



# Kick-starting Your Career Adventure



by **Dr Elaine Hickmott**  
*An Innovating Your Career e-Guide*

# Welcome to the A to Z of Career Kick-starting Your Career

Like you, everyone’s career has to start somewhere. This early stage is an exciting and transitional time because getting in the career zone is new, unknown territory. It is also a time when recognising your value and your potential can sometimes be a challenge.

Full of tips and activities, this e-guide is designed to help you understand more about yourself, your aspirations and take action to kick-start your career adventure.



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## Aspirations

A successful career is built on a mix of aspiration, evolution and action so the dreaming part is a key factor. Imagining your future helps you take actions which are aligned to your aspirations. It allows you to spot gaps and do something about it.

Understanding your current situation and recognising your aspirations allows you to follow a path between them. It might not be a straight one and it might change but at least you'll be heading in the right direction.

### **Try It Today**

1. Take some time away from your day-to-day activities
2. Relax and let your mind wander
3. Now imagine yourself in 3 years time talking to a friend
4. You are telling them about your life.
5. What will your life be like? What will your career look like?



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## Beginning

You know you're at the beginning of your career. Right? Some people say the words but behave as if they are really at the end. Putting themselves under so much pressure it can become paralyzing.

Choices made early on in your career help you make other choices, open your eyes to different opportunities and enable you to learn. It's how you grow your capabilities and skills.

Plus early career experiences enable you to understand more about what you don't enjoy. An important part of your career mix.

### Try It Today

1. If you're having trouble making choices, make a list of what matters to you and what you'd like from your first role. Be honest
2. Look at the list and decide on your top 3 'must-haves' (*Mine were location, in manufacturing and possibility of progression*)
3. Use your top three to help you find, create and choose opportunities



## Confidence

One brilliant and frustrating fact about confidence is that it grows when you do new things or you are challenged in different ways.

Approaching these challenges and having a go builds confidence; avoiding them and waiting until you feel more confident has the opposite effect.

### **Remember**

If self-doubt does creep in, your own beliefs, assumptions and actions can become skewed. This in turn can give you a distorted sense of what's really happening. In essence, you start standing in the way of yourself. Keeping a healthy perspective on situations helps keep a check on reality.

It is natural to sometimes feel lacking in confidence, it happens to everyone at some point or another. How you deal with those feelings is the key. Recognise them and find ways to move forward.



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## Discover

How well do you know yourself? What value would you bring to an organisation? Often people starting their careers don't think of themselves in this way. Why should you; you might not have done it before!

Two important factors to consider...

... you already have valuable skills and experience but may not realise it

... to potential new employers you're a stranger so they need your help to see your awesome value and why you're an asset.

Taking time to discover and articulate your skills and experience helps you help people get to know you, boosts your self-confidence and reminds you of what you have already achieved.

### **Try It Today**

Create a richer picture of yourself:

1. Write brief stories about your achievements, challenges you faced, things you are proud of, things you enjoyed...and...
2. Look back at each story and highlight skills you are demonstrating
3. If you can't be objective, ask someone you trust to help



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## Explore

It's amazing how tightly we become locked in our own personal bubble. We maybe forget there's a big wide world out there or maybe we choose to ignore it. This disconnection has a direct impact on our career success and is an important aspect of kick-starting your career adventure.

Exploring beyond what you know, being curious and asking questions:

- increases knowledge and understanding
- enables you to find and create career opportunities
- encourages you to see things from the perspective of others

Fresh insights result. Unimaginable opportunities arise. Careers get the injection of energy they need. And sometimes... new friends are made.

### **Top Exploring Tip**

Speak to people; ask them questions, for their insights. Don't just rely on what you find online. People are generally helpful and happy to share their experiences. They are an excellent source of real insights.



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## **Flexibility**

We are in a time where we have the ability to find and create more career opportunities than ever before. Jobs don't have to be for life anymore which gives us freedom; portfolio careers are the norm which gives us variety; people are filling roles that didn't even exist a decade ago which demonstrates how the workplace keeps evolving.

This rich, changing environment is full of potential, as long as you are prepared to adapt and evolve.

Flexibility is your friend. In a world of constant change the ability to be flexible is an asset.

### **Top Tips**

Don't be too rigid in your thinking. If you see a role which satisfies most of what you are looking for go for it.

Once you start your first role be prepared to take on new things and contribute to new projects. Don't let today's role define you; it's a springboard to the next.



## Gaps

Instead of 'minding the gap', think about 'finding the gap'. Whether it's a gap in experience, skills or knowledge, a gap in the market or a gap in an organisation's talent or capabilities, gaps are great. They are where career opportunities lie. They are spaces just waiting to be filled by learning, new products or services, you and your amazing skills, abilities and experience.

At the start of your career you will inevitably identify gaps. It's up to you to compare them against what you are trying to achieve and decide whether or not they are important to your success. Don't let them hold you back, use them as seeds for growth. OK, I know you probably think that's a bit 'cheesy' but it's true. My proudest moments and greatest successes happened thanks to the good old gap!

### **Top Tip**

If you genuinely find an important gap please do something about it; come up with a plan of attack. Approach it; don't ignore it.



## Help

Being independent and self-sufficient are good traits in anyone...as long as it doesn't mean being closed off from others. There are occasions when everyone gets stuck, needs a sounding board or would benefit from an alternative perspective. Taking responsibility for yourself and your career mixed with a dash of outside help enhances your recipe for career success. There is a caveat. Be careful in selecting your confidantes and remember it's still your career and your responsibility.

### **Tips for Selecting a Mentor**

1. Meet or speak with prospective mentors to check compatibility. After all, if they irritate you things aren't going to progress well
2. Think about what it is you're trying to achieve by having a mentor. If you don't exactly know but just know that you need some support, that's fine. Good mentors will help you with this too
3. A mentor is there to challenge and support you but ultimately, you have to commit to, and take responsibility for, making any changes



## Inspiration

What are you motivated by; money, responsibility, status, power, challenge, variety? We all have different motivations which vary over time depending on our circumstances.

To really motivate yourself to kick-start your career and turn ideas into action requires a little more detail and emotion than 'I want loads of money' or 'I want to feel fulfilled' or 'I want a good job'. What do these things really mean to you?

Digging deeper, asking yourself why you want them; why they matter to you, starts to make what you're aiming for much more real and the thought of it becomes much more of an inspiration.

### **Try It Today**

Write your own manifesto. Think about what you want to achieve by when. Imagine what it will allow you to do; personally, professionally; for yourself, your friends, your family. Capture it, keep reading it, live it.



## Job...or Career?

When you're in or just out of education you may take on various jobs. These bring cash, skills and experience. All of which are valuable to your career adventure. There is, however, a difference between having a job and building a career.

Moving from one different, unrelated job to next with no thought of the future or striving for personal growth is not building a career.

A career is the connected, evolving, long-term progress you make within your work life. And it will most likely be made up of a variety of jobs, roles and accomplishments. It may also involve more than one career path. Careers harness learning, evolving skills and experiences; helping you to develop your work life into future. It's like a personal career snowball!

### **4 Elements at the Heart of a Career**

**Perspective:** Taking a longer-term view

**Progress:** Moving forward and developing

**Purpose:** Knowing aims and objectives

**Personal:** Unique to each individual



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## Kindness

When you set off on your career adventure it is easy to focus on what you do not have; the skills you are missing, the experience you haven't gained.

Knowing the gaps, as I've already mentioned is a good thing. Getting overly fixated on your apparent shortcomings is not.

Being kinder to yourself can go a long way to boosting your self esteem. Remember, you can't know everything; skills and experience develop over time. Plus rejection happens to everyone at some stage or another.

So next time you think of an aspect you don't have, purposefully think of one you do. When rejection comes your way, see it as the chance to find something better.

And if the kindness vibe feels a bit of a struggle for you, I found a helpful befriending meditation in the book, *Mindfulness*, by Mark Williams and Danny Penman. It helps you relax and see yourself and the world around you in a much kinder way.



## Leverage

Going back to the subject of getting to know yourself better, kick-starting your career involves leveraging what you have in your skills and experience treasure chest. By leverage I mean..

*...to use something to maximum advantage*

Everyone's career starts somewhere. Early career opportunities are gained by taking maximum advantage of what you have and the potential you demonstrate. Help others to see that potential by the way you 'package' yourself; how you showcase what you have to offer.

Plus never dismiss or undervalue experiences gained from placements, part-time jobs, club participation, volunteering, hobbies etc. They are examples of your skills in action and are valid at this stage of your career.

### Try It Today

1. Take an honest look at your achievements
2. Be proud and enthusiastic about them
3. Capture examples of your skills and capabilities in action



## Matching

The beginning of your career adventure involves the hunt for new opportunities. This may mean creating them yourself, going and finding those that are already out there or a combination of both. Regardless of how you go about your opportunity hunt remember, you are looking to make a value match between you and the employer/customer. It's about them as much as you. Demonstrate how you will help them succeed or overcome a challenge; how you will help them and the organisation.

### **Top Tips**

1. Define what an opportunity actually looks like for you
2. Use a multi-channel approach to finding opportunities; the world is greater than the sum of online jobs boards

### **Try It Today**

Describe your dream role, what would it look like? Then see if you can find it. If you can't find it, think about how would you go about creating it? Who would you ask for help?



## Networking

Sorry to bring up the 'N' word. I didn't mean to scare anyone or cause a cold sweat! Networking for career success is a positive and empowering experience. Yes, it can sometimes be challenging and frustrating and you meet the occasional 'bad apple' but in general people are friendly and helpful if you give them the chance.

Networking helps with gaining fresh insights, learning, exploring beyond your bubble. All of which support your mission to kick-start your career.

### Thoughts on Networking

Fundamentally, networking is all about people so be human and treat others as human beings too. Remember these three aspects...

1. **Radar** – to start a conversation people need to know you exist
2. **Rapport** – keeping the conversation going and building trust takes time and positive intent
3. **Relationship** – not everyone you connect or converse with will lead to a professional relationship. Invest proactively in those that do



## Open

Being open-minded and creative, whether you realise it or not, are key to achieving real career success. This is particularly true at the beginning of your career. Entering the career zone for the first time with an open-mind and a willingness to adapt will help you find your first professional role.

Adopting a more creative mindset enables you to stay curious and to make progress. It allows you to spot opportunities and means you will be able to deal more positively with any challenges.

**Important reminder:** Remember you are already creative. It's an integral part of you so embrace it. Being artistic is one output of creativity; not creativity itself! Creativity is a capability and can be continually developed

### 3 Mindset Boosters

1. Exercise is good for our brains. Movement improves thinking skills
2. Imagine what someone else would do in your situation
3. Stay curious. Ask questions. Explore beyond what you know. Comfort zones are not as warm, fluffy and safe as you think



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## People

Always remember that at the centre of everything there are people. Some we might like, some we might dislike. One thing is for sure that without them the world would be a lonely, boring place.

**Precious People:** When you're embarking on a programme of personal or professional change it's really important to know your true friends, allies, champions. They want you to succeed; together you can help each other.

**Pointy People:** Adrian Webster in his book *Polar Bear Pirates and Their Quest To Reach Fat City* calls these people *Neg Ferrets*. Whatever you do they'll have something negative to say; pointing out everything that is or could go wrong. So when you're setting off on your career adventure don't be deterred by the Pointy People. And, looking on the bright side, sometimes their negative perspective might hold a nugget of something useful...or not!

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## Questions

Picture the scene, you are at a conference, having a coffee during one of the refreshment breaks. As you sip your drink one of your fellow delegates says hello, introducing themselves as the Managing Director of a company you have dreamed of working for or supplying into. Apart from hello, of course, what would you say? How would you make a lasting, positive impressions?

When we go for job interviews we usually have time to prepare a few questions for the panel. When you're kick-starting your career and on the hunt for opportunities you never know when and where these opportunities may arise. Being prepared with some well thought out questions is a valuable thing to do.

### **Personal Insight**

Since I became self-employed I'm always ready for those ad-hoc, random conversations and encounters. You never know who you might meet or what opportunities lie within your reach.



## Results

How will you know if your making progress or achieving your goals? What do you want to achieve by when? After all, if you don't know what you want to achieve, how will you know when, and if, you've achieved it? In business and education, deadlines and outcomes are expected and part of everyday life. When it comes to our own personal aspirations and activities they can often be forgotten. OK, it might be because you get enough of all that blah-blah-blah elsewhere but setting goals for yourself will help you kick-start your career adventure. Trust me. It's worth it.

### **A Few Words on Goals and Action Plans**

You probably already know about SMART\* goals and action plans so I'll keep it brief. In summary, it's a way of making your goals more defined and understandable which in turn helps you monitor progress... and pat yourself on the back when you've achieved them 😊

\*In case you need it:

Specific | **M**easureable | **A**chievable | **R**elevant | **T**ime-bound



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## Success

Measures of success, like our careers are very personal to each individual. You might crave a mega-yacht, while I might crave freedom to take walks in the countryside. Plus our measures of success change over time and with changes in our circumstances.

As you kick-start your career adventure it's important to have a sense of what success means to you. And I emphasise the word 'you'. Don't look to others, it's all about you.

### **Try It Today**

1. Ask yourself the question, "what does success look like for me?"
2. Write down everything you comes into your head. Don't analyse
3. Now channeling your most artistic self and using an A3 piece of paper, create a Success Board for yourself based on your notes
4. Use drawings magazine clippings, motivational quotes, whatever you can find to represent and create your picture of success



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## Time

Sorry to state the obvious but some things just take time.

As someone who is inherently impatient when it comes to seeing results, I do feel a bit hypocrite as I type. Please forgive me!

Putting my personality quirks aside, it really is true that finding and creating career opportunities takes time. Achieving the successes we desire on the whole takes time. The fact is that, in most cases there is no such thing as an overnight success.

It generally takes a healthy dose of PATIENCE...

**P**ersistence

**A**daptability

**T**hought

**I**vestment

**E**ffort

**e**Nergy

**C**ommitment

**E**nthusiasm



## Unique

Although some professions and organisations have certain defined career steps, everyone's career is unique to them. Your career is unlike anyone else's. There may be similar patterns of progression compared to others but ultimately your personal combination of learning, experiences, skills and capabilities mean your career is special to you.

I make this point because it can be easy for some people to become disillusioned at the beginning of their careers because they are misguidedly benchmarking themselves against others. When instead, getting their own house in order would be much more beneficial. Being overly concerned about other people's careers can be a powerful source of career frustration.

### **Top Tip**

Don't fall into the 'my dad's bigger than your dad' trap!

You really don't know what's happening with other people and their careers plus perception is a powerful thing. Concentrate on being your best and building the career you desire.



## Values

Your values are defines as..

*...your principles or standards of behaviour; your judgement of what is important in life*

Therefore, thinking about what matters to you and what you value is a worthwhile exercise when you're kick-starting your career adventure. Not only does it help you take a fresh perspective on yourself and what you want, it can help you with making those early career choices.

### Try It Today

1. Ask yourself the question, "It is important to me in my career that I..."
2. Write down everything you can think of: e.g., type of work, environment, culture, ethos, management, leadership, responsibility, rewards, prospects, enrichment, power, status. etc, etc
3. Look at what you have written, which 5 things do you value the most?
4. Use these insights to help you find and create career opportunities



## Workplace

Like people, every workplace is different. This is a fact that can sometimes be forgotten. It has an impact on your career because it is:

- factor in the process of making a match between you and an employer
- linked to your aspirations, interests and what you value

At the beginning of your career you may not have experienced many working environments and this is to be expected. What you can do is think about your preferences.

### **Try It Today**

1. Suspend reality for a moment
2. Imagine there are no constraints and anything is possible
3. Now describe / draw your ideal workplace
4. Look back at what you've captured, what aspects really matter to you?
5. Use these insights to help find and create opportunities and to inform questions to potential employers



## **X-Factor**

No, I don't mean your first professional role has to be appearing on a TV talent show. Though if that's your aspiration, go for it! What I'm talking about here are any components that you are not prepared to compromise on when it comes to your first role. Knowing your deal-breakers helps you find and create more opportunities that are right for you.

Plus, if you have a confidence wobble, you can easily lose sight of what matters to you. This in turn can lead to skewed decisions. Getting ahead with your deal-breakers means you already have a well thought out reference point if you need it.

### **Try It Today**

1. Set yourself a time of five minutes
2. On a blank piece of paper write down everything that you would call a 'deal breaker' with respect to your first role
3. Don't censor yourself, let the words flow
4. Stop at five minutes and review
5. Sort into themes and decide on your top 3 deal-breakers; the things that you're not prepared to compromise on



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## You

Who's the number one person you need to be able to rely on during the lifetime of your career? No, it's not a trick question and a little obvious I know...it's YOU! You are the linchpin that makes it all happen.

As you are the main protagonist in your career adventure remember to give yourself the opportunity to step away from what you're trying to achieve. It's good for the soul; bringing renewed energy and perspective. This is especially true in times of change, like when you are in the process of kick-starting your career adventure.

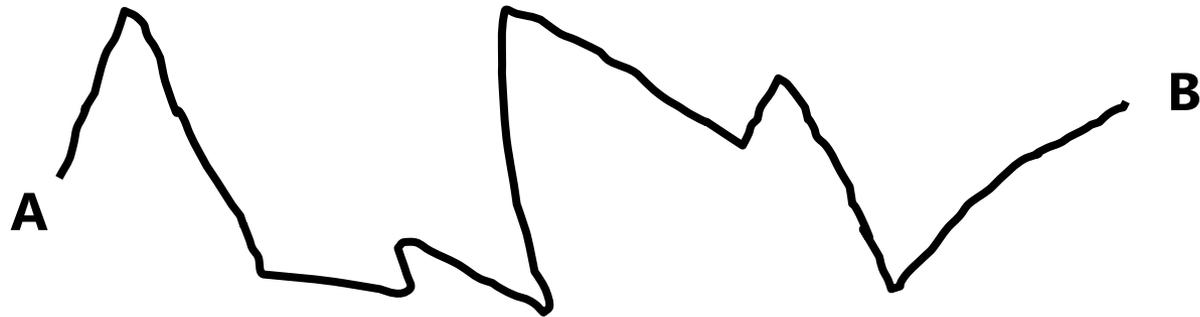
### **Pause Pact**

No matter how buzzing you are and no matter how invincible you feel, you need to take a bit of time for yourself. Go for a walk, spend time with loved ones, listen to some music, visit a museum, get a group of friends together and share a couple of beers/cappuccinos, watch your favourite film/TV show. Whatever works for you.

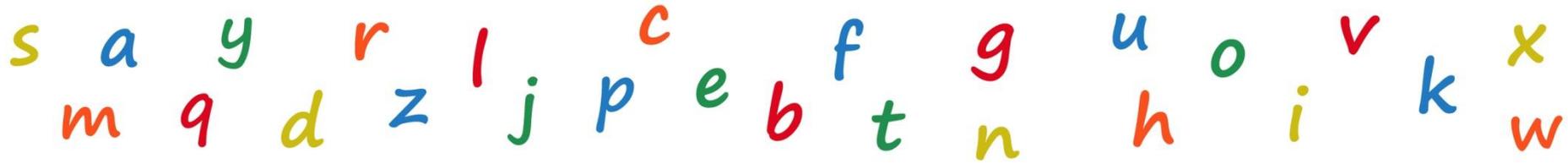


## Zigzag

Career paths are very rarely straight lines. What else can I say 😊



I wish you every success with kick-starting your career and the dynamic evolution of your career adventure. You may not know what's round the corner but with the right attitude and approach who knows what exciting opportunities the future may bring for you.



## Additional Resources

**Books** to help you take a fresh perspective

*Mindfulness* by M Williams & D Penman

*Playing Big* by Tara Mohr

*Polar Bear Pirates and Their Quest to Reach Fat City* by Adrian Webster

## Innovating Your Career e-Course

My online career development course - <https://www.udemy.com/innovating-your-career/>

**Instagram** perspectives on life, careers and more at @innovatingyourcareer

**Posts** from my learning and career blog

Networking for Career Success - <https://elainehickmott.com/2018/11/08/networking-for-career-success/>

10 Creativity Boosts - <https://elainehickmott.com/2019/01/10/my-10-creativity-boosts/>

Creating Portable Personal Power - <https://elainehickmott.com/2018/02/06/creating-ppp/>

## Innovating Your Career

It's fair to say I have had a varied career path. From researcher to industrial chemist to business leader to entrepreneurial experimenter and talent developer.

Supporting others on their career adventures is something that I have done for many years. Following our interactions and my personal successes (and shaky moments) I was inspired to create ***Innovating Your Career***; a practical framework for adopting the right attitude and approach to achieving the career success you desire.

You'll find my **Innovating Your Career e-course** on Udemy. A practical guide to kick-starting your career adventure... <https://www.udemy.com/innovating-your-career/>

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### About Dr Elaine Hickmott

When I'm not writing e-guides I'm an independent Talent Developer and Career Mentor running my own learning and development consultancy which specialises in working with scientists and engineers. I'm proud to have helped thousands of people at varying career stages invest in their professional development and career progression.

Stepping back in time, my adventure began with a PhD in chemistry followed by experience as an industrial chemist and working in commercial and business leadership roles. In a nutshell, a PhD in chemistry launched me. Manufacturing and business inspired me. Curiosity and pro-activity did the rest. I've happily gone from boilersuit to boardroom and beyond.

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