

# The Field Guide to Personal Alignment

A guide to personal alignment — so  
your effort compounds in the right  
direction.

# PART 1 – INTRODUCTION

## An Introduction

### A Note Before You Begin

There is no shortage of career advice.

Much of it sounds inspiring.

Little of it survives contact with a real workplace.

This guide is not built on sentiment. It is built on experience — years inside organisations, building teams, navigating politics, making decisions that carried consequence.

The aim is simple:

Give you perspective and action that does no harm.

Work is messy. Some patterns repeat. People rarely do.

But once you learn to see what is actually happening — not what you wish were happening — progress becomes possible.

Be careful what you implement.

Be careful who you listen to.

This workbook will ask you to confront your own thinking — your habits, your blind spots, your comfortable stories. Without honesty, we don't thrive. We cope.

We will face facts.

Then we will move — deliberately — from reality.

When I first did this properly myself, I didn't like what I saw.

But I finally knew what needed to be done.

# Using This Guide

After some sections, you'll find a worksheet.

Please do complete them — this is where the learning happens.

If you can, print the relevant pages and work by hand. Don't feel you need to print the whole thing. Read the digital version first, then print only what you'll use.

Some activities take longer than others. Go slowly. There's no prize for speed. Calm, honest thinking beats rushing.

There are no right or wrong answers here — only answers that are true for you.

When you finish, you'll have a clear picture of your current reality — and a steadier starting point for what comes next.

## PART 2 – FUTURE, NOW, GAP

# The Future, The Now, The Gap

### Step 1 - Paint a picture of the future

Energy and attention move things forward.

But if you don't know what you want, you risk becoming excellent at the wrong things.

Many people drift through their careers pulled by employers, expectations, or circumstance. Not all of us have the same options — but all of us can decide what we would ideally like our lives to look like.

You may not control the outcome.

You do control direction.

A painted picture gives you that direction. It becomes a decision filter. A compass. Something steady to refer to when new opportunities appear — or when you're simply taking a role to pay the bills.

This is not about fantasy.

It is about orientation.

Imagine yourself 2 - 3 years from now:

- What have you achieved?
- Who are you helping?
- Who have you become?

Take your time. Find quiet if you can.

This doesn't need to be grand or dramatic. It doesn't need to impress anyone. It doesn't need to solve the world's problems — unless that genuinely matters to you.

It can be small. It can be simple. It just needs to be honest.

And instead of setting a rigid “destination”, focus on becoming.

Destinations create a strange emptiness once reached.

Becoming creates ongoing growth.

So write in the present tense — as if it is already true. Focus on who you are being, what you are doing, and who you are helping.

Not what your employer wants.

Not what your parents hoped for.

Not what looks impressive on LinkedIn.

What you want.

Examples might include:

- I run my own small business.
- I have a steady job that supports my family well.
- I am calmer and more present with my children.
- I speak confidently in meetings and on stage.
- I’m building expertise in photography.
- I manage my finances with confidence.

Notice what’s missing: specific outcome targets.

Results are often outside your control.

Habits are not.

You can’t control a particular weight, salary, or title.

You can control routines, effort, learning, and character.

So focus on the person you are becoming — and the patterns you practice daily.

That is what compounds.

### Step 2 - Name the obstacles

If the future you described feels compelling, why aren’t you there already?

- What’s stopping you?
- What’s blocking you?
- What are you telling yourself about that future?

This is where we begin shaping strategy.

A strategy isn’t complicated. It simply requires three things:

Clarity about where you’re going (your painted picture).

Honesty about where you are now.

A way to navigate what stands between the two.

Not every obstacle is the same.

- Some are real and structural.

- Some are imagined.
- Some are habits we've normalised.
- Some sit entirely outside our control.

Part of this step is learning to tell the difference.

Many barriers are self-constructed — protective stories, inherited beliefs, assumptions about what “people like us” can or cannot do. Others genuinely exist. Both need to be seen clearly.

More obstacles will appear. That's normal. Growth always introduces friction.

But once you're clear on who you are becoming, obstacles stop being proof that you can't move — and start becoming part of the terrain you're learning to navigate.

There is no smooth path to improvement.

There is only clarity, adjustment, and steady movement forward.

### Step 3 — A Strategy for the Next 10 Years

If you know who you want to become — and you've named the obstacles — the next step is simple:

Build a plan.

Strategy isn't complex. It is direction plus deliberate action.

Your painted picture gives you a 2-3-year horizon.

Now we introduce a 1-2-year marker.

One to two years sits neatly between today and that future self. It's

close enough to act on. Far enough to matter.

Your 2-3-year goals should ideally:

- Move you toward your painted picture
- Directly address the obstacles you've identified

For example, if your painted picture includes becoming confident at presenting, and earning money from speaking — and you've identified fear of public speaking as an obstacle — your 1-2-year goals might look like:

- Become a regular attendee at a local Toastmasters group.
- Deliver a talk at a local meetup related to your work.
- Read and apply one respected book on communication (like the Zero to Keynote book from Cultivated)

Notice what's happening:

The goals are specific.

They are measurable.

They are time-bound by the 1-2-year horizon.

Most importantly, they are within your control.

You cannot control applause.

You cannot control reputation.

You can control attendance, effort, learning, and repetition.

Your own goals will likely span several areas of your painted picture — career, health, relationships, capability. That's fine. Just ensure each one clearly moves you toward the person you are becoming.

Strategy is not a dramatic leap.

It is a set of steady decisions, aligned to a future you have chosen.

*What's your painted picture of the future, say 2-3 years from now? Who do you wish to help? Who do you want to become? How will you add value?*

*What's stopping you from achieving this bright future? Name the obstacles*

*What goals do you want? What horizon are you heading towards over the next 1-2 years?*

## PART 3 – THE TRINITY

# The Trinity of Career Development

Wouldn't it be better to grow your career in alignment with who you actually are?

A few years ago, I burned out. Not because I was incapable — but because I was being asked to operate in ways that didn't suit me.

I thrive in ambiguity and building.

Once the chaos passed and the company shifted into steady execution, the work stopped fitting. I became bored. Then stressed. Then depleted.

The problem wasn't effort.

It was misalignment.

After some HR research and reflection, I combined three tools into what I now call the Trinity of Career Development — a simple way to understand yourself in relation to work.

The Trinity consists of:

**DISC** — how you naturally communicate and behave

**Strengths** — what you are genuinely good at

**Happiness** — what gives you energy and meaning

Note: For links to various tools, please see this article on the Cultivated website: <https://www.cultivatedmanagement.com/the-trinity-of-career-development/>

Together, they form a practical “guide to yourself”.

You can use alternatives if you prefer — or even create your own Trinity. These are simply tools that cover three essential dimensions:

- How you show up
- What you do well
- What sustains you

### The Trinity — DISC

DISC helps you understand your behavioural preferences.

It is not about labelling your personality. It describes tendencies — especially around communication and decision-making.

The four broad preferences are:

- D (Dominance) — decisive, direct, results-focused
- I (Influence) — expressive, energetic, people-oriented
- S (Steadiness) — calm, supportive, harmony-focused
- C (Conscientiousness) — analytical, structured, detail-oriented

Most of us are a blend.

DISC becomes powerful when you realise two things:

- Different styles naturally clash.
- Skilled communicators adapt.

If you are highly direct and results-driven, you may unintentionally overwhelm someone who values harmony and careful pacing. If you are highly analytical, you may frustrate someone who wants speed and movement.

Great communicators move toward the other person.

Understanding your style allows you to adjust — without losing yourself.

### The Trinity — Strengths

Strengths tools help you identify where your natural energy and capability lie.

You cannot be exceptional at everything. Nor should you try.

The aim is not to “fix” every weakness. The aim is to ask:

Is this weakness preventing me from becoming who I want to become?

If yes, it may be worth developing.

If not, don’t build a career around repairing it.

Careers accelerate when we lean into strengths and deliberately align them with what our organisation needs.

It is exhausting to spend most of your working life operating from weakness.

It is powerful to build from competence.

## The Trinity — Happiness

The final dimension is simpler, and often neglected:

What brings you energy?

Happiness does not have to be found at work. And employers are not responsible for manufacturing it for you.

But if your work aligns with your DISC preferences and your strengths, you are more likely to feel competent and fulfilled.

Outside of work, you must still protect space for what restores you — whether that's creativity, learning, family, movement, nature, or contribution.

Ignoring this dimension is how slow burnout begins.

## Bringing the Trinity Together

The goal is alignment.

- Do my career decisions respect how I'm wired?
- Do they use what I'm good at?
- Do they allow room for what sustains me?

When those three begin to line up, progress feels energising rather than draining.

When we ignore them — chasing titles, money, or external approval — misalignment creeps in.

I've done that. It led to burnout.

Seasons of life differ. Constraints are real. Trade-offs happen.

But clarity about who you are allows those trade-offs to be conscious — not accidental.

Complete your own Trinity on a single page.

Keep it visible.

And let it inform the decisions that shape the next chapter of your career.

## PART 4 – PILLARS

# The Pillars of Life

We all move through different seasons.

Our motivations change. Our focus shifts. But beneath all of that, certain pillars support a good life and a sustainable career.

When those pillars are strong, growth is possible.

When they weaken, we wobble.

For years, I over-invested in one pillar: effectiveness at work.

Health slipped. Family slipped. I knew it — and ignored it.

Eventually, I burned out.

That moment forced reflection. I listed the pillars that actually mattered. Then I rebuilt them — deliberately.

This isn't about "work-life balance." It's about tension. As you strengthen one pillar, another can weaken. Awareness must be ongoing.

The pillars became a decision filter:

- Do I take this project — or protect time with my children?
- Do I write tonight — or rest?
- Do I chase the opportunity — or protect my health?

You won't give equal weight to every pillar at every stage of life. But neglect one for too long, and the structure weakens.

Below are the core pillars I use. You may define your own.

## Health

Without health, the rest becomes irrelevant.

This includes body and mind. Strength, sleep, nutrition, emotional regulation, clarity of thought.

It may feel selfish to prioritise health. It isn't. If you cannot function well, you cannot contribute well.

I neglected this once. The decline was gradual — until it wasn't.

Protect your health early. It compounds.

(For specialist advice on health or finance, seek qualified professionals. This guide is not medical or financial advice.)

## Family

Success means little if there is no one to share it with.

List the people who matter most. Protect time with them deliberately.

Work expands to fill space. Family time must be guarded.

Ask yourself:

- Who will celebrate with me?
- Who will remain when titles disappear?
- Who am I doing this for?

Family first. After health.

## Effectiveness

Busyness is not effectiveness.

Effectiveness means focusing on the few levers that create meaningful value.

Learn to get the right things done — not simply more things done.

When you are effective:

- You reduce rework.
- You build trust.
- Opportunities come toward you.

But remember — effectiveness is one pillar, not the whole structure.

I once put it above everything else. Never again.

Also: be effective before you chase efficiency. Making something ineffective faster does not improve it.

## Money & Finance

We all need enough.

Often, we need less than we think — but we are conditioned to want more.

Money solves practical problems. It rarely solves internal ones.

Higher income usually follows effectiveness, contribution, skill, communication, and confidence. It is rarely accidental.

Be sensible. Be measured. Build stability.

But don't sacrifice alignment for numbers alone.

### **Societal Impact**

A good organisation would be missed if it disappeared.

The same is true of you.

Aim to be someone who adds value — someone who leaves systems, teams, and communities better than they found them.

Not for applause. Not for leverage.

Because contribution is part of a meaningful life.

Add more than you take.

### **Education**

Learning does not end with formal schooling.

Education is ongoing refinement.

Read. Study. Observe. But most importantly: implement.

Information without application is assumed competence.

The strongest professionals combine information with practice. They test ideas. Adapt them. Integrate them into their own way of working.

Education strengthens every other pillar.

### **Bringing the Pillars Together**

You will not balance these perfectly.

You will manage tension.

Awareness is the key.

When making decisions, ask:

- Which pillar does this strengthen?
- Which pillar might it weaken?
- Is that trade-off conscious — or accidental?

Strong pillars create a stable life.

From stability, ambition becomes sustainable.

## PART 5 – COMMUNICATION

# Become a Great Communicator

Most workplace problems aren't technical.

They're human.

Confusion. Misalignment. Friction. Conflict. Missed expectations.

Nearly all of it traces back to communication — what was said, what wasn't, and what people thought they heard.

Communication is also how we build relationships.

And relationships are how work moves.

If you improve one skill for your career, make it this one.

### Your turn

In the space below, write down the parts of communication you want to strengthen.

A few prompts:

- Listening
- Presenting
- Writing
- One-to-one conversations
- Non-verbal communication
- Speaking up and being heard

- Interviews and tough questions
- Building rapport
- Nerves, pressure, or performance moments

Be specific. “Better communication” is vague. “Stay calm in conflict” is actionable.

### Why communication matters

My kids get asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?”

They answer with job titles.

With hindsight, I wish I’d answered with the kind of person I wanted to become.

Because job roles change. Industries shift. Tools evolve.

But communication behaviours travel with you.

They transcend careers.

They set you apart.

And they compound over time.

A good answer to “What do you want to be?” is:

A great communicator.

### Relationships are how work works

You can be brilliant and still stall your career if people don’t trust you, understand you, or enjoy working with you.

To be effective over time, you need two things:

- The ability to deliver value
- The ability to build relationships

Some people get results and leave a wake behind them.

Others are lovely — and never ship anything.

The sweet spot is the middle: trusted and effective.

Communication is how you live in that middle.

## Influence that lasts

There are three common kinds of influence in organisations:

- Role influence — authority from title
- Expertise influence — authority from being the expert
- Relationship influence — trust, credibility, and connection

Role influence works — but overuse becomes tyrannical.

Expertise influence works — but it can turn brittle when your expertise is no longer rare.

Relationship influence is the only form that scales sustainably, and it's available to everyone — regardless of level.

It's built one interaction at a time.

## The 11 principles of effective communication

These principles underpin my approach:

1. All communication has a Purpose, Audience, Context
2. Be enthusiastic

3. Communication is something the audience does
4. Stories go where facts cannot
5. Don't waste the audience's time — know your content
6. Practice is preparation
7. People remember how you make them feel
8. Non-verbal is a superpower
9. People resonate with those who are like them
10. You can hack your body
11. Listening is the greatest compliment

As you read each principle, make notes on how you could apply it — at work, at home, and in the situations that matter most to you.

Communication improves through application — and because it's often so poor in workplaces, small improvements create outsized gains.

If you want to develop the superpower of effective communication - the online work book is here: <https://cultivatedmanagement.com/online-communication-course/>

# Close Out

If you've worked through this guide properly, you now have something valuable: clarity.

Clarity about who you want to become.

Clarity about what may be holding you back.

Clarity about the foundations that matter.

From here, the work is simple — not easy — but simple:

Keep applying.

Keep adjusting.

Keep becoming.

If you'd like to go deeper into communication, effectiveness, and career development, you'll find further guides, workshops, and resources at:

[cultivatedmanagement.com](http://cultivatedmanagement.com)

This guide is just a starting point.

The real work — and the real growth — happens in how you apply it.