



OAK FORWARD · FREE TOOLS

A Better Way to Think About Work

*Five principles for building a career without losing
yourself*

Start here

1

Start with what you need, not the next title.

It's easy to get trapped thinking the only path is analyst to manager, manager to director, director to VP. But the real question isn't "what's next" — it's "what do I need in my life right now?" Do you have the balance you want — can you make it to soccer practice? Are your skills actually being used? Could you contribute at the next level in a way that's meaningful, or are you climbing just because the ladder's there? Sometimes the better move isn't up — it's sideways, toward a skill you're missing for where you actually want to end up.

2

Chase alignment, not just money — and balance is part of it.

Everyone needs money — this isn't about ignoring that. It's that money alone isn't fulfilling, and here's the counterintuitive part: the more balanced you are — showing up well at home and at work — the *more* valuable you actually become at work. If climbing the ladder becomes your sole objective, you lose the broad perspective it takes to deal with people at every level. Balance isn't a distraction from success. It's what makes you effective. And nobody controls that balance but you.

3

Find your sweet spot.

Years ago, in a leadership program, I learned a simple model: your sweet spot is where what the company needs, what the world needs, and what you're actually passionate about all intersect. That intersection is what you're looking for — not just a job that pays, and not just a passion with no need behind it.

Where it counts

4

Every job has parts that suck. Learn to love those too.

There's no way around this. Look at the most successful people you know — every one of them pushed through a stretch of a job that had parts they didn't love to get where they wanted to go. If growing in your career matters to you, you have to be ready for the part that isn't fun. The real skill isn't avoiding that part — it's learning to love it, and finding ways to use your own gifts to make it suck less while you keep moving.

5

Be the best teammate, not just the best performer.

Early in my career, I wanted to be the best analyst in the room. The better goal turned out to be becoming the best teammate. That starts with actually considering what the people around you need — not the story you've told yourself about what they want. Ask questions. Get curious. Pay attention. Serve them, starting with your boss, but it doesn't stop there — the more you help your whole team work better together, the more value you create, and the easier everyone's job gets, including yours. Show up aligned to your values, focused on what the company actually needs, even when it's not the most convenient thing for you personally. That's the real recipe.

ONE THING TO PRACTICE

Before your next move — a promotion, a lateral shift, a new job — ask the question underneath all five of these: not "what's the next step," but "who do I want to become, and does this move me closer or further from that?"