

# CareerActually

Career success

Job search

Expert Advice

Inspiring stories



## TEN BEST POSTS OF 2014

## WELCOME TO CAREERACTUALLY'S FIRST COLLECTION OF BEST POSTS

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When I started CareerActually in early 2014, my hope was it would grow to be a place for people to find practical career advice, connect to career experts, share their own experiences, and be inspired by others' career stories. More than 100 posts later and close to 10,000 views, I am pleased that more and more people are finding value at CareerActually.

In no small part this is due to the quality of the content that CareerActually's **contributors** provide – they are all talented people wanting to make a contribution to the development of others and, like me, learning as we go.

This e-book dips into that content to bring you 10 of the best posts of 2014 and a taste of the variety that *CareerActually* offers.

I hope you enjoy the read and good luck with your brilliant careers!



Carole Brown  
Founder, Career Actually

### *Carole*

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# 1 What does it actually mean to have a successful career?

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Carole Brown

May 4, 2014

Hi everyone, from a chilly day in Canberra, Australia! For those of you who don't know Australia well, Canberra is Australia's capital city and has been my home for the past 20 years. Here's a photo, to give you an idea of what it looks like.

Often people ask me – *What does it mean to have a successful career? What changes can I make to improve my situation at work?*

These questions are sometimes about making small changes to the way they go about their current job; improving their relationships with a couple of key people at work; learning new skills or planning a whole new career direction.



I always love to hear these and other questions because it usually means, that whoever is asking them, recognises that giving your career some regular attention is really important to your sense of direction and purpose, to your ability to perform and achieve well and to your overall happiness.

Take a look at the following definitions of *successful* and *career*.

*Successful (adj.) fruitful, positive, thriving, productive, flourishing, effective, real, authentic*

*Career (n.) vocation, job, profession, calling, business, livelihood*

You'll see that 'career' can take on a different meaning depending on how you think about it. Your career could be your business or profession. It could also be something that you definitely consider a calling – a path that you are really meant to be on. Or you may prefer to think about your career as the way you earn your livelihood and your current job, or a combination of all of these!

Whatever you choose to call your career to what extent, on a scale of 1 to 10, would you say that it is successful?

Managing your career successfully is about taking charge of what direction you are heading in by:

- being tuned in to who you are and what you want for yourself and others around you
- knowing what you have to offer
- keeping informed about opportunities
- having the confidence, focus and energy to set some goals, make decisions and take action to change what needs changing

It is really unwise to assume that if you perform your job well, that your career will take care of itself or that your boss will be there to support you. There are countless examples of people who have lost their jobs or where their workplace has gone 'sour', despite their ability and willingness to turn up every day and do an excellent job.

In order to manage your career you need to be proactive and flexible, be open to new ideas and opportunities, and able to ride out the bumps of less-than-ideal work situations. It also means that you pay attention to office politics, talk to key influencers and notice (and where possible be part of) the decisions that the organisation is making, and why. Most importantly, managing your career requires you to be prepared to make decisions to take you forward and act upon them.

What would it take to move your career in a positive direction along the scale of 10, say from a 5 to a 6 or 7, or an 8 to a 9?

Try this simple exercise:

- Identify one issue you have with your career or current job.
- What options or ideas do you have that could change it for the better?
- List 2-5 actions you could take to improve the situation. (Note: it is really important that you are confident that you can actually do the actions)
- Notice what results from the actions you take. Was there positive change?

You could do this exercise with a friend or work mate - often it's more fun and effective to do it that way.

I'd be delighted to know if something that you try works out for you. Any step forward, no matter how small is great progress! Also, if you would like a little guidance about how to go about this, [please let me know](#).

In one of my tip sheets - [How to Future -Proof Your Career](#) - you'll also find some other ideas about how to manage your career successfully.

Very few people have what they would describe as a 'perfect' career or job, but most people want to make some improvement and that's what we can all aim to do.



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## 2 The waves of change and the beach you're on

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Kyanne Smith

September 28, 2014

Recently I went to a presentation about workplace change. Thankfully, it wasn't the usual approach to the subject, although the presenter did acknowledge a few of the 'basics': *We know it's an ongoing, expected part of life at work. We know it's tricky, frightening, frustrating and sometimes exciting.* But on this occasion the topic was approached in a very refreshing way.

We were invited to the beach...*in our imagination.* We walked down to the water and felt the sand under our feet. Our colleagues were there too.... and then came the waves. Some small and easy to jump, and some were the ones that just pick you up and turn you over. The waves were the changes we experience in the workplace.

At a rather funny point in the presentation, we were introduced to a person on the beach with a loud speaker, shouting (not so helpful) information ... *"there's a wave coming, but we don't know how big... We'll get back to you when we know more"*. All the while you're still in the water and wondering what's going to hit you and when.

It got me thinking about the 'waves' in my workplace, which was a really good reminder about my own response to changes. In particular, it was a note of caution for me.... to be careful of what and who I listen to. I've come to know that some workplace 'announcements' aren't all that helpful. The people with the loud speakers don't always have the answers (or give accurate information). To use that old phrase, 'best to be alert, not alarmed'.

The presenter asked us an interesting question: *What helps us stay afloat?*



My mind presented me with an image from childhood – those orange inflatable ‘floaties’ that went on each arm. I loved those floaties when I was little because they made me feel safe. So I wondered what ‘floaties’ I use in life now? Upon reflection I realised I have a lot: fun and humour at work, time with my family and friends, getting outdoors, working in my garden, and continuing to learn new things. All these things help keep me buoyant. I found it really useful just to take a moment to remember this, from a different perspective.

I wonder..... how’s your beach looking right now? Are you swimming? Perhaps you’re looking for a new beach? Wherever you find yourself, we know something for certain- that the weather and the surf will change. In the positive words of Dory, from the film Finding Nemo, perhaps the thing to do is *‘just keep swimming’*....and remember to put your floaties on!



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## 3 You don't have to have a dream

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Julie Preston

November 12, 2014

Inspiration can turn up in the most unlikely of places. I recently stumbled on an old YouTube video and would like to share my reflections.

[Tim Minchin's biography](#) describes his career as “musician, composer, actor, comedian and writer”. In 2013 he gave the *Occasional Address* at a University of Western Australia graduation ceremony. The official YouTube video of his address has been viewed over 2 million times.



Tim spoke of *nine life lessons*. Despite professing “I’m certainly not here to give career advice, cos... well I’ve never really had what most would call a proper job”, Tim’s address contains thought and reflections that can be applied to developing a successful career:

1. You don’t have to have a dream.
2. Don’t seek happiness.
3. Remember, it’s all luck.
4. Exercise.
5. Be hard on your opinions.
6. Be a teacher.
7. Define yourself by what you love.
8. Respect people with less power than you.
9. Don’t rush.

The ‘lesson’ that resonated with me was his first, that you don’t have to have a dream. This is an excerpt from the transcript:

*... I never really had one of these big dreams. And so I advocate passionate dedication to the pursuit of short-term goals. Be micro-ambitious. Put your head down and work with pride on whatever is in front of you... you never know where you might end up. Just be aware that the next worthy pursuit will probably appear in your periphery. Which is why you should be careful of long-term dreams. If you focus too far in front of you, you won’t see the shiny thing out the corner of your eye.*

I was asked only last week “Where do you want to be in 5 years?” and I wasn’t even in an interview! As children we’re encouraged to imagine what we want to be when we grow up. Having dreams and goals to strive for can offer purpose and direction, and facilitate choices around career direction. However, too much focus on the dream robs enjoyment from now. We’re never quite there, never quite good enough.

And what happens [if the reality doesn’t live up to the dream](#)? I started University with the dream of becoming Professor Preston. The goal was fixed, and I knew the path to get me there... PhD... Postdoc... Fellowship... At the time I was so focused on my goal of Professor Preston that I was unwilling or unable to notice academia wasn’t really the right choice for me. After a few critical events at work, and conversations

with a trusted colleague and friend, I sought the guidance of a career mentor. We explored the reasons I had chosen an academic path, what I wanted to achieve in my life, my values and how academia wasn't fulfilling enough of those values for me.

**The goal had to change.** When I look back I recognise some big clues that I wasn't enjoying the path I had chosen. Academia can be very isolating, even more so because I had moved on my own half way around the world to start my postdoc. Experiments don't always work the first time, and sometimes not even the 10th time. I had the curiosity and enthusiasm to get started, but not the resilience to see my through long stretches of disappointing results, rejected papers and failed grant applications.

Almost as importantly, my mentor gave me the space to realise that leaving academia, setting aside my big goal and pursuing a different path did not make me a failure. It was a positive step forward in my career journey. The mentoring relationship was relatively short, but it completely changed my approach to work dreams and goals, resetting their degree of importance in my life.

In his address, Tim encourages us to pause, to look around and really see where we are right now. Opportunities and possibilities may present themselves from unexpected places if we only take the time to be aware.

After finishing my postdoc in the UK, I returned to Australia and retrained in Career Development. I have since worked to support academics on their career journeys, and currently coordinate a university student Career Mentor Program. I no longer have that big end goal that had been driving me for so long. Instead, I have a set of **values that guide my career choices.** I remain focused on the task at hand, but at the same time I'm aware of opportunities around me.

Keep hold of your dreams and ambitions, but don't let them cloud your enjoyment of today's possibilities.



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# 4 Being resilient through job search

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Carole Brown

July 15, 2014

Looking for a new job can be a stressful activity – uncertainty about the future, combined with potential knock backs, feeling trapped in a job, as well as financial pressures, can all combine to test the most resilient of us. Resilience is a concept we hear a lot about these days. I like to think about it as the capacity to survive and thrive in the face of setbacks and challenges. Resilience can be built by cultivating positive emotions, ensuring you have good support networks, remaining grounded in your values and being reasonable and realistic about your goals.

Here are 10 tips to improve your resilience through career transition and job search:

## **1. Adopt a positive and future-focused mindset.**

As difficult as this can sometimes be, especially if your job search is taking longer than you expected or hoped, try to think and act constructively and be around positive people that help you to be resilient and support your job search. Be open and alert to possibilities and remain confident about what you have to offer. Set some goals for each day, take action (however small) and look after yourself physically and emotionally.

## **2. Be realistic about your expectations**

It may take a while to secure your next job – this is normal, so be prepared for that. You may need to submit multiple applications and attend a range of interviews. As long as you are approaching your **job search efficiently**, then you will be on track. Please see my tip sheet [Fast Track Your Job Search](#) for some more information about how to do this.

## **3. Learn from feedback**

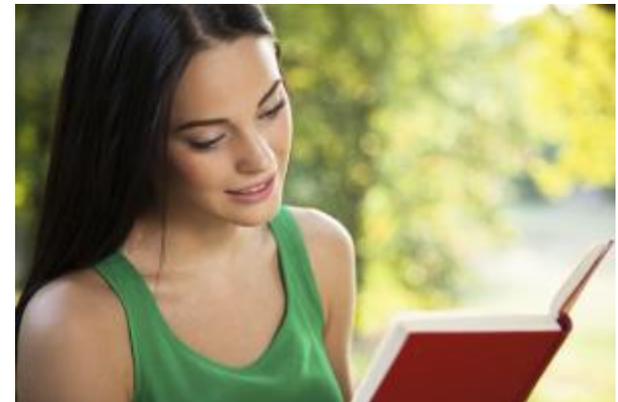
If you aren't successful with an application or at an interview, seek some feedback about what you did well and what let you down. Often we catastrophise our performance (in interviews in particular), assuming all sorts of negative things about ourselves. The reality

of course is usually far different from your dire assessment. Act on any **constructive feedback** you receive, tweaking and adapting your approach as needed.

#### 4. Be guided by your values

Everyone has a different set of values, ethics, motivators and interests which when understood, honoured and acted upon, provide the compass needed to guide career and life choices. **What are your values?** What really matters to you? Consider the following 10 examples of career values. Are any of these important to you? Which ones top your list?

1. Earning a reasonable wage
2. Achieving status
3. Innovating and trying out new ideas
4. Opportunities for promotion
5. Having challenging work
6. Using and developing your skills and talent
7. Having flexibility in work hours
8. Being part of a friendly team
9. Working in an environmentally sustainable workplace
10. Being of service to others



Make your own list or complete CareerActually's on-line **career value card sort** and try to align your job search to your values – it will definitely be more authentic, motivating and successful if you do.

#### 5. Look in the right place and in the right way

There are many job seekers who unfortunately subscribe to the 'more is better' philosophy which sees them submitting multiple (sometimes hundreds) of applications through job vacancy sites. The problem is that these are usually the same resume submitted time and again for many different kinds of jobs. Unsurprisingly they have a very low success rate, because they do not take into account what the employer is actually looking for, nor what it is they are actually looking for. Once you have a good resume you can quickly

adapt it to other positions because it will already largely reflect your skills, values, experience and interests. Please take a look at my tip sheet [10 ways to future proof your career](#) for more ideas about this.

### **6. Remain focussed and active**

Continue to move towards your goals. Take small achievable steps if that's all you can do or have time for. Small wins will boost your confidence and help to ward off any fear of failure that comes your way. By being targeted and focussed, you make best use of your energy.

### **7. Be open to opportunities**

Often when your resilience is tested, it can be natural to get frustrated, feel defeated and lose momentum. This in turn can make you less alert to job opportunities and leads. Avoid this by being open to ideas and options and new ways of approaching your job search. Bounce some ideas around with your friends and colleagues, brainstorm new ideas and possible contacts and allow yourself to think creatively and imaginatively about your future.

### **8. Always have a Plan B**

No matter how happy you are with your current job or career, there are plenty of examples, where people have not been resilient in the face of unexpected changes such as funding cuts, a change of management or a re-structure. Ask yourself, if your job were to end today, or things turned bad at work, what would you do? Do you have a Plan B? Likewise if you are currently out of work or in the process of making a change, keep in your mind that even when you do secure your next job, that every job is temporary.

### **9. Take care of yourself**

Pay attention to your physical and emotional wellbeing. Engage in activities that you enjoy and find relaxing and exercise regularly. Taking care of yourself helps to keep your mind and body primed to be resilient through job search.

## 10. Enlist your support crew

Experience shows that those who have a good 'support crew' around them have the best chance of maintaining the resilience and focus needed to succeed in job search. Enlist the support of trusted friends, colleagues and family who are there to encourage them, proof read applications and generally listen to their plans and ideas. Also important, can be a qualified career coach who will improve your efficiency through expert advice on how to plan your career and be 'on your side' as you plan and implement your job search.



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# 5 Climbing mountains: or, what I learned at University

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Emily Brown

July 15, 2014

I am currently gazing out from the summit of a four-year-long university degree. The view is pretty incredible: opportunities sprawling out as far as the eye can see, as numerous as trees in a forest. But I'll be honest; I'm getting a little vertigo. It feels like I'm at the edge of a precipice, preparing for a leap into an abyss of job applications – and worse, rejections – with little hope of a soft landing.

As with vertigo, I'm beginning to realise that the trick at this juncture is not to look down. Instead, start by looking back the way you have come. My time at university has been intense, challenging, and stressful, but ultimately the most rewarding experience of my life so far. I've reached a number of peaks throughout my climb, and funnily enough, few of them have much relevance to the degree. One of the best things about university is the amount of time you can spend doing other activities.



*Source: MinutesAlone*

The first peak on Mount University is the social life. The first years bring one social event after another, but in every room the atmosphere is tinged with a slightly frantic urgency to meet new people, make new friends, and find new flatmates. It feels like you're on a slope, constantly grappling to keep hold of old friendships and new, all the while struggling across slippery patches of social awkwardness. But once you reach the top of this first peak, and settle in with a solid group of friends, you realise that being approachable, friendly, and inquisitive toward a wide range of people is actually an invaluable skill. This is how you make contacts, find out about opportunities, and develop rewarding professional relationships.

The second peak of university life is sampling and committing to the huge variety of experiences offered by clubs and societies. As a member of a university society (or societies!), you get to take advantage of resources and opportunities which are often unaffordable or out of reach for non-students. You can try new sports, indulge hobbies like film, photography, and literature, learn new languages, and promote your political interests. You can pursue leadership roles on committees, and be involved in shaping the experiences of your fellow students.

But what is undoubtedly a blessing can also be a curse. It's easy to find yourself overcommitted, and more than anything my involvement with committees and societies has taught me not to bite off more than I can chew. No matter which career you're pursuing, time management and organisation are essential. Throwing yourself into clubs and societies will teach you your limits, as well as a host of teamwork and management skills, without very dire consequences, like the real-world risk of being fired.

The third peak of university is juggling your coursework with employers' increasingly common demands for relevant work experience in your chosen field. This is especially taxing when many of these experiences are unpaid or only minimally recompensed. I was lucky enough to have financial support from my mother, but I know of many students who have taken up part-time voluntary roles in an effort to flesh-out their CVs. But once you've finished moping about the undervaluation of undergraduate labour, you realise that these experiences pay a pretty important bonus. In amongst the sprawling abstraction of an arts degree, work experience teaches you what kind of job you might actually want to do. Even if you have a bad time, you're rewarded with the knowledge that firstly, it is oh so temporary, and secondly, that maybe that kind of work (or working environment) isn't for you. What's more, the positive experiences will replenish your motivation to achieve, which a four-year slog at the same subject can sometimes sap.

Turning toward the future, I'm learning to look up and out, and move onwards and upwards. It turns out I'm not on the edge of a cliff after all, but at the foot of an even larger incline. The climb won't be easy – no upward struggle ever is – but on reflection, I know that I've already come a long way. My journey through university has taught me that the more effort I put in, and the more carefully I think about my route, the better the view will get. It's all a matter of perspective.



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## 6 I'm so uninspired that it's inspirational

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Amelia Ishikawa

August 31, 2014

I have something I want to write about, something I've decided will be exceedingly relevant and interesting. I've even toyed around with an opening line. However, every time I sit down to write it, it comes out all wrong. The words don't co-operate with me, the topic seems dry and uninteresting and I've somehow lost my connection with it....for the time being.

Luckily, in times such as this, I remember one of my favourite quotes, from artist [Chuck Close](#):

*Inspiration is for amateurs; the rest of us just show up and get to work. If you wait around for the clouds to part and a bolt of lightning to strike you in the brain, you are not going to make an awful lot of work.*

I have called upon this quote many times in my life as I've struggled to get started, when I've been inclined to hang out for the angel of inspiration to visit me in my sleep and plant the perfect word or image or idea into my waiting, vacant brain.

It works every time.

So, how is 'inspiration is for amateurs' working for me this time around? Well, I'm writing this, which is arguably an improvement. It may not be what I planned, and it is certainly not as interesting and as insightful as I might have imagined, but this is definitely preferable to staring at a screen, moaning about my murdered mojo.

How can I connect all this back to our career story?

I use the word 'story' to illustrate that there are many points along the way in our careers when all we want is a flash of inspiration. What will be the next great plot twist? Is this chapter going anywhere? Do I need to add in some new characters? Sometimes we can acquire some inspiration by talking to colleagues or mentors, reading a biography, revisiting our values, taking a walk or having a chat with Aunty Google.

However, sometimes inspiration has packed her bags and headed on a hike up Machu Picchu and no matter what number we phone, she just doesn't have reception.

That's when we evoke Chuck.

That's when we just do something, anything at all that will shake us out of our malaise. For writers it may look like setting the novel aside and playing around with a short story or, for an artist it might involve dabbling in a new medium and for someone stuck for ideas regarding their next career move it might involve applying for a secondment, taking a short course, talking to a career practitioner or volunteering in an area of interest. We don't wait for inspiration, we act in its absence. Amazingly, inspiration is attracted to action like a bee is to blossoms. All of a sudden one idea leads to another which then leads to a cross pollination and suddenly we're producing fruit. That was an interesting fusion of thoughts and metaphors there, but you get the point.

Someone very wise once told me that inspiration works like a GPS, you will only be given the next instruction if you're already moving. If you're standing still it goes silent.

If you've made it to the end of this post, it means that I'm now inspired. Taking some time out from my original idea and playing around this one has renewed my energy and enthusiasm. I feel my mental block dissolving and I'm once again excited to give my original idea another crack.

Join me friends, set a timer for 10 minutes and do something, anything at all. You never know, it may just invite inspiration home...not that we need it, we're pro's.



*Source: Museum of Contemporary Art*

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## 7 Every job is temporary

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Carole Brown

April 6, 2014

The famous Dick Bolles' book *What Color is Your Parachute* provides a great deal of wisdom and sensible advice for job seekers. First published in 1970 (and substantially revised many times since then), 'Parachute' has been one of the most influential job hunting books ever published. One of the sections I like best is early in the book when Dick lists general tips about the job hunt. First among these relates to attitude toward today's job market, beginning with '*Every job you get is temporary*'.

We are accustomed to thinking about temporary jobs as those where people are employed for a short term to complete a specific project or to replace someone who is on leave. Sometimes, people prefer to 'go temping' rather than seek a longer-term contract or 'permanent' position. However, in today's labour market, it is unwise to think about a job as anything but temporary, that is, lasting for only a limited period of time. Most people earn their living as an employees working for an organisation. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, this represents in excess of eleven and a half million Australians. And, how long your job lasts is largely up to the employer, not you.

Of course, being a productive and positive employee who shows initiative and gets on well with co-workers holds people in good stead. But every day, decisions about our careers and livelihood are made that we have very little control over. Witness, the rounds of recent lay-off's across the nation that have literally dislocated whole communities, and impacted thousands of individuals and their families.

The workplace is in a constant state of flux with organisations constantly changing, new managers being recruited, and workplace cultures shifting. It is true that a job and workplace you have been happy in for some time can change quite quickly – in some cases literally overnight! Once you understand the temporary nature of all employment, your attitude to managing your career will probably shift. One of the mantras that my clients and colleagues hear regularly is "Always have a Plan B". While this is 'not rocket science' it continues to amaze me how few people have actually really thought about options for their next job.

Ask yourself: do you have some ideas for future jobs, roles and organisations that would suit and excite you, that will hold you in good stead when you decide it is time to leave or the choice is taken away from you? Do you know what is happening in the labour market? Are your networks in good shape to provide the leads and suggestions that you may need?

If you are not sure where to start with your plan B, you might want to take a look at my [free career tip sheets](#). I am always available to [answer your questions as well](#).

So with very job having a limited lifespan you need for a Plan B and even C and D! If you are currently in a job, ask yourself what would you do if your job ended tomorrow?

A little bit of career planning is worth the investment of your time. Good luck with yours!



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## 8 Lessons from teaching: take time out

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Peter Luscombe

October 8, 2014

The need to get away, to get out from under, is a common experience we all face. There are many ways to do this at work IF you build such into your work day. That's a big IF some days. Really it begins with the mind-set of looking out for yourself; your own best interests. Time when you take the helm and steer your course away from reefs and choppy waters. Time when you seek a breath of fresh air.

Rarely in teaching was I stuck at a desk for a prolonged period. Most often I was on my feet. Unless I took time out I would race through the day – a quick cup of coffee during a break, lunch hastily taken because there was so much to do before ... before whatever came next then next then next ... Whew! Even now I can remember that head long rush.

*CareerActually* contributor Julie Preston in her post [Give yourself time to dream, think, learn](#) addressed this, finishing on a thought provoking question: *How will you pause from the race to truly savour the journey?*

For me that meant getting right away so I went for a walk. During that time I stepped out of the rush. Admittedly, at times I thought through some issue that was on my mind, however, I had the space to do so right there and then. On some days when I was fed-up and going nowhere positive it was a relief to say – “I’m going for a walk. I’ve had enough for the moment.” Most times I came back, even though it was only about 15 mins, refreshed and feeling productive again. Regular and routine time out is a necessity, if you want to make the best for yourself in your work day.

Going for a walk was my regular time out, however, colleagues had other ways and means which involved sharing time at work and beyond. Some had Tuesday lunch together, others drinks after work, or time at the gym. Often these occasions were a time to decompress. I learned from hanging with teachers during work time and after work that while decompression was good, it also meant you remained focused on work. No one likes to be under the pump all the time, right?

I applied that consideration in class. With the idea of meeting a challenge and having a bit of fun, I introduced activities like *crossword time*. The class and I would do a crossword together. On the ledge of the whiteboard sat a number of markers and when they solved an *across* or *down*, then they went to the whiteboard to score their finding. It was free moving, a challenge, sharing and fun. Most of my students got into it and anticipated *crossword time*. This also made me realize how true this was for time with my colleagues.

Time out together needed a shake-up. Those scheduled lunches and other times weren't truly proving as time out from work. Decompression had a place, and that was a given, however, we needed to be more spontaneous – add spice and invention. As Les Emery pointed out in his [recent post](#) fun re-invents how you approach life and work; career change as well. The 'Fun Theory' fascinates and has so many possibilities. With the idea of time out as fun my cronies and I had dim sims for a coffee break so unexpectedly; looked at one another over lunch and someone would say – "Let's go out to dinner tonight or tomorrow night." Such wasn't regular or planned or staged, it was in the moment and that made it exactly what it was to time out from work and all the rest. Our ideas and events weren't so adventurous, they weren't even so often, however, they were so much fun.

In teaching, as with any form of work, you learn 'lessons' like:

- take time out regularly and routinely
- allow time out for others
- open the windows and doors to spice and invention
- recognize that 'fun' is spontaneous and in the moment – works for others there and then



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## 9 A simple hello

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Julie Preston

June 17, 2014

Communication and networking have been a regular theme of my social media networks in recent weeks, finally pushing me to write this post for Career Actually. Just one more means of connecting.

Carole has written about the importance of a strong network in other places on her blog. Networks are [places to find opportunities](#) that may not be advertised through the normal channels or a [source of renewal and support](#) when a job search is getting you down. Establishing a professional network has never been easy for me, especially during the early stages of my first career journey as an PhD student and postdoctoral researcher. It seemed that everyone I should be speaking to was too busy or too important. Add my introvert personality and I was happy to sit quietly in the corner and wait for opportunities to come to me.

I have learned since then that proactivity is the best approach. It is not enough to simply wait for the next great job. I need to get out there and make things happen, which is where this quote fits with my approach to networking.



My first job after completing my PhD was the result of a simple hello, although on that occasion the first hello wasn't mine. My supervisor introduced me to a researcher who's manager was looking for new staff with the kinds of experience I had. The second time I met the same researcher it was up to me to reconnect, start a conversation, and establish that I really was a suitable candidate for the position. A few months later, after the standard written application and phone interview, I was standing at Sydney airport waiting for a plane to England and my exciting new life in biomedical research.

Since returning to Australia I have taken the daunting but incredibly rewarding step of changing my career path. I now work in learning and development, encouraging and supporting others to be their best. Many of the professional connections I have in my new field are virtual, having their origin in the social media platforms like Twitter. The benefits of these connections are the same as those that started face-to-face in the coffee queue at a conference, but they are nurtured differently. I will write about online presence and its impact on career in a separate post.

Here, I would like to share just one example of connection and benefit from that simple 'hello' in the online world. Dr Tseen Khoo is one half of the team responsible for [Research Whisperer](#), a popular and well respected blog in the field of academia. A few weeks ago I shared my thoughts on her blogpost via Twitter. Although not strictly a 'hello', my comment sparked a request to write a guest post for her blog. I have now met Tseen in person, and in a short time have moved from admiring her work from afar to writing something simple for her blog and knowing that I can chat with her about relevant career issues at any time.

There are opportunities to connect all around us, all the time. Developing my career, whether is it building my current position or securing the next one, depends on taking the right opportunities and making them work for me. So take that first step and say (or email or tweet) 'hello'. You just never know where that one word could take you.

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# 10 Friday on my mind: capable of more than I know

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Carole Brown

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*Friday on my mind is a weekly series of short, personal reflections by CareerActually founder, [Carole Brown](#).*

It's a wonderful thing human potential – those latent qualities or abilities that are in all of us that can lead to future success or usefulness.

Potential is sometimes realised as a surprise, when one day an ordinary task is somehow completed in an extraordinary way – writing a paper with greater fluency; preparing an unbelievably sumptuous meal; or pulling off a tough conversation at work with the grace and effectiveness you only heard about in training courses.

As a child, when I achieved something I was terribly excited about, my mother used to say with a smile: *“I didn't know you had it in you!”* Neither did I, although I have a feeling mum actually might have. Others see in you what you often do not.

Sometimes tapping your potential is about sheer hard work and practice and making the most of the intrinsic gifts and talents and slice of the gene pool that you have.

Recently I visited a colleague at Australia's Institute of Sport (AIS), not far from where I live in Canberra. The AIS is full of stories of human potential – dramatic and heroic successes and less-acknowledged disappointments. It is a place full of inspiration for visitors and athletes alike, with larger than life athletic outfits on display and walls covered in thoughtful quotes. Here's one that I particularly like from [Caroline Buchanan](#), the BMX 2013 World Champion:

*The biggest thing I have learnt is not to limit myself by the norm or what I should be doing ...  
I have learnt I'm capable of more than I know.*

I think that's a marvellous idea – knowing that we are capable of more than we know.

Human potential is an irresistible hopeful force in everyone that seeks space and opportunity. It is an antidote to declining self-confidence and lack of purpose. It needs to be given a chance.

I hope you happily skip through this day either surprised by your own potential, or intent on allowing more of what you are capable of to be realised.



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