

Optimizing for Adaptation

A practical learning module for getting unstuck

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You don't need to know exactly where you're going before you begin. You need a way to learn your way toward it.

PREFACE

This module is an experiment. It takes the ideas from Career Coaching with John: Optimizing for Adaptation and applies them to a much more personal question: What do you do when you know something needs to change, but you do not know what comes next?

The goal is not to leave with a perfect career plan. It is to get curious, gather information, challenge some of your assumptions, and create enough movement to begin seeing possibilities that are not obvious to you today.

By the end of the module, you should have a clearer understanding of what matters to you; what is draining or frustrating you; what is missing from your working life; what you are curious about; what you still need to learn; what you can test rather than simply think about; and what evidence you will use to decide what comes next.

You do not need to answer before you begin. The point is to build a better way of finding it.

Lesson 1: Recognize the Stalemate

A career doesn't have to be terrible to be wrong for you. Jenny's situation matters precisely because there is no crisis. She has stability, decent income, flexibility, and time for her family. Yet she is bored, disconnected, and unmotivated. This lesson is not about convincing yourself to leave. It is about describing reality accurately.

EXERCISE

What is working?

What does your current career give you that you genuinely value?

What is not working?

What consistently leaves you bored, frustrated, underused or disconnected?

Think about the last two weeks. Describe three specific moments when you felt this way. What were you doing and what was missing?

What do you wish you had more opportunities to do?

Being uncomfortable doesn't automatically mean something needs to change. But being comfortable doesn't mean everything is working.

Lesson 2: Define Success Again

Jenny's definition of success included being present for her family. That was true, but it wasn't the whole truth. Her definition pointed her back toward the exact situation making her unhappy. Your definition of success may need the same second look.

EXERCISE

Start here

Complete: I will consider my working life successful if...

Then interrogate it

If you achieved exactly what you wrote, what would it give you? What would still be missing?

Look for yourself

What part of yourself isn't represented in that definition?

Reflection

What else would have to be true for this life to feel fulfilling?

Your definition of success may not be wrong. It may simply be incomplete.

Lesson 3: Calculate the Cost of Standing Still

People are usually very good at identifying the risks of doing something different: less money, failure, regret, and disruption. But doing nothing is not risk-free. Staying where you are is also a decision, and it has consequences.

EXERCISE

If I change...

What might I lose? What could go wrong? What am I afraid of?

If I don't change...

Where am I likely to be in three years? What happens to my skills, confidence, motivation, relationships and sense of myself?

Reflection

Which risks have I been paying attention to - and which ones have I been ignoring?

Staying where you are is still a decision. It has consequences too.

Lesson 4: Stop Looking for the Answer

When you don't yet know what you want, searching for the perfect job can make the problem worse. Endless options don't create clarity. Instead of looking for the answer, start looking for information.

EXERCISE

Instead of: What job should I do?

What kinds of problems do I enjoy solving?

Instead of: What am I passionate about?

What am I curious enough about to investigate?

Instead of: Should I leave?

What would I need to learn before I could make that decision intelligently?

Reflection

What have I been curious about that I haven't given myself permission to explore? Write down five things. They do not have to be sensible, and they do not have to become jobs.

Curiosity isn't the answer. It is how you start finding answers.

Lesson 5: Build Your Feedback Loop

At the heart of Brave1 is a simple feedback loop: Build. Test. Learn. Improve. Repeat. The individual version is not about making a huge career decision. It is about designing a small experiment that produces useful information.

EXERCISE

BUILD

What could I do - not merely think about?

TEST

What is the smallest reasonable version: a conversation, side project, course, shadowing experience, new tool, volunteer assignment or informational interview?

LEARN

What information am I looking for? Did I enjoy it? Was I good at it? Do I want to get better? What surprised me?

IMPROVE

What will I do with what I learned: change the experiment, go deeper, try another idea, or abandon it?

Lesson 5: Reflection

Complete one experiment in the next seven days. Success is not changing careers. Success is learning something you didn't know before.

An experiment that tells you an idea is wrong has still worked. It produced information.

Lesson 6: Optimize for Adaptation

The goal is not to find the perfect career where nothing ever changes again. It is to build a life that keeps giving you information about what should come next. Think about the environment around you and whether it makes learning easier or harder.

EXERCISE

People

Who exposes me to ideas outside my normal world? Who challenges me rather than simply agreeing with me?

Information

Am I encountering new ideas, or mostly reinforcing what I already believe?

Experience

Where am I actually testing myself? When was the last time I was a beginner?

Feedback

Where do I get honest evidence about what's working? What feedback am I avoiding?

Lesson 6: Reflection

Over the next three months, I want to become more curious about...

My next experiment will be...

The aim isn't certainty. It is to build enough movement and feedback that better answers can emerge.

Closing Reflection

Jenny thought she needed another job. Maybe she does. But another job isn't really the first question. The first question is whether she can give herself permission to explore what else might be possible.

The answer isn't sitting on Indeed.

You aren't trying to solve your entire career today. You're trying to create enough movement that you begin discovering answers you couldn't see from where you were standing.

Build. Test. Learn. Improve. Then do it again.

What are you waiting for permission to explore?