

YOUR 21ST CENTURY CAREER

Heather Carpenter PhD



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**NEW PATHS TO
PERSONAL SUCCESS**



Heather Carpenter PhD

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getting the success you want

You do best when your career and life goals work together – and there are ways to help this happen.

What do you want from your career? Thinking strategically and purposefully about the success that you want offers the best chance of making the right choices, the ones most likely to bring it about. If you don't think about it, then you don't clarify the vision and working towards it is less purposeful. Chances are what you want will reflect where you are in terms of your career, age, and experience. The kind of success for which we strive can mean very different things at different stages of our lives.

Stages of success

Starting out (whatever age)

Success is: the right track to the right work for you

Achieved by (in a nutshell): good decisions, choices that suit you

Key knowledge required: what suits you, your talents and strengths, what's out there

If this is you, your primary concern is with decision-making, and ensuring that you choose the right options for work, education, or training. Getting this step right acts as a springboard to future success

– you will be motivated to achieve, and obtain work that suits and satisfies you. One way to make better decisions is to know what *really* makes a difference to your progress.

Early career

Success is: a chance to grow, develop, opportunities to zoom ahead or balance life and work

Achieved by (in a nutshell): getting very good at what you do

Key knowledge required: the work environments/patterns that suit you, the key skills to learn, what employers value

If this is you, making the progress you want, and finding the areas in which you wish to grow your expertise, depends on being strategic about *where* you work – in particular, targeting the work environments that suit you, and developing the right higher-level competencies or professional skills for your desired future roles.

Mid-life or mid-career

Success is: a chance to change, work in different ways, and take a new perspective on life

Achieved by (in a nutshell): exploiting your assets and experience in new ways, possibly taking a whole new look at learning

Key knowledge required: what you have to offer, the currency of your career capital, and how to adapt to new patterns of work

At this stage you need a clear understanding of what motivates you, and *where* and *how* you want to work. One way to exploit your assets is to be very clear about what they are, and how they might be applied in ways to build a different future. What is your area of expertise? Are you up to date? What might you build on or develop for now, and later in life?

Later career

Success is: working in the way that suits you – when you want, as much as you want

Achieved by (in a nutshell): redefining work and life goals and patterns

Key knowledge required: possible ways to restructure your life and work, and how you might transfer and leverage your existing capital

When you are confident in your knowledge and skills, you may want to work out how to restructure work in your life to get the freedom you want and the income you need. How can you utilise your skills and experience in a whole new enterprise or role? You will want to know how to continue working as long as you need to – in ways that interest and suit you. For a couple it may mean a whole new joint project.

Define your success stage

You may decide you are a combination of the various stages of success, but take a moment to think about it. What really is success for you at this stage of your life? Try putting it down in words:

Success is

.....

Achieved by

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Key knowledge required

.....

Steve, in his late fifties, recounted his change of thinking about success over time: 'When I was younger, to be successful was to be the top salesman, but as you get older you ask yourself, is money the measurement? I suggest no, maybe not, because as you get older most successful people do accumulate, and as we are accumulating we are building up assets to make ourselves more comfortable in our lifestyles, and then it goes to something different. How you stand in the community? Are you respected? Do you tell the truth? It is more value based.'

Chart your career success map

There are various ways to consider success in relation to your career, and one is through a career success map. C. Brooklyn Derr suggests that we all have different orientations to career success, and an 'internal career success map' that drives our thinking. He identifies five key dimensions of career success, as described below.¹ Use the exercise beneath to rate these dimensions for yourself.

Concern with:	Primary objective
Getting ahead:	Upward mobility
Getting secure:	Security, sense of belonging
Getting high:	Challenge, stimulation
Getting free:	Autonomy, freedom
Getting balanced:	Finding an equilibrium between personal and professional life

Put these measures in the order of relevance for you. Which is most important? (1) Least important? (5)

1.

Continued

2.
3.
4.
5.

Strategies for your orientation

When you realise your orientation to career success, you can be more strategic about how to get what you want. There are key words for each of these orientations,² to explain what to do for yourself, and what to look for in workplaces, in order to thrive and be satisfied.

Getting ahead

Self-development is the key word if you are focused on the advancement track, and that is about both what you can do for yourself as well as finding workplaces that offer you opportunities to grow and develop and take on the kinds of responsibilities you want. Organisations that empower their staff, and offer development opportunities, formal learning, and special projects are helpful to you.

Getting secure

Employability is the key word if your focus is security, and this means keeping yourself up to date with ongoing learning. Looking ahead to what your employer will want in the future and preparing for it is the more proactive way to go, but you will thrive best in workplaces that are more stable and willing to make long-term investments in their staff.

Getting high

Challenge and *stimulation* are the key words here – you want new

problems to solve and tasks to master. Choosing sideways moves and new career paths may give you what you want, which is most likely to be offered by workplaces that are flexible and creative in people management.

Getting free

Freedom is the key word for this group – freedom to work in the style that you like and within the structures that suit you. It is often your own business that inspires you, as you are among the people looking for entrepreneurial ventures and ways to create your own work. If you work for an organisation, you seek flexibility in the way you are managed.

Getting balanced

Quality of life is the key focus – finding the balance between your work and your family, and aspiring to a richer quality of life through different work arrangements. You may want to work from home providing a business or service – perhaps to the organisation that once employed you. If you are in full-time employment, you will be happiest in organisations that promote family-friendly policies and allow your desire for a balanced lifestyle to flourish.

It is useful to think about what orientations drive you – and even more useful to put the knowledge of these orientations to work. Thinking about your goals in this way gives you the ability to plan more strategically for your personal success.

Personal success is the goal

The protean or self-managing career of the 21st century emphasises the new idea of success – psychological success, the path with a heart – in other words, the success that suits *you* and fulfils *your* goals. It has been described as success that is *personally meaningful*, with goals set

by the individual and not parents, peers, organisations, or society.³ It is success without an audience, designed for nobody but you, or for just you and your family. It doesn't have to meet anyone else's standards, or require anyone else's approval.

In the traditional career

Success is obvious

Success is defined by promotion and climbing the ladder, symbols of status, money

In the new career

Success is personal

Success is defined by you and reflects your individual values and goals; what satisfies you and gives you the life you want

This is not an either/or proposition. Many of you, particularly Enterprising types who are ambitious and love to earn at the highest levels, will aspire to a success path complete with increasing wealth and all the status symbols that go with that. You will also derive huge satisfaction from being seen to be successful by others. Absolutely fine – that is *your* personal success choice, but in the past it tended to be the *only* version of career success. New versions of success are customised – it is whatever suits you and gives you the most satisfaction in both your work and life goals. Your vision will be unique to you.

**Personally meaningful success is success without
an audience, designed for nobody but you,
or for just you and your family.**

A useful exercise at any stage of your life is to create a vision of the success you are aiming for. Writing it down gives it substance, power, and clarity.

My personal success scenario:

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Knowledge of your guiding values – a prerequisite for satisfaction

One of the key factors determining your feeling of satisfaction and success is the values that guide you. Understanding and knowledge of these helps you make the best choices in the first place. Like other career planning guides, this book asks you to think about your values, but there is one key set of values I have found very useful for assisting people to understand themselves, and these are known as ‘career anchors’. Edgar Schein describes them this way:⁴

Your career anchor is a combination of perceived areas of competence, motives and values that you would not give up; it represents your real self.

In the world of careers, true satisfaction and success comes from work that is congruent with your real self – and any way you can gain more insight into this is beneficial to your thinking, and consequently the choices you make. Schein proposes that even in a varied and turbulent environment, when work conditions may change quickly, the career anchor that is predominant for people provides a consistent sense of direction and purpose – an anchor in a storm. It can also be

used as a touchstone when considering work and a new role: Is that really me?

Consider the following descriptors of career anchors and self-assess their importance by ranking the three that most apply to you. For those wishing to learn a little more about career anchors, a full test can be undertaken online at www.careeranchorsonline.com

Career anchor	Characteristics
Technical/ functional competence	You like developing and using specific skills, becoming very good at a particular area, often technical
Managerial competence	You have an interest in and orientation toward the management of others, and gaining more and more responsibility; you are not interested in specialisation
Autonomy/ independence	You want the freedom to define yourself and your work; to work in the ways that suit you
Security/stability	You are concerned about feeling secure in your work and your industry; stable, predictable work is important
Entrepreneurial creativity	You want the ability to create new products or processes, to be innovative and recognised for your work
Service dedication to a cause	Service to others is high among your personal values and you want work that reflects this ethic
Pure challenge	You want work that presents new and ever-increasing challenges and problems to solve
Lifestyle	You look for balance, and work in a way that allows you the preferred personal or family lifestyle you want

I relate most to these career anchors:

1.
2.
3.

Schein describes these anchors in terms of *what you would not give up*. If the anchor that attracts you is *technical/functional competence*, you would not want to give up any opportunities to develop your skills in that area to the highest possible level. If it is *general managerial competence*, you would not want to give up any chance of progressing to a position of greater responsibility for others. If it is *autonomy/independence*, you would not want to give up the ability to work the way you choose. If it is *stability/security*, you would not give up work that provides employment and financial security. If it is *entrepreneurial creativity*, you would not give up the chance to build your own venture through your own efforts. If it is *service/dedication to a cause*, you would not give up the chance to work where you can make a difference. If it is *pure challenge*, you would not give up work that offered *really* difficult problems to solve or overcome. And if it is *lifestyle*, you would not give up work that allows you to balance all that is important for your personal life, or that of yourself and your family.

Recognising where you stand in relation to these anchors may help you be more strategic about your preferences and think further about how you might integrate these with your career goals. In this way, you are more likely to make purposeful choices that truly suit you. Understanding why some moves might not work so well for you is also important.

One of the most typical moves in companies or organisations is when the highly competent person in a specialist area becomes the manager – and then has to be dedicated to a generalist perspective.

For many it just does not work. If you are dedicated to an area of expertise, enjoy increasing your skills in this area, and get impatient with waiting for others to meet or complete their tasks, you might enjoy managing a technical team in a specific area, but you are highly likely to be frustrated in a general management role.

James was five years into his career as a business analyst when he entered a large multinational bank, pleased to enjoy the benefits, training, and travel opportunities it offered. The first three years went well, but then new management structures and priorities were introduced. James was offered a team leader's role, and accepted it, but it didn't take long to work out that the role frustrated him greatly. He found team meetings difficult, and he was impatient with delays: 'I hate waiting for others to complete their work, waiting for decisions, wasting time. What I like most is my own specific work with my own tasks or problems to solve.' James realised that he preferred to work on his own or in a small technical team. He was more interested in being an *expert* than a *leader*.

Understanding why you might be dissatisfied

Think about your current work roles and tasks, and how compatible they are with the career anchors that stand out for you. This is a helpful way to become more clear about what causes your dissatisfaction, and to think about ways to turn this around. You may be able to find something more compatible within your current workplace – or outside it.

Your career anchor is a combination of perceived areas of competence, motives and values that you would not give up; it represents your real self.⁵

Your core values and success

Keeping up to date with what really matters to you improves your ability to make better choices in both life and career. You are unlikely to achieve what you consider personal success unless you have managed to build a life that encompasses all the values that are most important to you. Consider the following list of core values and the combination of these that rank high on your list for a satisfied and successful life:

Achievement	accomplishing your goals, mastering your craft
Beauty	loving and creating beautiful things, art, nature
Challenge	enjoyment of new and demanding tasks
Community	local involvement, taking part in events, contributing
Competition	putting yourself up against others, winning, enjoying contest
Co-operation	interested to work with others, create synergy, enjoy teamwork
Creativity	being innovative, using imagination, expressing yourself
Environment	love of nature, interest in preserving what is around you
Excitement	enjoyment of a stimulating life, lots happening
Family	making family important, living in ways that put family first
Freedom	being able to work, live as you want
Fun, pleasure	joy, laughter, happy events in your life
Helping	looking after others' welfare, making society better
Independence	able to make your own decisions
Integrity	sticking to, and standing up for, what you believe in

Continued

Intellectual stimulation	discussion, learning, understanding is important
Leadership	able to influence others, have status and authority
Loyalty	allegiance to friends, work, or causes
Morality	living according to what you think is right
Order	having routine, and stability in your life
Personal development	developing to your full potential
Physical challenge	challenging yourself to greater endurance, speed
Physical health	placing importance on wellbeing
Security	a steady reliable income, and resources
Self-reliance	ability to be independent, self-sufficient
Spirituality	following ideas and beliefs that bring spiritual growth
Status	achieving a position of importance, standing
Tranquillity	a calm, contented life without pressures
Prosperity, wealth	having plenty of money, gaining wealth
Wisdom	valuing knowledge and meaning in life
Variety	liking new and different things to do, places to be

Select the values from this list that are important to you, and that you wish to integrate most into your own life:

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Success for high achievers often means more and more achievement at ever-advancing levels. Top lawyer Mai Chen had followed such a path: valedictorian of her school, a Harvard law degree, work with the United Nations, partnership in a successful public law firm. In recounting a particularly difficult year of her life, when her son was little, she decided she had never worked so hard or slept so little: 'I just woke up one day and realised I didn't want to live this way any more . . . what happens when you work all the time is that you are not relating to all the other things in your life that matter.' Chen changed her schedule, reorganised her life to spend more time with her family, and redefined success: 'Is it ultimately that everyone else thought you were successful or is it that you had a happy and fulfilling life? I suspect now that it's the latter. I didn't always think that.'⁶

The boundaryless career – and career-maker

In today's world, the career is one of the most significant ways in which we express our real self – and just as there are no rules about success, there are no longer any rules about the way we conduct and manage our careers. The idea of the 'boundaryless' career – where we are not stuck with one role, one occupation, one type of industry, one way of working – captures the imagination of many. Now we can move across industry boundaries, and perhaps combine our various work experiences in a portfolio career. All we need is our portfolio of skills and knowledge, and our ability, energy, and desire to learn more.

Although many Generation Y workers instinctively understand and practise this ethos, they are not the only ones. Older workers experiencing the greatest success and satisfaction in their lives also display strong qualities of 'boundarylessness' in their thinking, seeking broader experiences and implementing creative approaches to obtain their desired career. In some ways, it is more apt to talk about boundarylessness in terms of the 'career-maker' rather than the career. What it means is not being bound by old conventions and strategies, or the actions or opinions of others, and understanding that:

- ▷ you can design your own career
- ▷ you can design your own success strategy
- ▷ there are certain actions and attributes that help you better than others

Take the time to think about the success you want and you are much more likely to make it happen. Do the thinking you need to do about your vision of success, as it will become the driver in the direction that you want. Think about the values that are important to you and that you want present in your life and work. Better still, write your ideas down, make them concrete – this always helps to see them as real aspirations, on their way to becoming realised, and not just a bit of wishful thinking of the moment.

Psychological capital

Underpinning all our efforts towards the success we want is another form of capital which impacts not just on our career but on all aspects of our life. It is the part of ourselves that decides whether we believe that we can have what we want, and keeps us positive through difficult times.

Towards the end of last century, psychologists began to talk more about positive psychology, which studies optimal human functioning. It focuses on helping people live more meaningful lives, in ways in which they realise their full potential. Organisational theorists are interested in measuring positive psychological abilities of employees as a means of learning more about the abilities that improve job performance. One such area of interest is positive psychological capital, with its components of hope, optimism, self-efficacy (self-belief or confidence), and resiliency:⁷

- ▷ *Hope* is the component that gives you the willpower to attain your goals – it is a combination of the desire to attain what you want, the ability to plan what you want, and the belief that you can do it.

- ▷ *Optimism* is the component that allows you to maintain a persistently positive expectation of future events, and capitalise on favourable occurrences.
- ▷ *Self-efficacy/self-belief or confidence* allows you to be open to challenges and willing to set goals, as you have the expectation of achieving them.
- ▷ *Resiliency* gives you the ability to bounce back from setbacks or failure.

A person in command of all four components has the confidence to accept challenges as they arise, recover well from setbacks, and view the future with positive expectations – he or she is an individual with the ability to persist and persevere, because they believe things will work out for them. Research on these attributes in the workplace suggests that:

- ▷ people high in psychological capital perform better than those with low psychological capital⁸
- ▷ people high in psychological capital respond and adjust better to organisational change⁹
- ▷ people high in psychological capital influence positively the workers around them – in other words, it can have a ‘contagious effect’¹⁰

These attributes of psychological capital are helpful to all aspects of your life, your career dreams and personal success goals, your workplace performance, and your reputation. If you are a person who regards concepts such as hope and optimism as ‘apple pie’ and ‘Pollyanna thinking’, take some time to give them a little more thought. You may be denying yourself valuable capital that contributes to all aspects of your life and career.

Summarising your success drivers

What orientation to career success drives *your* internal success map?

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What are the career anchors you relate to most?

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How will you use this knowledge in your current or future work?

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Rewrite your personal success scenario here:

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Which of your values does it represent?

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Drew rang me as he was leaving New Zealand for London. 'Can you help me with my career?' he asked. 'I think I'm in the wrong job.' As a long-distance client, he became an ideal candidate to test the processes in this book.

Drew had been working for some time as a freelance video editor, and he had considerable experience in postproduction work. However, he could clearly itemise why he was disenchanted with his current role, as the following values and work aspects were missing for him:

- a desire to help people and feel as if he were making a contribution to society;
- a desire to work as part of a team (often he was on his own in an office-type situation);
- the ability to work in smaller centres rather than being limited to working in major centres;
- a healthier, less computer-oriented, and more physical type of work.

Working on the exercises from Chapters 3 and 4, Drew quickly realised that there were aspects of his orientation out of kilter with his current work. He found he had a strong **R** orientation, signalling a love of the outdoors and hands-on lifestyle that was not being realised.

He commented: 'I've just read through the chapters and done the exercises and found it very interesting – it's given me a lot to think about, and the hexagon in particular has given me inspiration. My themes are **RAS** – I've been working in an indoors situation and feel a lack of nature in my working life. I'd like to take the online test to find out more.'

One area that resonated very strongly with Drew was landscape gardening and design, and he has begun to explore this work: 'I feel it could potentially combine my love of nature with my creativity and social needs.'

Did you know about . . . success intelligence?

‘Success intelligence’ is defined as applying wisdom to success. Robert Holden, who describes the concept, states: ‘the major challenges we face today require not more effort, but more thinking’, and says we should think wisely about success so that it does not cost us our health, our relationships with others, or our joy in life. Holden developed the ‘S4’ model defining the four factors critical to success intelligence:

- Self* knowing yourself, your talents, your strengths
- Success* clarifying your vision, purpose, and goals
- Strategy* making decisions, taking actions
- Synergy* understanding the power of others: relationships,
co-operation, and collaboration in achieving success

Synergy is the factor that is most often overlooked, because for many, their strategy for success is to compete. However, when competition is your only strategy for success, you often ‘block all opportunities for mutual support, potential for shared learning, and possibilities for creative collaboration’; and when your only definition of success is to ‘win’, then you will over-compete, use others to get what you want, and fail to reciprocate genuinely.¹¹