

Career analysis - how to generate executive brand insights from your job history.

If you are building a consumer brand you start with consumer perceptions – initiating research such as focus groups and user habit studies. It's about generating insights. But how do you do that with your career? The answer is to treat yourself as a brand [link to Blog 01](#). Following a systematic process to analyse your career to date will help you create a narrative to your working life and identify the elements of your career that are most important to you – these are the essential ingredients for your next role.

The question of 'What next?' often comes when you have grown into an executive role and are looking for the next prospect. But it needs to be the right opportunity and fit with other priorities in your life. Just as consumers buy the 'why' and not the 'what', your essential ingredients must be rooted in your personal situation, qualities, experiences and values, rather than your skills.



Define and analyse your essential ingredients

Your essential ingredients can be found by analysing your last five director or executive roles. I encourage you to use a template that lists your current and previous four roles in rows, with columns split into two areas: what you liked most and what you disliked in each role. Print this out three times and place it in three areas of your life – in your car, in your jacket and beside your bed.

Over the course of three to four weeks, think about each role and reflect on what elements triggered motivation and enjoyment. But also consider the elements that gave you adrenaline or the opportunity to expose your talents. Be honest – remember what irritated you, what filled you with dread and what left you feeling exhausted. Be condensed in your wording and find the key words that express the experience best

Then use a colour coding system to reveal patterns. Look for similarities in your reflections of each role and identify key words that are repeated. Highlight the positives and the negatives - the negatives can be used to positively shape your decisions in the future, but you need to know what they are before you can turn them around to your advantage. This data is your starting point, but the best feedback often comes from a life partner or a close friend who has been beside you during the years of your career. They can challenge you and ask you the right questions to sharpen your thinking.

So take an evening with them, leave the kids and the mobile phones at home and go out for dinner. Listen to their perspective. You might remember working long hours as a negative, but they can remind you that you worked late because you were enjoying your work.

Examples of essential ingredients

Different people will experience and reflect on similar situations in different ways. Take retail management, where senior roles demand remote management of huge numbers of people across stores, warehouses and offices.



I remember two executives who came to me after their long international careers in retail. The first one had great memories of the experience and said: "I enjoyed presenting our new strategy in front of a large crowd of employees and rolling out the implementation in the shelves and warehouses. After three weeks we saw the first signals of change in our management data — I truly enjoyed that".

The second retail executive said: "I am done with HR policies, with restructuring plans, shop closures and even robberies on the shop floor. I am looking for a far more relaxed role with a maximum of 4 or 5 people reporting to me."

From a similar experience, each person had a unique takeaway, revealing different essential ingredients for their next role.

You will get the best results from the career analysis process if you are honest. I coached one candidate who worked seven days a week in a high-pressure role. He shared his personal and honest reflection that he needed status. The need to be the real number one gave him the energy that allowed him to be driven around and regularly appear on business TV. Be honest with yourself about what makes you tick and about what is important to you. Ask yourself, 'do I love managing a crisis?' and 'should I seek out difficult challenges?' Consider whether it is just about you or if it is a family decision.

One candidate I worked with was a divorced father. He had promised his son — who lived with his mother in Europe — that he would only ever be half a day's travel away from him. So when he was offered a multi-million Euro CEO role in South Asia, he turned it down – his commitment to his family was one of his essential ingredients. You have to realise the limits of your life and choose your ingredients accordingly.

Utilize a career matrix

Once you have defined your 10 essential ingredients you can cross-reference them with jobs that you admire using a career matrix. These may be roles you've seen friends or colleagues take, roles you've been approached about or simply your dream jobs.



For each job, give a score out of 10 depending on the match or mismatch with your essential ingredients. The numbers create a visual analysis and provide an insight into whether the next job is the right fit for you.

Career matrix - examples

10 essential ingredients for your next job

| admired jobs | E. I. 1 | E. I. 2 | E. I. 3 | E. I. 4 | E. I. 5 | E. I. 6 | E. I. 7 | E. I. 8 | E. I. 9 | E. I. 10 | Max score |
|--------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|----------|-----------|
| Job 1 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 10 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 8 | 9 | 91 |
| Job 2 | 2 | 9 | 4 | 6 | 8 | 2 | 7 | 8 | 3 | 7 | 78 |
| Job 3 | 10 | 7 | 2 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 7 | 8 | 81 |
| Job 4 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 8 | 9 | 4 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 7 | 82 |
| Job 5 | 9 | 8 | 7 | 8 | 7 | 8 | 7 | 8 | 7 | 8 | 77 |
| Job 6 | 9 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 8 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 92 |
| Job 7 | 9 | 2 | 3 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 10 | 4 | 2 | 10 | 67 |
| Job 8 | 9 | 3 | 8 | 7 | 4 | 9 | 10 | 10 | 8 | 9 | 77 |
| Job 9 | 9 | 10 | 10 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 8 | 7 | 10 | 10 | 90 |
| Job 10 | 8 | 2 | 3 | 7 | 9 | 3 | 1 | 9 | 10 | 10 | 62 |
| Job 11 | 9 | 9 | 8 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 9 | 8 | 7 | 10 | 90 |
| Job 12 | 8 | 5 | 6 | 8 | 9 | 7 | 6 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 55 |

Be aware of your mood when you fill out your matrix. One candidate told me he filled his out three times – on a grey, rainy Sunday afternoon, on a sunny Saturday after a run and in an evening after a drink with some friends – he got three different sets of numbers! He researched why he had different perspectives and levelled out the matrix to give a more balanced perspective.

Within your top jobs, the top five ingredients must score seven and above. When you review your matrix, concentrate on the top five scores and let the other jobs go - learn to say no in the career switch stage and keep your search focused on the outcomes of your own analysis.

Action your job search mission: research, network, meet

Now you have narrowed your search to five roles, the work really starts.



If you have your sights set on an industry that's unfamiliar to you – if you're a consumer goods guy who aspires to work in the seed industry, for instance – you still need a depth of knowledge specific to that industry, despite your experience being elsewhere.

Research the best companies in that sector, find out who the key players and owners are, look into how the money flows across the market, not only in your own country but across the whole continent, and most importantly, research the stakeholders – the people who make the decisions about who to employ. Qualitative industry reports can - for example - be found at investment bank research departments and consultancy firms.

Once you've done your research and discovered who the key stakeholders are, it's time to network. Activate your existing network to get introductions with the right people – the calibre and reputation of the people who recommend you is key to getting your first meeting. Always meet with the stakeholders and not your peers – your best friend could be your competitor, so be careful who you share your plans with. Once you've got that appointment, you're ready for the next step - find out more about communicating your executive brand in an interview setting.

Want to sharpen up your career analysis? Get in touch [link to contact](#) with me to start refining your executive branding - and bring your way forward into focus.

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