

## Mentoring for Career Change: 10 worksheets to help navigate your future

Brian Raison, PhD, Professor, The Ohio State University  
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### Contents of this Guide:

This guide includes materials specifically chosen for folks who may be facing a job loss, change, or retirement. The materials can help focus one's ideas and thinking now, and thus plan for the future they desire.

The materials consist of mostly 1-page worksheets. We suggest working through them with a friend or mentor. The discussion will provide insight and richness beyond an individual study approach.

### Career / Personal / Professional Reflections:

1. Early, Mid, or Late Career: *Opportune Times for Change and Growth*
2. Who You Are vs. What You Do
3. Your Personal Mission  
(Being Remembered video - 3:17) - <https://youtu.be/allzLWcnpic>
4. Gratitude: *Can making a list improve your career?*  
(video -2:31) - <https://youtu.be/npboMBY-hJE>
5. Five Things to Do, Have, Help, and Be

### Resume and Interview Thinking:

1. Triangulating Your Skills, Abilities, and Interests to Find Your Future  
(Curiosity video - 2:49) - <https://youtu.be/FWThUed5Gow>
2. The Resume and Cover Letter
3. Real Interview Tips that Work
4. Change, Growth Mindset, Ambiguity: *3 skills to describe in an interview*
5. Opportunity Questions and Future Career Exploration  
(Volition / choices video - 3:31) - <https://youtu.be/7ypwg6UN1uM>

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## Early, Mid, or Late Career: Opportune Times for Change and Growth



Whether you're working in business, industry, farming, education, the non-profit or government sector, or for yourself, one's *early, mid, or late-career* can be an exciting time for professional development and growth. But it can also bring great internal worry and doubt. These often occur *at the same time*.

In early career, we're getting the lay of the land, and beginning to understand what we're good at (and perhaps where specific talents lie). As we move into mid-career, we begin to trust ourselves (having been around long enough to learn a few things), but we can also have lingering existential questions about whether we're really on the right path. In our later stages, we may begin wondering if our management and leadership and communication skill sets are as good as we'd hoped at this point. If you're feeling any of these concerns, good! That's a sign of humility which is a key trait for great leadership.

That humility can also spur your intrinsic motivation to dig in and learn. This again is a good thing. In fact, I contend it's necessary for anyone who wants to move (as Jim Collins outlined) from "*good to great*."

In this series, we'll dive into ideas that can help anyone in their early, mid, or even late-career range. But before jumping into the specific ideas / challenges, let's pause and do a quick career assessment.

**Career Assessment Challenge:** Here are some career questions to ponder. Take your time with these over the next few days or even weeks. Jot a few notes on paper. Review them as you read the forthcoming material. It will provide specific ideas and tools to help whatever stage you may find yourself.

### ***Current-State Career Assessment:***

1. What do you like about your current work?
2. Are you challenged in this career field (or in your particular position)?
3. Are you finding meaning, feeling fulfilled, and being motivated? (Is that internal or external?)
4. In what ways are you learning and growing (both personally and professionally)?
5. Is work-life balance real? How do you make time for important life events?
6. What are some stressors in your current job (or career field)? What change might you make to help?

Again, take some time pondering these. Please do not tackle them all at once. Questions such as these are meant for stewing. In doing so, you will begin to formulate a bigger picture, and ideas on how to move forward to see that picture completed. Some of these will be answered as you read and consider upcoming segments and handouts in this outline.

Lastly, remember to give yourself some grace as you ponder these things. Enjoy thinking about the *potential* that's inside of you right now. (NOTE: If you don't believe much potential is there, you're wrong. And I'll prove it to you right now.) The fact that you're reading this is proof that you are interested. That's the first step in moving toward success and positive impact in this world.

These materials (reading them by yourself or discussing them with a mentor) will help you see your potential and more. I believe in you. You're on the right path.

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## Who You Are vs. What You Do



**Purpose:** To help you think about who you are or who you want to become instead of the classic question which asks what you want to do.

**Background:** What is the one thing people almost always asked you when you were young? For many, we heard the repeated question, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Some of us imagined firefighting, others considered becoming a nurse, farmer, or teacher.

Asking “Who do you want to become?” is qualitatively different from the normal inquiries we get as children about what we want to be. Many of us were never encouraged to really think through what we enjoy doing, what we are good at (natural gifts), and where we want to learn more. When coupled with what is needed (in business, society, the home, etc.), this is a trifecta that can point to future career satisfaction.

The question below is one many people have never been asked. It is the opposite of what we’ve been trained to expect. (i.e., What is your next career move? What position are you hoping to attain?) The question may take a moment to sink in. Give yourself time in responding.

Who do you want to become?

**Summary:** You do not need to fully answer this question right now, on the spot. Jot some ideas down. Then ponder it over the coming days and weeks. Then expand your writing. Also, look back and reflect on the Personal Mission and Five Things exercises.

**Challenge question:** This is a way to think about how to achieve the who you want to become.

What are some things you could begin doing to get there (to become the person you want to be)?

Note: This is a question that you may wish to return to over time. Feel free to do that with any of the questions. Your answers will change, and that’s normal. This is a journey.

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## Your Personal Mission



A personal mission is a statement about your “why.” It describes what you believe is most important in life, and how you want to be remembered. [Here’s a related video - <https://youtu.be/allzLWcnpic> (3:17)]

Being missional gives you priorities which let you say “no” to non-essentials, increasing capacity. Capacity provides options that can enhance living. **Consider keeping this paper.** When you apply for a job, school, etc., having (*and referencing*) a personal mission can help you stand out from other candidates. It is a powerful tool.

### The 4 Steps:

**1. Think about your Core Beliefs and Values.** Write down 4 or 5 key words or phrases under each.

Core beliefs: What are some key things you believe? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Core values: What are some key things you value? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Overall, what really matters in life? What’s most important? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**2. Think about your Hopes, Dreams, Desires, Goals.** Do not limit these based on current circumstances. Jot down 2 or 3 items under each category. These are not commitments, but *possibilities*.

Personal: \_\_\_\_\_

School/Career: \_\_\_\_\_

Community/World: \_\_\_\_\_

Family/Friends: \_\_\_\_\_

Spiritual: \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Leaving a Legacy:** (*These questions are to help focus your thinking.*)

How would you like to be remembered? What do you want people to say about you (now or after you’re gone (from this world, or simply from a meeting!)? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What do you dream of contributing in the future? \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Draft Your Personal Mission Statement:** Review the above. Underline words that stand out. Then write your Mission using the key words / ideas. Don’t worry about getting it perfect. It will evolve over time.

My mission in life is to... \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**2 Word Challenge:** What two words could summarize your personal mission?

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_

**Final Action Step:** Ask yourself whether your friends, co-workers, and family members know these things about you. How might you begin to let them see what is most important in your life? Jot some ideas. *Then do them.*

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## Gratitude: Can making a list improve your career?



If you have time, watch this video brief on gratitude - (2:31) <https://youtu.be/npboMBY-hJE>

Can increasing gratitude improve your brain chemistry and help you feel better? Can it help your career?

The science of gratitude has expanded greatly in the past twenty years. Studies increasingly show that regularly practicing gratitude contributes to better relationships, decreased anxiety, and increased internal satisfaction. These bolster what Daniel Goleman labels emotional and social intelligence, key items for success in our careers and lives. When we pause to focus on things we're grateful for, we shift our thinking from negative to positive. This can energize and reinvigorate us even on a bad day.

What are you grateful for? Jot a few items. - - - - -
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**The Challenge:** Could you increase your practice of gratitude? This may sound simple, but if you write down three things you are grateful for each day for twenty-one days, former Harvard researcher, Shawn Achor, says you will train your brain to look at the world differently. Once the habit is formed, you will start scanning the world for positives instead of threats. It's a game changer.

Researcher Robert Emmons, likewise, said that even though we do not have total control over our emotions, "being grateful is a choice that can sustain us through the ups and downs of our lives." When we become more grateful, we are more stress resistant and our self-worth increases. This often shows outwardly. When that is noticed, it can result in career progression and success.

Are you willing to take the 21-day gratitude test? (i.e., Will you write three things per day for which you're grateful?) ___ Yes? ___ No? How might increasing gratitude help your career? (Make a list of ideas here.) - - -
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**Here are some additional thoughts around gratitude, along with some ideas to try at the office:**

1. Start your next meeting with a gratitude question. For example, ask attendees (or your teammates) to:
  - a. Name a project you're thankful to be working on.
  - b. Name a work colleague and tell how you're grateful for them.
  - c. Describe a recent lesson you have learned, and how you are thankful for it.
2. In work or at home, think about how you can be grateful for the person, not just their output.
3. Gratitude and appreciation go hand-in-hand. Review Dr. Gary Chapman's *5 Languages of Appreciation* (<https://www.appreciationatwork.com/>). Consider how people prefer to receive gratitude. How might you show gratitude and appreciation this week.

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## 5 Things: A Personal Futuring Exercise



This exercise can help you envision and create the future you desire. Everyone... every company, every non-profit, etc., has two options for the future. These are: The one that **will** be if we do nothing... (continue the status quo), or the one that **could** be if we work to achieve it... (plan and act to reach desired ends, goals, dreams, mission).

Most people are asked at a very early age, “*What do you want to be when you grow up?*” We often prompt young minds with examples: “*Do you want to be a firefighter? A teacher? A farmer?*” But what if there is a more important question: “***Who do you want to become?***” This is qualitatively different. This is perhaps the best question to ask to prompt future thinking, focus, and goal setting.

Use the chart below and fill in the responses. Carry this around, think, reflect, and update it over the next few weeks. Reflection over time is powerful. Discuss insights with a friend or mentor.

### **What are 5 things you want...**

<b>...to have:</b> (These can be tangible or intangible.)	<b>...to do:</b> (This is about “what” you might do: jobs career, things for fun, “Bucket List” items, etc.)
<b>...to help:</b> (These can be big and small. Think broadly.)	<b>...to be:</b> (Not “what” you might do, but “who” you might become.)  <b>Challenge:</b> (actions to move you toward your “who”):  1.  2.

**Analysis:** Look at the things you want to **have** and to **help**. Really consider them. Now, will the things you want to **do** move you in the right direction to accomplish them in the future?

**Challenge Activity:** The “to be” category will likely reflect how people remember you, now or when you’re gone. (i.e., When someone thinks of you, what pops into their mind?) So consider 2 action items that will help you accomplish “**who**” you want to be and how you want to be remembered. Some may be short-term actions, some long-range. *For example:* If you want to be remembered as someone who was/is kind, what do you need to start doing?

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## Triangulating Your Skills, Abilities, and Interests to Find Your Future



**Purpose:** To help you think through three items: 1.) what you enjoy doing, 2.) what you are good at (i.e., natural gifts), and 3.) where you want to learn more. Bringing these three together can powerfully steer you toward your desired future.

Most people have multiple gifts. Many people have the ability to do a variety of jobs, and career paths are frequently not linear. Anecdotally, my friends and former students share that their journeys have been directed more by chance than any kind of plan. That's okay if you are lucky. But many folks find themselves in ho-hum jobs they could take or leave. *So how can you change this approach?*

We often prompt children to think about their future and possible professions by asking that age-old question: "What do you want to do when you grow up?" But even if they have taken some high school career assessments, the Myers-Briggs, or other employment interest instrument, many younger people have never thought through what they enjoy doing, what they are good at (natural gifts), and where they want to learn more. As I noted before, when coupled with what is needed (in business, society, the home, etc.), this is the trifecta that can point to future career satisfaction.

**The Process:** Consider these questions. Jot down a few ideas under each. Then review this list and consider it over the next few weeks. When answering these questions, do so in the context of considering your future career or *potential* employment:

Skills, abilities, interests: 1. What do you enjoy doing? - - -  2. What are you good at (natural gifts)? - - -  3. What do you want to learn more about? - - -
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**Summary:** This simple exercise can help you begin directing your career path while simultaneously aligning it with personal interests and life goals.

**Challenge question:** Imagine bringing those three things together. What field or job might you aim for in the future?

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## The Resume & Cover Letter

*(Always be prepared.)*



There is a lot of advice on this topic. The key is to be clear. Be succinct. The main thing today's applicants need to understand is that they must get past the AI (artificial intelligence) that is doing the initial (and sometimes secondary) screening for almost every job. Applicant tracking systems (ATS) are becoming more sophisticated. Your objective is to have the right mix of keywords without going overboard so a real person will give your resume a look. Here are two questions to get started.

What keywords from your experience do you need to highlight to match the position description?

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What could help your resume get past first and second rounds of AI screening? (Think about matching/aligning key words, clarity, cogent work experience.)

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Here are some additional tips that might help.

1. **Do not use columns** in your resume. It may or may not confuse AI or screen readers.
2. **Capture attention.** Write yourself a tag line. Include pertinent details. Capture the eight seconds of attention you're afforded when a human eye actually reviews your document. Pull them in.

What's your tag line? (Hint: Look back at your *Five Things* and the *Personal Mission* reflections. These will contain your key words to deploy here.)

3. **Be judicious** in your attempt to game the system. Yes, match keywords in the position description with keywords in your resume. But don't go overboard. Advancements in AI can recognize gaming.
4. **Return to the fundamentals.** i.e., Write your resume to tell your story. After you get past the AI, a real person will recognize a person who has real-life experience, AND who has reflected on it to understand what they have learned and how they can apply that in their next position.

Here's an example I've seen from numerous students when I'm reviewing their documents.

**Boring / meaningless resume item:** "Server and host at \_\_\_\_\_ restaurant."

**Meaningful / attention-getting rephrase:** "Used my creative thinking and problem identification skills to recognize customer needs and respond to create a positive experience."

The later tells the reader you actually thought about what you were doing, and how it could make a positive difference for the restaurant. This is extraordinarily better than simply listing the task you performed. This shows metacognition. This will bolster any resume entry.

**Summary:** Know that AI will be screening your resume. Create one that will advance you to the next step so your real self and ability can shine.

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## Real Interview Tips that Work



Throughout my 40+ year career, I have interviewed hundreds of people for positions ranging from entry-level to executive. There are a some key things that make an applicant stand out from the crowd.

1. The number one attention-getter is when someone describes how their ***personal mission aligns with the organization***. This shows metacognition... that the applicant is not just telling “what” skills or training they have, but “why” they want to use them to bring success in this new job.
2. If you bring **genuine curiosity about the interviewer** (and their reasons for working there), you will better connect, and gain deeper insight into the job.
3. I encourage folks to read through interview tips on LinkedIn, Handshake, and other job boards, and to **use AI (artificial intelligence) for interview practice**. Input the position description and company background. Then ask it to interview you... and to give you tips for improvement.

**Preparation to Ensure Success:** The purpose of an interview is to showcase your skills, experience, and personality to a hiring manager or team in a short amount of time. That window may be in person, or online. This can be stressful but managed with some simple preparation. Here are the basics:

1. **Research the company:** Learn all about the job and the company. Know their mission, history, products, and services. Relate your *personal mission* to their *corporate mission*.

Pop quiz: In less than ten words, what is your personal mission?

2. **Practice your responses:** Be familiar with common interview questions. Practice responding with a friend, family, or AI. Articulate your skills and experience in a clear and concise manner.

Who will you ask to invest an hour with you? \_\_\_\_\_

3. **Dress appropriately:** Whether in person or online, dress professionally. Our society judges people on *first impressions*. If online, position your camera to frame a positive background or scene.
4. **Be on time:** Arrive on time or log in early. This punctuality shows your respect for the interviewer's time.
5. **Listen:** Instead of formulating responses in your mind, listen carefully to the interviewer's questions. Feel free to pause, reflect, and then provide examples of your experience.

Pop quiz: What are 3 tips for listening well?

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6. **Follow up:** After the interview, send a thank you email or note.

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## Connecting your personal mission during the interview *(detail)*



Connecting your personal mission to an organization's mission will greatly enhance your potential of landing the job. You are demonstrating your understanding of the proverbial big picture, not just a task that you know how to do or a discipline in which you have certain skills, education, qualifications, or experience.

A lot of interviews will open with this: "Tell us a little bit about yourself." You could start by restating their mission. Say aloud: "I want my work to help move (the organization) toward your mission of x, y, z." (Fill in with their mission brief.) Then, tie your personal mission in, noting how it will support and energize your work. Jot some ideas below.

**Challenge:** How will you begin your response? (This is key. You need to have a clear, strong opener.) For example:

"I want to help \_\_\_\_\_ (organization) accomplish its bottom-line mission of \_\_\_\_\_ (2 or 3 words from their mission) by. . ."

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### When you interview, ask questions.

Here are 3 categories of questions to consider. i.e., Instead of a canned question, think about the situation and create a meaningful question germane to the position. (Adapted from Chad Littlefield, 2021.)

1. **Empathetic questions:** Imagine what your interviewer is thinking about. What do they care about?

*True story:* My niece was interviewing for grad school at Univ. of Kentucky with limited openings. She was the last student of the day. The interviewer seemed disconnected, but at the end, asked, "Do you have any questions." My niece replied, "Just one. I'm curious how you became interested in \_\_\_\_\_ (subject / discipline), and how that led to becoming Chair." That question changed everything. The interviewer became animated and began sharing. They found **common ground** on motivations, etc. And yes, she got one of the few openings in the program.

2. **Curious questions:** Change your focus from "me" to "we". Genuine curiosity opens conversation.

- a. Notice – look around the room; observe your interviewer; look at their desk, photos, etc.
- b. Wonder – ask yourself about what you see. What strikes you?
- c. Inquire – form a question about what you've noticed and are curious about.

3. **Design Thinking questions:** Start with a problem (not a solution). E.g., "If I showed up to work on my first day with a magic wand, what would you have me fix?"

### Some example questions you might use or adapt:

- I have always been curious and outgoing. I enjoy problem solving, understanding how the world works, and human interaction. Can you see that fitting in this position?
- I have a strong appreciation for diversity. How can I bring that to your organization?
- I have a passion for being "on mission." I have a personal mission to \_\_\_\_\_.
- I'm curious to know how YOU got involved in this field. What path did your career take to lead you here?

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## Change. Growth Mindset. Ambiguity: *Three Skills for Career Advancement*



**Purpose:** To help you consider three critical skills that, if communicated and demonstrated, will help you capture the attention of your supervisor (or a hiring manager during an interview) and help propel your career advancement. Before jumping in, let's set a foundation. Please reflect on this simple, but deep question:

For what do you want to be known? (i.e., How do you want others to view you?)

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Now, as you consider how you want others to view you, think about how that might match up with an idea from Gary Burnison, Korn Ferry CEO, who outlines three critical professional skills that can help people advance in their career. These will help anyone stand out in an organization (or during a job interview). Think about these three areas below. How are you at:

1. **Handling Change:** When change hits our workplaces (or lives), is our attitude one of immediate resistance? Or do we engage our curiosity and wonder? e.g., "Could this result in something good?"
2. **Having a Growth Mindset:** Carol Dweck's research suggests people with a growth mindset believe that, even if they struggle with certain skills, their abilities are not set in stone. They understand that with work, their skill sets can grow and improve over time.
3. **Dealing with Ambiguity:** Burnison defines dealing with ambiguity as knowing how to "make good decisions based on limited knowledge, or the information you have at the time." This takes some guts. Deciding and acting without knowing the whole picture can be frightening. But one can learn to gather information from diverse sources, weigh data, and mitigate risk and uncertainty.

Jot down some ideas around your skill or approach (or need for help) on these three topics:

Can you demonstrate how you...

1. handle change –
  
2. have a growth mindset –
  
3. deal with ambiguity –

**Homework:** Seek training or conversation on any topic above where you need help. Look for places to lean in and use skills that you have in other areas. Demonstrating these will open opportunities.

**Sources:** Burnison, Gary (October 16, 2022). Special Edition. *Our Time to Take Control*.  
Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random House.

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## SUMMARY: A *Fantastic Time for Growth*



I hope you've enjoyed these brief worksheets, whether in conversation with someone (a friend or mentor), or as a self-study for reflection. We began this series with some introductory questions about your job and career to help you discover what's most important through the process of conversation and introspection.

So. Now that you've come this far, please allow me to pose some additional "opportunity questions" and "future career" questions that may be of interest in your personal and professional growth.

### Opportunity Check:

1. Know Thyself: Have you taken an EQ assessment, cultural inventory, hidden bias test, or used other personal growth tools? (Will you give one a try this week?!)
2. Coach/Mentor: Do you have a career coach and/or mentor? (Hint: Have a couple.)
3. Learn List: What are some things you want to learn?
4. Bucket List: What are some things you want to do or achieve?
5. Values Review: How can you exhibit your personal values in your work (bringing your whole authentic self)?

### Future-State Career Potential:

1. Mission: What is your compelling "why"? How can you let it guide and bolster your career?
2. Leadership: How can you lead and encourage and enable others (at any level in your organization)?
3. Legacy: How do you want to be remembered?
4. Challenge: Will you become a mentor and be an encouragement to someone else?

## Rebuilding Volition

As you invest time pondering the questions, reflections and worksheets, you will begin to formulate a bigger picture of your career and life. You are on a path, moving forward to see that picture completed. But if (or when) you get stuck (because we all do!), here is one final idea. Consider how you might rebuild your *volition*.

Volition is how we make choices to take action, or, how we harness the power to use our free will. But in times of stress or anxiety, we sometimes feel hindered in our ability to exercise that choice and action. We may even feel powerless, frozen in place, and unable to act at all.

Penn State professor and author Dr. Heather Holleman has researched human volition, and has suggested one key question that you can ask someone (or that we can ask ourselves), that will help: "**What are your choices?**" If you can name *one thing* you might do, you can begin to unlock your potential for taking action. . . deploying your volition.

In real life, after asking the first question and breaking through the mental block, simply follow up with: "*Then what? What's your next step?*" If you or someone is struggling deeply, you might be more specific: "*What is a small task today that could get you moving?*" Friends, family, and counselors can be of great help here too.

If you have time, watch this video on volition. It may be helpful. (3:31 brief) - <https://youtu.be/7ypwg6UN1uM>

Lastly, if you don't have a mentor, go get one. Engaging in conversations that matter can be a tremendous benefit to anyone in any phase of life. You are moving forward! My best wishes on your journey.

**Homework:** A lot of these are great *perspective questions*. Reflect on them from time to time. What subjects or areas might you wish to explore further in reading or study? Pick out a few questions that resonate. Circle or highlight them. Set a deadline to prompt yourself to go deeper. Then track your journey as you create the future you want.