

# Ten career tasks to keep moving forwards.

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1 Make your CV more effective as a marketing document.</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2 Make your whole digital profile work for you.</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3 Develop your capacity to grow through effort and stress.</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4 Make sure you're giving and receiving the care that these times call for.</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>5 Clarify your executive priorities.</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>6 Get fully resourced.</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>7 Get clear on the talents you can bring to a future role.</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>8 Reflect on your career purpose – is it shifting?</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>9 Nurture the professional community of which you're the centre.</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>10 Expand your community.</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Further action</b>	<b>9</b>

## Introduction

Executive careers follow a cycle that entails high-intensity roles and high-intensity, high stakes transitions. With executive tenures shortening, it can feel like life is a continuous transition. Executive success requires that you have a clear career strategy and execute it continuously, regardless of the other demands of roles and personal life.

The pandemic and its economic fallout make it even more important to take strategic action on your career. Action in the face of uncertainty and complexity. Action that develops resilience, ignites opportunity and inspires others.

You have the chance to build the new future that has become possible and necessary. It's not simple or easy, wherever you are in the cycle - leading an organisation, seeking a new role or contributing as an advisor or board member.

This short workbook outlines some questions that have helped my clients move forwards in their careers, whatever the challenges they've been facing. They're brief but go deep and I believe will provoke similar insight and action on your career strategy.

Some tasks will stand out as particularly relevant, for you, in your immediate circumstances. Others may not be so important. Focus on your top three tasks, think them through with your close support group and take some action right away.

These tasks have proven helpful over the past 20 years in helping senior executives, CEOs and partners in professional firms to get out of an intelligent but limited pattern of thinking and turn new insights into real world initiatives.

Thanks for taking the time to do this work. It's a simple, first level way of addressing career tasks, but can lead to positive results in your career and the organisations you touch.

It's the work that ultimately makes life better for all those you care for.

## 1 Make your CV more effective as a marketing document.

Since Leonardo da Vinci invented the CV in 1482, it has evolved. It is now expected to do different work. One of your CVs is an historical document, from which someone can infer your talents. An executive CV is an influence document that markets you.

1. Does your CV clearly set out your 3 executive **talents** in the first paragraphs?
2. Is it clear in what **circumstances** you excel?
3. Does it show the brief **evidence** for what you say?
4. Does it suggest how you're **developing** in response to new challenges?

## 2 Make your whole digital profile work for you.

The paper document is not enough. Hiring managers and recruiters use the whole internet to find out about you. Yet the focus on a traditional CV means you could be neglecting your online presence. You need to ensure the online message is the one you want people to see.

1. Is your **LinkedIn profile** complete and in line with your executive CV, board profiles, company profiles and mentions of you in other documents?
2. Are your latest **achievements** visible through interviews or articles? (within limits of confidentiality etc)
3. Do you like what you find when you **google your name**? Are there three simple things you could do to improve that?
4. Is there a 'trail' of your **comments** on blogs, articles, YouTube videos or elsewhere that aligns with your professional interests and insights?

### 3 Develop your capacity to grow through effort and stress.

Your success depends on your resilience; indeed the term 'antifragile' means more than recovery from stress but getting more robust through challenges. This is a lifetime's learning that calls for attention to your cognitive, emotional and physical resilience.

1. Do you have trusted ways to properly relax and **recover**? (Do you recognise that recovery is as important as effort for elite performers?)
2. Are you maintaining appropriate standards of physical **fitness**?
3. Are you making sure you get the right quality and quantity of **sleep**?
4. Are you helping your **professional friends** pursue their health and wellness strategies?

### 4 Make sure you're giving and receiving the care that these times call for.

The statistics for mental health this year are making it a critical issue in society at large and in many organisations. It has highlighted how **caring** is now a driver of success. And leaders need care too.

1. Are you nurturing the people you most care about and making that **circle of care** wide enough?
2. Are you asking for the chance to **express yourself**, so that you can embrace your fears and anxieties, as well as hopes and aspirations?
3. Do you have a regular time to **meditate** on Self-compassion, Gratitude and Abundance?

*If everything is becoming overwhelming, please reach out to the professionals – anxiety, stress, depression & despair are all normal and the right professionals can help endure them, move past them and grow from the experience.*

## 5 Clarify your executive priorities.

In complex times, it's hard to make clear decisions. Everything is important and urgent, breaking or broken. Prioritising is crucial and that's an executive's key task.

1. What are the three survival **issues** for your career?
2. How are they also **opportunity** areas?
3. What professional **capabilities** do you need to use – or acquire – to deal with them?

## 6 Get fully resourced.

We can't do it all alone. You need to design and attract the support that complements the strengths you bring and are relevant to the challenges you face..

1. What is that helps you be **the best you can be**?
2. **Map the talents** around you as they relate to the big issues you face. How can you help your supporters learn & grow as they join you in the task?
3. **Reach out** – to mentors, past colleagues, other professionals you admire. Could you phone three of them this week? Support is mutual, so they'll welcome the call.

## 7 Get clear on the talents you bring to a complex role.

An executive role is more than the job. There are tasks that demand talents beyond the technical or managerial. I've listed them below in simple terms. Some will stand out for you – value them, as they are your secret sauce! Each is an area of development and learning in itself.

### Rank the following:

1. I get **the job** done well, according to the Position Description, with time to spare.
2. I build and develop great **teams**.
3. I express deeply held **values** through my work and help others do the same.
4. I embrace the whole **organisation** and make it hum.
5. I design and drive the core intangible **assets** of the organisation: influence, reputation, culture and strategic coherence.
6. I exemplify and systematise technical **excellence**.
7. I work the **vision**.
8. I manage the boundary with **stakeholders**; it is a state of mutual support.
9. I make the strategic intent – the Big **Aims** – real and in-process.

## 8 Reflect on your career purpose – is it shifting?

As we mature, purpose feels less like an arrow to a single destination; it becomes a sustained state of being. This version of purpose comes to life when you can answer these four key elements of work.

1. What is the right **work** for you at this stage of life?
2. Who are the right **people** for you to be working with?
3. What **energises** you professionally and personally?
4. What **rewards** for your work are right? Are you clear about the relative importance of time demands, tempo, variety, status, collegiality, security, money, growth, influence, meaning, fun..... etc.

## 9 Nurture the professional community of which you're the centre.

Careers depend on professional community. This includes your influencers - those who have more experience or scope than you – and your peers. It also includes younger people who can 'reverse mentor' you on their areas of expertise. How well engaged are you with that vital community?

1. Are you taking the initiative to be engaged with your **influencers and mentors**, asking for their insights and sharing your perspectives?
2. Are you taking the initiative to connect with your **peers**, both offering help and asking for it (even if you haven't spoken in a while)?
3. Are you turning up as part of the **solution** by testing ideas, sharing research and encouraging innovation amongst your colleagues?

## 10 Expand your community.

The next stage of your career will involve new people, but you have to find them. It's more than 'networking', it's engaging at a deeper level with people who share your passions and values, where there's mutuality and not just a transaction.

1. Are you **helping others connect**, setting up online sessions where you can't meet in person?
2. Are you working on **relationships**, deepening them and bringing them into your world in a more intimate way?
3. Are you putting in extra to engage with your closest **professional friends**, to make sure they are coping and finding new ways to enjoy their careers?

## Further action

Now that you've come this far, take a note of the questions that struck you hardest. They may look like they need complicated action, but simple acts such as a phone call, creating a list, crafting a statement or running a short brainstorming session, when you've done the background thinking, can set a lot of pieces into motion.

**Make a note below of the three things you can do within the next few days that relate to these questions.**

**Check in with yourself in two weeks and see how your thinking about your top questions has changed as the result of the actions you've taken.**

1. Action:

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Check-in reflection:

2. Action:

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Check-in reflection:

3. Action:

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Check-in reflection:

Thanks for downloading and working through this workbook. I'd be interested in learning which questions provoked you the most to action, so that I can continue to polish the workbook and improve its value to you! Email me directly at [sean@seanspence.com.au](mailto:sean@seanspence.com.au) with this or any other feedback.

Good luck on your executive journey!  
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