

Non-Negotiables

Identifying Your Career Must-Haves

This activity helps you identify your core values and the conditions you refuse to compromise in your career. By clarifying your non-negotiables, you can make career decisions that align with your integrity, well-being, and long-term fulfillment.

Understanding your non-negotiables fosters self-awareness and strategic decision-making, ensuring that your career aligns with your personal and professional values. It's a vital step toward a sustainable, fulfilling, and purpose-driven career — one where you don't feel forced to sacrifice your well-being for success.

STEP 1

Identify Your Core Values

Consider the values that define you and that your career must honor. These could include:

- Ethical alignment (for example, working in socially responsible industries)
- Growth and learning (for example, continuous education, mentorship opportunities)
- Autonomy and flexibility (for example, control over your schedule, remote work)
- Community and collaboration (for example, working in a supportive team)
- Creativity and innovation (for example, having the freedom to experiment and create)

Brainstorm 3-5 values that are non-negotiable for you.

Examples of Values

Accountability	Future generations	Pride
Achievement	Generosity	Recognition
Adaptability	Giving back	Reliability
Adventure	Grace	Resourcefulness
Altruism	Gratitude	Respect
Ambition	Growth	Responsibility
Authenticity	Harmony	Risk-taking
Balance	Health	Safety
Beauty	Home	Security
Being the best	Honesty	Self-discipline
Belonging	Hope	Self-expression
Career	Humility	Self-respect
Caring	Humor	Serenity
Collaboration	Inclusion	Service
Commitment	Independence	Simplicity
Community	Initiative	Spirituality
Compassion	Integrity	Sportsmanship
Competence	Intuition	Stewardship
Confidence	Job security	Success
Connection	Joy	Teamwork
Contentment	Justice	Thrift
Contribution	Kindness	Time
Cooperation	Knowledge	Tradition
Courage	Leadership	Travel
Creativity	Learning	Trust
Curiosity	Legacy	Truth
Dignity	Leisure	Understanding
Diversity	Love	Uniqueness
Environment	Loyalty	Usefulness
Efficiency	Making a difference	Vision
Equality	Nature	Vulnerability
Ethics	Openness	Wealth
Excellence	Optimism	Well-being
Fairness	Order	Wholeheartedness
Faith	Parenting	Wisdom
Family	Patience	_____
Financial stability	Patriotism	_____
Forgiveness	Peace	_____
Freedom	Perseverance	_____
Friendship	Personal fulfillment	_____
Fun	Power	_____

Let's take a closer look at your values.

Your personal values are likely the most important to your future career, so they are represented by the smallest circle below. Label that circle "Personal." Your sense of values are also influenced by other people, groups, and systems—for example, family, friends, faith tradition or faith community, society, culture, educational experiences. Choose the three most important influences on your values and label the remaining three circles below. The closer a circle is to the middle, the greater degree of influence it exerts on your personal values.

For each category, list up to five values. It is OK if values are included on multiple lists.

The diagram consists of four concentric circles, with the smallest circle at the center and the largest at the outer edge. Each circle is labeled "INFLUENCE VALUES" at the top. The innermost circle is the smallest, followed by a medium-sized circle, then a large circle, and finally the outermost circle. Each circle contains several horizontal dashed lines for writing values. The circles are colored in a gradient from dark red for the innermost to light orange for the outermost.

STEP 2**Define Essential Working Conditions for Your Well-Being**

Your work environment plays a huge role in your success and happiness. Think about:

- Work hours and schedule flexibility (for example, no expectation to work nights/weekends)
- Commute or remote work options (for example, unwilling to commute more than 30 minutes)
- Salary and benefits (for example, healthcare, retirement contributions, parental leave)
- Workplace culture (for example, diversity, open communication, leadership style)
- Job stability and security (for example, preference for long-term positions over short-term contracts)

List the 3-5 conditions that are essential for your well-being at work.

STEP 3**Define Your Deal Breakers (What You Will NOT Compromise)**

Think about past experiences or potential scenarios that would make you unwilling to accept a job.

EXAMPLES

- *Working for a company that violates your ethical beliefs*
- *Taking a job that requires 24/7 availability or extreme overtime*
- *Accepting a salary or compensation that does not support your financial goals*
- *Working in a hierarchical or rigid corporate culture*
- *Lack of diversity, equity, or inclusion in leadership*

What are the hard lines you refuse to cross?

Reflect

After completing the exercise, take some time to reflect on your non-negotiables and how they will shape your career choices.

1. For each value you selected as a personal value, write a sentence or two about what it means to you.
2. Note the similarities and differences between the values in each circle, representing values emanating from different people, groups, and systems that affect you. Are there any surprises? How are you influenced by each person, group, or system's set of values?
3. Reflecting on the five personal values you listed in the smallest circle, what makes these non-negotiables for you?
4. Were there any surprising realizations about your career priorities?
5. Have you ever compromised on one of these non-negotiables in the past? What was the impact?
6. How do your non-negotiables align with your long-term vision for your career?
7. Are there areas where you feel more flexible than you initially thought?