

Article 3 Resource: Honor Your Story

A Reflection Resource to Reframe the Myth of a
Linear Career



Real Talk & Reflection

Damon Maassen, CPTD



I used to think career movement had to make sense on paper. Like if it didn't follow a clean, linear path, it somehow made me less credible as a professional. But looking back, those shifts — some chosen, some not — were the most formative. They taught me adaptability, resilience, and how to build meaning even in ambiguity.

That resonates deeply. So many people I coach have been told to “tighten up” their story. But those pauses & pivots? That’s where the real growth happens. The deeper story of your career lives not only in the roles you’ve held, but in how those experiences shaped you. And so many clients look back at this time as one that cultivated deep introspection & gratitude, even in the face of misfortune.

Dr. Sarah Trocchio



And yet, there's still this stigma around detours. Whether it's leaving a toxic workplace, downshifting at work to care give, healing from burnout, or just realizing, “This isn't for me anymore” — it all gets reduced to a red flag if we're not careful.

Conversation Continued on Next Page

Article 3 Resource: Honor Your Story

A Reflection Resource to Reframe the Myth of a
Linear Career



Real Talk & Reflection (Cont'd)

Exactly. Especially when the decision wasn't yours. A layoff or health challenge can feel like it unravels your whole narrative. These moments don't take away from who you are. They just ask for time to make sense often before you can try to explain them to others. But those moments don't erase your value, they often reveal it. We just need space to reframe, not rush to explain.

Dr. Sarah Trocchio



Damon Maassen, CPTD



The irony is, we celebrate unpredictability in so many parts of life such as travel, relationships, even creativity. But when it comes to careers, we punish people for experiencing the same. It's time we shifted that mindset, for ourselves and others.

And the truth is that each shift, whether planned or forced, is a part of the landscape we're learning to navigate, understand, and as I often see with my clients-- to ultimately celebrate.



Article 3 Resource:

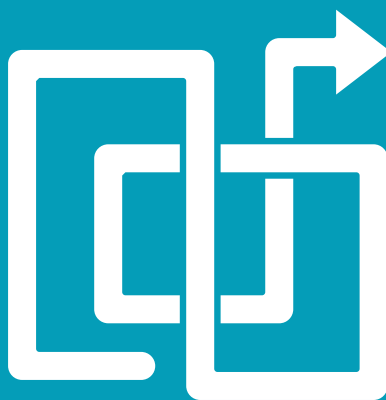
Honor Your Story

A Reflection Resource to Reframe the Myth of a Linear Career



Reframe: Let Go of the “Straight Line” Narrative

Career success is often painted as a straight, upward line — intern to manager, director to executive. But real careers? They zig, they zag, they pause. They detour for caregiving, for reinvention, for burnout, for diagnoses, for joy.



Some changes we choose. Others choose us.

Let's normalize career shifts that don't follow conventional arcs:

- The artist turned nonprofit strategist
- The teacher turned UX researcher
- The laid-off tech worker turned freelance facilitator
- The parent returning to work after caregiving
- The government analyst turned small business owner
- The policy advisor turned executive coach
- The higher ed administrator turned digital accessibility consultant
- None of these are failures. They're just different chapters in a longer, richer story.

“Trust the people, and they become trustworthy. Trust yourself, and you become trustworthy.”

— adrienne marcee brown

Article 3 Resource: Honor Your Story

A Reflection Resource to Reframe the Myth of a
Linear Career



Reflection Prompts

Use these questions for journaling, coaching, or quiet reflection:



- What part of my career journey have I downplayed, even though it shaped me?
- Where have I made courageous pivots that I can now own with pride?
- What assumptions do I hold about what a “real” or “respectable” career should look like? Where did those assumptions come from?
- If I stopped comparing my story to others, what might I celebrate?
- What values have consistently guided my decisions, even when the path wasn’t linear?

Gentle Practices for Career Transition

Career transition should go beyond rewriting your resumé to also allow for rewriting your narrative, both internally and externally. These practices can help you reclaim your story on your own terms, while also shaping how others understand your path.



- **Rename the Gap:** Instead of “time away,” call it “a season of reflection,” “caregiving chapter,” or “consulting sabbatical.” Your language matters.
- **Build a Value Timeline:** Sketch out your roles — not by title, but by the values or skills each one helped you develop (e.g., resilience, leadership, creativity).
- **Reclaim Your Introductions:** Instead of “I used to be...” or “I’m just figuring it out...,” try “I’m in a chapter of redefining what meaningful work looks like for me.”
- **Collect Non-Linear Inspiration:** Follow or talk to people who’ve made bold career pivots. Let their stories expand your own possibilities.

Article 3 Resource: Honor Your Story

A Reflection Resource to Reframe the Myth of a
Linear Career



Support from The Square Peg Club & Damon Maassen

Led by Dr. Sarah Trocchio, The Square Peg Club offers values-driven coaching for those navigating career transitions, pivots, and identity-aligned growth. Learn more at [The Square Peg Club](#).

Damon Maassen offers coaching and consulting to help people and teams rewrite their narratives during times of change. His work centers inclusion, belonging, and clarity as paths toward more human-centric workplaces and careers. Connect with Damon on [LinkedIn](#) to learn more.

Whether you're looking to pause, realign, or reignite your work with intention — we're here to support you.



Final Encouragement

It's easy to celebrate reinvention when it's glossy, public, or backed by privilege. It's harder when change is forced by layoffs, life circumstances, or systemic barriers. But even then, your story still holds power.

You are allowed to change your mind, try again, shift directions, and start new chapters — at any age, in any industry, for any reason. The measure of a career isn't its linearity. It's whether it reflects who you are and what you value now.

— Sarah & Damon