



WHAT IS YOUR WORK REALLY WORTH?

A reflection workbook for looking beyond salary, status, and job titles

A Professional Purpose Workbook

Use this workbook to think more deliberately about the kind of work you want, the trade-offs you are willing to make, and the kind of life you want your job to support.

“Income is one form of wealth. Time is another. Autonomy is another. Energy is another.”

This workbook is for reflection and career development purposes. It is not financial, medical or psychological advice.





1. Before You Begin

A job is never only a salary. It is also a way of spending your time, attention, energy and abilities. It can create security, identity, learning and opportunity. It can also require sacrifice, conformity, long hours, emotional labour, uncertainty or less control over your life.

This workbook is not designed to tell you which job is “best”. There is no universally perfect form of work. Its purpose is to help you understand what matters to you, what different kinds of work may ask from you, and whether the exchange feels worthwhile.

Use it honestly

You do not need to produce impressive answers. Write what is true for you now. Your answers may change as your responsibilities, finances, health, family circumstances and ambitions change.

Start with the present.

My current situation is:

- ☐ Employed full-time
- ☐ Employed part-time / shift work
- ☐ Self-employed / entrepreneur
- ☐ Freelance / Contractor
- ☐ Student / learner
- ☐ Unemployed / seeking work
- ☐ Between careers /considering a change
- ☐ Other: .

What made you download this workbook?





At the end of this workbook, I hope to understand.....

2. What Does a “Good Job” Mean to You?

Many of us inherit a definition of career success before we have had enough experience to decide whether it belongs to us. Salary, status, qualifications, a respected title, a company car or an impressive office can become shorthand for success. But your own definition may include very different things.

Without overthinking it, complete these sentences.

A good job is one that.....

A successful work life would allow me to....

People whose careers I admire tend to have.....





I would feel unsuccessful at work if.....

Which of your answers come from you – and which might come from family, school, social media, colleagues, culture or other people's expectations?

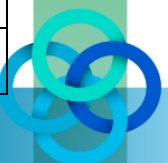
Reflection

Prestige is visible. Fit is personal. A career can look successful from the outside while being deeply unsuitable for the person living it.

3. Your Work Values

Rate each dimension twice. First: how important is it to you? Second: how well does your current or most recent work provide it? Use 1 = Very low and 5=Very High.

Dimensions	Importance 1 - 5	Current Fit 1 - 5	Notes
Income/earning potential			
Job security/predictability			
Flexible work hours			
Control over where I work			
Autonomy over how I work			
Time for family/relationships			
Energy left after work			
Meaning/contribution			
Learning/ intellectual challenge			
Advancement/career growth			
Status/professional recognition			





Supportive leadership/culture			
Work-life boundaries			
Creativity/variety			
Ability to disconnect			

Circle or note the three dimensions with the biggest gap between importance and current fit. Those gaps deserve your attention.

4. The Real Compensation Package

Your payslip shows only part of what work gives you. It also does not show everything you give in return. Use this page to look at the whole exchange.

What my work gives me	What my work asks from me
• Salary/income • Benefits • Security • Experience • Learning • Status/credibility • Network • Purpose/contribution • Routine/structure • Flexibility • Other:	• Hours of my life • Mental energy • Physical energy • Availability after hours • Commuting time • Family/social time • Freedom over leave • Location constraints • Stress/responsibility • Opportunity cost • Other:

What part of your compensation matters most to you right now?

What is your work currently costing you that does not appear on a payslip?





If another role paid you 20% less but gave you substantially more time or autonomy, would you consider it?

Why or why not?

5. Put a Value on Your Time

Time is easy to treat as free because nobody deposits it into a bank account. Yet every job has a time cost: working hours, commuting, preparation, after-hours availability, recovery time, and the mental space work occupies when you are technically off.

Estimate an ordinary working week.

Time Category	Hours per week
Contracted/scheduled working hours	
Overtime/extra hours	
Commute/work travel	
Getting ready/preparation	
After-hours emails, calls or messages	
Time spent worrying/mentally carrying work	
Recovery time because work leaves me depleted	
TOTAL	

Now reflect:

How many hours of genuinely free, usable time do I have in an ordinary week?

What would I do with five extra hours every week if I had them?





How much additional money would I need to receive before I would willingly give up another ten (10) hours of my week?

6. Autonomy: How Much Control Do You Need?

Two jobs with the same salary can feel completely different depending on how much control you have over your time, methods, location and priorities. Some people thrive with structure; others need significant independence. Neither preference is inherently better.

Rate how important each form of control is to you: 1= not important, 5=essential.

Dimension	Importance 1 - 5	Current Fit 1 - 5	Notes
Choosing when to start and finish work			
Choosing where I work			
Choosing the order of my tasks			
Choosing how I complete my work			
Being able to take leave without guilt			
Being unavailable outside agreed hours			
Saying no to unreasonable requests			
Choosing clients/projects/assignments			
Adjust work around family responsibilities			
Taking breaks when I need them			

I feel most trusted at work when.....





I feel most controlled at work when.....

The amount of structure I work best with is.....

7. The Golden Handcuffs Check

Sometimes the hardest job to leave is not the terrible one. It is the one that pays well enough to make leaving feel irresponsible. Salary, bonuses, pension contributions, medical benefits, a lifestyle built around your income, or fear of starting again can keep you in work that stopped fitting you years ago.

Tick any statement that feels uncomfortably familiar.

- ☐ I regularly think about leaving, but the money stops me.
- ☐ My lifestyle now requires an income level that limits my choices.
- ☐ I would not choose this work again if I were starting from scratch.
- ☐ I stay mainly because I am afraid of losing status, seniority, or benefits.
- ☐ I tell myself, "I have already invested too much to change."
- ☐ I earn enough to fund a good life but have too little time or energy to enjoy it.
- ☐ I have postponed exploring alternatives for more than a year.
- ☐ My role conflicts with important values, but remuneration makes the conflict easier to tolerate.
- ☐ I am waiting for retirement, a payout, a promotion or another milestone before allowing myself to reconsider.

If your salary stayed exactly the same but you could choose another organisation, role or type of work tomorrow, would you choose your current one?





What would become possible if your monthly financial obligations were lower?

Important

Recognising golden handcuffs does not mean resigning impulsively. It means becoming conscious of the trade-offs so that staying is a deliberate choice rather than an accidental one.

8. Before You Choose the Lifestyle, Understand the Life

This page is especially useful if you are choosing subjects, qualifications, a field of study or an early-career direction. A career can be attractive because of what it symbolises. Your task is to investigate what the day-to-day work is actually like.

The career/job/profession I currently find attractive:

What attracts me to it?

- ☐ Income
- ☐ Status/prestige
- ☐ Clothing/lifestyle
- ☐ Travel
- ☐ Job security
- ☐ Helping people
- ☐ Creative work
- ☐ Intellectual challenge
- ☐ Independence
- ☐ Family expectations
- ☐ Other: _____





What do I actually know about an ordinary working day in this career?

What do I NOT yet know?

Three people I could speak to, shadow or interview:

Three questions I need answered before committing:

9. When You Cannot Afford to Wait for the Perfect Job

In South Africa, career choice exists alongside a difficult labour market and very real financial responsibilities. Sometimes the practical decision is to take the job available. That is not failure, and it does not mean you must stop thinking about your long-term direction.

A job can be a destination. It can also be a bridge.

If I need to take work that is not my ideal fit, what can I intentionally get from it?

- Income and short-term stability
- A savings buffer
- Experience for my CV
- References and credibility





- Technical skills
- Communication/people skills
- Industry knowledge
- A professional network
- Exposure to roles I had not considered
- Evidence about what I do and do not want
- Capital or experience for future self-employment

My “bridge job” plan

What I need from this opportunity now:

What I want to learn or build while I am there:

What signal will tell me it is time to reconsider my next move?

One practical step I can take every month so that I keep creating options:





10. Compare Two Opportunities Properly

Use this page when comparing jobs, staying versus leaving, employment versus self-employment, or two different career paths. Score each factor from 1 to 5, then add notes. Do not let salary silently become the only criterion.

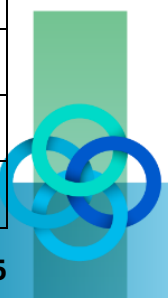
Factor	Option A	Option B	What matters here?
Take-home income			
Benefits/security			
Working hours			
Flexibility			
Autonomy			
Commute/location			
Energy cost			
Stress/responsibility			
Learning			
Future opportunities			
Meaning/value fit			
People/culture			
Family compatibility			
Ability to disconnect			
Overall fit			

Which option better supports the life I actually want – not just the image of success I want other people to see?

11. Your Non-Negotiables, Preferences and Trade-offs

Not everything you value can be non-negotiable. If everything is essential, nothing is. Separating true boundaries from preferences helps you make clearer decisions.

NON-NEGOTIABLES Without these, the role is not sustainable for me	STRONG PREFERENCES Important, but I may compromise for the right reasons	TRADE-OFFS I CAN ACCEPT Costs I am willing to carry





The trade-off I have been pretending does not matter is.....

One boundary I need to become better at protecting is.....

12. Define “Enough” Before More Defines You

Ambition can be healthy. So can growth. But if “more” has no definition, it can expand forever. Knowing what enough means gives you a reference point for decisions about money, time and responsibility.

I need to earn enough to.....

I want enough time to.....

I want enough energy left after work to.....





I need my work to allow me to.....

I am willing to sacrifice.....

I am NOT willing to sacrifice.....

If nobody else could see my job title, salary, car, office, or lifestyle, success would mean.....

13. Your Personal Work Manifesto

Bring everything together. Do not aim for a perfect answer. Aim for a useful one – something that can guide the next decision.

Complete this sentence.

I want work that gives me _____, allows me to _____ and does not require me to sacrifice _____





My five (5) most important work values are:

The three (3) signs that a role or organisation is probably a poor fit for me are:

The three (3) signs that an opportunity deserves serious consideration are:

The next career decision I need to make is:

One action I will take in the next thirty (30) days:

“You do not need to find work without disadvantages. You need enough self-knowledge to choose the advantages you value and the disadvantages you can live with.”

