



Creating career **clarity**

{ a timeline exercise. }

make.believe.

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Introduction.

Ask yourself who you are and your mind can only offer up impressions of yourself from 10 or more years in the past. Because your mind doesn't update your mental image on a daily basis as you change and grow, conscious reflection is an invaluable experience to take inventory of the terrain you've crossed and to decide what terrain lies ahead. The information you gain is a resource for how you decide upon and design your future career path.

This exercise asks you to create a life record (with whatever comes to mind without too much effort or strain) to engage yourself in a conversation using your own life wisdom and insights from the past. This is an activity that is famous for spurring "a-ha moments" for my clients.

A timeline exercise.

Give some thought as to how you'd like to approach this activity. You will be mapping out your life from birth to now with events that you consider to have been significant. Only you can decide what is significant to you and what is significant is what comes to mind.

The timeline you'll be creating can be used to explore any number of elements in your life including relationships, family occurrences, beginnings, endings, job changes, so on and so forth. A timeline provides you with an opportunity to identify life's highs and lows, uncover patterns, and recognize turning points. By marking your individual milestones, you can review the nature of your relationships, notice periods of personal growth or stagnation, highlight where your career needed some inspiration and so forth. This, in turn, helps you reveal and strategize on how you'd like to proceed.

How to maximize this exercise.

Your life is influenced by many interrelated factors and events. So, I recommend beginning with a general life timeline containing all of your significant information. Then draw out your career timeline from there – either separately or noting items of consequence in your career to date.

If you focus on just one element of your life, important events may be left out because they appear unrelated. For example, if you only include what you've been paid for, and ignore what you are drawn to effortlessly outside of your paid experiences, you might miss clues or neon signage. Clues (subtle or obvious) that may help you design your career path into the future because they indicate where you are really drawn to spending your time.

The most useful frame of mind for this exercise:

- Over-analysis of your experiences can limit this process, so be easy with yourself. You can always fill in gaps or spaces afterwards or not at all;
- Focus your energy on what easily comes to mind, trusting that important forgotten details will surface given time and space;
- You may want to keep a journal and jot down things as your mind reveals information to you;
- Pay attention to what you liked or wanted in each situation, what didn't work, what your learning was, and how you were experiencing your life at particular instances along your timeline – remembering specific seasons of joy, contentment, sadness, or frustration;
- Be kind to yourself while you are engaging with this process. Working through our very complex lives can feel overwhelming; and
- If you get stuck or can't remember a date or event, take a break and come back to it when you can, or bring in someone you trust to help out.

How to create a timeline.

Allow creativity to guide you – there is no right or wrong way to create your timeline. Go with the unique form that best represents your unique experiences.

Listed are some suggestions to assist you. Try one way and if that doesn't feel right, try something else:

- Create a table with columns (date/name of event, liked, didn't like, learning outcome, feelings);
- Draw or cut out pictures (from magazines) and create a timeline with pages taped together or large flip chart paper with dates noted; or
- Draw and/or write everything out in a notebook.

Mine wisdom and insight from your timeline.

Once you've completed your timeline, you have a wealth of information available to you. To gain as much information as possible, take a break from your timeline when you're finished it (whether it's a few hours or a few days). When you return, look at your timeline as though you were trying to understand a piece of art that you're drawn to, but can't exactly say why. Here's what to look for and note:

Response – How do you feel about your timeline? What reactions (thoughts, feelings, sensations in your body) surface and at what point in your timeline or review process does this occur? Feel free to remark either in writing (a journal), to a friend or a career guidance professional for reflection or discussion.

Patterns – What do similar feeling events have in common? Were certain kinds of events (joyous ones or disappointing ones) at regular intervals? For negative experiences in particular, what occurred just before or just after those events? And do they have anything in common (thoughts, feelings, people, or tasks)?

Shifts in direction – When you review your timeline(s) can you draw out what prompted a change in direction either more or less to your liking?

Consider requesting feedback – You may want to review your timeline exercise with someone that you trust. A fresh set of eyes might be able to offer new perspectives, insights and observations. It's possible your vision may be limited because the information is so close or because you have strong feelings about it. Inviting someone's help can bring compassion to your experience.

Next steps – The past was a series of choices and the future is a series of choices too. Extend your timeline into the future and mark the milestones. And don't forget to include/write down all the steps that would help you reach your future milestones.



I'm Sabrina Ali, [Career Counsellor and Writer](#). I believe in doing what you were meant to do and getting paid for it. I engage people (like you) in real career conversations because I know that you are meant to feel at home in your body and what you do for work.

I teach authentic career navigation and potent career planning using an "extra-ordinary" approach (I promise that it's not what you think or how you've been taught in the past). The best part is that I wrote (and recorded myself in video and audio) it all down for you in one place – the complete guided journey. It's called [the Bliss Kit](#): a digital guide to authentic career creation. It's for people who want to not just work for survival, but soul satisfaction too.