



How to fast track your career

Work. To most people, the word implies something that is hard, something you have to do.

Career on the other hand, implies you're working toward something more sustainable that you devote more energy to and that gives you a sense of purpose.

But what about your **motive**? This is often something you feel compelled to do - not for money or the way it makes you feel. You do it because it's what you're made for.

So, are you on the right career path for you? Does your career check all your move boxes? Let's find out...

Your career: reflecting on the past 12 months

Let's start with a short exercise. Either type directly into the boxes below, or print this out and then grab a pen and fill out the tables below...

<i>What were your biggest achievements?</i>	
Career	Personal
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

<i>What were your biggest challenges or disappointments?</i>	
Career	Personal
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

<i>If you could re-do the past 12 months, what would you do differently?</i>	
Career	Personal
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

How easy was it to fill these tables out? Was it easier to reflect on the achievements, or the challenges and disappointments? If so, that's a sure sign that something needs to change, otherwise you'll find yourself at 'work' instead of having a career that leaves you fulfilled.

Where is your career going next?

To find out where your career should go next, think about your top three to five goals for your career over the next 12 months. Write them down in the table below...

<i>What are the top 3 - 5 goals you can strive for in your career in the next 12 months?</i>		
Career goal	Why is it important to you?	Who or what could help?
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

No matter how well you are currently doing, it is good to not be complacent. Perhaps the tables above indicate that you're not happy with the direction your career is going in, and there's some work to be done... Either way, you're in the right place! Read on.

Taking positive steps towards career success

The question many of us have is simply, *how*? How do we secure that next promotion or new job?

If you're stuck on the same step of your career ladder or wanting to be proactive and accelerate your career, here are steps you can take towards career success.

1. Make sure you are doing a job you enjoy

This is ultimately the first step to career acceleration; finding something that you actually *want* to be doing. If your career isn't progressing at a rate you'd like, it's worth considering if you're actually doing what makes you tick.

In 2010 Warren Buffet, the world's third richest man, celebrated his 80th birthday. He was asked to give just one piece of advice to those aspiring to achieve wealth and happiness.

His reply was, *"The one piece of advice I can give you is, do what turns you on. Do something that if you had all the money in the world, you'd still be doing it. You've got to have a reason to jump out of bed in the morning."*

Motive makers. This doesn't necessarily mean a dramatic career change. Are there things that you could do to tweak your role or shape it into one that gets you excited again? Not sure? It's not surprising that most of us don't really know how to pinpoint what motivates us at work as 80% to 90% of who we are is unconscious. Why do we enjoy some tasks and not others? What makes us feel comfortable in some environments and not others? And why do we get on with certain people and yet can't get through to others? Knowing what motivates and drives you, gives you the opportunity to explore the implications of this in relation to not just your career but also how you communicate with others.

If you're struggling to find out what makes you tick, the [LAB Profile](#) is a tool we regularly use with clients to help them understand their subconscious motivations at work. Once you know what motivates you at work, you will find it easier to shape your career into one that doesn't feel like hard work. If you want to find out more, get in touch with me directly by emailing support@careerambitions.co.uk. You can also

read more about how a client of ours used the LAB Profile to change the way he viewed his role and his colleagues, changing his leadership skills entirely [here on the Career Ambitions website](#).

What do you enjoy? What hobbies do you have? What kinds of people do you like working with (e.g. children, leaders, creatives)? It can be easy to separate ourselves from our job however sometimes the lines between personal and professional can be more blurred than you think. The clues are all there in your hobbies and even what you enjoyed doing as a child.

2. There is no 'I' in team, and you will need help to get to the top.

If promotion is where you see your career going in the next 12 months, then it's particularly important to bear this in mind. Leadership authority is something that is given to you and is a compliment. At the same time being set apart as a leader can open rifts between you and the team. The principle 'look after number one' may result in upsetting the people you work with in your quest to gain promotions and accelerate your way to the top. Instead, finding ways to work *with* your colleagues to reach your individual goals is a scenario where everyone wins.

By developing your people and leadership skills you will build motivated teams that will go that extra mile for you.

Let's think about what the definition of leadership is. There are hundreds of these definitions which are not helpful! Many of us think of leadership as 'influencing others to be willing to do what you want them to do'. A recent definition more fit for purpose in the 21st century comes from Erik de Haan and Anthony Kasozi: "Leadership is a process that is devoted to enhancing an organisation's effectiveness." Effective

leadership is therefore the result of combined work of all members of the organisation - to ensure the team or organisation can compete better.

Is this something you aspire to? If you are thinking yes, you will need to develop stronger relationships and gain respect from executive leaders, peers, direct reports and clients.

Think about the worst bosses and colleagues you have had. They can be over-emotional or unreliable, being overly friendly with you one minute and hostile another. How motivated are you to carry out a task for or work alongside them? How much faith in them do you have that they're good at their job? We all have a sunny side and a shadow side too - which is referred to as the leadership shadow. Knowing what they are and how to manage them will result in you mastering your emotions, impulses and actions. This in turn will help to prove to your colleagues that you are an effective, strong and reliable leader. Then, it'll be you who stands out when a promotion opportunity arises.

3. Do not be short sighted, think about your long term career plan too.

Sporting stars often say that they visualise something they want to occur, such as scoring a goal, the night before a big game to get them more motivated and focussed on the task ahead. Similarly, in order to achieve career success you need to visualise what you want to happen and map out a plan of how it's going to happen.

This is more than simply 'thinking positive'. It is about having a clear picture in your mind of what you want - what you expect - from your future career. Try to regularly think about and openly discuss your hopes, dreams and career aspirations. Never give up or let your hopes slide. Time has a habit of passing by before you know it, so it's important to keep clear goals and positive aspirations in mind. Re-affirm this vision daily; what you think and believe is true for you and will help to shape your future. Above all, believe and take positive action, and opportunities will arise.

One way to future proof your career is to keep learning. However successful you feel your career currently is, there's always more learning to be done! Neglecting our own personal development is a trap that a lot of us fall into once we're comfortable in our careers.

Do you have a fixed or growth mindset?

Time for another exercise. A mindset is a belief about yourself and your fundamental qualities. The view you adopt for yourself can have a huge impact on the way you lead your life. Which of the two columns below do you most identify with?

Fixed mindset	Growth mindset
Priority: The need to constantly prove myself, show that I am bright and right.	Priority: I want to improve my intelligence, become brighter and smarter.
Seeks out: Quick wins, easy successes, less able competitors - to prove I am intellectually well endowed.	Seeks Out: Challenges, smart friends, opportunities to learn and improve in order to develop.
Avoids: Tough challenges, high effort, high performing peers as I may not be able to do well.	Avoids: Tasks and situations already mastered, as there is no new learning there.
Under Pressure: I become flaky and flustered. Likely to move away from the task, doubling my own capability to perform. I might even cheat!	Under Pressure: I try harder, show grit, creativity, resilience, revise my strategy and seek to become a better learner.
Contributors: I will have been praised as a child for getting things right. Possibly experienced over-praising. May have taken on labels - quick, bright, stupid, slow etc.	Contributors: I will have been praised as a child for commitment and effort, developing good strategies, showing interest, and being curious. Labels avoided.
Features include:	
Risks and challenges are to be avoided as they might reveal my weaknesses.	I scan for errors, then process and correct those errors with experimental Con.
If I fail, the conclusion is that I am stupid.	If I fail, it is just my first attempt at learning.
I devalue effort - I should be flawless already!	I am convinced that individual effort makes a difference.
I resist feedback, this is a threat to my intelligence.	I am open to challenges and constructive feedback.
Asking for help is stigmatising.	Able to learn well with and from others.
Test results define me. Effort grades are pointless, only achievement grades count!	Attribute success to my efforts rather than innate abilities.
Failure becomes an identity, not an achievement.	I am resilient in the face of obstacles and initial failure.
I'm only somebody when I'm successful.	I am somebody regardless of success.
I need to already 'be there'.	Becoming is better than being.
I am outcome focused.	I am process focused.

How many of the left or right column did you identify with? Do you predominantly have a growth or fixed mindset? A growth mindset is what we're aiming for here!

“Although bright people aren't more likely to have growth mindsets, those with growth mindsets tend to become 'brighter' over time. Fortunately, we can change our mindset.” Dr. Carol Dweck, Mindset, 2006

Five growth mindset attributes to embrace:

If you circled mainly fixed mindset attributes in the chart above, then read on. Successful leaders almost always have a 'growth mindset' - but it's never too late to change! Here are our **top five growth mindset attributes** that we should all be embracing in order to achieve our career goals:

1. Learning from others

The difference between those with a growth mindset and a fixed mindset, is that people with a growth mindset are open to learning from others. You may be highly skilled in one area, but let's be honest, no one's perfect! Having the ability to look at others and identify the skills that they have that you could benefit from, is priceless. Modelling and learning from others allows you to expand your portfolio of skills. As Howard Gardner writes in his book *Extraordinary Minds* (1997): 'exceptional individuals are especially talented at identifying their own strengths and weaknesses'. What are your weaknesses, and who can you think of who you admire for having those skills? Not only will you end up with a new skill, but you'll also be making yourself more valuable to your company or employer, as well as adding another tool to your belt!

2. Welcoming feedback

Let's be honest, not many people like being criticised or told they could have done something differently, or indeed, better. However, people with a growth mindset look at this criticism in a different light – rebranding it as welcoming feedback. Constructive criticism has been found to have hugely positive effects on development: leading to improved performance, a steeper learning curve and ultimately increased personal growth according to Todd Smith. How often do you ask your colleagues and peers for their opinion on your work? By welcoming feedback in order to improve your work you will become better at what you do! When someone suggests a way you could improve, remember that every single person on this planet is an individual, and will therefore offer a new perspective and opinion. Theirs may not match yours, and you may not agree with their suggestions, however by being curious rather than closed may lead to valuable learning.

3. Self belief: “I am somebody, regardless of success”

The power of the mind is incredible. Believe you can, and you will! Stanford Professor Carol Dweck found just this when researching the growth mindset, and wrote:

“Believing that your qualities are carved in stone - the Fixed mindset - creates an urgency to prove yourself over and over.”

But who exactly are you proving yourself to? Why live with the sole purpose of showing others what you can do? Be proud of yourself and your achievements. By embracing a growth mindset, Dweck recommends looking at the hand you’re dealt as a starting point, rather than the be all and end all. Strive for more, learn more, do more, be more. But never put yourself down. When something you are attempting doesn’t go to plan – is that failure? No! It’s an opportunity to learn.

4. Continuous improvement: “Better is better than being”

If you have a fixed mindset, you believe that you are dealt a hand at birth, and that sticks with you throughout the game of life. But is that right? Absolutely not, says Dr. Carol Dweck. Her research found that those people with a growth mindset had a far greater potential to become successful, than those with a fixed mindset. The nature of a fixed mindset means those people avoid new challenges, and prefer to stick with what they know in order to avoid any embarrassing failure. On the other hand, those with the growth mindset embrace challenges, seeing them as an opportunity for continuous improvement. Dweck wrote:

“When you enter a mindset, you enter a new world. In the [growth mindset] world – the world of changing qualities – it’s about stretching yourself to learn something new. Developing yourself.”

No matter how old you are, there is always more to learn, something new to accomplish, someone better to become.

5. Resilience

Being resilient in the face of obstacles and setbacks is easier said than done, we know! Trust us, we have been there. You step out onto the road to success and bang, you come face to face with an obstacle. What happens next could mean the difference between success and failure. Do you find a way round, or do you take the easy road back to where you’ve come? Those of us with a growth mindset would instantly choose the first option, while those with a fixed mindset would turn their backs, never knowing what might have lay in wait just past that obstacle! One of the keys to being successful in life is resilience. We can’t always predict what life will throw at us, so we need to prepare to be surprised. Nothing worth doing is ever easy. Otherwise everyone would be doing it!

Finalising your career goals

You are more likely to succeed in your career if you are open to new learnings, and embrace a growth mindset.

Take a look back at the career goals you wrote down on Page 2. Could the growth mindset attributes you wrote above help you achieve those goals and accelerate your career? Now it's time to finalise these goals. Write down below what they will be, and how you will get there:

<i>What are the top 3 - 5 goals you WILL strive for in your career in the next 12 months?</i>	
Career goal	What are you going to do to get there?
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

Now there is nothing left to do, but to go out and achieve them!

Further reading:

- *Read more about how the LAB Profile works, and how it could help you to identify what really makes you tick.*
- *For more on leadership, I can highly recommend reading Erik de Haan's book, **The Leadership Shadow**.*

I hope this resource has helped you to make positive steps towards career change that will leave you excited to go to 'work'! But if not, please pick up the phone or send me an email, I'd love to help you find a career that leaves you fulfilled (it's NEVER too late).