



THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO  
**Developing Your Career  
in the Public Sector**



Great careers don't begin by accident.

The best careers come from years of hard work, talent, and strategy, all mixed in with the right support, and a little bit of luck.

A career development strategy is a roadmap to achieving what you want when it comes to your career goal. With the right plan in place, you determine which roles are best for you, and what actions you need to take.

Strategies give you the accountability of fixed objectives, along with the inspiration and motivation that comes from knowing what you truly want to do.

As Abraham Lincoln once said: *"The best way to predict the future, is to create it."*

In this complimentary report, we cover all the fundamental approaches to developing a robust career plan; from cultivating the right mindset to setting SMART goals.

I hope this will give you the impetus you need to climb the career ladder of your choice

**Heather Clarke**  
**Managing Director**  
**Harris Burns**

## Maintaining the Right Mindset

The first step in developing your career, is to embrace the right mindset.

It's easy to assume that creativity, intelligence or talent are the things that set successful people apart from the rest of the world. However, the truth is that all the most powerful people in position today reached their goals through perseverance, grit, dedication and the right mindset.

According to Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck and scientists following her research, the best predictor of success in life is your mindset. The most successful people believe that they can achieve great things.

## Why Mindsets Matter

Though a strong career plan and excellent focus are critical to achieving your goals, your attitude is the fuel that keeps you moving in the right direction. Even the best employees face challenges at times, and the right mindset is how you overcome those obstacles and keep moving forward.

Consider Sir Anwar Pervez who moved from Pakistan to the UK aged 21 and later opened his first convenience store, which developed into Bestway group the UK's largest cash and carry group. He started with £2,200, and his company is now worth £2.95 billion.

Alternatively, Chris Dawson, a former market trader who founded The Range with £5,000. The group now has 140 stores and it worth £1.65 billion.

## How to Change your Mindset

With the right mindset, you can change everything. Converting your attitude from an "If I can" perspective to an "I can" focus helps to free you from limiting beliefs that hold you back from success. So, how can you use your mindset to develop your career?



## **1. Exchange the “Fixed” Mindset for Growth**

The growth mindset concept created by Carol Dweck is one of the most powerful motivators for career-focused people. While a fixed mindset suggests that a situation is set in stone and there’s nothing you can do to change it, a growth mindset encourages the creation of change.

With a growth mindset, you break free of your limitations by working hard, adapting to feedback and enhancing your skills. In other words, you take charge of your development.

## **2. Discover What You Truly Want**

The right mindset requires focus, and that means deciding what you want from your career. Do you want the position you’re currently in? Or do you need to look at another area of the public sector to find the role that’s suited to you?

You can’t reach your destination unless you know where you’re going. Before you can create a strategy, you need to outline your vision of success.

## **3. Be Willing to Do What it Takes to Get What You Want**

Once you decide what you want to accomplish with your career development plan, you need to be willing to go out there and take charge of your growth. To some extent, this means being willing to work hard, invest in yourself, undergo additional training and develop your network.

At the same time, it’s important to be willing to fail. Sometimes the only way to grow is to make mistakes and learn from them. If you’re not willing to take risks in the pursuit of your ideal job, then you may end up stuck in a role that doesn’t fulfil you.

## Know What You Want & Be Prepared to Adapt

As we alluded to earlier a significant part of developing your public sector career is knowing what you want. More than half of all employees are unsatisfied with their current position, simply because they don't know what they want.

The important thing to remember is that your idea of the perfect role can change over time. The more you learn about the sector, your skills, and opportunities, the more your career path evolves.

Look at your current end-goals and ask yourself whether they align with what you need both from a personal and professional perspective. You can work out what you want by:

### **1. Planning your Ideal Day**

Consider what the perfect day in your dream job would look like.

- What would your schedule look like?
- Where would you be?
- What would you be doing each day?
- Who would you be working with?

While it's important to be realistic with your vision, this visualisation strategy can help you to determine whether you're really on the right track in your current role.

### **2. Measure What You Like and Dislike About Your Current Position**

If you're feeling overwhelmed or burned out, it might be difficult to determine which parts of your role satisfy you. A good way to overcome this issue is to rank aspects of your job on a happiness scale. Think about what you do each day and give everything a number from 1 (terrible) to 10 (spot in).

Ranking the happiness, you feel in your position will help you to decide whether it's time for a career change. The quantitative values assigned to the factors that make you happy can also help when it comes to looking for the right career opportunity with your recruitment advisor at Harris Burns. For instance, if you know that you feel level 8 happiness when working with a team, you can focus on looking for a role where teamwork is critical and with a company culture that matches this.



### **3. Make Your Goals Both Short and Long Term**

Whether you decide to stick with your current position or transition somewhere new, remember that you don't have to commit to your new goals forever. Lives change and career ambitions change with them. While today you might love the idea of working in one part of the public sector space, tomorrow you might discover something entirely different.

Additionally, remember to leave room for flexibility from a personal perspective too. For instance, you might one day want to settle down in a space with your family or travel while you work.

## **Make Sure You Have a Plan**

When you know what you want out of a career, and you have the right mindset to go and get it, the next step is developing a plan.

Career planning is the tool you use to build bridges from your current position to your new opportunities. The bridge gives you safety, direction, and focus as you pursue your ambitions. Develop your plan using the following steps:

- Find the Right Field

The more you learn about the sector you work in, the more you'll discover new career opportunities and paths you can take. If you're not sure which road to take, there are ways that you can develop your insights.

For instance:

- Job shadowing gives you experience in your field while allowing you to spend some time in someone else's shoes.
- Internships or volunteering: A more long-term approach to learning more about a specific field, internships and volunteering can give you a deeper insight into roles in your sector.
- Networking: Discussing career opportunities with peers in your space can help you to learn more about the positions that might appeal to you. You can even discuss your opportunities with a specialist recruitment agency.
- Work Backwards From Your Goals

With a vocation in mind, consider where you'd like to be five years from now. Perhaps you want to be in a managerial position or have a job in a different organisation. List the targets most important to you today, and consider what you might need to do to get from point A to point B.

For instance, if you want a management position, you may need additional training to build your leadership skills or develop your technical expertise.

- Implement your Plan and Adjust as You Go

A successful career plan requires hard work and dedication. If you want an executive level role, then you may need to learn a lot of new skills between now and year five. Getting the training, you need while maintaining a high level of performance at work can be tough - but it's important to commit yourself to the path you choose.

However, while dedication is crucial, it's worth remembering that professional plans don't always follow a linear structure. While some people develop themselves one step at a time within the same company, others need to move sideways into new roles and opportunities.

## Set SMART Goals

Goals are crucial to developing any career.

Without goals to inspire and drive you, it's impossible to know if you're moving in the right direction. In simple terms, if you don't know the destination, then you can't plan the journey.

Goal setting allows you to take control of your professional life. Your goals can also be helpful when it comes to mid-year and end-year personal reviews, as they inform whether you're making sufficient progress.



To effectively accomplish your goals, you'll first need to know how to set them. Simply saying that you want something isn't enough. Goal setting is a strategic process that begins with a consideration of what you want to achieve and ends with hard work and dedication.

## How to Set Smart Goals

One of the most popular goal-setting strategies involves creating "SMART" goals. There are variations on what the "SMART" acronym stands for, but most experts agree that it requires your goals to be:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Attainable
- Relevant
- Time-Bound

## Setting Specific Goals

Career goals must be clear and defined. A vague goal like "I want to get a promotion" doesn't provide sufficient direction. Determine what kind of promotion you need, whether you have a specific title in mind, and when you want to accomplish that target by. If it helps, write your goals down.

A Harvard Business Study found that the 3% of MBA graduates who wrote their goals down earned up to 10 times more than the other 97% put together.



## Setting Measurable Goals

Measurable goals include precise quantitative figures you can use to determine your success. For instance, if your goal is to get a pay rise, you can say, I want to earn 5% more by the end of the year. Measurable goals give you an easier way to track your success.

## Setting Stretch Goals

Choosing stretch goals means finding the right balance between targets you can realistically achieve and aims that challenge you. If you're currently in an entry-level role, then it's unlikely that you're going to be a CEO by the end of the year. Setting goals that are too ambitious can erode your confidence and demoralise you.

However, don't set goals that are too easy either. It's important to challenge yourself, as that way you can reap the rewards of feeling accomplished and driven. Find goals that help you to raise the bar on your work and performance.

## Setting Time-Bound Goals

Giving your goals a deadline keeps you motivated and focused. Time-based aims eliminate procrastination and give you milestones that you can use to measure your success. When you're working on a deadline, you push yourself to be more efficient, and productive.

## Conduct a Skills Audit

To accomplish career goals, you will have to up level your skills relevant to the roles you want.

For instance, if you want to become a senior manager, you may already have a basic understanding of your sector but need to build your leadership abilities or develop your talents in a specific area.

A skills audit is a way to lay out all the skills you currently have and determine where you need to put in additional work.

Conduct your skills audit by:

### **Comparing the Present and the Future**

Begin by looking at your current CV and comparing it to a job description for the role you want five years from now. What's missing in your knowledge bank? Where can you add extra value to yourself?

If your organisation is in a state of transformation, then it may be worth considering the current policy direction and how they might affect your role in the future. For instance, would it help to be familiar with the latest technology, or commit to learning about innovations in your sector.

### **Knowing What You Need to Work on First**

With the specs for your ideal job to guide you and your CV in hand, write a list of the skills you need to work on and rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 4. A rating of 4 indicates that you're an expert in the area, while a rating of 1 indicates that you have very little knowledge or skill in that area.

Once you know which elements need the most work, you can develop a list of activities that will help you close the gap.

### **Put Your Plan into Action**

Create a comprehensive "personal development" plan that maps out what you need to do to develop your skillset according to the requirements of your ideal role. As you put your plan into action, make sure to set milestones for your development, and reward yourself for success.

It also helps to regularly go back and audit your skills again when major changes happen in your sector.

## Write Your Own Development Plan

There's a great quote to keep in mind when you're developing your career in the public sector:

*"If it's to be, it's up to me."*

If you want to accomplish incredible things in your career, then you need to take control of your path. A personal development plan is a way of doing that. With a personal development plan, you can get the focus you need to map your path towards your ideal vision of success.

Your plan gives you the compass you need to make better decisions, and pivot quickly when things do go wrong.

Looking at all the information about your goals, ambitions, and skills that you've gathered so far, design your development plan template by:

### **1. Prioritising your Targets**

Look at your list of goals and decide what you need to accomplish first. For instance, while your end goal might be to achieve a management position you'll need to reach other milestones first before you can get there. For instance, a hierarchy of goals might look like this:

- Develop sector skills with training courses
- Build my professional network by 10%
- Achieve a promotion, or move to a more challenging role that will stretch my skills
- Take on additional challenges/projects in my role and build leadership skills
- Apply for a management position with the help of my recruitment agency – Harris Burns.

Once you have your list of prioritised goals, give yourself deadlines and milestones related to when they need to happen.



## **2. Recognise Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats**

A skills audit, like we described earlier is a great way to outline the strengths and weaknesses in your current career plan. Once you know what your strong skill points are, and what you need to work on, you'll also need to follow through with an evaluation of the opportunities and threats you're likely to face.

This is all part of something called a personal "SWOT" analysis. A SWOT analysis gives you direction in your professional life and helps you to solve potential problems before they arise. For instance, if you know that you aren't great at networking, but might be missing out on opportunities with your industry peers, then you can start to work on that issue.

## **3. Get Help to Develop Yourself, and Measure Progress**

Once you've got your milestones, your SWOT analysis, and your ambitions to guide you, you can begin developing yourself into the employee you want to become.

While a development plan requires a lot of internal evaluation and personal effort, you don't have to do everything alone. Mentors, colleagues, and a specialist recruitment company can help to give you the guidance you need to reach your goals or overcome problems. Remember to turn to others for help when you're struggling to work out which step to take next.

Additionally, don't forget to measure your progress. After six months or so, reflect on how far you've come and celebrate the successes. Recognition is a great way to boost your motivation and dedication.

## Get a Mentor

As mentioned above, while it's up to you to do the work required to accomplish your goals, there are ways you can get help.

For instance, a mentor in your field can provide invaluable guidance as you advance in your career. A mentor can be an experienced colleague or someone from outside of your business.

- When you're just starting in a new role, they can help you to reduce your risks of making mistakes, and ensure you make the right impression. Mentors can even help you to unlock the secrets of your industry.
- In the midst of your career, when you need a little extra motivation to find your path, a mentor can help you to climb up the ladder, discover new opportunities and refine your goals.

Here are just some of the ways that mentors support public sector career development.

### **1. They Push You to Acknowledge Your Development Areas**

Moving up in your career doesn't only mean working harder, it also means figuring out what's holding you back. While you may be able to define some of your shortcomings yourself, it helps to have an outsider's opinion too. A mentor can point out issues you might not be able to see constructively and helpfully.

They can even provide strategies on how to develop your weaker areas. For instance, if you're struggling to stand out in your role, a mentor might suggest taking leadership classes or learning a new skill.

### **2. They Develop Your Strengths**

While it's key to acknowledge your shortcomings, it helps to understand your strengths too. Your mentor can help you to see strengths that you didn't know you had. With the right guidance, you can build on the best parts and develop the assets you need to access new opportunities in the future.

Career coaching from a mentor can help you to build new points of strengths in areas that you're only "average" in today.

### **3. They Keep you on the Cutting Edge**

No matter how much you think you know about the sector you operate in, constant policy change and growth in the market means that it's always helpful to update your knowledge. A mentor can give you insights that you can't get anywhere else. They can tell you about upcoming changes in your space, as well as providing you with advice and insights from their experiences in the field.

Mentors can even help you from a networking perspective, by advocating for you with peers in other organisations. Sometimes, introductions can go a long way in the right space. A mention from your mentor can change the way that other people perceive you and improve your chances of being considered for new opportunities and roles.

### **4. They Help you Make Difficult Choices**

Finally, when you're struggling to figure out where your career plan should take you next, a mentor is there to offer an educated outside perspective. Your mentor knows you, your goals, and the industry that you're working in. This means that they can provide you with ideas that you might never have considered yourself.

For instance, if you're not sure whether to take a new manager role because it means more time away from the family, your mentor may suggest asking about remote working or flexible scheduling opportunities.

Mentors can also assist you in making the right choices when new opportunities come along. Even if they just act as a sounding board, helping you to sort through your options, the right guide provides you with a wider view of a complex situation.

## Work with a Specialist Recruiter in Your Field

When you're in the middle of your career path it's easy to feel as though you're on your own. However, you do have an ally out there - specialist recruiters.

Recruitment consultants can't give you the dedication and drive you need to reach your career goals, but they can help to steer you in the right direction, by providing you with insights into the industry and roles that will get you where you want to go.



Specialist recruitment teams commit themselves to finding the right person for the ideal position. They understand your sector, and if they think you're the right person for a role, then they can be a huge help in getting you in front of a hiring manager. Just some of the benefits of working alongside a specialist recruiter include:

- Excellent knowledge of the industry: Your consultant can help you to figure out where you need to develop your skills to make 'you' more compelling as a must have employee. They also know where the latest opportunities are.
- Large networks: The extensive, yet focused nature of a specialist recruitment company means that have access to plenty of opportunities relevant to your career path. Remember they will also have access to exclusive roles you can't find anywhere else.
- Current advice and information about the best way to present your written application and perform well at interview

## Develop Your Career Today

Developing your public sector career is hard work, but it's worth it. With a solid plan, the right support, and a strong vision of your goals, you can achieve incredible things in your professional life.

Taking charge of your career development plan puts the power back into your hands and reminds you that you're responsible for where your jobs take you.

Is it time for you to develop your career?



# HARRIS BURNS

## About Harris Burns Ltd

Set up in 2017, Harris Burns is a specialist recruitment business and talent partner with a strong knowledge and understanding of the Public and Not for Profit Sector.

Our highly experienced, specialist consultants each have extensive knowledge of the market, proven track records and an established network.

We provide a wide variety of recruitment solutions to clients and candidates alike.

Each consultant concentrates on a particular sector, enabling our clients and candidates total piece of mind that they are discussing their opportunities and careers with an expert who has a pride in constantly improving their knowledge and service.







## About Heather Clarke

With over 20 years experience in the recruitment market, Heather has extensive experience covering executive permanent appointments across a variety of specialisms.

She has an in-depth understanding of public sector organisations and has developed a client portfolio ranging across the whole of the NHS, Social Housing, Charity, Education and NDGB sectors.

As a trusted recruitment partner, Heather thrives by gaining a detailed understanding of her clients situation and constantly look to attract candidates who would fit into these organisational cultures and really live the values. Developing excellent client and candidate relationships and working with an honest and professional approach is of the highest priority.

Heather has personally recruited for clients across Midlands region for roles including: Chief Finance Officers, Directors of Finance, Directors of Nursing, Director of Strategy, Chief Operating Officer, Deputy Director of Finance, Head of Information, Head of Procurement, Head of Commissioning etc.

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Best wishes for an amazing future career

**Heather**

