



The Professional's Playbook: A Strategic Guide to Shaping a Fulfilling Career

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My Struggle

There are several times in my life that I have wondered if doing things across industries and disciplines reflect the ideal nature of a true career professional. I have often wondered about the concept of creating niches for career success. Why should I remain an academic because that was where I got my first expression for work? Why should I remain a consultant in Human Resources and People Management when Corporate Planning and Strategy is something I excel at effortlessly? These curious comments drove me to searching for what truly is a career.



What Exactly is a Career?

I believe very strongly that a career is a person's long-term journey of work.

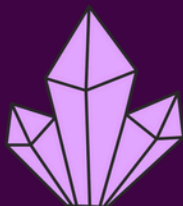
It consists of your personal growth because it involves continuous learning, skill development, and self-improvement. I counsel people to embrace self development as the basis for determine the quality of their contributions to others. Your greatest gift to people, groups, institutions, societies, and nations, is your self development. When you become better, your outputs and contributions become enriched.



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Dr. Olumuyiwa A. Oludayo, Principal Consultant – Nathan Leadgate

Career as a Journey of Self-Development



Initial Career

Starting point of professional life



Continuous Learning

Acquiring new knowledge and skills



Skill Development

Honing existing abilities and expertise



Self-Improvement

Personal growth and self-awareness



Enriched Contributions

High-quality outputs and positive impact

I also think that your career involves advancing through roles, responsibilities and even industries. It won't be a career if it is static. Careers are known by their dynamism. They would evolve over time as they adapt to changes in the job market, industry, and even personal interests.

“Your greatest gift to people, groups, institutions, societies, and nations, is your self development.”

A career often time is driven by long-term objectives that can span from attaining a specific position to earning a certain income or even making a specific meaningful impact. Our careers are marked by their multifaceted nature. They are springboards for the fulfilment of our dreams and ambitions.

Your career is not to be static, it should always be dynamic because of the cycles and changes of life.

One major thing that we experience but don't really talk about is that our career intersects with our personal lives. I have seen people take different jobs because of their family, and even marital relationships. Many people have moved into new fields of engagement because they have prioritised their well-being.

Careers are springboards for attainment



The Professional's Playbook: Meet **the Shapers of Your Career**

I believe that your long-term journey of work is shaped by certain forces. My intention is to help you identify, describe, and maximise each of these shapers and influencers of your work life. Your career is shaped by:

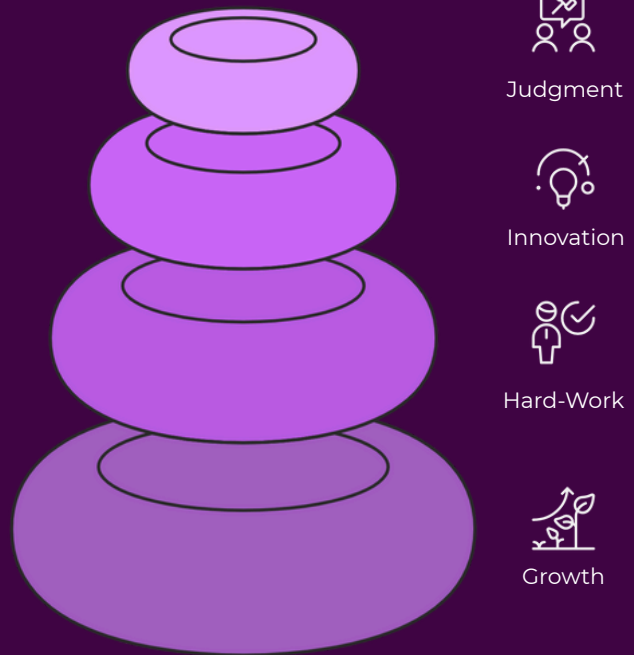
- **Aspirations:** Your aspiration is the picture of your future that you have captured in your mind. It defines your career direction and the heights you seek to reach. Many professionals have dreams of what the future should look like. These imaginations have shaped the choices we make about work. Imaginations are great influencers of our direction in life. You can make the most of them by setting clear and measurable goals, aligning them with your personal values, and regularly reviewing them to be sure they are still relevant.
- **Beliefs:** Your guiding principle in life is another great shaper of your career decisions and pathways. They define your response to opportunities and challenges. They form the basis of your transitions and considerations. You have a responsibility to ensure this force doesn't limit you. You must ensure you confront limiting beliefs, surround yourself with empowering relationships that are growth-centric, and ultimately ensure it aligns with the ethics of the organisation you are a part of.
- **Capabilities:** Another force that shapes your career is your capability. The things you can do and the extent at which you can do them to produce results often time is a critical determinant of your career. Take time to do a personal SWOT Analysis alongside a capabilities gap analysis (I can help you with these). Embrace continuous learning and a lifestyle of practicing what you have learnt.

- **Determination:** Sometimes life hits us so bad that we rise by a resolution to prove a point that we are capable of doing what life has said you could not do or threatened you not to see through. For certain people, it is this resolution that drives and sustains them in roles and responsibilities where they have made their mark. If you must lean on your determination to produce results in your career, then by all means develop resilience amidst difficult situations, cascade your dreams into manageable bits your mind can carry and draw inspiration from those who have overcome incredible odds in life to do remarkable things in the world.
- **Experiences:** The things that we have been exposed to also shape our careers. If you have been a part of projects that inspire you, you will most likely gravitate towards them for work. If you have been exposed to best practices in certain industries by virtue of travel or education, you will most likely want to replicate it where you are. The key to maximise this factor is by leverage. Look to it and let it help your navigation.
- **Faith:** Sometimes we have confidence in the unseen possibilities of life. Faith provides the courage to take risks and take on new career paths. Most times, you get a hunch or a nudging to follow a path and that becomes the beginning of a whole new work life for you. Trusting the process as you step out into the unknown is one thing you have to do as you make the most of this factor. Never lose connection with divinity as it is your surest guide if this factor is deliver maximally for you in the years to come.



- **Growth:** Simply because you believe in the mantra that says "you are not good enough to remain the way you are," you find yourself seeking other career expressions. Growth is essential for career longevity. If you develop a lifelong learning mindset and challenge yourself with stretch assignments.
- **Innovation:** Innovation is your ability to think creatively. It sets you apart in problem solving and influences your career decisions. When you work in an environment that prioritises innovation and increasing improvements, you are going to feel at home and build your career nest there. However, if your creative juices aren't allowed to flow, you will look for greener pastures where they can be engaged.
- **Hard Work:** When you see the effort you put into work and the rewards that follow after it, you are most likely going to be influenced to make a change of your career's direction. You know that consistent effort leads to excellence and recognition. When you get it, you are likely to stay, but when you don't get it, you are going to move. You must begin to work smarter and not harder, set priorities and work on high-impact tasks, and remain focused even in trying times.

- **Judgement:** Sometimes the move we make in our careers rides on our decision making abilities. A strategic move is sometime delayed because of indecision. Good judgement is a much needed requirement for wise career choices. Those who are decisive are never stranded. The quality of your decisions will most invariably be defined by the quality of information at your disposal. Your career moves will also draw maximally from the lessons you can glean from your past decisions. Wise decisions also come from wise company. If you will keep seeking counsel, you will not make poor decisions because it is in the multitude of counsel that you find safety nets for your career.



My Pivot

I believe we are capable of doing more than we do today. Many a time, we believe it will stretch us beyond the limits of our capabilities and cause us to lose. As we look further into the Professional's Playbook, I identify other critical factors that shape our careers.

What are the other shapers of your Career?

Knowledge: What you find while learning directs your path. Our careers are shaped by our discoveries. If you embrace the principle of lifelong learning under the energy of curiosity, you'll find for yourself that which adds value and maximises your capabilities. Knowledge enables you to secure validations for acquired abilities. It is a curator of your disposition and response to opportunities. Knowledge is a builder of your skills and a definer of the experience you should pursue.

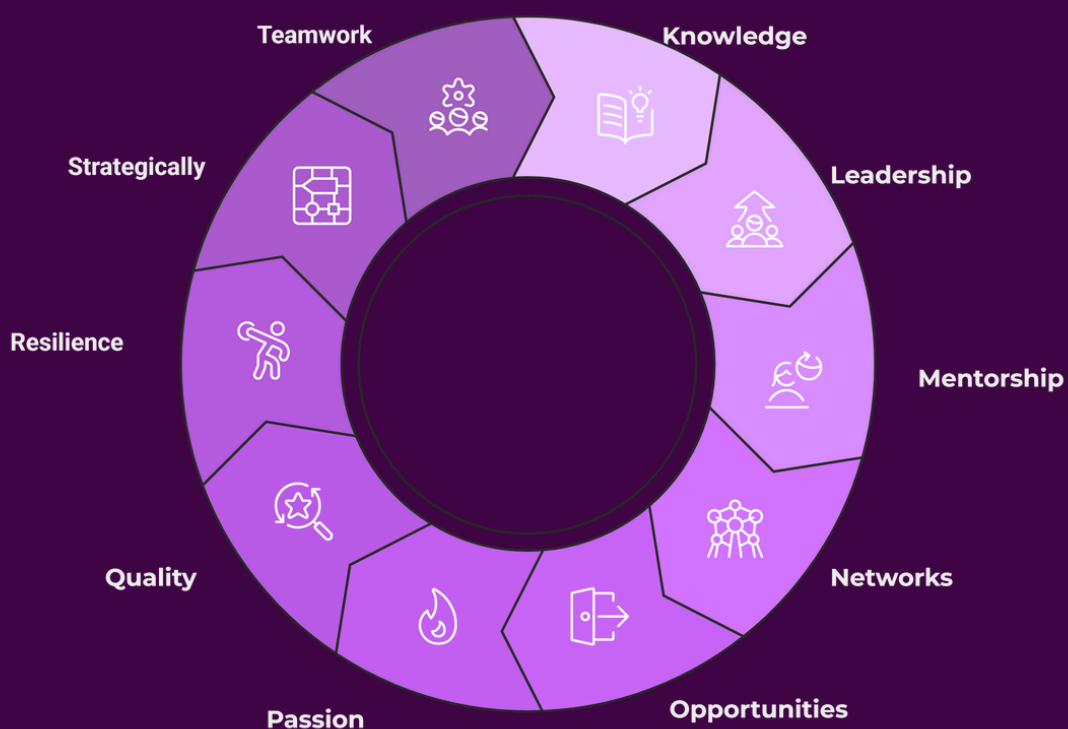
Leadership: One great influence of our career is leadership. True leadership begins with oneself. If you can influence yourself, you can shape your journey. Our career is also shaped by the influence of other individuals, they play a pivotal role in how we deploy our capabilities. The impact of a leader on your career is such that you follow the tracks they lay, maximise the opportunities they offer for your growth, and deliver results to validate the trust they had in you.

Mentorship: A mentor is a trusted advisor. Sometimes, we find ourselves in a fix. Our professional life looks like an unsolved puzzle. These mentors come to our rescue with counsel that seems like laws and suggestions that have the effect of an instruction. This is because they are experienced and can see far ahead of us even when they are not in the centre of our situation. If you will allow mentors guide you with their counsel, you will take better decisions in your professional life. These people ensure you don't do life alone.

- **Networking:** One of my favourite quotes when speaking about networking is "if it takes you too long to get what you want, your network is poor." Many of us need to build professional relationships and connections that will contribute to our growth. Building this network begins with checking in with those you already know. It is like going from the known to the unknown. Many of us don't know what we have until we ask those we know. Take time to connect others to more and they will introduce you to more as well.
- **Opportunities:** There are defining moments in our lives that turn the tide in our careers. Many people have been bolted into prominence in their careers simply because they took up an opportunity. It is important not to pass on a chance to add value at scale. Any opportunity to do more is one you should embrace. Any call to do bigger things should be welcomed. Any invitation to collaborate towards greater impact, should be honored. Your career is your chance to serve with your capabilities. It is a calling that you must fulfil whenever you are called upon to do so.
- **Passion:** The dynamic nature of our careers impact our energy levels. Passion is needed when there is no motivation and incentive to keep coasting in your career. The things you are passionate about will get your attention. Your passion is a shaper of your career. Check out the issues, events, and matters that make an impression on you, they signal where you need to direct your energy.



- **Quality:** I have read that excellence is the greatest deterrent to racism and sexism. The desire for top quality is a shaper of careers. Don't celebrate mediocrity simply because excellence is scarce. If you love growth, you will love quality. Those who desire improvements will always find ways to develop their careers in ways that adds more value to people.
- **Resilience:** Life will not always be rosy. The times will not always be fun. Your career will present moments of trials to you. These experiences may be self-inflicted, others may be drawn by external factors. Nevertheless, the source of your problems are not material to your career progress as your ability to navigate through them. Develop a mindset that allows you to bounce back from defeat and pursue success against all odds.
- **Strategy:** Nothing happens by chance. You will never experience greatness because you simply wished it. There is a need to plan for what is ahead. Your efforts becomes worthless if you have not factored the things that can hinder their valued impact to your stakeholders. Be intentional about developing a clear plan for your career. Don't leave anything to chance.
- **Teamwork:** Collaboration is an amplifier. Working together is a maximiser. Letting others be a part of your journey makes it more fulfilling. We all must learn to partner with others in order to make the most of our work lives. It is teamwork that brings the dream to reality. It is okay to conceive an idea, but it is more important to have persons that can join hands with you to birth your conception. We are better when we collaborate. Those who go far in their careers always journey with others. Have a core group of colleagues that you win and learn together.



My Resolution

This one thing I do, **I forget the things of the past and pursue the things that are ahead.** I have come to accept that all glory is fleeting, hence, seeking new challenges everyday is what validates growth. There is no place to plateau for the person who has seen both victories and failures. They look on to the new horizons and chase unfulfilled dreams.

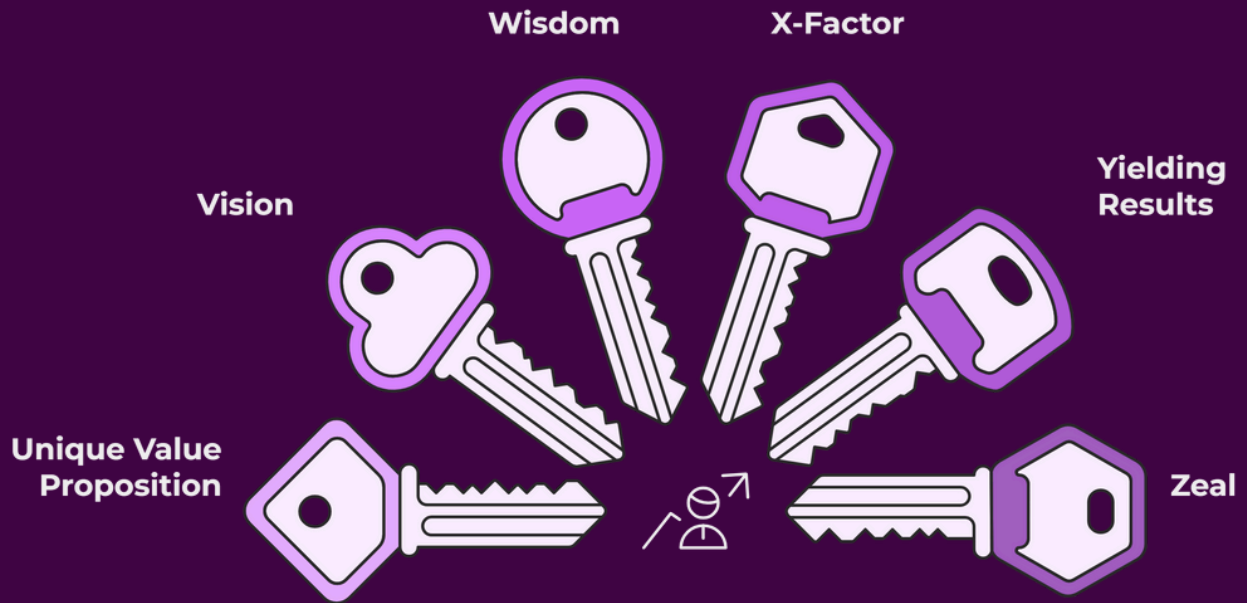
As we bring these series of ideas to a close, be rest assured that you pass the torch to the next generation of change makers!

Let's Wrap This All Up! The Final List of Career Shapers

- **A Unique Value Proposition:** The value you bring to the table is a determinant of your career. Always position yourself to be a contributor. When you choose a contribution mindset, you will find yourself becoming very creative as you seek to solve problems and not cause it. You will easily identify opportunities for service and not self gratification. Never remain on the menu, ensure you strive hard to be on the table. Those who are in the room when critical decisions are been made have the advantage of being first movers.
- **Vision:** Another shaper of your career is your picture of the future. I recall a mentor of mine once asked me "Where do you see yourself making your utmost contribution to life?" That question influence the extent of my dreams. I expanded my expectations of a rewarding career. I started to look in many more directions than I have ever looked at. Vision is the image of the value we nurture to share with others. When we pursue it, we validate its authenticity.
- **Wisdom:** Knowledge is good and so is understanding. However the ability to discern the right path is the value that wisdom gives your career. Those who work with contextual intelligence are always relevant for the moment and beyond. You must apply discernment in your decision-making efforts. Arrogance is the barrier to expressing great wisdom. A career laced with wisdom will surmount hurdles and maximise opportunities.

- **X-Factor:** On a team of competent people, capacity is the difference maker. Your career is often time shaped by that extra thing you bring to the team. Your career is shaped by your distinction. The goal is not to compete with the people you work with, rather the quest is to be better than your previous best outcome.
- **Yielding Results:** Nothing commands respect like results. It is only results that terminates insults. The proof of success is the results you deliver. A fulfilling career is marked by results. Results help to reinforce your relevance. They energise your team to surpass their last outing. Results set you apart from talkers and analysts. It is the lever upon which your uniqueness rides. Results confer leadership on you and make you a force to be reckon with in your career. With results, you become the talk of the profession and the source of inspiration for the next phase of the profession. To produce better results, pay attention to your thoughts, feelings, actions, capabilities, approach, and tools.
- **Zeal:** Potential is not what makes you great, it is products. Products are outcomes of inputs of energy, enthusiasm, and dedication. Shared goals don't drive success as much as an unflinching commitment to the demands of the goals. Situations can steal the glorious picture of your career future if you have got no zeal. Pay the price for greatness by embracing responsibility.







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...influencing change