PAID TO BE YOU

The Career and Financial Plan AI Cannot Replace

Donna Sunario BSc

10-10-10 Publishing

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www.donnasunario.com

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For the people who look capable

from the outside and feel split on the inside.

This book was written for you.

Foreword

Dear Reader,

You have built a good career. It pays well, people respect you, and from the outside everything looks fine. And yet something feels off. If you are honest with yourself, it has probably felt that way for a while now. Not constantly. Just often enough to notice. A quiet voice appears on Sunday evening, in the middle of a meeting, or when someone asks how work is going and you hear yourself say fine when you mean something else entirely.

What is stopping you from doing something about it?

After the first few pages of a book, I know whether it will change someone or just keep them company. This one will change you.

Donna Sunario spent twenty five years working alongside some of the most high performing people in the world, at Goldman Sachs, BP, and Accenture. She was in the room when the big calls got made. And what she observed, over and over again, was that the most capable people in those rooms were often the ones quietly falling apart inside. They stayed because the money was good. They stayed because leaving felt disloyal after everything the company had invested in them. They stayed because so much of who they were had become tied up in what they did, and walking away felt like losing themselves entirely. She understood all of it. Then she spent years building a method to help people find a way forward that does not require them to blow up everything they've worked for.

That method is in this book. It is not about following your passion or taking a leap of faith. It is about getting

genuinely clear on your numbers, your strengths, and your real options before you make any move at all. The Survival Number. The Freedom Number. The Clarity Fund. The Runway. Donna gives you a financial framework that most career books never go anywhere near, because most career books are written by people who have never had to make a real financial decision under pressure. Donna has. She knows what it actually takes to make a transition that holds.

I've seen too many talented people wait too long. They keep telling themselves the timing is not right. They wait for the perfect moment that never quite arrives. They wait until things get so uncomfortable that they feel they have no choice. By then so much has already been lost, not just time, but confidence, energy, and the sense that another kind of working life is still possible. This book shows you how to move before you reach that point. With a clear head and a real plan, not just a feeling that you cannot keep ignoring.

Donna is not asking you to be brave. She is asking you to be honest with yourself. In my experience, that is always the harder thing to do. It is also the thing that changes everything.

Read this with a pen. The answer you keep coming back to is probably the right one.

Raymond Aaron
New York Times Bestselling Author

Acknowledgements

Books may carry one name on the cover, but they are never written alone.

To my son, **George Gennuso**. This book was written while you were at university, finding your shape in the world. Whatever profession you choose, I hope it shows you that your skills and knowledge are never wasted. The ALIGN method and the financial framework in these pages were built for people exactly like you. There is always a way to build work that fits who you are.

To my rock, **Colin Francis**. Thank you for your patience through every stage of writing this book. Through the late nights, the early mornings, the lost weekends, and the tired conversations, your support never wavered. Yours, Zara.

To my paternal Indonesian grandparents, remembered with deep love. **Prof Mr Sunario Sastrowardoyo SH**, Indonesia's former Minister of Foreign Affairs and former Ambassador to the United Kingdom, and to **Dina Maranta Pantauw**, who shaped the values that reached me across generations.

To my late father, **Irawan Sunario MA**, and to my late Irish mother, **Deirdre Stuart**, who gave me my compass. I've never stopped using it.

To my sister, **Maya Sunario MSc**, for your unwavering support, and to my niece, **Kira Lynch BA**. I hope this book finds you at the right moment.

And to **Gucci**, my loyal mini poodle and writing companion, thank you for keeping me company through the long hours and making sure I remembered to take a break.

A Personal Note

This note was not in the original plan for this book. The world did not stay in its original plan either.

By the time this manuscript reached its final stages, the professional landscape had shifted sharply enough that beginning without naming that shift felt dishonest. Not because the method in this book needed replacing. It does not. The principles beneath it are grounded in human behaviour, nervous system intelligence, and lived experience. Those principles predate artificial intelligence, and they will outlast the current cycle of disruption. What has changed is the context in which you are reading them. You do not need another alarmist book about work. You need an honest map.

Here is the first thing worth saying plainly. The people building the technology are not speaking with one voice of total reassurance. Some of them are openly uneasy about the speed of change, the concentration of power, and the scale of what is being decided by a very small number of companies. That matters. It means your unease about what is happening to work is not irrational, not dramatic, not evidence that you are failing to adapt. It may mean you are paying attention.

Here is the second thing. As more cognitive work becomes automated, the distinctly human parts of work do not become less valuable. In fact, they become more valuable. Communication that reads the room. Judgement that cannot be templated. Trust built in person over time. The capacity to sit with another human being and know what is needed before it can be neatly articulated. These are not soft skills. They are market advantages.

When something becomes abundant, its value falls. When something becomes scarce, its value rises. Artificial intelligence is making certain forms of output abundant. The part of you that cannot be standardised matters more now, not less.

What is really happening is a redistribution of value rather than an elimination of it. Work that depends on pattern completion is becoming cheaper and faster to produce through automated means. Work that depends on context, on reading a specific situation in real time and responding to what is specifically true about it, is not. The conclusion that your particular contribution is at risk requires knowing specifically what that contribution consists of. That is what this book is designed to help you find out.

I spent twenty five years working inside high pressure corporate environments alongside C-suite leaders including Goldman Sachs, BP, and Accenture. I was in the rooms where the decisions were made. I watched how capable people perform certainty they do not feel, and how rarely the external life matches the internal one. Alongside that, I studied Forensic Psychology, Psychotherapy, and Finance, completing a Bachelor of Science degree while working full time. I later trained as a coach and NLP practitioner, studying directly with Richard Bandler and Paul McKenna. What I observed in those rooms, filtered through what I learned in those studies, became the foundation of the method in this book.

Some books will tell you to follow your passion. There are books about deep work, about finding your why, about career capital. This book does what none of those do. It takes the signal your body has been sending you for years and gives it a commercial structure. It does not ask you to

choose between meaning and money. It insists you do not have to.

This book makes three promises. It will help you separate panic from signal. It will help you identify the value that is specific to you. And it will help you build a bridge from insight to income without asking you to gamble your life on inspiration alone.

Now let's begin.

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How to Use This Book

This is not a book to skim for temporary motivation. It is a book to work with.

Read it with a pen. Mark the lines that feel accurate. Do the exercises in order. Let the same answers repeat before you draw conclusions. Repetition matters more than intensity. A truth that returns quietly three times is usually worth more than a dramatic insight that disappears by morning.

Do not use one hard chapter as a reason to make a rushed decision. If something lands in your heart, pause. Walk. Come back. This book is designed to help you move with more accuracy, not more panic.

The Paid to Be You Workbook and Survival Number Calculator at www.donnasunario.com give each exercise a structure to return to. All resources are in Continuing the Work at the back of this book.

Part One helps you recognise the split between the life that looks right and the life that fits. Part Two gives you the ALIGN method for working with that split properly. Part Three turns clarity into financial structure. Part Four asks who you become when your work, your money, and your truth stop pulling in opposite directions.

You do not need to solve the whole future while reading this book. One honest move is enough. The next one becomes easier to see.

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PART ONE

Chapter 1

The Crossroads

Why success without alignment is
the most expensive thing you will ever own.

She had just been told she was getting the promotion.

She was standing in the corridor outside her director's office, holding a coffee she had forgotten to drink. The building was quiet. Through the glass, the city lights were coming on. By any measure, this was the moment she had been building towards for seven years. The title change. The salary adjustment. The confirmation that her work had been seen.

She felt nothing.

Not relief. Not excitement. Not even the exhaustion that follows sustained effort. Nothing. And then, before she could arrange her reaction, a single thought arrived, clear and unwelcome. I have to do this for another twenty years.

She told nobody. She went back to her desk, answered the congratulations emails, and booked dinner. She did the things you do when something good has happened. But the thought stayed. It was there on Monday morning. It was there at Christmas. Three years later, when she walked into my office, it had never left.

That absence of feeling was not a failure of gratitude. It was information. Her nervous system was registering that the external milestone and the internal life had stopped moving in the same direction.

You may think the problem is that you are not appreciating what you have. But what is really happening is your body has kept a more honest ledger than your mind.

The Sunday feeling does not have a name. You know it.

It is not dread exactly. It is something more specific. A heaviness that arrives around 6pm and does not announce itself. You are still at the dinner table, folded into the sofa, or watching something you will not remember. You are, by every visible measure, fine. Underneath that, something is counting the hours until Monday with quiet accuracy.

You have been pushing that feeling aside for longer than you would like to admit. You are good at it. You have had years of practice.

This chapter will not tell you the feeling is wrong. It will show you what it is. Because a feeling that specific, persistent, and immune to better circumstances is not a mood. It is a signal. And a signal that will not stop is not asking for your patience. It is asking for your attention.

You are not necessarily in crisis. You may be at a crossroads. Those are not the same thing. The person at a crossroads is not lost. They have reached the point where the life they can keep living and the life that is actually theirs are no longer on the same road. Recognising that distinction is what this chapter is for.

What if the career AI cannot replace is
the one you have been too afraid to build?

1.1 The 2am Question

The 2am question is rarely the first sign that something is wrong. It is usually the first moment the noise stops long enough for you to hear it.

During the day you are insulated. The inbox. The commute. The meetings that need preparing for and recovering from. The evidence that your life is functioning. The role is still intact. The salary still lands. The busyness gives your mind something to organise itself around, and that organisation keeps the question at a safe distance.

Then the night arrives. The room is dark. The noise has gone. There is nothing between you and yourself except your own breathing. And the question comes.

For some people it sounds like: *Is this it*. For others: *What am I actually doing with this*. For others it is not a sentence at all. It is a pressure in the chest. A restlessness in the stomach. A strange heaviness in the throat, as if something needs to be said and keeps being swallowed back down.

The phrasing does not matter. What matters is the persistence. That is the telling detail. Ordinary dissatisfaction has a visible cause. The workload is too high. The manager is difficult. The team is dysfunctional. Address the cause and the feeling often eases. The 2am question behaves differently. You get the promotion. You feel good for a while, but it returns. You move teams. Again, feel good for a while but it still returns. You take a fortnight in Tuscany and sometimes hear it more clearly there, without the noise to drown it out. You book the holiday, sleep twelve hours a night, feel briefly human again, and then the Sunday evening before you fly home the feeling is already waiting for you at arrivals.

That persistence is the clue. You are not just dealing with circumstances. You may be dealing with structure. With a deeper split between the life you are living and the life your system has registered as yours.

Most capable people respond in one of three ways. They numb it, with overwork, with scrolling, with the kind of relentless productivity that looks like ambition and functions as avoidance. They rationalise it, calling themselves ungrateful, invoking the people who have it harder, downgrading the question into a mood or a phase or a midlife cliche. Or they panic, oscillating between fantasies of burning everything down and fearful promises to change nothing at all.

Each response makes sense in its own way. Numbing is the one our culture rewards most, because overwork can look exactly like ambition. The person working fourteen hour days looks driven from the outside. Inside, the truth may be very different. They are not working because they love the work. They are working because staying busy keeps the question away. A full inbox is louder than an honest doubt. The productivity is real, but so is the avoidance.

The rationalising response is quieter and more psychologically sophisticated. It works through comparison, through the invoking of context, through the construction of an argument that the feeling is disproportionate or irrational given the objective circumstances. You have more than most. Other people are dealing with harder things. This is what midlife feels like for everyone who is paying attention. These are not lies. They contain real information. But they are deployed in service of suppression rather than clarity, which is what makes them expensive. The rational case for the status quo is always stronger than the rational case for change, not

because staying is always right but because the costs of staying are invisible and the costs of changing are very visible. The rationalising voice exploits that asymmetry.

Panic looks most like action, but it usually creates the least useful movement. It swings between the dramatic gesture and the return to safety. The resignation letter written at midnight. The decision by morning that nothing will change. The need underneath the panic is real, but panic is a poor compass. It is trying to relieve discomfort, not assess direction. The moves it creates are usually quick, thin, and easy to reverse once the first wave of relief fades.

None of those produces clarity. None of them is wrong, exactly. They are all reasonable responses to something that feels unreasonable. But they share one feature: they treat the question as a problem to be managed rather than a signal to be heard.

The better response is quieter. Listen. Not dramatically. Not with the pressure to solve your whole life before breakfast. Not with a resignation letter half-drafted in your head before the school run. Just listen. The 2am question is not trying to ruin your life. It may be the only part of you still trying to save it. Everything in this book follows from taking that sentence seriously.

The question is worth looking at properly because it rarely arrives when life is obviously falling apart. It comes in the margins of a life that works on paper. The mortgage is paid. The children are busy. The career is still moving in the expected direction. And still the question comes. That usually means the issue is not one bad manager, one difficult quarter, or one demanding project. Something deeper is no longer fitting, and that kind of problem cannot be fixed only from the outside.

What makes the 2am question different from ordinary dissatisfaction is that it does not respond to ordinary solutions. Ordinary dissatisfaction responds to change. Change the manager, change the team, change the project, and the feeling eases. The 2am question responds to none of that. It is not about the surface. It is about the depth. It is asking something about the whole shape of the professional life, not just the current chapter of it. That is why the usual tools, the holiday, the promotion, the pep talk from a mentor who has known you for years, do not reach it. They treat the symptom. The symptom is not the problem.

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1.2 The Gap Between Your CV and Your Soul

On paper, your life may look impressive. The degree. The title. The salary. The pension. The polished online profile that describes a career trajectory you technically have had. The long history of being trusted with serious things. On paper, you may have done everything right.

Paper does not have a nervous system. It cannot tell you whether the life you have built actually fits the person living it.

The gap I'm describing is the distance between your achievements and your truth. Between what you have accumulated and what genuinely engages you. Between what looks right from the outside and what feels right from the inside. It is a gap especially common among high achievers, and for a reason that sounds like a compliment but is actually a trap. Competence attracts reward. When you are good at something, the world gives you more of it. More responsibility. More money. More identity. More of the same thing you are already doing. Over time, it becomes very easy to build an entire professional life around capability rather than alignment. You get better and better at work that is costing you more and more.

I've watched this pattern from the inside. A lawyer technically brilliant and visibly alive only when she talked about education policy over dinner. An investment banker who could model complex derivative products in his sleep, but whose whole face changed, physically softened, when he described the furniture he built at weekends in a workshop he had converted from a garage. A marketing director who hit every target for six consecutive years and couldn't remember the last time she had felt genuinely curious about a campaign. These are not people who are failing. They are people who are excelling at work that is

slowly taking something from them that does not show up on any performance review.

That cost is not just emotional. A sustained gap between your CV and your soul narrows the life available to you. It affects energy, creativity, focus, and the quality of thinking you bring to everything else. You can still perform at a high level. But the aliveness goes missing. Work becomes something you can do well without fully inhabiting it. You start performing the role rather than occupying it. You answer the right questions in meetings with the right words, and something in you watches from a slight distance, noting that none of this costs you anything because none of it reaches you.

Competence disguises the problem perfectly. The world keeps rewarding you, so leaving appears irrational. Your manager rates you highly. Your team relies on you. Your salary buys a good life. The rational case for staying is always stronger than the rational case for questioning. But the wrong fit does not always arrive as collapse. Often it arrives as quiet erosion. Less curiosity year by year. Less joy. Less appetite for your own life. A growing sense that you have become very good at the wrong thing.

One more thing needs naming before we go further. Success can deepen the trap rather than release you from it. A promotion can make the split worse, not better, because it increases your investment in the wrong track. You become more visible in a role that fits you less. More rewarded for strengths you no longer want to organise your life around. More dependent on the very structure that is draining you. And once that identity is rewarded often enough, questioning it starts to feel less like courage and more like ingratitude.

You cannot redesign a life you are still pretending fits. That sentence is the centre of this chapter. The rest of the book depends on taking it seriously.

Sit with why this particular trap is so effective. It works because the people inside it are, by most visible measures, succeeding. The performance reviews are good. The income is good. The professional reputation is good. And all of that goodness becomes, over time, a kind of evidence that the direction must be right. You wouldn't be this successful if you were this misaligned. Except that success and alignment are not the same thing. You can be highly successful at something that is not quite yours. You can be excellent, recognised, and rewarded, while the most genuinely capable parts of you go quietly unused.

The people who resist this idea most strongly tend to be the ones it most applies to. They have built too much on the foundation of the wrong identity to easily examine the foundation. Every credential, every relationship, every piece of professional infrastructure has been constructed on the assumption that the direction is correct. Questioning the direction feels like questioning the entire structure. But the structure is not under question. Only its orientation. You can redirect without demolishing. You can build differently without tearing everything down. That is what the rest of this book is for.

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1.3 How We Learn to Betray Ourselves for a Salary

Nobody usually sits a child down and explains what is about to happen. The lesson arrives more quietly than that.

From early on, many of us are trained to orient towards the authority figure. Produce the correct answer. Complete the assigned task, not the one that captures your interest. Read the room. Learn what draws praise. Learn what keeps you safe. These are not trivial lessons. They build adaptive skill. They help people survive demanding schools, difficult homes, unpredictable systems, and high pressure workplaces. They also, over time, build something else entirely. A reflex that places the outside signal above the internal one. A habit that says: first check what is wanted, then decide what you think.

That reflex makes people very employable. If you can read what is needed, manage your own expression, and deliver against outside standards, organisations will reward you. The problem is that reward can feel like proof that the work fits when it may only prove that you are good at adapting. Being effective is not the same as being aligned. Being good at someone else's priorities is not the same as building your own.

I know this pattern personally. Growing up across mixed cultural expectations taught me to scan a room quickly and become whatever the room required. That made me competent. It also made it easier to spend years in work that looked successful from the outside while losing contact with what I actually needed from the inside. The competence and the disconnection ran in parallel for a long time before I understood they were connected, that one was feeding the other.

Over time the pattern becomes moralised in ways that make it nearly invisible. Self-abandonment starts to look like maturity. Compliance starts to look like professionalism. Exhaustion starts to look like ambition. Staying when you want to leave starts to look like responsibility. The betrayal itself is rarely dramatic. It is usually a long sequence of individually reasonable decisions, each of which makes complete sense in isolation. Taking the safer role instead of the alive one. Staying another year because leaving feels irresponsible right now. Choosing what is credible over what is curious. Accepting the promotion because saying no seems ungrateful. Together, those decisions carry you a very long way from yourself. Not in one moment. Over many years of small, sensible choices.

The particularly difficult part is this. Once the pattern is established and rewarded, questioning it can feel like disloyalty. Not only to the organisation or to other people, but to the version of yourself you have spent years building. You have become the reliable one. The capable one. The one whose life looks solid. And that identity has been confirmed enough times that dismantling any part of it can feel like dismantling yourself.

I'm not asking you to blame anyone for this. Much of the conditioning began as protection. The point is not blame. The point is recognition. Until you see how thoroughly you have been trained to prioritise outside approval over internal signal, you'll keep making the same choices and wondering why the question in the dark will not stop returning.

The hardest part is that this pattern is rewarded almost everywhere high achievers spend their time. Schools reward it. Companies reward it. Professions reward it. Families often reward it too. The person who learns to read

the room and deliver what is expected is praised early and often. By the time the cost shows up, the behaviour no longer feels like a pattern. It feels like personality.

The work of this chapter, and the chapters that follow, is not to undo your competence. Your competence is real and it matters. The work is to separate competence from compulsion. To notice when you are doing something because it reflects who you are, and when you are doing it because the system around you trained you to put its needs before your own. That distinction is where the change begins.

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1.4 The Body Keeps the Invoice

The wrong fit has a physical signature. If you do not listen when the signal arrives as a feeling, the body often escalates until you are forced to hear it as a symptom.

I want to be precise here because this is not an argument for psychosomatic mythology. Not every symptom is caused by work. Not every illness is a message about purpose. That would be careless and irresponsible. But long term misalignment between a person's values, abilities, and daily work can create a sustained stress response with real physical consequences that compound over time. This is not metaphor. It is biology.

When you spend your days at work that does not engage you, your system does not go neutral. For many people it shifts into a low grade state of threat or functional shutdown. You are present. You are performing. You are delivering. But something in you is dampened. You are getting through the day rather than inhabiting it. The nervous system knows the difference between endurance and engagement, even when the performance looks identical from the outside.

The signs are often so familiar that people stop counting them as signs. Insomnia. Jaw tension, especially through the night. Tight shoulders that do not release between meetings. Persistent fatigue that feels disproportionate to the effort actually involved. Sunday evening dread that arrives reliably, like an internal alarm set to the same time each week. A flatness in your voice when someone asks how work is going. A growing inability to remember the last time you felt genuinely curious about what Monday might bring.

I experienced aspects of this myself. The loudest signal was insomnia. For years I woke in the early hours, somewhere between 2am and 4am, and couldn't get back to sleep. I tried to manage the symptom without addressing the cause. Better sleep hygiene. Better routines. Magnesium. Blackout curtains. Eye mask. Nothing changed. When my work began moving towards what was actually mine, the insomnia eased. My body was not malfunctioning. It was carrying information I had been too occupied to receive.

The body keeps an invoice because your system is always recording the cost of the life you are asking it to sustain. It tracks what energises you and what depletes you. Where you constrict. Where you go numb. Where you can breathe properly. That does not mean every sensation should be obeyed immediately, or that every uncomfortable feeling is a career crisis. It does mean your physical responses deserve to be taken seriously as data. Not the only data. But real data. Ignoring the data does not cancel the debt. It only postpones the moment when payment becomes unavoidable, and by then the interest is usually substantial.

This escalation usually has a pattern. At first, the body speaks quietly. A bit of tension that eases at the weekend. Less energy than the role seems to require. A low grade restlessness that can be blamed on the season, the workload, the commute, or a difficult quarter. These signals are easy to miss because there are always reasonable explanations available. You are still functioning. The discomfort is real but manageable, and manageable discomfort is easy to call normal adult life.

Over time, the signal gets louder. Mild tension becomes chronic tension. Low energy becomes fatigue. Sunday restlessness becomes dread. The body is not malfunctioning. It is trying harder to get a message

through. Many people who say they were finally forced into career change are describing the point at which the body became too loud to ignore. That moment is costly because it usually comes after years of smaller signals that were not taken seriously.

I am not naming this to scare you. I am naming it to bring the timing forward. If you learn to read the quieter signals, you can respond while the cost is still low. A holiday can return your energy instead of only interrupting your exhaustion. Sunday evening can lose its familiar weight. Monday can feel like the start of something rather than the return to something you are enduring. Those changes become possible when the split is addressed, not just managed.

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1.5 When Relief Hides Inside Redundancy

There are people who expect fear when a redundancy letter arrives and feel something else first.

Relief.

Before the practicalities. Before the calculations. Before the socially appropriate response has time to assemble itself. Relief. The kind that arrives like oxygen returning after a long time spent underwater. A breath you did not know you had been waiting to take.

Then guilt follows immediately, because guilt always follows relief in these situations. It arrives within seconds. What kind of responsible adult feels relief at losing a well-paid job. What kind of person feels better, not worse, when the thing they have been fighting to keep is suddenly gone without their choosing it.

The answer is straightforward. Someone whose body has just told the truth. I recognised it when it happened to me. The relief arrived before I had any time to arrange my reaction to it. It arrived in the body before the mind had constructed the story I was supposed to feel. That arrival, that sequence, was itself the most important information in the room.

That kind of relief is one of the clearest signals you can receive. It is not laziness. It is not ingratitude. It does not mean you failed to value what you had. It means your nervous system has registered the removal of a strain you may have been carrying for longer than you admitted. The guilt that follows is not wisdom. It is old training rushing in to correct the body’s honesty before anyone notices it.

But the body does not organise itself around appearances. It registers what it experiences as life-giving or depleting, as true or false. And sometimes the most accurate information it can offer is this: the thing you have been holding onto was costing more than it was worth, and you already knew it.

Not everyone receives the external event that forces a reckoning. Most people will not get the redundancy letter. Most will just keep collecting small moments of bodily truth while building increasingly elaborate explanations for why those moments do not count. Why a sensible adult shouldn't take a flash of relief at a cancelled meeting as meaningful information about their working life.

The signal does not only arrive through big events. It often arrives through small moments that are easy to dismiss. A cancelled meeting. A flash of relief. A quiet lift when you imagine another kind of work. The question is whether you are willing to stop brushing those moments aside and start treating the pattern as information, not as evidence that you are ungrateful.

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1.6 ALIGN Exercise: The Disharmony Inventory

This exercise makes visible the gap between your external circumstances and your internal experience. Its purpose is not to produce a decision. Its purpose is to make the split impossible to ignore.

You'll need twenty minutes, a pen, paper, and a willingness to be accurate rather than presentable. This is not an exercise for performance. Do it alone. Do not show it to anyone until you have sat with it for at least twenty-four hours.

Draw a vertical line down the centre of a page.

Left column heading: What Is True on Paper

Right column heading: What Is True in My Body

Under the left column, list the visible facts of your current professional life. Your job title. Your salary. Your qualifications. Your achievements. Your responsibilities. The clear evidence that your life is working. Be complete. Be honest about what looks good. Do not understate it.

Under the right column, list the lived reality. How you feel on a Sunday evening, specifically and physically. What happens in your body when your alarm goes off on a Monday morning. What you feel in your chest when you imagine doing this for another five years. Where you feel tension in your body during or after work. Where you feel heaviness. Where you feel nothing at all, which is often the most important entry.

When both columns are complete, sit with the gap between them. Do not try to close it yet. Do not start planning your escape. Do not turn the exercise into a problem to solve

before bedtime. The gap is not your enemy. It is the most honest thing on the page.

Pay particular attention to anything in the right column that surprises you. Often the most important signals are the ones we have suppressed so thoroughly that they startle us when they finally appear on the page. One woman who did this exercise wrote only three words in the body column: I feel nothing. That was the most important entry on the page. She hadn't just lost enthusiasm for her work. She had disconnected from the body's signals entirely, and that numbness was the signal she most needed to see.

The first step of the ALIGN method is Acknowledge. Acknowledgement begins here. With the simple and difficult act of telling the truth about where you are, on paper, where it cannot be revised mid-sentence to protect anyone's feelings, including your own.

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