FREE GUIDE · BUILDING WHILE EMPLOYED

The Career *Clarity* Guide

A practical framework for getting clear on what your job should be funding, and how to use where you are to build what comes next.

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INSIDE THIS GUIDE

What's Inside

INTRODUCTION

Start With What *Your Job Should Fund*

Most career guides jump straight to tactics: how to update your résumé, negotiate an offer, or prepare for an interview. Those matter. If you skip the thinking that comes first, though, you'll end up back here in two years, making the same decision from the same place of confusion.

This guide is for people who are employed and building something on the side, or thinking seriously about it. It's for people who treat their job as the first investment in whatever comes next, as well as a source of income.

> *The relationship between employees and employers has changed. Many people still plan their careers as if it hasn't.*

The numbers show it. Median job tenure in the United States was 3.9 years in January 2024. For workers ages 25 to 34, it was 2.7 years. A long career with one employer is the exception now, so plan for change.

This guide helps you do three things: evaluate what your current job gives you to build with, get clear on what you need from any future role, and take one concrete next step before you close this document.

You won't have every answer by the end. You will have a clear next step.

SECTION ONE

Your Job Is Your *First Investor*

Most people judge a job by salary and title. That view leaves a lot of value on the table.

A more strategic view treats your job as capital. When it's working well, your job gives you a salary that creates runway, skills that grow over time, access to people and problems you wouldn't meet on your own, and the structure to build something on the side without betting everything on one move.

> *A silent investor funds your runway, opens doors, and gives you time to figure things out. Your job can do the same, if you manage it that way.*

The question is whether you treat your job as an investment or only as a paycheck. The answer leads to very different decisions about which jobs to take, how long to stay, and when to leave.

Some jobs make poor investors. They take everything you have and leave nothing for the life you're trying to build. The three modes on the next page will help you see which situation you're in and what to do about it.

3.9 years	2.7 years
Median job tenure in the U.S. as of January 2024.	Median tenure for workers ages 25 to 34, the group most actively making career decisions.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employee Tenure in 2024.

Accepting this early helps you make better decisions.

SECTION TWO

What Mode Are You *In Right Now?*

Your job should serve different needs at different stages of your life. The mistake is judging every opportunity the same way, whatever your life needs right now. Here are three modes and what each means for how you evaluate your situation.

MODE ONE · YOU'RE BUILDING FINANCIAL STABILITY

Your job's main purpose is to fund your stability. You evaluate opportunities by salary, benefits, flexibility, and security. That's a smart choice. Stability is the foundation that makes everything else possible, including building on the side without making decisions out of desperation.

MODE TWO · YOU'RE FUNDING YOUR NEXT CHAPTER

You want to start a business, build something on the side, or set yourself up for full independence. In a sense, your employer is an investor in that plan, whether they know it or not. Your paycheck covers your bills, and some of it goes toward the tools, savings, and breathing room you need for the next move. Your job gives you runway. Use it on purpose.

MODE THREE · YOU'RE BUYING TIME AND FREEDOM

Right now, you need flexibility more than anything else: to build on the side, pursue a creative project, or keep enough capacity to think. You need a job with schedule flexibility, energy left at the end of the day, and work that doesn't follow you home. That's a valid, strategic thing to choose.

No mode is better than the others, and you might be in more than one. What matters is knowing which mode you're in and whether your current job serves it.

YOUR TURN

Write It *Down*

Don't overthink this. A rough answer written here is worth more than a perfect one still in your head.

Which mode am I in right now, and is my current job serving it? Be honest. If the answer is no, that's useful information.

What is my job giving me to build with right now? Think beyond salary: time, skills, access, structure, and relationships.

SECTION THREE

Four Filters for *Any Job Opportunity*

Most people evaluate a job opportunity by asking: Can I do this? Do I like this company? Is the salary fair? Those are reasonable questions. If you're building something on the side and working toward independence, you need a few more.

Run every opportunity through these four filters before you say yes.

1. **Does it pay enough for you to invest in what you're building?** After your obligations, is there money left for tools, experiments, and the early costs of building something?
2. **Does it leave you the time and energy for the work you care about outside it?** The most expensive jobs are the ones that want all of you. If a role regularly takes your evenings, weekends, and best thinking, you're surviving while employed, with nothing left to build.
3. **Does it build skills you'll use when you work for yourself?** Every role should add to what you can do. Sales, operations, communication, finance, and client management transfer directly to running your own business. They're worth more than a title that looks good on paper.
4. **Does it put you near people, conversations, and problems that speed up your path?** Access is capital. A job that puts you in rooms with potential clients, future collaborators, or problems you're learning to solve gives you something salary alone can't.

If the honest answer to all four is no, a better salary won't fix it. It's the wrong job.

SECTION FOUR

Questions Worth *Asking Yourself*

Before you update your résumé or scroll job boards, spend some time with these. Don't rush them.

What does my life need in the next one to two years?

Forget what it needed five years ago or what looks good. What does the life you're living need most right now?

What would have to be true about a job for it to meet that need?

This is where you build your own criteria, from your life and what you're trying to build instead of a list you found online.

What is my exit condition?

Decide what would need to be true before you leave your current role, and decide it before you're in the moment. It might be a specific revenue number, a validated offer, or a set number of paying clients. The goal is to make the leap from a position of strength, instead of frustration or hope.

SECTION FIVE

Questions Worth Asking *in Any Interview*

Once you know what your life needs, evaluate every opportunity through that lens. In interviews, bring questions that tell you what you need to know.

ASK	WHY IT MATTERS
"What does the compensation structure look like, and how are raises determined?"	Essential for Mode One. Understand what this job will fund before you accept.
"What is the company's policy on outside projects or entrepreneurial work?"	Critical for Mode Two. Know whether the runway you need is available to you.
"How does the team approach flexibility around schedule and remote work?"	Matters most for Mode Three, and for anyone building on the side. Ask for specifics.
"What is the company's financial health, and how has headcount changed in the past year?"	Shows how stable the role is. If there have been recent layoffs, ask directly.
"How would you describe the boundaries between work time and personal time on this team?"	Culture and day-to-day expectations show up in this answer. A polished non-answer tells you something too.

> *If you go in knowing nothing is guaranteed, you'll negotiate better, save smarter, and keep your options open.*

SECTION SIX

Your One Clear *Next Step*

You've now thought through something most career guides skip: your relationship with work and what you need it to do for your life.

Here's the one action item in this guide. Answer this question honestly and specifically, in one or two sentences, as a clear statement of what your next move needs to accomplish.

Given where my life is right now, what does my job need to be doing for me, and is it doing that?

That answer becomes your filter. Run every opportunity, offer, and decision through it first. That's how you stop overanalyzing and start making decisions you can stand behind.

> *Work is a tool. Know what you're building with it.*

None of this means holding back effort where you are. Work with integrity, do the job well, and build strong relationships. Those things matter for your sake, because your reputation travels with you long after any job ends.

CLOSING

This Is Your *Starting Point*

The most important thing you can do right now is answer the questions in this guide honestly, before you search a job board. Even rough answers are more useful than none.

Clarity comes from getting your thinking out of your head and onto the page.

If you want to keep going, the site has more: a framework for using your current job strategically, a process for deciding when the timing is right to leave, and practical tools for building something while you're still employed.

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