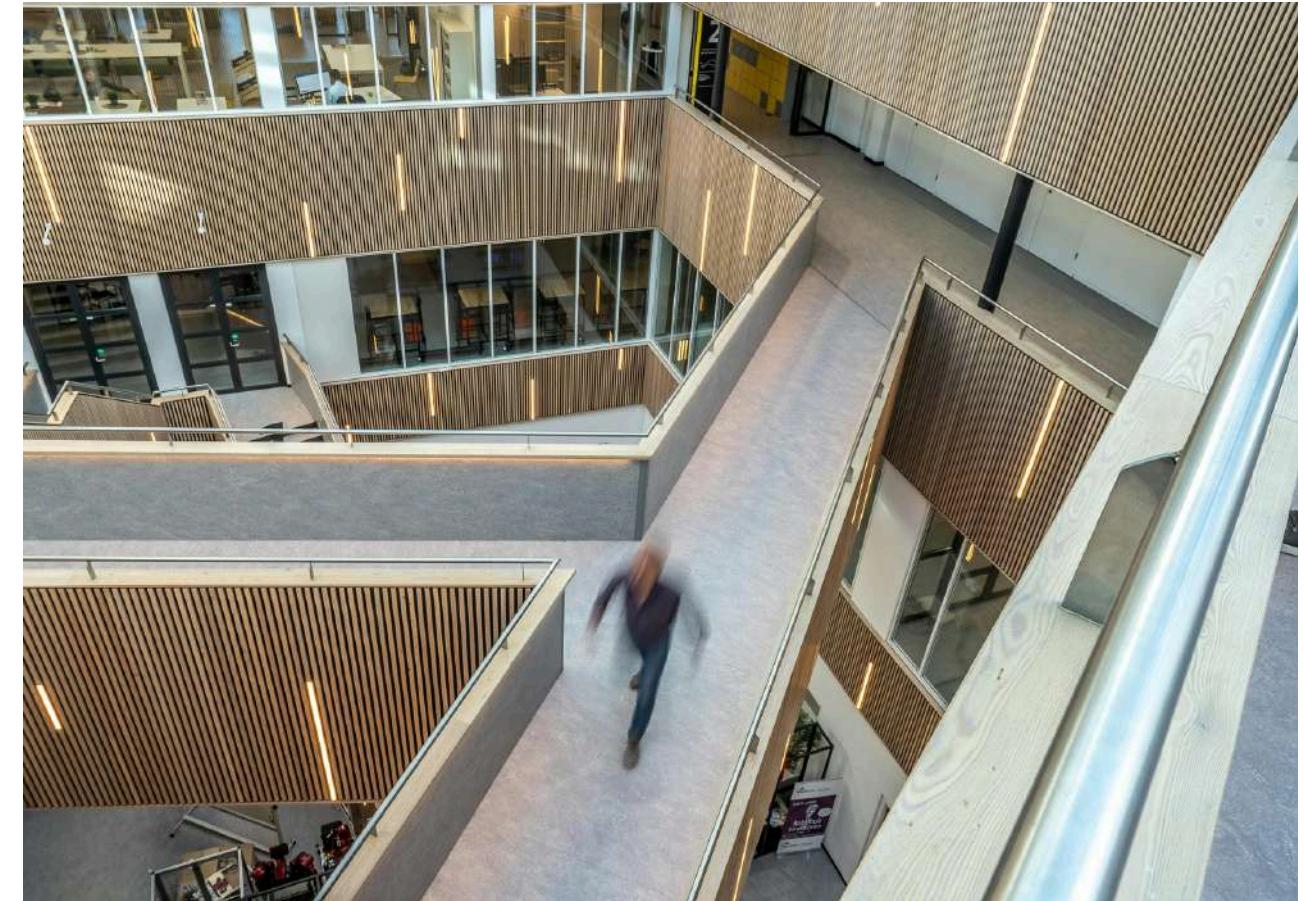
Categorization & prioritization

The second step is to start categorizing and prioritizing your network. For categorization, you should identify those people in your network who work in the industry / companies that you have identified and in the department(s) / function(s) that you are looking for. You can then start prioritizing your contacts.

1. Your primary contacts are those who work both in the industry and department that you are aiming for, as they will be the ones who will be best placed to advise you on how to approach opportunities with the company and when they appear.
2. Your secondary contacts are those who work in the industry of choice, but in a different department or function. They will be able to give you insights into the organization and connect you to colleagues in the relevant department.
3. Third in line are those individuals who work in the type of function you are aspiring for, as they can give you insights into trends and developments within the field and can potentially connect you with peers who are closer to or in the industry of your choice.
4. Lastly, there are those contacts who neither work in the industry nor the functional area that you are targeting. It would be easy to simply dismiss this group but don't jump to that conclusion! There still might be a number of people in this category who can be good to connect with, as you can see below.

You may want to add additional categories (e.g. location) you find relevant. However many you choose, in the end you should end up with a matrix similar to the one below that allows you to prioritize your contacts.

Industry / Company	Department / Function
1 Yes	Yes
2 Yes	No
3 No	Yes
4 No	No



Priority 4 contacts

The majority of your contacts will most likely be “priority 4” contacts. They don’t work in the companies you are targeting, nor do they have the type of job you want. But they can still be good sources of advice so take the time to go through the list and see if you can identify people who fall into one or more of the categories below:

- **HR professionals:** Consider reaching out to them for open advice on the career transition you want to make. It can also be a way of finding out if they have a connection in one of the companies you are targeting.
- **Connectors:** Some people are natural connectors and have built incredible networks over their careers. If you know one of them, there is no harm in reaching out to them and asking for advice on how to build your network where you feel it’s a bit weak. They might know just the right person you should be talking to!
- **Change makers:** Has someone made a career change like the one you want to make? Or led the type of business transformation you want to lead? Ask them about their experience and if they would have any advice for you.
- **Fellow alumni:** An alumni network can be a powerful tool when job hunting. Let them know that you are looking to make a change and if there is a local Alumni Club, consider reaching out to them to ask if there are other members you could talk to. Most schools also have some form of career support for alumni so it’s worth reaching out to them.

Expanding your network

Once you have mapped out your network, you may realize that it is not as strong as you would like it to be in certain areas. You may have no contacts in one of your top companies or you lack connections in the geographical area you are looking at. That means that you will have to put some effort into building new connections.

One way of doing this is through your existing connections but there are also other ways.

Executive search companies

As part of your job search, you will inevitably contact or be contacted by a variety of Recruitment, Executive Search or Headhunting companies – one of the so- called Big Five / SHREK (Spencer Stuart, Heidrick & Struggles, Russel Reynolds, Egon Zehnder, and KornFerry) or one of the many boutique specialists. It's good to manage your expectations around what you can expect from an executive search company or consultant.

The one thing you should always keep in mind is that executive search companies earn their money by solving a hiring need for a company, which makes the company the client and not you. That dynamic can play out in a number of ways:

- If they have a search and you are a qualified candidate, you will most likely never be the only one that they introduce to a client. No matter how qualified you are for the role. If they tell you that you are a great fit for the job, they will tell the same to possibly 3 or 4 other candidates. It doesn't mean it's not true, but you may be the ideal number 2 and they don't know if number 1 is going to accept the offer - so they don't want to lose you until they know what happens with number 1.
- If you are one of the 3-4, then they will be focused on this role for you and you will be off the radar for any other until the process is complete (which could be up to 3-4 months), during which time you will not be proposed for other roles. So make sure you are really interested in that role.

In general, a search company will be interested to speak with you for one of these reasons:

- They have an assignment for which you are an interesting prospect.
- They know the needs of the hiring company or manager so well and your profile is so interesting, that they are willing to introduce you without having a formal assignment, sometimes for a need that they know will emerge, sometimes to help a client meet interesting longer-term prospects.

- They do not have a project and also do not know of a specific need, but your profile is so interesting that they want to get to know you, possibly as a future candidate, or (from a sales point of view) to develop you as a potential future client, as they know you will land at some point in a new role and may have hiring needs.
- Your profile is so interesting, that they can 'use' you to open the door with a prospective client. This typically happens more with opportunistic search companies.
- You have a long-term relationship with the search consultant.
- They simply love talent development conversations.

The intention is not to paint a negative picture of the industry here, but rather to say that if a search company or consultant does not have time for you, it is never about you personally. It's a question of supply & demand and timing and at that point in time, you probably do not fit in any of the categories. Also, search consultants are just like you, human beings who are best when there is reciprocity in the relationship and saying 'no, I don't have anything for you' can get uncomfortable. For both parties.

So certainly, invest in building and maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship with those search consultants whom you feel are trying to do the same. Ask around in your network who has had good experiences with which search companies and try to find the right person to contact (most consultants have a specialization in industry and/or function). Just don't expect that they suddenly are 'at your service' when you need them.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn has what is called the “Social Selling Index” (SSI). It is a unique LinkedIn metric that determines your profile’s rank. [You can find your SSI here](#). The index is made up of 4 pillars:

- Establish your professional brand
- Find the right people
- Engage with insights
- Build relationships

Establish your professional brand (see our previous chapter)

This measurement looks at the extent to which you have leveraged LinkedIn features such as a profile picture, a banner image, custom summary, experience filled in, unique recommendations, etc. Posting regularly on LinkedIn can boost your profile and get you noticed. You could produce your own content with pictures or videos, run a poll, share a job opening, or recommend people you know are all ways of increasing this score.

Find the right people

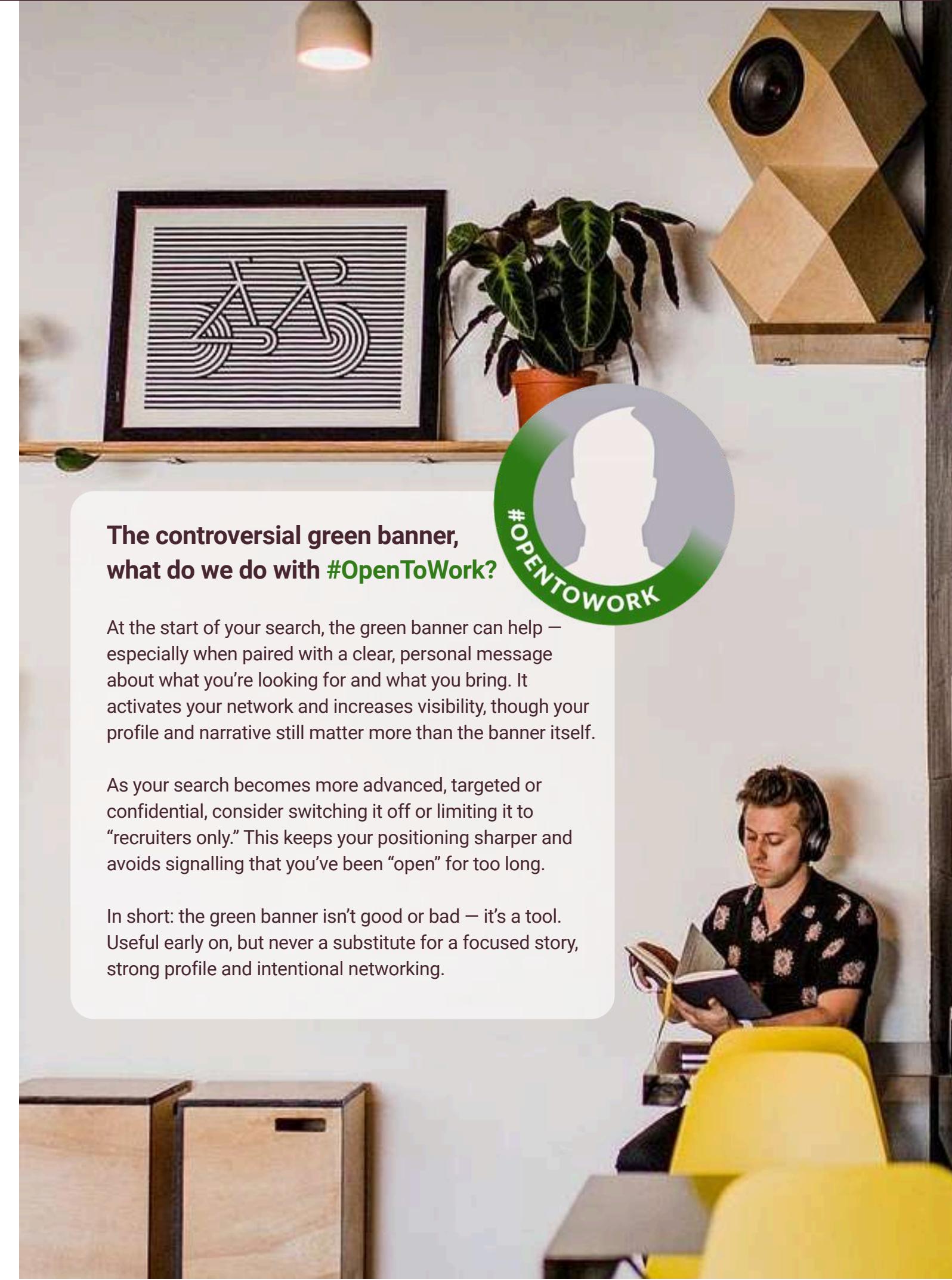
Here LinkedIn looks at the relevance of your network – how much are your contacts really related to your background, industry, role, etc. You can expand your LinkedIn network by asking your connections to hook you up with their own contacts who could help you with their insights and advice. You can also see who is following you, who you follow and start to follow those whom you feel could be relevant to your job search.

Engage with insights

This LinkedIn SSI pillar measures your engagement – in terms of shares, likes, and comments your posts are receiving. What can help to increase your engagement scores is to engage more actively with the content of others.

Build relationships

The final measurement looks at your ability to strengthen your network “by finding and establishing trust with decision-makers and other thought leaders in your niche.” To grow your connections on LinkedIn, it is worth considering to pay for LinkedIn Premium. You can usually try it out for free for one month.



The controversial green banner, what do we do with #OpenToWork?

At the start of your search, the green banner can help – especially when paired with a clear, personal message about what you’re looking for and what you bring. It activates your network and increases visibility, though your profile and narrative still matter more than the banner itself.

As your search becomes more advanced, targeted or confidential, consider switching it off or limiting it to “recruiters only.” This keeps your positioning sharper and avoids signalling that you’ve been “open” for too long.

In short: the green banner isn’t good or bad – it’s a tool. Useful early on, but never a substitute for a focused story, strong profile and intentional networking.



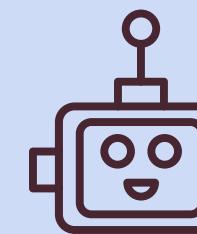
The advantage of LinkedIn Premium is that it allows you to search people more effectively. Let's say you have determined that you want to become a Marketing Manager at Coca Cola in New York. You will be able to get better search results and see who you know that knows someone at Coca Cola. This allows you to then ask your contact for an introduction to the person you have identified. And, if you don't have an indirect contact, you have the option to send a direct in-mail to this person.

It's a long shot, but always worth a try! You will also be better equipped to carry out due diligence, to research any recruiters, HR, and other people you may be about to meet, and look at their connections.

Networks & associations

Networks and associations can be a bit hit and miss. Many of them ask you to pay a membership fee purely for a monthly newsletter or get-together. That won't be the best use of your money or time, as it doesn't offer genuine opportunities to develop yourself and your network.

What you want to figure out is if there is a network related to your industry/function or an alumni club of one of your schools that offer interactive events in which you can both learn something and meet people. On their website, they will usually showcase past events, so have a look at the topics and who the speakers were. Look at who is in their Board to see if this is the calibre of network that you are aiming for.



PROMPTS

These are ready-made prompts you can copy-paste into ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot or any other AI assistant to get personalised guidance for your next career step.

Diagnose the strength of my network

You are my personal Fork in the Road guide, a career guide expert for the next step in my career.

Goal: Help me assess how strong my current network is for the roles I'm targeting, and where I should focus my networking energy. Do not ask for names, email addresses or any contact details.

1. Ask me:

- What roles, industries and types of organisations I'm targeting.
- Which kinds of people are in my network today (for example former colleagues, ex-bosses, clients, suppliers, mentors, headhunters, alumni, community contacts).
- How often I'm in touch with them (regularly, occasionally, almost never).
- Where my best conversations usually come from now (which groups or channels).

2. From my answers:

- Group my network into:
 - Strong ties (regular contact, high trust)
 - Warm ties (know each other, some contact)
 - Dormant ties (no contact for a long time)
 - Gaps (people or circles I don't have yet but need).
- Highlight 3-5 priority groups that are most useful for my current job search.
- Point out the biggest gaps that could slow me down.

3. End with:

- 3-5 concrete actions I can take in the next month to: Re-activate dormant ties / Deepen a few warm relationships / Start building connections in my biggest gap area. Keep the advice practical, encouraging and privacy-safe.

Design my networking game plan

You are my personal Fork in the Road guide, a career guide expert for the next step in my career.

Goal: Turn my network into a structured job search plan, spending at least 50% of my search time on networking.

1. Ask me:

- How many hours per week I can realistically invest in my job search.
- My job search time horizon (for example 3, 6 or 12 months).
- How comfortable I currently feel with networking (low / medium / high).
- Whether I am actively applying to advertised roles as well.

2. Based on my answers:

- Allocate my weekly search time between networking, applications and research.
- Define a 4-6 week "networking sprint" with:
 - Number of outreach messages per week.
 - Number of conversations / coffees per week.
 - Time for follow-up and relationship maintenance.
- Suggest which contact tiers (primary, secondary, third line) to focus on first.

3. End with:

- A one-paragraph summary of my networking game plan.
- 3 simple weekly KPIs I can track (for example "outreach sent", "conversations held", "warm leads created").

Keep the plan realistic for a busy professional and clearly staged over time.

Write my outreach messages and conversation guides

You are my personal Fork in the Road guide, a career guide expert for the next step in my career.

Goal: Help me write effective outreach messages and prepare for networking conversations.

1. Ask me:

- The roles / industries I am targeting.
- Which types of contacts I want to approach:
 - Close contacts
 - Weak ties (people I know a bit)
 - New contacts / referrals
 - Recruiters / headhunters
- What I am most nervous about when reaching out.

2. Then:

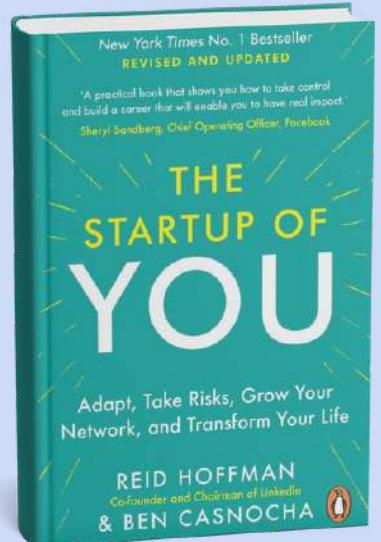
- Draft 3-4 short LinkedIn/email templates:
 - One for close contacts (asking for a conversation / advice).
 - One for weak ties.
 - One for new contacts or referrals.
 - One for recruiters / headhunters.
- For each template, include:
 - A clear subject line or opening.
 - 3-4 sentence body text in a warm, professional tone.
 - A simple, low-pressure call to action.

3. Also provide:

- A mini conversation guide: 5-7 smart questions I can ask in a networking call.
- 2-3 closing questions that make it easy for them to suggest introductions or opportunities.

Keep the language natural, not salesy, and easy to adapt to different people.

FURTHER READING

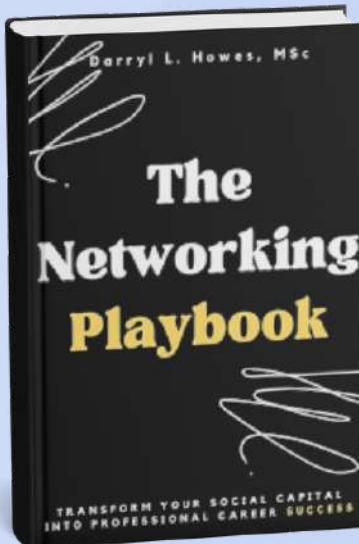


Design your network as a lifelong asset:

The Startup of You

Reid Hoffman & Ben Casnocha

How to treat your career like a startup and your network like a set of “allies” and weak ties you intentionally cultivate over time.

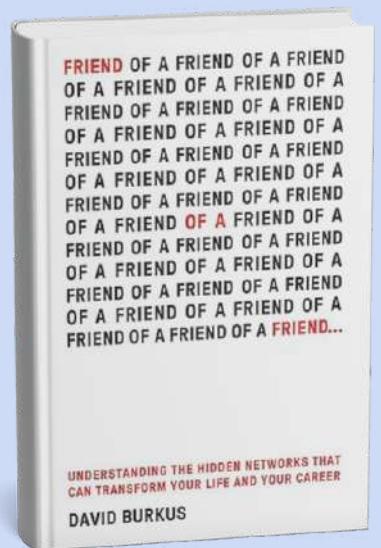


Turn social capital into career success:

The Networking Playbook

Darryl L. Howes

A structured, research-informed guide to building and using professional relationships, with frameworks for mapping your network, crafting messages and engaging mentors/advocates.

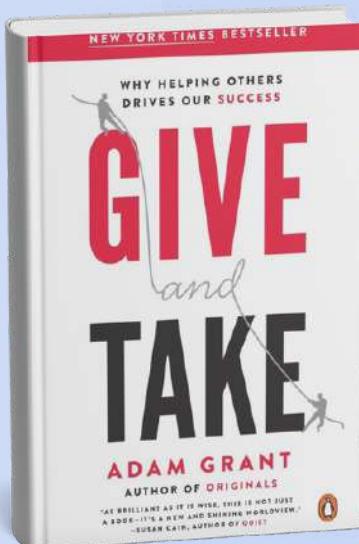


Use network science, not random coffees:

Friend of a Friend

David Burkus

Explains how real networks work (weak ties, clusters, structural holes) and how to move through the network you already have instead of “collecting business cards.”



Build a giver-style network: Give and Take

Adam Grant

A now-classic on why generous, other-focused networking creates stronger, more durable careers than transactional “what’s in it for me” tactics.



Prefer to listen or use an app?

Try the Find Your Dream Job podcast for practical, no-nonsense advice on building relationships and using your network effectively in a job search.



APPROACHING YOUR NETWORK

Approaching your network

Once you have mapped and prioritized your network, the next step is to start reaching out to your contacts. A key thing to keep in mind when networking is that it's about creating and building a connection, not making a hard sell.

Always check with your contacts that they are happy for you to use their name in career or networking conversations and don't worry about bothering people - let them be the judge of that!

Defining your goal

It is very rare to get a job lead in the very first conversation, so you need to set different goals for yourself as to what you want to get out of the conversation. The goal needs to be realistic, something you think the person is both willing and able to give you, as this will increase the chances of that person agreeing to speak to you. Such goals are usually related to tapping into the knowledge that the person has. Calls or meetings should aim at tapping into the knowledge of your contact such as information about their company, department, team, challenges, and goals, or gaining market insights on key players in other businesses where your contact may have connections. It's also about establishing a level of trust through smooth, pleasant conversations that leave an opening for a follow up in a few month's time. And ensure that you maintain these new contacts over time so that they become part of your supportive network to help you navigate the job market in the future. Make sure that the relationship works both ways – that you are an available and valuable source of information and contacts for them.

Most people are happy, if not flattered, when asked to share their knowledge. Examples could be:

- Insights into trends within the industry or function (How do you see the future of....)
- A better understanding of the company: the culture, its strategy, key projects, key talent gaps etc. (Where do you see the company in 5 years...)
- General advice for your job search (What would you do if you were me...)



Remember that asking about job openings is not one of the goals. If you make clear to the person that you are reaching out to them because you are considering a career change, this will be implicit anyway. If there is a job opening, they will tell you without prompting. If there isn't, then asking them about it will only put them in the awkward position of having to say 'no.' Nobody likes saying 'no' and it is often a conversation killer. There is one goal that should be fixed - yet unspoken - in all your interactions and that is to get recommendations on other people to connect with. If all you walk away with after a call is a new name of a person to speak with, you are winning!

Reaching out

Reaching out to your network might feel a bit like 'cold calling' and anyone who has done that knows it's not the most fun thing to do. It takes a lot of (emotional) energy, which is why we often procrastinate in this area. Understandable, but that's why it's good to set yourself a goal of how many people you will reach out to per week. It can be just 1 or 2, it doesn't matter. What matters is that you start because as soon as you start, you will see that getting a positive response (yes, I'd be happy to have a coffee with you!) will give you lots of positive energy!

When you reach out to make the initial contact, leverage your elevator pitch. Make it clear who you are, why you are reaching out to them and what you would like to get out of the conversation (your goal). Ask them for a 30-minute call, a coffee, or, if you know them reasonably well, a lunch or dinner. Keep the bar low for them to say 'no.' Remember, this is the first step of building a connection so if they only have 10 minutes for you, take it and set arranging a second meeting as your goal.

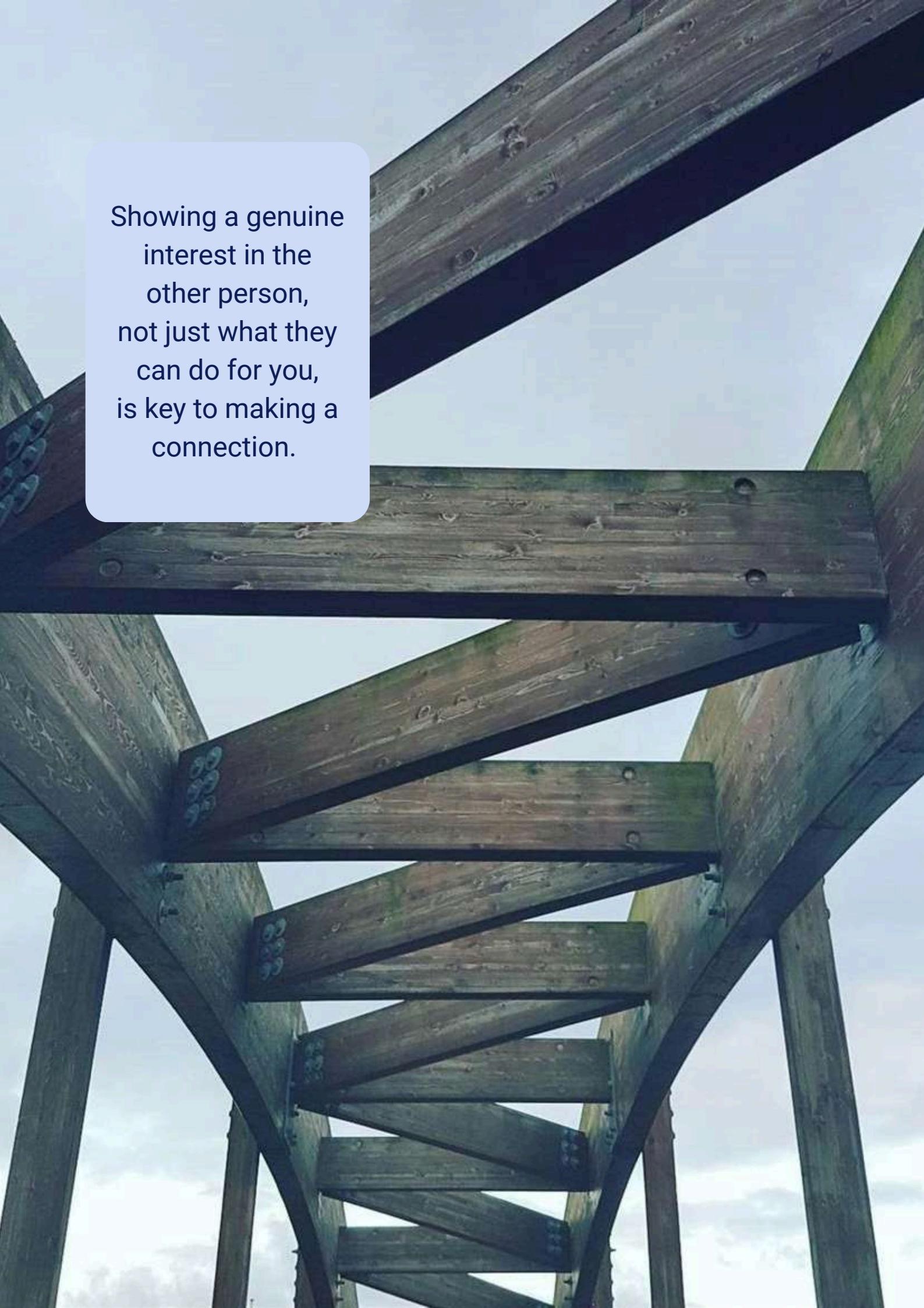
The meeting

If you have done work on your USP, then you should already be prepared when it comes to what you want to share about you when the opportunity presents itself. You have also defined your goal for the meeting. But don't forget to do some research on the person you are about to meet so that you have some ice-breakers.

Things to look for

- **Things in common:** Do you have people or interests in common? Have you lived in the same countries or do your kids go to the same school?
- **Career history:** Is there something unique about their career you can ask questions about?
- **Company activities:** Has the company they work for done something interesting lately? Is there a big project or transformation going on in the company that you can ask about?





Showing a genuine interest in the other person, not just what they can do for you, is key to making a connection.

Showing a genuine interest in the other person and not just what they can do for you is key to making a connection. Nobody likes it if they feel they are being 'used' and when they do, they tend to clam up. If, on the other hand, you feel that the person sitting opposite you is genuinely interested in you and what you have to say, you are more than willing to share and to help.

A common pitfall of networking within a job search context is being negative about the process. If you have been searching for a long time and experienced a lot of rejection or no responses at all, it is very normal to feel deflated, frustrated, or demotivated.

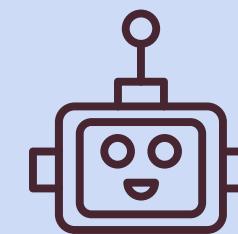
These emotions are justified and should come out - just not in a networking conversation. Find a friend to whom you can vent, go for a run, or listen to loud music. Do whatever it takes to put the negative feelings aside before you enter into a networking conversation. It is simply not the place and it will leave a negative impression on your contact, lessening the chances that they will help you out in the future.

Try and formulate a response to the question 'how is your job search going?' that is both realistic (e.g. it's not easy – cause it's not!) and optimistic (e.g. you are grateful for the number of people who have taken time to speak to you – because you are!) before going into such conversations, so that you are not caught off guard. A good way to close the meeting is to ask the person 'Is there anything I can do for you?' Most people won't expect this question and will be positively surprised by it. It's another sign that you want to build a reciprocal connection and it shows confidence – after all, you do have a lot to offer!

After the meeting

If one of your contacts has referred you to someone else or sent you a job opening, make sure to let them know how the meeting or application went. Even if the contact was not useful or the application didn't work out, let them know and show appreciation for the effort they made. A good way to maintain the connection, even if you didn't make any fixed agreements, is to follow them on LinkedIn and comment or like their posts. You can also send them articles that you think might be of interest to them or relate to a topic you may have discussed.

When you have found your new job, it is also important to let everyone know who has helped you along the way and to thank them for the role they played, no matter how small. You should never stop networking as having a strong network is an important tool, wherever you are in your career. And when someone asks you for help in return, remember to pay it forward. You know what that person is going through so show them the kindness that others have shown you.



PROMPTS

These are ready-made prompts you can copy-paste into ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot or any other AI assistant to get personalised guidance for your next career step.

Design my next networking conversations

You are my personal Fork in the Road guide, a career guide expert for the next step in my career.

Goal: Help me prepare 3-5 high-quality networking conversations with clear goals and good questions. Do NOT ask for any names, email addresses or phone numbers.

1. Ask me:

- What kind of roles and companies I am exploring.
- Which types of contacts I want to speak with (for example former colleagues, ex-bosses, clients, mentors, alumni, headhunters).
- What I would realistically like to get from each conversation (insights, perspective, market intel, introductions).

2. Then:

- For 3-5 contact types, propose a realistic PRIMARY GOAL for the conversation that does NOT involve directly asking for a job.
- For each contact type, suggest 5-7 smart questions I can ask about:
 - Their company, team and challenges.
 - Industry or functional trends.
 - Advice they would give someone in my situation.
- Suggest 2-3 ways to close the conversation that leave the door open (for example asking for recommendations of other people to talk to).

3. End with:

- A short checklist I can review before each call or coffee (goal, a few key questions, how to close).

Keep it concrete, confidence-building and focused on creating connection, not a hard sell.

Write my outreach messages

You are my personal Fork in the Road guide, a career guide expert for the next step in my career.

Goal: Help me write short, effective outreach messages for different types of contacts, so it feels natural to reach out.

1. Ask me:

- The kind of roles / transitions I am exploring.
- Which types of contacts I want to approach now:
 - Close contacts
 - People I know a bit (weak ties)
 - People I don't know yet but would like to meet
 - Executive search consultants / recruiters
- Whether I prefer a more formal or informal tone.

2. Then:

- Draft 3-4 outreach templates (LinkedIn message or email), including:
 - A subject line or opening sentence.
 - 3-4 sentence body that briefly says who I am, why I'm reaching out, and what I hope to learn.
 - A light, low-pressure call to action (for example a 20-30 minute call or coffee).
- Draft 1 short, polite follow-up template I can send if someone hasn't replied after 7-10 days.

3. End with:

- 3 tips for sending these messages in a way that respects people's time and keeps the relationship human.

Language should be warm, professional and easy to adapt, never salesy.

Turn reaching out into a weekly habit

You are my personal Fork in the Road guide, a career guide expert for the next step in my career.

Goal: Help me turn "approaching my network" into a realistic weekly habit that I can sustain, even when I feel reluctant.

1. Ask me:

- How many hours per week I can realistically spend on my job search right now.
- How emotionally draining I find networking today (low / medium / high).
- What feels hardest about reaching out (for example fear of rejection, not knowing what to say, feeling like I'm bothering people).

2. Based on my answers:

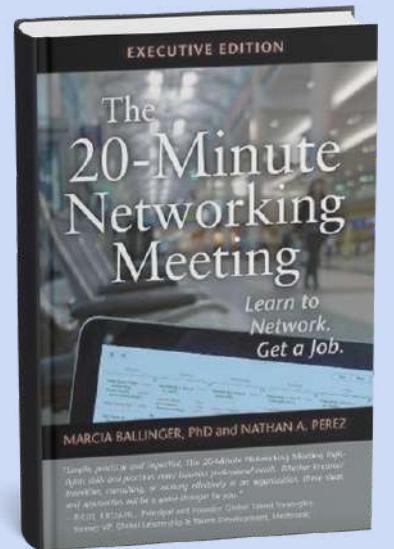
- Propose a simple weekly outreach routine (for example X new reach-outs, Y follow-ups, Z conversations).
- Suggest when in the week I might schedule this, given my energy (for example mornings vs afternoons).
- Give 3-5 practical tactics to lower the emotional barrier (for example batching messages, starting with "safe" contacts, using scripts).

3. End with:

- A very small "minimum viable" networking commitment I can make for the next 4 weeks.
- 3 weekly reflection questions to review how it is going and adjust.

Keep it realistic, encouraging and focused on consistent movement rather than perfection.

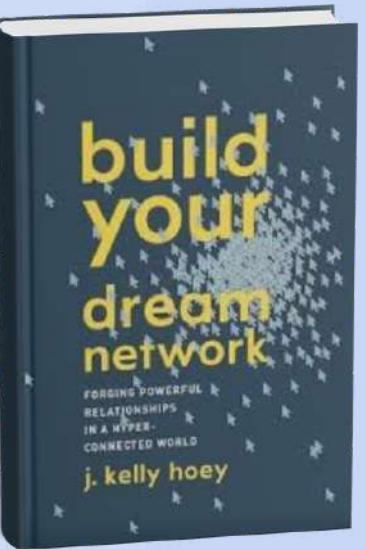
FURTHER READING



Make every coffee count: The 20-Minute Networking Meeting

Nathan A. Perez & Marcia Ballinger

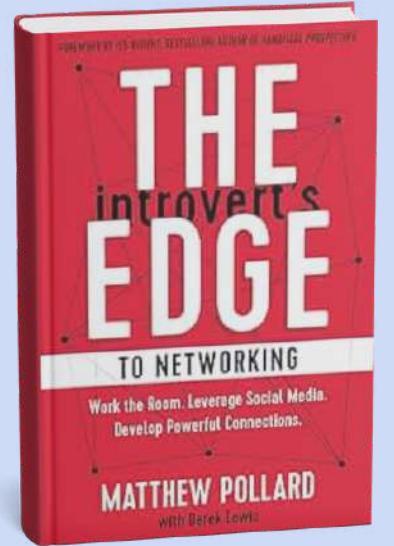
Super practical guide to structuring short, focused networking meetings, including how to open, what to ask, how to close, and how to follow up.



Modern, authentic outreach: Build Your Dream Network

J. Kelly Hoey

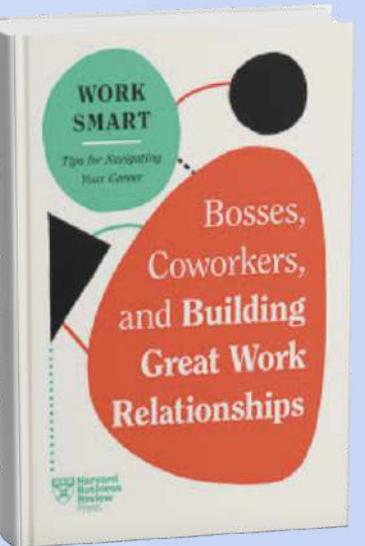
Fresh, very concrete strategies for approaching people online and offline, with examples, scripts and small daily habits to turn contacts into real relationships.



Go beyond transactional networking: The Introvert's Edge to Networking

Matthew Pollard

Shows you how to build powerful, authentic connections without pretending to be an extrovert, with a clear step by step system for approaching people, working a room and using social media in a way that feels natural.



Strengthen everyday work relationships: Bosses, Coworkers, and Building Great Work Relationships

Harvard Business Review

Helps you have better conversations with bosses, peers and stakeholders, navigate office politics and intentionally build a strong professional network.



Prefer to listen? Try the Harvard Business Review podcast episode "How Do I Build My Network from Scratch?" (from the New Here series) for practical, down-to-earth advice on starting and sustaining professional relationships in a way that feels authentic, not awkward.



WORKBOOK EXERCISE

**REACH OUT**

Contact your connection with a clear purpose and context.

**ENGAGE**

Have a conversation focused on learning and gathering insights. Avoid asking for a job directly.

**VALUE**

Appreciate the insights shared and express gratitude.

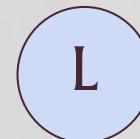
**EXPLORE**

Ask if they can suggest additional connections or resources.

**ACT**

Apply the information and advice you received to your career strategy.

How did your actions make a difference?

**LOOP BACK**

Update them on your progress and maintain the relationship for future engagement.



APPLY THE REVEAL METHOD

The REVEAL Method provides a structured approach to networking and informational interviews, ensuring that interactions are strategic, meaningful, and effective rather than random or transactional. Here's why each part matters:

REFLECT ON YOUR INTERACTION

Reflection is important because it helps you learn from your experiences, gain insights, and improve future actions. By thinking about what worked, what didn't, and how you responded, you strengthen self-awareness, make better decisions, and build confidence, turning each networking conversation or career action into a meaningful step toward your goals.

- **What did I learn from this conversation?**
- **How did this conversation influence my career thinking or next steps?**
- **What could I do differently next time to strengthen the connection or gain more insight?**

PREPARE
TO SUCCEED

Prepare to Succeed

You've arrived at that decisive moment and here is some final advice to help you secure your future role.

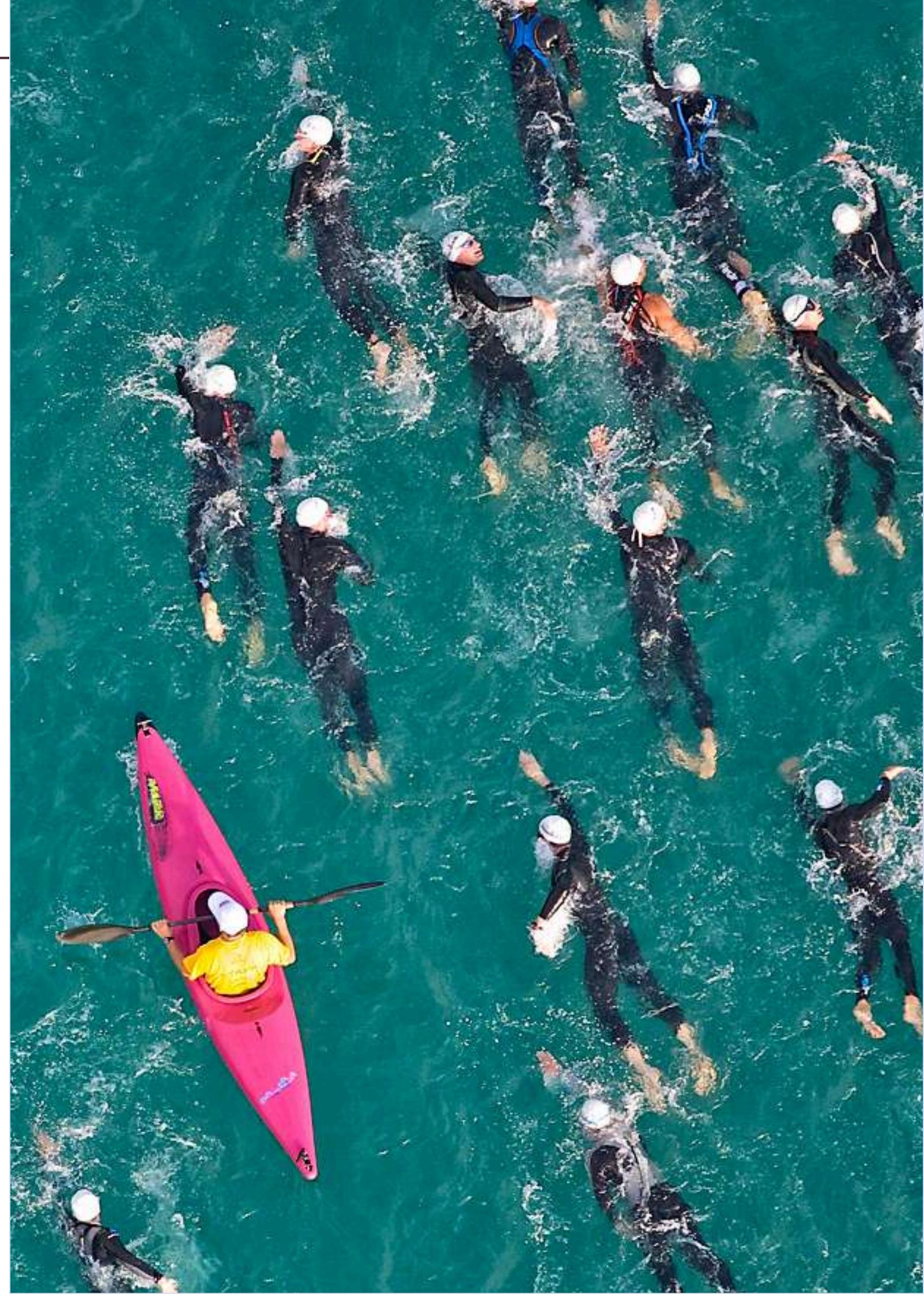
It goes without saying that for any interview you should be fluent and knowledgeable about yourself, the role you have put yourself forward for, and the company you would like to work for. You should also have questions you would like to ask them. After all, as with any relationship, both parties need to get to a "yes." So prepare for the interview and, if you haven't had an interview for a while and are rusty, ask a friend in HR or someone who recruits for positions on your level to do a run-through with you. Practice makes perfect, as they say.

Do your homework

Due diligence on a potential new employer is critical and often neglected. You should understand how the company makes money, what its culture is, how decisions are made, and what its current issues are. Try to find out what kind of person your potential new boss is, how long they have been with the company, and what makes them successful. Get in touch with your connections to find out what's going on in the company or use our friend Google.

In today's world, many companies are undergoing a transformation and this takes on many forms: growth or downsizing, acquisition/integration, expansion, new market entry, spin-off, a changing business model, adding a digital layer, a culture change - to name but a few. When companies are searching for candidates, the vacant roles are always in some ways related to their ongoing transformation.

Additionally, there may be a more specific issue affecting the team/function or its capabilities.





So, research the company to seek this out and it will help you understand what is behind the job. What issues is the hiring manager trying to solve? If, as a candidate, you understand this then the connection will be more effective – because you will know what solutions you can bring to the table for their specific challenges. This is the space where those very concrete conversations start.

Manage the conversation

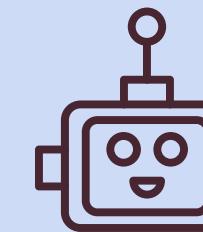
Let's begin with a hard fact: recruiters will typically see 5-10 people a day. You need to make yourself stand out because a week after they have met you, they will have seen 50 people.

It's not as daunting as it sounds! You can make an impact by researching the person you have an appointment with (on social media as well as on professional platforms) to find an initial hook: people or interests you have in common for instance. Your goal is to start with a meaningful conversation (not a recital of your CV) to build a relationship so that you become interesting to them. Take the first moments of any interview to let them get to know you and remember: it's not just about what you do or say, but how you make people feel.

Once you've got started, try to steer the conversation around areas where you can shine, around that USP you defined earlier. As we've said, many people struggle with the invitation 'tell me about yourself.' But if you have done your due diligence, then you know where their challenges and opportunities lie. So after 2-3 sentences, you should try to address their challenges, hit the nerve! Then you can refer to a challenge that you overcame that touches on ones the company is facing and show them that you are the solution.

An ability to articulate well the match between your own experience and the challenges the company is focused on, is one of the most powerful ways to differentiate from other candidates. By doing so, you suddenly become a solution – in other words, a great fit with a vacant role.

And lastly, don't wait too long to talk about numbers. It shouldn't be the first thing you talk about but also not the last. It is important to create trust and be transparent earlier on in the process around all components that are relevant for a possible offer (pay, notice period, etc.) to make sure you are not wasting each other's time. So don't be afraid to bring it up to see if you have the same / similar expectations.



PROMPTS

These are ready-made prompts you can copy-paste into ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot or any other AI assistant to get personalised guidance for your next career step.

Prepare my interview strategy and key messages

You are my personal Fork in the Road guide, a career guide expert for the next step in my career.

Goal: Help me prepare a sharp interview strategy and 3 to 5 key messages for a specific role.

1. Ask me:
 - The role and level I am interviewing for.
 - What I know about the company and its situation.
 - The main responsibilities and success criteria from the job description (or ask me to summarise them).
 - My main strengths and concerns for this role.
2. Then:
 - Summarise what this employer is most likely looking for in 5 to 7 bullet points.
 - Draft 3 to 5 clear key messages I want the interviewers to remember about me.
 - Suggest how to link my experience to their needs in simple, concrete language.
3. Also provide:
 - 5 to 10 likely interview questions for this type of role.
 - A short note for each question on what I should focus on in my answer.

Keep it practical and specific to the role, not generic advice.

Practice answering tough questions with feedback

You are my personal Fork in the Road guide, a career guide expert for the next step in my career.

Goal: Help me practice answers to common and difficult interview questions and give me feedback.

1. Ask me:
 - The role and level I am preparing for.
 - Any questions I am particularly worried about (for example gaps, layoffs, short tenures, career shifts, salary).
2. Then:
 - Run a short mock interview:
 - Ask me 8 to 10 questions one by one.
 - After each answer, give me specific feedback:
 - What worked well.
 - What was unclear, too long or risky.
 - How I could improve it next time (for example structure, examples, impact).
3. Make sure you:
 - Include at least one question about my motivation for this role and this company.
 - Include at least one question about a failure, conflict or difficult situation.
 - Include one question about my salary expectations and one about my development areas.

Keep your tone supportive but honest. Help me sharpen, not just feel good.

Design my first 90 day success plan

You are my personal Fork in the Road guide, a career guide expert for the next step in my career.

Goal: Help me design a simple 90 day success plan for when I start my next role, so I am ready to succeed from day one.

1. Ask me:
 - The type of role and level I am aiming for.
 - The kind of company and business situation I expect (for example start up, turnaround, growth, steady state).
 - What I know about the team and key stakeholders.
 - What early wins would look like for me.
2. Then build a 90 day plan with 3 phases:
 - First 30 days – listening and learning:
 - What I should focus on understanding.
 - Which relationships to build first.
 - What questions to ask.
 - Days 31 to 60 – shaping and testing:
 - Where to look for quick wins.
 - How to test ideas and build credibility.
 - Days 61 to 90 – delivering and aligning:
 - How to firm up priorities and ways of working.
 - How to align expectations with my manager and key stakeholders.
3. End with:
 - A short list of 5 to 7 success signals I can use to check if my first 90 days are on track.

Keep it realistic for a senior role and focused on relationships, learning and a few meaningful wins.

WORKBOOK EXERCISE



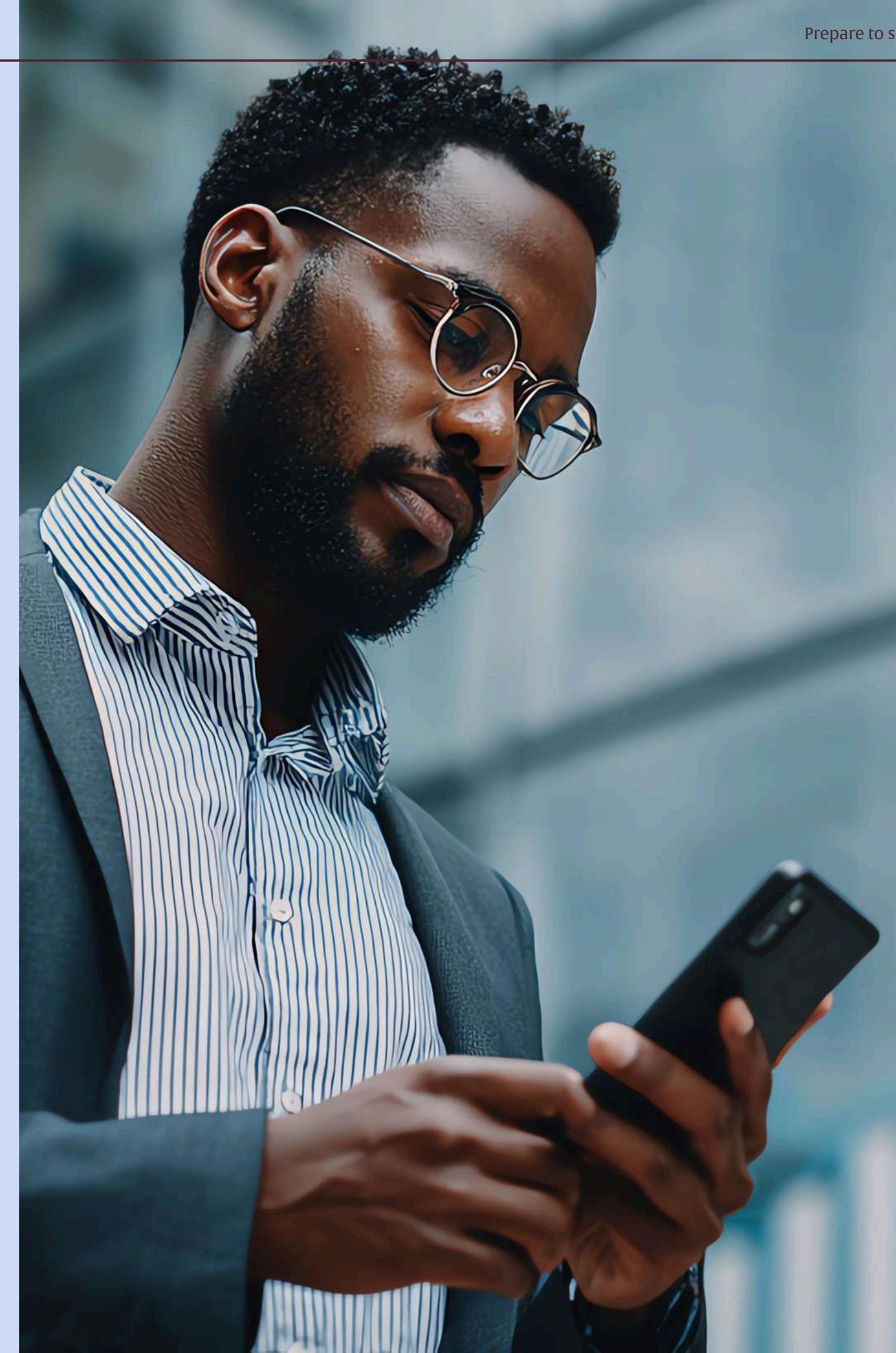
PASS THE MACHINE, IMPRESS THE HUMAN

How to Make Your CV ATS-Proof and Stand Out to Recruiters.

Most large companies use Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) to scan and score CVs before a human ever sees them. This means that even a professionally written CV can be rejected if it isn't optimized for the machine. To ensure your CV reaches recruiters and makes an impact:

Optimize for ATS

- Include a Skills Section: Clearly list hard, soft, and technical skills. ATS scans specifically for these keywords.
- Add an Executive Summary: Include your target job title and highlight your value proposition at the top of your CV.
- Use Standard Formatting: Avoid graphics, tables, or unusual fonts that may confuse the ATS.
- Include Dates: Use months and years for each role to ensure proper parsing.



Treat ATS as the First Recruiter

- Think of the ATS as the gatekeeper: it decides which CVs make it to human review.
- Align your CV with the job description and industry. Highlight the most relevant accomplishments using quantifiable results (e.g., “increased sales by 25%”). Emphasize experiences and skills that directly relate to the role.
- Even strong candidates can be filtered out if their CV is generic, poorly formatted, or missing key information.

Make it Stand Out for Humans

- Even after passing the ATS scan, your CV should be clear, professional, and easy to read.
- Highlight your most relevant accomplishments using quantifiable results.
- Tailor your CV to the role and industry, ensuring the skills and achievements align with the job description.

Continuous Review

- Run your CV through ATS simulators or online tools to check scores and keyword optimization.
- Update and adapt your CV as job requirements and ATS standards evolve. What worked three years ago may no longer be enough

Apps that you can use:



ResumAI
AI-powered resume and cover letter generator.



Rezi
ATS-optimized resume creation tool.



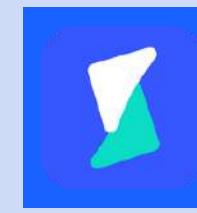
VMock
AI feedback on resumes and LinkedIn profiles.



Enhancv
Evaluates your CV for ATS compliance and readability while giving tips to make your achievements stand out.



Jobscan
Scans resumes against job descriptions for keyword alignment.



Skillsyncer
Identifies missing skills, recommends keywords, and helps optimize your resume for ATS and specific job listings.

CV CHECKLIST

Optimize for ATS

- Include a Skills Section (hard, soft, technical skills)
- Add an Executive Summary with target role and value proposition
- Use standard formatting (no graphics, tables, unusual fonts)
- Include complete dates (month/year) for all roles
- Separate Awards, Projects, and Certifications into distinct sections

Tailor to the Role

- Align CV with job description and industry
- Highlight relevant accomplishments with quantifiable results
- Emphasize skills and experiences that match the role

Make it Readable for Humans

- Use clear headings and bullet points
- Keep concise, professional language
- Open with a compelling executive summary (who you are, what you do, unique value)

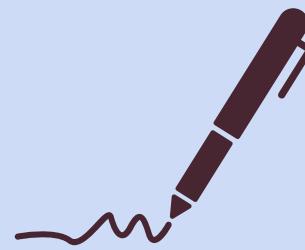
Test and Refine

- Test CV in ATS simulators
- Get peer or mentor review for clarity and impact
- Update CV regularly based on job requirements and ATS feedback

Focus on Differentiation

- Highlight your unique value and achievements
- Include a conversation hook or standout accomplishment
- Avoid just listing responsibilities; show impact and results

WORKBOOK EXERCISE



WHAT TO DO BEFORE YOU MEET AN EMPLOYER



Beginner Level *Must-do for every interview*

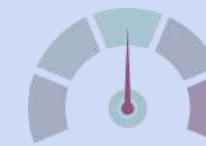
Google the company
What they sell, who their customers are.

Scan the “About” & “Careers” pages
Note mission, values and 2 things you like.

Check recent news
Read 3–5 headlines or press releases.

Study the job ad
Highlight the 5 skills/results you must prove.

Look up your interviewer(s)
Role, background, any common ground on LinkedIn.



Intermediate Level *For roles you really want*

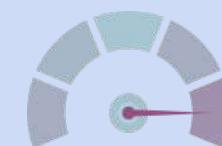
Research the leadership
CEO + your future department head; watch 1 talk or interview.

Use the product
Try it or watch a demo; list 3 things you like and 2 questions.

Check performance & priorities
Skim annual report or blog for growth areas.

Map their customers
Who they serve and which problems they solve.

Note key industry trends
2–3 shifts that could impact the company.



Advanced Level *For dream jobs or senior roles*

List main competitors
3–5 rivals and how your target company is different.

Read employee reviews
Recurring themes about culture, leadership, workload.

Scan product reviews
Common strengths and pain points from customers.

Summarise their strategy
Write 2 bullets on long-term goals or big bets.

Spot recent innovations
New launches, pilots or projects you can mention.

CLOSING THE LOOP



Sharing Your Success and Paying It Forward

Reaching the end of a job search isn't just about landing a new role, it's the culmination of reflection, intention, vulnerability, resilience and growth.

How you close this chapter can strengthen your relationships, honour those who supported you, and open doors for others walking their own path.

Share your news with clarity and gratitude. When you announce your new role, keep the message authentic and centred on what matters: what you're excited about, what you've learned, and how the journey has shaped you. Acknowledge the people who contributed – mentors, friends, colleagues, connectors, not as a formality, but as recognition of the community that helped you navigate your fork in the road.

Pay it forward. Your search has likely given you fresh insights into the market, your strengths, and the hiring landscape. Consider sharing what you've learned with others still in transition: offer to make introductions, share resources, give feedback on profiles or CVs, or simply hold space for someone who is where you were months ago. Small gestures can have a disproportionate impact.

Leave the door open, not the chapter unfinished. A thoughtful closing message signals that you're stepping into your next role with intention, while staying connected to your network. You don't need to tell the whole story – just enough to reflect your journey and express gratitude. Your "success post" becomes part of your professional identity: humble, grounded, generous.

Celebrate – quietly or loudly – but consciously. Whether you mark this milestone privately or publicly, take a moment to recognise the work you put in: the reflection, the conversations, the courage to make choices. Every fork in the road teaches you something. Honour that learning before you move ahead.

CLOSING WORDS

“Small acts, when multiplied by millions of people, can transform the world”

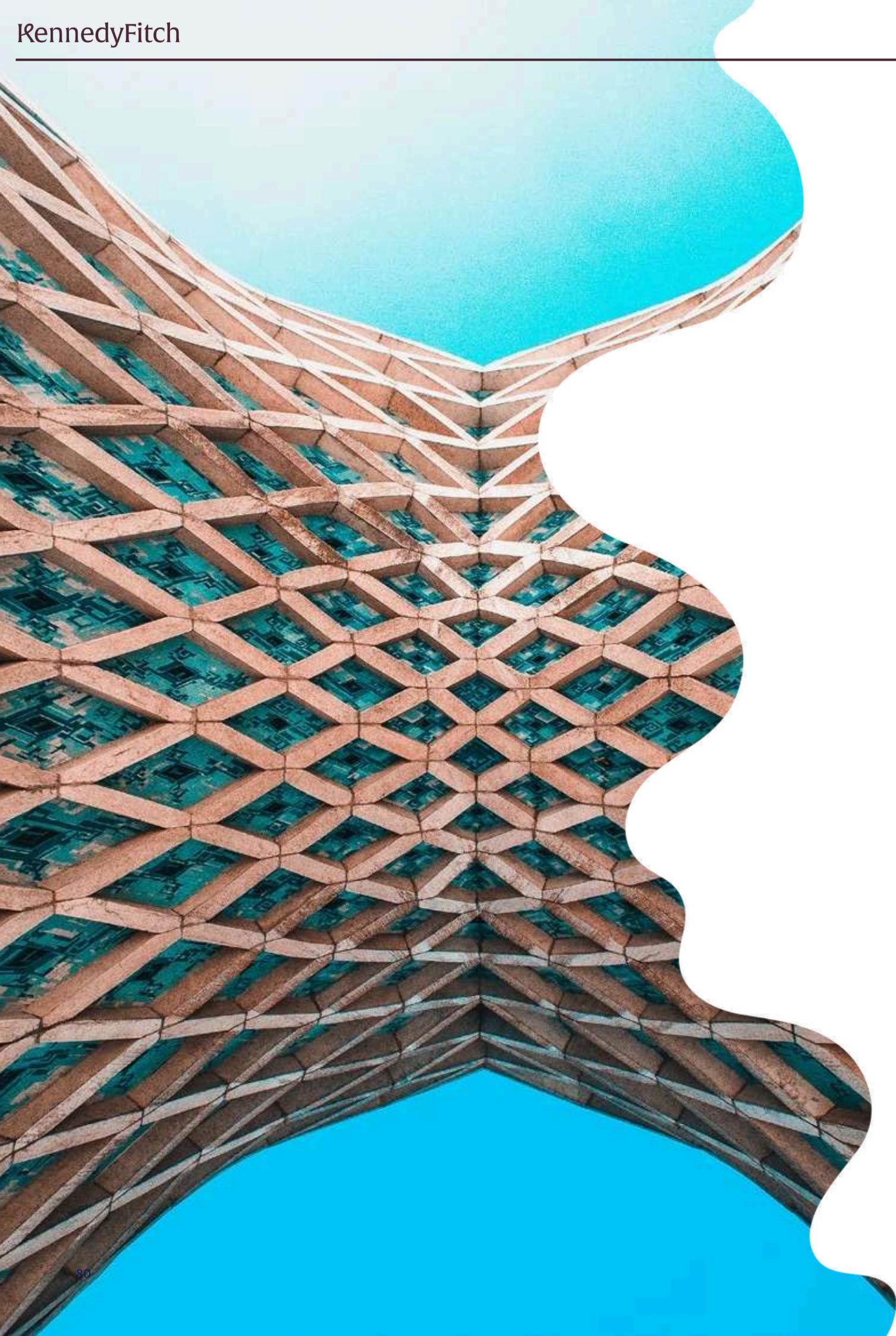
Howard Zinn

Before joining KennedyFitch, each and every one of our Partners had a career behind them of at least 15 years as a practitioner. And, so we have all experienced the highs and lows of job and career changes. We hope that we have been able to convey that understanding and empathy in this guide, and that it has helped you to feel more in control of your process.

We are all where we are today thanks to the helping hands and words of wisdom of others, which is why we are passionate about paying it forward through initiatives such as this guide. We hope that it has offered you some concrete tips that will help you in your search and, more importantly, we hope that you encounter similar helping hands and words of wisdom on your journey.

When you do find that next role, next career step, we would like to ask something in return from you and that is that you too pay it forward. To pay it forward by showing empathy and giving time to others who are navigating the world of work and looking for their next growth opportunity. To remember how you felt when someone took your call, met you for a coffee or introduced you to someone new and pass on that feeling to someone else.

We call this Tender, Love and Care!

A large, abstract graphic on the left side of the page features a repeating pattern of teal and brown hexagonal shapes, resembling a stylized architectural or circuit board design. It is set against a light blue background with white, organic, cloud-like shapes that partially overlap the graphic.

About KennedyFitch

KennedyFitch is a partner-led boutique focused on uplifting the world of work by helping organisations hire and build leadership for fit for the future, not just fit for now. We do that through three pillars: **Executive Search**, where we appoint senior HR leaders and future-ready executives with a strong track record across industries; **People Advisory**, where we bring the human back into Human Resources through HR consulting, capability building and coaching; and **Leadership Development**, where we strengthen the mindsets, behaviours and systems leaders need to turn strategy into traction. We also bring together the HR community, creating trusted spaces where peers learn fast, share what's really working, and take ownership of their careers through our networks, events and research-driven insights.

When change hits, we help both organisations and individuals move through it with clarity, ownership and momentum. We support career transitions at two levels. For organisations, our Career Transition Programme helps companies, leaders and HR teams turn pivotal moments into opportunities for internal mobility, growth and retention, combining one-to-one support with a practical, ready-to-use toolkit that fits your talent processes and can be delivered in tailored cohorts, open groups or individual journeys. For individual leaders, we offer career transition coaching that creates clarity on what's next, sharpens their leadership narrative, and supports a confident move into the right next role, ideally inside the organisation and, when needed, beyond it.

www.kennedyfitch.com

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