

Chapter One

Start Smart

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.

—NELSON MANDELA

What do you want to be when you grow up? It is a question we ask children of all ages, not because we are prepared to take the answer seriously but because we believe the response is a gateway to the child's inner fantasies and obsessions. As we get older, all that changes is that we expect the answer to get serious. Saying you want to be a saint at age five is cute but at age twenty-five it starts to sound neurotic and—worst sin of all—impractical.

The question persists across generations because it works: it *does* show us what we value, dream about, care for. And we aspire to work at professions that express these. Finding the right work means knowing who you are—but work, quite often, is also the way that we find out. “What do I want to be when I grow up? How should I know? I’m twenty-two, I haven’t done very much yet—and I’m supposed to decide the rest of my life *now*?”

I would like to be able to offer a formula for figuring out how to identify your life's work. However, although my business career has taught me a lot about women in business and a lot about myself, nothing I've learned produced a quick and easy formula. What women are and what they want is too complex, personal, and rich to be stereotyped. I've done great and hideous jobs, I've worked for peanuts and I've made millions. I've worked in Europe

and the United States for gurus and psychopaths and with legions of brilliant men and women. I've learned a lot about what I like and don't like and how to tell the difference. I've learned that opportunism is good, but not good enough, and that there are smart ways of thinking about our careers that help us more quickly reach the places where we really want to be.

What I have learned too is that the journey is different for women. Although it looks like men's and women's careers have become increasingly similar, huge and important distinctions remain. Women are still paid less than men, they advance less easily, they are more likely to leave large corporations to run their own business. Corporate career structures, built by men for men, are anachronistic and wholly out of sync with what women do, need, and value. Women will all tell you that a big part of our careers involves navigating the shoals of preconceptions, stereotypes, and projections that we are born into.

I remember sitting in a room full of brilliant women at a leading investment bank. Together, they probably had more degrees than the government and more intelligence than their board of directors. What was their problem? They didn't know how good they were. Anxious, demoralized, and demotivated by a toxic environment that measured them only by how successfully they imitated men, they found it hard to take themselves seriously as women with unique talents, skills, and opportunities. That experience has been repeated the world over, in every industry I can think of. It's way past time for women to take ourselves seriously, know how good we are, be comfortable with our own energy, skills, and talents—and make sure we put ourselves in positions where these are used, admired, respected, and compensated appropriately.

Karen Price

I am 35, graduated summa cum laude with a BS in civil engineering, I have an MBA, and this past January I left my six-figure management job and a promising career because I couldn't stand it anymore. I felt like a failure for quitting, but I had reached the end of my rope. I wasn't entirely sure what was wrong, I just knew that I felt like part of me was dying. What I thought was success instead had become a death trap.

Karen didn't make mistakes. She got qualified, she was smart, she worked hard. In the eyes of others, she was very successful. Why isn't this a happy ending—yet?

Karen's experience is not unusual. All over the world, girls are going into business. We start off smart, enthusiastic, and optimistic—we work hard and are immensely dedicated. And we succeed. For the first few years, we get accolades, encouragement, and promotions. But as we get more and more power, weird things start to happen. The style and tactics that seemed so successful suddenly stop getting results. We encounter resistance and hostility. Our lives get harder to manage. We enter an Alice-in-Wonderland place where friends become enemies, values become liabilities, success makes us vulnerable and choices feel like strait jackets. We feel that we must have done something wrong somehow and, in our confusion and humiliation, we withdraw, lose confidence—and so find success even more elusive. *The problem, we think, must be me. What have I done wrong?*

Nothing. We've done nothing wrong. Being smart and working hard are entry-level requirements. But they won't protect you from the weird experience of being a business woman in a world that remains dominated by men and their values. The companies we see today were built by men for men. Reluctantly, grudgingly, they granted women access—at first just to lowly positions but eventually, when it served men's self-interest, to more powerful positions. We called this progress. But everything comes at a price. The price was that we had to behave in ways that men could be comfortable with: we mustn't frighten them, threaten them, usurp them, or in any way disturb their universe. In other words, we were allowed in as long as we didn't *change* anything. We became gatecrashers.

Because we didn't build the business environment we now move in, it doesn't derive from or express our style or thinking habits. So, sooner or later, every woman is faced with a choice. We can either assimilate—keep working hard to blend in, avoid attention or offense, in order to be accepted—or we can leave the party altogether and go to, or build, a different and more congenial place. That choice is unavoidable, decisive, and utterly personal. Every woman makes it, consciously or unconsciously. Our decision derives from who we are and will define who we become.

Once we understand this, we start to see that most of the difficulties we face aren't our fault. They go with the territory. We can't avoid them; we just have to decide how to deal with them. Whatever we decide, our decision is made easier when we see that we aren't alone, that we can reach out to others for context and advice—context that demonstrates that our challenges aren't exceptional or personal, and advice drawn from the repeated experience of women who've handled the same setbacks. We can overcome any of the challenges hurled at us—it's just a lot easier when we see that we aren't alone and we haven't failed. No woman has ever enjoyed a successful career without help.

What will protect you is knowing that perfect paths aren't an option. Almost no woman has had a wholly unimpeded career; in fact, careers are beginning to look more and more irregular, interrupted, and individual. In choosing a career, what's essential is to remember who you are and what you value, to stay very focused on finding work that is consistent with that, and to be prepared to leave when your identity and values feel like they are dying. Sounds simple, feels hard. The big challenge is not to be successful in business, but to be successful while remaining the woman you want to be.

Ten careers in a lifetime. A hundred thousand hours. That is what a working life is estimated to be. How are you going to spend them? I've had eight careers: radio production, television production, television business affairs, CEO, consultant, business owner, interactive consumer product developer, writer. And I'm not nearly done yet—or at least I don't think I am. Oh, and there's also wife, mother, sister, daughter, friend. Do those count? I think so—even if I didn't choose all of them.

A career is not a job. A career is a path along which you grow. So, when I had my radio production career, I had a different job every year. Same with television. As CEO, I ran several different companies, in different markets. Careers are about growth, development, learning more, making more. But where do you start? And does it matter?

Just because you will have ten careers doesn't mean that choosing them doesn't matter—although it may not be the kind of life-or-death decision that your parents imagined. Because the days of joining one firm—or even one industry—are mostly over, your

choice isn't going to make or break you for the rest of your life. You can—you should—experiment. You must make mistakes. What's important is that you put yourself in a place where you can learn, you do learn, you recover quickly from mistakes, you engage with work you value—and you get out if you feel you're dying.

I knew none of this when I started.

Which Way Should I Go? Asked Alice

Before you can begin to think about your career, you have to think about yourself. How important is your career? How important are you to yourself? Are you prepared and able to take seriously what happens to you—or are you prepared to leave this to others?

These sound like absurd questions. I wish they were. But of the many hurdles women face in their careers, the very first is the challenge of taking ourselves seriously. Our expectations for ourselves derive from a myriad of sources—none more potent than our families.

Donna Collins

I was nudged into becoming a registered nurse by my dad. I guess I didn't have exposure to the kind of professionals that may have made me think on a grander scale of ambitions. I had straight A's in honor classes and got accepted to all the colleges I applied to. I wish I'd known there are other careers for women or that I could have applied to Ivy League schools. I was still living my family's expectations of me. I wish I had more exposure to female role models that could have helped me stretch my reach.

Women often start out with ambitions well below their capabilities and we do so because we don't take ourselves, our careers, seriously. We don't plan, we don't think. I've talked to hundreds of women who will say their careers “just happened” or their careers just chose them. They describe themselves as passive characters swept along in someone else's narrative—but they're describing a central activity of their lives. We do ourselves a disservice when we fail to take ourselves seriously—and we set ourselves up to be trivialized by others.

I left a great university with a good degree—and started work as a secretary. This was dumb. I wasn't taking myself seriously. None of my male peers would have contemplated taking such a miserable job. And I was miserable, for years. Miserable enough that I started doing that job badly, which is dangerous because you don't ever get promoted for poor performance, no matter how great your degree is. Underestimating our capabilities and not putting together a bold, ambitious career plan is the recurrent feature of women's careers. We drift—and find ourselves in places we didn't plan and don't like.

Chris Carosella

I started as a receptionist in a financial institution . . . no particular reason, it was just a job. One promotion led to another and another. I moved around in the industry, always performed well. It wasn't until I escaped that I realized I had been in a corporate cult. I found out who I was after I left the toxic culture that I had been in for eleven years.

Chris became a senior vice president when she was thirty. Don't our stories prove the Cinderella myth—that you can start at the bottom and end up at the ball? No, they don't. Although legends abound of women starting in lowly positions and clambering to the top, they are grossly misleading, omitting all the pain and humiliation and anger that such career paths provoke. And the legends always leave out the women who didn't make it but were abandoned to badly paid jobs. One of the many reasons women fail to make it to the top is because they start so close to the bottom. Starting down there just makes the journey harder and longer. And makes it more likely you will end up in a place you would never have chosen for yourself if you had taken the time to think about it.

Cindy Solomon

I started as assistant product manager and went up through the system to VP of Sales and Marketing. I did this in 3 years and I'm not that good! What was I thinking? I kept thinking I would be happier in the next job and then the next job. I had no one to talk to because I was the only woman at my level. It is horribly depressing to realize that the assumptions you based your life and work on are based on other people.

Lacking a plan, failing to take ourselves seriously, means we find ourselves fulfilling the needs and expectations of others—satisfying family or corporate goals rather than our own. This passivity bedevils women because so many norms of femininity revolve around putting others first, not being pushy, not being ambitious. Ambitious women are regularly portrayed as sexless harridans, greedy, obsessed with power—who wants to be like them?

Well, no one, of course. But taking ourselves seriously is not selfish or greedy or wrong. In fact, quite the opposite: failing to do so wastes our gifts and diminishes our contribution. We can do more, for ourselves and for those we love, when we put ourselves in places where we can succeed.

Who Am I?

The successful career requires knowing what you want and knowing how to get it. Of these, the second part is easier. Knowing what you want requires tremendous self-knowledge and self-examination. But at the beginning of a career, without a lot of experience, what can you know?

Quite a lot, as it turns out. You've done something—exams, jobs, projects. When you reflect on those, what have you done best? Don't just guess—ask people. They'll have insights you will never see yourself. Think about the work you've done that you are most proud of: what made that so satisfying? Think about work you've failed at or just not enjoyed: what are its characteristics? Depending on how much experience you've had, you may not be able to come up with very complete answers, but once you start asking these questions, you will begin to note how you perform, where you thrive, and where you don't. Start to track how you work and to identify where you get stuck. A career that builds on your strengths is a great place to start—it may be all you need to know. The women with the smoothest careers are those who've followed their passions, regardless of discouragement or obstruction. Love isn't everything but it's a powerful motive.

Linda Alepin

My passion for technology started with my love of crossword puzzles. I found my first primitive programming courses to be the same sort of challenge—make all the words fit! I did sort of choose it

“blindly” but having chosen well, I guess I do not see what I might have known that would have helped that choice.

Jennifer Herron

I love to watch machines move. I chose engineering because I liked to know how things worked and I was good at maths and sciences.

Think about how you like to work. Do you enjoy speed? My dumb job as a secretary taught me one thing: I worked in an office that produced two radio programs—an hour and a half of original programming—every day. I loved that pace. Later on, when I was given a year to produce a one-hour film, I should have either said no or changed the schedule; it was too much time and I did poor work when asked to slow down. In broadcasting, time is considered a luxury, but for me it was a burden.

Do you like working alone or in teams? If you love teams, all kinds of work will be wrong for you—and if you like working alone, project work will drive you demented. Are you practical or conceptual—do you like ideas or getting things done? Women have such a tremendous reputation for pragmatism and multitasking that we are more likely to be assigned project work than conceptual planning—you can only fight these preconceptions if you know yourself well. Sometimes, of course, the only way to find out is to try something different and see how you thrive.

Interviewing hundreds of people throughout my career, I’ve regularly asked them how competitive they were. Most of them didn’t know what to say. I didn’t really care what the answer was; what is important about being competitive is *knowing* whether you are or not. Not everyone is competitive but I am constantly amazed by how many people are—especially, how many women are. Deeply, intrinsically, ineradicably competitive. They won’t tell you so because it doesn’t feel quite nice—but if you are very competitive, downplaying it is like driving with the brakes on. Unleashing it is exhilarating.

Heather Johnston

I started racing bikes; I showed up for a training ride and discovered a bunch of people who weren’t threatened by a smart, tough, talented woman—they thought it was cool. They actually expected it of me! Suddenly I realized I was motivated by competition; I had

power, athletic talent, and a thirst for speed and fast machines. This was fun and not very ladylike—and for once, altogether acceptable. This was revolutionary. I was getting respect for being no-holds-barred Real, as opposed to Proper. The experience drove me to dig deep and find the energetic, powerful, talented, creative girl I’d hidden away at age 11 when that got dangerous, and find new expression for her. It was great. Ultimately, the experience of rediscovering my talent and power, and finding a way to embrace them, gave me my whole spirit back, and that led to the courage to start my company.

I’ve met more women who were competitive than weren’t—and I’ve met more women who didn’t know it than did. And after underestimating themselves, the most recurrent error I’ve seen women make is getting their own competitive quotient wrong. Knowing this about yourself makes choosing the right career a great deal easier.

Stereotypes suggest that men are more competitive than women; I have found this to be entirely untrue. Stereotypes equally suggest that certain “masculine” hard-core business profit-and-loss disciplines—finance, engineering, sales—are competitive, while the “softer,” “feminine” disciplines of marketing, design, and operations are not. Also untrue. Competitiveness isn’t intrinsically good or bad, masculine or feminine—but it is fundamental to your work style and to the kind of environment in which you can thrive.

Much of the same discomfort that attaches to competitiveness attaches to ambition. How ambitious are you? Do you feel the need to achieve? Like competitiveness, there isn’t a right answer—but you must know this about yourself or you’ll start in the wrong place. Line positions involving profit and loss—such as sales, marketing, and manufacturing—offer a lot of power. Staff jobs (HR, legal, strategy, research and development) do not; for ambitious women, they will be the wrong place to start. Women running companies mostly come through line positions, not staff positions.¹ But staff positions are the “caring” ones—looking after people, looking after the company—so women easily gravitate there. The fact that *66 percent* of women work in these areas must be related to how few women end up at the top of organizations.²

What kinds of environments do you enjoy? Do you thrive on chaos or do you need total clarity about tasks and responsibilities? Do you enjoy spontaneity or does the absence of direction make

you feel anxious and worried? You don't need any work experience to answer questions like these—you will know from family life, parties, and vacations. Think about where you've been happiest; did that pleasure come from careful planning or pure opportunism? If you like spontaneity and are one of those women who can always see what needs doing, you will love start-ups; if you prefer clear instructions, more traditional organizations will suit you better.

C. J. Hathaway

For me small companies were much better because they afforded me opportunity. I've always been a person who looks around to see what isn't working or what isn't getting done—and then I'd jump in and take them on. In small or start up companies, that has allowed me to expand my responsibilities, and in some cases even create positions for myself that hadn't existed previously.

It is, of course, possible to enjoy both order and chaos. Daphne Kuo worked for me as a finance VP and had the closest thing I've ever seen to a perfect c.v. She alternated big companies—Toshiba, Johnson & Johnson, Fidelity—with start-ups. She loved both and learned from both. Start-ups gave her the opportunity to take on massive new responsibilities; established businesses confirmed those skills. She brought innovation to more staid workplaces and a real sense of process to brand-new companies that sorely needed them.

My father always maintained that the best way to choose a place to work was to think about the people you would be working with. You will spend so much time with them; are they your kinds of people? Would you want to be stuck on a transatlantic flight with them? Your peers don't have to become your best friends (although if you choose well, some of them may). But you will spend too much of your life with them to devote that time to uncongenial colleagues. And if you don't like them, they probably won't like you. Work is hard enough without having to pretend a compatibility that isn't there.

These are all questions that you will ask yourself over and over again. Experience will refine your answers, maybe even change them completely. Different jobs will reveal to you aspects of your talent and personality you didn't see before. But some of the most important questions to ask yourself as you set out on a career are these: What are my values? What do I care about? Where can I find

work and colleagues that I respect? All individuals and all businesses have values. Values congruence—aligning what you value with what your company values—produces a great deal more satisfaction in work; working for people you don't respect, on projects that you don't feel are important, is a recipe for frustration and failure.

We all want to do great work, on something we believe in, that we can be proud of, with people we respect. Although I started in a bad job, I discovered that the company offered much of what I was looking for: the products were tremendous, the values (of public service broadcasting) made me feel my work was worthwhile, and the people were a blast. Once I changed jobs (which I could do easily because the corporation was still expanding), I was in the right place. And there were a lot of women around in positions of power.

One of the key issues for women is finding companies that respect them. When you visit a business, look around. Do you see women in positions of power? Are they treated with respect? When you talk to them, do you get the impression that they are expressing who they are—or hiding it? Are they all wearing the same predictable protective coloration—dark suits, helmet hair—or are they allowed to be feminine? What can your network and research tell you about them? Go online and look at the board of directors—do you see any women there?³ If there are no women at the top of the organization, it will be hard (and sometimes, though not always, impossible) to be taken seriously. Yes, you can be the first; is this your goal? Do you want to start your career with a fight?

Chris Carosella

I never had a plan to go into financial services. I wish I had known how few women ever made it to senior positions. I wish I would have made a conscious decision to determine what my values were and how I could find work in an area that was something I was passionate about.

Values aren't the same as money—but how important money is to you will be an important determinant in the career choices you make. Why? After sex, money is the most personal, complex, mystifying part of our lives. People find it hard to talk about, to understand, and to manage. I always thought money didn't matter to me because I didn't like the men who were driven by it. Their passion for money struck me as cold, greedy, inhuman—so my

career was never driven by financial goals. I just did work that I loved. I wasn't rich, I just always lived within my means. But as I grew older, I became afraid—afraid of what my retirement would look like. I would take my children to the McDonald's near Quincy Market in Boston, and watch a woman working there—red-haired, in her late sixties—and panic that that would be me one day. I had few savings. I had never really thought about how I would live if I didn't work.

That redhead changed my life. I decided that I did want to make money. Not to be driven by it and not to let it dominate my life. But I wanted to make enough money not to be afraid. And enough money to be able to make choices—about where I worked, what I would (and would not) put up with, about where I lived. Making money gave me freedom I could not have had otherwise, and having choices made my life feel like it was mine—not the company's, not my family's, but mine. It was a wonderful feeling.

By contrast, I recall with horror watching a friend ask her husband if she could buy a drink. A grown woman asking permission like a child? But she had no money of her own. I've never entirely understood where today's women got the idea that they weren't responsible for their own financial health. We take responsibility for ourselves, for our children, for our employees. Money is about responsibility too; will you take responsibility for your own financial security? If you won't, you become dependent.

Jana La Sorte

My father is military so we all followed his life, my mom in particular. His money, his job location changes, his timetable all ruled our lives. My parents fought constantly about money so the only teaching I received was that money caused problems. And that whoever had the most money, had the most power. I understood early on that I wanted my own money so I did not have to be subject to anyone else's rules or fight with anyone about what I could/could not buy. And, of course, to have my own power ultimately.

Having her own money was just one aspect of Jana's independence that led to her also having her own company. She is quite clear that she is responsible for her own financial well-being. This doesn't make her cold or unfeminine—it makes her secure.

There is no evidence that money makes people happy. You should never take a job, or a career, just for the money. But in a world where we regularly see divorce, layoffs, and early illness and death, we can see that financial dependence is a highly dangerous road to take. Women are poorer than men. In part this is because we are less well paid and because we have babies. But it is also an inevitable consequence when we don't take money seriously. We take responsibility for our finances if we care about independence, security, and being able to work the way we want to. Having money, and being very good at making money, gives Carol Vallone the power she needs to run her business according to her values. It allows her values and her money to be in sync.

Carol Vallone

I have the massively large house and all of the trappings that would indicate money, position, that sort of stuff. And maybe once you have that, you don't care about it any more. So money is definitely important to me but important as it relates to my other purposes. The ultimate importance to me is you can do business this way: you can be passionate, you can work in an alternative way *and* you can make money. Money as it relates to having a comfortable lifestyle is important to me but having those other pieces is the *most* important to me. The amount of money itself doesn't quite do it for me.

Thinking about values helps you to ask the fundamental question: where do I belong? This is a particularly critical question for women who still will encounter many companies where they will be made to feel they do not belong. Companies that do not value us as different but will judge our success only by how far we succeed in assimilating male behaviors, standards, and values. It's no fun working where you aren't wanted or appreciated—gatecrashers are too worried about being discovered to enjoy the party. You will find that you belong in a place that has values similar to your own, that values you as a woman and does not try to turn you into a man.

Values can be hard to think about—they're so abstract and nebulous, hard to see in real, concrete terms. Sometimes the best way to think about them is to visualize what a particular job would look and feel like. On leaving university, I was offered a job with a prestigious investment bank. Like most graduates, I would start as an analyst—in my case, I was to be analyzing the brewing industry,

which was big business and reasonably attractive to someone who enjoyed drinking. The pay was great, there was a clear career path, and I knew my father would be pleased as punch. But then I tried to visualize what my life would be like in year one and then in year five. I saw a suburban house, a car, roses at the door, a leather briefcase, smart suits. I knew I couldn't do it. I didn't feel that I belonged in that picture.

Some industries are better than others. Many senior women have succeeded in retail, consumer products, and the media. Other industries, notably financial services, continue to be characterized by macho cultures that celebrate and reward bullying, intimidation, and late nights. But even industries that look inimical to women have good companies—I know women who've enjoyed great careers in aerospace and the car industry—so you will get greater insight by looking at individual businesses. What do stand out are individual companies—and your plan needs to find those. Monica Leuchtefeld, who runs global e-commerce for Office Depot, maintains that the company matters more than anything—and many successful women agree with her.

Betsy Cohen

I looked for the largest company that had good training programs and good products that I believed in. I thought that a brand management career was the stepping stone to general management, and that has been true. I wish I had known how long it really takes to work oneself upward in a big company, as that has been frustrating because a large company has so many talented people and no one leapfrogs upward. Maybe smaller or more flexible companies can accommodate faster upward movement.

Big or small, old or new, what matters is uncovering those companies where your values and your ambition don't have to be suppressed, where you can be appreciated by the contribution you make to work you believe in.

What's Your Plan?

Actress and writer Anna Deveare Smith says that whenever she hears women complaining, she asks, "What's your plan?" It's an invaluable mantra. When you have a sense of what you want to do,

or where, what's your plan to get there? Knowing what you want is the hard part—getting it can be, maybe not easy, but easier, if you have a plan.

Since so many successful women claim their careers “just happened” to them, why do you need a plan? Because without one you can fall into career drift—satisfying other people, achieving other people's goals, building success in areas you don't really relate to. Without a plan, you absorb your company's plan, or your parents' plan—and find yourself, years later, wondering why you are doing a job that feels like a death trap.

Plans help us to work smart. Without them, we just outwork everyone around us; we throw quantity instead of quality at the problem.

Cindy Solomon

I began my career fresh out of college with only two firm expectations . . . first, that I would get a job and second that I could pay off my student loans and support myself. No one ever mentioned that I was supposed to like the work, find a company where I could excel over time, etc. Additionally, I never addressed my career and my career moves proactively, I simply worked until I dropped and hoped that it would get me promoted.

I neglected my entire life for too many years because I was seeking to achieve the only way I knew how, which was to outwork everyone else. If I were to do it again and approach it the way I mention above, I would out-think the organizations and the opportunities rather than out-work them. That would have allowed me to, if not have it all, at least have some life while I was achieving my work goals.

Plans save us time and energy. They stop us from making commitments to people we don't like and projects we don't enjoy. But most of all, plans work. At the age of fourteen, I fell in love with Shakespeare and became utterly determined to become a theatre director. At the age of fifteen, as an American living in London, I sought out Anne Barton, an academic married to the preeminent director of Shakespeare. I thought that as a fellow American and Shakespeare enthusiast she would be able to help me—and she did. On her advice, I graduated from high school a year early and applied to and was accepted by the top London school that sent more girls to Oxford and Cambridge than any other school

in England. I overcame their prejudice against American education to apply for and win early admission to Cambridge University, where all of my idols had trained. And, when I got there, I started directing plays. I had a plan. The plan worked.

The problem I encountered next was something I had not planned for: I discovered that I hated directing plays. What I should have done next was make another plan. Instead, I drifted and became a secretary. When eventually I made another plan, that worked too.

Whenever I've had a plan, I've made progress; when I didn't, I drifted. Plans work because they focus your mind and attention and also because they help you to identify and articulate what you want. Once you can do that, you can ask people to help you—and they will if they can. If you can't say what you want, people may want to help but not know how.

Plans focus what you want and make you think about the skills you need to get there. Do you have those skills or do you need to develop them? Does that mean school or experience? Who do you know who can help you? Who do they know? Who can give you insight into whether or not your goals are achievable and appropriate and, if they are, how you reach them? Marjorie Scardino, the CEO of Pearson, says you should have a plan and “execute it violently.” She points out that we plan most major aspects of our lives—we plan weddings and vacations and maternity leaves. Why on earth would we *not* plan a career?

Plans don't stop when you get the first job or when you get the big job. Plans keep your career moving on your terms—not anyone else's.

Cindy Solomon

The mentoring I give to younger women now includes the following things that I would have done very differently not only from the start, once I was with a company.

1. Ensure that the due diligence you do on every job move includes whether you like the actual work and whether the company has proved in words and deeds that they are willing to work with you to meet your goals (no better way to get at this information than to ask to interview some of their mid level managing women).

2. Once you are in a job, determine what you want to learn from it, what achievements you hope to have within it, what your skill sets will be when you've achieved your goals and where you will be challenged next. I also suggest that women look at the financial contributions they are making to their company every six to twelve months and ensure that they are being adequately compensated.
3. As soon as you hit the door of each job within each company, find a male mentor to get you up to speed on the relationships and real decision making processes. This will also ensure that someone is out there in the "boys network" giving you unintended positive PR.

If we start smart, and stay smart, our working lives become easier and we feel in charge of them, not dependent on the whims of men and markets. I'm struck that the most dynamic women I know are fearless in identifying goals for themselves and figuring out how to achieve them. They don't wait for good fortune to strike; they go out and make it for themselves. And knowing what they want helps them to get out of bad situations fast.

Many women, asked to explain their careers, will come out with the demure response: it was luck. This is immensely frustrating to hear because it suggests that you can't really *do* anything; you either have luck or you don't. They attribute their success to luck because they don't want to appear to boast or to appear to be too calculating—or perhaps because they don't want to share what they know. But it turns out that luck isn't quite as arbitrary as it appears. Recent studies show that people who consider themselves to be lucky are simply more observant than those who consider themselves to be unlucky. Experiments show that when a person who considers herself lucky and a person who considers herself unlucky walk down the same street, it is the "lucky" person who spots the coin.

Having a plan makes you more observant because you know what you are looking for and are better attuned to find it. You have a better-defined sense of what is useful to you. And plans get you to where luck happens; I may have discovered that I hated directing plays, but Cambridge was not a bad place to be while I reconsidered. If your plan lands you among smart people in a place where you belong, your "luck" often does the rest.

You have to know what you want. You need a plan to get it. You need “luck.” And you need to take risks. When asked how she had managed to combine a dazzling scientific career with successful business and broadcasting ventures, Susan Greenfield said, “I took risks. I decided to say ‘yes’ to everything that wasn’t life-threatening. I used to say, ‘Boats are safest in harbor but that’s not what they’re built for.’ Those who risk nothing, risk more.” She is fifty-three years old, a baroness, a lecturer at Oxford University and director of the Royal Institution, one of Britain’s most ancient and admired establishments. She also runs several businesses and has twenty-one honorary degrees. In careers, just as in investing, you find a risk/reward trade-off.

In my own life, my big successes have come from deviating from the norm—doing something unexpected that involved significant degrees of uncertainty. Leaving broadcasting, having babies, leaving England, starting new companies, leaving America. I’m not sure I experienced these decisions as risks—at the time, I felt I could not decide differently. But their outcomes were uncertain and, compared to my peers’ career choices, they were risky.

When we take risks and they work to our advantage, we call that luck. When they don’t work to our advantage, we call them mistakes. I learned I didn’t like directing plays; it was a good thing to know, and analyzing why eventually sent me off in a more fruitful direction. Mistakes in a career are really just learning.

Paige Arnof-Fenn

I would say I have learned something really important in every job. But every day in those jobs would not be described as a day or an experience I loved. But it was incredibly important that I learn in those roles. I was an analyst on Wall Street. It was difficult mentally and emotionally. I decided to leave Wall Street and I think I have done better with the opportunities. I don’t think you have to like every job but you have to learn from every job.

Paige took herself from Wall Street to Procter & Gamble to Coca-Cola; she has had a rich and varied career, characterized by companies she’s passionate about and colleagues she admires. She is now CEO of Mavens & Moguls, a new business that she believes can grow to be as big as she wants it to be.

Paige Arnof-Fenn

I think people are always in transition. That is the reality of the economy today. There is no lifetime employment or staying in that job forever. If you are doing something you love, learning new things, and adding value to the world at large, it is as if you are walking around with a toolkit adding to that skill set. How you spend your time is what really matters—and doing something with it.

You have to be true to yourself and know what your true north is. It never works if you go against that. If it means you have to leave a job or a company to go where you are more in sync with your value systems and beliefs, do it.

A career is not a plan for life—at best, it may be only your plan for the next chapter of your career. But if it is in tune with your values, the story will be rich in experience and make sense. Be ambitious with your plan; successful women always set themselves goals that are a bit of a stretch: not impossible but not too easy either. If you aren't ambitious for yourself, no one else will be. Most men still regularly assume that other men are ambitious and expect them to want more—responsibility, pay, promotion. They do not regularly make the same assumptions about women but tend to underestimate what we do and what we want. They will continue to make that mistake unless we signal our ambitions, needs, and goals clearly. It's not a bad habit to start thinking well of yourself.

Think about how much of a fighter you are or want to be. You may not know this until you find yourself in the midst of a battle, but the question is almost bound to arise at some point in your career. Do you want to stay and slug it out, or do you want to work someplace where you are accepted and appreciated for the woman you are? It takes a lot of confidence to fight your way through toxic environments and hostile industries—if you can do it, the sense of accomplishment is immense. But it isn't for everyone. Many women enter financial services thinking they won't mind the fight. They leave in droves when they discover otherwise.

When you find yourself somewhere you don't want to be, don't feel ashamed. Call it learning, not a mistake, and analyze what you've learned before you make the next plan. That way, however bad the experience, you will have extracted value from it. The most successful women are the best learners.

Talking to successful women about their careers, I've heard hundreds of hair-raising stories about awful men they've worked for, ludicrous tests they've been put through, enormous challenges they've overcome. But I've always heard laughter too. Because once they've come through these ordeals, what remains is amusement and joy. Amusement at the absurd obstacle race we still run; joy when we find the work, the colleagues that bring out the best in us. Joy too at the discovery that, after all that, we've discovered what we should have known all along: we *are* worthy. There is nothing we cannot do. We just have to set our minds to it.



I used to find that the only time I got for thinking was while traveling on a plane or train, and I came to value this time for providing the space I needed to ask myself questions about where I was and where I was going. At the end of all but the last chapter, therefore, are some questions to reflect on when you next find yourself on a plane or train or stuck in traffic. They are timeless questions and, over the years, your answers may well change.

Travel Thoughts

- What do you believe in? How would you describe your values? Do they relate to your work? What work would match those values more closely?
- How important is money to you?
- How competitive are you?
- How ambitious are you? For what?
- Where do you imagine you want to work?
- What's your plan? What skills do you need to achieve it? Who do you know that can help? Have you told them what you want?