



THE

Five Steps

CAREER

to Finding Your

CHANGE

Dream Job

GUIDE

RACHEL SCHOFIELD

The Career Change Guide

About the author

Rachel Schofield is a qualified personal development and career coach and a former journalist. She worked for the BBC for over twenty years, including reporting for Radio 4's *Woman's Hour* and presenting on the BBC News channel before making her own career pivot into coaching.

Connecting her journalism and her coaching is a deep curiosity for people and their stories and a desire to effect change. She supports clients from senior leaders to women returners to get unstuck, take action and reshape their working lives.

She lives in London with her husband and two teenage daughters. *The Career Change Guide* is her first book.

The Career Change Guide

Five Steps to Finding
Your Dream Job

Rachel Schofield

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For my own band of career change cheerleaders,
Jeremy, Martha and Anna, who believed in me when
my courage wobbled.

And for any other mums who sometimes need reminding
who they really are and what they are capable of.

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Introduction

So tell me, just how long have you been thinking about a career redesign?

A few months? A couple of years? A decade?!

Does it sneak up on you on holiday when your mind finally has time to wander? After a crappy day in the office when you've sold more pointless widgets and your ideas have gone unnoticed? When your surly teen rolls their eyes at yet another meal you've slaved over and you wonder if it's time you went back to work? As you hit 'Like' on a friend's LinkedIn post and notice an uncomfortable twinge of jealousy?

Of course, we all have days when we idly dream of a new life. But this is different.

The career thoughts and ideas that regularly rattle around your brain inspire, terrify and muddle you all at the same time.

You've probably tried the patience of your partner and friends with your constant talk of change and your utter inability to take action.

You've made a few half-hearted attempts to get started but soon backed off, full of more doubt and questions than excitement and motivation.

You've become a serial googler of training courses, solo-preneurs or career pivots.

Sound familiar?

If you're wondering how the A-level choices you made ten years ago have led you down a career path you feel you never really chose . . . if you're reassessing your future now you're a parent with new priorities and different ambitions . . . if you're sensing an opportunity to reinvent yourself as your kids are growing up and it's finally 'you' time . . . if the global pandemic has shaken your world and is pushing you towards change . . . this book is for you.

The wonderful people I coach all have their own individual career stories, but it's fair to say they have three things in common:

- They feel they've somehow lost sight of who they really are.
- They want to create a working life that feels meaningful and fulfilling, but they're unsure what that looks like or how to get there.
- They're excited and motivated some days, and hit by rocky confidence and self-doubt the next.

Sound like you? Thought so.

Because my knowledge of what goes on in the heads of career changers doesn't just come from working with my clients. It comes from my own personal experience of the strange roller-coaster ride that is a career change.

Let me briefly share my story with you.

Before making my very own career pivot, I reported and presented for the BBC for over twenty years. Starting out as a keen young reporter for local TV and radio, I moved to Radio 4's *You and Yours* and *Woman's Hour* and then spent more than a decade presenting for the organization's flagship 24-hour news channel.

I was full-time, part-time and freelance, changing my work to fit around our family and reassessing what worked (and what didn't!) after both of my year-long maternity leaves. I'm married and our two daughters are now teenagers.

When it felt like there was too much that wasn't working – practically and in terms of my own job fulfilment – I did what you're doing. I started investigating. I knew I wasn't inspired. I was fed up with antisocial shifts and felt a little bit unseen as a small freelancer in a huge machine. I knew I still enjoyed asking questions, analysing responses and digging for truth, but I was tired of asking questions people tried to avoid answering and was looking for something more collaborative to replace the combative nature of political debate. I knew I wanted a change – and it needed to be bigger than working as a journalist in another guise. But I was also scared of getting it wrong and parting company with an internationally respected organization which I'd been proud to call home since I was 21.

What else *could* I do with the skills I had? What *should* I do? What did I *want* to do? How would I make it happen? And – horror of horrors – *how would I explain it* in a way that was credible to other people?

Working that out took time, energy and honesty. It led me to where I am now – a fully qualified personal development and career coach, using the techniques and framework I was trained in and my own journey to support others.

But first, I had to do exactly what I'm about to help you to do. Deal with all the negative voices in my own head. Figure out who I really was – in my case after two children and two decades in one industry. Get clear on my purpose. Work out which of my ideas made most sense and felt most promising. Transition from one role to another.

For me, that meant embarking on some formal retraining,

rebranding myself and establishing and growing my own coaching business.

I'm delighted to accompany you on this journey and find out what it means for you.

This book is designed to take you from the confusion and indecision that stops you doing anything to a clearer picture of the kind of work and life you actually want, and then to give you a roadmap to make it a reality.

It will take you on a structured five-step career redesign journey: Preparing – Reflecting – Imagining & Designing – Taking Action – Keeping Going.

First, we'll get your fickle brain in gear and equip you to become a committed career redesigner.

Then you'll reflect on your greatest strengths and skills, what lights you up and what motivates you, to get clear on what meaningful and satisfying work is going to look like for you.

Thirdly, you'll generate and prioritize ideas and explore the resulting career options, designing ways to put them to the test.

Next you'll create a proper action plan for whatever future you decide on.

And you'll finish by supercharging your mindset to ensure you see it through, with insights and advice from people who have already made their own career changes, great or small.

Each step is packed with thought-provoking exercises to increase your self-awareness, clarity and confidence, along with practical insights on how to tackle the day-to-day challenges of a career redesign.

OK, enough procrastination . . . are you ready to discover your dream job?

Step One

Preparing

Before we start, there are a few things we need to tackle head-on.

Because I suspect you've made a few attempts to start this journey before. And you've become stuck. You've felt demoralized. You've run out of steam. So let's make sure that, this time, you pack the right kit for what can at times feel like a bumpy journey. It's tempting to skip this bit. 'Let's just get stuck in!' I hear you thinking. But that's where you've gone wrong before. So trust me, and stick with it.

Chapter 1

Time to Get Off Your But

If there's one massive obstacle in your way, it's you.

Or more specifically, your own brain. It's like you're in a tug of war with yourself. On one side is your ambitious, creative, adventurous self, pulling hard towards change and nurturing thoughts of a more fulfilling work life. Yanking back is your risk-averse, status-quo-loving alter ego, fearful of the unknown and desperate to keep you safe and comfortable.

For every idea you tug at, your brain pulls back control with a big list of why it JUST. WON'T. WORK. The result of this epic tug of war? Your dreams lose. You're forever falling on your but:

'I'd love to return to the arts, but . . .'

'I sometimes wonder if I could start my own business, but . . .'

'I dream of becoming an accountant, but . . .' (OK, so no one has ever said that to me . . . yet)

So what's going on?

Predominantly, our own biology. Neuroscientists will tell you that we're hardwired to resist uncertainty – so much so that our brain prefers a predictable, negative outcome over an uncertain one. Our natural default is to stay put – where our brain is confident it knows what's coming and how to handle it.

No wonder you have a tendency to conclude a career move would be a disaster and jog on, rather than wrestle with the unknown.

Change is certainly challenging. It can seem scary and risky. A career change or redesign doubly so, tied up as it is with our identity and our status, our finances, our family life and our friendships.

‘Nope!’ says your brain. ‘Let’s just not go there . . .’

Bored and unchallenged you may be. But at least you’re *safe*. Because safety is one of your brain’s main priorities. However, in the relative comfort of the twenty-first century, your well-meaning mind has a habit of miscalibrating danger.

‘Negativity bias’ is a stubborn psychological tendency which served humans well when we were threatened by huge hairy predators with large tusks or sharp teeth. Put simply, you were more likely to survive if your brain was quick to highlight and react to danger and risk. But whilst sabre-toothed tigers no longer routinely jump out at us from behind trees, our brains have been slow to evolve. Have you ever noticed how the one bad experience from your day weighs heavily on your mind as you lie in bed, despite the many positive ones? How one piece of negative feedback knocks the good ones out of the picture? Not all emotions are created equal.

Understanding that your own brain might not be your most reliable companion on this career journey is a powerful realization and one you’ll need to return to time and time again. Ready to address the imbalance?

Let’s start with that voice inside your head.

Whether you call it your inner critic, your self-saboteur, your sh*tty committee or your confidence gremlin, you’ll know what I mean. Even titans like Michelle Obama and Tom Hanks have talked about the experience of self-doubt, so you’re in good company. It’s natural.

So how do you push back against the brain chatter that’s

getting in the way of your career move? We need to get you off your but.

Among the people I work with, I see some really big ones. See if you recognize any of these:

Common Career Change Buts



I've left it too late



It might not suit
the family



I'm too old to be
taken seriously



I don't have the
right skills



I lack the experience



It's not the
perfect time



I'd have to take a pay
cut



Retraining would take
years



I'd have to start at the
bottom again

How to Get Off Your But

The key to getting off your but is not to try and ignore its hefty size! Pretending those worries aren't there won't make them go away. So let's grab hold of them, bring them out of the shadows and engage in a spot of truth-tussling.



My Biggest Buts

Complete the following sentence to identify any negative thoughts that are holding you back.

I'd love to redesign my career BUT . . .

Now what? Well, first it's crucial to understand that you have the ability to separate yourself from your own thoughts.

Your brain is not you. It's offering you a series of beliefs about your career move, but how you respond to them remains in your control. I use the word beliefs deliberately because what your brain is presenting are generally exactly that. Beliefs, not facts. And it's no surprise that the beliefs you've written down are routinely referred to as 'limiting beliefs', because by holding on to them as truths, we stop ourselves growing and progressing towards our goals.

Take this example that I often hear, and you may well have chosen too: 'I'm too old.'

Now that is not a fact, though you may have started to accept it as one. When it comes to your age, there's only one fact in play: the date on your birth certificate. But what your brain has done is take a fact and layer on an *assumption*: that your age makes you 'too old'.

The same often goes for 'I don't have the right skills' or 'The family can't manage without me'. A whole bundle of

assumptions are colourfully gift-wrapped by your brain as accepted facts.

So first thank your brain for offering you these thoughts to consider. Remember, it's got your best interests at heart – low risk, safety, security.

But now it's time to launch your investigation.

Take each career-related belief you've doggedly held on to and get it under the magnifying glass. Here are some questions for you to consider:

Belief



How long have I held this belief?

Where does it come from?

What real evidence do I have for this belief?

What other evidence is there?

How does it help me to hold this belief?

How would it help me to let go of it?



Digging into where a belief has come from can be intriguing territory.

Some beliefs we adopted years ago. How many of us have been trotting out the line that we're 'not great with figures' just because A-level maths was never on the table? Or 'I can't give presentations' because we had one awkward run-in with PowerPoint as a junior sales assistant fifteen years ago? It's time to reassess.

Janette – a 47-year-old police officer turned furniture creator – is a case in point.

'There is a bit of sadness. What could I have achieved had I done this a lot sooner? I think one of my big passions

is around how your opportunities and experiences at school really form what you go on to do in later life. I still remember my art teacher laughing at me, telling me I wasn't very creative. And actually, since then, I had never done anything and it was only really in lockdown that I picked up a paintbrush. I mean, I'd done DIY, but now I'm kicking myself because I just wish I could have tuned into my creativity more as a child and I might have done something totally different.'

More recent beliefs can be equally telling. If you're hampered by concerns about poor confidence or questionable competence, you may find that's directly related to how long you've been toiling in a job that doesn't stimulate or suit you, or perhaps how long you've been out of the workplace on a career break. So it's not that you aren't a confident person or your skills have somehow left the building never to return. It's more than likely that you simply feel undervalued, out of practice or worried about a move to a less familiar environment. All of which can be rectified.

Identifying where a belief has come from can be powerful too. Sometimes that can be a parent or a teacher. Maybe an uneasy relationship with a previous boss? Are you really ready to let them have the last say on your future?

The evidence we have for many of our beliefs is anecdotal at best. Perhaps it was a conversation we overheard about the challenges of getting into PR, one article we read about retraining as a teacher or a quick Google search about the average age of hairdressers. Hardly concrete data on which to base an opinion. And yet we do.

And, of course, our negativity bias tends to supercharge that one piece of worrying 'evidence' over other experiences that

might redress the balance. So remind yourself of times in your life that tell a different story about you, look out for wider success stories and examples of people who have done what you want to do.

It's vital to understand how holding these beliefs is impacting on you. Weirdly, there's normally a pay-off to holding some of these ideas. They help you off the hook and keep you far away from the perceived risk of judgement and humiliation. Of course you can't be expected to make progress in your career when you're 'too old'! How can it be worth trying if 'no one will take me seriously'? These beliefs help you avoid getting uncomfortable.

But the overwhelming impact of these beliefs is to dash your self-belief and stop you before you've really started. How different would your life be if you could let them go? What would change for the better? How would you feel about yourself?

So how firm is your 'but' looking now you've taken a good look? I hope it's all kinds of wobbly.

The next step is to put something more positive and punchy in its place. So that when your fickle brain returns to the 'but', you'll be ready.

'Reframing' negative beliefs is a great habit to develop. Even a simple change of vocabulary can help for starters. If I bring you a 'problem', that's pretty demoralizing, right? If I offer you a 'challenge' or a 'puzzle' not so much, even though it might still prove hard.

So how else could you look at that belief when it shows up? What alternative perspectives could you adopt? And what could be the result of you shifting your thinking?

Here are a couple of examples:



Managing Your Mindset

REFRAMING

Current Belief	Other Perspectives	Result
<i>I can't do this without letting other people in the family down.</i>	<i>It's OK to ask the family to make some changes and for everyone to play their part.</i>	<i>Move away from feelings of guilt. Take action to share household chores more fairly.</i>
<i>It's too late to make a career change.</i>	<i>I have years of experience to offer and another 25 years of work still to shape!</i>	<i>Greater motivation and self-belief. An end to continual procrastination.</i>

Try it for yourself.

Managing Your Mindset

REFRAMING



Current Belief	Other Perspectives	Result

Rest assured, this is not some trite exercise in sugar-coating. When you've taken a good look, you may come to the conclusion that some beliefs you hold, some of the butts holding you back, are indeed closer to facts. It may be the case that you don't have a particular qualification. That the local nursery will be expensive

to send your kids to if you change your hours. That you are slightly lousy at interviews. It may be fair to say that you are short on relevant experience. That a pay cut would be challenging.

In which case, dare I point out that sitting on that but still won't help you! The question becomes not one of reframing but: What you are going to *do* about it? Some career buts are a total deal-breaker. If you want to join the police force and you're 58, chances are that's a waste of time, as you'll have to retire at 60. If you want to be a doctor but aren't up for six years plus of study, it's game over. But there are very few scenarios like that in reality.

If this exercise has thrown up practical barriers you're still worried may get in your way, make a note of them. Checking the truth of them will form part of your investigations in Chapter 9. Because chances are, they can be worked on, particularly if you're prepared to think laterally. Relevant experience can be built up, poor interview skills can be improved, qualifications can be fine-tuned or sometimes circumvented, alternative childcare arrangements can be found.

I hope you're seeing how crucial your mindset is going to be to this process. But let me stress at this point, that this is not a case of one 10-minute exercise and you've got it nailed.

You may well be pushing back against default patterns of thinking about your work life that have been established for many years. These beliefs have become well-worn neural pathways in your brain, forming foundations for habits in the way you think and feel and, consequently, behave. Put simply, the flattened grass and deep indentations make it very easy for your brain to keep walking you down these routes. And every time you walk down them, you embed the habit even more. The path less trodden – perhaps that you have great abilities or are a serious candidate or feel strong and confident – is harder for your brain to spot.

The good news is that your brain can develop new pathways.

Neuroplasticity is the ability of the brain to adapt and change in response to new information, experiences or environments. On this career redesign journey, it's your job to feed your brain those new stimuli! You have in your kit one hell of a powerful tool. Make it your daily habit to challenge your old thinking and be open to the new.

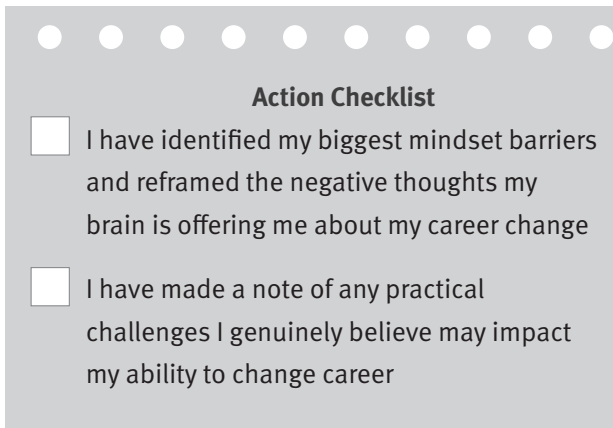
Key Takeaways

Your brain is hardwired to dislike change and uncertainty and is not always a reliable indicator of how possible a career change can be.

Negativity bias supercharges our observations of what seems risky, dangerous or troubling.

Many of our thoughts are beliefs not facts. Examining where they come from and how true they are is vital.

It's possible for your brain to develop new ways of thinking, known as neural pathways, if you work at it.



Action Checklist

- I have identified my biggest mindset barriers and reframed the negative thoughts my brain is offering me about my career change
- I have made a note of any practical challenges I genuinely believe may impact my ability to change career

Chapter 2

The Three Cs

So you've owned up to the size of your but and decided to finally give it a good kicking. You've accepted your brain may need some ongoing encouragement on this journey if it's not going to derail you. But – I'm sorry to tell you – there are other potential pitfalls heading your way.

Don't worry, I'm very big on encouragement as well, but I like to tell it how it is. Because have you noticed how the world of fridge magnets and car stickers is trying to trick you into thinking a career redesign will be a breeze?

'If you can dream it, you can do it!'

'Let your dreams be your wings!'

Wow. Just let me sit down with a coffee and imagine my best life and I'm almost there. Who knew?

Ah, if only. By all means, make that cuppa and grab a seat. But we're not dreaming yet. (Though we definitely will, I promise.) First, though, I'm going to talk you through the Three Cs. Without them, you can dream all you like but I suspect it won't happen.

The Three Cs



Commitment



Courage



Curiosity

1. Commitment

A career change is not the work of five minutes and it's not always easy. You've got to be ready to stick with it. Give it proper time, focus and energy. This could take many months; it could take a year. Maybe more if you are aiming for something excitingly radical. Are you ready for that?

If you've been procrastinating over this for quite a while, occasionally going at it in a slightly half-arsed manner, you should be getting a hot wave of recognition right now.

What was it Thomas Edison said? 'Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.'

In fact, I'd encourage you to think of it exactly like that. Reshaping your career is best approached as a mini job in itself. Which might sound like a bit of a bummer, because in this case no one will be paying you, the office doesn't have aircon and there's no fancy coffee machine. But you do get to choose your own holidays and you can have as many Dress-Down Fridays and Doughnut Days as you want.

Consider yourself in charge of a creative work project. The plan is for it to be fun, but yes, it's going to take proper Commitment.

So just like a job, you'll need to put some structure in place. Create some effective routines, prioritize your tasks and have the right team around you to ensure you can do your best work and achieve your goals.

Create an Effective Routine

There will be days when you're raring to go on Project New You and days when you're just not feeling it. What you are aiming for here is consistency. Flurries of activity followed by weeks of inaction is a deeply ineffective way to make progress and a sure-fire way to lose momentum.

This book is packed with exercises and challenges to get you started and set you on your way. Get into good habits with scheduling these and you will lay some great foundations for keeping going and finally bringing about the change you so desperately want.

So, let's nail down the practicalities that will be best for you. As with everything I'm going to ask you to do, there is no right answer. This journey is yours and it's vital you take ownership of it. So – depending on your current situation – you may have five hours a week to give to this process, you may have two hours a fortnight. The important thing is you decide what feels manageable and stick to it.

<p>How much time do I want to dedicate to my career change each week?</p>	<p>When and where do I work best?</p>	<p>How will I make and keep my notes?</p>

TIP: What feels manageable but also motivating? Are you a little-and-often person (30 minutes a day) or someone who focuses better with a big chunk of time (every Monday evening)?

TIP: Play to your strengths: what time of the day do you do your best thinking? What kind of environment suits you – do you have a favourite spot in the house or is it better to escape to a coffee shop or the local library where there’s less distraction?

TIP: Don’t end up with a muddle of scrappy notes you can’t later decipher! Do you like to work digitally or by hand? Will a fresh new notebook inspire you or are you an Excel spreadsheet geek?

Once you’ve decided on the time commitment you want to make, grab your diary and ring-fence those time slots as fixed appointments with yourself. Call it ‘Project Me’ or ‘Job Power Hour’ or whatever feels motivating and real. I’m serious. Do it.

If you don't protect this process, other things will creep in and it will be the first thing that falls off your agenda. Which leads me to your need to . . .

Prioritize

I suspect your own future plans come pretty low down the pecking order, particularly if you currently have caring responsibilities.

We can feel like we have endless demands on our time. As colleagues, partners, parents, children, siblings or friends, we have hefty to-do lists whether inside or outside work. Caring responsibilities can fall particularly heavily on women. Whether your work is paid, voluntary or household, you may feel you are carrying a huge mental load. If I were to take a screen grab of your brain right now, would I find a crazed jumble of dentist appointments, unanswered emails, in-laws' birthdays, school reply slips, gym guilt, car MOTs and passport renewals *on top* of any other work you have do?

Consider this career project a chance to step back and reflect on your life and commitments more widely. In order to give this adventure the time it deserves, indeed, the time *you* deserve, there are things that might need to change. And not just in the short term while you work your way through this book.

This is a great opportunity to do a quick audit of your time and your commitments. Whether you are already working in a formal capacity or a member of the small army of people holding up their families and communities (or both), I'll bet you have 101 extra demands cropping up.

I'm not saying you need to ditch these commitments, but some will feel like important, conscious choices you've made and others will be habits, activities or roles you've fallen into and

might need to reconsider. Remember, this process is the start of a bigger change, and reclaiming control of your own time will build you some strong foundations for the future you.

Take a look at your average week and how you're spending your time. Use the following questions to help you assess whether your own career redesign is going to survive an encounter with your current reality:

- List the people or activities that currently make calls on your time. What might you need to say No to if you are going to say Yes to this new chapter of your life?
- List all the things that are likely to stop you sticking to your career appointments, such as last-minute work demands, invitations to see an old friend, the needs of your mum-in-law or children's sports fixtures. How will you handle these?
- Think of your home and family. How would you assess the current balance of responsibilities? What conversations need to happen to bring about any change you feel is needed? What would you like your partner and children to do that they aren't currently doing?
- What additional resources or help could you call on to give you more time and headspace? Think about arranging some reciprocal playdates for your kids with a friend, asking your teenager to walk the dog, using an afterschool club or switching to an online shop and batch cooking for the freezer.