



THE CLASH BETWEEN EXPECTATIONS AND JOB MARKET REALITIES

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Abstract: This module explores the psychological, social, and cultural aspects of the transition from education to employment. It examines how personal aspirations interact with the structural realities of today's labor market and how social comparisons, generational narratives, and digital culture shape expectations about work.

Drawing on the concepts of the protean and self-directed career (Hall, 1996; Briscoe & Hall, 2006) and research on person–environment fit (Edwards et al., 2006), it encourages reflection on individual values, self-awareness, and adaptive career strategies. The module aims to help young people redefine what a “good job” means, build self-direction in their career choices, and navigate uncertainty through informed, value-based decisions.

Keywords: career choices; self-directed career; knowing your strengths; self-awareness; purpose and meaning at work; motivation; realistic expectations; adapting to change; meaningful work; redefining success; confidence; personal values; decision-making; personal growth; learning from experience

INTRODUCTION

Entering adulthood and taking your first steps into the job market is a huge transition. It comes with hopes, plans, and ideas about what a “good job” should look like and the role it should play in life. Many young people want their work to be more than just a way to earn money—they want it to bring meaning, growth, and the chance to live in line with their values. These desires are valid and deserve space in any conversation about the future.

At the same time, it’s not easy to find your place in a reality that can be far less perfect than what we see on social media. There’s often tension between what we want to do and what the job market allows - the demands of employers, organizational structures, and financial constraints. It’s also hard to understand how the job market works when no one has ever explained it to you. How do you negotiate pay? What should you agree to, and when should you say “no”? Am I good enough?

Many young adults also experience a fear of “getting stuck” - in a job they don’t like, in a life that feels out of balance. A belief that adulthood is all about obligations, pressure, and having no time - or that you’re supposed to have a “plan for everything.” It’s understandable — no one wants to feel disappointed. But sometimes that fear keeps us stuck in places that aren’t right for us. And then there’s another voice - the one from the internet — saying that everyone else has already “made it,” found their passion, landed their dream job, launched their own business, succeeded. But the truth is more complicated. Most people figure adulthood out as they go. They make mistakes and adjust directions. Careers aren’t straight lines - they’re winding paths, full of roundabouts, intersections, and doubtful moments.

That’s why we need space to talk about work honestly. Without judgment. Without pressure. With respect for our own pace, our experiences, and our doubts.

Our goal is to support you in making choices that are truly yours - based on knowledge, not just outside opinions. We want to help you deal with the gap between expectations and reality of the job market - this will help you adapt wisely, protect what matters to you, and build your career based on knowledge, agency, and real possibilities.

Welcome to the world of work! Take a breath, you don’t have to know everything right away.

FIGURE OUT WHERE YOUR EXPECTATIONS ARE COMING

1 FROM

Before making important career decisions or getting discouraged by your first experiences in the job market, it's worth pausing for a moment to reflect on your expectations. Where do they come from? Are they realistic? Do they truly belong to you, or were they brought to you by your surroundings? Below, you'll find three key areas that will help you better understand the roots of your ideas about work and career.

1.1 Self-awareness as the foundation of a successful career

The first step is self-reflection. Awareness of your own values, needs, strengths, and limitations is the foundation for consciously shaping your professional path. If you don't know what really matters to you, it's easy to adopt someone else's expectations — ones that may not match your strengths or lifestyle.

Ask yourself:



What kind of work environment gives me energy instead of draining it?



What working conditions completely demotivate me?

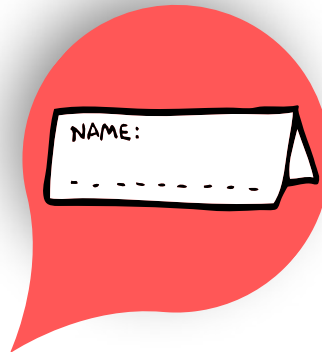


What do I truly need from my job: security, variety, a sense of impact, independence, or maybe creativity?

After reflecting, grab a sheet of paper and write your name in the centre — that's you. Around it, write:

3 situations from the past year when you felt truly yourself (what were you doing, with whom, and how did it make you feel?)

3 things you absolutely don't want in your future job (e.g., constant competition, rigid rules, lack of influence)



3 values that are non-negotiable for you (e.g., autonomy, community, growth)

Finally, ask yourself:

What on this map could serve as a guidepost for my career decisions — even before I choose a direction or job offer?



This short exercise will help you distinguish **what's truly "yours"** from what's "socially expected" — and begin building a career path that aligns with who you are, step by step, without the pressure of making perfect choices.

1.2 Social comparisons - source of pressure

Even though it's completely natural to compare yourself to others – especially in the era of social media - it's important to remember that we're often comparing our own 'backstage' to someone else's highlights. When you see friends showing off their career achievements, it's easy to feel pressured to also have a spectacular success - instantly and without setbacks. This is a good moment to pause and validate what's real and what might not be.

Remember that:

Fact

People rarely share their failures or doubts on social media.

Career is a process — it takes time, effort, and often many attempts and failures.

Comparing can be motivating, but often leads to unnecessary stress and feelings of inferiority.

Many people take different paths to find their dream job, and it often takes years.

Myth

Everyone succeeds easily and effortlessly.

Career success should come right after graduation, and if it doesn't, it means I've failed.

If others are progressing quickly, it must mean I'm doing something wrong.

There is only one "correct" career path that everyone should follow.

1.3 How can you manage social comparison so it doesn't become harmful?

- **Limit exposure to idealized content** (e.g., on LinkedIn or Instagram). Try practicing mindful scrolling: instead of consuming content passively, seek out materials that also show real challenges and struggles - for example, podcasts or blogs where people share both their successes and failures.
- **Value-meter:** check how you feel before and after looking at certain content. Identify which accounts or creators truly support you, and which ones harm your mindset. Unfollow harmful ones or reduce time on platforms that trigger comparisons and frustration.
- **Focus on your own path** - success doesn't have one definition. Keep a journal of progress: regularly note down small wins and challenges you've overcome, even if they seem minor. This will help you see that your journey is unique and meaningful, no matter what others are doing.

1.4 Generational narratives and expectations about work?

Every generation grows up in a specific social, economic, and cultural context. Today's young people often hear messages like: "Find a well-paid job," "Find meaningful work," "Your job should reflect who you are," or "Don't settle for less." While these slogans can be motivating, they can also create pressure that every job must be immediately perfect.

Pressure placed on young people often comes from the experiences of older generations, who grew up in very different socio-economic realities. Parents' and grandparents' generations often value stability, security, and permanent employment - values shaped by the period of political transformation, economic crises of the 80s and 90s, and the early decades of capitalism. In their narratives, a "good job" provides a stable income, social prestige, and opportunities for promotion.

Older generations had fewer opportunities to reflect on whether work felt meaningful, which is why they may see such reflection today as a luxury or unnecessary complaining. Clashing with these expectations can lead to internal conflict between your real needs and the imagined "right" career path.

Expectations from older generations are often unconscious and come from a place of care — but also from misunderstanding the current labor market, which is far more unpredictable, dynamic, and unstable than the one they faced.

Luckily, you get to decide what your career path looks like.

You have the right to seek your own definition of a good job.

So it's worth asking yourself:

- Are my expectations about work shaped by my own experiences, or by external influences?
- Do I allow myself to experiment, or do I expect perfect alignment right away?
- How can I balance my ideals with the realities of the job market?

1. **Influence chart:**

Category	Examples of influences	Guiding questions
Family and close ones	Parents, siblings, partners	What was said about work in my home? What did “success” mean?
School and education	Teachers, counselors, university	What messages about my career future did I hear there?
Media and pop culture	Movies, TV shows, podcasts, Instagram, TikTok	What images of work do I see daily? How do they affect me?
Authorities and leaders	Influencers, motivational speakers, experts	Who do I trust when it comes to growth and success?
Peer group	Friends, online communities	What does a “normal” career path look like in my environment?
Personal experience	Internships, first jobs, job interviews	What emotions come up when I think about my experiences?

Example:

"I see people my age running businesses and traveling on TikTok — it makes me feel like I'm falling behind."

→ **Influence:** social media

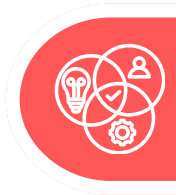
→ **Narrative:** "Success = entrepreneurship and freedom"

→ **Reflection:** Is that my definition of success? Do I want to accept it or redefine it?

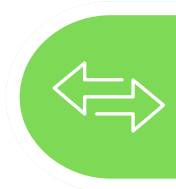
2. Summary



Separate what's truly yours from what's been culturally or socially imposed.



Base your mindset on values and beliefs you genuinely identify with, believe in, and consider to be true.



Finally, validate your influences — choose the ones that serve you and point you in a good direction. And by good, we mean your own.

You're already in a great place in discovering what really matters to you in the workplace. Now, let's take a look at what's possible on the job market.

REDEFINE WHAT YOU CONSIDER

2 A "GOOD JOB"

The idea of a "good job" often comes from simplified social narratives - like the "dream job," "a company with a mission," or "do what you love, and you'll never work a day in your life." While they sound great, they rarely reflect the full complexity of real working life. To avoid disappointment, it's worth exploring what a "good job" truly means for you—in a more realistic way that considers the changing stages of life and professional growth.

2.1 Values vs. „Ideal conditions”- How to make it realistic

Young professionals often expect their work to fully align with their value system—such as having a social impact, supporting sustainability, or being rooted in collaboration and inclusivity. The challenge begins when values get confused with ideal conditions: flexible hours, high pay, no stress, and rapid promotions. This combination of expectations is often impossible to fulfill all at once. So, what can you do?

- Know your core values and understand in what conditions they can realistically be lived out.
- Distinguish values (what matters most to you) from preferences (what would be nice but isn't essential).
- Instead of looking for the perfect company, look for a good-enough environment where you can nurture your priorities.

In eBook No. 1 “Getting Ready to Explore the Job Market,” you had the chance to identify your 3–5 most important values (see the “My Life Compass” exercise). Now it's time to ground those values in business reality.

Exercise: My values in practice



Understanding how your values show up in practice can be a valuable compass when navigating toward a job that genuinely satisfies you.

2.2 Careers are built – Step-by-step mindset

The idea of a career as a single, linear path is becoming outdated. Contemporary perspectives — like the protean career theory (Hall, 1996) or the concept of a “self-directed” career (Briscoe & Hall, 2006) — show that professional development is more of a journey than a straight route from point A to B. You change, your values change, circumstances shift, and even your identity may evolve — all of which influence your career choices.

Building a career is a process, not a test with one correct answer. You don’t have to know “what you want to be for the rest of your life” — what matters more is knowing where you are now and what you need at this stage. Maybe you’re learning and experimenting? Maybe you’re building specific skills? Or maybe you feel it’s time for a change? Thinking in stages helps take the pressure off from finding the “perfect job” and allows room for trying things out, making mistakes, and learning about yourself.

Take a moment and ask yourself:

- What stage am I at now — exploring, building, stabilizing, or changing something?
- What do I need most right now — clarity, courage, support, a mentor, peace of mind?
- Are the decisions I’m making aligned with who I am today, or am I trying to meet someone else’s expectations from the past?

Your career doesn’t need to be “ready from the start.” You can build it inch by inch — in alignment with yourself and at your own pace. Your first job, your first choice of studies, or even your first failures — none of these define you. They’re just part of the journey. Many well-known people understand this. Here are a few real stories that show just how non-linear career paths can be — and that it’s totally OK:

Quebonafide (Kuba Grabowski)

He started out as a rapper and gained massive popularity at a young age. But he didn’t stop there — he explored new possibilities, made a radical shift in image, and eventually stepped away from show business. Today, he’s an entrepreneur and community advocate, involved in educational and health projects. His story shows how your professional identity can change — and that you have the right to redefine yourself.

Agnieszka Holland

Before becoming an acclaimed director, she studied painting and screenwriting. She repeatedly changed paths within her profession — from working in Poland to international productions, from personal topics to political ones. Her journey proves that a career isn't a “once chosen path,” but rather a space of continuous decision-making.

Ralph Kamiński

Before launching his music career, he worked in a call centre and considered whether it was even worth returning to the stage after a break. His artistic journey has been a series of phases, experiments, stylistic shifts, and searching. Today, he's one of the most distinctive voices of the young generation.

Elon Musk

Although best known as the founder of Tesla and SpaceX, in his youth he programmed games, studied physics and economics, and later co-created PayPal. His career is a great example of the protean approach: switching industries, moving between technologies, creating new markets. He didn't follow one straight line — he built in stages, based on what mattered to him at the time.

2.3 Ask questions instead of idealizing

When choosing a new career path or considering a job offer, it's easy to fall into the trap of your own idealized vision — about the place, the people, or the company culture. This is a natural mental shortcut, especially in uncertain situations. However, idealization dulls our alertness and limits our ability to realistically assess the fit.

Instead of creating a fantasy about your “dream job,” ask questions — to yourself and others. Doing so helps you make more informed decisions that are more aligned with your values.

Examples of questions to ask:

To the employer/recruiter:



To yourself:

- What is the basis for my positive image of this job?
- What warning signs of a mismatch might I be ignoring right now?
- What would need to happen for me to feel like this is truly the right place for me?

Remember this:

Not every job — if any — will meet all your needs. Employment is an art of compromise. Work becomes a space for negotiation between what the employee needs (e.g., purpose, flexibility, security) and what the organization is realistically able to offer. This applies to all of us. Research shows that perfect matches are rare. Most people operate under “suboptimal fit” conditions, learning to adapt and compromise (Edwards et al., 2006).

Work isn't only a space for self-fulfilment — it's also a space of adaptive regulation. Employment means operating under constraints, and making conscious trade-offs — between security and autonomy, passion and financial stability, or influence and privacy.

What matters is that the balance works in your favor.

People constantly navigate the tension between their personal needs and organizational structures. This requires flexibility, adaptability, and realistic expectations about work as a social institution.

The good news: You always have the power to decide whether to accept or stay in a particular job.



REEVALUATE YOUR SALARY

3 EXPECTATIONS

Talking about salary is one of the most emotionally charged moments in the entire career process — both for job seekers and those already employed. However, it's worth approaching this topic strategically and thoughtfully, distinguishing between:

- Your sense of self-worth and financial needs
- Your current market value — meaning the skills you bring, your business understanding, and your overall contribution.

Rethinking your financial expectations is not about giving up on ambition — it's a way to negotiate consciously and build your professional position over the long term.

3.1 Salary vs. market value of a job position

Your **skills, knowledge, and experience** have a certain value within a specific market context, which depends on the **industry, location, seniority level, economic conditions, technological trends,** and **structural shifts in employment.** This means you can be a highly valuable person, and still the market may currently price your role lower than you'd like.

And here's the challenge: modern social media often creates unrealistic images of success and earnings. You see influencers talking about six-figure incomes, 23-year-olds buying apartments, or TikToks with advice like “become the CEO of your life in 3 months.” This creates pressure: “Why am I not earning that much? Is something wrong with me?”

Meanwhile, the real job market is much more nuanced. High salaries usually result from years of experience, acquired competencies, industry insight, and — let's be honest — also structural conditions (like better negotiating positions in corporations, or access to cultural or language capital).

Practical tips:



Check salary medians and ranges for roles in your industry — in reports by Hays, Randstad, Sedlak & Sedlak, or No Fluff Jobs.



Compare not only job titles but also scope of responsibilities and level of accountability.



Does the offered salary include bonuses, benefits, flexibility — or just a base salary?

Remember: Having high expectations is perfectly fine — but it's important to match them with your **current context** and **career stage**. Just because you're not earning "like the people on social media" doesn't mean you're on the wrong path — it just means you're comparing yourself to an illusion. Careers and salaries are **a marathon, not a sprint**.

3.2 Focus on the value You bring to the company

It's also important to remember that **salary is not just compensation for showing up to work**. It's an **equivalent exchange for the business, social, or organizational value** you bring. Employers don't pay just for competencies — they pay for the **application of those skills** and the **results** that contribute to the company's goals.

To better present yourself in a job interview and open the door to more satisfying compensation, prepare clear answers to the following questions:

- **What problems am I effective at solving?**
- **What measurable results have my actions delivered in previous roles?**
- **Do I have a unique combination of skills** (e.g., analytical and communication) **that is rare in today's job market?**

3.3 Tracking your career development

To effectively negotiate your salary (or plan for its growth), you need to have a clear awareness of your development over time. That means: What new skills are you acquiring? What areas are you beginning to support within the organization? How is your role evolving - even informally?

A good practice is to keep a “skills journal” - a short monthly or annual note tracking what new things you’ve accomplished, what you’ve learned, and which projects you’ve completed. This is helpful for annual reviews, salary negotiations, and career development planning.

On the next page, you will find the **Self-Evaluation Matrix of Market Value**, designed for individuals who want to assess their professional standing, prepare for salary discussions, or plan further growth. The matrix integrates concepts from talent management, personal strategy, and career planning (see Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005; London, 2003).

Market Value Self-Evaluation Matrix

Assessment Area	Reflective Questions	Rating (1-5)	Comment / Evidence
1. Core Competencies	What hard and soft skills do I have? Are they current and in demand on the market?		e.g. tool proficiency, languages, management, teamwork, analytics
2. Uniqueness of Profile	Do I have competencies or experiences that are rare or unique?		Interdisciplinary skills, niche expertise
3. Experience and Results	What projects have I completed? What measurable or qualitative results did they produce?		e.g. increased sales, process optimization, cultural transformation
4. Autonomy and Influence	Do I make decisions, drive change, or influence others?		Team role, strategic involvement, mentoring
5. Learning and Development	How often do I learn new things? Am I proactively developing myself?		Courses, certifications, training, applied knowledge
6. Reputation and Network	Am I recognized in my field? Do I have an active professional network?		LinkedIn activity, conferences, recommendations
7. Flexibility and Adaptability	How do I handle change? Do I adapt easily to new conditions?		Experience in varied environments, multiple roles
8. Market Knowledge and Salary Benchmarks	Do I know the market salary range for people with my profile in my industry and region?		Sources: Hays, Randstad, Sedlak & Sedlak
9. Cultural Values and Fit	Do my values align with what today's organizations seek (diversity, autonomy, responsibility)?		e.g. inclusive workplaces, experience in remote teams
10. Negotiation Readiness	Can I articulate my value? Do I have the confidence and language to talk about money?		Prepared examples, solid data, assertive communication
11. What do I need/want to develop in this role?	What do I need in the workplace to function well?		Clear expectations, new competencies, better knowledge of analytical tools

How to Work with the Matrix:

- Rate each area on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = low level, 5 = very high level).
- Record specific evidence, examples, or sources in the "Comment" column.
- Identify your strongest and weakest areas — these are your leverage points for negotiation or targets for development.
- Additionally, the evidence becomes your argumentation during recruitment or salary discussions.

FINAL REMINDER:

Your financial expectations are valid — if they are grounded in market knowledge, an understanding of your impact, and a long-term development plan.

Salary negotiation is not a power struggle — it's a conversation about value exchange.

BALANCE YOUR LIMITING 4 BELIEFS

4.1 “I’m only good at simple tasks” – limiting beliefs.

Have you ever heard a voice in your head saying:

- “I’m not cut out for this,”
- “It’s better to stay quiet,”
- “This isn’t for me — it’s for people who’ve got it together,”
- “What if something goes wrong?”

Don’t worry — it’s completely okay to feel this way. But it’s important to know that this isn’t the voice of reason. It’s the voice of fear, past experiences, and sometimes other people’s opinions that stuck in your mind like unwanted notifications.

We all have certain beliefs about ourselves. The problem starts when those beliefs hold us back instead of lifting us up.

Instead of saying “This isn’t for me,” try asking: “How do I know that’s true?”

In this chapter, we’ll talk about:

- where these limiting beliefs come from (e.g., “I’m only good at simple tasks”),
- how to deal with them so they don’t control your choices,
- and what it means to be proactive — not waiting for something to happen but creating your own path.

How can you use this in practice?

STEP 1:

Write down 3 beliefs you hold about yourself in the job market. For example:

- “I’m not qualified enough.”
- “No one will hire me without experience.”
- “I always mess up interviews.”

STEP 2:

Now challenge those beliefs. Answer the following questions:

- **What evidence supports this belief? Can I observe it in real life?** (e.g., “I’m not competent enough” — do I have grades, reviews, or experiences that prove that?)
- **Are there situations where this belief doesn’t apply? What happens then?** (e.g., Have I ever been praised at work? Gotten invited to a job interview?)
- **What are the facts — not feelings or opinions — that might challenge or balance this belief?** (e.g., feedback from others, number of applications I’ve sent, responses I’ve received, professional achievements)
- **Would this belief be understandable or acceptable if someone else said it about themselves?** (If someone said this to me, would I see it as fair or helpful?)
- **What would a “camera recording” of my job search show? What am I doing in practice — and what am I only interpreting?**

STEP 3:

REFRAME THE BELIEF – CREATE A SUPPORTIVE VERSION

The goal here is to consciously transform a limiting belief about yourself in the job market into something more realistic and empowering — based on facts, aligned with your values, and helpful for your career goals.

Answer these questions:

- **What would I like to believe about myself in this situation if I looked at myself kindly, yet realistically?** (e.g., “I don’t have to be perfect to be competent.”)
- **What new belief would be helpful for me and still feel available?** (e.g., “I may not know everything yet, but I’m able to learn.”)
- **How could this new belief influence my decisions and actions?** (e.g., “I’ll start applying for roles that interest me — even if I don’t meet 100% of the requirements.”)
- **How can I remind myself of this new belief in everyday life?** (e.g., “I’ll write it in my journal or set it as my phone wallpaper.”)

EXAMPLE:

- Limiting belief: “I’m not suited for working with people.”
- Reframed belief: “I’ve worked well in teams before, and I can keep developing those skills with practice.”

Continue reframing your belief:

- **Does this belief support or limit me?**
(Identify how this belief impacts your emotions, actions, and choices.)
- **What could I think instead, to stay realistic but feel more empowered and motivated?**
(This isn’t about “positive thinking” — it’s about beliefs grounded in facts and aligned with your goals.)
- **How can I phrase this belief so that it gives me strength instead of taking it away?**
(Use active, action-oriented language. Avoid words like “always,” “never,” or “I must.”)
- **What will my behaviour look like if I adopt this new belief?**
(What will I do differently in practice? How will this impact my job search actions?)

EXAMPLE OF REFRAMING

- **Original belief:** “I don’t have enough qualifications, no one will hire me.”
- **Facts from the ‘camera test’:** I have 3 years of experience, completed several courses, and received positive feedback from a former employer.
- **New belief:** “I have concrete experience and skills that are valuable. I’ll focus on companies that are looking for what I offer.”
- **Action driven by the new belief:** Regularly applying to relevant job listings, reconnecting with my professional network, and preparing and refining my portfolio.

And now, with your new beliefs — go toward the job market that just might be looking for someone like you

4.2 Avoiding the comfort trap

Young people today tend to dream of a job that gives meaning, good money, free time, and zero stress. And sure — these are real needs. But sometimes these expectations don't come with a readiness to give something in return: commitment, flexibility, taking responsibility, or stepping up when something unexpected happens in the company.

Some people say plainly: “I'm not going to sacrifice myself for work.” But growth isn't sacrifice — it's movement. And often that requires stepping outside what you know and control. Doing something that's not 100% comfortable. In organizations, what matters is not only what you can do “easily,” but how you react when something needs to be handled suddenly, a plan needs to change, someone needs help because they're struggling, or simply — staying a little longer when needed.

Psychology calls this stepping out of your comfort zone — more precisely: entering the growth zone. There, you feel slight discomfort but also learn. It's not about living in stress — it's about not always doing only what's easy and familiar.

A few simple ways to practice stepping out of your comfort trap:

- Instead of saying, “This isn't my task,” ask, “What can I learn if I try?”
- Volunteer for a task that scares you a little - a presentation, a client meeting, leading a workshop.
- Don't give up just because something is difficult — give yourself time to be “unskilled.”
- Accept small risks of making mistakes - because it's the only way to gain more agency later.
- Be the person your team can rely on - not only when everything is going smoothly.

Professional growth is an internal readiness: to respond to tougher situations, to act even when not everything is under control. And those are exactly the people organizations look for — not only talented, but also ready to grow.

4.3 Myths about adulthood and work

Online, it's easy to come across the narrative that work is an evil necessity. That once you have a job, all that awaits you is a hard grind, toxic corporate culture, burnout, and a life of constant pressure. That you work for someone else's dreams, not your own. But that's also a myth. Or rather: an oversimplification.

Sure — there are places that exploit people. But there are also places where you can grow, learn, and build something bigger with others. Work doesn't have to be exploitation. It can be a space for growth — provided you approach it with a learning attitude, not just a demanding one.

Engagement is not submission. Often, it's the path to agency and influence. To become someone others invite to important projects — because they know you deliver, because you care, because you are a professional.

Expertise doesn't come from memes about “quiet quitting.” It's built through hours of learning, testing, and sometimes doing tasks no one else wants to do. It's not sacrifice in the sense of losing yourself — it's a serious investment in yourself. You don't have to work just for the sake of working. But if you want agency, independence, and choice — work is the way you build them.

REJECT THE INTERNET MYTH OF 5 A “PERFECT CAREER”

5.1 Exposing the “dream job” myth.

You don't need a perfect Instagram life to have a good future. Online, you see fragments — usually the shiny parts. And a professional life is a process, not a “GPS-targeted destination.”

There is no single “perfect job” that will give you fulfillment forever. Sometimes something that looks amazing from the outside feels very different inside. That's why it's worth looking for a job that fits your current stage, not one that's perfect forever.

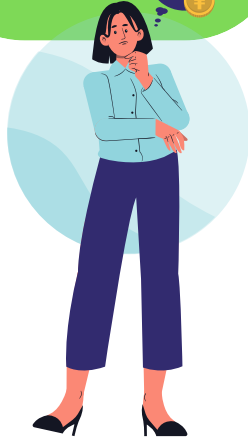
What you can do:

Write down what “a good job” means to you today — and check which of these things you can already start developing.



Watch interviews with people you admire — notice how often they talk about changes, difficult moments, and trial & error.

Stop comparing yourself — your path can be totally different from others.



5.2 Observing real professional experiences


Instead of scrolling through others’ successes, listen to what daily life looks like in different jobs. Not from videos, but from people who actually do them. You’ll see that every job has pros, cons, and “meh” phases.

What you can do:

- Arrange a “job shadowing” — observe someone for a day at their work.
- Talk to someone working in the field you’re interested in — ask about the things nobody talks about on TikTok.
- Do a mini-project on a topic that interests you — e.g., a website, a simple event, an interview, a podcast — and check how it feels to act.

Tip: Don’t look for “the one perfect answer” — look for places where you can grow, experiment, and over time find something that truly makes sense for you.

Summary



High salary expectations should be matched with reality — not to give them up, but to learn how to negotiate your place in the market consciously.

Career is not a race but a process. Sometimes you'll turn, sometimes you'll stray, sometimes you'll take a step back. That's normal.

Work doesn't have to be the meaning of life — but it can be a place where you develop skills, meet people, and build your strength.

Adulthood and professionalism don't have to mean living by the book or forgetting yourself. But you won't build them without engagement either.

It's not about sacrifice. It's about understanding what you invest your time, energy, and growth into — and doing it more consciously.

Fortunately: you don't have to live by someone else's script. You have the right to create your own

Good luck!

6 CONCLUSION

Contemporary narratives about work, especially among young people, reveal a tension between high expectations (fulfillment, passion, independence) and the realities of the labor market. Cultural and social messages — both from social media and family environments — reinforce the pressure for immediate professional success, which can lead to frustration and a sense of inadequacy.

In light of modern career development theories (e.g., Hall, 1996; Briscoe & Hall, 2006), it is worth promoting a staged, flexible, and self-awareness-based approach. Work does not have to be merely a source of exploitation — it can become a space for growth when accompanied by agency, readiness to learn, and a realistic understanding of one's situation.

Therefore, it is essential to build a new language for talking about work — one that connects aspiration with responsibility and supports young people in developing a mature professional identity.

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8 GLOSSARY

Self-awareness

understanding one's own values, strengths, needs, and limitations.

Values

the principles or qualities that guide a person's decisions and actions

Social comparison

the act of evaluating oneself against others, often leading to feelings of pressure or inadequacy.

Generational narratives

common beliefs and messages from older generations about what constitutes a "good job" or career path.

Realistic expectations

understanding what is achievable in the current job market and aligning personal desires with practical possibilities.

Limiting beliefs

assumptions about oneself that restrict potential or prevent taking action.

Comfort zone

a mental space where a person feels safe and experiences little stress or challenge.

Growth zone

the area just outside the comfort zone where learning, development, and skill-building occur.

Salary negotiation

the process of discussing and agreeing on compensation for a job, considering both personal worth and market conditions.

Market value

the value of an individual's skills, experience, and contributions in the context of the job market.

Job fit / suboptimal fit

the degree to which a job aligns with an individual's skills, values, and needs, with suboptimal fit referring to an imperfect but manageable match.

Negotiation readiness

being prepared and confident to discuss terms, conditions, and compensation in a professional context

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