



The Six-Week Career Makeover

*Week 6: Your Career is an Asset—
Manage it Well*

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WEEK 6: YOUR CAREER IS AN ASSET: MANAGE IT WELL

Your career is an asset that must be managed to maintain or increase its value. If you don't maintain your car, it will lose value quickly. If you maintain your vehicle (and career), invest in upgrades, and even replace major components over the years, you could end up with a classic worth a significant amount of money.

If you aren't currently working, you might be thinking to yourself that "managing your career" requires you first to have a job and a career to manage. You may even be wondering why I'm including this chapter in a book about writing your resume and conducting a job search. I'm including it because even if you skip this section (I hope you don't), sooner or later, you *will* be in a new position and will need to know how to thrive and grow in your new role. I'm including it because growing your career means growing yourself: learning and improvement never end. And there may be things you can work on and develop while you're looking for your next job.

Loyalty between employers and employees is a thing of the past. In 2019, almost half of millennials were considering leaving their jobs in two years.¹ Post-pandemic, in 2022, that number skyrocketed to 75 percent of millennials ready to leave their jobs within a year.² At-will employment, combined with rapidly shifting work priorities in the sluggish post-pandemic economy, is also resulting in increased layoffs and the elimination of positions, even though the job market remains relatively strong.

The New Career Reality

Let's look at what that maintenance requires in today's world, because the terrain has changed dramatically. The average job tenure is now 3.9 years³ (down from 4.2 years pre-pandemic). About four decades ago, most skills stayed relevant for a decade before needing an update. Now, that window has narrowed to just four years—and it's continuing to shrink due in part to the increasing use of AI and automation.⁴ Gaurav Vohra, CEO of Jigsaw Academy, claims that technical job



skills can become obsolete in as little as 18 months.⁵ “Coasting” may be a legitimate phase in your career, but standing still is not an option.

So, what’s the antidote to stagnation? It’s not about perpetual hustle—it’s about intentional management. Managing your career includes two primary activities: developing yourself and navigating the relationships and culture of your work environment. This, of course, assumes you have a clear understanding of yourself, your life priorities (worldview and worldview), and you know what “success” looks like for yourself.

The Career Ladder is Sawdust

I frequently coached employees to shift their approach to career planning. “There is no such thing as a defined career path,” I tell them. Sometimes they look at me as if I just told them Santa Claus isn’t real, either. There is no set “curriculum” like in college, or a linear route to get from line professional to executive vice president or CEO. “Go talk to five executives,” I tell them. “Ask them about their careers. I guarantee you’ll hear five different stories about how they got to their position. Now, let me tell you why that is, and why it’s a good thing...”

As someone advances in their career, they hopefully gain a level of expertise and mastery in their role. They become an excellent “widget maker” or whatever their functional role is because they’ve likely had a chance to practice and master their role under different circumstances and in other contexts. It’s the difference between passing driver’s ed and getting your driver’s license and becoming a great driver after years of driving in different conditions—ice, snow, driving rain, mountain passes, and busy downtown city driving.

Career growth requires mastery, not just basic education. And the higher you go, the more your success will depend on skills that take longer to master, including soft skills like motivating people, delegating, and managing conflict, and strategic skills like seeing the big picture, managing the business, and setting a vision. These skills are developed by practicing them in various contexts. Often, it is lateral moves, rather than promotions, that enable the best growth. So let go of your pre-



conceived “career path” and focus instead on gaining mastery in the skills and knowledge needed to manage and lead people and the business. This will make you more available and willing to embrace experiences that may not seem like “advancement opportunities” at first.

Focusing on mastery and growth rather than your career path demonstrates you want to contribute to the success of the business, and not just advance to new titles and bigger paychecks. It keeps you on the right radar screens, and that is what will ultimately determine whether your name comes up when a position or opportunity emerges.

Rock Climbing and Scuba Diving

Many traditional corporations have detailed “career path” plans for a variety of professional roles. Each “level” of advancement may be defined by a fancy, complex (and usually, expensive) competency framework. Almost all these “paths” only go in one direction: up. But now that we know the career ladder has been pulverized... what do we climb instead? Enter: career rock climbing—and for some, a deep dive. The idea of “upward advancement” remains the primary focus of most companies and most employees. Promotions to higher-level positions mean bigger paychecks, of course, but very few employees are coached or developed to learn and master the whole new range of skills and competencies required for management. They are rarely sat down to be coached on the stress, responsibilities, extra hours, high expectations, and accountability necessary for these higher-level roles. It takes a good level of self-awareness and sense of self for an employee to know enough about themselves to think, “That’s just not for me.”

Linda the Rock Climber

Remember Linda, my posse evangelist? She mastered in her career what I refer to as brilliant “rock climbing.” Instead of only being able and willing to go straight up a boring career ladder, she would shift over a bit—within reach, but maybe laterally—to get to where she wanted to go. Our company president would refer to rising leaders like Linda as “good corporate athletes.” Their ability to transition



from one market or sector to another and succeed was highly valued because they possessed a deep knowledge and mastery of the company itself, even when applying it in a new context. Linda transitioned from being a construction manager to a leader in the construction sector and was subsequently appointed to lead a division of a newly acquired intelligence and cybersecurity company. She thrived in her new role.

Nick the Scuba Diver

Nick wasn't interested in rock climbing as much as scuba diving, reaching the depths of his field of expertise. He had been nominated to the HiPo program, and I sat down with him to get a better sense of his aspirations. "Where do you see yourself in five years, Nick?" I asked.

He rolled his eyes. "This is where I'm supposed to tell you I want to be a sector VP in five years," he sighed.

"Nope," I replied. "I want you to describe for me what a perfect day five years from now might look like for you. What are you doing? Forget expectations; what would light you up?"

Nick was barely in his mid-20s at the time. He had a Ph.D. in linguistics, which he applied to hacking and cracking code, and delivering exceptional accolades from his clients. He had blue hair and wore graphic T-shirts and torn blue jeans in a corporate environment ruled by ex-military generals in three-piece suits. There was no way I was going to try to turn Nick into *that*.

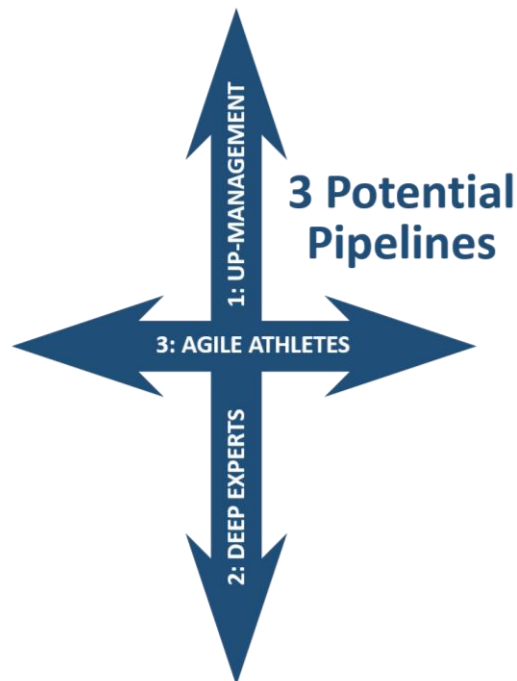
Nick described how he wanted to become known as the best hacker in the field, winning the "Capture the Flag" simulations and hacking competitions typical of the profession. He had a hundred ideas for innovative approaches to cybersecurity and intelligence problems brought to us by clients. He couldn't care less about business development, managed revenue, or job titles. He just wanted to be The Best at what he did. His face was completely lit up as he described his vision to me.

I went to my CHRO and suggested we start to develop a "deep" pipeline with a fellowship track that provided an alternate to the "up" pipeline, with ways to



recognize and reward those who perhaps weren't C-Suite material but were nonetheless core and critical talent to the firm because of the value they brought to our clients. A year later, Nick was invited to present to the senior leadership across business units at their annual retreat, which, I was told, he did brilliantly to great reception by the silk-tie-and-pinstripe-wearing C-Suite executives—in his T-shirt and blue jeans and rocking his blue hair.

Nick's brilliance and Linda's agility are proof: our talent systems need more than just ladders and rigid upward paths. They need dimensions. In my ideal world, corporate HR functions would build out at least these three talent pipelines: Up, Wide, and Deep. The "career ladder" would be replaced by the "career matrix," with the direction informed as much by your aspirations as the needs of the business.



Up, Wide, and Deep Career Paths



Developing women leaders is becoming increasingly important, especially as companies seek to close the gender gap in their highest ranks and individual women strive to improve the financial return on their career efforts. Specialized programs targeting emerging women leaders continue to grow in popularity. Often, these programs miss their mark because of a "one-size-fits-all" approach: a failure to differentiate development dimensions and design learning experiences that are most appropriate for the development goal and specific to the unique individual context. More fundamentally, two talent strategy trends are making traditional approaches to talent development obsolete: first, companies are prioritizing flatter, more networked organizational structures to create more agile and adaptive organizations in rapidly changing, uncertain business environments. The second trending priority is to recruit, retain, and develop talent pools with deep subject matter expertise who drive client value. However, current standard practices for identifying, assessing, and developing high-potential talent still focus exclusively on upward management and executive leadership pipelines. Until organizations catch up with these trends and improve the way they identify, develop, and retain talent, it's up to you to manage and think carefully about your career path and the development you'll need to get there.

Stay on the Right Radar Screens

In most large corporations, early-career high-potential employees are often identified and provided with opportunities to learn and develop, to build a strong pipeline of leadership talent for the future. Some companies have formalized HiPo programs, while others have more informal approaches. Either way, young professionals with promise end up on a "radar screen" by higher-level management. They're watched, tracked, and sometimes are told directly that the company believes they have potential for advancement.

There are conflicting philosophies regarding the identification, assessment, and development of potential talent. You can read about those elsewhere. This conversation is about the radar screen.



“There are two radar screens,” I told Matt. It’s a conversation I’ve had dozens, if not a hundred, times over the years. “You already know you’re on the ‘good’ radar screen—your managers see your performance; you’re ambitious and dedicated, and they want to help you grow and succeed. It’s a great radar screen to be on in any company,” I went on.

But there’s a second radar screen most young HiPos aren’t aware of. It’s the one that blips and turns on when they start pushing too hard for their next opportunity. Typically, it would be an HR manager who would come to me and complain about millennials and their sense of entitlement. Ouch. Some companies, even some managers, are hesitant to inform a young professional that they have been labeled a HiPo because “it goes to their head and they get cocky.” It has happened (the HiPo label is, after all, major ego fuel), but sometimes it’s the discomfort of the manager or HR person who doesn’t have an opportunity available to give. Hence, they get a bit defensive when a HiPo starts asking, “What’s next for me?”

First, let me be clear that I rarely meet a millennial—high—flyer, HiPo, high performer, whatever—with the kind of self-centered, immature “entitlement” mentality that most millennials are accused of having. The early-career HiPos I’ve met and worked with are driven, dedicated, incredibly smart, and make significant contributions to their companies. But, because of their reasonably limited experiences, they don’t always know what they don’t know. In college, they sat with their advisor and often mapped out a plan: take these particular courses, in this order, because this class is a pre-requisite for that class, four per semester, eight per year, and in four to five years, you’ll arrive at your destination: graduation. It’s a straightforward, neat, groomed path. It’s understandable to try to apply a similar approach to career development once you’re in the workplace. But the work world is a lot more complex, and “development” is a much fuzzier, nuanced thing than traditional “learning” in a classroom.

Let’s go back to Matt and the conversation I have memorized and delivered over and over to him and his peers.



“Accurate or not, justified or not, you’re on the wrong radar screen. Perception is everything, and now your job is to manage those perceptions. Because trust me, you don’t want to be on that radar screen.” It’s a tough conversation to have. I’ve been fortunate that every time I’ve had to have this “Come to Jesus” meeting, I had established trust and credibility with the employee. In every case, there was no doubt in their minds that I had their best interests at heart—I want to see them succeed and not get derailed because of the perception that their self-advocacy and drive are immaturity and arrogance.

What do I advise Matt and his peers? First, I point out the very real possibility that even though they may believe they are ready for “the next step,” their manager may disagree. Or perhaps their manager’s manager doesn’t agree. They need to ask for this feedback and be willing and ready to receive it, even if it’s hard to swallow. Alternatively, there may not be a suitable opportunity available at this time. Positions aren’t invented for employees; they exist to do the business of the enterprise. And of course, the higher you go, the fewer positions there are available; there’s just less real estate at the top of the pyramid.

Development needs planning, too.

If the radar matters—and it does—then the best way to stay on the right screen is to take ownership of your development. At an individual contributor level, success and performance are primarily dependent on functional or technical expertise, with a need to demonstrate interpersonal skills when working with diverse teams of people. As you transition into management, successful performance will require enhanced people skills, including managing conflict, communicating clear expectations, providing feedback and direction, and collaborating across broader organizational boundaries. By middle management, your emotional intelligence competencies must continue to increase, and managing more complexity and scope will become increasingly important. At the same time, functional and technical expertise may begin to take on a lesser role and consume less time in the position (although new horizontal learning, focusing on business acumen, financial acumen,



or market knowledge, will likely be required for success). At an executive or deep SME level, the ability to create and communicate a vision or complex concept, and to set a strategy based on a big-picture perspective of the enterprise within its social, economic, and political environments becomes critical. Thinking strategically and the ability to establish and develop a broad range of relationships are not innate, fixed capacities; they are high-level competencies that can—and should—be developed.

The most my phone rang and email filled as a Talent lead was when Individual Development Plans (IDPs) were due in the performance management system.

Fortunately, it is easier than ever to gain new knowledge and skills, keep abreast of your field, or develop deep mastery within your profession. Besides the thousands of courses offered on LinkedIn Learning, websites such as Udemy, EdX, and Coursera offer excellent courses for free or at a very low cost. If you have a gap due to being out of the workforce or because you are looking to change direction, take advantage of these resources. As a bonus, you will be able to add a bullet or two to your resume that speaks to “familiarity with” a specific software program or professional methodology to capture common keywords. Perhaps you’ve never worked in Salesforce before, but taking an online class on customer relationship management (CRM) will enable you to speak to your knowledge of standard programs and practices, and how your previous experience will enable you to meet those requirements.

If you’re not working right now, you may be rolling your eyes thinking about a “development plan” that may have been required as part of your annual performance review and goal setting in your last job. I’m going to let you in on a little secret: I have a Ph.D., 30+ years of experience in my field, and recently retired from corporate life—and I still have a development plan for myself. I’m relatively proficient with Excel and data analysis, but I recognize that I could improve my skills in data visualization. Now that I’m semi-retired and focusing on individual executive coaching, as well as other freelance and consulting work, I need to learn more about marketing, update my web design skills, and adapt to smaller, start-up



work environments with limited resources and rapid change. Your IDP isn't just HR paperwork; it's how you future-proof yourself and remain adaptable in rapidly changing environments. Let's stop treating IDPs like corporate Sudoku puzzles. Career development should be purposeful and personal.

Pick Two, And Make them SIMple.

I have reviewed thousands of development plans over the years. The biggest shame to me is how few managers know how to help their direct reports put together a meaningful and effective learning plan. So, for you, right here, right now: you are taking charge of your own career development. You're going to figure out what you want to develop, and then create a plan on *how* to develop those skills and build those competencies. Whether you are currently employed or not, the next time you need to submit a development plan to your manager, you will know exactly how to do it, and how to do it so you truly develop and improve something about yourself and your work.

A good IDP (formalized for the work environment or just for yourself) should have four key components: First, it should *align* with the needs of the organization (or client, if you're going indie). They should *stretch* your capabilities – both for technical skills and “people skills.” Plans should *evolve* and adapt to new environments, challenges, and contexts. Finally, they should be measurable (and don't forget that qualitative measures are perfectly valid!).

Employees would come to me for help with their development plans, which typically consisted of a list of online courses they believed they should (or perhaps even wanted to) complete. Occasionally (though less often than more), that “training” might even align with something they've been told they need to improve.

Usually, I'd start the conversation like this:

“What's your degree in?”

“Engineering.”

“Were you a good engineer when you graduated from college?”

“Gawd no, I was so green, and I didn't know how to do anything!”



“How did you learn how to be a good engineer?”

“Uhm, by *doing it*. By working. By learning from my boss and others.”

“Then why do you think taking one online class will improve your management skills?”

<crickets>

“OK, let’s start with the obvious: Let’s define very clearly what you want to learn how to do or what you want to get better at doing.”

And that’s exactly where you’re going to start. First, think of just one thing (for now) you want to improve. For now, let’s focus on technical or functional skills (we’ll talk about leadership and “soft skills” later).

First, let’s clarify your development goal (again, let’s start with one). Did you have any “areas for improvement” listed on your last performance review? What have you received feedback or (ugh) even criticism on?

- What do I need to improve to be better at my current job, or what knowledge, skills, and/or competencies will I need in my targeted next position that I don’t currently have?
- Is there a technical skill or functional area that I need to learn or master?
- Is there a new process, system, or program I need to learn to stay proficient in my current role?

Now, let’s make this a SMART goal. If you’ve been in Corporate America for any length of time, you already know that a “SMART” goal is Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic, and Time-Bound. Being specific is often the biggest hurdle. Many years ago, Marc Effron, author of *One Page Talent Management*, introduced the idea of SIMple goals, which I like much better. I always replaced SMART goals with SIMple goals (Specific, Important, Measurable).⁶ Ask yourself this simple question to get to your specific goal:



What would I be doing differently if I demonstrated improvement in this area?

Essentially, define what improvement, competency, or success in learning looks like.

Now, let's make it "measurable" by defining the qualitative or quantitative improvement. Complete this sentence: I want to go from [current proficiency or skill level] to [specific improved performance.]. This "from/to" framework will help you become very clear about *what* you want to develop. Let's say you've received feedback that you need to improve your presentation skills. First, you need to learn which part of presenting you need help with. Ask for feedback and direction: Do you need to prepare the presentation content better, or do you need to be better at delivering the presentation?

I want to go from speaking too fast, using too many "umm" fillers, and sounding nervous to delivering with concise language and a confident voice.

I want to move from diving too deeply into topics to creating more targeted and impactful presentation content.

(To make this truly measurable, you might even go so far as to say you will do this by a specific date and/or improve feedback ratings over a certain time period. I won't go into that level of detail for now.)

So, if, as you've said above, you've gotten better at other skills by practice, doing, and learning from others, let's make those actions the biggest part of your plan. Some years ago, the idea that 70 percent of learning came from experience became very popular (it was a misinterpreted study, but that's beside the point right now).⁷ The 70-20-10 learning model was promoted as a way to reflect this, suggesting that 70 percent of learning should come from experience (practice), 20 percent from learning from others, and only 10 percent from traditional, formal learning or "training." The percentages are irrelevant, but a meaningful plan on developing skills competencies will include all three. Here's what your plan might look like if you were going with the Presentation Skills development goal:



Example 1: Improve the development of content and delivery of presentations	
Learn it (10%) Formal learning/Self-study	Presentation skills online training Read “Presentation Zen” and “Talk Like TED.”
See it (20%) Learn from others	Observe my manager during her presentation. Take notes about style, content, speaking, etc. Ask to help my manager prepare her regular presentation Interview two people whose presentations I liked to learn about how they prepared their presentations and became effective speakers.
Practice it (70%) Practice/Experience	Ask a peer for feedback on my XYZ presentation Join Toastmasters and attend/participate in at least 75% of meetings for one year. Deliver at least three work presentations and solicit feedback.

Planning for Horizontal and Vertical Development

The 70-20-10 or integrated learning plan is great for functional and technical skills, and the companies I’ve worked for have a solid offering of training and development opportunities for “hard skills” and functional competencies as well as



“soft skills” and leadership competencies. But planning for these two kinds of development is just not the same, even though corporate learning and development professionals almost universally approach “learning” and “development” in a singular approach. The integrated framework of formal training, learning through others, and learning by doing works well for most functional and technical skills (unless there is something internally or externally preventing you from performing), but “soft skills” require something more to master truly.

When an executive tells me that they need to work on a “soft skill”—building relationships, keeping composure, delegating, managing conflict—the standard “Learning and Development” formula for development planning feels awkward or flat-out wrong. The most a traditional training program can do (even if it is designed well) is introduce new concepts that might help you rethink current perspectives, but it won’t help you internalize and act on those new perspectives. In these cases, transformational learning is needed. And there has been plenty written on that subject as well. What hasn’t been done in the L&D field is looking at them together: differentiating and then integrating them. By differentiating, we can examine the unique challenges of each and consider which development approach is most suitable. Applying transformational learning to building functional or technical competencies makes even less sense than applying traditional training to building leadership competencies. Having an executive “practice” of keeping their composure or building relationships through better listening only addresses behavior and not the underlying worldview, values, and beliefs that drive automatic behavior.

Robert Kegan⁸ and Susanne Cook-Greuter⁹ both outline frameworks that describe adult developmental stages, and their research supports the idea that cognitive and mental development in adults does not end at a certain age. Cook-Greuter offers a description of horizontal and vertical development that aligns neatly with my description above of functional/technical competencies and behavioral or leadership competencies. (In fairness, her work is far more encompassing, and I admit to borrowing the analogy because it works here.)



Horizontal Development: What You Do

Horizontal proficiency looks at knowledge, skills, and functional or technical competencies. Think of these in terms of what you need to know and what you need to do to deliver the work expected in your current (or targeted) role.

The first step in any development planning should be to assess the level of horizontal proficiency for the majority of competencies required in your current role. Look at skills and competencies individually: you may be quite proficient, even expert-level in some, but only a novice in others. Proficiency might be assessed (or even self-assessed) as

- **Novice:** You need direction and supervision to perform or complete work.

This is expected when you are new in your role or profession. Depending on the skill or competency, proficiency can take anywhere from a few months to several years to achieve.

- **Proficient:** You do not need direction or supervision to perform your work. You receive feedback that your work is good.
- **Expert:** Others come to you for your advice and expertise. You can coach and develop novices to become proficient in their skills.

If development is needed in any horizontal competency area, and if you, as the professional seeking to develop or gain proficiency in these competencies, are intrinsically motivated and committed to develop, then planning the development should involve the integrated learning framework (or the 70-20-10 approach) as described above.

The good news here is that you don't have to be employed to put together a plan to learn and develop in these areas, and working with others as peer coaches or mentors will give you a great secondary benefit of building ties within your network. It's just important to remember that while an online course or reading a book will help you gain foundational knowledge, building skills and gaining



functional competencies require the utilization of all approaches. Some classroom learning will involve more than one or all three methods. Traditional adult learning approaches work well for horizontal development.¹⁰

Vertical Development: How You Do What You Do

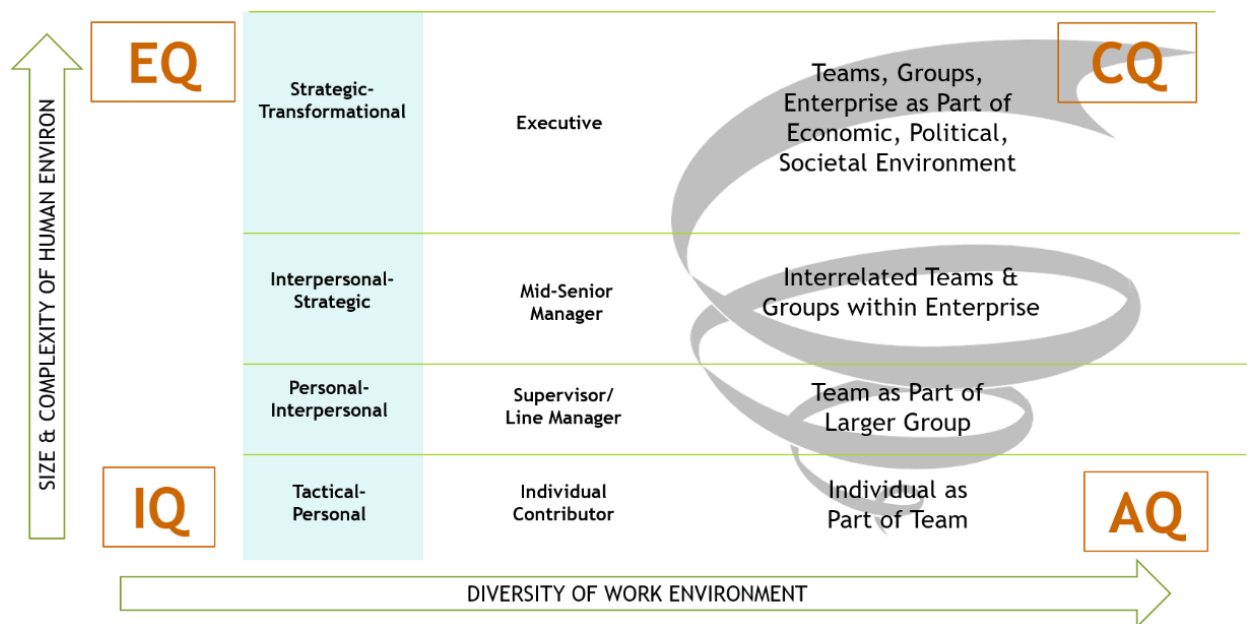
Think of vertical proficiency in terms of how you deliver your work in the context of solving problems and working with other people. Behavioral competency expectations for many large companies are sometimes defined as a Leadership Competency Framework or a Competency Model. Especially if you have aspirations for senior management or an executive-level position, you have to develop vertically as much as horizontally.

Vertical proficiency looks at behaviors, mindset, professional maturity, and emotional intelligence. It also examines a cognitive framework (even if not explicitly stated). The Center for Creative Leadership asserts that to be effective, a leader's thinking "must be equal or superior to the complexity of the environment."¹¹ It's important to remember that vertical proficiency is not equivalent to your current role, title, or position. It is common for people to be promoted to higher levels before they have achieved the vertical proficiency to be effective and successful at that level.

I wrote about the idea of integrating horizontal and vertical development in the article, "Disrupting Best Practices in L&D" for *Training Industry* magazine.¹² Horizontal development targets learning and development to increase proficiency and performance with functional and technical competencies (IQ), but also to increase flexibility and adaptability (AQ) to add skills and apply multiple proficiencies in new situations, markets, functions, or within different and more diverse work teams and structures. Vertical development focuses on enhancing social and emotional intelligence (EQ) and cognitive complexity (CQ) to develop managers who will succeed at higher leadership levels or excel as subject matter experts (SMEs). Senior-level positions, whether deep in a particular knowledge domain or broad across many functions or market sectors (as is often the required



for executive level roles), require leaders to demonstrate the ability to establish and maintain a higher variety of relationships while also managing a larger scope, complexity, and uncertainty within the economic, socio-political, and ecological environments of the enterprise. Each unique organizational and individual context will likely require a mix of both horizontal and vertical development. In flatter, more networked environments, pipelines are rarely straight and linear, and neither is development.



Developing Four Types of Intelligence

Still with me? Let’s bring it all together with a simplified model that captures how humans grow. While I’m not convinced of the value of complex developmental assessments or models for my leaders, I do believe a simplified stratum model—one that reflects natural progression both upward (vertically) and outward (horizontally)—offers a practical and intuitive approach to leadership development. The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) (2014) integrated the research of Cook-Greuter, Kegan, and Bill Torbert to achieve a similar goal; however, I found their proposed “levels” to still be uncomfortably value- and



judgment-laden.¹³ Instead, by examining the primary levels of leadership in a typical organization and the developmental levels described by these researchers, I drafted three levels of vertical proficiency that I believe make the most sense (I suspect I will refine or develop these further over time). If a company has a level-specific leadership competency framework, it can be used here in considering these levels:

- **Contributor:** You demonstrate the problem-solving and interpersonal/relationship skills needed to perform well as an individual contributor.
- **Manager:** You are a contributing manager who demonstrates the problem-solving and interpersonal skills needed to lead and drive the performance of a single or a few interconnected teams with or without authority. You can motivate and develop individuals' horizontal competencies, solve problems, and build relationships across direct boundaries. You can coach a contributor to manager proficiency.
- **Executive:** You are a collaborative manager and leader who demonstrates interpersonal skills and problem-solving to address complex problems by seeing the whole picture in both a current and future state across multiple and extended boundaries. You understand interdependent variables and their impacts, seek out alternative perspectives, and can hold multiple perspectives simultaneously. You build collaborative cultures and healthy relationships. You can coach a manager to executive proficiency.

Use the following approaches, methods, and tools to improve vertical competencies. The approaches below are primarily “pull” approaches and facilitate



your ability to transform internally (changing perspectives and beliefs about yourself so that default behavior patterns and habits change, too):

- Formal learning (for introduction to new concepts and perspectives only—the most minor component of vertical development; often reading)
- Experiential/interactive leadership development programs (provide new perspectives, time and space to dialogue and reflect, and often opportunities to receive feedback)
- Professional coaching or structured and focused informal peer coaching/mentoring
- Use an “Immunity Map” to uncover competing objectives and hidden assumptions when old behaviors don’t change (best done with a coach or mentor with whom to reflect and discuss). A brief overview and a link to a downloadable Immunity Map worksheet can be found at:
<http://www.extension.harvard.edu/inside-extension/why-we-struggle-change-how-overcome-it>
- 360 feedback to uncover blind spots and identify areas for further development
- Personality/leadership assessments: at the contributor or manager level to gain understanding and awareness of the styles, perspectives, and traits of others to appreciate and integrate differences
- Learning or reflection journal (this can be an “old school” spiral notebook or a structured online tool)



Key experiences for vertical development identified by CCL:¹⁴

- Intense Stretch Experiences. CCL identifies these as “heat experiences” and describes them as “a time when you are confronted with a task or assignment that has the following conditions: 1) It is a first-time experience. 2) Results matter. 3) There is a chance of success and failure. 4) Important people are watching. 5) It is extremely uncomfortable.”¹⁵ The best of these include an increase in scope, turnaround, horizontal move, and new initiative.
- New Ways of Thinking. Experiences here include having to deeply experience alternative perspectives, learning to manage polarities, and developing systems thinking.
- Strong Developmental Networks: Experiences here focus on learning from others with higher-level thinking and interpersonal skills.¹⁶

Keep in mind the adage that you can’t learn from experience unless you experience the learning. I believe one of the next practices of learning and development organizations will be to add rigor to non-formal learning experiences and create tools and processes to track their results. In the meantime, simply keeping a learning journal and utilizing personal and shared reflection opportunities will help developing leaders extract the most growth from their observations and experiences.

What might a development plan look like for a vertical skill? Usually, it’s much more experience-based with an emphasis on building and learning from a variety of relationships. For example, a senior individual contributor-level employee who wants to pursue a promotion into management may wish to increase cognitive complexity by gaining a deeper understanding of how their department operates and integrates with other departments. Their plan might look something like this:



Development Objective	Action Steps	Development Resources	Success Measures	Target Completion Date
<i>Gain a broader understanding of my department outside my project assignment.</i>	<i>Observe a department-level meeting.</i>	<i>Direct Mgr & Dept Mgr</i>	<i>Can describe the department-level goals, benefits, and current challenges within the business unit</i>	<i>10/01/2023</i>
	<i>Participate in standardizing/improving a process across all projects/sectors.</i>	<i>Project Mgr, Direct Mgr, Dept Mgrs, peers</i>	<i>Can describe which practices are uniform across the business unit and which are flexible and customized for specific purposes</i>	<i>09/01/2023</i>

To develop emotional intelligence competencies, our client, Preeya, had been given feedback that she becomes too confrontational and defensive in meetings. In speaking with her “devil’s advocate” from her posse, they confirmed they’ve observed her getting defensive if she is challenged when presenting a new idea or even questioned about her recent monthly status report. Her development plan might look something like this:

Development Objective	Action Steps	Development Resources	Success Measures	Target Date to
------------------------------	---------------------	------------------------------	-------------------------	-----------------------



**assess
progress**

Be less defensive when an idea or my work is challenged.	<p><i>Reflect and identify what “triggers” my defenses. Identify the root belief and thought process that drives my triggers. Work with my coach and mentor to help reframe my beliefs and thinking.</i></p>	<p><i>Direct Manager, Trusted senior leader, Posse.</i></p>	<p><i>I can describe what triggers my feeling defensive and identify the thinking or belief that drives the default behavior.</i></p>	<p><i>10/01/2023</i></p>
	<p><i>Solicit feedback from my team and peers. Ask for their support to flag when I’m getting defensive.</i></p>	<p><i>Specific names here</i></p>	<p><i>I can listen to feedback with curiosity and an interest in learning about myself.</i></p>	<p><i>09/01/2023</i></p>

Assignment 6a: Write your IDP

Work with your Posse Career Coach to identify just one or two areas where you want to develop. They could be either “horizontal” skills development, “vertical” leadership development, or transformational behavioral changes. Write down the specific formal learning, learning through others, experience/practice actions you will take, plus additional coaching and development actions for transformative learning. Decide how you will receive feedback on progress and the timeframe of your plan (e.g., six months, two months, a year).



Career Management: Navigating Obstacles in the Organizational System

Setting priorities for yourself, determining a direction for your career, and achieving those goals within the context of your company or organization's culture requires a high level of both self-awareness and cultural awareness. With luck, your values and goals will align with the organization you are working for. More realistically, there will be conflicts between what you want and what your boss or organization wants from you. Some of those might be explicit expectations: "We expect formerly hybrid or work-from-home employees to spend at least three days in the office." More often, those expectations are implicit cultural norms: "If he's taking parental leave because his wife had a baby, he must not be serious about wanting that promotion this year."

Work-Life Integration

When I interviewed senior management and executive-level women for my research, I asked them about their aspirations for the C-suite. Suppose you are a female executive and work in a company that is working to build diversity at the highest levels of leadership. In that case, you very well may find yourself on an officer-level succession plan. But being a Chief [X] Officer has its trade-offs. The corporate workplace evolved to reward men (and let's be honest here: primarily white men) who were willing and able to dedicate all their energy and time to their work. Unfortunately, that corporate cultural expectation hasn't changed much, even if men and women *both* want and expect more work-life balance. In 1973, only six percent of employees complained of excessive work hours. Yet, in 2024, 77 percent of global workers reported feeling burned out in their jobs, even as the average number of hours worked has moderated slightly since the pandemic.¹⁷ Additionally, the health impacts of long work hours are now becoming very clear. A World Health Organization (WHO) study in 2021 showed that long work hours correlated to increased deaths from heart disease and stroke,¹⁸ and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has shown a correlation between working over 10 hours per day and



an increase in cardiovascular issues.¹⁹ In addition to health issues, extensive hours can lead to relationship problems and depression, and ironically, result in lower productivity.²⁰

I am not advocating against ambition. The world needs women who aspire to be true leaders. But there are trade-offs to be considered for both men and women. My experience suggests that most corporations strive to offer competitive benefits for their employees. The best companies strive for some flexibility and may even promote work-life balance in principle, but the long-entrenched corporate culture remains very much alive and well. In another study, only 15 percent of women and 20 percent of men believe they can take advantage of such flex programs without jeopardizing their career advancement.²¹ My sincerest hope is that as younger generations of men, especially Millennials, achieve leadership roles, their priorities for work-life balance will help shift these corporate cultural expectations. Every one of the young male emerging leaders and high-potential managers I worked with voiced opposition to the long-time expectation of working excessive hours to advance their careers. Most frequently, what I heard from young men was, “My father was never around when I was a kid. I won’t do that to my own children.” I hope we start seeing real change in the unwritten—and outdated—expectations most companies place on their talent.

In *Designing Your Life*, Burnett and Evans suggest assessing your life on a dashboard that includes health, work, play, and love, with health being foundational to the other three.²² I think having a personal “dashboard” to assess your progress quickly is a great way to keep multiple aspects of your life visible and in focus. It’s very easy to forget about (or ignore) your health, your emotional well-being, and your relationships if you are only thinking about your career goals. Books are filled with brilliant artists and wildly successful business leaders who accepted the trade-offs and sacrifices of other dimensions of their lives, whether consciously or not. Your life goals are foundational. In my mind, health, play, and love are what give life joy and meaning. “Work” may provide part of that meaning, too, of course, but



it is still primarily the means to take care of your health and to enjoy your life and your relationships.

It's a good time to reflect on your unique essence and "genius" from the first assignment. Make sure that *what you do* for a living isn't negatively impacting the core of *who you are*, your "gift." Work ideally is just one way to express that gift. And consider using your Tree of Meaning or your Integrity Wheel from Week Three as your "dashboard" for continual assessment and reflection.

Work-life balance is a myth. Most people know this intuitively, but as I wrote earlier, it's about setting your priorities, understanding your values, and being conscious of the trade-offs your career choices will require. Adrienne liked to talk about your work-life equation and broke it down a bit more: It's not just work-life, but career, income (separate even if related), self (mental and physical health), and our relationships (family, friends, community). Yes, you can truly "have it all" if you are intentional and conscientious about your priorities and time. But they will rarely—if ever—be truly "balanced."

Sylvia Ann Hewlett's book, *Off-Ramps and On Ramps: Keeping Talented Women on the Road to Success*, brought to widespread awareness the impact of taking a break from one's career for family needs. There is no judgment about these choices, but Hewlett wants women to understand fully the trade-offs they are considering.

Nearly 4 in 10 highly qualified women (37 percent) report that they have left work voluntarily at some point in their careers. Among women who have children, that statistic rises to 43 percent. Only 40 percent return to full-time, professional jobs, while 24 percent take part-time jobs, and 9 percent become self-employed. Women lose 18–28 percent of their earning power in one to three years, 37 percent after three years.²³ Whether women leave their careers for "pull factors" such as childcare or eldercare, or "push factors" like job dissatisfaction or a stalled career, nearly 90 percent of women who leave their careers want to resume their careers, but less than half successfully return to full-time employment.

The cost of off-ramping for women is even more sobering. Hewlett writes:



How does this affect a woman's earning potential later in life? How is this tied to a woman's 80.5 cents to a man's dollar? Our research finds that off-ramped women take tremendous hits when they come back to the workforce: 26 percent of women saw their management responsibilities curtailed, and 22 percent had to accept a lower job title. Earnings also suffer: on average, women lose 16 percent of their earning power when they take an off-ramp. After three or more years out of the workforce, a woman's earning potential, compared to a counterpart who remains on track, decreases by an astounding 46 percent.²⁴

Barriers and Bridges to Career Management for Women

My doctoral research argued that the gender gap within the corporate C-suite is a complex, systemic problem emerging from the interrelation of multiple variables.²⁵ My research participants spoke about their childhood and upbringing, as well as how their personality worked for and against them in the workplace and in work relationships. They described how they built their careers while responding to gender expectations from those around them, even when they didn't identify specific experiences or interactions as gender-related. They discussed the importance of having supportive bosses and mentors throughout their careers, as well as managing work responsibilities while raising children and growing their families. They described challenges in their work primarily in terms of how others related to them both as individuals and as women. Each of their stories, though unique, illustrated how the variables of personality, leadership style, levels of ambition and confidence, upbringing, organizational culture, societal culture, how others interact with them, work-life balance, and mentors created a systemic "whole" that brought them to their current level of success in their careers. It is within the context of describing and understanding the systemic complexity of the issue that recommendations for action can be developed.



The Gender Gap is a Systemic, “Wicked Problem”

The 2018 women’s US Open Final tennis match sparked considerable controversy and provided valuable lessons for women who often face invisible barriers in the workplace and feel confused and frustrated.

Sally Jenkins’s September 8, 2018, op-ed for the Washington Post about the dramatic ending to the women’s US Open Final between Serena Williams and Naomi Osaka is a good read, whether you are a tennis fan or not. Debate erupted on social media about “blame” for the controversial end to the sports event. Williams had an outburst; so did the umpire, Carlos Ramos. Naomi Osaka won the event amidst a heated and emotional controversy, making for a hardly celebratory victory. Was Ramos treating Williams more harshly than he had previous male competitors? Was Williams wrong for vigorously venting her disagreement with the umpire? Was Osaka’s win “legitimate?” Who was right? Who was wrong? Who started it? We are conditioned to want simple answers and disregard variables we don’t know how to evaluate. Was Ramos harsh on Williams because she was a strong woman? A strong black woman? Because he didn’t like her catsuit, even if she wasn’t wearing it that day (or maybe it was the tutu)? Because a driver cut him off on his way to the match, and he was in a bad mood? Was he more tolerant of outbursts by male athletes? These are unseen variables that we don’t think of—or we don’t want to think of—watching a tennis match.

There are lessons to be learned there, both by women and the managers and executives who are accountable for instituting policies, practices, and structures that create and support an inclusive and respectful workplace—and, as necessary, an environment where individuals are constantly encouraged and challenged to check their unconscious biases. (Note I didn’t say *eliminate* unconscious bias, which is not realistic—but to acknowledge it and test it whenever possible.)

We are educated in the traditional sciences and even in social sciences, such as history, to see issues from a more nuanced and complex perspective that transcends overly simplistic cause-and-effect, action-and-reaction, and linear timelines. Thinking about multiple variables, subtle and unseen influences in a situational



context (such as psychology and culture), long-term impacts—these are like mathematical algorithms or meteorological modeling of which few of us pretend to hold mastery. So, we remain unaware of, or largely ignore, the complexity of any given problem.

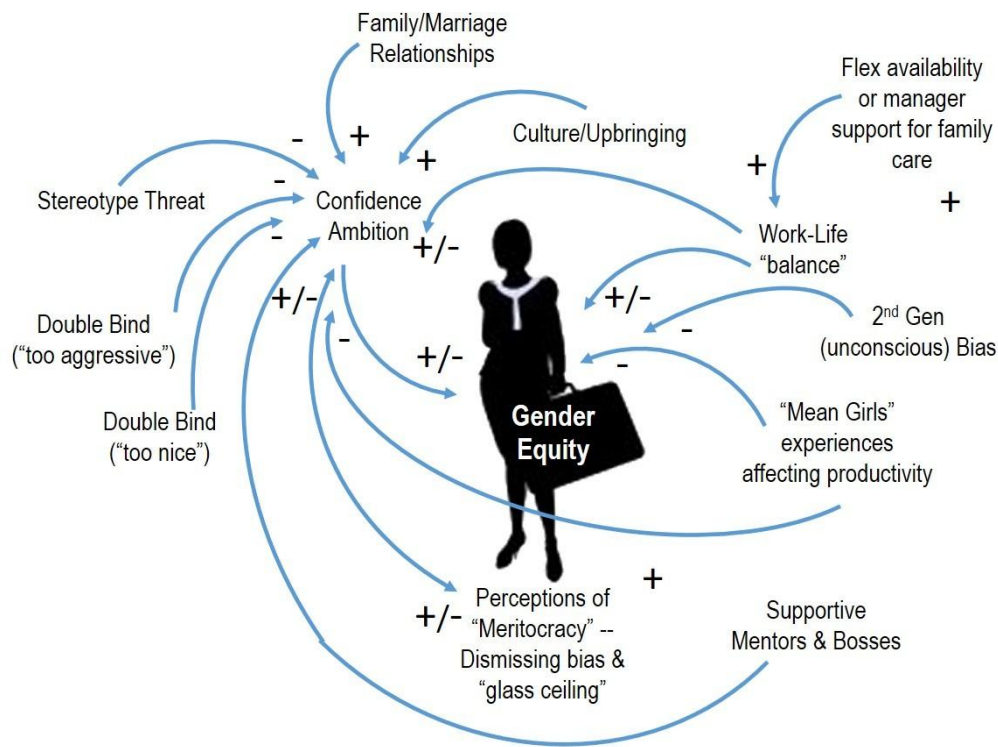
During my doctoral research, I found only two references that detailed the complex, systemic nature of the gender gap in executive roles. Most research on the topic follows a traditional framework: A hypothesis about how variable X impacts women, research to test the hypothesis, usually validated, followed by a proclamation that by fixing X, women will be more successful. Whether we are debating a tennis match or gender equity (or pretty much any political debate), it's essential to accept that answers are rarely simple. Social media memes do nothing to help us develop cognitive complexity, a critical competency in today's world.

Another blog post published around the same time highlighted the structural and cultural factors that affect women's success and gender equity in the workplace.²⁶ The post argued that by promoting and encouraging women's leadership programs, we are putting all the responsibility for increasing gender equity on women and leaving organizational leaders off the hook. I shared the article because the author makes some important and valid arguments. But, like the women's US Open final, this is not a simple debate about "who's to blame, and who is responsible to fix it." There are multiple, individual internal variables, cultural variables, and structural variables that create a systemic milieu that differs for different women, cultures, and organizations. There are intersectional issues at play. There are uniquely individual personalities, psychologies, and contexts at play.

When considering how to assure equality in the workplace, some researchers focus on internal barriers (confidence, ambition, executive "presence," or gravitas) and propose that women are ultimately responsible for their success. Sheryl Sandberg's bestselling book, *Lean In*, has been criticized for this emphasis; I've criticized that unbalanced emphasis myself, noting that "leaning in" to a brick wall is an effort in futility. Other research focuses on the broader cultural and societal



context, emphasizing the need to question and dismantle outdated and limiting gender norms, as well as the importance of addressing unconscious bias and promoting change at a systemic cultural level. Others focus on what companies should do in terms of policy, process, and structure. A systemic perspective considers the complex interactions among all these variables. Even in mapping a causal loop diagram (a standard tool for modeling and mapping complex problems in the systems sciences), whether any particular variable is a balancing or reinforcing influence may depend on other internal and external variables. For example, whether a woman dismisses or acknowledges the existence of the “glass ceiling” may have both positive (reinforcing) and negative (balancing) influences either way. According to one study on beliefs about the glass ceiling, denial and resilience showed a positive correlation with work engagement. Denial also had an additional positive association with career satisfaction, and resilience was related positively to *happiness*. *Acceptance correlated negatively with happiness, and resignation correlated negatively with both happiness and emotional and physical well-being. The researchers were surprised that denial seemed to be the strongest predictor of career satisfaction and work engagement (perhaps ignorance truly is bliss?).*²⁷



Gender Equity Causal Look Diagram

And, of course, no model can ever encompass all possible variables that influence success. The diagram above, part of my doctoral research, doesn't include variables like experiences of sexual harassment or retaliation for reporting harassment or assault. It admittedly does not include intersectional variables such as different gender expectations based on culture or race.

Instead of debating whether women should "lean in" or if the ultimate solution rests with dismantling a 5,000-year-old cultural patriarchy, or what companies should and shouldn't do to increase gender and diversity equity in their C-suite, we need to learn how to see both the "whole system" and the system components. We need to consider the system through multiple lenses and examine how the environment, processes, and system structure interact with individuals within the system. Then we can begin to identify which leverage points to address to effect change (and it *will* be multiple leverage points, not any one singular strategy).²⁸



I'd offer a both-and strategy to women: take those leadership workshops, become aware of your internal barriers, the structural barriers, and the cultural barriers you face; make adjustments to your behavior when necessary, while remaining conscious of the external variables impacting your career. Read *Lean In*. Believe in yourself, but pay attention to obstacles that are external as well.

The Meritocracy Myth

I have to admit that I chuckle every time I read an article or op-ed proposing the “solution” to reducing the gender gap at senior levels is—(duh) —to hire more executive women. Companies should, indeed, create a larger funnel of women candidates.

A blog post some years ago suggested three more strategies to recruit female executives: Make sure half the candidate pool is female (nearly impossible in male-dominated industries where the workforce likely consists of 20 percent women or less); make sure half the interviewers are women (again, a great idea if there are sitting female executives in a reasonable position to interview candidates); and finally, commit to building your executive board to be half women (laudable, but a “lagging indicator” of gender equity rather than a “strategy” toward it).²⁹

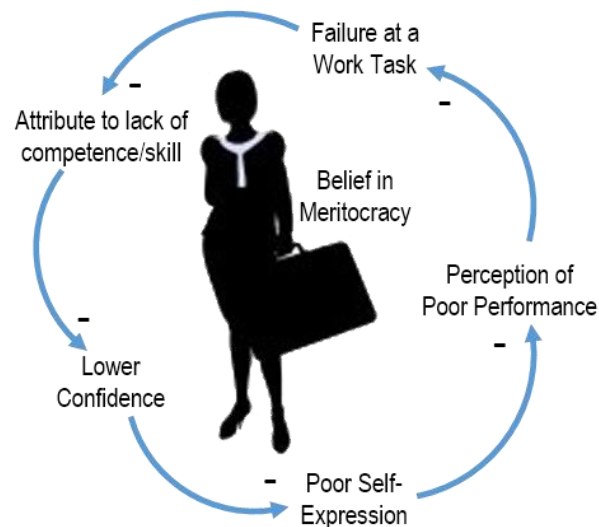
I noticed that the article was shared almost 100 times on LinkedIn within a few days. I sighed—yet another “solution” targeting low-leverage interventions in a complex, systemic issue. By failing to address the structural, process, or cultural obstacles that women face in their careers, the author (a male) unintentionally reinforced the prevailing perspective that women work in a meritocracy. The same HBR article he cited agreed with my assessment:

[C]ertifications and degrees have historically played a different role for women than for men. The 20th century saw women break into professional life – but only if they had the proper training, the right accreditations. These qualifications were our ticket in, our way of proving we could do the job. We weren't part of an old boys club in which we'd get the benefit of the doubt. That history can, I think, lead women to see



the workplace as more orderly and meritocratic than it really is. As a result, we may overestimate the importance of our formal training and qualifications and underutilize advocacy and networking.³⁰

Women need to learn to manage their careers as an asset, optimizing for return. To do that, they need to realize that “one size fits all” career management programs and activities rarely address the hidden barriers they face. Like Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, women need to do everything the men do, only backwards and in high heels. In contrast to the low leverage point in the system of hiring higher numbers of women (which will ultimately backfire if the culture, policies, and programs of the organization fail to optimize their careers), a higher leverage point action would be to raise awareness of what I call the “meritocracy myth.” This is the belief by women that they will be promoted and rewarded based on merit or work performance, whereas men have learned to leverage networks and advocacy to drive career growth. This belief can become a “balancing” feedback loop that keeps women’s self-perceptions at a low level.



The Meritocracy Myth

Barreto et al. (2009) describe an example of how this balancing feedback loop happens as the culture and work environment influence women who may otherwise



be likely candidates for advancement. Due to the current cultural emphasis on individuality and meritocracy (where people achieve and are successful based on individual performance and capability), women often attribute any failure to succeed to their own performance or ability, which in turn leads to lower confidence and self-doubt. What then follows is poor self-expression, which further exacerbates a perception of inadequate performance. Subtle, unconscious bias that is hard to detect influences how women feel about themselves and how they act, “even leading them to unwittingly behave in ways that contribute to justifying or perpetuation of their inferiority” Helping women recognize these subtle, persistent barriers with ways to address them could further reinforce ambition and confidence before it starts to wane.³¹

Even still, addressing the meritocracy myth by raising awareness and shifting the paradigm is not enough to get women to the top, or even to give them the confidence and ambition to strive for it. When I conducted my research on the gender gap in executive ranks, two of my participants shared that their ambitions shifted not because of a lack of confidence, but due to other factors. I wrote about these in Week Three, but will share them again here. For one, a health crisis in the family shifted her priorities. “I used to have a Type A personality,” she reflected. “Now I’m probably more like an A-minus.” The other executive struggled to keep up with traditional corporate performance expectations (long hours, extensive travel) without sacrificing her relationship with her children—a challenge that is not just a “woman’s problem,” by the way. She told me, “I didn’t hit a glass ceiling; I hit a sanity ceiling.” Another Harvard study shows that while 60 percent of executive men have stay-at-home wives, only 10 percent of women executives have that kind of dedicated support at home. While 90 percent of executive men are married, only 70 percent of women are, and they have fewer children on average compared to non-executive women.³² Even more significant is that, for both men and women, there remains a very traditional perception of whose career will take priority or precedence as they advance. That perception, of course, is that at a very



high differential, in conventional heterosexual marriages, the man's career will take priority.

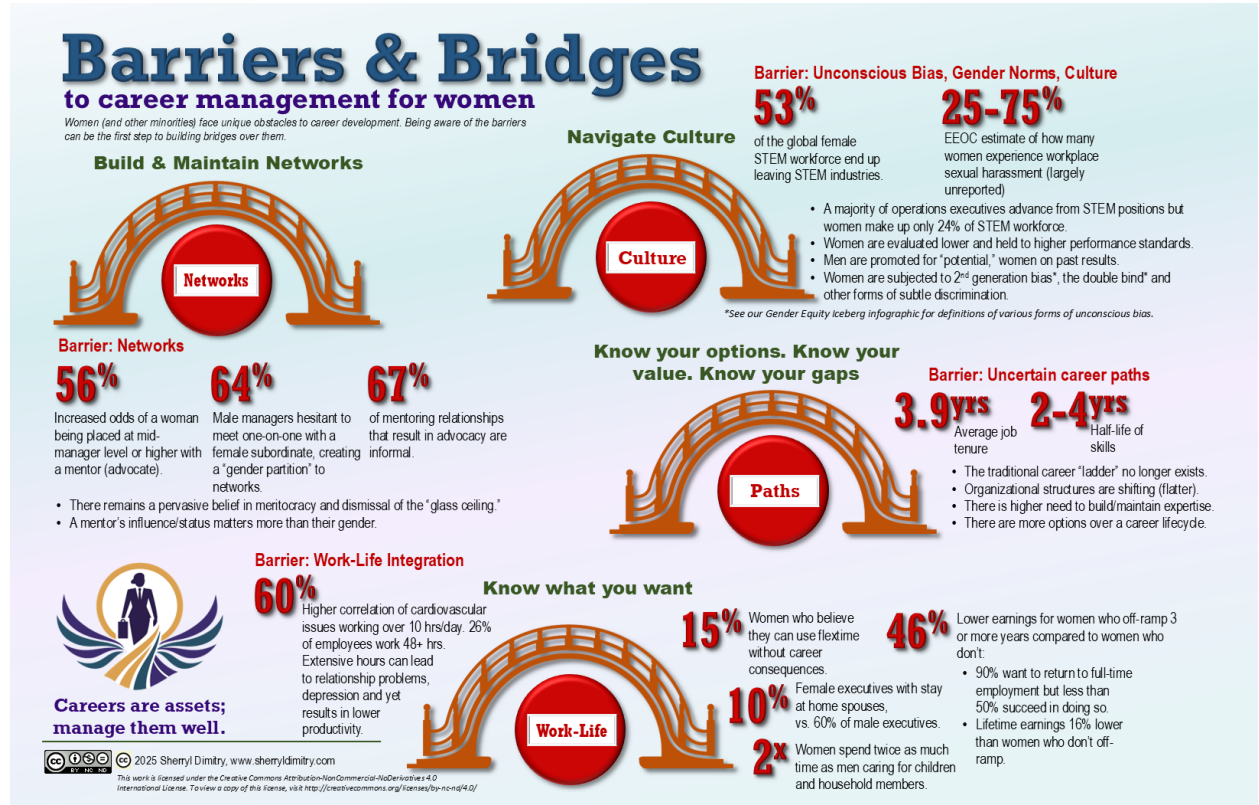
There are other hidden, often hard to identify forces that create both internal and external obstacles for women's advancement, and they don't get the press and publicity as the visible, explicit obstacles such as sexual harassment and outright discrimination. However, even at the visible "tip of the iceberg" level, there are obstacles that reinforce inequity, which often go unnoticed or unquantified. The number of women who came forward in 2018 to say *#MeToo* demonstrated that sexual harassment and aggression are a far more ubiquitous and pervasive problem than ever imagined. Workplace cultures that tolerate harassment or punish women for speaking out might be considered a new obstacle that is now coming into awareness. While a handful of men decried the injustice of firings of highly visible and influential men accused of misconduct without "due process" of investigations, "ruining" careers unfairly, even conservative publisher *Fortune* sees how environments such as this derail and block women's careers before they even get a chance to succeed. During the height of the *#MeToo* media coverage, a former co-worker reported proof of unwanted sexual harassment by her male supervisor on an international assignment to HR and her group executive. To "protect" her, the company removed her from the country but left the male supervisor to continue his job as usual through the investigation. She left the firm just a few months later, to her professional benefit and the company's detriment.

The gender gap will only close when women begin to learn how to manage their careers and navigate the often invisible obstacles that can hinder their progress, without blaming themselves for falling behind. Likewise, organizations must address the issue systemically, focusing on an integrated strategy for change, including diversity hiring, but even more importantly, evaluating policies and practices, programs for development, and at the highest point of leverage, raising awareness of, and shifting the paradigms that define their organizational culture.

The barriers that women face in their careers can be internal, but many of the obstacles are driven by unspoken, deeply embedded gender and cultural norms. The



infographic in the assignment shows some of those challenges and obstacles, some of which I've written about here, as well as considerations for overcoming them.



The full-size Barriers & Bridges infographic can be downloaded from <https://sherryldimitry.com/resources/>

Assignment 6b Build Bridges over Barriers

Download the full Barriers and Bridges infographic and consider some of the barriers and obstacles you have experienced in your career. Some might be internal (confidence) and others cultural (unconscious bias). Your career asset? It doesn't just grow when someone promotes you. It grows when you decide to navigate, recalibrate, and keep showing up with clarity.

Working with your coach and your broader posse, discuss ways you can build bridges over the career obstacles and barriers you have experienced in the past.



Final Reflections: Lather, Rinse, Repeat to keep your Career Glow-Up Shining

If you've made it this far—and it's been six weeks since you began—first of all, congratulations. You've done more than just “read a book.” You've walked yourself through a structured, strategic reinvention. You've paused long enough to reconnect with what matters, then moved deliberately toward what's next. That's not easy work. But it is transformational work. Big changes can still feel scary—even when you're ready. That's not hesitation. That's the feeling of stepping into something bigger.

Let's take a moment to reflect on what you've accomplished each week:

Week 1: Gather Your Posse

You learned that the best career moves are never made alone. You named your mentors, allies, cheerleaders, and devil's advocates—and activated a circle of support around your career transition.

Week 2: Know Your Value

You did the deep, sometimes uncomfortable work of clarifying your unique strengths, gifts, and values. You asked others how they see your impact. You began to claim your story, not just your resume.

Week 3: Map Your Life System

You took a systems-thinking lens to your own life and career. Through the Integrity Game, you identified leverage points across health, finances, relationships, and learning, and saw how they shape your career direction and momentum.



Week 4: Explore and Define Your Targets

You moved from inward clarity to outward focus. You explored options, investigated potential paths, and started matching your value to real-world opportunities—no more aimless searching—just intentional aiming.

Week 5: Fire! Apply with Purpose and Authenticity

You built a strategic resume, leveraged your network, and customized your outreach. You activated your job search or freelance plan with precision and clarity—no black hole panic, no spammy spray-and-pray.

Week 6: Manage Your Career Like the Asset It Is

You zoomed out to think long-term. You explored individual development planning (IDPs), horizontal vs. vertical growth, and created a plan for managing your development no matter what career phase you're in. You stepped into the mindset of being your own best advocate.

I know it's been a journey, but here's the truth: you'll do this all again. Not the whole book, not in a linear sequence—but in cycles. Each time your life shifts, you'll return to these tools. You'll clarify what matters, re-map your system, explore what's next, and re-aim for the next chapter.

If you are out of work, odds are probably high that you are still job hunting. The average job search *before* the pandemic was about five months. But “average” should be taken with a grain of salt because every search is unique.³³ This is precisely why I started this book with the assignment to “gather your posse.” You need them now more than ever: they will support you, cheer for you, provide a shoulder, and if you're lucky like me, provide vodka and chocolate on the worst possible days. Just because you've reached the end of this six-week workbook does not mean you're finished with your career transition or have succeeded in achieving your career aspirations. Learning and growing are iterative processes, and this endeavor is no different if you have landed a new role—*mazel tov!* If you're still searching, stay grounded and in motion. And if this process has clarified that you don't want the same kind of job again, that's powerful information.



I encourage you to re-read or at least re-browse sections of this book as they become relevant to your focus, reconnect with your coach (or recruit a new career coach from your posse for your next six weeks!), and basically, lather, rinse, and repeat each assignment. Iterate. Revisit your north star. You'll find you have more profound insight, new experiences, and more ideas on each topic than you had the first time around. And never forget: your career doesn't just happen to you. You design it. You nurture it. And you are more than ready to take ownership of it.

Before you close this workbook, take a moment. Look at what you've created. You've clarified your value. You've mapped your system. You've rewritten your story and reclaimed your next move.

This wasn't just career work. This was *you* work—and it takes courage to show up, especially when it would've been easier to scroll, defer, or talk yourself out of change. You didn't. I hope you keep your Posse close, your Tree of Meaning or Integrity Wheel visible, and your confidence grounded in all that you now know to be true about yourself.

And if you ever start to question it again, that's fine. Reopen this book. Re-read your own words. They'll remind you who you are. If you need a boost or a battle buddy, feel free to reach out to me on my website. This book is also available as a six-week online self-study, with access to me and my team during regular office hours, as well as a private Facebook group where you can receive peer feedback, share successes and ideas, or even vent about a challenging interview experience. If you need dedicated one-on-one support, that can also be arranged.

You got this.

—Sherryl



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