



# Why Strategy Works to Address Misperceptions of Career Growth

Based on hundreds of appraisals and interviews with individuals of diverse gender, age, or education – while assessing their personal development (mostly career-related, but also dealing with life and self-fulfilment) – I have observed the most common problem to arise dealt with strategy (or, lack of it). In other words, many people fail to construct strategies to achieve a more fulfilling future. In fact, many people lack guidelines or frameworks that would enable them to develop effective strategies for their careers, lives, or relationships.

This observation is not as surprising as one might think, since a significant majority of people, in general, never receive formal guidelines as to how to live their lives satisfactorily or progress in their careers. Consider parenthood. Despite having numerous resources to draw upon when having a child, no parent goes to an institutional “school for parenthood” – although this topic could potentially be a university degree!

The same lack of formal preparedness too often occurs with regard to decisions about what one should do in life or how to move up the job hierarchy.

Typical (and practical) human behaviour leads an individual to find a job after graduation. After that, you are expected to navigate on your own to determine how to move forward, usually without a framework to help navigate the stormy weathers of your career. On the way, if you are “lucky,” some people will offer their own success stories, which will prompt you to try and live those stories yourself. But there is where the flaw lies, along with the misperceptions such stories engender.

## **The Better Choice to Avoid Misperceptions**

While success stories are encouraging, one must remember what they truly are – just stories – and not effective strategies. These positive tales are more about heroism and how one dealt with a specific situation, overcame a difficulty, and so on. Strategies, on the other hand, involve a framework, which will serve as a practical tool and guideline for dealing with any situation.

Consider this old concept: If you want to help poor people, don’t give them money. Instead, teach them how to fish, thereby providing a more sustainable solution to poverty.

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In this analogy, “a story” would be the money, and the “framework” would be “teaching how to fish.” Some people relate to an eager audience how they followed their passion, which explains their success. Or, perhaps, they became experts on a subject by studying and working 10,000 hours on it! These are all anecdotes, not frameworks – and to be successful, everyone needs some type of framework.

Too often, as a result of these narratives, people face a number of misperceptions that are driven by “observed realities.” It is critical for anyone who is currently planning to progress in their career or their personal life to consider these misperceptions and know how to effectively manage them. If unacknowledged, these misperceptions are so powerful that they interfere with our beliefs and paralyse our process of (logical reasoning) thinking. In the end, they may lead us to either over- or under-estimate what we are able to achieve.

Out of the several hundred interviews I have completed over the years, the following key – and dangerous – misperceptions emerged.

### **Misperception 1: People Win Lotteries, So You Think You Can, Too!**

This misperception is probably the most attractive one. The idea behind it is that we observe others hitting a “lucky” strike without any explainable reason – for example, your neighbour wins a lottery, a peer gets an undeserved promotion, or friends land amazing jobs that even surprise them. If such events happen to others around us, why shouldn’t they happen to us? This legitimate question – “Why others and not me?” – is one that everyone asks. Widely internalising this thought, many people wait for their turn one day. After all, if others were lucky, why shouldn’t I be one day?

Individuals need a strategy to avoid falling prey to this false idea. While luck may certainly come your way one day, there is no guarantee. To depend on such good fortune is ultimately damaging to your ability to develop your strengths and knowledge.

*Our advice:* Don’t wait for your turn, as it will most likely never be your turn.



### **Misperception 2: You See Good Things Happening to Others, but Not to You**

This misperception is the most “real.” Others need not win lotteries around you, but it appears that lots of other good things happen to them. In your restricted viewpoint:

- Others get promoted and earn more than you, although you think you deserve it, too.
- Others have more opportunities from which to choose, thereby boosting their career progression.
- Others have more support for reasons that are not very clear to you or anyone else.
- Others perform poorly, yet still manage to move forward at whatever they attempt.

And to make matters worse, you don’t seem to be alone in this observation. Other people around you also “see” the same things, making this misperception even more powerful. Without a strategy to avoid this negative mindset, you can easily become resentful and bitter, thereby adversely affecting your own life and that of those around you.

*Our advice:* Don’t try to reason out obvious manipulation and self-interest. You will most likely never achieve favour by anyone in that type of environment. If things are not transparent in terms of who get valued or promoted, there is something fundamentally wrong in that organisation.

### **Misperception 3: People Get Away with Lying**

You perceive that some people escape the consequences of lying, even though you are told to practise the opposite: tell and live the truth. The most important thing to recognise about lying is to understand why people do so in the first place. The simple answer is that people think they can get away with it! And do they? The “truthful” answer to that question is “absolutely,” which is the main reason that people deceive others.

Lying is an amazing practical tool that is used as a shortcut to resolve any size problem. Its lifetime can be either very short (seconds) or as long as the truth is not discovered – which can, hypothetically, be eternity.

If you don’t acknowledge this truth, the result can potentially be frustration. You can become upset with the world both within and around you, which may prove to be

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very destructive – for the most part, in fact, destructive to you. So, people need to acknowledge this reality and build strategies for dealing with such situations.

The main reason as to why people get stuck, frustrated, depressed, and resentful is that they are incapable of building strategies to deal with such situations. How can your boss or colleague clearly lie and get away with having whatever they want, while you choose to act with integrity and expect the same positive result – and fail to get it? It is almost an impossible expectation. However, that does not mean you should also lie to others to achieve what you desire. That choice is one you must make and pay for, either internally (by hiding yourself from the truth, while living in agony and soulless misery until you perish) or by being shamed and exposed externally in front of others one day.

*Our advice:* Don't stay in corrupt and harmful environments. The quicker you extricate yourself from such toxic situations, the less damage you will do to yourself by not mortgaging your unrealised future potential.

#### **Misperception 4: You Perceive Failure as Pain**

In your life or career, you attempt many things, but they don't work. Consequently, failure starts to feel like pain, which is a dangerous misperception. So many individuals refuse to be daring and try new approaches because they are afraid of failure (AKA, pain). Nobody wants to experience pain at any point, no matter the intensity.

Developing a strategy to understand failure and appreciate the lessons it may teach you is critical to going beyond that failure and achieving success. This approach is beneficial, whether dealing with personal or career decisions.

*Our advice:* If you are seeking genuine change, you must embrace failure, which will enable you to fine-tune your framework as you develop yourself or your career. Nobody has the miracle solution to success, fulfilment, or whatever you need to live a meaningful life. No single approach offers a silver bullet.



### **Change Misperception to Clarity**

In light of these false observations and misunderstandings that challenge us on a daily basis, one needs to be able to think clearly and comprehend the risks in what we face. When you listen to others' stories of their lucky breaks, remember, they are just telling you a nice story, but not providing a practical framework that will set you on the path you need.

Everyone needs more substance than stories in life to develop oneself on a personal basis, as well as in a satisfying work life. Everyone needs a framework – a “how to” – to strategise.

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