

CAREER

Clarity

**FINALLY FIND THE WORK
THAT FITS YOUR VALUES & LIFESTYLE**

LISA LEWIS MILLER

ADVANCED PRAISE:

“Lisa Miller's *Career Clarity* framework is life-changing. If you're someone who has struggled to find a career that feels like home, this book is for you. Lisa not only gives you a roadmap to combine your personality, interests, strengths, and skills into a profitable career that lights you up, but also fortifies your confidence and mindset along the way.” – Melody Wilding, MSW, TEDx speaker and author of *Trust Yourself*

“Life is both too short and too long to not love your work. Lisa gets this in a deep and powerful way. Best of all, she's written a book that isn't theoretical platitudes but a practical roadmap for how you can actually (finally) do the most meaningful work of your life. If you're underfulfilled with your work in any way, get this book and devour it immediately.” – Josh Allan Dykstra, CEO of Helios

“Does work feel a bit (or a lot!) off? Are you looking for the optimal career fit for *every piece* of you, including your lifestyle? Sought-after career coach Lisa Miller has created the premier system to get you there, filled with realistic, compelling, attainable steps. In her first book, Lisa hasn't just innovated — she's completely shattered the career search mold.” – Rebecca Fraser-Thill, senior contributor at *Forbes Careers* and psychology instructor at Bates College

“Lisa Lewis Miller's book, *Career Clarity*, guides the reader through a proven three-step process to career SANITY. She teaches that it's not about finding ONE dream job but enabling confident clarity about your values and finding a values match. Her process enables experimentation, piloting yourself through better and better career matches over time to arrive at a deeply satisfying career.” – S. Chris Edmonds, speaker, author, and consultant

“As a HR nerd, this book had me nodding my head so many times. If you just got a new job and have realized the grass isn't greener or keep feeling a calling to do something different, this book will help you figure out what and why. We spend so much time at work and yet we rarely take the time to do the research and preparation required. Lisa talks us through her 4 Pillars framework of not only why this is important but how it will make you happier in the long run.” – Janice Chaka, CEO of Introvert Media Lab

“If you know deep down that you’re unhappy in your work, this book will do more than just inspire you to take action—it will show you the path to a better, more satisfying career. With a warm heart and practical suggestions, *Career Clarity* will demystify the process of discovering a career you can be truly passionate about.” – Dr. Nick Wignall, clinical psychologist and author

“The worst part about going through a career crisis is believing that you're alone in the process. Lisa's willingness to be vulnerable about her own story and her clients' experiences shines a light on how common these moments really are. I needed this book as an academic overachiever who thought I was supposed to have it all together. This book has the perfect scaffolding to help you get up and take the next best, practical steps.” – Caitlin Faas, PhD

“Before you work on your resume, STOP! Read this book first. Using 4 Pillars of Career Fulfillment, *Career Clarity* invites job seekers to get clear on their next move — and embark on the 'professional road less traveled.' This is the book I wish I had before applying for any job or even starting my own business! Fueled by powerful stories and examples, Lisa Miller encourages the reader to be courageous and (even a little rebellious) so they can get what they want from their career.” – Chris Villanueva, CEO of Let's Eat, Grandma

“This book is packed with relatable examples of a proven framework that can be used over and over again throughout your career. It's a must-read for anyone ready to fill their days with meaningful work!” – Jenn Smith, HR expert and CEO of Flourish Careers

"If you're seeking career fulfillment, you've come to the right place. Let Lisa Lewis Miller guide the way with a playbook to help you find work you love that pays the bills." – Adam Smiley Poswolsky, author of *The Quarter-Life Breakthrough*

“*Career Clarity* by Lisa Lewis is a straight-forward, accessible, approachable solution for anyone who wants more clarity and less confusion in their career. Lisa is a gift to our industry and her work changes lives. Don't suffer alone. Reading *Career Clarity* will help you feel like you have the friend you need to help you succeed.” – Tracy Timm, author of *Unstoppable* and founder of The Nth Degree® Career Academy

"This isn't just a book about the next step in your career. This is an insightful framework that will lead toward fulfillment in your career and life for years. Buy it. Read it. Do it. You'll be thankful you did." – Scott Anthony Barlow, CEO and founder, Happen To Your Career

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

FOREWORD

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1: When Your Work Doesn't Align with Your Values

CHAPTER 2: A Framework for Successful Career Changes

CHAPTER 3: Mapping the Drivers of a Fulfilling Career

CHAPTER 4: The Mindsets that Help You Get Unstuck

CHAPTER 5: Taking Action Even When You're Unsure

CHAPTER 6: Getting Clear on What You Want

CHAPTER 7: Dealing with Doubts Along Your Journey

PHASE 1

CHAPTER 8: Pillar 1: Identifying Your Strengths and Gifts

CHAPTER 9: Pillar 2: Navigating Towards Your Magnetic Interests

CHAPTER 10: Pillar 3: Finding the Right Fit for Your Personality

CHAPTER 11: Pillar 4: Fitting Your Career and Lifestyle Desires Together

CHAPTER 12: The Money Versus Fulfillment Paradox

CHAPTER 13: Prioritizing Your Most Critical Values

CHAPTER 14: Generating Directionally Correct Career Ideas

PHASE 2

CHAPTER 15: Testing Your Potential New Career Paths

CHAPTER 16: Evaluating Viable Options and Course Correcting

CHAPTER 17: Managing the Bumps and Unexpected Bears on Your Journey

CHAPTER 18: Deciding to Go Your Own Way and Explore Entrepreneurship

PHASE 3

CHAPTER 19: Positioning Your Job Search in the Right Direction

CHAPTER 20: Building Effective and Strategic Professional Relationships

CHAPTER 21: Why Your Journey May Include a False Summit

CHAPTER 22: Scaling the Summit of Mount Fulfillment

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

FOREWORD BY JENNY BLAKE, AUTHOR OF *PIVOT*

If change is the only constant, let's get better at it. This is our new imperative when it comes to making career shifts, especially as technological innovation and globalization continue to change the world at such a rapid clip. The bad news: career certainty and stability have always been a myth. Upheaval is accelerating, resulting in increasingly frequent changes that can feel confusing and anxiety-provoking, and anything can happen at any time. The good news: we are all strengthening our skills to navigate the underlying reality of careers during the best or worst of times. By picking up this book, you're taking a wise step to prepare yourself to proactively pivot in ways large and small as you plan your career, creative projects, and next moves.

When the pandemic hit in 2020, it shook the world in unprecedented ways. Nobody was exempt: we *all* got pivoted. Maybe you were a twenty-something who graduated virtually, a frontline essential worker navigating terrifying health concerns, an employee working remotely (some while simultaneously juggling care for small children), or a small business owner like me who lost 75% of a typical year's revenue. Within a few months we all came to a shocking realization: there was no more "normal" to return to, not even a "new normal" to stand on. The "normal" ship had sailed once and for all, along with any answers about what the future might hold.

As you'll read in the pages ahead, even when you do land on a "perfect on paper" opportunity, you might grow out of it due to your success. *Imagine that!* For some, success (however defined) can be harder to grapple with than the hurdles it took to get there. No one is exempt from the existential searching that career changes tend to inspire, and with good reason: work is where we spend the most time and energy. To add to the pressure, our ability to provide for ourselves can make career change feel like a quest for survival, a matter of life and death. But it doesn't have to. You *can* get better at pivoting, navigating this process, accelerating how you reach career clarity.

As Lisa writes in the introduction, some of the people who look shiniest and happiest are furiously paddling beneath the water, chasing after the hungry ghosts of adoration, admiration, and approval. As the saying goes, "Don't compare your full-length movie to someone else's highlight reel." Your path towards a fulfilling career is yours alone, but a book like this can certainly help you pave the way, with many time- and sanity-saving tips throughout. After knowing Lisa for nearly a decade, I have watched her voraciously learn, grow, apply, stretch, and share her wisdom at so many of the exciting stages along her career journey—from pivoting internally by creating a new coaching role for herself, to building a side

hustle while mentoring other coaches, to launching her own thriving practice, and now to sharing her wisdom with all of you through this book and her podcast.

Lisa cares deeply about your fulfillment and about helping clear the messy path of research and realizations so you can land something you love even faster. A self-described learning junkie, she has synthesized years of seeking into a three-part journey that starts *now*. There is no better time. We are all in the same boat as we create a new future together, given that the "normal" ship has sailed. Lisa is living proof that career clarity starts exactly as you are: with curiosity, a willingness to grapple with big meaty questions without fearing the answers, and with a belief that what you want to create *is* possible. I know I speak for both of us when I say: we can't wait to see where you take things from here!

To your next moves,

Jenny Blake, author of *Pivot: The Only Move That Matters Is Your Next One*, September 2020

INTRODUCTION

We all want to tell a beautiful — and honest — story about our career choices. We want to be able to gush with authentic excitement over what we do, and why.

Some people have a talent for making everything *sound* gushy and picture perfect: constantly “humble bragging” about winning awards, traveling to cool locations for business meetings, or working with enviable clients. They’re the people who land on the “30 under 30” or “40 under 40” lists and share memes like: “Love your job and you’ll never work a day in your life!”

Depending on what you say and how you say it, you can easily paint your career like it’s a fairytale Disney movie, even if it’s not.

10 years ago, I could have spun a similar, seemingly impressive tale about my professional trajectory. In the course of two and a half years, I went from a nonprofit job with little growth potential and doubled my salary by becoming a communications consultant. I traveled to Canada, England, and Indonesia, teaching businesses how to create advocacy campaigns and mobilize the public in favor of policy change.

Sounds pretty exciting, right? It hit the trifecta of covetable careers: great pay, tons of accolades, and ritzy international travel opportunities.

But there’s a catch. (There’s almost always a catch.)

Our words have power — especially the words we don’t say. And that shiny Hollywood story above is the product of some serious lies of omission.

When I’m more honest about the pivot I’d made in my career, the lies of omission become much clearer: while I was on track to be a vice president by 28, I kept feeling like something was missing. As a communications consultant working down the street from the White House, I was basically a mercenary and hired gun tasked to spin media gaffes or public policy issues so they appeared to be in my clients’ political favor. My job required me to work on whatever problem came through our doors, whether or

not I agreed with the goals or beliefs. I felt like I was freely trading my own principles for a fast-tracked, externally impressive corporate career, and as long as I was comfortable with selling out, I could keep rocketing up the corporate ladder.

In short: I was unhappy, unfulfilled, and constantly questioning whether my work had any real value. Nobody else could see how conflicted I was about being great at work that tore me up inside.

Through this lens, it's clear the story is certainly not the same fairytale anymore. What it lacks in a cartoon heroine, it makes up for in honesty.

For many of us, our current career story doesn't sound so rosy. We don't want to stay on the same path for the rest of our days, and it can feel like the only way to have a career we love is by pretending and seriously filtering how we talk about our lives. We know those forced, airbrushed stories aren't real and aren't sustainable for the remaining decades of our careers, but don't know what else to do.

And yet... we know there are people out there who have taken courageous actions to create genuinely wonderful — and honest — new career stories.

People like Ron, an engineer in Portland who felt like his career and life in Oregon was starting to stall out when his wife suddenly landed a coveted tenured academic position in Seattle. To top things off, they found out they were expecting their first child. Ron's current job wasn't going to let him work remotely, and certainly didn't have an impressive paternity leave policy. Ron was staring down a career crossroads: he wanted to support his wife's career and relocate to Seattle where a lot of his family lived, but he didn't have any prospects in the area. He knew spending precious time with his first child was non-negotiable, and he wanted to make a change to make more money, but wasn't sure where to start. He used this framework to get clear on his priorities and options to better align his career with his life, and then took serious action: researching future prospective employers in Seattle remotely, repositioning himself as a leader and project manager, and negotiating his first six-figure job offer as well as six full weeks of bonus paternity leave.

Deja is another great example. Today, ex-pat Deja is based in London and is in charge of giving away millions of dollars to charities doing corporate social responsibility for an international media company.

But her career started on a very different trajectory: doing events and management work for musicians in the United States. By doubling down on creating a courageous vision for the work and impact she wanted, and following the steps you'll learn in Phase 3 of this book to perfection, she paired her clear career direction with an all-out networking campaign that opened incredible doors for her to lead and grow abroad. (You'll meet oodles of other clients in the pages to follow. While the stories and details are authentic, their names are changed.)

Neither Ron nor Deja need a filter to make their careers and lives look amazing anymore. They were willing to take unconventional steps to define success on their own terms, create career paths that fit, and put in the work to make it happen. And they're thrilled with how things turned out!

I want that for you, too. Because if you're reading this book, you probably aren't completely *in love* with your job.

You've probably been a pretty good worker (maybe even labeled as an overachiever). Your career might look pretty impressive or jealousy-worthy on the outside.

But if we get really honest, that career doesn't feel as amazing on the inside.

It isn't that you completely hate your work, but you want a challenge you aren't getting. You feel like you aren't living up to your full potential. You're antsy for a change. And while you're not used to feeling this persistent itch of discontent, you're really starting to pay attention to it now.

Let me be the first to tell you: nothing is wrong with you. Breathe.

Your feelings are *right* — this role doesn't fit you.

Maybe you outgrew it, or maybe it never fit quite right to begin with.

So if you've been measuring yourself against Dylan, the sweet and determined young sprout who knew at the tender age of seven that he wanted to be a dentist, you can stop. Choosing to go to grad school and

have a 40-year career in dentistry until you throw a retirement party in your 60s might work for some of your peers, but it's not the right path for you. And that's okay.

In fact, that might even be good: wanting to keep growing, stretching, and learning new things is good for you, good for your work, and good for our economy. Your desire to learn is one of the key drivers of the Career Clarity approach to career pathing. This book wouldn't have caught your eye if you didn't want to learn how to make a change.

You can trust your feeling that you want work to feel better. You *aren't* meant to settle. You don't want to become one of those people with the dead look in their eyes, for whom every day at work is “same shit, different day” — or worse: “fine.”

I've been in your shoes. As an obsessive learner and overachiever, I would devour books, podcasts, TED Talks, and online courses to try to understand the secret keys to creating a fulfilling, juicy, life-giving career path, because where I was felt so life-draining.

There are a *lot* of books out there. Some writers focus on the tactical pieces, like getting job offers or professional rebranding. Others teach you how to follow your heart. But while most thought leaders presented their strategies to solve a particular issue along the career journey, I noticed few people were effectively looking at the start-to-finish journey. As much as they entertain or encourage, they often don't zoom out enough to give you the full picture of why you haven't found fulfilling work you love — and how to land that fantastic job without going broke.

After collecting the data points from other experts, I went on to use that research to help more than 500 clients make successful career transitions of their own. This experience taught me a lot about what actually works (and doesn't) for finding lucrative, soulful, and joyful work. With the lessons learned from seeing hundreds of individuals on this professional pilgrimage, I synthesized the full body of work into the Career Clarity methodology. This book shares that strategic framework with you, so you can master how to find great work and create a satisfying, delightful career that empowers you to live your best life, step by step.

The Career Clarity framework is about addressing the underlying career fulfillment problems and equipping you with a strategy to use over and over again for the rest of your life. It will help you see (and value) your gifts in a new light, differentiate the superficially sexy ideas from the sustainable ones, and feel natural energy in your work again.

Ignoring a strategy for mapping your career moves is a risky decision. While throwing spaghetti at the wall or “falling into” a career path ends up okay for some folks, taking a step in your career without intentionality often leaves you adrift and spinning. There was a good reason you accepted this position, but as the months go on, you start to feel overwhelmed, overworked, underappreciated, or underpaid. And simultaneously, you’re feeling frustrated and hopeless because you thought you’d done everything right to get here. If you’re feeling nervous because you don’t know exactly how or why you got into this mess in the first place, imagine feeling that way every day over the course of the next 20 to 30 years of your career, bouncing like a pinball from job to job, hoping things will get better but not trusting that you’re making the best career decisions. Sounds nauseating and frustrating, right?

Now imagine how life would change if you had a strategic plan guiding your professional development. You’d make career decisions with confidence and ease — and know how to judge when the time is right to make a move. You’d start developing strategic relationships before you need them purely because it’s (gasp) fun, so job searching will no longer feel like your hair’s been set on fire.

To increase your intentionality and vision when making a career shift, the Career Clarity method will guide you through three phases to finding a career that feels like it truly fits you:

Phase 1: Finding a few strong-fit ideas of what you want next

Phase 2: Testing to confirm that your dream is dreamy in reality

Phase 3: Executing on your strategy to make it happen.

Think of this journey like scaling a giant, gorgeous, slightly terrifying mountain — maybe we call it Mount Fulfillment — and you don’t have much mountain climbing experience. Your first phase is preparation: finding the mountain you’d like to climb and deciding what you need to pack in your knapsack for your journey. You’ll want a good map, a well-calibrated GPS, water, a flashlight, non-perishable snacks... all that good stuff to help you get to the top of the mountain in a healthy, safe way. You’ll want to start learning how to read the weather conditions and decide how to plan an initial route. This stage of career

pathing requires auditing your current career assets, deciding which of them you want to take on your career journey, and brainstorming the best-fit ideas to pursue.

You'll never scale the mountain if you don't get off your couch, so the next phase has to be testing your desired path. If you planned a route on paper that isn't doable in real life, or you set out and discover, "Ack, there's a giant ravine ahead!" you'll turn back and give up at the first challenge that looks insurmountable. Therefore, we have to approach your career adventure with curiosity, the ability to be nimble, and willingness to adapt to changing terrain. This phase of career mapping requires courage and vulnerable action-taking. Without those traits, you'll always be wondering "what if" about those ideas in the back of your mind or the path not taken.

And then, the last phase is execution, or actually scaling the mountain to the summit. You've got the right tools, you've learned the best strategy, you've tested a route, so now all you have to do is pick up the pace of your hiking. This phase is where you go all in and go all out to achieve your goal: rebranding yourself to match your target sector, developing new relationships, and finessing your interview strategy. It's tempting to skip straight to this phase and jump out on the mountain, but if you skip over the first two phases, this part of career pathing can be the most painful, frustrating, arduous, and time-consuming of all. Don't do that to yourself! Trust the steps of the process, and you'll get the rewards you're looking for.

The reason a heroic climb resonates so deeply in our cultural context is because we can all see ourselves in the unpredictable ups and downs of a journey. You think you've taken the perfect next step in your work and — WHAM — out jumps the next challenge, whether that's a first child, a missed promotion, a sick parent, an abusive boss, or an unexpected cross-country move. But if the protagonist doesn't know where they're trying to go, the only way their story ends up with a fairytale ending is by sheer luck. We don't want to feel like the outcomes of our life and career choices are purely left to chance.

And when it comes to career success, you don't get hit by the luck truck unless you're standing in the middle of the road.

This book will show you an empowered strategy for navigating career choices so you feel fulfilled, happy, and clear. With its help, you can create a legacy you're proud of.

Approaching this journey with a strategic plan makes all the difference — even if we can't plan every step perfectly. With a framework to guide you, you'll know exactly where in the process you've gotten stuck before, and what you need to get back in motion.

The information in the pages that follow won't be enough by itself. The pathway to a career that makes money and makes a difference is embedded within these chapters, but it's up to you to choose to take action and follow it. The story of a real, incredible career adventure isn't written exclusively from a comfortable hammock at base camp.

Former client Aviva took action to change her career story. She was swirling after her California career as a Hollywood casting agent ended when she lost her biggest contract days after her second son was born. She was feeling uncertain but knew she wanted to start fresh and do work that felt more aligned with her values. Through exploring the process for mapping out what's next, she came up with an idea to start an acting instruction business that let her be home with her boys while making five times more than she'd ever thought possible — and hiring employees for that business by year two. Today, Aviva now runs two six-figure businesses from home and spends more time than ever with her sons.

A story like this is possible for you, too. Even if you didn't go to Harvard Business School, marry rich, or have a trust fund. (Goodness knows I didn't!) But you won't get to tell this kind of great career story if you fall into the trap of letting other people's opinions shape your career.

A guidebook like this will help you untether yourself from opinions, assumptions, and fears to find your own way. Use this book like a textbook, a workbook, or even a devotional to guide you each step of the way. There are clarifying questions sprinkled in at strategic points to help you reflect on the concepts and decide how to apply them in your own journey.

If you hope a change is possible for you, if you've heard a tiny voice stirring in your soul whispering that you can't keep doing the same thing for the next 10 years, or if you believe work can be easier and more fun than you ever imagined, you've already taken the first step toward career clarity.

Let's take the next steps together. Navigating the career waters like an expert takes time — and help.

CHAPTER 1: When Your Work Doesn't Align with Your Values

It's a lot easier to find a job that looks good on the outside than a job that feels good on the inside.

I, unfortunately, know from experience.

A decade ago, I was working in a fancy-looking corporate consulting job in Washington, D.C., mere steps away from the White House. Each day, I'd put on my Nordstrom Rack professional sheath dress (and sensible commute shoes), walk to the nearest Metro stop, take the subway to the office, change my shoes, grab some caffeine, and sit at my row desk in our "award-winning" open office space, ready to lead phone calls with high-paying clients all day long.

In that era, I was working on advocacy and communications campaigns for world-famous brands, traveling to glamorous places like London, Calgary, New York, Toronto, and Jakarta. I had built a reputation as a subject-matter expert in the company, had more vacation time than any of my friends, and was getting opportunities to speak about grassroots mobilization at conferences and networking groups. I was constantly getting face time with company leadership, boosting my promotional opportunities, and was on the fast track to be promoted to the VP level by my 28th birthday.

And yet, no matter how great it looked, it didn't feel right.

I felt guilty. Like I should appreciate what I had more. What was wrong with me that I wasn't satisfied?

I couldn't quite put my finger on what was wrong until the day my grandfather died.

It was a normal Thursday. My phone started to buzz underneath my desk, and I dug around in my giant commuter purse to find it and silence it. But I looked at the caller ID and stopped cold.

You know when you get a phone call, look at the caller name, realize what time of day it is, and know you have to pick up? This was one of those calls.

It was my dad, who pretty much only called me on birthdays, calling me in the middle of a workday. And it was definitely not my birthday.

I grabbed my phone, power walked across the open office to find an unoccupied conference room, and hesitantly pressed the green “answer” button.

As gently as he could, my dad told me that my 94-year-old grandfather had died that morning in Ohio. He said arrangements were being made for a memorial service, if I wanted to fly out and attend.

While I wasn’t surprised by the news — living to 94 is a long, rich life — I was still hurting. I numbly floated back to my desk. It was early in the day. I had a lot of time-sensitive work to do and important meetings to attend, so I tried to pull myself together. In that moment, I remember thinking, “The time for feelings is after work.”

There was a particularly important-seeming meeting on my calendar for late afternoon that day, too: a private one-on-one conversation with a recently promoted company leader. We’d never met, and she’d requested the meeting. Since we hadn’t discussed an agenda, I figured it was a get-to-know-you conversation I could probably muster up enough composure and professionalism to make my way through.

But walking into the meeting, I could tell I wasn’t “there.” My body was moving into the room, but my brain and heart were both making plans in Ohio.

The leader walked in behind me and sat down. She started by casually asking me how I was doing.

The question broke right through my fake composure, and I felt the tears start to well up in my eyes. With a squeaky, quiet voice, I said, “Uh, not great. I just found out that my grandfather died.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry for your loss,” she responded. “Please take all the time you need.”

“Thanks,” I said. The news of the loss was still so fresh, I hardly knew what else to say.

She took a deep breath. “So,” she began, “the reason I wanted to have this meeting was because I’d like to put you on a new client. It’s a full-time project in my department, and they need someone who can organize and lead it. I know this is outside your wheelhouse, but we need you.”

My brain started spinning. I hardly knew her and thought she didn’t know anything about me. Being asked to switch teams at work was totally unexpected — I’d never considered leaving my own beloved department and was already busy (and excelling) with a full workload.

“I... uh... well,” I stammered, wiping away an errant tear. “I appreciate being given the opportunity, but this isn’t really the kind of work I was intending to do here.”

That, apparently, was the wrong answer.

“Well, it’s not really up to you to just ‘choose’ not to,” she carefully replied.

She paused, giving me an intense look.

“I’m going to need you to tell me within the next 24 hours if you absolutely cannot do this assignment. I’ve heard good things about you, but you’re replaceable.”

I couldn’t make eye contact. My gaze fell, and I could feel the pricks of painful tears starting to form again. I stared at the floor in front of me, feeling an uncomfortable knot forming in my throat.

I felt scared and stuck — bamboozled by an opportunity I didn’t want, with a leader who didn’t actually care about me, with no way out. I didn’t even have the logistical information I’d need to answer her. The news was so fresh that I wasn’t sure when the funeral service was going to be, or if my family would need me to be in Ohio to help take care of the estate.

“Okay,” I whispered.

In silence, I pushed back my chair, turned around, and walked out of the meeting. Beelining straight past my desk, I went immediately into the bathroom, sat down in a toilet stall, and promptly started sobbing.

There's nothing quite like feeling as if you're no longer valued as a person at work, but as a unit of human capital.

After the first wave of shock tears poured out of my eyes, I could feel a new sensation erupting: a tsunami of righteous rage. How could someone who said to "take all the time I needed" tell me in the next breath that I had to make a near-instant decision — and that I wasn't actually that valuable to the company?

In that moment of realization, something inside of me snapped.

I thought, *"This place is not worth this. There has got to be a better way to make a living."*

For the first time, I realized there were things in my life that were more important than my career. My work was not my worth, and my worth and humanity were not contingent on my work product either. If a company wasn't going to honor that, they didn't deserve me anymore.

Despite feeling out of alignment with my core values of freedom, family, and meaningful work, my job had stuff going for it that made it hard to leave. I was on a rocket ship zooming up the corporate ladder, which fed my ego. I was making good money, which allowed me to honor my value of financial stability. I was challenged every day, which, as a learning junkie, I loved. Since it spoke to some of my values, I'd felt conflicted about the company and the role for a long time, but always ended up sticking it out another week.

But that moment shifted the sands within me. It made me realize that no matter how nice those perks were, if my core values weren't being met, I needed to leave. I'd never be truly happy or fulfilled at a company that didn't honor my values or treat me humanely. So I gave myself permission to start looking for an escape route out of that job... while also booking my ticket back to Ohio for my grandfather's memorial service.

That very night, after I hopped off the subway and walked home to my shared apartment, I was ready to operationalize my "that's it, I'm out of here" energy. Rage is a great motivator. I threw on sweatpants, hopped onto the couch, fired up my computer, and started searching for new jobs.

After I opened up my laptop and loaded up LinkedIn, the first step was to start figuring out: what did I want to do next? A deceptively simple question. Despite being good at the work, I hadn't loved what I was doing at the consulting firm, and I'd never really invested time thinking about what I'd want to grow into for the next chapter. I knew the things I definitely *didn't* want again, but wasn't sure what would fit me better. So my initial job searching ideas that night were full of "maybes" and half-baked hypotheses: *"Maybe leaving corporate America will solve things."* *"Maybe I need to go work for one company whose mission I love so I don't feel like a mercenary every day."* *"Maybe I'll feel more valued if I get a raise or a new title."*

As I perused the job boards, I found a startup just outside D.C. that sounded right up my alley. I'd be working to give people greater educational opportunities, democratizing access to the most prestigious universities' programs, and making academia flexible and responsive to people's busy lives. It sounded like a dream.

I opened up an online application to the first job at the company that looked like a pretty good fit. Spent hours updating my resume with the right keywords to get past their applicant tracking software and get an opportunity for an interview. After I'd proofread my materials one last time, I pressed "submit," crossed my fingers, and waited.

A week passed, and... nothing.

Like a woman possessed, I was undeterred. I applied online to the next role at the company that seemed like a strong match. Tailored my cover letter and resume to perfection once again. Submitted it mere hours after the job was posted. And, still crickets.

Finally, I thought to myself, *"I'm not going to settle for their silence. I'd be a great fit at this company. I need to up my job search game."*

I knew that tailoring a resume and cover letter wasn't enough to actually differentiate myself from any other candidates, so I decided to play all-out and use more effective job searching tactics (that we'll

describe in Phase 3 of this book) to land an interview and a job offer that perfectly fit my salary requirement within a week.

Beyond the sweet, vengeful satisfaction of putting in my notice at the consulting firm and telling that senior leader that I would never tolerate being treated like that ever again, I was on Cloud 9 because this new job looked perfect on paper. They had custom-created a management-level role for me — the first of its kind for the department. It was a nice pay raise, affording me the ability to buy a fancy new car. The office was close to family. I'd be managing multi-million-dollar advertising campaigns each month, which would definitely stretch me beyond the role I'd had at my last gig. And everyone said I'd really impressed them in the job interview, so I felt like I could float right into the job.

The first few weeks were magical. Literally. The company was holding an all-hands meeting in Disney, and, as a new hire, I'd just made the cut and snagged the final plane ticket to Florida.

But after the “new job” sparkle wore off and I was settling into my fifth week at the company, I started wondering if I'd made a terrible mistake. Again.

The role wasn't quite as it had been described. I had the title of manager but didn't manage anyone. I didn't manage any projects either. Instead, I was an analyst, staring at performance metric spreadsheets for 8 hours a day, every single day — and even though I *like* Excel spreadsheets and know my way around a PivotTable, it was too mind-numbing for me. Instead of using my strategic vision and team management capabilities, I was debating how many characters we could include in an ad headline. I was doing the jobs of more senior folks on other marketing teams better than they were, but wasn't able to do my own data crunching job to my boss' satisfaction. Instead of feeling like a sparkly promotion, it felt like a punishment.

The feeling of floundering wasn't even the worst part. The worst part was the team's culture.

The corporate culture was all about social gatherings, holding company-wide parties and shutting down productivity for the day to celebrate major holidays. But this team took the party atmosphere to the next level. There was a lot of drinking — to the point that on a business trip, there was an expectation that the entire group would go out drinking heavily together, with leadership footing the bill. The team was

overwhelmingly white dudes, so intoxicated shenanigans would follow these boozy team meetings, including drunken pushup competitions in dress clothes in hotel lobbies and on dirty street sidewalks. Choosing to stay sober or have a night in felt like self-ostracization and career suicide.

It wasn't just the concerning use of alcohol. The higher up someone got on the team, the more disrespectful they seemed to be to their direct reports. The more these supervisors treated their employees like they were idiots — in our open office where everyone could hear — the more they were protected by leadership when complaints were filed about their behavior. This team essentially controlled the company's profitability and was overflowing with 20-somethings who hadn't learned the full extent of professionalism, respectfulness, or collaboration.

I had a really difficult relationship with a particular director on the team. Her performance was directly contributing to how I was measured, but when our metrics would falter, she wouldn't explain why or how to fix it. She was constantly short with me when I asked her clarifying questions and wouldn't implement any of my ideas. I'd gone to my boss asking for suggestions on how to get what I needed from her so I could meet my performance objectives, and hadn't received helpful suggestions.

One day, my boss pulled us both into a conference room to have a meeting.

"Finally," I thought. "We can talk about how this relationship isn't working."

My boss asked her to share why we were having the meeting. In the 12 minutes that followed, she berated me in front of my boss. No requests for a different way of working together. No acknowledgments of how we were playing for the same team and working toward the same goals. Just airing her anger about how my efforts to find ways to work together was undermining her authority.

My mouth fell open. I felt my chest tighten. Shame, embarrassment, rage, grief, and betrayal all started washing over me. My boss wasn't standing up for me, this person's disrespectfulness was being empowered, and I'd foolishly believed there was hope for a way we could work better together.

I couldn't hold it together any longer. I started bawling, right there in front of both of them. (Thank goodness this conference room didn't have glass walls.)

In that moment, I realized some of my non-negotiable values had been violated again — but they were different values this time. I had a lot more freedom in this role and was located super close to family, but in my gut, it became clear that if I wasn't feeling respected or treated humanely, the freedom and location didn't matter anymore.

The conflict of seeking out work that better fit some of my values, only to have other values betrayed, was confusing and disorienting.

I felt like Goldilocks on a never-ending search for the perfect bowl of professional porridge: this one tastes too cold, this one is too hot, this one's too toxic. I'd done so many internships in college across different industries and in my twenties had already tried working in nonprofits, consulting, and now at a startup. I felt like a corporate failure, which is a terrifying prospect for someone with decades left in the working world.

The self-doubt and lingering questions crept back in: *Is there even a "right" job for me out there? Why couldn't I just figure it out? Was I just acting entitled, foolishly believing that I could have a job where I enjoyed solving problems that were meaningful for me at a company with a healthy culture and in a way that paid me well? Was it possible to feel satisfied in corporate work?*

I couldn't accept that I'd always been so eager to grow up and finally be an "adult" in the "real world," and was now decidedly arriving at adulthood only to feel overwhelmed, underappreciated, and ready to abandon the pipe dream of doing meaningful work.

I remember thinking, *"If this is what 'adulthood' is, don't sign me up. I don't want it. I refuse to resign myself to being dead in the eyes and becoming a corporate drone for the next few decades. There's got to be another way."*

This persistent belief — that there had to be a better way to work — combined with my desire to avoid re-experiencing the pain in my early career sent me down the path of obsessively researching the drivers of career fulfillment. Life felt far too short to do work for decades on end that dulled my flame. We all deserve to feel lit up and alive in our work!

That realization turned me into a woman on a mission for the next few years: figure out how to crack open these nagging career satisfaction questions to find the joy and keep from experiencing so much anxiety, stress, and pain around work. While I held down that toxic job to keep paying the bills in the short term, I dove deeply into the data about how to finally find the career that fits all your values and needs.

The existing research on career fulfillment wasn't hopeful, at least at first. I realized I wasn't alone in having unsatisfying professional experiences. The first major body of workplace research I discovered, from the Conference Board, joyfully reported that the employee satisfaction data they gathered in 2018 was at a 20-year high... with a whopping 54% of employees feeling "satisfied" by their work.

"Satisfied." That's the bar. And barely more than half of American employees are reaching it.

Job site Monster did a worldwide study of work satisfaction, and the global results are similarly disappointing: Canadians are the highest at 64%, but only 46% of Brits and 43% of the French report loving or strongly liking their work.

Besides crying in the bathroom at work, there are plenty of other consequences for our global dissatisfaction at work. Work unhappiness has the capability to spill over and suck away the joys inside our personal lives, too, if left unchecked.

Maybe you've come home drained and can only muster up enough energy to watch Netflix with a glass of wine. You definitely don't have the motivation or gas left in the tank to pursue your dream of starting a nonprofit, writing a book, or running a marathon. "*Not right now,*" you tell yourself. Maybe you're noticing that you're coping with your dissatisfying day job in other ways: skipping morning workouts in favor of pulling the covers back up over your head. Or desperately relying on intense physical activity every day to let off steam and frustration. Feeling sluggish. Having a couple extra mimosas (or doughnuts, or hits of weed) at brunch to take the edge off. Avoiding confrontational conversations. Yelling at your kids after work for something trivial when you didn't mean to but couldn't stop yourself. Watching your phone's average screen time report slowly creep up, week after week.

How we feel about our work has the possibility to seep into and infect every other part of our lives.

Can you imagine what our world would look like if people enjoyed — nay, even loved — their work?

We would have more energy. Studies show that doing work you're good at and that you enjoy gives you energy instead of sucking it away. More energy means more productivity within our jobs, more capacity to give to family and friends outside of work. We'd feel motivated to exercise or play with our kiddos or write our first novel after work because we'd still have gas left in the tank.

We'd perform better because we'd care more. Research shows that performance at work improves by anywhere from 12-36% when you like your work and feel your contributions make a difference. Better performance usually means more promotions, raises, eligibility for bonuses, additional challenging responsibilities, and higher job security.

We would also be happier. As Elle Woods, the unlikely lawyer from *Legally Blonde* brilliantly stated in her client's court defense: "Happy people just don't shoot their husbands." There are a lot of things genuinely happier people don't do as often, like numb out with alcohol, drugs, or other coping substances. Consistently happier people have more emotional resilience to weather the challenges of life and often extend more empathy and compassion to others who are struggling.

Our lives might even feel more meaningful. One of the biggest predictors of mental health and fulfillment across studies is a sense of groundedness and meaning in your life: you feel like your life is purposeful and you exist for a reason. The data tends to show that the healthiest, most stable individuals have a deep sense of spiritual connection to purpose in their lives. Work that validates or enhances a sense of meaning, purpose, and impact can legitimately improve the quality of our lives.

By reading this book, you are taking a step toward creating this more energized, happy, meaningful world. That's why this career pathing work lights my soul on fire: it creates a life improvement ripple effect both within you and far beyond you.

As an example, there were certainly positive ripples from Julia's career change. Julia was a special education teacher in inner city Chicago, and she needed to get out of teaching. As much as she was

passionate about her work and loved the impact she made, the lifestyle and stress weren't a fit for her bigger dreams of traveling and serving bigger communities. After moving through the Career Clarity process, Julia transitioned from education into a program manager role at a nonprofit that allowed her work to have local and global impact, and even allowed her to bring a friend with her to travel abroad each year on the company dime. Finding a job that's in alignment with your values, empowers you to live out your travel dreams, and increases your ability to understand and empathize with other cultures is a great ripple.

Or, your wave might look similar to the one Matt created. He worked in a sector that most people covet: international development. He'd worked his ass off to get into the field but was feeling like his growth, impact, and earning potential had all stalled. Matt felt disconnected from what he liked or even who he was, and was phoning it in at work. That stale energy started to trickle into his marriage and into his workouts, leaving him feeling less alive. Through reconnecting with his values and the areas in which he wanted to grow, Matt made the transition into a joyful role supporting nonprofits with their growth and development from the private sector, while also nurturing his dream to add more writing back into his life.

Notice that each of these stories is wildly different. Each person who walks through the Career Clarity process defines values and success on their own terms.

My mission is to show underfulfilled people that life is too short to work a job that doesn't light you up — and if you're willing to explore what success means for you, there's a real-deal framework to find work that will ignite you and fulfill you at every stage of your career.

Ready to learn the framework to successfully climb to your career summit?

Looking for more??!

If you loved what you've seen so far and are hungry to read the rest of *Career Clarity*, you can purchase your own full-length copy of the book at GetCareerClarity.com/Book.

Inside the complete book, I've included a special link that takes you directly to a resource bank to teach you how to apply the principles and concepts in your own life. It includes worksheets, podcast interviews, a book discussion guide, and more, and it's completely free for you as a thank you for buying and reading the book. Enjoy!

In addition, you can learn more about The Career Clarity Show podcast and subscribe at GetCareerClarity.com/Podcast.

And, if you're interested in learning about our intensive programs to guide you through a career change, step-by-step, [visit our Programs page here](#).

About the Author

If there's a job out there, Lisa Lewis Miller has probably done it. Lisa is a career change expert and the founder of Career Clarity, a company helping individuals step into the careers they've been dreaming of.

Her path evolved into coaching after working in digital marketing for nearly a decade at companies like 2U, Edelman, the American Cancer Society, *Teen Vogue*, *Seventeen*, Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship, and CBS College Sports.

Lisa's work has been featured in *The Washington Post*, *Business Insider*, *US News and World Report*, *Fast Company*, *Forbes*, *Refinery29*, and more. Clients praise her ability to see through their excuses, champion their possibilities, and give resume reviews that are like "purifying hellfire."

Lisa is from Colorado and received her bachelor's degree in economics from Barnard College in New York City.

If you're looking for someone who will believe in your potential career happiness as strongly as you do — and help equip you with the ideas and resources to make it happen — you can learn more about Lisa's work at [GetCareerClarity.com](https://www.getcareerclarity.com).