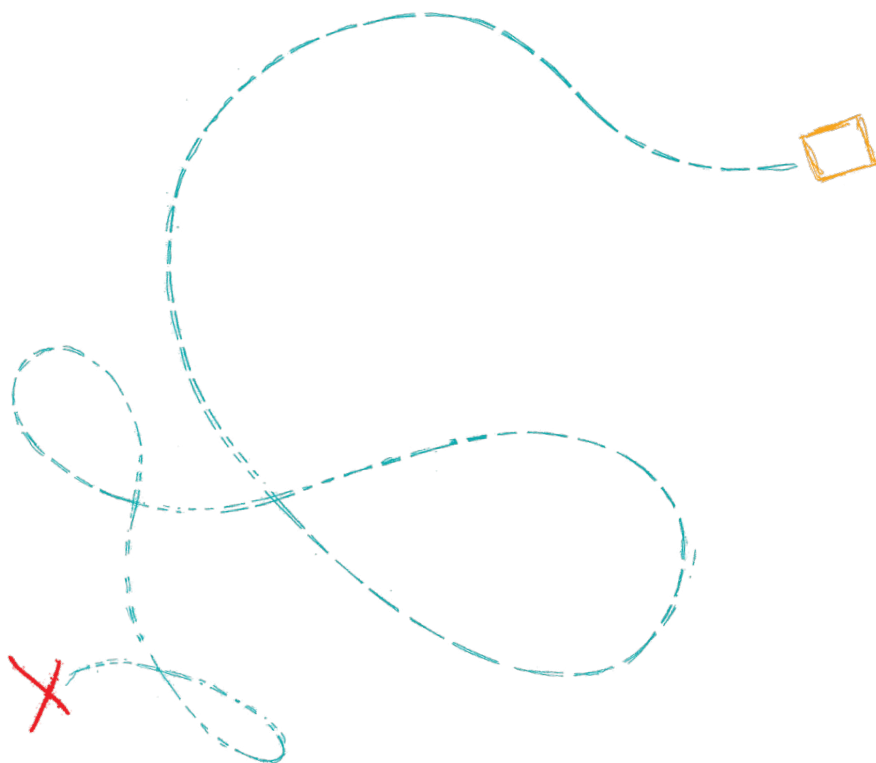


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Now It's Clear

The Career You Own



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How To Use This Book

Write. Walk. Reflect. Draw (and read a poem or two)

This book is to help you successfully navigate your career transition. Like a spiritual quest, it's a series of reflection-meets-business-meets-creativity steps. You'll think about yourself through questions and reflections with exercises that require walking, reading poetry, writing or drawing. (Don't get nervous about drawing: it can be learned and often habit forming).

The creative and reflective exercises are to direct you where you want to be, which requires thoughtful quality time, at your own pace. You can go through the entire book and complete all the exercises, stop at any point and continue when ready, or target certain areas — your choice. What it does require is focus and an investment of time.

The only person able to define a meaningful career for you is you.

This bears repeating.

Only you can define your own career. No one else.

Everyone has opinions about what you should be doing. It's important to listen, but the actual defining is done only by you. Don't jump to a shiny new opportunity until you've done the requisite self-facing due diligence. Many people take a new role to get away from difficult issues, only to find themselves facing the same issues in a new company. Don't repeat such patterns. *Only you can define what is a meaningful career.*

You'll need two things to get the most out of this book:

- 1) A pen
- 2) Your creative, uncluttered mind

Unpack the mental baggage, let go of rules and regulations, forget the 'should-haves', shrug off the 'busy-ness' and other distractions on your shoulders.

Let it go.

Most important, you *must* put away both your anxieties and that to-do list when working through this workbook. Concentrate on one thing at a time. We're all hard-wired that way, not to multi-task.

Along with your pen and creative mind, you'll take brisk 20-minute walks, wherever you are. It's important to find a good rhythm and spend some quality time with yourself. In this workbook, you'll have to *write, walk, reflect, doodle or draw*.

You will be asked to do these tasks at regular intervals. All are simple and reflective activities designed to go deeper into your subconscious and make friends with your gut, your instinct, your essence. I can honestly say that these simple activities, along with practicing meditation, which have worked for me.

At the core of the book is the ***Career You Own Manifesto***—as you work through the book, print a copy of the manifesto as a reminder of where you're headed.

BUILD A CAREER YOU OWN

LOOK WITHIN:

Take stock of who you are and what matters most to you. Listen to your inner voice and take that first step, no matter how small. You have everything needed to succeed.

WALK THE PATH OF MOST RESISTANCE:

This road leads to growth. Look back on your past to connect with the present. Career paths are never straight lines, so appreciate the curves. Wield an artist's brush to paint the future.

BE COMFORTABLE WITH DOUBT:

A frequent companion; know you're capable of more. Practice your craft like a master. Confront your fears to clear the way and new paths emerge. Reach for your dreams, take a firm hold and pull them closer.

INVEST IN RELATIONSHIPS:

Ask questions, listen fully and savor divergent views. Don't stand off to the side nor set out alone. Contribute to the conversation: share your story and what you know. Nourish your community. Till the soil. Plant seeds of common sense.

JOIN THE DANCE WITH THE WORLD AROUND YOU:

Step in, challenge yourself and arrive at a career you own.

The chapters are set out in a specific pattern which mirrors life. By looking inward and focusing on ourselves to being aware of our surroundings, we are able to stand on our own two feet, participate and contribute more actively.

The workbook is organized so you can build your own guidebook. Moving from carefully assessing ourselves and the past to examining doubts, understanding the present, building relationships, being comfortable with our unique individual narratives, ready to step into the future.

Chapter One: Looking Within starts by looking within and listening. You have the tools to succeed but may overlook them or shut out your inner voice. Find the obstacles.

Chapter Two: Looking Back goes back in time to connect the past with the present. Re-examine pivotal life events—what held you back, caused a change in direction or catapulted you to a new path—what was learned or not in the process, patterns of thought or behavior which can be seen and traced.

Chapter Three: Taking Stock helps evaluate previous roles, starting with first jobs, early influences, likes and dislikes. Revisit your values to uncover motivations and find what matters the most, and why.

Chapter Four: Seeing What's Possible reviews work preferences and helps identify future possibilities to bring out the best in you.

Chapter Five: Making Sense Of Your Data is a creative thinking exercise pulling together your notes, thoughts, ideas and memories to reveal what is meaningful for you.

Chapter Six: Getting Comfortable With Doubt addresses fear, allowing greater comfort with doubt in order to build greater self-confidence, recognize and fulfill unrealized potential.

Chapter Seven: Investing In Relationships shows how to build a solid web of inclusion to sustain energy and success, enabling you to tell your story.

Chapter Eight: Sharing Your Career Story provides ways to write; sharing your knowledge with others, which builds on the earlier questions of ‘Who am I?’ and ‘What’s my purpose?’

Chapter Nine: Bouncing Back concentrates on how to move forward and manage your career, navigating gentle slopes and hairpin bends—the joys, pains, excitement, hopes and dreams encountered along the way.

Chapter Ten: Joining The Dance helps translate plans into action and involves a creative exercise to navigate change and new beginnings.

Chapter Eleven: Ten Conversation Starters for you, your team and colleagues.

Conclusion shares one final story on looking back and includes an annotated bibliography on books which shaped my thinking, reflective resources, questions and action planning.

The exercises work if you put in the time and effort, so seriously consider each question and spend time writing your answers. Start with 20 minutes or more of writing, a reflective process that goes deeper than merely reading questions. (As does drawing and poetry.)

In [Chapter Two](#) you need to *look back* on your life. Not just the past few years, but time rummaging through old memories. Don’t rush it; proper reflective work is a steady pace.

Looking back on the choices I made at each turning point in my own career, I asked the same questions I’m now asking you to consider. In the following pages there are both personal and client stories to show how the exercises work.

Will you have answers today? Not likely. Tomorrow? Perhaps. Soon? Definitely.

Do the work and wait for the magic to happen.

As you start this transition, things shift. If you're thinking of learning more about finance, a flyer for a finance course appears in your inbox. Or when you plan for a holiday to Spain, soon you see references about Spain. We can call it 'synchronicity' or 'spirituality' or simply a happy coincidence, but it's really awareness at a different level.

Your reflective work sparks change, and the world shifts--ever so slightly, your way.

1

Looking Within: What's meaningful to you?

Let's start with the present. What do you find truly meaningful about your current role? It's a big question, so don't rush, you'll have time at the end of the chapter to address it, and I encourage you to return to this question more than once. What was important earlier in your career is usually not as important today. Deciding how meaningful your job is now may seem like a nuisance, but agitation often results in clearer definition.

When things get difficult at work we turn to what we have control over: reorganizing the desk, cleaning the closet, repotting plants, filing and deleting emails, surfing the Internet, social media. All need to be done at certain intervals, but can be 'displacement activities', delaying tactics to avoid a problem. This is especially true when it comes to one's career.

Time to change

William Bridges' classic *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes* highlights the ambivalence of wanting something new and fearing it might actually happen. Embarking on a new direction is exhilarating and uncertain. As you start this chapter, old thoughts or patterns—along with some doubts, will surface. Why is that?

Bridges explains that for most of us, the change, the 'transition, is psychological'. Something new is concrete, trading in the old way of doing things. The reason, he suggests, is 'not because we can't accept the change, but because we can't accept *letting go of that piece of ourselves that we have to give up* when and because the situation has changed'.

Change is uncomfortable, getting what we want can often feel as challenging as not getting it

Roman Krznaric's book *How to Find Fulfilling Work*, states that 'very few people today are able to shift careers without going through a turbulent period of uncertainty about what direction to follow.' Whether a career change on our own or being pushed, we go through emotional stages; from disbelief, denial, frustration, and indecision to decisions and adjustment. In *When The Heart Waits: Spiritual Direction for Life's Sacred Questions*, Sue Monk Kidd writes of three distinct personal phases: separation, transformation and emergence. Each stage has varying intensity, depending on circumstance and individual resilience. Some sail through each stage; others linger in neutral or fall back before moving forward. Others regress. This book keeps you from languishing in the 'I'll think about it later' mode, but does require consistent engagement.

Face your fears and find freedom by not rushing to fill the void.

In her book *The Places That Scare You: A Guide to Fearlessness in Difficult Times*, Pema Chodron writes about our unease with discomfort, and how to learn through such unease. Chodron is an American Buddhist nun who practices sitting meditation as a method to face these emotions. Instead of avoidance, she suggests we look entirely inward to gain clarity and discover simple truths. As poet William Stafford reminds us, "What you fear will not go away: it will take you into yourself and bless you and keep you. That's the world and we all live there."

When first *trying* to meditate, your thoughts may well go in different directions, distracting your focus. That's normal, and just means your mind is fully working. It truly gets easier with practice. Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, believes every one of us has a mindfulness seed deeply planted in us. To find the seed, we must take time to concentrate and breathe. More than clarity, slowing down, taking time to breathe, bolsters mental strength.

You can also walk your way to mindfulness. Jon Kabat-Zinn's *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindful Meditation in Everyday Life* gives mindfulness and meditation tools as a means for getting unstuck. He describes mindfulness as paying attention to the present without judging and offers a step-by-step guide to walking meditation. It's not hard to do. This simple practice is also called 'walking in two worlds' and taps into cognitive, affective, creative and subtle intelligences. With daily practice, you become more aware when walking. If we ignore the present, or fill the void with busy lists, we remain stuck on one lower rung of the career ladder.

Meditation and mindfulness require constant practice. Meditation is now branded as a cure-all for the ills of the 21st Century, and mindfulness is a modern derivative of meditation. It's not a panacea—you don't walk away from a few sessions of mindfulness and know exactly where you're headed. With discipline and commitment, such spiritual practices bring greater balance and awareness to your daily routine.

I often hear the phrase, 'I need to stop and think about what I want to do.' Many recognize the need, but fewer find the time to do it. Worrying about time leads to procrastination about career planning. We fill our days with distractions which deflect us from our course, putting off things until tomorrow, but tomorrow never comes.

If you're time strapped, read Rachel Harris' *20 Minute Retreats: Revive Your spirit in Just Minutes a Day with Simple Self-Led Practices*, a perfect introduction to meditation techniques for busy people. As the title implies, the book offers short, practical steps for dealing with distractions, enabling us to be more receptive to the intuitive messages often suppressed. These 'retreats', as she calls them, involve developing breathing techniques which can be practiced at home or at work—only two to five minutes of concentrated breathing to start the day with clarity. The exercises teach us to look at our lives and careers in a new way. I found the chapter 'Self-Acceptance' particularly useful in dealing with 'your inner critic', finding freedom by facing up to our fears.

Taking time to reflect on our intuition moves unconscious thoughts, dreams and desires from the back to the forefront

Another useful book is Pico Iyer's *The Art of Stillness: Adventures in Going Nowhere*, which suggests that being still cuts through the surrounding noise, re-energizes us and offers a platform to work through confusion. Iyer recommends a few minutes each day to sit quietly or take a long walk in the wilderness to learn what lies deeper. To change your life, change your mind set.

Sitting quietly is not a new concept. And while everyone can spare a few minutes, sitting still is hard. We learn from the past.

Try this: Before you get out of bed in the morning, lie and listen to the stillness.

For three minutes only.

***By sitting still, you find
yourself***

Searching for meaning and a sense of direction while navigating a day job is not easy, but do-able. Practicing meditation or mindfulness techniques will help, and each of the following activities have worked for me.

Walk, write, reflect, draw

If meditation or silent retreats are not making an impact, consider another time-honored method to free the mind: walking.

Why walk?

Walking is a cathartic form of meditation. If I'm stuck on a problem, unable to find a breakthrough, I walk. My Irish grandfather first instilled this love for walking, which the two of us would do for

miles along the barren railroad tracks in Southern California. I was not always in the mood to walk, but he had a job for me to do (usually picking up empty bottles). In retrospect, it seems to me that walking along those tracks was very zen-like, as I had to focus my attention solely on the path.

Walking alone is strong meditation. Rebecca Solnit's *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, suggests that 'a lone walker is both present and detached from the world around, more than an audience but less than a participant.' I've found that walking meditation requires attention to the actual act of putting one foot before the other, one arm and shoulder in sync with the other, the breathing, all being more acutely aware of body and mind. Each step and each part of the rhythm give rise to ideas, memories, questions and answers.

The aim is to create a rhythm of space, moment, and thought, reflecting in sync with your body.

Frederic Gros eloquently writes in *A Philosophy of Walking*, 'Walking causes a repetitive, spontaneous poetry to rise naturally to the lips, words as simple as the sound of footsteps on the road.' It is, he suggests, 'not a tightening of the mind but a participation of one's entire being'. Gros describes the power in repeating words, chants or songs while walking.

There's definitely a meditative appeal to poetry. Read a poem before your walk or bring a poem on your walk to listen to. While walking, reflect on the poem and realize there are multiple interpretations. Don't try to decode the poem. The more reflective you can be on your walk, the more you can create an open space, not judge or problem solve, but build awareness. Poetry is like walking, as John Keats suggests, 'a poem needs understanding through the senses.' This simple act of walking and reading poetry brings mind, heart and soul together. Walking can easily be considered an upright

and forward-moving style of meditation. Poetry reframes ideas, reexamines purpose, and fosters resilience.

Walking is not only good for your soul, but stimulates thinking. Stanford researchers Marily Oppezzo and Daniel Schwarz connected walking to creative thinking. They found creative output increased by 60% when walking, generated novel ideas and even better – had lasting impact throughout the day. Recognizing the value of walking were Steve Jobs, Mark Zuckerberg and Jack Dorsey, all of whom often held walking meetings. Such benefits didn't start with tech geniuses, Nietzsche, Beethoven, Dickens, Darwin and Thoreau realized that walking relaxes your mind and creates new thoughts. You can walk the four corners of your room and gain the same stillness but there is always beauty to being outside. As Thoreau wrote in *Walking*, 'There is a subtle magnetism in Nature, which, if we unconsciously yield to it, will direct us a'right.'

Walking time is for you and
your undivided attention to yourself.

Try it.

Take a few deep breaths, stretch for a moment, and go out for a walk. Think about what you find truly meaningful about your career. Write down or record your responses as soon as you think of them. What creative idea came to your mind?

Why write?

In her workbook *The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity*, Julia Cameron recommends daily rituals of spontaneous, stream-of-consciousness writing, along with various exercises to gain creative self-confidence. Cameron uses writing to find a sense

of self, the person within, a coming-to-terms with issues blocking success. As Mary Karr says in *The Art of Memoir*: ‘A curious mind probing for the truth may well set your scribbling ass free.’

Begin with spontaneous writing; immediate responses to a stimulus without concern over syntax, spelling and grammar. Spontaneous writing is a great way to uncover hidden memories by bringing what is embedded in the subconscious mind to the surface. Jack Kerouac was considered an arch exponent of such writing, ‘The jewel center of interest is the eye within the eye’, likening his style of writing to jazz improvisation.

Throughout this workbook there are reflective questions to trigger a thought and spark your writing. Follow Kerouac’s advice: find your center and don’t over-think. Jot down words, phrases, or sentences as they come. Forget sentence structure or whether the prose makes sense. Five minutes of writing and increase to twenty minutes as you become more comfortable.

The power of writing cannot be overstated. Writing—pen, laptop or phone—connects past memories to present stories. Research psychologist James Pennebaker, who wrote both *The Secret Life of Pronouns: What our Words say About Us* and *Expressive Writing: Words That Heal*, discovered spontaneous writing while working with trauma patients. He recommends twenty minutes daily for four consecutive days. If you’re wondering if four days of writing brings clarity, I’d say so. Although I’m suggesting a weekly routine, if four consecutive days feels right, keep at it.

Why drawing or doodling matters

Doodling and drawing are another legitimate way of thinking from different angles, literally. Drawing pulls both sides of the brain together; the left side of words/letters/numbers and right

side of patterns/pictures/intuitions. Many of us live on the left side and take short vacations on the right. We need to exercise both sides. Drawing elicits emotions and feelings, bringing a different perspective to pivotal events. I have witnessed the value of drawing in my workshops with multicultural teams. Art breaks down barriers, as it is an entirely different medium. Essayist and novelist Siri Hustvedt equates drawing to a whole-of-body experience, at once sensory, kinesthetic, cerebral, conscious and unconscious. Drawing exercises our self-reflection muscle, increasing our understanding of self and others. Poet Reginald Shepherd wrote, 'Art reminds us of the uniqueness, particularity, and intrinsic value of things, including ourselves.'

While reflective writing certainly works in accessing the intuitive, unconscious side of ourselves and unblocking creativity, drawing gives another angle. Isn't it interesting that today's adult coloring books have tapped into this spiritual quest? I realize that drawing can be intimidating for the uninitiated (as can writing and reading poetry). This workbook will encourage you to push boundaries with various exercises and activities, but guided, step by step.



EXERCISE:

Getting started, walking and writing

1. What time works for you? Morning, evening, or afternoon? You need 30 minutes to write and walk, a comfortable place or time where your mind is clear. Before answering the questions below, sit quietly. Take two minutes to breathe, no more:
 - *What do I find truly meaningful about my current role?*
 - *What gives me energy?*
 - *What do I like and dislike about my role?*
2. Do 10 minutes of spontaneous writing centered around these core questions. Do not stop. Or if it's easier, make a list or a collage of words scribbled across the blank page.
3. Take a short break. Re-read your notes for five minutes, circling or highlighting what stands out. If nothing does, that's alright. Remember Kerouac—don't over think it.
4. Go for a walk at a comfortable pace, there isn't a speed guide for mindful walking. Find a pace and path which you are most likely to maintain. The main point now is to pay attention to your thoughts.
5. When you return, write down the ideas from your walk. Some days you will write for longer than others, there is no time frame.
6. **Chapter Reflection:** In this chapter you will peel back the layers of your real self to explore energy, likes and dislikes. Energy drives our actions and reactions, so imagine the benefit of tapping into this daily. What have you learned about yourself in this chapter? Circle some words which accurately depict energy and likes.

7. Read the poem *Letter to Gail* by Barbara Crooker. Think about her words before returning to your daily routine.

You write, "Where has the fall fallen?"
and how time is escaping, leaking like a hiss
from a blue balloon. Outside, the sky
is that lapidary azure of mid-October.
You rush from meeting to boardroom,
while each day the leaves shift
in color and tone, red-orange, green-gold.
When you turn, they've already fallen.
You write that you would like to stop working,
but phone messages and faxes pile up on the floor.
This air, so cold and clean you could bite it,
like an apple. All of our stories have the same ending.
Still, we drone on, little bees, drive while listening
to voice mail, drinking take-out coffee, trying to do
too many jobs in too few hours. You say you'd like to wake
up in the light, go for long walks with the dog, not answer
the phone for months. Outside the window, the unreachable
sky, the burning blue fire.

Barbara Crooker

Reflections