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Welcome to your squiggly career

We're going to start by asking you three questions about your career today:

1. Do you feel like you're climbing a ladder with each step of your career clearly mapped out ahead of you?
2. Can you imagine working in the same role for the next five years, and in the same company for the next ten?
3. Do you think you'll be able to retire at the same age as your parents?

No, no and *unlikely!* are the typical responses that most people give to these questions.

The world of work has changed dramatically over the last few decades and for the most part it's changed for the better. Today, careers are filled with endless opportunities, but those opportunities also come with more complications. Most of us are seeking jobs that excite and fulfil us, where we can use our strengths, find purpose, work flexibly and learn new skills. We've come to expect a lot from our careers, and are constantly told to 'love your job', 'follow your dreams' and 'live your best life'. But this aspirational advice often feels far removed from our reality. Sometimes it's hard to 'follow your dreams' when you have rent or a mortgage to pay, a manager to keep happy and expectations from colleagues and friends that you should be available on email or WhatsApp 24/7.




Jobs for life are a thing of the past and our career expectations have changed.

There's a gap between the promise of work today – a shiny world full of opportunity, creativity and freedom – and the reality of many people's

careers. And building the bridge to this new world of work is going to take more than pithy advice and inspirational quotes.

So, what does it take? To find happiness in the modern world of work and take control of your career now and in the future, you need to develop a set of five career skills. These skills are:

1. **Super Strengths: the things you are great at.** You need to know what your strengths are and take action to make sure your strengths stand out across everything you do.
2. **Values: what makes you 'you'.** Identifying what motivates and drives you will help you make the right career decisions and understand other people in a meaningful way.
3. **Confidence: belief in yourself.** We all have 'confidence gremlins', the things that hold us back at work. You can learn how to cage these gremlins and build your resilience by focusing on your successes and developing a strong support system.
4. **Networks: people helping people.** It is important to build relationships in a way that works for you, and to learn to build an effective network based on what you can give rather than gain.
5. **Future Possibilities: exploring options.** Career plans are a thing of the past; your focus should be on identifying future possibilities and taking action to explore them in the present. What is your work 'why' and how can it help futureproof your career now?



Ditch the ladder,
discover opportunity
and design a career
that works for you.

It is within everyone's capability and control to develop these skills no matter what stage of your career you are at – whether you've just started out in your first job, are a manager leading a team of ten people, or have just launched your own business.

Knowing and using your strengths, living your values, caging your confidence gremlins, building a network in a way that works for you and exploring

your future possibilities are the essential skills you will need to have a happy and successful squiggly career.

Spotting the squiggle

Let's start by telling you a bit about us and the light-bulb moment that led to this book. We first met studying Business Management at university, and in June 2013 we got together for a regular catch-up over coffee. We were in a particularly reflective mood that summer's day, sharing our feelings about how life at work had changed since the days of our first jobs.

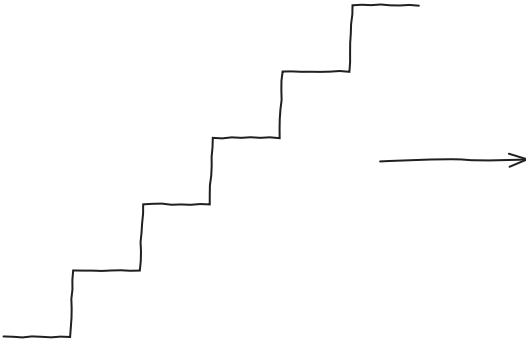
We both left university ambitious and motivated to climb the career ladder. We had imagined and planned for an end destination that was as far up 'the ladder' as was possible. But the reality of our experiences was somewhat different. Twelve years on, we were both just as ambitious and were enjoying successful careers, but these careers were becoming increasingly unpredictable and somewhat ... squiggly.

We had moved organizations, roles and professions much more than we had anticipated. Sarah joked that she had already worked in more companies and roles than her dad had done in his entire career. This gave us pause for thought. We realized that careers weren't really linear anymore; they had become more complicated and complex than that. Every aspect of our working lives seemed to be changing in some way, and the pace of change was speeding up.

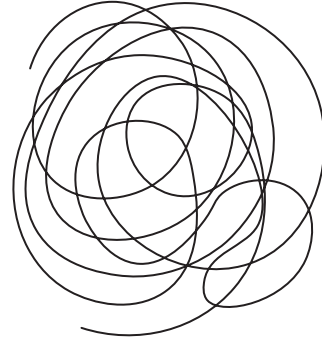
Luckily, we were both enjoying and benefitting from these changes. We were learning, exploring new and interesting opportunities, and building relationships with a variety of inspiring and interesting people. But we felt we were in the fortunate minority. Many people we knew were struggling, feeling confused, stressed, anxious and overwhelmed about their careers. Our friends, peers, and people working for us had expressed frustration over their progress, saying things like 'I don't know where I'm going', 'I feel stuck', 'how do I find out what I'm good at?' and 'how do I find a job I love?'

As we sat drinking our coffee, we reflected on this new idea that work was squigglier than it used to be. Sarah picked up a pen and started scribbling on her napkin:

CAREERS IN PAST



CAREERS TODAY



In drawing this sketch, the ‘squiggly career’ was born. We realized that the career ladder was gone and in its place was the squiggly career. We asked ourselves, wouldn’t it be amazing if everyone had the skills they need to succeed in a squiggly career? And decided we wanted to take action to make this happen.

There and then, we started a side project together called Amazing If, to help people be happy and fulfilled at work. Very much accidental entrepreneurs, we were fuelled by an ambition to create a new approach to professional development.

Scaling the squiggle

In the years that followed, our side project took on a life of its own. We began running small skills workshops where people would try out the tools we had designed to support their career development.

At the start of every workshop we drew the staircase and squiggly diagram and shared our hypothesis about how the shape of careers was changing (more on that in the next chapter). Met with nods of agreement every time we showed this sketch, we knew we were onto something. Over the next six years, we ran courses for bigger audiences and tweaked

our tools to make them as impactful as possible. The tools became a fundamental part of our own career development as we progressed in leadership roles, navigated parenthood, redundancies and many other personal and professional changes. And as our day jobs grew in size and scale so did our side project.

We worked with organizations large and small to support their employees' career development and we launched the *Squiggly Careers* podcast so we could share our ideas with people who couldn't come to our events. Before we knew it, we had trained thousands of people and developed a large community of advocates and ambassadors of the squiggly career. Hundreds of 'Amazing If Alumni' shared their success stories with us, from being promoted to improving a relationship with a manager to discovering a whole new career. Our small side project had become something much more significant than we'd ever imagined.

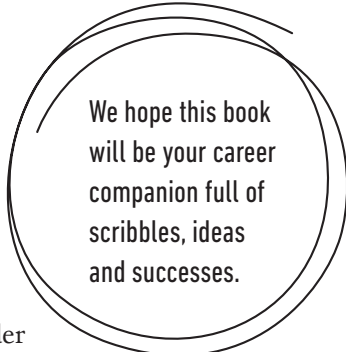
Cue this book! For the first time, we have compiled all our ideas, actions, tools and techniques into one place. By reading and working through this book you'll discover new insights into yourself and your career. And before we begin transforming your career, here are some tips on how to make the most of *The Squiggly Career*.

How to use this book

This is a practical book jam-packed full of exercises, tools and techniques. Everything we share is designed to help you discover insights about yourself and take action today, next week and for the rest of your career.


We begin the book in Chapter One by delving deeper into what we mean by the squiggly career and discuss how the career ladder analogy has lost its usefulness in the context of work today.

In Chapters Two to Six we focus on the five core skills we have already identified, which will be key to the development of your successful squiggly career:



We hope this book
will be your career
companion full of
scribbles, ideas
and successes.

1. Super Strengths
2. Values
3. Confidence
4. Networks
5. Future Possibilities



Turn the insights
you discover into
action at work.

Each chapter begins with a brief explanation of what we mean by each skill and explores why it matters in the context of a squiggly career. We then move on to how you can develop each skill and turn the insights you discover into action at work. In some of these chapters we include our own career stories to illustrate how these skills have helped us to learn and succeed in the workplace. You'll find these personal stories in break-out boxes with our names next to them. We finish every chapter with a ten-point summary of the key areas covered.

In Chapter Seven we will address the most common career conundrums including:

1. Should I start a side project?
2. How do I find a mentor?
3. What do I do if my organization doesn't invest in training?
4. How do I achieve work/life balance?
5. Should I stay or should I go?
6. How do I build my personal brand?
7. How do I demonstrate I'm a leader when I don't have a team?

These are the questions we get asked most frequently by people in our workshops and podcast listeners. They are common concerns that become relevant to many of us over the course of our careers. In this chapter, we will share ideas and actions to help you tackle these tricky topics and finish each conundrum with a list of useful resources for you to read, watch or listen to.

In the final chapter, you will find 100 pieces of career advice from people we have worked with or who have inspired us in our careers. Each person has shared their advice with us specifically for this book, so we hope you find their wisdom as invaluable as we have. You'll find nuggets

of advice from people like Adam Grant, Professor at Wharton University and author of *Give and Take*, *Originals* and *Option B*, Emma Gannon, author of *The Multi-Hyphen Method* and host of the *Ctrl Alt Delete* podcast, and Carolyn McCall DBE, the CEO of ITV.

Things to keep in mind as you make your way through the book

Get scribbling. There are tools and exercises for you to complete in each chapter, and this book is designed to be written in. If you need more space or want to start an exercise again there are some blank pages at the end of the book. If you're reading this as an eBook, you might want to keep a notebook to hand and use the highlighting function from time to time. We want this to be the most dog-eared book on your shelf, full of turned-down pages and notes – so scribble away!

Adapt the exercises to work for you. Over the past six years we have developed these exercises with the help of our workshop participants but don't be afraid to adapt them to suit your needs. They are not set in stone. If you can spot ways to tweak them so they work even better for you, go for it. This book is your career toolkit to use and personalize to suit you and your needs.

Come back to the exercises more than once. This is really important. These skills are not something you think about developing once, tick off your to-do list then never return to again. View all the exercises as a step towards working out an answer rather than immediately providing the definitive answer. Keep coming back to them and you'll learn new things each time. We have both done the exercises in this book hundreds of times over several years and we continue to find them useful and insightful every time.

Read and re-read. If you have the time, we would suggest reading the book in the order we've written it. Though each chapter can be read in isolation, we think most of you will find it helpful to build on the learning and insights from the previous chapter. After you've read the book once, it's highly likely you'll come back to specific sections to repeat exercises that feel relevant to you at that particular moment in your career.

Get in touch. We'd love to know what you make of our exercises and tools – we want to hear what works and, just as importantly, what doesn't work for you. And if you have ideas for areas you'd like us to cover in the future, please get in touch.

You can find us in a few places:

Instagram: @amazingif

We share daily career tips on Instagram Stories and explore the ins and outs of squiggly careers with our community.

Podcast: *Squiggly Careers* is available for free across all platforms

We host a weekly podcast covering every career topic you can think of, from asking for a pay rise to managing stress at work to how to build your gravitas.

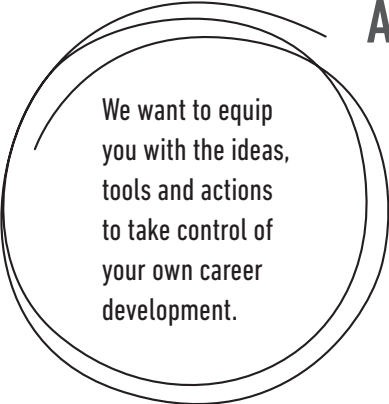
Email: helenandsarah@amazingif.com

If you have any feedback or questions, send us an email. Our favourite part of running workshops is hearing people's success stories afterwards, so we'd love to hear how the book has helped you in your career.

Website: www.amazingif.com

This is where you'll find lots of free career resources, like the ones found in this book, and access to our online courses.

A final word from us



We want to equip you with the ideas, tools and actions to take control of your own career development.

By choosing to read this book you are already taking action to learn and improve, and that's half the battle! Adopting an open mindset, practising self-awareness and prioritizing learning are fundamental to achieving success and finding fulfilment in a squiggly career.

By the end of this book, you'll have gained the insight and confidence to kick-start your squiggly career success. Working through the book will require you to think deeply and reflect thoughtfully on your current and future career but it's also designed to be a fun process. We hope you enjoy reading *The Squiggly Career* and that it supports the careers of you, your colleagues and your friends for many years to come.

Get stuck in and good luck!

Helen and Sarah

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The signature on the left is 'Helen' and the signature on the right is 'Sarah'. Both are written in a cursive, flowing style.





Chapter 1

The Squiggly Career

Careers used to be about climbing a ladder; they were predictable, linear and we knew what was coming next. Now everything feels much more uncertain. We all know what it's like to feel overwhelmed and stressed in our jobs, and we're looking for more freedom and fulfilment from the time we spend at work. We came up with the idea of the squiggly career as a way of describing our new reality. All careers today are squiggly, which is why it has never been more important to prioritize your own development and design a career that works for you.

There are many reasons why we face squiggly careers. The last decade has seen seismic shifts in the who, what, where, when and why of work, and created a dramatically different working environment. Before we dive into the five skills you need in order to thrive today, we're going to explore some of the biggest changes of the last decade and what it means for your career today. The who, what, where, when and why of work are all changing. Let's explore each of these and why they matter to you.

WHO we work with

Five generations working side by side

Right now, there are potentially five generations of people working side by side, as an aging population has introduced more demographic diversity into the workplace. Each generation and individual is at a different stage in their career, with varying needs and expectations. A 'one size fits all' approach to career development has become redundant and been replaced by the need for a more personalized framework that recognizes that everyone has different motivations in their career.

Who is at work today?

People aged 75+. Sometimes referred to as 'the traditionalists', this group of people are choosing to work past retirement age thanks to improved health, technology and flexibility.

People aged 55–74. This group of 'baby boomers' have probably experienced a more linear career but now have the opportunity to learn new skills and even retrain for new career options later in life.

People aged 44–54. Typically, this generation is referred to as 'Gen X', and they are identified as being well educated (60 per cent have achieved further education¹) and having experienced the 'work hard/play hard' approach to careers.


People aged 25–43. This group will represent 75 per cent of the workforce by 2020.² For 'Gen Y', finding purpose in their work is important. A tech-savvy group who feel comfortable job-hopping.

People aged under 25. Digital from day one. 'Gen Z' are the most politically and socially active group in work today.

What this means for you: *own your development*

Career paths are disappearing

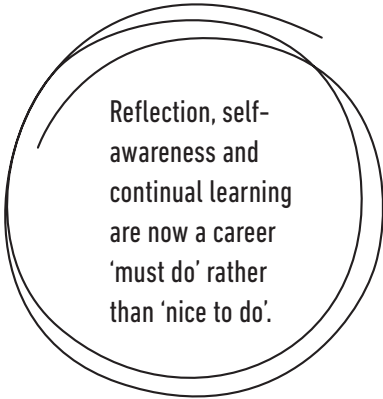
A more diverse workforce has two significant implications for your career. The first is the increasing expectation and need for individuals to take active ownership of their career development. Organizations used to do a lot of the hard work for us, mapping out things like career paths and promotion plans. Organizations once told us what to do and where to go, but now we need to be able to answer those questions for ourselves.



No one cares about your career as much as you do.

Enjoy the journey, it's a long one!

Secondly, we are living and working for longer, spending an average of 90,000 hours at work in our lifetime.³ If you're thirty now, you will probably continue to work in some capacity for the next forty years. While this might feel like a slightly terrifying thought at times, it's a useful reminder of just how important it is to design a career that delivers personal fulfilment, growth and happiness.



Reflection, self-awareness and continual learning are now a career 'must do' rather than 'nice to do'.

WHAT we work on

The impact of automation

The type of work we're doing has changed. Very few of us have jobs where we do the same thing day in, day out. This has been primarily driven by the impact of technology, which is replacing the need for humans to complete many repetitive and predictable tasks. A McKinsey report suggests that as technology continues to develop, up to 375 million workers may need to change their occupational category by 2030.⁴

No two days are the same

Work is now more project based and job specifications become out of date almost the moment we start a new job, as we adapt to meet the needs of

our organizations. The acronym VUCA – volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous – is sometimes used to describe the environment we're now working in, and it doesn't feel like the pace of change is about to slow down. Change asks a lot of people. In a constantly shifting work environment we have to learn new skills, build relationships, communicate effectively and adapt to ongoing shifts in our day-to-day role and responsibilities.

'In order to keep up with the world of 2050 . . . you will above all need to reinvent yourself again and again.'

**YUVAL HARARI,
21 LESSONS FOR
THE 21ST CENTURY**

Change is constant

Responding and adapting to change also requires organizations to create agile operating structures and develop nimble teams. This means less hierarchy and more restructuring. A 2019 Global Human Capital Trends report by Deloitte discovered that nine out of ten leaders set restructuring as a top priority.⁵ This environment means that organizations are looking to hire people who are resilient, adaptable, curious and can demonstrate their ability to learn quickly and succeed in a fast-moving world.

What this means for you: *become a 'learn-it-all'*

Work in progress

As the type of work we do is transforming, our perspective and relationship with learning needs to change too. Learning has to become part of how we work every day, rather than being limited to an occasional training day or team meeting. We need to acknowledge and embrace a 'work in progress' mindset towards our careers, appreciating that there is no point at which we will be 'done' with our professional development.

Lifelong learning

Professor Carol Dweck's research on learning and intelligence proves that our mindset impacts our level of achievement. In a fixed mindset we believe our qualities to be unchangeable, and therefore focus on proving that we are right rather than learning from mistakes. If we adopt a growth mindset we invest energy in stretching our abilities and view failure as an

opportunity to learn. The mindset we choose has an enormous impact on how we approach problems and perceive achievement and success. With a fixed mindset we see problems that we aren't smart enough to solve, whereas in a growth mindset we believe we will find a solution, we just haven't got there yet. In her popular TED Talk Dweck refers to this as 'the power of yet'.

Dweck's ideas, which she put forward in a book called *Mindset*, are beginning to be adopted by progressive organizations which recognize the value of integrating learning into their DNA. Satya Nadella, CEO of Microsoft, believes that everyone, including himself, should focus on being a 'learn-it-all' rather than a 'know-it-all'.

'You need new ideas and you need new capabilities, but the only way you're going to get those new ideas and new capabilities is if you have a culture that allows you to grow those.'

SATYA NADELLA,
CEO, MICROSOFT

WHERE and WHEN we work

No more 'nine to five'

Typically, the 'when' of work used to be 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., but according to a YouGov survey in 2018 only 6 per cent of the people surveyed were working the schedule that we traditionally associate with making a living.⁶ Employers and employees are beginning to recognize the mutual benefit of individuals defining their own pattern and place of work.

We are motivated by the freedom to work in a way that suits us best and in return organizations benefit from more productive and diverse employees.

Flexibility is more than working from home

Almost half the people surveyed by YouGov worked flexibly in some way, through initiatives such as job sharing, compressed hours or the four-day week. This is a good example of where flexible working benefits organizations as well as individuals, as 72 per cent of businesses featured in the study reported an increase in productivity as a direct result of implementing flexibility at work in some way.⁷