

Career Booster Workbook

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Career Booster Workbook

Introduced by Mind Tools CEO, James Manktelow



Everyone needs a career boost now and then. Perhaps you feel that you're in a rut. Maybe you're stressed, and just can't seem to climb out from under the weight of it. You might even be in the wrong job, and maybe that's

causing you deep inner frustration.

We all get tired in our jobs from time to time. That's when we need a burst of motivation to get going, ratchet up our productivity, and get excited about work again.

This e-booklet brings together some great exercises to help you rebuild your inner energy.

Whatever your reasons for needing a career boost, this workbook will show you how to re-energize and re-motivate yourself to reach a high level of job and career satisfaction.

To make it easier to find the material you are looking for, we've split the workbook into three sections.

- Finding Your Passion – Are you doing what you love?
- Planning Your Future – Moving forward with a purpose
- Career Boosting Skills – Increasing your personal productivity

In particular, I encourage you to complete the self-audit in the "Finding Your Passion" section. This will help you uncover core issues related to motivation and help you focus on your own, unique, career boosting plan.

I hope you enjoy this PDF and find it useful!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Manktelow". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

James Manktelow, CEO,
MindTools.com

Finding Your Passion

Are You Doing What You Love?

Are you doing what you love? Or do you feel that you're "going through the motions" in a job that you find unsatisfying?

One of the most important factors in boosting your career is making sure that you are doing work that you enjoy, and that you find satisfying and worthwhile. It's worth thinking about this carefully, because it only gets harder to motivate yourself if you're doing work that you are not passionate about.

This section starts with a short self-audit that gets you thinking about what you enjoy and value. By comparing these qualities with the work you are currently doing, you can decide what you'll do to make your work more fulfilling.

Alternatively, if you are already actively considering a career change, this self-audit will help you start to think about the direction you want to head in.

What Are You Really Proud Of?

A great place to start uncovering your passion is to list experiences and accomplishments from your past that you are particularly proud of. Examples might be earning a Most Valuable Player award for a sports team, creating a new product or process at work, helping a friend solve a personal problem, or saving enough money to take a year off work and go traveling.

- What sort of things have you done that make you especially proud?
- When you think about events from your past, what makes you energized and excited?

Write down your pride experiences as you think of them. Then use the following grid to categorize your results.

Pride Experiences

Age	Education	Work	Family	Leisure
Up to 18				
18-30				

Age	Education	Work	Family	Leisure
31-45				
46+				

When you know what you've done in the past that has made you proud, it is easier to see the types of things that get you excited. Often, you'll find that these are the things that you really wanted to accomplish, or worked hard to achieve.

By identifying your pride experiences, you can better understand the values that lie close to the core of your motivation.

What Do You Value?

The reason you stick with a difficult task, take on a long-term project or switch careers midway through life has a lot to do with what you value. If you value career satisfaction, then you'll probably be prepared to work hard and take risks to find the career of your dreams. If you value helping others, you might be happy spending years in a lab working on a new drug. If you can identify what it is that you value, you can start to uncover the elements you need in a job to find satisfaction.

To do this, think about the events that you took most pride in. Think about way in which you worked during the experience or leading up to the accomplishment. Then look at the following statements and put a check mark beside the ones that apply to your pride experiences.

I value experiences where I am able to:

- Move around at work
- Work with my hands
- Work outdoors
- Structure my own work
- Demonstrate expertise in an area
- Contribute new ideas to my profession
- Answer complex questions
- Write and present my ideas
- Express my opinions freely
- Create and develop new things or ideas
- Help others through my work
- Contribute to a better world
- Make a difference
- Participate in personal development activities
- Work with others for a common purpose
- Get ahead in my career
- Influence others
- Afford a very comfortable lifestyle

- Impress people
- Command respect and status
- Do what is expected of me
- Attend to details to meet requirements
- Work in a secure environment
- Complete tasks that are clear and direct
- Predict my hours and work

If there are other things about work that you value, list them below.

Now, look over the lists you've created, and choose the five things you value the most.

<p>Top 5 Elements You Value</p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p> <p>4.</p> <p>5.</p>
--

In this list, you've identified the five things you most value in your work. Now's the time to think about what you're good at!

What Are You Good At?

Whether you have had to work hard to master a skill, or it comes naturally, you're likely to prefer doing work that you do well. The trouble is, we often don't take the time to think about all of the things we are good at. Perhaps it can seem boastful, perhaps we take these things for granted, or perhaps we just assume that everyone can do equally as well. Identify your individual skills by checking the questions to which you answer "yes":

- Do you have physical co-ordination and athleticism?
- Are you good at building things?
- Do you work well with your hands?
- Do you operate machines well?
- Are you good at working with nature?

Are you logical and a good problem solver?

Do you conceive or develop new ideas?

Do you observe, investigate, and synthesize events effectively?

Do you entertain, sing or dance well?

Are you artistic?

Do you write and communicate well?

Are you creative and imaginative?

Do care for, treat and heal others effectively?

Do you counsel, coach and listen to others well?

Do you provide comfort?

Do you mediate and liaise well?

Do you teach, train and instruct effectively?

Do you plan, administer and set goals well?

Do you advise and consult effectively?

Are you good at managing people, delegating and directing?

Are you good at selling, convincing others, and promoting ideas?

Are you good at budgeting and accounting for financial data?

Do you attend to details?

Do you calculate and compute numbers accurately?

Do you estimate and forecast effectively?

Do you monitor and co-ordinate schedules well?

Are you good at organizing, cataloguing, and arranging?

If you have other skills, or specialist skills, list these below.

Now choose the five skills that you consider to be your most important and significant skills.

Master Skills

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Now review the things that have made you most proud, the things you value the most, and your master skills. Bring these together into a

list of the top five things that are important to you for career satisfaction.

Most Important for Career Satisfaction:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Looking over your "Top 5" lists, you now have a good picture of your strengths and the things

that you need to be doing to feel a sense of vocation.

Take some time to evaluate the degree of fit between what you want and what your current job and industry offers.

If you conclude that the fit is reasonably good, has completing this exercise in self-discovery given you a bit of a boost? For many people, the process of sitting down and looking at their strengths and values is a great affirmation that what they are doing is right for them. Sometimes we need solid evidence that our current path is the right one. Armed with that knowledge, it is much easier to be invigorated and get recharged. What's more, it allows you to focus yourself completely on your current career, rather than wasting energy wondering if "the grass is greener on the other side."

Where there is a large difference, you should reconsider your career path. You may be able to motivate yourself in the short term to stick with a job that isn't inherently satisfying, however, the effort you put into self motivation

might be better spent planning and securing a career that will meet your inner needs.

Equally, the better the match between your career path and your personal and professional needs, the more career satisfaction you will enjoy. Your job is to continuously monitor what is happening and keep your career on target.

But What's Getting In Your Way?

The other side of finding your passion is to understand what STOPS you from enjoying your job. It's therefore worth looking at the things that you find unpleasant or overwhelming in your current role, and understanding what makes them so unpleasant.

Look back at the things that you haven't liked about your job in the last month, and list the most significant of these on the table below. Then choose which comment describes your feelings most closely.

What did you find unpleasant?	Why was it unpleasant?
	I don't currently have the skills needed to do this well. It wasn't. I could solve this by taking a more positive perspective on it. This is a necessary bad part of an otherwise good job. I shouldn't have to/don't want to experience this.
	I don't currently have the skills needed to do this well. It wasn't. I could solve this by taking a more positive perspective on it. This is a necessary bad part of an otherwise good job. I shouldn't have to/don't want to experience this.
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Now review this analysis. Where you need to build skills, schedule the activities needed to do this. Where you shouldn't have to or don't want to experience something, think about and schedule an appropriate action. Where you need to change your perspective, take a look at our rational and positive thinking article and take action appropriately:

http://www.mindtools.com/community/pages/article/newTCS_06.php

Some common issues that people experience include:

- Being too accommodating, and agreeing to take on more responsibilities than you can handle.
- Being too available to people, and being constantly interrupted by people expecting you to help them solve their own problems.
- Not having the resources and support necessary to meet expectations.
- Dealing with office politics and stakeholder issues.
- Resolving conflicting demands from work and family.
- Not taking enough breaks from work and becoming physically exhausted.

If you're particularly concerned about this (and in stress, in particular) you may want to investigate the causes in more detail. You can do this by keeping a Stress Diary:

http://www.mindtools.com/community/pages/article/newTCS_01.php

From Negative to Positive

Once you've identified the things that you find stressful and unpleasant, you can start to take steps to manage them. There are many useful techniques for doing this, including relaxation, meditation, positive thinking and building stress defenses. You can read more about these on the Mind Tools stress site at:

<http://www.mindtools.com/smpage.html>.

When we talk about career boosting, though, you need to do more than just cope with stress and things that are unpleasant. This is the perfect time, then, to re-evaluate where you are, and rediscover your commitment to personal growth and development.

Completing these exercises is a great first step in that process. The more you understand yourself and what you need from your career, the better able you are to go out and create a work situation that is satisfying. This might mean changing careers, changing jobs,

reshaping the job you are in, or steering the development of your job towards the things you find most satisfying.

Whatever course your career boosting process takes, you will certainly need to find the motivation and drive to work your plan. That's what boosting your career is all about: Sometimes it takes a little discontent to give you that burst of energy needed to change things for the better.

If you're considering a significant career change, then make sure that you research your options properly.

You can get a good idea of the sort of jobs that you might find satisfying using the MAPP test provided by: www.assessment.com.

Alternatively, consider talking to a local career counsellor – you can find these through Google or by personal recommendation. A good local counsellor will have a good knowledge of your local job market and will help you make the change successfully.

Planning Your Future

Moving forward with purpose

If you want to get ahead fast, you need to know where you want to go. Otherwise your efforts will most-likely be disconnected and random, and your results will be mediocre. With a coherent direction and with clarity you will be able to focus your attention on those aspects of your career that need changing, and recognize those that may just need a little tweaking. A boost for some may mean a complete change of direction; others might only need a small correction or a sharpening of focus.

Whatever the size of the push you need, you need to develop a plan to move your career in the desired direction.

The first step is to look at where you are now. You did this with the first exercises in this workbook. As a result, you may be confident in where you are now, and just want to accelerate on your current course. Alternatively, you may want to make a more fundamental change. Either way, you need to set clear career goals to motivate yourself to move forward.

Career Goal Setting

When you want to achieve something, you need to set relevant goals. This helps you define precisely what you want, and gives you something concrete to aim for. By setting goals,

you can avoid distraction, and get back on course when distraction gets the better of you.

A great goal is motivating and inspiring. And the best part is that as you start achieving your goals, your self-confidence builds and you'll want to set and achieve more and more of them. This is where the strongest form of career boosting energy comes from!

So give yourself a head start, and begin setting some career goals today!

Set Long-term Goals

Use the table on the next page to identify the goals you'd like to achieve in the next 10-15 years. This is pretty much the furthest ahead that you can plan realistically, but it's also the sort of timescale you need for goals that involve developing serious professional expertise in a particular area. (Research shows that this is the timescale needed to build real, world-beating expertise in an area – just as long as you work very hard!)

Change the category names if you prefer, and write as many goals in each category as you can think of. (We'll refine these at a later stage.)

Category	Goal	Priority
Artistic What do you want to achieve artistically?		
Attitude Is your mindset holding you back?		
Career What do you want to achieve with your career?		

Category	Goal	Priority
Education Do you need further education to achieve any of your life goals?		
Family What is your ideal family situation?		
Financial Do you have an amount you want to earn or have saved by a certain time?		
Physical Are there health or athletic goals you want to attain?		
Pleasure How much time do you want for yourself and what will you do with it?		
Public Service Do you want to improve your community or even the world?		

Look these goals over and highlight one in each category that stands out as the most important. These are your key long-term goals.

At this point, it's worth considering whether your goals are realistic as a set. If you've identified major, demanding goals in a number of categories, consider whether it is actually possible to achieve all of them, or whether you need to prioritize them (use the third column in the table above), and then scale down the lower priority ones. For example, it may not be possible for you to achieve a high level of success in a sport, whilst also being a star parent, all at the same time that you're working towards getting a seat on the board at work.

If you want to reach the highest level in your career, it will take many years of hard work, so you may need to adjust your sporting goals accordingly. But if your sporting or family goals are actually more important to you, then you

may need to accept that career progression may be slower.

Tip: Be careful with your family goals in particular: Many people end up regretting not having spent more time with their partner and children. And young children, in particular, benefit greatly from love and attention from their parents if they're to grow up as happy and confident individuals. There are many things you can deprioritize, but don't deprioritize your family – it's such an easy mistake to make.

What's important is that you decide for yourself what your priorities are, and accept the necessary consequences of deprioritizing other things in life. By deciding this consciously, you'll be so much happier, more in control and so much less stressed than if you try to "have it all."

So go back to the table on the previous page and prioritize your goals. Then, if necessary, scale back your lower priority goals so that you can put sufficient effort into the things that really matter to you.

Tip: A useful way of making goals more powerful is to use the SMART mnemonic. While there are plenty of variants, SMART usually stands for:

- S – Specific
- M – Measurable
- A – Attainable
- R – Relevant
- T – Time-bound

As we’re focusing on boosting your career, we’ll now focus on the next step you need to take to achieve your realistic long-term career goal. This involves setting intermediate goals with smaller time horizons: To reach your long term goal, what do you have to accomplish in five years? In one year? In six months? In one month?

Consider the following as you come to define shorter-term goals:

- What skills do you need to acquire?

- Do you need to gain formal qualifications?
- What experience do you need?
- What do you need to improve on?

Because you’re setting goals for particular time-horizons here, they will automatically be time-bound, as in the SMART mnemonic. But it’s important that you ensure that the shorter-term goals are as attainable as the long-term goal you defined earlier, and that goals are expressed in specific rather than general terms. So, rather than say that you want to “get better at understanding finance”, say “understand how our company balance sheet is constructed”.

For each of your major goals, write down the attainable intermediate goals that you need to achieve en route to achieving it on the table below. Make sure that these intermediate goals are expressed in specific terms, and that they are relevant to achieving your long-term goal. Then identify how you will measure when you have achieved them.

Note that while you have a single long-term goal, you may need several goals for the intermediate time-horizons. (Appendix A has four more copies of this table.)

Goal Horizon	Specific, attainable goal	Achievement Measure
Long-term		
5 years		
1 year		
6 months		
1 month		
Next week		
Today		

Make sure that you keep on working towards your most important goals on a day-by-day basis – this helps you ensure that you are continuously working towards your lifetime goals. This brings your long-term goals out of the realm of the inconceivable, and into the realms of everyday action.

Set up a regular review process to make sure your lifetime goals and daily goals are consistent with one another (a good way of doing this is to set up a quarterly recurring review in your office diary.) Modify them as necessary as your own priorities, circumstances and experiences change.

It's important that you set goals that are motivating. This is what will provide the boost you periodically need. To set inspiring and achievable goals, use the following tips:

- Write goals down – this makes them real and gives them weight.
- Express your goals positively – express what you will do rather than what you won't.
- Set priorities – identify which goals take precedence and what needs to be achieved in what order.

- Keep daily goals small – you want to build your success factor. The smaller and more achievable your initial goals are, the more confidence you will generate in your ability to achieve what you set out to.
- Focus on performance rather than outcomes – sometimes a result is out of your control. Giving your best effort is not.

Plan Your Approach and ACT

With your career goals set, it's time for action. Writing them down is just the beginning. Commit to yourself, and even publicly, what you intend to achieve, why, and how. Some people create daily reminders to provide the motivation they need to keep going. Whatever you need to do to motivate yourself, do it.

The time is now and the opportunity is yours. Career propulsion requires fuel and that comes in the form of hard work, determination, and a firm belief that you can do whatever you set your mind to.

To learn more about the career planning process, see Mind Tools' Career Planning tool: <http://www.mindtools.com/stress/pj/CareerPlanning.htm>

Career Boosting Skills

Increasing Your Personal Productivity

So, now that you're clear about what your passions are, and you've set your short-, medium- and long-term career goals, you know what direction you want to take your career in. Your strategy is now firmly set.

But how will you get there on a tactical basis? We'll now look at a set of key personal productivity skills that you can start using right away to start boosting your career.

Job Analysis

Start by making sure that you really understand what your job's top priorities are by carrying out a Job Analysis.

1. Review the formal documentation that relates to your job, including job descriptions, and the forms used for performance review. What activities and behaviors attract additional rewards? Find out what training is attached to your role.
2. Understand your organization's strategy and culture. Identify which tasks in your role contribute the most to the wider organization's direction.
3. Find out who the top achievers are and why they are considered to be so successful. Learn the skills that get them ahead.
4. Confirm your understanding with your boss.

For more on job analysis, click here:

http://www.mindtools.com/community/pages/article/newTCS_02.php

Once you know what you SHOULD be doing, make sure that you understand how you're

actually spending your time by maintaining an activity log for at least a week. The results are often surprising! Use the Activity Log Worksheet on the next page to record when you're doing tasks, what you're doing, whether each activity is high, medium or low value, and how much time you spend on it.

You should then be able to free up extra time by:

- Eliminating jobs that are low priorities according to your job analysis. These may include tasks that someone else in the organization should be doing (possibly at a lower pay rate) or personal activities such as sending non-work e-mails.
- Scheduling your most challenging tasks for the times of day when your energy is highest. That way your work will be better and it should take you less time.
- Trying to minimize the number of times a day you switch between types of task. For example, read and reply to e-mails in blocks once in the morning and once in the afternoon only.
- Reduce the amount of time spent on legitimate personal activities such as making coffee (take turns in your team to do this – it saves time and strengthens team spirit).

Your minimum working hours are almost certainly fixed. So if you are determined to achieve other things in addition to work, and you're not currently finding the time to fit them in, you may need to consider getting up earlier, perhaps to work on a personal project or train for your sport.

Prioritization

You have to know what tasks to work on now and what to leave until later.

- Do you have a To-Do list?
- Do you rank the items and work on those with high priority first?
- Are you working on items of importance, or things that someone would just like to be urgent?
- Do you feel you have to attend to everything in your inbox, or can you ignore some requests?

These are just some of the questions you need to answer when developing your prioritization skills. You can learn a whole lot more about how to prioritize in our Bite-Sized Training session on prioritization:

<http://www.mindtools.com/community/Bite-SizedTraining/HowtoPrioritize.php>

Delegation

Another way to lessen your workload is to delegate some items, so that you can free up time to work on your most important projects. People tend not to delegate because they are uncomfortable handing their work to someone

else. With the right amount of training, communication, and trust you can learn to delegate effectively. It comes down to three things:

- Knowing what you CAN delegate.
- Deciding WHO to delegate to.
- Developing a delegation plan that includes training, communication, and feedback requirements.

Yes, activities do actually take longer the first few times you delegate them than they'd take for you to do them on your own. However, provided that you choose the right person to delegate these tasks to, you'll soon find that you do less, and that precious "discretionary time" (i.e. time for you to use at your discretion) is appearing in your schedule.

Using the Delegation Log template on the next page, think through your role and responsibilities over, say, the last week, and write down your most time-consuming tasks on the following table. Then identify whether the task could be delegated and, if so, to whom they could be delegated.

To learn more about this essential strategy for reducing your workload, see our Bite-Sized Training session on delegation: <http://www.mindtools.com/community/Bite-SizedTraining/Delegation.php>

To manage interruptions effectively, you need to start by understanding who is interrupting you and why. Record the interruptions you experience regularly on the Interruptions Log template below:

Managing Interruptions

Everyday interruptions at work can be a key barrier to managing your time effectively and, ultimately, a barrier to your success.

Interruptions Log

Person	Date and time	Description of Interruption	Valid?	Urgent?

If you're being interrupted regularly by the same individuals for reasons which are not valid, explain this to them politely but firmly.

For valid interruptions, the following approaches will help:

- Pre-empt queries by holding routing update meetings.

- Make a time available in your schedule when people can interrupt you, and be available during this time.
- Block out time to focus on key tasks and use your voicemail or even Out of Office Agent to let others know why you are not returning their calls or e-mails that day.
- Learn to say "no" – you have to respect your own time and priorities, so don't allow an interruption to continue if you're working on something important.

For more on how to create pockets of time in which you can focus on your high-priority tasks – while still working effectively with your colleagues – see:

http://www.mindtools.com/community/pages/article/newHTE_94.php

Beating Procrastination

The sad fact is that procrastinators mostly work as many hours in the day as high achievers, but because they're putting off doing those tasks that they should be doing (those that contribute the most to their organization and would therefore boost their careers), they achieve much less.

Beat procrastination by:

1. Recognizing when you're procrastinating. Did your activity log show that you were spending too much time on low priority tasks that you "like"?
2. Working out WHY you're doing it. Do you find certain tasks unpleasant or overwhelming, or do you lack the skills to perform these tasks properly?
3. Getting on with it! Help yourself to do this by making up your own rewards, asking someone else to check up on you, identifying the consequences of NOT doing the task, and breaking the task into manageable components.

Click here for more on beating procrastination:

http://www.mindtools.com/community/pages/article/newHTE_96.php

Ready, Set, Blast-Off

Put It All Together

Career boosts are useful at various times within our careers. When you're feeling disillusioned, stressed, or think that you're failing to meet your potential, it's time to re-evaluate where you are headed and get your career back on track.

This is the essence of a career boost. Nothing is more motivating than knowing you are surely working your way toward the career of your dreams. The challenge is to figure out what that is and go for it.

We hope this workbook and the tools we referred you to throughout give you the necessary boost you need to take control of your career and reenergize yourself. There is no limit to what you can achieve. Dig deep, concentrate your energy, engage the thrusters and prepare to boost yourself higher than you ever thought.

Appendix A – Goal Planning Worksheets

Goal Horizon	Specific, attainable goal	Achievement Measure
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1 year		
6 months		
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