

# Career Clarity Trail Guide

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## Checkpoint 1 (Day 1): Career Alignment Audit

Instructions:

Take a moment to reflect on each statement below as it relates to your current, or most recent, role. Rate yourself on a scale of 1–5:

1 = Strongly Disagree

5 = Strongly Agree

### Your Career Energy & Alignment

- Most days, my work leaves me feeling energized.
- I regularly use my best skills in my role.
- My values align with the work I do.
- I feel recognized and valued for my contributions.
- My work has a meaningful impact.

### Your Growth & Future

- I see growth potential in my current path.
- I am learning and developing in ways that matter to me.
- I have a clear vision of where I want to be in the next 3–5 years.
- I'm excited about where my career path is taking me.

### Your Support & Security

- I feel financially secure and fairly compensated.
- I have the right support system (mentors, peers, leaders) to grow.
- My contributions are important to the success of my organization.

### Scoring & Reflection

- **Score 52-60: Strong Footing**  
You have a solid foundation, so focus on **optimization**. Fine-tune skills, maximize opportunities, and continue to grow intentionally.
- **Score 40-51: Transition Zone**  
You're at a crossroads. Now is the right time for **strategic shifts and key conversations that unlock your next level of growth** toward the future career you want to achieve.
- **Score Below 40: Change is Calling**  
Something significant is missing, and that's okay. This is a signal to **explore new directions**. The good news? You don't have to figure it out alone.

Wherever you landed, this checkpoint is about **awareness first, action second**. Review your scores and note the areas that matter most to you. Those are the places to start making intentional change.

## Checkpoint 2 (Day 2): Clarity Compass

This exercise will help you explore your career “true north.”

Instructions: In each quadrant, list **at least 5 items** that come to mind. *Don't overthink it, rather just write what feels true in this moment.*

<p><b>What I love doing...</b> <i>List the work, activities, or responsibilities that bring you energy and joy.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> <li>4.</li> <li>5.</li> </ol>	<p><b>What I'm great at...</b> <i>List your strongest skills, the ones people count on you for and where you consistently deliver.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> <li>4.</li> <li>5.</li> </ol>
<p><b>What sustains me...</b> <i>List the work or roles that can provide you stability and meet your current lifestyle needs.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> <li>4.</li> <li>5.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Where I can make a difference...</b> <i>List areas where your work matters, contributes to others, your org. and industry, or your community.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> <li>4.</li> <li>5.</li> </ol>

### Reflection

Where do these overlap? How does it resonate when you look at those overlaps as 'your direction?'

## Checkpoint 3 (Day 3): Opportunity Cost Calculator

It's time to get specific about what staying put is actually costing you. This isn't about guilt, it's about clarity. A practical self-assessment tool from Emerging Trails to help professionals uncover the hidden costs of staying in their current role. This calculator worksheet will guide you through financial, career capital, and personal opportunity costs – offering clarity on salary growth, skill development, promotion timelines, energy, and life goals. Designed to support mid-career professionals in making informed career decisions and planning their next steps.

You can read more at [The Hidden Costs of Staying Put](#).

### Checkpoint 3 Part A: Financial Opportunity Costs

#### 1. Salary Growth Assessment

- Current annual salary: \$\_\_\_\_\_
- Industry average for someone with your experience: \$\_\_\_\_\_
- Potential salary in a growth role (research 3 similar positions): \$\_\_\_\_\_
- **Annual opportunity cost:** \$\_\_\_\_\_ (Potential - Current)
- **5-year projected loss:** \$\_\_\_\_\_ × 5 = \$\_\_\_\_\_

#### 2. Skill Value Assessment

- List 3 skills you could be developing but aren't:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

- Estimated salary premium for these skills (research job postings): \$\_\_\_\_\_
- **Annual skill stagnation cost:** \$\_\_\_\_\_

#### 3. Promotion Timeline Cost

- Typical time to next level in a growth environment: \_\_\_\_ years
- Your current timeline to promotion (be honest): \_\_\_\_ years
- Salary difference at next level: \$\_\_\_\_\_
- **Delayed promotion cost per year:** \$\_\_\_\_\_

**Subtotal Financial Costs:** \$\_\_\_\_\_ per year

*Continue to Part B*

## Checkpoint 3 Part B: Career Capital Costs

Rate each statement from 1-5 (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree):

### Professional Growth

- I'm learning new, marketable skills regularly
- My resume is stronger than it was last year
- I'm building visibility in my field
- I'm expanding my professional network
- I'm working on increasingly complex challenges

Score: \_\_\_/25

### Energy & Engagement

- I feel energized by my work most days
- I'm proud to talk about what I do
- I see clear growth potential ahead
- My work aligns with my values
- I'm using my best talents regularly

Score: \_\_\_/25

### Future Readiness

- I'm confident I could land a better role if needed
- My skills are relevant for the future of work
- I have mentors/sponsors who support my growth
- I'm known for something valuable in my organization
- I have options if my current situation changes

Score: \_\_\_/25

### Total Career Capital Score: \_\_\_/75

- **60-75:** You're likely in a growth position—keep building!
- **40-59:** Warning signs present—time for strategic planning
- **Below 40:** Significant opportunity costs accumulating—urgent action needed

*Continue to Part C*

## Checkpoint 3 Part C: Personal Opportunity Costs

Complete these reflection prompts:

### Time & Energy

- Hours per week spent frustrated or disengaged: \_\_\_\_\_
- Energy level at end of workday (1-10): \_\_\_\_\_
- Times per month you've canceled personal plans due to work drain: \_\_\_\_\_

### Life Goals Deferred

List 3 personal goals you've postponed "until work gets better":

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### Relationship Impact

- How often work frustration affects home life (daily/weekly/monthly): \_\_\_\_\_
- Quality time lost to work worry (hours/week): \_\_\_\_\_
- Conversations dominated by work complaints: \_\_\_\_\_%

**The Bottom Line Question:** If you stay exactly where you are for 5 more years, who will you become? Is that person aligned with who you want to be?

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## Checkpoint 4 (Day 4): **The Stepping Stones**

When frustration builds, it's tempting to make a big leap, however the most sustainable career transitions happen by taking small, planful steps. This exercise will help you brainstorm and prioritize those steps based on your unique situation and needs.

Instructions:

1. List at least three ways you could explore your "what's next" (e.g., networking, skill-building, testing a role internally).

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

2. Prioritize your list by those that feel both realistic and energizing.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**Reflection:** How will taking these smaller steps keep me grounded and moving forward with clarity? Notice how one-at-a-time planful actions shift your perspective compared to reactive leaps.

## Checkpoint 5 (Day 5): **Your Personal Board of Directors & Trail Partners**

This exercise will help you identify the trusted group of people who you need to support, challenge, and guide you through your professional aspirations.

Instructions:

Step 1: Identify Who's in Your Corner

List the people currently supporting your career growth (e.g., path-aligned mentors, supportive peers, leaders, family, friends).

Step 2: Spot the Gaps

Where are you missing support? Do you need someone who will hold you accountable? Who opens doors to new opportunities? Who helps you think strategically about your next step?

I need:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Step 3: Prioritize Your Needs

Look at your cumulative list, including gaps. Which type of support feels most critical to you right now? Rank your top 2 priorities.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

**Reflection:** Where do I need new voices to challenge or encourage me? How would my momentum change if I had the right mix of support?

## Checkpoint 6 (Day 5): **The Summit Reflection**

You've explored your energy, story, opportunity costs, key conversations, and support network. Now, it's time to pause at the "summit" to look back and ahead to chart your next moves.

### **Day 1: Career Alignment Audit**

You've scored your current situation, and now had a few days to let the results sink in.

**Reflection:** Does what I named in Day 1's "Note the areas that matter most to you" reflection still hold true?

**Action:** Prioritize your list. For the top two, identify and write an action to achieve these. Set a date.

*These can be as big as exploring new roles, or setting better boundaries in the workplace.*

### **Day 2: Career Compass Exercise**

Return to your overlap areas, including the ones that spark interest and excitement.

**Reflection:** Which ones feel the most practical for my next 1–3 years? How does this align with what I named on Day 2 around what energizes me as I think about what's next?

**Action:** Write down how you see these intersections as potential directions for your career path. Get specific with elements like title, responsibilities, compensation, etc.

### **Day 3: Calculate Opportunity Costs**

Review your scoring once again and reflect on your Bottom Line question. Reflect on how your perceptions of this exercise may have shifted over the last few days.

**Reflection:** What's the real cost of inaction for me? What feels the most urgent to address? What small actions have I taken since completing the exercise? What is the core realization or theme I want to cement into my ongoing growth plan?

**Action:** Name the realization/theme. Turn it into an operating principle that defines a trigger (including timing) and new behavior. *Ex: I will send two networking messages each Monday, with 8 by month's end.*

### **Day 4: Pause, Plan, and Proceed.**

Look back at your "what's next" list.

**Reflection:** What would it look like if I took one small, intentional step?

**Action:** Identify one step you can practically take to get closer to what's next. Write it down, set a date.

### **Day 5: Map Your Support Network**

Revisit your critical support needs, including the gaps.

**Reflection:** How might my journey change if I intentionally filled the gaps in my support system?

**Action:** 1) Document a plan to share your needs with the supporters you already have in place, so they understand how they can best help you.

2) Identify at least one action to strengthen your support system – whether it's reaching out to a former colleague, joining a peer group, or finding a coach – and set a date to follow through.