

My Top 5 Books for Job Searchers & Career Changers

When working with careers clients, there are various tools, methodologies and techniques that I draw upon dependent on the needs of the client. In addition to providing clients with workbooks – where relevant I provide additional reading. Below I have listed my five most recommended careers related books and why.



Fierce Conversations, author Susan Scott

It is a terrific book that offers a framework for having difficult or challenging conversations at work or home. In some instances having the challenging conversation can sometimes ease a difficult situation at work that is contributing to dissatisfaction or provide the vehicle in which to have that career conversation about where you really want to be working within the organisation. Without having these conversations you can overlook ideal career opportunities that maybe right in front of you! It must be added that this book is a challenging one to get through with a lot of exercises to apply the strategies – however well worth the effort.

Business Model U, author Tim Clark

What Colour is Your Parachute by Richard Bolles has stood the test of time and is a great career resource. However Business Model U offers a more contemporary take on the career change

front leveraging a business minded approach to the task. It is based on the structure of creating a business plan and provides practical information in small chunks, including activities and stories by other career changers on how they did it. An appealing book for those who like a more pragmatic approach.

The Happiness Trap, author Russ Harris

Changing jobs or careers requires a lot of time and dedication and with it comes a lot of rejection. Maintaining a positive state of mind can be tough as applications go unanswered, interviewers don't give you 'real' feedback or update you and all you seem to be receiving are countless verbal and emailed no thank you's. In my recent post ['How to Tame the Internal Critic when Job Seeking'](#) I explain how the internal critic within can blare more loudly when you are making a career related change. This book offers practical and easy to apply techniques to help control the internal critic. It is an easy and enjoyable read and one that will help you get through the job search or career change process more confidently.

How to Master Networking, author Robyn Henderson

Networking can be enjoyable – it just depends on how you approach it. If you view it as simply an opportunity to learn new things and meet interesting new people it can take the sting out of the process. In her book, 'How to Master Networking', Robyn Henderson offers practical and easy to apply techniques to improve your networking ability and enjoyment. It is a career essential and particularly relevant for professionals and executives to master.

The First 90 Days, author Michael Watkins

While 'The First 90 Days' relates to how best to use your time once in the job, it is also incredibly relevant when going through the interview process. As a professional or executive going through the interview process if you can share your ideas and a high level strategy of how you would execute in the role the interviewer cannot help but be impressed. It is

this preparation and strategic thinking that makes the top candidates stand out from the others. This book offers a framework of how to succeed both in the interview and once in the role. It is very detailed offering a step by step approach.

While these are some of my favourite books to assist job and career changers, I would welcome hearing about your favourite books.

Status Anxiety & Its Impact on Our Careers

Do you suffer from status anxiety at work? Alain De Botton has done a terrific job in his book 'Status Anxiety' explaining how and why most of us are 'consciously or unconsciously' status orientated in life and work. As the excerpt below from his book clarifies so succinctly.



"This is a book about an almost universal anxiety that rarely

gets mentioned directly: an anxiety about what others think of us; about whether we're judged a success or a failure, a winner or a loser. This is a book about status anxiety. We care about our status for a simple reason: because most people tend to be nice to us according to the amount of status we have (it is no coincidence that the first question we tend to be asked by new acquaintances is 'What do you do?')."

My interest is how status anxiety relates to our careers – our worklife in fact. I think it starts with our parents. They can have a huge influence over our careers and how we view career status. As adults we tend to hear our parents engaging in job title status related discussions with their friends about how well X,Y, and Z are doing in their careers. There is nothing worse than having to listen to your parents tell you how well your contemporaries are doing on the workfront and or their partners! Worse still when you are unemployed! Many parents seem to want to show how 'successful' their children are and having status orientated job titles and jobs seems to be an effective way of doing this. Unfortunately a great sounding job title does not equal job happiness – and when do you parents brag to others about your job happiness?

While job titles are not all bad, a negative aspect is that they are a label and labels can be misleading. They can also lead to segregation and all sorts of other negative associations. Job titles can be truly un-helpful in our careers as people may not look too much into the content of the job but rather be swayed by the job title. From resumes to job ads to workplaces – a great sounding job title seems to give you a lot more status and career progression. The content of the job seems to play second fiddle to the title!

While I don't expect this to change anytime soon, I do believe there are a few ways to manage status when it comes to job seeking.

What is behind the job title?

It begins with looking beyond the job title when job seeking and looking at the content of the job ad and position description (if available). Don't be fooled by a great sounding job title or put off by a lame one. Sometimes people don't apply for their dream job because it has been mislabelled and they think they are over or under qualified. I have seen this occur on a regular basis. If you are not sure, do as much due diligence as you can on and offline around the job. A good place to start is [ONet](#) if you are not sure about certain job types and titles.

Selling your achievements

When job seeking your job title can hold a lot of weight and in those instances when your job title does not reflect the core job and what you have achieved, it is important to include relevant achievements stories. While listing your responsibilities is good, achievement stories have a much greater impact on the reader. If you can flesh out your transferable skills that are aligned with the job you are targeting and demonstrate these in achievement stories it can help position you better.

Job titles

I certainly don't advocate making up jobs you have done however if your employer has given you a completely obscure or irrelevant job title that is not relevant to what you do, then it is fair to change this to be more aligned with what the general market uses. An ill fitting job title means that recruiters may overlook your experience. So if for example your job title is Accountant and only a small part of what you do is the actual accounting work and the remainder is more operations and staff management, you may be better for example to have either, Operations Manager or a combined Accountant / Operations Management. You could even try to get your employer to change your job title if you have a good business case to do so.

Networking

Networking is important in the job search as a resume cannot do justice to your career to date and where you want it to go and why. This comes through best when you meet with people face to face and they can see your passion and listen first hand to your story. Putting yourself in networking situations that are relevant to what you are targeting on the job front is a must. It avoids the focus being so much on what your current job title is and enables you to talk about what you want to be doing in your next role and what you bring.

At different times throughout our careers, job titles can have both a positive and a negative impact. In those instances where your job title is not working for you (as highlighted above) there are a few things you can do to better position yourself and your career.

Please share your views on status anxiety and how it relates to our careers.

Insightful Interview
Preparation Questions

It is always a challenge to know what questions to prepare for an interview. It can also seem that the questions asked by the interviewer have no logic or real purpose behind them – this is rarely the case.



I found an insightful post by Yscouts called '[15 Outstanding Executive Interview Questions](#)'. They are a pretty good selection of questions to start from as they give you an explanation as to why they are being asked and therefore what the interviewer is looking for you to respond with.

For example:

Teach me something I don't already know.

A good friend of mine informed me of a brilliant question that is asked from the top heads at Google during the hiring process. The candidate is asked some iteration of, "teach me something I don't already know." The candidate then has to quickly think of something unique on the spot to teach that will effectively portray their intellect and personality.

What are your goals?

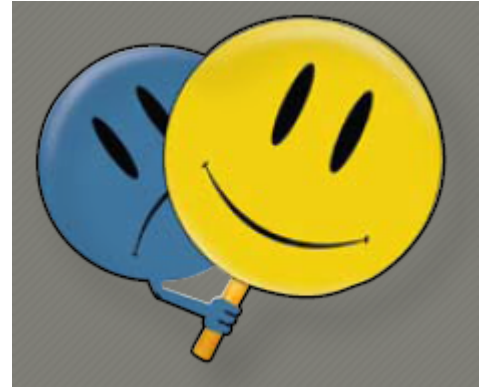
I find this question helps me understand what motivates a potential hire and sheds light as to whether she would be a good fit. I am a big believer in 'fit' and this question goes a long way. People draw motivation from different sources, and understanding that from the outset is very helpful in building a successful relationship.

If you are going through the interview process you may find these [15 interview preparation questions](#) very valuable.

What are some of the better interview questions you have asked or been asked?

How to Tame the Internal Critic when Job Seeking

Have you ever experienced moments of self doubt? Do you sometimes have that internal critic playing in your head telling you that you are not good enough, that you cannot achieve your goals, that you are not smart enough, successful enough, attractive enough? You get the picture. We all experience these moments however for some of us the internal critic can be louder and more frequent than others.



The internal critic can come and go. A time where the internal critic can really be blaring is when you are looking to change jobs or careers. You are regularly putting yourself out there in the marketplace for others to make judgements about you – how you look, talk, your experience and your skills. Unfortunately rejection is inevitable – forcing you to question whether you are the right person for that job or the new career. For some of us when we have this constant ‘rejection’ it can slowly erode at our self esteem making the goal of securing your next job seem impossible.

The good news is there are ways you can manage this which Russ Harris outlines in his wonderful book [‘The Happiness Trap’](#). As Russ highlights in our society, it is thought that we should all be happy all of the time, which is not realistic (particularly when job seeking). The reason he says “is that the things we generally value in life come with a whole range of feelings both pleasant and unpleasant.” Added to this, “we

have less control over our thoughts and feelings than we would like.”

Our ‘unrealistic’ expectations around happiness can only lead to disappointment and hence the internal critic comes in. In his book he talks about the theory of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), a mindfulness based program for overcoming negative thoughts and moments of stress, fear and self doubt. While I will not elaborate on the theory of ACT and mindfulness here, I can illustrate a tiny piece of it with the following;

When job seeking you may experience some of the following thoughts:

- “I am not good enough to get a new job”
- “Why would anyone want to hire me, I don’t have enough experience”
- “I won’t get the promotion because I am not the top performer”
- “They will not hire me, I am not smart enough”
- “I can’t make a career change, I am not too old”

If these are playing too frequently in your mind it is easy to see why your self esteem can plummet. A technique in ACT is to ‘name the story’ and thereby acknowledge the thought. For example the thought “Why would anyone want to hire me, I don’t have enough experience” may become ‘the job seeker story.’ By acknowledging and naming the story you can then decide to let it be and move on or to let it keep repeating. A detailed explanation of this technique can be found in’ [The Happiness Trap.](#)’

A month or so ago I was lucky enough to attend an event that Russ Harris was speaking at. I was so pleased to see that Russ was everything you would hope having read his book. He is an open, easy going, fun and authentic man. His passion came through and his demonstrations of mindfulness were engaging.

Russ is very open in his book at his personal challenges with the internal critic and how ACT has changed this.

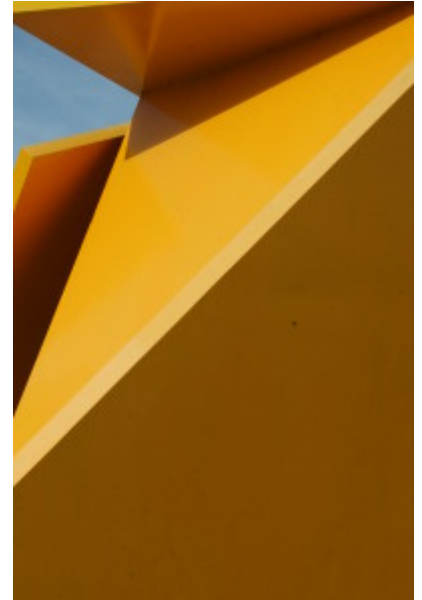
If you do find the internal critic playing a bit too loud I would encourage you to buy or loan a copy of [‘The Happiness Trap’](#). There is a lot of information in the book about ACT with further information and exercise being freely available online. I have found the book to be a wonderful resource for myself and for my careers clients. It is logical and straightforward to implement in your life.

What I am hoping to impart with this post is that it is common for all of us to experience the internal critic playing in our heads – that this is not unique to just a select few. This as mentioned is magnified when changing jobs or careers and there are terrific resources and people who can assist you.

Please share your tips and insights on this topic.

Trends in the Careers Landscape

Recently I was invited to be a guest speaker on the topic of careers at a [Polson & Co](#) HR Discussion Group hosted by a wonderful HR Thought Leader Reg Polson.



The topic was on 'Life Stages & Career Decisions' which was terrific particularly given we had representatives from each of the life stages present to discuss the realities and challenges of working life in Australia.

Trends discussed include:

- There is a lack of engagement and job satisfaction by Australian employees. Some research citing that 65% of employees are not satisfied in their jobs. This can be supported by the topics that Daniel Pinks book 'drive' details. While he states most people want autonomy, mastery and purpose in their work, many organisations are still working on 'chain & command' models from the industrial age.
- Recent research shows that for an Australian professional to advance their career their best chance is to go to a new company. Unfortunately we are not a good country for promoting from within and developing our talent.
- We hire people who have done the same job before with little room for growth and then wonder why with professionals you can expect a quarter to leave with the first 12 months. See ['Hiring Hell One in Four Quit Within a Year'](#) This links with the lack of career support

and not promoting talent from within.

- An increase in people taking 'career breaks' which is expected to grow due to redundancy, caring for kids, elderly parents, burnout.
- Growth in personal branding is expected to continue online and offline. This is based on the increasing number of career changes we can all expect to go through, combined with the increase in contracting and self employment and the need to re-invent and re-brand ourselves.
- Careers are no longer linear. As Dr. Jim Bright explains in his ['Chaos Theory of Careers'](#). Change is dynamic and continual. The theory is not saying we cannot control our careers and that everything is random. It more suggests adopting different strategies to managing our careers. The focus is around planning and looking for opportunities. Given things are forever changing and we now live in a world of VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity), it is about identifying strategic opportunities. As such we need to be more nimble and opportunistic in how we manage our careers.
- There is a growth in female professionals being desired by employers. There are still issues with female part time workers and the jobs available however for full time female working professionals – they are in demand. It is suggested women will continue to dominate in the workplace. See ['It's a Woman's World'](#) article.
- For younger people there is the growing opportunity to have a global career. Which brings with it a global mindset and being culturally aware. Added to this for younger workers, self awareness skills are becoming crucial for career success as is the ability to cope with ambiguity. For skills of the future visit the [Future work skills](#) report.

These are just a few of the trends we are seeing in the careers landscape. If you have any comments or any others to

please share.

Contemplating a Career Change? Have you considered a Vocation Vacation?

If you have done the preliminary work (*either by yourself or with a coach*) spending time reflecting on the below areas – you may well be ready to go on a ‘Vocation Vacation’.



- Core skills
- Work values
- Career highlights
- Past roles and managers
- Interests & passions
- Personal attributes
- Career goals

Having done the self reflection work, a good way to marry this up with the next part of the career change process – the career analysis and exploration, is to consider a ‘Vocation Vacation’. Chances are you have created a list of professions (vocations) that hold a degree of real interest. While doing online research about these professions via sites such as ONET is great, coupled with having face to face ‘informational interviews’ with people in these professions, the final part is to try before you buy!

You don't have to throw in the towel with your current employer to follow a hunch that this could be the right profession for you. If you have gone through the career change steps as described above, then having one or a few 'Vocation Vacations' will minimise the risk of making a wrong career move.

So how does the 'Vocation Vacation' work?

It is really straightforward. Again, once you have done all your research (*I cannot highlight enough that without the preparation it is hard to get someone to give you a go*) and have your list of target profession/s you can directly approach people to see if they will employ you short term. And by short term it is however much annual leave you have up your sleeve that you can dedicate to helping out in this new profession to really get a feel for what it is like working in it.

In the USA there are 'Vocation Vacation' companies who you can pay to assist you in securing a stint. Below are a few of the vocations on offer:

- Sports Announcer
- Professional Photographer
- Auctioneer
- Bed & Breakfast Manager
- Doggie Daycare Owner
- Architect
- Coffeehouse Owner
- Car Restorer
- Pit Crew Member

Another alternative option is to do volunteer work or approach the company on an internship or short term project capacity. In some instances you may be paid however it is most likely you will not be paid however remember you are still effectively getting paid as your using your annual leave.

Any opportunity to actually spend time in the profession/s you are targeting will be immensely valuable. You will learn both a lot about yourself and if this is truly the profession you want to dedicate the next few or many years of your life to.

Share your thoughts on taking a 'Vocation Vacation'. Is this something you have done before or would consider doing?

[Recommended Niche, Employer Direct & Not for Profit Job Sites](#)

While there are the big job sites to incorporate into your job search (*however don't rely too heavily on these*), there are also a great selection of niche job sites to explore for part time, full time, volunteer, committee, board and not for profit sector roles.

I encourage you to branch out if you are looking to make a job or career change or thinking about starting your board career.

[Our Community](#) – *great for board, committee and volunteer roles. I found my last committee role here which was terrific*

[Not for profit jobs](#) – *for a great selection of paid jobs in the nfp sector*

[Pro Bono Australia](#) – *for a mix of paid and unpaid roles and volunteer opportunities*

[Apply Direct](#) – *while recruiters form an essential part of job searching, it is also nice to have a site where you can find a*

selection of jobs directly from the hiring companies

[Lifestyle Careers](#) – a site that has stood the test of time helping those looking for more worklife balance

[Career Mums](#) – a great site with lots of jobs and information for women looking for part time and family friendly job opportunities

The above is a selection of some of the sites that I like, use and recommend. If you have any other great jobs sites please post or send through the details to add to the list.

[Power Posing – a technique that may improve your interview & meeting performance!](#)

When it comes to the job search process, rightly or wrongly how we present ourselves does play a role in our success. There are many aspects to how we present ourselves – from our clothing, hair, to our language, tone and also our body language. Our body language is one that often we neglect to work on – as we don't see it.



Its role in our career is important – as it is so very

telling. It lets people know if we are engaged, confident, defensive, happy, easy going and so on.

The topic fascinates me and I am regularly working with clients on this aspect of their job search. When I came across Amy Cuddy on TED, talking about body language and 'power poses' I was delighted. [Amy Cuddy – 'Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are'](#) is a brilliant video worth watching if you are interested in personal development. Her research suggests that if you hold a powerful position for 2 minutes, it can have a profound effect on how you feel – and ultimately how you come across to others. It could be just the interview preparation or meeting boost we all need!

There is also another link to a talk on the subject Amy Cuddy did on [CNN](#)

I am a true believer in the simple things often being the most effective – this is just an example of this at work. Let me know your thoughts.

Note: image provided by [Graffiterati](#)

[ONET – An Amazing Job Search & Careers Research Tool](#)

While [ONET](#) is a tool created by the US Government to present an extensive amount of jobs and industry data, it is a tool that can be successfully used by anyone looking to make a job or career change.


Some examples of how the site can be used:

- A search on Skills: for example 'complex problem solving' the site will bring up a list of jobs where complex problem solving skills play a key part. From here you can then find out more about these jobs.
- A search on Career Clusters (*Career Clusters contain occupations in the same field of work that require similar skills*) for example 'business, management & administration' will again bring up a comprehensive list of jobs for you to review.

When you run various searches, each job is given a job outlook rating, in addition to a lot of background information about what the job entails, values, tools & technology and wage and employment trends.

[ONET](#) is a brilliant research tool that I would encourage anyone who is exploring job or career options to leverage.

Why finding the top performing recruiters can double your job search odds

[Recruitment Extra](#) is a monthly journal that I always enjoy  reading as the content offers a diverse range of perspectives and is always current and thought provoking. This post was not intended to be a plug for Recruitment Extra however given they do such a great job I thought it worth mentioning. The other reason is that it offers job seekers some good content to assist in understanding how the recruitment market works to better manage a job search or career change.

One of the articles in a recent addition that caught my eye was '[What does that top performer really look like](#)' by [Nigel Harse](#). The article was describing a top performing recruitment consultant, which was interesting. More interesting was the fact that it talks about 'candidate utilisation' which they state that with a top performer "candidate utilisation is also generally twice as good as the industry average which runs at approximately 10%-12% of people being interviewed that are placed." So, as a job seeker it is interesting to know your odds of securing a role are basically one in ten with a typical consultant. This stat indicates how hard you need to be working when it comes to job seeking to secure a role. It is a case of doing your own networking, contacting companies direct and meeting with a lot of recruiters – and where possible finding out who the top performing recruiters are to increase your odds!

The more you understand about how the recruitment process works, the more empowered you are as a job seeker, and hopefully you can achieve your goals in a quicker and less stressful fashion.