Career Insights · Free download

Twenty career books. The ideas worth acting on.

You want the best thinking without reading a shelf of books first. We've grouped the most useful titles into five themes, with the one idea from each that you can use this week.

- Curiosity and breadth
- Test and reinvent
- Relationships and visibility
- Habits and self-awareness
- Landing and long lives

THE CHALLENGE

Too much advice, not enough time.

OUT THERE

Thousands of career books, many contradicting each other.

IN HERE

You read one, feel inspired for a week, then nothing changes.

WHAT'S RIGHT

Good ideas should turn into action, and you should know which claims hold up.

Your guide: every summary is in our own words, and we flag where a book's evidence has been questioned. Read the originals for the full picture.

THEME 1 · CURIOSITY AND BREADTH

Follow what fascinates you, and don't fear a varied path.

GURLEY'S SIX PRINCIPLES

1 Chase your curiosity	**2** Hone your craft	**3** Find mentors
4 Embrace peers	**5** Go where the action is	**6** Always give back

From the publisher's summary of *Runnin' Down a Dream*.

Runnin' Down a Dream

Bill Gurley · 2026

Step off the "safe" conveyor belt and build a career around what you'd study in your spare time.

Range

David Epstein · 2019

In messy, changing fields, people who sample widely and specialise later often do better.

Refusing to Choose

Barbara Sher · 2006

Many interests is a way of working, not a lack of focus. Design room for several.

Ikigai

Héctor García and Francesc Miralles · 2016

Purposeful activity, community and flow sustain long, contented lives.

Key takeaways

- Test your direction: would you learn about it in your spare time?
- A varied CV is range, not drift, if you can tell the story.
- A "good-enough job" can fund other interests.

THEME 2 · TEST AND REINVENT

Find your next career by doing, not just thinking.

IBARRA'S THREE PRACTICES

Craft experiments
small projects, side work

→

Shift connections
people in the new field

→

Make sense
retell your story

From *Working Identity*, in our words.

Working Identity

Herminia Ibarra · 2003

Identity follows action: try possible selves before choosing one.

The Search

Bruce Feiler · 2023

Most people rethink what work means to them several times; your story is yours to write.

Key takeaways

- Name three possible selves and design one small test for each.
- Meet people who already do the work.
- Revise your story as you learn.

THEME 3 · RELATIONSHIPS AND VISIBILITY

Opportunities travel through people.

HOW OPPORTUNITY REACHES YOU

Performance your results → **Image** how you're seen → **Exposure** who knows you → **Opportunity**

Coleman's PIE model, with networks and influence as the engine.

Empowering Yourself

Harvey J. Coleman · 1996

Promotions are decided by others: manage how you're seen and who knows your work.

Building a Winning Career

William Cowan · 2021

Run a senior job search as an active, structured project built on advice-seeking.

Influence

Robert B. Cialdini · 2021 ed.

Seven principles explain most persuasion. Use them honestly.

Connected

Christakis and Fowler · 2009

Habits and moods appear to spread through networks.

Findings debated

Mastering Connections

Joe Navarro · 2026

Body language builds rapport and trust; use it to connect, not to "read minds".

Digital Body Language

Erica Dhawan · 2021

Online, timing, tone and punctuation do the work your face used to.

Key takeaways

- Find a sponsor, not just a mentor.
- Give before you ask.
- Treat every email and video call as part of your first impression.

THEME 4 · HABITS AND SELF-AWARENESS

What got you here may not get you there.

GOLDSMITH'S FOUR CHOICES FOR ANY BEHAVIOUR

Create start something positive	**Preserve** keep what works
Eliminate stop what hurts	**Accept** what you can't change

From *Triggers*, in our words.

What Got You Here Won't Get You There

Marshall Goldsmith · 2007

Moving up usually means stopping an old habit, and asking colleagues for "feedforward".

Triggers

Marshall Goldsmith · 2015

Your environment triggers your behaviour; daily self-questions build lasting change.

Insight

Tasha Eurich · 2017

Few people see themselves as others do. Ask "what", not "why".

Before You Know It

John Bargh · 2017

Much behaviour runs automatically, so redesign the cues around you.

Some studies not replicated

Rebel Talent

Francesca Gino · 2018

Constructive rule-breaking can fuel engagement and creativity.

Author's research questioned

Key takeaways

- Review a few "Did I do my best to…?" questions each day.
- Change your surroundings to change a habit.
- Use flagged books for ideas, not as evidence.

Cautions: replication studies of Bargh's priming work (Doyen et al., 2012); Harvard's 2025 findings on Gino's research, which she disputes.

THEME 5 · LANDING WELL, LIVING LONG

Start strong, and plan for a longer working life.

WATKINS' STARS: DIAGNOSE YOUR NEW ROLE

Start-up	Turnaround	Accelerated growth	Realignment	Sustaining success

Different situations need different first-90-day strategies.

The First 90 Days

Michael D. Watkins · 2013 ed.

Learn fast, secure early wins and agree expectations with your new manager.

Master Your Next Move

Michael D. Watkins · 2019 ed.

Promotion, onboarding and leading former peers each need their own approach.

The 100-Year Life

Lynda Gratton and Andrew Scott · 2016

Longer lives mean many career stages; invest in skills, health and relationships.

Key takeaways

- Draft a 90-day plan before your first day.
- Name which transitions your new role combines.
- Audit your non-financial assets every year.

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Inspired for a week, or changed for good?

Reading alone

Good ideas, quickly forgotten when the week gets busy.

Reading with a plan

Each idea turned into one action, tested and reviewed with support.

Turn one idea into action.

Book a free 30-minute exploratory call, or subscribe to The Blueprint newsletter for one idea, one fact and one tool each month, through the Jonathan Windsor & Associates website.

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