

It's amazing how many successful leaders I coach who confess that they are at a crossroads. They had a goal, started down the path, but somewhere along the way, something went awry. They took a detour and now they are wondering how to get back on track. Interestingly, as we tease apart what happened on the journey, one trend emerges. While there was a clear vision, their behaviors did not help them move in that direction. They made small decisions that led them in the opposite direction. Ask yourself these 5 questions to ensure that each step of your journey aligns with your ultimate goals.

1. What is My Goal?

Think about your ideal job and write down as much as you can to describe what it looks like. What does the environment look like? Who will you be working with? What will you be doing? Will you be working with others or alone? Will you be part of an organization or running your own business? This is your time to dream and paint the picture of where you want to go. Be as specific as you can be and don't worry about all the steps to get there. Define the destination because it's hard to know if you've arrived if you don't know what "it" looks like.

2. What Do I Value?

While goals are the destination, your values inform and determine the actions you choose to get there. Periodically take a step back and think about what you value most. What is most important to you? What drives you? What will you / won't you do to get to your goal? Define your limits because each value will guide you in a specific direction. For example, if you value spending time with your family, you may choose to pass on a promotion where you are expected to be on calls all hours of the day. If you value flexibility and independence in your work environment, you may choose to do freelance work or be an independent consultant.

3. What do I Value About Current and Past Roles?

What if you can't clearly articulate your values? Don't worry. You are in good company. Years ago, when asked what I value most, I drew a blank, then picked from a random list of values, only to later realize that something was missing. Here's a simple technique to create your own tailored list. Make a list of the roles you have held in your career. In one column, list everything you enjoyed about the role. Was there anything in

In the next column, list everything that you did not enjoy. Is there anything you gravitated away from?

As you look over your list, do any patterns emerge? For example, you enjoyed a flexible work environment and working remotely, but you did not appreciate the lack of communication and not feeling connected to others.

4. Do My Values Help or Hinder my Goals?

Not every value that we have will drive us to our goal. In fact, some of our values could be things that hold us back or things that will prevent us from getting to where we want to go. For example, if you want to own your own business but you value financial security, you may delay taking any steps towards reaching your goal. Now that you are aware, you get to decide what to do next. You could adjust your goal, determine that a value is no longer as important or do both. You could start planning and create an action plan on how to start a business, while still maintaining a full-time job. You could even take a job with less responsibility or hours to free yourself up to think through your business logistics.

5. Will this Next Step Move me Towards or Away from my Goal?

With every decision and choice in front of you, look back at everything you've outlined and ask yourself it will bring you one step closer to your goal or one step away? Or could this be a conscious detour? The key to aligning work to goals is making purposeful and conscious choices, based on your intended direction and staying true to your values.

In summary, invest your time wisely on what aligns with where you want to go. Re-direct any efforts and energy away from those things not in alignment. And recognize that nothing is linear; no matter how clear your goals or detailed your plans, there are unexpected changes and decisions along the way.