

Top 10 podcast episodes of 2025



Our most popular episodes

1. **#460** How to master small talk (even if you're an Introvert)
2. **#466** How to focus on outcomes to reduce overwhelm
3. **#458** How to deal with any challenge at work (career scenario planning)
4. **#457** 3 ways to give and get constructive feedback
5. **#459** 3 types of awareness to accelerate your career growth
6. **#452** Influence: the psychology of persuasion at work with Robert Cialdini
7. **#453** How to manage stress at work
8. **#477** Why your energy is more important than your time
9. **#482** How to stay in control during change at work
10. **#481** Four AI prompts to accelerate your squiggly career

Small talk is part of lots of work moments but can feel uncomfortable.

Reframing small talk as a chance to make a quick connection can be a useful starting point to make conversations easier.

Coach yourself questions

How do I feel about small talk?



Which small talk conversation starter feels most natural for me?



Ideas for action



1. Small talk starters

Getting started is often the hardest part. Try one of these approaches to ease into small talk:

Low-commitment questions

Simple questions help take the pressure off and keep the conversation informal and easy to answer. Try asking:

- 📌 "What have you been up to since I last saw you?"
- 📌 "Who are you looking forward to hearing from or seeing today?" (at events)
- 📌 "What's new since last week?" (ask your team)
- 📌 "How's your week going?"

Giving to get started

Share something about yourself to encourage others to do the same. e.g.

- 📌 "This week I've been..."
- 📌 "Yesterday I..."

2. Half versus whole listening

Small talk is easier when you focus on listening rather than thinking about what to say next.

Whole listening means being present, which makes it easier to spot subtle signals and quick connections. Try:

- 📌 After a quick connection, test your whole listening – can you remember 75% of what was said?
- 📌 Paraphrasing what you've heard during a quick connection to help the conversation flow naturally.

3. When to stop the small talk

Small talk is short – often just a few minutes. The key is to know when and how to move on.

There are two ways you could do this:

- 📌 **Segway to the main conversation:** signal the shift by saying: "What's the most useful thing for us to talk about first?" or "Let's get started"
- 📌 **Stop and conclude positively:** end the chat in a way that feels authentic to you. For example: "It's been lovely talking, I'm going to go meet a colleague"

Recommended resources



10 ways to have a better conversation.
Insightful Ted Talk by Celeste Headlee.



How to get better at small talk and even enjoy it. Ten minute video by Harvard Business Review.



Helen talks to journalist and author Kate Murphy on how you can upgrade your listening skills in episode **#319** of Squiggly Careers.

How to focus on outcomes to reduce overwhelm

Overwhelm is a state of emotional or mental overload, often caused by stress, external pressures or unmanageable demands. It can show up as anxiety or helplessness, and exhaustion, making it difficult to focus or take action.

Focusing on outcomes instead of just tasks, can help you gain clarity, prioritise what matters and reduce overwhelm.

Ideas for action



1. Connect activities to outcomes

Shifting your focus from activities to outcomes can help you prioritise, making it easier to achieve what's important and reduce feelings of overwhelm.

Outcome orientation creates a filter for what to do first and what not to do. Try:

- ✎ Listing your weekly activities: what tasks are filling your time?
- ✎ For each activity, identify the outcomes – what impact does this have? What difference will it make?
- ✎ Group by outcome type – Does it contribute to *impact*, *learning*, or *relationships*?
- ✎ Adjust your focus – Prioritise tasks that drive the outcomes you're aiming for.

2. Talk it out

Conversation can bring clarity and calmness when work situations are difficult to deal with.

Spot the people who have specific conversational skills to get the most useful support when you're feeling overwhelmed.

- ✎ **Clarity Creators:** Help you step back and focus on what matters most
- ✎ **Challengers:** See and say things you might not be prepared to do for yourself.
- ✎ **Coaches:** Ask insightful questions and listen, helping you to think it through for yourself.

Reflect on the support you need most and reach out for a conversation to discuss your situation.

3. Focus on what makes you feel good

Recognising what you're doing well is really important for your resilience and can help you get through overwhelming moments. At the end of the day, try asking yourself:

- ✎ *What's one thing I've made progress on?*
- ✎ *Who is one person I've helped?*
- ✎ *What do I feel good about in my world outside of work?*

Coach yourself questions

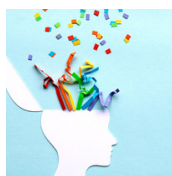
When do I start to feel overwhelmed?



How can I share how I am feeling with people?



Recommended resources



How to Deal with Constantly Feeling Overwhelmed.
Useful HBR article by executive coach Rebecca Zucker.



Investing in your resilience. Try our free 10 minute tool to get a view of your 'resting resilience'.



Helen and Sarah share insights, ideas, and actions to support your stress tolerance at work in episode **#316** of Squiggly Careers.

Scenario planning helps you explore future changes, challenges and opportunities that could impact your career development.

Without it, you might feel less capable of responding to change. With it, you'll feel more confident and proactive in your career development.

Coach yourself questions

What would you love to happen at work in the next 12 months?



What do you worry might happen at work in the next 12 months?



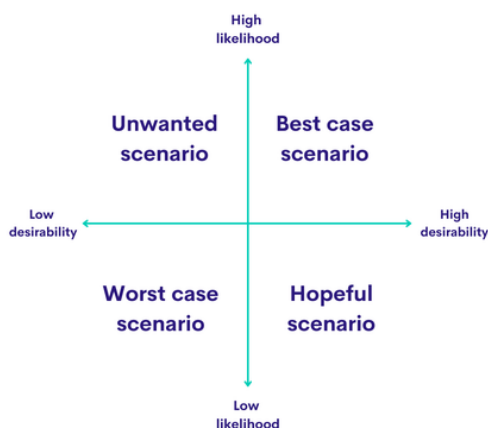
Ideas for action



1. Generate four scenarios

Use our matrix to explore four different future career scenarios based on two factors: likelihood (how likely it is to happen) and desirability (how much you want it to happen).

Try working with a thinking partner and use a 12 month timeframe.



2. Identify the actions you can take now

If each scenario happens in 12 months, what could you do now to prepare?

Planning ahead helps you to feel more in control and better able to respond to change.

3. Try using AI for more scenario ideas

Try using this prompt with AI:

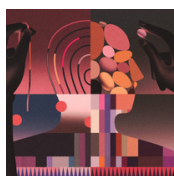
"I am a _____ who works at a _____ and I want to proactively think through potential career scenarios to help me navigate uncertainty and change over the next 12 months.

I'd like you to generate career scenarios using the following framework:

1. Best Case Scenario: A highly desirable outcome with a high likelihood of happening.
2. Worst Case Scenario: A low desirability outcome with a low likelihood of occurring.
3. Unwanted Scenario: A high likelihood outcome that is not desirable.
4. Hopeful Scenario: A highly desirable outcome that has a low likelihood of happening.

Please suggest potential career scenarios based on market trends, the industry, and my role. Ideally, these scenarios should reflect both opportunities and risks I might need to prepare for."

Recommended resources



How to become your own career coach.
Harvard Business Review article by Helen & Sarah



Download our Career Canvas tool
as a framework for your career conversations.



Helen and Sarah share 3 ideas to help define, connect, and communicate your career ambitions on episode **#407** of Squiggly Careers.

Feedback stops and starts

Feedback is a powerful tool for career development, but it can be hard to give and to get.

Challenging the assumptions and actions that get in the way of feedback, can help you to reset your approach.

When learning is the priority, feedback feels much easier to do.

Coach yourself questions

What's stopping me asking for feedback?



What feedback am I avoiding sharing?



Ideas for action



1. Stop ad hoc feedback → start always on

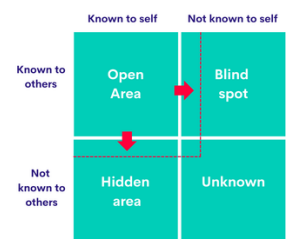
Treat feedback as a regular habit and it becomes less daunting to do. Try to:

- ✎ Add feedback into existing meetings. Ask: *What worked well today? What should we do differently next time we meet?*
- ✎ Make an easy ask: *What's one thing we could improve? What's the best thing from today?*
- ✎ Give a heads up. Before a meeting say: *"I'm trying to improve my..... I'd love to get some feedback from you after today's meeting".*

2. Stop focusing on weaknesses → start diving into strengths

We have more opportunity to learn and grow in the areas we're already strongest at.

Using the Johari Window Model, ask for feedback on when you're at your best to try and make the open area as big as possible.



3. Stop outsourcing feedback → start owning your feedback

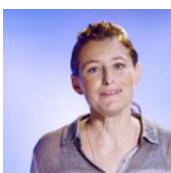
Owning feedback puts you in control and connects what you want to learn with people who can help you grow. Start by:

- ✎ Identifying areas where your work is most visible (e.g. projects, meetings, processes).
- ✎ Asking relevant colleagues for feedback on your impact.
- ✎ Reflecting on how their insights on your impact align with your intent.

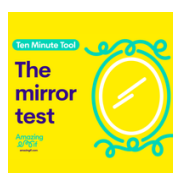
Feedback questions to try

- ✎ *What did you think was the best thing about our meeting today and what's the one thing you'd change for next time?*
- ✎ *How do you think I could improve my impact on the project?*
- ✎ *What three words would you use to describe me at my best?*

Recommended resources



The secret to giving great feedback.
TedTalk by LeeAnn Renninger.



Use our **free mirror test tool** to compare what you want to be known for with what you're actually known for.



Helen and Sarah share 5 ideas for action to give and get fast and frequent feedback on episode **#301** of Squiggly Careers.

Turning awareness into action

Awareness is a powerful skill for career growth, yet it's often overlooked. Small shifts in both awareness and action can help accelerate your career.

Awareness isn't just about self-awareness- we also need to consider our situational awareness (reading the room) and relational awareness (understanding your impact on others).

Ideas for action

1. Self-awareness - understanding yourself

Start by understanding your strengths, triggers and how you might get in your own way:

- 🔗 Identify: *me at my best vs. me at my worst*
- 🔗 Ask others: *'when do I get in my own way?'*

Our values are a strong motivator for change. Use values-based questions to support a change in your behaviour. e.g.

- 🔗 *If I stop this, what can I start?* (value: action)
- 🔗 *What am I learning from this?* (value: learning)

2. Situational awareness - reading the room

In a meeting/moment, pay attention to shifts in dynamics. Are people showing up differently? Ask rather than assume.

Try:

- 🔗 Asking yourself: *'what's different today?'*
- 🔗 Considering: *how can I be useful now?*
- 🔗 Offering options where people might need help: *'do you need a sounding board, problem solver or suggestions to get started?'*
- 🔗 Giving choices: *'where do you want to start?'* or *'what would you rather do?'*

3. Relational awareness - understanding your impact on others

This looks different for different people - which means you need to be able to adapt.

To understand your impact on others, map the 5 people you spend the most time with at work and reflect on whether you're a good or bad influence on their work. E.g. are you:

- 🔗 Enabling them to be at their best?
- 🔗 Working in a way that suits you not them?

Build trust across a team by acknowledging how you like to work and give people permission to have a conversation if that isn't working. e.g.

- 🔗 *"This is typically how I like to work, I do know that can feel X. If that ever feels hard, please talk to me about it."*

Coach yourself questions

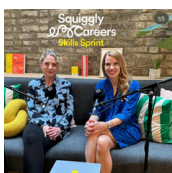
Where do I have the biggest awareness gap?



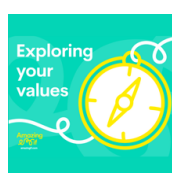
What is my main motivation to improve?



Recommended resources



Watch our Skills Sprint on Influencing.
Learn how understanding others and gaining trust can help you succeed.



Download our free values tool
for five exercises to help you explore your values.



Helen and Sarah share 6 ideas to help you increase your self-awareness and take action on episode **#249** of Squiggly Careers.

Influence: the psychology of persuasion at work



Robert B. Cialdini

Developing your influence ability helps you to achieve more of what matters to you in your squiggly career.

It leads to more successful interviews, makes your asks more effective, and results in more desirable outcomes and actions from the people you work with.

Influence is a learnable skill, we just need the right tools and techniques to do it well.

Ideas for action



1. Use reciprocity

Robert's research shows that people feel obligated to give back to other people who have given to them first.

You can use this insight to influence people's actions. By thinking about what you can give and being strategic about who and when you share it with, you can build reciprocity into your relationships.

What experience/expertise could you give to others?



Who would you like to build a reciprocal relationship with?



2. Leverage your authority

We trust people who have authority and they influence what we think and do at work.

You can be **in** authority (someone who is in a formal position of power e.g. manager, leader) or you can be **an** authority (someone who has specific knowledge or expertise in an area).

Everyone has the choice to become **an** authority.

Are you more motivated by being 'in' authority or being 'an' authority?



What would you like to become 'an' authority in?



3. Start small

Making a big ask first can backfire. We can build influence into our asks by starting small, getting a 'yes', and then following up with a more significant ask.

Robert's research shows they where you make the ask matters too. People are 16 times more likely to say yes to an in-person ask than one made remotely or over email.

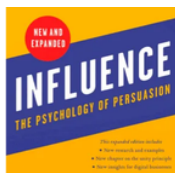
What's a big thing you want someone to say yes to and what smaller asks could you start with?



Recommended resources



Watch the [LIT Videobook on Influence](#) for an engaging and useful way to learn about the topic.



Read Influence to dive deeper into Robert B. Cialdini's work



Helen and Sarah share insights, ideas, and actions to develop your skills of social influence at work in episode [315](#) of Squiggly Careers.

How to manage stress at work



Amelia Nagoski

Stress is a cycle that happens in our body. If we can't complete the cycle and discharge the stress that we experience, we risk burnout.

Burnout has a huge impact on people and companies. When you experience burnout you have a decreased sense of accomplishment, you're less able to solve problems, you think less creatively and you struggle with complexity.

Learning to complete the stress cycle reduces the risk of burnout.

Ideas for action



1. Make more meaning in your work

You are less likely to burnout if you are connected to something bigger than yourself.

This might include:

- 🔗 Legacy - *your long-term impact*
- 🔗 Community - *the people you feel connected to*
- 🔗 Service to others - *your positive impact on others.*

What do you want people to say about you and the work that you do?



2. Do a thing

When you feel burnt out, you are more likely to experience a sense of learned helplessness. This is when you feel powerless to change your circumstances.

Rather than feel stuck, we need to take an action. Any action which helps us to feel a sense of control. It can be a walk, asking for feedback, completing a course or having a conversation with a mentor. Doing 'a thing' breaks patterns which sustain burnout.

Who could you ask for strengths based feedback? e.g. *when do you see me at my best?*



3. Add active rest into your week

Active rest is a simple way of releasing stress. It provides a focus for your mind and an outlet for your emotions.

Active rest is personal. For some people it might be a creative act like drawing or dancing, for others it might be more playful, like gaming and for many, it's exercise based.

The important action is to know your active rest and to add it into your week.

What does active rest look like for you?



How can you add it into your week?



Recommended resources



Watch the [LIT Videobook on Burnout](#) for an engaging and useful way to learn about the topic.



How rest can make you better at your job.
Insightful Ted Talk with author Alex Soojung-Kim Pang.



Helen and Sarah share insights, ideas, and actions to support your stress tolerance at work in episode [316](#) of Squiggly Careers.

How to manage your energy to increase your impact

Being intentional about how you manage your energy can help you to increase your impact at work.

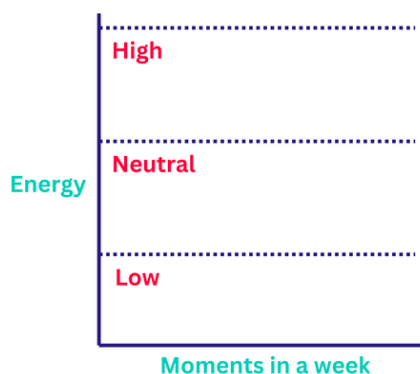
You can't gain more time - it's a finite resource - but you can increase the energy you have in a week. Gaining a greater understanding on what gives and takes your energy can help you to make better decisions about what you spend time on and how you do your work. This increased awareness and autonomy can fuel your motivation so you can achieve more of what matters to you.

Ideas for Action



Track your energy across a week

Use a graph to think visually about your energy - how it moves up, down, or stays neutral throughout the week.



By understanding your energy flow, you can identify changes to structure your week more effectively and show up in the way you want.

Use our prompts to explore how your past/present/future perspectives, relationships and environment impact on your energy.

1. Play with perspectives

Consider whether reflecting on your past successes, staying focused on your present reality or projecting into the future could be helpful for your energy.

Which prompt feels most energising for you?

- 🔗 What moments from the last 12 months am I most proud of? (past perspective)
- 🔗 How can I increase my effectiveness this week? (present perspective)
- 🔗 What do I want to be true in 12 months time that isn't true today? future perspective)

2. Reflect on your relationships

We exchange energy with the people we spend time with. Understanding who impacts your energy helps you to be intentional about who you spend time with.

- 🔗 Which interactions cause your energy levels to go up or down?
- 🔗 How can you adapt your interactions based on this insight?

Coach yourself questions

What's your high energy moment this week?



What can you remove that drains your energy?

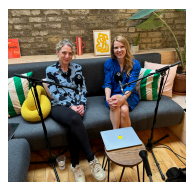


3. Experiment with your environment

Your working environment can affect your energy. Being conscious of the places and spaces that you are at your best in can help you rethink where you spend time.

- 🔗 Notice if your energy shifts when you stay in one place or switch spaces during the day.
- 🔗 Experiment with where you work to find out what boosts your energy the most.

Recommended resources



Watch our 7 minute Skills Sprint on how keeping your energy levels high can help you to overcome challenges.



Manage Your Energy, Not Your Time. HBR article by Tony Schwartz and Catherine McCarthy.



Our Being Better Than Busy tool is a useful template to reflect on where you're currently spending energy at work.

How to stop change from stalling your progression

Change comes in lots of forms and from lots of directions. It often feels like something we're forced to respond to and requires a lot of resilience. At worst, change can result in being put into a role or team that doesn't feel like a good fit and leave you feeling limited in your career.

How you respond to change is a skill you can learn. Developing this skill helps you take back control, keep moving forward, and make the best of what's next, even when things feel uncertain or uncomfortable.

Ideas for action



To make the best of where you are now

1. Talk to your manager about what they can influence or control

They might be able to spot projects, learning opportunities, or areas where you can get involved. Try a simple approach:

"I appreciate I'm no longer able to work on..., an alternative I think could be interesting would be to..."

2. Spot new opportunities to learn & connect

This helps you add new experiences, create fresh learning, and build new connections.

"What's a project I haven't been involved in? What part of the business do I know little about? Who are the people I haven't worked with before?"

3. Set a one-word intention

Pick a word that reflects how you want to show up during this time and use it to focus your mindset and actions.

e.g. pragmatic, open, calm, creative, connection

To go beyond to feel better

1. Find a move mentor

Spot someone who's experienced in your area of interest (inside or outside your organisation). They can help connect your skills/guide your next steps. You could say:

"I want to be known for/use more.. These are some areas I'm interested in. I'd really like your advice on how I can connect my talents to those positions."

2. Opt into some unapologetic 'me-time'

When change is hard, set clear boundaries to protect your energy.

Take your lunch break, leave work on time, or spend time on hobbies or communities that recharge you.

3. Choose your change story

How you talk about your situation affects how you feel about it. Instead of focusing on what's wrong, reframe your story:

"What did this change mean to you? What did you learn? What would your advice be to other people?"

Coach yourself questions

What benefit could this change bring?



What action will help me to move forward this week?



Recommended resources



Download our free career canvas to help you understand your strengths, values, confidence, network and what you'd like to learn.



Discover what to unlearn and relearn to navigate change with futurist, speaker, and author April Rinne in episode [#379](#) of Squiggly Careers.

4 AI prompts to accelerate your career

AI is having a significant impact in how we work, learn and grow in our careers. Experimenting with AI tools can lead to new insights and ideas to support your development.

Try our AI prompts to explore four important areas that impact your career: relationships, change, emotions/feelings, and your online presence.

Ideas for action



1. Building relationships at work

Prompt: Here's a profile of someone I work with [insert 5 personality traits], Here's my profile [insert 5 personality traits], How do I build a positive relationship with this person?

Follow-up prompt: What could get in the way of us building a good relationship?

Try: as a team, ask everyone to build a profile of someone they work with. Share what AI came up with, then discuss: What would you build on? What did it miss?

2. Coping with Change

Prompt: I work as a [job] at [company]. The change I'm experiencing is [issue]. I'm finding it hard because [worry] I would like some ideas to [e.g. respond to this change, progress in my career].

Follow-up prompt: Create a 30-day checklist of small daily actions to help me feel more [insert feeling] during a challenging time at work - make it a PDF I can tick off.

Try: in pairs or teams, compare checklists and share which actions feel most helpful.

3. Help with how you feel about work

Prompt: I'm a [role] in [type of company] and I'm feeling a bit [feeling]. What questions could I ask myself to feel more positive about the work that I do?

Follow-up prompt: Where would you recommend I get started? Which questions should I ask first?

Try: take each AI-generated question and spend 3 minutes doing a mind map to explore your thoughts. How do you feel? Which questions helped the most?

4. Reviewing your LinkedIn profile

Prompt: Review my LinkedIn profile [profile link] and do three things: 1. Summarise my profile 2. Identify the personal strengths that stand out 3. Suggest opportunities to improve.

Follow-up prompts: I want to be known for [area], who should I follow for inspiration? or I want to be known for [area], share 3 ways I could build my profile.

Try: Reflect on your intent vs. the impact of your profile. Are the strengths you want to be known for standing out?

Coach yourself questions

What career questions could AI help me answer?



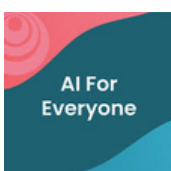
What would help me to use AI more as a source of career support?



Recommended resources



Download our **Career Scenario PodSheet** for another AI prompt to support your future career planning.



AI for Everyone
Free course from Coursera produced by Andrew Ng



Helen and Sarah explore more AI tools to help your career development in episode **#331** of Squiggly Careers.

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